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Islamic Friday Sermon in Italy: Leaders, Adaptations, and Perspectives

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Abstract: The focus of this article is to spotlight the ritual frame of the canonical Friday prayer that is organized weekly around midday in places of Islamic worship in Italy. I verify how the Muslim communities in Italy, as a "cognitive minority", use different strategies related to the performance of the Friday prayer ritual, and I analyze its continuous reframing. During the preliminary investigation I selected seventeen places of worship located in major cities and provincial towns located in the North, Central and South of Italy including Sicily. I have only considered spaces run by Sunni Arabs because they are the majority of Muslims in Italy. In these places I performed the participant observation from October 2016 to July 2017 collecting empirical data and more than a hundred sermons that I analyzed later. I also relied on interviews with preachers and people in charge of these places.

Keywords: *Khutba*; sociology of religions; discourse analysis; Islam in Europe; imam

1. Introduction

The focus of this article is to spotlight the ritual frame of the canonical Friday prayer that is organized weekly around midday in places of Islamic worship in Italy. I verify how the Muslim communities in Italy, as a "cognitive minority" (Berger 1995), use different strategies related to the performance of the Friday prayer ritual, and I analyze its continuous *reframing* (Goffman 1997). During the preliminary investigation, I selected seventeen places of worship located in major cities and provincial towns located in the North, Central, and South of Italy including Sicily. I have only considered spaces run by Sunni Arabs because they are the majority of Muslims in Italy. In these places, I performed the participant observation from October 2016 to July 2017, collecting empirical data and more than a hundred sermons that I analyzed later. I also relied on interviews with preachers and people in charge of these places.

2. The Space–Time Dimension of Friday Prayer

At the beginning, we deal with the description of the ritual as the object of our research to verify the different frames of the enunciation of the homiletical product in its ritual sphere (Goffman 2001). I will try to verify the degree of conformity and stylization of the ritual itself, and the dimension of the space–time framework of its presence in "precise" places and moments (Romania 2008). *Ṣalât al-ǧumu'ah* is a cultural ritual that Muslims should perform in mosques at the time the sun reaches the azimuth following ritual sequences in an almost invariable manner over time and space. In other words, I will first verify how Muslims have adapted the space reserved for religious worship to respond to the needs of worshipping. Secondly, I will see how the religious leaders responded to temḌporal demands to guarantee the fulfillment of the ritual respecting its prescribed schedules.

The first significant datum is the original use of these "converted" places of worship. Actually, three of them were industrial sheds located outside residential areas, two industrial sheds located in

residential areas, three garages, six ground floors of residential complexes and three townhouses. Even the temporal dimension has undergone transformations. In the mosques of the predominantly Muslim countries, five canonical prayers are celebrated daily. One of them is celebrated when the sun touches the azimuth (astronomical noon) and is called *ṣalât aẕ-ẓuhr*.

"Italian" Muslims, on the other hand, have changed this norm: all the communities have set a fixed time for the beginning of the ritual functions on Friday. This transformation is due to the needs of the faithful who work or study at the university who are forced to take advantage of the lunch break to participate in the aforementioned ritual, otherwise most of them would not be able to do so. This may seem simple to us, but it is not. An *ḫaṭîb*[1] confided to me that it took two years to accept a change of this kind, that is, to pray on a precise hour instead of celebrating worship respecting religious tradition. Moreover, when the hands of the clock go forward one hour at the end of March to start the summer time period, the leaders of certain places of worship maintain the same prayer time even though the sun does not reach the azimuth. I was surprised when I participated in this ritual in a northern provincial town and I found that even there the Muslims adapted to this change, despite the dominant Salafist religious orientation of the community that absolutely does not accept the *bid'ah* (innovations).

The ritual lasts between 30 and 40 min in all the places I studied, except one in a southern provincial town where it lasts 50 min. The question of the available time to the *ḫaṭîb* is very present in the interviews released. An *ḫaṭîb* in a northern city told me: *"The first thing I do when I finish ṣalât [the canonical prayer, in this case the one with which the Friday ritual ends, ed] is to look at my wristwatch. Time has become sacred."* Preachers are subject to many pressures to respect scheduled time both from the leaders of the places of worship and from the faithful themselves. Another *ḫaṭîb* told me: *"While I was doing the ḫuṭbah,*[2] *a brother who came late and sat at the back of the room showed me his watch, in the meaning of ending the prayer."* This issue was also confirmed in interviews with mosque leaders, when they stated that one of the rules they demand the *ḫaṭîb* to respect is to stick to the available time for praying. This new "sacredness" of time is due to the work situation of many faithful who take advantage of the lunch break to participate in the ceremony or university students who must return to their classes. The *ḫuṭabâ'* interviewed complained much about the short time available: in thirty or forty minutes, the *mu'aḏḏin*[3] (the person who call people to prayer) must do the *'âḏân*, the *ḫaṭîb* must do the two *ḫuṭab* (plural of *ḫuṭbah*), translation must be carried out, *ṣalât* must be prepared and performed. In practice, the sermon lasts between fifteen and twenty minutes, including the *muqaddimah*. A *ḫaṭîb* confided to me: *"In fifteen minutes I can barely warm up my voice and make a nice introduction. What can I teach in so few minutes to the faithful that I only see on Friday and do not have other chance to attend the mosque during the week?" and* continues*: "In Egypt it is very different. Friday is a public holiday so the public [uses precisely this term to indicate the faithful, ed] comes very early to the mosque and ḫaṭîb has plenty of time to make a ḫuṭbah kwayyisah [a nice sermon, ed]."* The Friday ritual celebration time management is a fact that depends on many social factors, and the final decision is not in the hands of *ḫaṭîb* but in those of the leaders of the place of worship, except in the case where the *ḫaṭîb* is the leader as well.

In several cities that are the object of our research, the places of worship are not big enough to accommodate all the faithful participating in Friday prayer. Consequently, there are places where Friday prayer is organized more than once a day. So, it is therefore possible to divide the places into four categories:

- places of worship where the problem does not exist;
- places where the number of the faithful is higher than the spatial availability and consequently the leaders have decided to organize the ritual twice a day. The faithful organize themselves according to their needs. A manager of a place of worship gave me this explanation: *"We worship*

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[1] Preacher plural is *ḫuṭabâ'*.
[2] Sermon, plural is *ḫuṭab*.
[3] La persona incaricata a fare l'invito alla preghiera.

twice to avoid overcrowding, to guarantee the organization, not to disturb the neighbors, to facilitate the workers to participate in one of the rituals of Islam."

- places of worship where the ritual ceremony is organized twice because the city authorities have obliged the leaders not to let more than a specific number of faithful participate in. The places of worship of Sassuolo (RE), Cantù (CO), and Modena (MO) belong to this category.
- places of worship where the prayer need exists but the preachers celebrate the ritual only once a day. For example, in a provincial town of Central Italy the leaders decided not to let women participate in Friday worship so as to allow the male faithful to use the space usually reserved for women; in spite of this, the space is not enough and consequently they have also started using the adjacent public space.

The places of worship object of our research do not show the characteristics of the sacred architecture of the mosques spread in the Muslim countries (Allievi 2009). Small places or those in small cities do not even have a sign indicating that it is a place of worship, they are "invisible" places of worship; in other cases, which I have referred to as 'semi-invisible,' a public sign is placed in such a way that it does not have much visibility (Rhazzali 2013). In other cases, however, we find a large billboard written in Italian and Arabic that indicates the place of worship with the term "mosque" followed by its name. In all these three cases, leaders of the place of worship decide to use or not a public sign. These places are common places transformed into places of worship as we have already written, and Muslims adopt different strategies to "sacralize" these profane buildings (. The most common sacred furnishing (Durkheim 2005) is the *minbar*.[4] A *ẖaṭîb*, during the interview, speaking of the importance of *Ṣalât al-ǧumu'ah* said: *"[...] When we speak of ẖuṭbah, we speak of ẖaṭîb, of his knowledge, of his culture, of his whole environment, how he transmits the juice of his knowledge and speaks from the minbar of Sidna rasûlu Allâh* [the pulpit of our messenger of Allah, ed]." The sacredness of the *minbar* is connected to the Prophet and this is the symbolic meaning that imam enjoys climbing on any pulpit in any mosque as it was the pulpit of the prophet (Reeber 1992). In addition to the *minbar* and the carpets that cover the floor of the prayer room, the use of various decorative motifs of the Arab-Islamic art is to be noted. In the places of worship in cities frequented by an economically wealthy Islamic community, the wall that houses the *minbar* (pulpit) and the mihrab (niche) reproduces the decoration of mosques of countries of an Islamic majority. In other places, Muslims simply attack several paintings bearing Arabic calligraphies composed of verses from the Koran and the *ḥadîṯ* (sayings of the Prophet).

3. The Ritual Description of the *ṣalât al-ǧumu'ah*

The first worshippers began arriving a couple of hours before the beginning of the ritual, around eleven in the morning. Thirty minutes before the beginning of the ritual, the flow of the faithful greatly increased and the queues began to form in the area of the *wuḍû'* (ablution). During this time, there are mosques where the *ẖaṭîb*, or another person, states a *dars* (a religious lesson) that has no connection with the *ẖuṭbah* and the faithful behave in different ways: some take one of the copies of the Koran, meticulously resting on shelves, and read *sûrat al-kahf* (The chapter of the cave), others read the Koran from their smartphones, some pair themselves and whisper to each other private discourses, while most merely watch and wait because "*even the expectation of the imam is ibâdah* [devotion, ed]."

In the prayer rooms of large places of worship, the *ẖaṭîb* enters the hall through a door that gives access to a space dedicated to the administration, which on Friday becomes the dressing room of the religious preacher (Goffman 1997). He enters the room with the *mu'aḏḏin*. The *ẖaṭîb* goes directly to the *minbar*, climbs on it, greets the faithful saying *"salâmu 'alaykum"* and sits, and the faithful greet him *"wa 'alaykum salâm*." At this time, the *mu'aḏḏin* speeches the *'âḏân*. The appearance of the speaker on the scene, his entrance into the prayer hall, or his going towards the minbar have a very specific symbolic

[4] Pulpit.

meaning. At this point, all the faithful settle down, whoever was reading the Koran gets up to put it on the shelf or sometimes there is a volunteer who collect the copies of the Koran from the faithful and puts them back in their place. In this context, the *'âḏân* has the symbolic Goffmanian meaning of the theatrical curtain that descends. From this moment on, silence is a must and worshippers not only accept this rule but defend it. After the end of the *'âḏân*, the first *ḫuṭbah* begins, which takes about fifteen minutes. During this time, the flow of the faithful reaches its maximum. One can always see a latecomer pass among the seated faithful to occupy a place, despite that the religious norms discourage this behavior, but nobody has to speak, except the *ḫaṭîb.* During my participation in this ritual, I have never encountered a *ḫaṭîb* who advises these people against their improper behavior during *ḫuṭbah*. Sometimes a faithful's cellphone rings, and he tries to turn it off under the disapproving gaze of the faithful who are close to him. In crowded rooms, the *ḫaṭîb* occasionally interrupts the *ḫuṭbah* to ask the faithful to move forward to make room for the brothers, saying "*tazâḥamû tarâḥamû*" (closer plus mercy): someone comes forward and someone pretends. On three occasions in which I participated, one of collaborators, during *ḫuṭbah*, went to whisper to the *ḫaṭîb*'s ear to get him to ask the faithful if there was the owner of the vehicle blocking a neighbor's garage.

At the end of this part, the *ḫaṭîb* takes a break and sits on the platform of the minbar, while some faithful raise their hands towards the sky to recite their supplications. This is a habit in Muslim-majority countries. In some places of worship, I examined, the leaders have different behaviors: some take advantage of the pause to collect the money offers from the faithful thanks to the collaboration of the assistants in charge who pass among the ranks of the faithful and encourage them to donate their offers. In other cases, the translator from Arabic to Italian delivers his short translation which consists of communicating a summary of the delivered sermon. Everything lasts a short time and the ḫaṭîb restarts his speech. This behavior has become a code of conduct in these places. Then the *ḫaṭîb* descends from the minbar and the mu'aḏḏin recites *iqâmat ṣalât* (beginning of the canonical prayer). In the mosque of a town in Central Italy, however, this moment is dedicated to the collection of donations of offers. It is the moment when all the participants are present and cannot leave the place. This leads us to wonder how many strategies religious leaders set to push the faithful to donate. The canonical prayer lasts between five and seven minutes; as soon as it ends, the faithful begin to leave the place in a hurry.

Therefore, in mosques where *ḫaṭîb* has important announcements, he immediately stands up and stops the faithful to transmit his instructions; in most cases, these are invitations to donate money to cover the costs of the place of worship.

4. The producers of Homiletic Discourse

It is of great importance to know who the religious leaders of the ritual of Friday in a context are where there is no Islamic "church." We will see in this part the adaptations and practices carried out by the Muslims to ensure the presence of a religious staff able to play the role of experts in the sphere of the sacred. In this perspective, I will try to answer the question: who are the producers of the sermon? It is not enough to trace their biographical profile, but it is important to study the premises that contribute to determining their khatabitic (homiletical) production, taking into consideration the conditions in which it is produced (Rovere 1982). In this sense, Jean-Paul Willaime wrote (Willaime 1986, p. 8):

> *"L'Approche sociologique de la prédication ne se limite cependant pas à l'étude de la réception de la prédication, elle analyse aussi ses conditions d'énonciation et l'appréhende comme une pratique discursive spécifique."*

First, let me point out that all seventeen religious leaders considered by our research were born abroad and some of them acquired Italian citizenship by residence. Only one of them is of Italian mother tongue because he immigrated to Italy thanks to family reunification. These religious people have followed courses of study and trainings, and this determines the knowledge of Italian and Italian culture. As we will see later, the scholastic path will be crucial in the use of the Italian language in

Islamic religious discourse. Four *ḫuṭabâ'* have a secondary school diploma, three have a high school diploma and ten have a degree: two engineers, one doctor, and seven graduates from universities in the countries of origin. Excluding religious graduates in Italy, almost all the others attended an Italian language evening school. Three religious leaders come from a *multazimah* family. This term means a family that follows one of the currents of Islam's reforms born at the beginning of the twentieth century. Thirteen of them, instead, grew up in conservative families. With the term *conservative* we mean families that practice a popular Islam (Pace 2004), characterized by a spirituality and a personal religiosity widespread especially among the popular classes of North Africa.

I found only one case of an *ḫaṭîb* raised in a family that had no relations with religion.

Another datum I collected deals with the working experiences of preachers. We can split them into different categories: preachers who have always been *ḫaṭîb* (in the countries of origin and then in Italy): Ga'far, Muḫtâr, 'Usâm, and Am'ad and they are paid by the local Islamic communities; preachers who have done different jobs before becoming full-time and paid *ḫ*utabâ', such as the *ḫuṭabâ'* Faiṣal, Marwân, and 'Abbâs; and finally volunteer *ḫ*uṭabâ', who perform different work activities, such as the *ḫuṭabâ'* Ḥusâm, Nâsar, Nawfal, Omar, Rašâd, Safwân, Samîr, Târiq, Hamîd, Yûnus, and 'Idrîs. It is interesting to notice that there are ten worker and volunteer ḫuṭabâ', more than half of the number I studied; instead, there are seven full-time and salaried *ḫ*uṭabâ' four of which carry out the same profession in the countries of origin. But how did they become *ḫ*aṭîb? The important datum that I collected during the investigation is that any network or ideological group does not allow a non-adherent *ḫaṭîb* to enunciate any *ḫ*uṭbah for the community because the minbar is consecrated to the members of the ideological-religious circle of the leaders of the place of worship. Who speaks above the pulpit transmits the "true Islam" because it speaks above the pulpit of the prophet. A *ḫaṭîb* told me: "*We do not accept an ḫaṭîb who does not share our thought of delivering the ḫuṭbah on Friday, for example a mutašaddid* [intransigent, ed]*, we do not give him this opportunity to destroy everything we have built over the years, especially if it is an eloquent speaker.*" This practice is not respected in some cases that I have found, such as the invitation of an *outside* preacher to give a sermon on a specific topic the leaders are interested in or a preacher who speaks Italian to address a topic of political interest. Therefore, being *inside* within a religious circle increases the chances of becoming a *ḫaṭîb* if a person possesses some characteristics such as a minimum knowledge of religion that distinguishes him from other faithful and the ability to speak in front of the crowd. Another way to become a *ḫaṭîb*, besides the characteristics already mentioned, is the charisma. There are *ḫ*uṭabâ who have become leaders thanks to their own charisma. They are not adherents of ideological or religious associations but their khatabitic ability and their eloquence have created a local popularity around them. For example, *ḫaṭîb* imam Nâsar who states: *"If you have the ability to do ḫuṭbah when the imam in charge is not available, it becomes your duty to fill the void. If you don't fill it, someone will come but unable to fill it. Also the way of transmitting the message is important and I discovered this thing in 2003, that I am good at doing the ḫuṭbah. Near the city XXXX the brothers said 'we need someone doing the ḫuṭbah and I did it. I explained a verse of the Quran with ease and I felt that I did it well, so the brothers decided that I would become a ḫaṭîb in a mosque near XXXX for eight years, from 2003 until 2010."* In recent years, the leaders of places of worship are very careful in hiring *ḫaṭîb*, so they rely much on social networks to learn about a potential new preacher's experiences, looking for information through and above all closed groups on WhatsApp. Through these channels, the imams in search of an occupation offer their availability and the social network does the rest.

Beyond the way in which a person has become a preacher, his socio-discursive practice takes on characteristics that typify the preachers. Analyzing the interviews, the *ḫuṭab* of the preachers and the faithful participation, I noticed that the actions and practices of these religious people lead to different types of preachers. Activist *ḫaṭîb*, for example, comes mostly from a *multazimah* family. The perception of one's role is to be a leader and listeners must learn from him and follow his teachings, as *ḫaṭîb* 'Amğad told: "*As a model, imam guide, what I say they follow, they listen to me, and this is important for me.*" According to him, the faithful need to hear a religious opinion about what is happening in the world: "*They listen to the TV and read the news but they are disoriented, they do not know how to behave and they come*

to the mosque to hear my opinion." He added: "*The ḫuṭbah must guide the faithful and the ḫaṭîb is a religious reference of Islamic knowledge and life. He has the duty not only to teach religion to the faithful, but also to convey the religion's point of view with regard to the events that happen around. Sometimes the faithful feel lost, they do not know what to think and the ḫaṭîb orients them, it is like a compass*." Another type is that of the *ḫaṭîb* as a "priest." Some preachers clearly expressed their way of perceiving their role, which is not limited only to the celebration of religious rituals: they have moved their religious actions as "experts of the sacred"—to use a term very dear to Durkheim—outside the place of worship. The *ḫaṭîb* Faiṣal for example stated "*I try to be an imam inside the mosque and outside*," and he added: "*Everyone sees the solution in you and throws their problems on you, whoever has a problem comes to see me, someone has problems with his wife, others with his deviated son, all the problems of the community, all come from the imam, I receive them and listen to them carefully*." In his daily life, as he informed us, he always presents himself with the expression "*I am an imam*," even with friends. An imam *ḫaṭîb* who carries out his activities at the market, in the bar, and in the street and lately visits Muslim prisoners in the city jail. Moreover, this *ḫaṭîb* played a very important role in convincing the faithful to accept the presence of non-Muslims in the place of worship, he explained to us by saying. "Another aspect of the Christian influence on *ḫuṭabâ'* is the pattern of behavior of the *ḫaṭîb* imam Marwân. He is convinced of being a particular *ḫatîb* and says of himself: '*I am ḫaṭîb al* muğtama' [of society, ed]." He does not mean that he carries out his sermon in a place open to the public, but rather he understands that his religious activities are not limited within the walls of the place of worship. Furthermore, the leaders of the place of worship gave him the freedom to carry out activities outside the mosque and participate in the activities of other religious groups. The openness of the imam Marwân also concerns clothing: he has no traditional clothes when delivering the sermon, but when invited to a meeting of interreligious dialogue with Christians his attitude changes and he wears traditional clothing and he explained why: "*Many times [the representatives of the Christian Church, ed] they ask me to dress in traditional clothing because this is the official dress for them as I am a rağul ad-dîn [religious man, ed] for them. We do not have this clothing rule in the Islamic religion, but I do it out of respect for their request. Even the ḫaṭîb imam Nâsar has done a statement in which it is evident the phenomenon of the "churchification of Islam"* (Vinding 2018): "*In that case I did an ḫuṭbah to explain that our religion does not allow a welthy person to beg. The ḫuṭbah had a good success and 90% of the people that were used to ask Caritas for help stopped going. Me and my brothers we are thinking to have an Islamic Caritas here in the mosque.*" This statement is significant to understand how the dynamics of mutation and transformation within a minority culture are triggered and how it is influenced by the dominant culture. The missionary *ḫaṭîb* instead considers his presence in Italy as of divine nature to carry out a mission like the case of *ḫaṭîb* imam 'Idrîs. According to him, immigrant Muslims in Italy need someone who helps them learn about their religion and at the same time passes this knowledge on to non-Muslims. He does not speak of conversion, but speaks of his mission, which he considers a duty, saying: "*Whoever hides a knowledge and does not transmit it, will not feel the scent of paradise*." Therefore, the *ḫuṭbah* for him is a perfect means to transmit this knowledge, especially during those occasions in which non-Muslim people participate. The reason for his satisfaction is summarized in this sentence: "*Because among them there are young people who hear information about Islam for the first time, and among them there will be one who has taken the seed, which sooner or later will intrigue him, and he will seek the truth to know God and the day of judgment. At that moment my mission is over*." The *ḫaṭîb* imam Nâsar also considers himself a missionary. He does not care about being an imam and he thinks that anyone with a bit of the Koran and knowledge how to carry out prayers could do it. What is important for Nâsar is to fill a void by teaching people "the true religion": "*It is a duty to fill the void when the official ḫaṭîb is missing, otherwise the void will be filled by someone who would divert people. For that I do the ḫuṭbah, but I also teach to children in the weekend school*." Along the same path, the *ḫaṭîb* imam 'Abbâs is, who considers his profession as *ḫaṭîb* only a part of his duty to Muslims because, he explains, their right is to have a teacher who teaches them "*al-'islâm 'alâ minhâğ al-kitâb wa as-sunnah*" (the Islam of the Koran and the sunnah). This involves a series of complementary activities for him to teach religion during the week, even for children. At this point, it becomes necessary to know how religious leaders see their audience.

Faced with the question of describing the faithful who attend the place of worship where the sermon is held, the *ẖuṭabâ'* answered by emphasizing different dimensions. Some considered the origin of the faithful, others talked about the level of knowledge of religion, others put emphasis on the generations, others on the level of attendance of the place of worship, and finally, some focused on the ideological tendency of the faithful. In some cases, like the *ẖ*uṭabâ' imam Marwân and Omar, they gave more than one answer. Sometimes the faithful belong to two generations and this fact influences greatly the choices, according to *ẖaṭîb* imam Ḥusâm. Each generation has special needs and expectations different from the preacher's. He explained this: "*The first group are the old faithful who have come to Italy since a long time and who attend the mosque to pray and listen to lectures on fiqh, how to do al-wuḍû' [the ablution, ed], how to do* ṣalât [canonical prayer, ed], *and to ask for answers to everyday life questions such as: Am I allowed to visit a Christian church? What can I do when you receive a gift containing a bottle of alcohol? My employer is dead, can I offer condolences to his family and attend the funeral? The second category is young people who seek answers on current issues such as terrorism, the Palestinian question, the ḥiǧâb of Muslim women, etc*." The *ẖaṭîb* imam Faiṣal shares Husam's considerations and works in a place of worship of the same city. For other *ẖuṭabâ'* such as Imam Mu*ẖ*târ, Imam 'Imad, and Imam Marwân, the faithful are divided into two groups: one group that has a good knowledge of religion and needs to learn something new and one group that needs to hear basic information about religion. In this perspective, the *ẖaṭîb* imam Marwân told us: "*The elite group expects a deep and informative speech whereas the workers' group wants to hear a speech full of stories and moving situations. That's why my ẖuṭbah can't present a single topic of discussion but I have to talk about both*." This fact is connected to the reality where the place of worship that I analyzed is located, that is a metropolis in Northern Italy that hosts different social categories of immigrants such as freelancers, businessmen, small entrepreneurs, embassy employees, university students, the second generation, skilled workers, general workers, and refugees recently arrived, as well as converted Italians. For other *ẖutabâ'*, the significant fact to categorize the faithful who attend the place of worship is their origin. According to religious leaders, this diversity is an obstacle for the composition of a *ẖuṭbah* within the reach of all. The obstacle that the *ẖaṭîb* imam Ga'far explains, for example, is of sociolinguistic nature and this what he told me about it: "*Ethnic diversity becomes a burden on the shoulders of haṭîb because he must convey a message clearly for the faithful of different origins and different cultures and he must make a linguistic effort to be clear and understandable to most of the faithful. Easier is the situation where the haṭîb does the huṭbah in his country of origin, in a small town where the faithful would be his relatives, his uncles, his neighbors, his friends, and ibn ḥittitu* [the boys of the neighborhood, ed], *and they perfectly understand his dialect*." On the contrary, Imam Safwân categorizes the faithful into two groups, the habitual and the occasional. He explained this fact at the beginning of his story by offering justifications for what we might call "*seasonal religiosity*" connected to specific times of the year or connected to religious celebrations: "*The faithful have economic interests. The immigrant Muslims who are here didn't come to do tourism or excursions as everyone came in search of money, and to improve their life. Consequently, they are more engaged in work activities. Religious practice in Italy is mostly seasonal and there are faithful who attend the mosque only on Fridays, some only in the holidays and others only in the month of Ramadan. Instead in Egypt, Tunisia or Morocco the faithful attend the mosque for the five daily prayers or at least for the prayer of the maġrib [*sunset*] and 'iša'* [the night]."

5. Production of the Khatabitic (Homiletic) Discourse

At first sight, Islam appears as a religion without a Church (Pace 2004). Consequently, one might think that, in front of this institutional void, religious leaders in Italy have total freedom in their missionary and religious choices. The stories of the *ẖutabâ'*, the analysis of the *ẖuṭab* and the direct observation I made showed us that there are many factors that have a pivotal role in the choices of these preachers. Muslims, as a "*cognitive minority*" (Berger 1995), possess their own conceptions of reality, which are generated and built in the societies of origin. In Italy, these communities find themselves to deal with concepts and values of "other cultures" and to question themselves about the obligations and religious practices in the new context (Dassetto 2011). Indeed, the Islam of the diaspora alternates

negotiation and conflict, withdrawal and communication, to reconstruct an individual and collective identity step by step (Saint-Blancat 2008). In this continuum, the *ḫuṭabâʼ* suffer social pressures of various nature, and they adapt themselves to the contexts where they do their homiletical activity. Analyzing the life stories of the imams and those responsible for places of worship, I noticed that, due to social pressures, these religious leaders have established norms that concern the discursive choices of preachers (Fairclough 1992). These rules oblige preachers to avoid some discursive choices in favor of others. It is a matter of real censorship that governs homiletic activity in places of worship in Italy.

The first type of censorship that I noticed among some preachers is that the mass media often transmit news related to the extradition of an imam from Italy because of his intransigent religious discourse, and such news is often accompanied by harsh statements by politicians. For example, let's take a news story that was broadcast by Rai News, on 28 July 2016: "*Terrorism. An imam extradited thanks to moderate Muslims. His sermons were progressively radicalized, witnessing his proximity to the extremist Salafi ideology. Due to this Mohammed Madad, a 51-year-old Moroccan and imam of the Noventa Vicentina (VI) Islamic prayer center, was expelled from Italy*." This is a type of news that becomes the subject of discussion among Muslims and this means that a specific *modus operandi* and a range of topics to avoid are being chosen in the community of the faithful. In practice, the possibility of adopting a code of conduct that complies with expectations is discussed (Anderson 1923). In this perspective, it is important to know that social networks have an important role because they become the means by which to convey these discussions. I cite the example of a discussion started on WhatsApp by a group of imams: a religious leader, after having recommended to the *ḫutabâʼ* to address the situation of Myanmar Muslims in the sermons, points out to the members of the group the issue of security writing: "*In today's Friday sermon, which will surely be recorded and translated word by word, I think we should take advantage during our speech from the event concerning the tragedy of Muslims in Myanmar and focus on the rights that Islam has guaranteed to religious minorities in predominantly Muslim countries ... I believe it is important to avoid sentimental words and instead convey a dignified image of Islam*." The religious leader alludes to the recording and translation that some security body could do and warns others *ḫutabâʼ* to be careful in the choice of words and not to give too much space to emotion during their performance. He also invites the other preachers to address the issue of the right of non-Muslim minorities to profess their own religion. In some cases, censorship is chosen directly by the *ḫaṭîb*, as it is the case in a place of worship in a big city in Northern Italy. During our interview, the preacher in his reply concerning the question about the feedback of the faithful to his *ḫuṭab*, he told me that there are faithful who occasionally ask him to deal with practical-ritual topics, for example how to correctly perform *al-wuḍûʼ* (ablution) and the *ṣalât* (the canonical prayer). But the *ḫaṭîb* said he was not happy with these requests. This attitude shows that a *ḫaṭîb* can censor a type of argument requested by a believer because he does not consider it appropriate. Another example of self-censorship that I found is the control that some *huṭabâʼ* apply in the parts of the Koranic readings in which the term *ǧihâd* is used: in practice, the *ḫuṭabâʼ* recite verses and when they reach the verse that contains this term, they skip it completely. Another preacher, on the other hand, said in the interview: "*I avoid talking about topics like the terrorism that some Muslims practice, because everyone knows that it is not Islam, and then terrorism is a subject that can create problems and it is better to avoid it*." It is important to know that censorship comes also from the faithful themselves. In an interview with a *ḫaṭîb* of a place of worship in a northern metropolis, Ḥusâm told me that, after talking about what the Palestinians are living in Gaza, one of the faithful asked him to avoid this topic because it was not appropriate. Two other *ḫutabâʼ* have confirmed to me that they have received harsh reactions from some of the faithful when they addressed the subject of the military takeover against Morsi in Egypt. The censorship by the faithful was reported to me also by another *ḫaṭîb* named Samîr, who told me that on one occasion, after finishing the *ḫuṭbah* and the canonical prayer, a believer said to him: "*In all the Koran, did you find nothing else to recite except this verse on ǧihâd*?" I report below another type of censorship by the faithful, a sociolinguistic censorship: the *ḫaṭîb* Omar, a construction engineer, told us that a group of faithful asked him to lower the language level of his sermon; the faithful also added: "*We are not at the university*!"

The faithful practically asked the *ḫaṭîb* to make the language used during his sermon more accessible and less refined. Another type of censorship is that being exercised on the preacher by the leaders of the place of worship. In practice, the religious leader of a community gives the preacher a verbal handbook containing the code of conduct to be followed, including the topics to be avoided in sermons and lectures. Within the Muslim prayer centers in provincial cities, attended mainly by workers and refugees of low cultural level, the censorship concerns the following topics: it is forbidden to talk about politics, the Palestinian question, Muslim minorities and terrorism. The *ḫaṭîb* is allowed to focus on religious ethics and on the *'aḥkâm* (doctrinal norms). In places of worship in metropolitan cities, on the other hand, the most frequent recommendation is not to openly name Arab states or their rulers in the event of criticism by the preacher. The last type of censorship is strategic censorship. This censorship is used by Islamic organizations which want to prevent their members from addressing a few categories of topics, for example, talking about politics, criticizing heads of state or addressing issues concerning wars in the Middle East. At this point, I can state that the preacher does not limit himself in exercising social control through his religious discourse but, at the same time, undergoes social control in his discursive choices in the dialectical relationship between himself and society. This factor leads me to address another important aspect, that is, identifying the most significant difficulties relating to the preparation of *ḫuṭbah*. The question I asked the religious leaders was: "*What difficulties do you meet before and during the preparation of the ḫuṭbah?*" Four *ḫuṭabâ'* emphasized the problem related to their dual activity, namely their job and the exercise of the profession of *ḫaṭîb*. This category is composed only of volunteer *ḫutabâ'* who carry out work activities on Fridays too. A second category, composed of seven *ḫutabâ'*, focused their answers on the cultural diversity of the faithful and on its influence on the language of *ḫuṭbah*; five out of these seven *ḫutabâ'* do their *ḫaṭâbah* (the art of preaching) in places of worship located in the metropolis and in an urban center of Northern Italy. The geographical location of these places of worship gives us the explanation: the faithful living in these cities come from various countries and, consequently, their cultures of origin are as diverse as their languages. A third group, composed of six *ḫutabâ'*, did not provide precise answers, especially the *ḫaṭîb* imam Nawfal, who does not stop talking about his khatabitic successes up to the point of trying to convince me that even the faithful from Senegal who does not speak Arabic would understand his sermons in Arabic anyway. Let's analyze deeply the answers and explanations of the *ḫutabâ'*. For the *ḫaṭîb* imam Ğa'far, the sociolinguistic dimension is the most important challenge he faces in the preparation of the *ḫ*uṭbah: "*In my country of origin the ḫuṭbah has only one language, only one dialect is spoken. In Europe, languages, cultures, ethnic groups are different, this is the* taḥaddî *[challenge, ed]. Even if you are among a group of Arab faithful, every Arab has his spoken Arabic, the Moroccan does not understand the Egyptian, the Egyptian does not understand the Moroccan and the Moroccan does not understand the Palestinian and so on. This is the biggest challenge: the language and the overall diversity*." The *ḫaṭîb* 'Amğad was on the same position: "*My goal is that 70–80% of the people [the ritual participants, ed] learn something from this topic, I always try to speak in classical Arabic, no dialect, because there are Egyptians, Algerians, Sudanese, Senegalese who studied Arabic, but the linguistic problem remains present*." For *ḫaṭîb* imam Omar, the problems are many and all are related to the diversity of origin of the faithful: "*The diversity of the origins of the faithful and their different languages puts me in great difficulty. For example, if I talk about what is happening in Syria the 75% of those present are not interested; if you speak of Egypt the same happens. Sometimes while I am doing the ḫuṭbah there are people who talk to each other and do not respect the rule that says they do not have to speak during ḫuṭbah, and this is a demonstration of the religious ignorance of these faithful; others check their mobile phones or text. The people need to learn the rules of participation in ṣalât al-ğumu'ah. To these I must teach a basic culture, others want me to speak of '*ibâdât [religious practices, n.d.r.], *others want me to talk about the injustices faced by Muslim people. This plurality pushes me to diversify the themes. If the faithful were all Moroccan or Egyptian, for example, it would be less difficult, but this diversity actually puts me in difficulty in choosing the topic of ḫuṭbah. We have many students who attend the Polytechnic university and do not speak either Arabic or Italian and ask us for an English translation*." For the *ḫaṭîb* Yûnus, on the other hand, the judicial–religious dimension is the enormous difficulty he faces not only in the *ḫuṭbah* but also in the

lectures: "*The faithful come from different countries and consequently know Islam under profiles of different juridical and religious fiqh, the Malikites, the Shafi'ites, the Hanbalites and the Hanafites [sic], so I preferred to avoid to present themes of the* fiqh *in the* ḫuṭbah." For *ḫaṭîb* imam Samîr, nothing is "normal" in the ritual of Friday in Italy: "*When I visit my country of origin and participate in Friday prayers, I see that all the participants of the country, including* ḫaṭîb, *pray in a real mosque with the minaret, they have the same mentality, the same culture. Instead in Italy, we pray in a shed turned into a mosque, we pray in a hurry because we have to go back to work, the faithful are of different origins, they have different cultures and even* ḫaṭîb *is of different origin. Nothing is normal. The language that unites all is Italian but very simple Italian. That is an Italian that immigrants can understand not an* 'Italian of books.' *In this case, making an* ḫuṭbah *that meets everybody's needs becomes difficult or impossible. Moreover, in recent years many refugees have come to Italy and they speak neither Arabic nor Italian*."

On the other hand, the topics covered in the sermons belong to different discipline and I may speak of different thematic areas that constitute the argumentative map of the sermons. The nearly one hundred sermons collected belong to eleven thematic areas as can be seen in the table below (see Figure 1). Most sermons are related to issues concerning ethics. The invitation that is addressed to the faithful is not to think about accumulating assets in this earthly life, but rather to focus on the afterlife. This sermon was held in the place of worship of a provincial town whose attendants are mostly immigrants, and specifically refugees, who are therefore looking for work, or if they have, they are still in a state of economic hardship. From the titles of the sermons, among the topics analyzed, six of them seem to deal with current topics; I report a few: (1) social networks and their correct use; (2) dialogue and ability to listen to others; (3) fight smoking; (4) dialogue within the family: how to maintain traditions and ensure that this is a need for all family members? (5) the citizenship (or al-*muwâṭanah*). From the analysis of the themes of the sermons on religious celebrations, instead, it emerged that all the religious leaders concentrate their homiletic production on Ramadan during the holy month. On the first Friday of holy month, the sermon recalls the rules and the importance of fasting and, in many cases, it is the same sermon repeated every year at the beginning of the month of fasting. However, this practice is different on the anniversary of the birth of the prophet. On this anniversary, the *ḫuṭabâ'* can be split into three groups: (a) those who do not talk about it; (b) those who emphasize this anniversary and invite the faithful to celebrate it; (c) those who face this occasion to emphasize the knowledge of the Sunnah and invite Muslims not to celebrate it because it is a *bid'ah* (religious innovation). At the beginning of March, two religious leaders treated the subject of women in their sermons and both reiterated rhetorics such as: "*Islam has freed women fourteen centuries ago*" or "*The Koran and the Sunnah have guaranteed the women's rights since the dawn of* Islam." In this perspective of non-Islamic celebrations, it is interesting to note that, despite that the collection of *ḫuṭab* coincided with the Christian Easter, 25 April and 2 June 2017, these deliberations did not find place in religious discourse. See Table 1.

Table 1. Theme area by number of sermon.

Theme Area	N° *ḫuṭbah*
Self-criticism	1
Myths	1
History	1
Politics	2
Da'wah (propaganda)	7
Charity	7
Transnational Islam	7
Fiqh (religious law)	15
Celebrations	16
Spirituality	16
Ethics	28

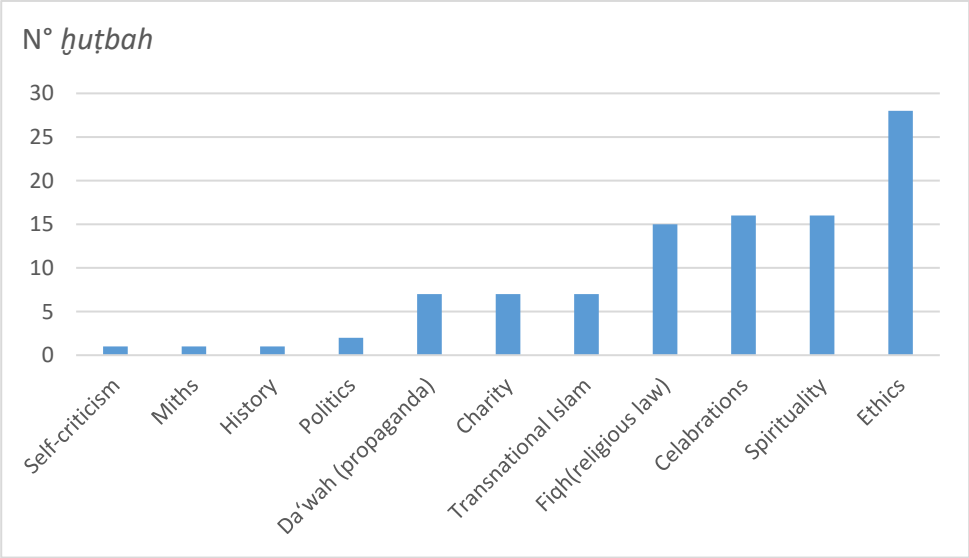

Figure 1. Theme area of the *ḫuṭbah*.

Another aspect of great importance and of significant media and political interest is the use of the Italian language in religious discourse and, more precisely, in the Friday sermon. The Italian language is present in all places of Islamic worship; indeed, it is the only common language among the Muslims living in Italy. An Egyptian speaks Italian to communicate with a Pakistani and a Moroccan does the same thing to a Senegalese and an Arab adult speaks Italian with a second-generation boy, and so on. Even the Arabs themselves inside the place of worship speak an Arabic enriched with different Italian expressions. But listening to the *ḫuṭbah* in Italian is another thing. There are various degrees of the presence of the Italian language in the sermon. The first places of worship that have adopted the Italian language in the *ḫuṭbah* are undoubtedly those frequented by Italian citizens converted to Islam. A *ḫaṭîb* named Târiq told me that the first time he decided to do *ḫuṭbah* in Italian was in the eighties of the past century and he had difficulties because he felt "as if he were a priest." It was a converted Muslim who asked him and at the same time helped him to accept the new reality. The converted person in this situation acted as a mediator between two cultures (Allievi 1999) and suggested to the *ḫaṭîb* to preserve the ritual words and religious terms in Arabic and to pronounce the rest in Italian. A second degree is the situation in which the *ḫaṭîb* summarizes the sermon in Italian. This situation is the most widespread model in Italy. The category of *ḫutabâ'* that adopt this model is made up entirely of immigrants who have lived in Italy for a long time; they are all peddlers, except one who owns a butcher's shop. The level of knowledge of the Italian language of these *ḫutabâ'* is low. Some of them attended the evening school of Italian for foreigners managed by some social and integration association, or in other cases by the city municipality. The *ḫaṭîb*, after having enunciated his own sermon and before leaving the place, gave a brief summary: it is not a translation but a very faithful reproduction to the subject of *ḫuṭbah*.

Another model of the relation between *ḫuṭbah* and the Italian language is that in which a summary in Italian enunciated by a translator is provided. I found it in five places of worship. This model is the second most common in the places covered by our investigation. This model is found in many places of worship of big cities. The explanation of this is that, in these large cities, the faithful can afford to hire a *ḫaṭîb* graduated in religious studies in the country of origin, and usually this category of preachers does not follow a course of study in Italy that would allow them to do the *ḫuṭbah* in Italian as well as in Arabic. In these cases, the leaders of the place of worship designate a translator with the task of summarizing after the *ḫuṭbah* and before celebrating the *ṣalât*. In all five cases studied, I noticed that the translator is a young second-generation male, and many times, a son of one of the leaders. Another model describes the situation when the first *ḫuṭbah* is in Arabic and the second one in Italian. This model is presented to this study by three *ḫutabâ'*. The model consists in the performance of the

first *ḫuṭbah* in Arabic and the second in Italian. In practice, the three *ḫutabâ'* divide the homiletical product into two equal parts and join Arabic and Italian in the same sermon. The preachers do not read the translation from a sheet but make a spontaneous speech in which they try to remain faithful to the topic of the first part enunciated in Arabic. These three religious people graduated in Italy, two engineers and a doctor. Their academic career and their social life have played a very important role in giving them mastery of the Italian language and a greater openness to Italian society than their colleagues. Another linguistic practice found in only one case is the multilingual *ḫuṭbah*. A few years ago, a preacher told me that he started to do translation in Italian, and due to the immigration flows of the last 2–3 years, he found that almost 40% of the participants were refugees who spoke neither Italian nor Arabic. Therefore, he decided to enunciate the *ḫuṭbah* in Arabic and in Italian and he also started to make a summary in French and English. It is important to highlight that, in all the places of worship I analyzed, I have noticed that the majority of the faithful are refugees, a fact which has led me to ask the leaders of places of worship and the *ḫutabâ'* for an explanation. However, no one was able to give me numbers or percentages: I had to make estimates during the period of participant observation, and it seems that the percentage of refugees varies between 20% and 40% of the total of the faithful. Although the religious leaders are aware of this ethnic transformation of the faithful, they have not undertaken any initiative to facilitate the understanding of the *ḫuṭbah* by the refugees. The last model is that of the *ḫuṭbah* enunciated only in Arabic. The two *ḫuṭabâ'* involved both say they are in favor of using the Italian language but are unable to make a religious speech in Italian, and therefore rely on second-generation people who unfortunately are not always available to make a summary in Italian at the end of the ritual. During my participant observation in these two places of worship, however, I noticed that there is no translation in Italian. I witnessed a loud criticism of a group of faithful who asked for the Italian translation in the place of worship where the imam 'Abbâs preaches. In a spontaneous conversation with the group of protesters, I realized that the translation into Italian has never been done, except when the leaders ask the faithful to make donations to cover the costs of the place of worship. The second imam told me that, during the *ḫuṭab* of *'Id al-Fitr* and of *'Id al-Adhâ* (the celebration of the end of Ramadan and the feast of sacrifice), a second-generation young man was assigned to prepare the translation a few days before the celebrations because the rituals are organized in a public space and some mass media usually participate. But on normal Fridays, he told me: "*ma šafna had*" (no one sees us). Therefore, in the *ḫuṭbah* of the feast, the Italian language translation is not used to transmit knowledge to the non-Arab faithful—and they are many—but to show the public opinion that the sermon is done in Italian. The two places of worship involved in this practice are both of Salafi doctrine and, in my opinion, these two leaders are not convinced in using Italian in religious discourse. Once, the refusal to use the Italian language in the sermon was manifested by a believer. When the *ḫaṭîb* began the sermon in Italian, he stood up and explained that Muslims must learn Arabic, the language of the Koran, but a group of faithful asked him to be quiet or leave and they supported *ḫaṭîb*, who continued his performance in Italian.

6. Conclusions

The ritual frame of the canonical Islamic prayer of Friday in Italy has undergone transformations in many ways: the traditional space for prayers is no longer a mosque ad hoc, but it is buildings converted. Also, the organization of the ritual more than once in the same building for logistical reasons is a novelty as it is the setting of starting and ending time for the ritual. The same can be said about the profile of the *ḫaṭîb* that presents himself today in a new multiple aspect, as multiple are its scholastic and academic formation, its status and its role. This alludes to the fact that new models of *ḫuṭbat al-ǧumu'ah* are being built in Italy (Berger and Luckmann 1997); these models are attempts to reconstruct a plausible structure of Islam in Italy. The investigation carried out so far provides essential elements to affirm that we are in front of two degrees of reconstruction of the plausible structure of Islam. Through *ḫuṭbat al-ǧumu'ah*, the first degree is represented by the knowledge that the *ḫuṭabâ'* transmit in their homiletic discourse, in which they try to reconstruct the credibility of

Islam among the participants. This is what I called 'the reconstruction of community plausibility'; the second degree concerns the messages that the *ḫuṭabâ'* transmit through the *ḫuṭab* in an attempt to reconstruct a plausibility in Islam communities in the world outside the place of worship and, in this case, I speak of the "reconstruction of social plausibility." Another significant fact is that each of the two grades show different levels of plausibility: these levels are determined by various factors, such as the ideological tendency of the *ḫaṭîb*, his level of education, the sensitivity of the leaders of the place of worship towards the social life, the availability of the faithful to adaptations, the environment where the place of worship is located and the social pressure involved.

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