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Conceptualizing Contemporary Audiovisual *Da'wa*

Abstract: This paper addresses the audiovisual composition of contemporary Muslim preachers' videos. Proposing *audiovisuality* as a conceptual approach, I hope to offer a perspective on this emerging field that helps to improve understanding of contemporary Muslim preachers' audiovisual mediations. These intentional and complex communicative offers are—like other practices of preaching and a variety of other social practices—embedded in a discourse surrounding the negotiation of religious beliefs, norms, and values. In the paper, I describe the concept of audiovisuality and then present four examples to demonstrate how this conceptual approach can be used to explore and better understand the ways in which audiovisual mediations allow media *du'ā* (preachers) to not only participate in the above discourse, but also shape the audience's understanding of Islam and Muslimness in a distinct manner.

1 Introduction

Spreading the message of Islam through word and deed is an important part of Muslim religiosity. The call to all people to confess and serve the one God is expressed through the Arabic term *da'wa*. Deeply rooted in Qur'an and sunna, the concept not only carries a rich horizon of meanings ranging from invitation to proselytization, but also imbues notions of theology and sociality.¹ Notwithstanding the complexity and history of the concept as well as its diverse interpretations and expressions, *da'wa* is, as it were, part of everyday Muslim practice. Moreover, it is manifested especially in the work of those who have dedicated themselves to reaching out to humanity and call others to Islam. Whether embedded in socioreligious movements, state-funded structures, institutions of higher religious learning, or lay milieus, preachers (*du'ā* /sing. *dā'ī*) have spawned a host of cultures of preaching the religious message, situated in local contexts as much as they are closely linked to issues of religious (often institutionally confined) authority and

1 Matthew J. Kuiper, *Da'wa: A Global History of Islamic Missionary Thought and Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

the ‘right’ interpretation of the scriptures.² Beyond these individuals, their life-worlds, biographies, and situatedness in specific socio-political contexts, it also appears that the forms and formats they choose to disseminate their messages are equally significant. Their writings can be found in plain treatises as well as in richly illustrated manuscripts full of brilliant rhetoric, photographs of preachers with an outstanding performative presence, recordings of rousing Friday sermons and immersive videos that impressively teach the Qur’anic text.

During the past five decades, audio-visual mediations of Muslim preaching evolved from the distribution of audio cassettes via religious programs on state-owned television channels in Muslim-majority countries to a great variety of programs available across the globe on satellite TV and a wide range of web platforms. Against the background of growing web literacy and a decreasing digital divide, the internet has been described as a structure that enables a great diversification of Muslim religious mediations, interactions between believers unrestrained by religious authorities, as well as entanglements of the local and the global. In this way, the internet helps to transform religious discourses amidst a plethora of Muslim religious online activities.³

2 See Matthew J. Kuiper, *Da’wa and Other Religions: Indian Muslims and the Modern Resurgence of Global Islamic Activism*, (London/New York, NY: Routledge, 2018); Itzhak Weismann and Jamal Malik, eds., *Culture of Da’wa: Islamic Preaching in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2020); Simon Stjernholm and Elisabeth Özdalga, eds., *Muslim Preaching in the Middle East and Beyond: Historical and Contemporary Case Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

3 Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Gary R. Bunt, *IMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); M. el-Nawawy and Sahar Khamis, *Islam Dot Com: Contemporary Islamic Discourses in Cyberspace*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2009); Thomas Hoffmann and Göran Larsson, “Muslims and the New Information and Communication Technologies: Notes from an Emerging and Infinite Field: An Introduction,” in *Muslims and the New Information and Communication Technologies: Notes from an Emerging and Infinite Field*, eds. Thomas Hoffmann and Göran Larsson, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013); Göran Larsson, *Muslims and the New Media: Historical and Contemporary Debates* (London: Routledge, 2011); Matthias Brückner and Johanna Pink, eds., *Von Chatraum bis Cyberjihad: Muslimische Internetnutzung in lokaler und globaler Perspektive*, (Würzburg: Ergon-Verl., 2009); Heather M. Akou, “Interpreting Islam Through the Internet: Making Sense of Hijab,” *Contemporary Islam* 4, no. 3 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-010-0135-6>; Jacqueline Gottlieb Brinton, *Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016); Anna Piela, *Muslim Women Online: Faith and Identity in Virtual Space*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

This process has both been stimulated by as much as it shaped an emerging generation of Muslim preachers. Their characteristics and cultural particularities but also the ways in which their preaching parallels forms of teaching in other religious traditions have been described by a host of terminologies.⁴ Despite this terminological and conceptual variety, current scholarship on these actors predominantly evolves around their relation to traditionally established institutions of Muslim religious learning, the measures and goals of their cause, their appearance and demeanor, and around their rhetorical and technological abilities.⁵ Additionally, the audio-visual mediations of these preachers are a lens for the ways in which critical junctions between communication technologies and religious discourses, beliefs, and practices correlate with a transformation in content, format, and the relationship of preachers to their audiences who engage with, and make sense of, digital

4 Wā'il Luṭfī, *Zāhirat al-Du'ā l-Judud: Taḥlīl Ijtimā'ī: al-Da'Wa, al-Tharwa, al-Shahra* (Cairo: Al-Hay'a al-Misriya al-Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 2005); James B. Hosterey, "Marketing Morality: The Rise, Fall, and Rebranding of Aa Gym," In *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, eds. Greg Fealy and Sally White (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008); Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, "In Defense of Muhammad: 'Ulama', Da'iya and the New Islamic Internationalism," in *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times*, ed. Meir Hatina (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Yasmin Moll, "Islamic Televangelism: Religion, Media and Visuality in Contemporary Egypt," *Arab Media & Society*, no. 10 (2010), accessed June 2, 2023, <https://www.arabmediasociety.com/islamic-televangelism-religion-media-and-visibility-in-contemporary-egypt/>; Denis Bekkering, "From 'Televangelist' to 'Intervangelist': The Emergence of the Streaming Video Preacher," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 23, no. 2 (2011); Nabil Echchaibi, "Alt-Muslim: Muslims and Modernity's Discontents," In *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (London: Routledge, 2013); Marcia Hermansen, "The Emergence of Media Preachers: Yusuf Al-Qaradawi," in *Islam in the Modern World*, eds. Ebrahim Moosa and Jeffrey T. Kenney (New York: Routledge, 2014); Yasmin Moll, "Divine Cosmopolitanism: A Reply," *Media, Culture & Society* 38, no. 1 (2016), accessed June 2, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715615416>; Joe F. Khalil and Marwan M. Kraidy, *Arab Television Industries* (London: BFI Publishing, 2017); Tuve Floden, "Defining the Media *Du'ā* and Their Call to Action," in "New Islamic Media," ed. Project on Middle East Political Science, Special issue, *POMEPS Studies*, no. 23 (2017); Shaimaa El Naggar, "American Muslim Televangelists as Religious Celebrities: The Changing 'Face' of Religious Discourse." In *Faith and Language Practices in Digital Spaces*, ed. Audrey Rosowky (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2018); Shaimaa El Naggar, "'The Eyes of History Are Looking Upon as a Community': The Representation of Islam and Muslims by the Televangelist Hamza Yusuf," in *Aspects of Performance in Faith Settings: Heavenly Acts*, ed. Andrey Rosowsky (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019); Aaron Rock-Singer, "Neoliberal *Da'wa*: The Egyptian New Preachers (*al-du'a al-judud*) and the Restructuring of Transnational Religious Preaching and Practice," in *Culture of Da'wa*, eds. Weismann and Malik; Simon Stjernholm, "DIY Preaching and Muslim Religious Authority," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 8, no. 2 (2019); Richard Gauvain, "Nothing Has Changed/Everything Has Changed: Salafi *Da'wa* in Egypt from Rashid Rida to the 'Arab Spring,'" in *Culture of Da'wa*, eds. Weismann and Malik.

5 See Floden, "Media *Du'ā*," 10.

media and use them in the context of their faith practices.⁶ Complementing their work in local communities, a growing number of Muslim preachers have begun to employ formats such as talk shows, reality programs, music and theatrical performances, alongside an elaborate use of social media platforms and a broad variety of orations to orient their mediations more to the lifeworld, daily experiences, and media practices of their audiences.⁷ As digital media, chief among them social media and mobile apps, have become an indispensable and ubiquitous feature of these lifeworlds and people's everyday practices, online and offline religious spheres have become increasingly blended and integrated. In this process, the mediations of contemporary preachers constitute elements of a complex communicative environment in which Muslims across the globe access and arrange a host of digital media in everyday social contexts and social relations to express and negotiate religious values and beliefs. Through their ubiquity, the forms, formats, and contents of these mediations thus appear to be embedded in a particular way in the everyday life and media practices of Muslims. In this way, media not only offers *du'ā* new avenues for conveying religious messages to a wide audience, but also facilitates the emergence of new patterns of interaction and complex ways of communicating between all participants.

This paper addresses the audiovisual composition of contemporary Muslim preachers' videos. I hope to offer a perspective on this emergent field that has received little attention in previous research grounded on interviews with media *du'ā* or an analysis of audiovisual material that focuses on spoken text and sidelines other aesthetic means.⁸ I propose *audiovisuality* as a conceptual complement to this

6 Kerstin Radde-Antweiler, 'Ritual Is Becoming Digitalised,' Introduction to the Special Issue on Rituals on the Internet," *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 2 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.11588/REL.2006.1.372>; Stuart Hoover and Nabil Echchaibi, "The 'Third Spaces' of Digital Religion," <https://thirdspacesblog.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/third-spaces-and-media-theory-essay-2-0.pdf>; Heidi A. Campbell and Louise Connelly, "Religion and Digital Media," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Materiality*, ed. Vasudha Narayanan, (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2020); Heidi A. Campbell, "Surveying Theoretical Approaches Within Digital Religion Studies," *New Media & Society* 19, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816649912>; Pauline H. Cheong, "Tweet the Message? Religious Authority and Social Media Innovation," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 3, no. 3 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-90000059>; Erica Baffelli, "Charismatic Blogger? Authority and New Religions on the Web 2.0," in *Japanese Religions on the Internet: Innovation, Representation and Authority*, eds. Birgit Staemmler, Erica Baffelli and Ian Reader, (New York: Routledge, 2011); Giulia Evolvi, *Blogging My Religion: Secular, Muslim, and Catholic Media Spaces in Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

7 Echchaibi, "Alt-Muslim," 190; Moll, "Islamic Televangelism."

8 E.g. Moll, "Divine cosmopolitanism," Yasmin Moll, "Screening Faith, Making Muslims: Islamic Media for Muslim American Children and the Politics of Identity Construction," in *Educating the Muslims of America*, eds. Yvonne Y. Haddad, Farid Senzai, and Jane I. Smith (Oxford, New York:

research. I argue that the concept of audiovisuality helps to understand contemporary Muslim preachers' audiovisual mediations as intentional and complex communicative offers that—like other practices of preaching and a variety of other social practices—are embedded in a discourse surrounding the negotiation of religious beliefs, norms, and values. The epistemological interest of this paper is thus in the ensemble of (in)audible and (in)visible elements that structure audiovisual practices of preaching. An analysis of these elements can be useful in exploring the ways in which audiovisual mediations enable preachers to participate in the above discourse. I also assume that the audiovisual mediations of contemporary preachers are not merely illustrated texts set to sounds, but that social actors use audiovisual media because they combine a variety of sensory stimuli and thus create specific opportunities to address audiences. Audiovisual media thus allow them not only to participate in the above-mentioned discourse, but also and more specifically to shape the audience's understanding of the topics covered in a distinct manner.

In what follows, I will first describe the concept of audiovisuality and then present four examples to demonstrate how this conceptual approach can be used to better understand audiovisual mediations of media *du'ā*. My contribution does not provide a comprehensive analysis but rather serves as an exploration and suggestion for an additional perspective on contemporary Muslim preaching practices.

2 On Audiovisuality

Audiovisuality describes a social actor's ability to intersect power and audio-visual representation through the creation of images and sounds that 1.) appeal to individual and collective bodies of knowledge as well as modes of sensation and 2.) present an interpretation of reality that does not appear constructed but rather natural, and hence is ascribed the status of evidence or truth and helps to advance aesthetic legitimization of the actor's cause.⁹ The concept is inspired by the work of art histo-

Oxford University Press, 2009); Yasmin Moll, "Television Is Not Radio: Theologies of Mediation in the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 33, no. 2 (2018); Stjernholm, "DIY Preaching,"; Simon Stjernholm, "Brief Reminders: Muslim Preachers, Mediation and Time," in *Muslim Preaching*, eds. Stjernholm and Özdalga.

9 Christoph Günther and Simone Pfeifer, "Jihadi Audiovisuality and Its Entanglements: A Conceptual Framework," in *Jihadi Audiovisuality and Its Entanglements: Meanings, Aesthetics, Appropriations*, eds. Christoph Günther and Simone Pfeifer (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 9–14.

rian Nicholas Mirzoeff who, in his insightful paper “On Visuality,”¹⁰ offers a nuanced discussion of the term, which has seen a wide, almost ubiquitous application in the humanities and social sciences since the advent of the visual turn. Mirzoeff suggests that visuality should not be thought of primarily as merely the set of visible traits of a cultural artifact. Rather, he draws our attention to the ideas of the historian Thomas Carlyle, who coined the term in the mid-19th century in his lectures *On Heroes*.¹¹ Mirzoeff writes that “visuality was, then, the clear picture of history available to the hero as it happens and the historian in retrospect. It was not visible to the ordinary person whose simple observation of events did not constitute visuality.” In this perspective, Mirzoeff argues, “claims to visual subjectivity must always pass by visuality. [. . .] As a keyword for visual culture [visuality encompasses] both a mode of representing imperial culture and a means of resisting it by means of reverse appropriation.” Visuality thus transcends mere visual representation and is closely linked to social positions, abilities, claims to interpretative sovereignty over social facts and developments, as well as the power to enforce these claims. It also reminds us that texts, speech acts, images, and videos are not random phenomena, but rather intentional and complex communicative offers. It is through these mediations that we can reconstruct the ways in which social actors seek to create meaning and knowledge.

As I have demonstrated elsewhere in more depth, reflections on vision and listening, that is on seeing and not seeing as well as on audition and inaudition, are central to the conceptualization of videos as expressions of audiovisuality.¹² These are all learned capacities that are constantly being honed. Moreover, they help us to make sense of, order, or categorize visual and audible impressions because they are embedded in specific mediating formations, routines, and contexts. In order to attend to these aspects, I propose to combine and expand on notions of scopic regimes¹³ and auditory regimes¹⁴ to make sense of the various registers that social actors appeal to by using auditive and visual elements such

10 Nicholas Mirzoeff, “On Visuality,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 5, no. 1 (2006), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412906062285>.

11 Thomas Carlyle, *The Norman and Charlotte Strouse Edition of the Writings of Thomas Carlyle: On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993 [1841]), notes and introduction by Michael K. Goldberg, text established by Michael K. Goldberg, Joel J. Brattin, and Mark Engel.

12 Günther and Pfeifer, “Jihadi Audiovisuality.”

13 Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, [Repr.] (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000 [1977]), trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti.

14 J. Martin Daughtry, *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma and Survival in Wartime Iraq* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

as postures, “costumes, props, make-up, hairstyle, spaces as a stage or scene (*setting*, in Goffman’s terms) to construct images for their sensitive effects.”¹⁵ However, I want to stress that our (in)abilities and (limited) horizons of knowledge result in us always perceiving more, and always perceiving less, than what is there to be heard and seen, because our sensations are “rerouted through memory and fantasy, caught up in threads of the unconscious and entangled with the passions.”¹⁶ Furthermore, our sensations appear to alter the mediations we encounter and to transform us at the same time. The creation of knowledge and meaning through the sonic and the visual is therefore never static, but rather always in the making, resonating between people and their socially acquired and culturally learned (in)abilities, material artifacts, cultural contexts, and technological mediators. The configurations of people’s sensations and their receptivity thus shape the ways in which images and sounds are accorded specific qualities and assume a certain kind of status (e.g. as truth or evidence). This applies regardless of any ‘power’ inherent in a medium itself to change the social reality by “enchancing or affecting people,” that is, to spark emotional, intellectual, and physical responses. It should be remembered, however, that these configurations are contingent on “a recursive feedback loop, subject at any given time to stabilising and destabilising influences.”¹⁷

Against this background, texts, speech acts, images, and videos are understood as intentional and complex communicative offers by media *du‘ā* to create meaning and knowledge based on their understanding of how Islam is to be practiced, interpreted, and proclaimed. The concept thus considers that Muslim *da‘wa* is a largely actor-centered phenomenon in which individual religious scholarship, performative and rhetorical skills, and social relations are of key importance. At the same time, the concept of audiovisuality facilitates a wider perspective, and a comparative approach emphasizes the relationality characterizing social actors, their mediations, specific religious and social contexts. It also emphasizes the audiences engaging with this material in that it points to the ways in which con-

15 Katya Mandoki, *Everyday Aesthetics: Prosaics, the Play of Culture and Social Identities* (Aldershot, Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2007), 146.

16 Maaike Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking*, Performance Interventions 3 (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1–2.

17 Kyle Grayson and Jocelyn Mawdsley, “Scopic Regimes and the Visual Turn in International Relations: Seeing World Politics Through the Drone,” *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 2 (2019): 433.

temporary Muslim preachers and their mediations are linked to specific religious and social contexts, how they appropriate the affordances offered by different social media platforms, their modes of media composition and symbolic repertoires, as well as to their interactions with audiences perceiving and interpreting these mediations.

3 Preliminary Case Study: The Audiovisuality of Place

Contemporary Muslim preachers make extensive use of audio-visual mediations as a form of communication, yet they apply different means of pictorial composition in order to place aesthetic mediations at the service of the appeal of divine revelation, Islamic ethics, and devotion.

For this paper, I want to demonstrate this using four examples that are listed as results in a search for a Friday sermon (*khuṭba*) on YouTube.¹⁸ The title of each video contains the Arabic word *khuṭba*. These titles not only indicate the format of this distinct preaching practice, but they also latch onto the horizon of knowledge of the audience about the significance of this markedly formalized practice for the self-understanding of Muslim communities. Beyond this ontological appeal, the categorization of an exhortation as a *khuṭba* may also govern the audiences' expectations as to the procedure of such a sermon, its rhetorical elements and subject matter, the role and conduct of the preacher, as well as the spatial setting. With regards to the latter, that is the choice of space and the positioning of the preacher in it, the selected videos show some of the ways in which contemporary Muslim preachers relate to the conventions of this practice (and the expectations of the audience).

Images from the videos range from a preacher, Muhammad Tim, standing on an ornate minbar in a mosque, via a female preacher, Susanne Dawi, standing in the middle of a plain room in a mosque behind an unadorned lectern, a preacher,

¹⁸ At the publisher's express request, no screenshots from the respective videos are reproduced in this article. Interested readers may therefore wish to get an impression for themselves and watch the referenced videos. The URLs are <https://www.youtube.com/live/i1VnT6pqd0>, <https://youtu.be/hrQ8Dd8CYF8>, <https://youtu.be/z0o6XrnzMX4>, and https://youtu.be/Pwge_NLH2GU. All videos were last accessed on June 2, 2023.

Numan Ali Khan,¹⁹ standing on a modern pulpit with modest wall decorations, to a preacher, Amin Aaser, at a desk in a windowless room that can be used for various functions. While Muhammad Tim, Numan Ali Khan, and Susanne Dawi preach in a space that is identifiable to the audience as a mosque, Amin Aaser addresses his audience in a room that seems to be used for diverse purposes. In addition, we see Muhammad Tim and Numan Ali Khan standing on a minbar, which in the case of the former is perhaps also most clearly recognizable to spectators as a pulpit due to its direct proximity to the prayer niche (*qibla*), while in the second case the preacher stands rather on a spacious gallery. Regardless of the concrete appearance of the podium, in both cases the preacher takes an elevated position.

Three of the four examples suggest that contemporary Muslim preachers (and the people who advise and support them in the production of their media) entitle as *khutba* those mediations in which they conform to the convention of a Friday sermon (or homology on the occasion of the two festivals) as a practice of preaching that is tied to a specific space, namely a mosque, where a congregation of believers is present and wherein those delivering the homology take a distinct position in order to address a co-present audience eye-to-eye and likewise receive their attention. These examples thereby conform to and re-affirm what could be called the conventions and standards of this preaching practice, also through the choice of and the position of all participants in an appropriate spatial setting.

At the same time, these examples also demonstrate differences in the interpretation of such standards. Muhammad Tim and Numan Ali Khan standing on a pulpit—regardless of the architectural differences between the two galleries—visually manifest a perhaps conservative understanding of the way a preacher positions himself vis-à-vis the co-present congregation. Both preachers hence shape the knowledge of the audience on site and the mediatization of how a preacher should present himself to the congregation present during a Friday sermon, that is on a prominent spot. It is noteworthy, however, that the camera position resembles this notion only in the case of Muhammad Tim, who is filmed slightly from below, while Numan Ali Khan meets the YouTube viewer almost at eye level. Susanne Dawi's positioning in the room and in relation to the camera's gaze, however, gives the impression that she is meeting the present and mediated audience at the same eye level. She preaches in a mosque and addresses an audience present in the room, but at the same time she does not take an elevated posi-

¹⁹ Editor's note: Please find a critical examination of the preacher and scholar Numan Ali Khan in this book's contribution by Margherita Picchi, "Khutba Activism against Gender-Based Violence: The Claremont Main Road Mosque's Community *Tafsīr*."

tion in the room and thus certainly—and probably intentionally—enacts what might be called a more progressive interpretation of the form and function of a Friday sermon. Amin Aaser, on the other hand, performs a disruption with such conventions on another level, as he does not preach to a co-present congregation at all, but addresses a YouTube audience directly, here specifically children in a “khutba for kids.” It can be argued that the selected spatial setting and the positioning of the camera accommodate the relationship between the preacher and this specific audience. It seems as if conformity to and re-affirmation of the guidelines for a *khutba* had to be secondary in preference to a low-key communicative situation that appears as direct as possible, albeit conveyed through a medium. One may conclude that the channel operators assume that their target audience will acknowledge the specific address as a *khutba*, despite the fact that Amin Aaser is seated behind an unadorned desk and positioned in the middle of a windowless room used for multiple purposes. It may also be that the audience is unfamiliar with the conventions of a *khutba* and that this term is used synonymously with “sermon” in everyday language. If this is the case, one can demonstrate through this example that the creativity and understanding of contemporary Muslim preachers (and those who help them produce their media) of how best to present the message of Islam to a specific audience has an equal impact on the visual and acoustic composition of videos as well as the messages they convey.

In light of the above reflections on the audiovisuality of these videos, a mosque in this case does not only provide a space that conforms to the conventions of a Friday sermon. As a place where Muslims have gathered since the early days of Islam and constituted themselves as a community through shared and collectively experienced practices, the mosque links the symbolic with the formation and enactment of social identities. This level of meaning is part of the mediation in the videos and is not only conveyed through what is visible, but also through what remains invisible and is audible at the same time. It is not only the sound of the preacher’s voice created by the architectural characteristics of a large room and the use of microphones, amplifiers, and loudspeaker systems that can shape the way a YouTube audience perceives and assesses a *khutba*. In particular, it is the people, more audible in some videos and less audible in others, who are co-present at the site of the performance. This community of believers confirms through repetition of certain prayer sequences, coughing, whispering, audible movements on the carpet, and many other vocal expressions, that the video is a Friday sermon delivered live to an audience present in a mosque. Their presence thereby reaffirms what is visible on the screen. Secondly, they are an essential

element of a process Victor Turner²⁰ has termed the creation of *communitas*, in that they give the audience of the mediation, who are likewise, perhaps even equally, the addressees of the sermon, the impression of co-presence and participation in a ritual from which they are separated both in time and space.

Consequently, it is not only the architectural features of the space and other visible elements that create the opportunity for the YouTube audience to recognize and acknowledge this *khuṭba* as such, but also and especially acoustic stimuli and the immersive power they emanate. Visual and acoustic features of the video thus become comprehensible as elements of a composition intended to confirm the claim of the speech act shown here, i.e., a Friday sermon, to legitimacy, authenticity, and authority. For the viewers of the videos, what makes the acknowledgement of this claim possible is the positioning of the preacher in a specific space that conforms to the norms for a Friday sermon, as well as the audible co-presence of a group of people who are both addressees and contributors to the performance conveyed through the digital medium. Whether and to what extent this acknowledgement actually materializes could be explored, for example, through a closer reading of the user comments under the respective videos. This element lies outside the scope of the present chapter.

What media *du'ā* and *dā'iyyāt* allow us to see and hear under the title of *khuṭba* is thus oriented towards the rules for this preaching practice formulated in the works of Muslim scholars and validates these standards both to the audience present and to the viewers of the mediations. At the same time, some contemporary Muslim preachers deviate from these rules, in some cases substantially, and thus shape a divergent understanding of this preaching practice. The ways in which media *du'ā* or *dā'iyyāt* position themselves in a physical space and employ its visual and acoustic features, along with the potential presence of participants, direct the audience's listening and gaze and elicit physical, cognitive, and emotional reactions. Following the theoretical presuppositions of the function of audiovisualities detailed above, we may assume that these elements, among many other variables, shape the ways in which people perceive the practices of preaching described above. The manipulation of audio-visual elements may therefore aid social actors to bolster their audiences' belief in the veracity, authenticity, and authority of their messages.

20 Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974).

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