

The Sound of Satan: Different Aspects of Whispering in Islamic theology

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to outline Islamic discourses on sound, more particularly whispering, found in the Qurʾān, the *ḥadīth* literature and contemporary online fatwas, with the aim of determining whether whispering has different connotations and meanings in different contexts, literary genres and ritual contexts. Examples discussed in the article are derived from a broad range of Islamic sources, such as the Qurʾān and its exegesis and the prophetic literature, but also from a number of different fields within Muslim culture, such as the Internet, YouTube clips and notes from fieldwork among Muslim groups in Sweden. On the basis of the texts and videos selected for analysis, I discuss the belief that whispering has the potential to disturb and cause disorder, and is associated with Satan. Whispering is looked upon as an intermediate and therefore suspicious position, between silence and saying something out loud. More generally, whispering is closely associated with the negative effects of Satan's power over mankind.

Keywords: *Satan, whispering, Islam, Theology*

Both academic databases (such as the Index Islamicus) and publication catalogues indicate clearly that academic interest in Islamic opinions and debates about music has grown over the last decade. This interest includes such questions as whether music is lawful or unlawful according to Islamic theological interpretations and Muslim cultural practices, and to what extent Muslims make use of music for various reasons – for example to promote and spread Islam or to protest against oppressive regimes. But scholars who are interested in academic studies of Muslim debates and perceptions of sound in general are not likely to find much information. Compared to the study of Islam and music – if I may use a broad category, including many different topics and academic interests – it is much more difficult to find studies of sound and Islam, which to the best of my knowledge is a neglected field of studies.

In this article, which should be seen as a contribution to the study of sound and Islam, I focus on the sound of whispering and private conversation in Islamic theology. My purpose is to explore how and why whispering is discussed as a theological issue, and why whispering and private conversation might be perceived in the Qur'ān and the prophetic and juridical literature as a challenge or even as dangerous. A second purpose is to determine whether whispering has different connotations and meanings in different literary and theological genres. In developing my arguments I have made use of a broad range of Islamic sources, including the Qur'ān and its exegesis, the prophetic literature, YouTube clips, and notes from field studies among Muslims in Sweden. This explorative approach is necessary because I want to locate as many Muslim discussions about whispering as possible and to determine whether and why whispering can have multiple meanings in diverse Islamic contexts. My analysis is influenced by the discussion in social anthropology concerning pollution, social danger and taboos. In the words of Mary Douglas, pollution is 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1968, 338). Like dirt, the difference between sound and noise is relational and is closely related to a social or cultural system of values and order. Douglas explains this as follows:

Thus the idea of dirt implies a structure of ideas. For dirt is a kind of compendium category for all events which blur, smudge, contradict, or otherwise confuse accepted classifications. The underlying feeling is that a system of values which is habitually expressed in a given arrangement of things has been violated. (Douglas 1968, 338.)

Before I present the empirical material and develop the analysis, it is important to broaden our perspectives and think more creatively about sound and noise. If you have normal hearing, it is evident that various types of sound are part and parcel of human existence. For example, while typing this text I can hear the sound of my fingers moving across the keyboard, and through the open door of my office I can hear the calm and muted talk of the administrative staff in the corridor. When I take a sip of coffee, the mug creates a distinct sound as the porcelain meets the wooden desk. Without paying much attention to it, we are constantly surrounded by sounds and noises, created by humans, animals, natural phenomena and machines. While modern life in a large city in the Western world is distinctly different from life in a rural village or a medieval dwelling, noise and sound have always been part of human life. The squeaking sound of a rope raising a bucket of water from a well, the metal worker hitting the iron on the anvil

with a hammer, and the *adhān* calling believers to prayer are all distinct types of sound. Such sounds – or noises, depending on the circumstances and the listener's individual preferences – have to the best of my knowledge seldom been the focus of academic studies of Islam. From a more general point of view, it is also important to stress that there is only a thin line between an accepted sound and a disturbing noise, and that this boundary is normally constituted by cultural norms, situated in specific cultural contexts that change over time. One example: in the early twentieth century jazz music was generally perceived in Western culture as something dangerous and even anti-religious, but today it is a highly valued, prestigious musical form and is performed on a regular basis in many churches in the West. Like pollution and dirt, to refer again to Douglas's theoretical perspective, the difference between accepted and rejected sounds is rooted in cultural and social norms that are often closely associated with religious norms and values.

Before I turn to the Qur'ān and other examples in my text, it is necessary to stress that whispering in Islamic contexts is associated with Satan; it also occupies a dubious position between things that can be said aloud and silence. As in many religious traditions, Muslims generally feel that a person should speak out loud if he or she has good reason to do so – for example, in order to tell the truth – but that the individual should refrain from gossiping and backbiting, practices often associated with persons whispering or speaking in a low voice. Because of these two attributes, whispering is perceived as something that can threaten and disturb the social order.

Whispering in the Qur'ān

As Jacqueline Chabbi has correctly pointed out, the Qur'ān contains 'many allusions to aurality and its different degrees' (Chabbi 2006, 478). For example, since the Qur'ān should be heard and verbally memorized, Muslims generally stress that it is not enough just to read the text: every syllable, word and sentence must be perceived as a sound. The very meaning of the Arabic word *al-Qur'ān* is 'recitation' or 'reading' (Wehr 1979, 882), and it should therefore come as no surprise that numerous scholars of the Qur'ān, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, have highlighted the importance of the oral aspect of the text (see for example Graham 1993; Nelson 2001). Sounds can for example foretell a positive inspiration or revelation (*wahy*), as in Q 21:45:

Say, 'I do but warn you according to revelation': But the deaf will not hear the call, (even) when they are warned!

But sound can also be turned into noise, and in this form it comes close to the negative messages that can be associated with 'unexpected, furtive, worrying sounds', as in Q 20:102, a passage that refers to the end of the world:

The Day when the Trumpet will be sounded: that Day, We shall gather the sinful, bleary-eyed (with terror).

We may ask whether the symbolic importance of sounds in the Qur'ān is a remnant of pre-Islamic society and its understanding of sound as something disturbing and unpredictable (Tritton 1934). In this milieu, sounds related to natural phenomena (wind, thunder etc.) were often perceived and interpreted as expressions of something dangerous and supernatural (i.e. something produced by jinns or other non-human evil beings). From a comparative point of view, a connection between sound and supernatural beings, deities and forces is not unique to Islam or Middle Eastern traditions. A number of supernatural beings in the history of religions have been closely associated with natural phenomena such as wind, fire and thunder, to mention just a few connections between religion and sound (consider for example the Hindu god of wind Wayu or the old Norse god Thor). Accordingly it is not surprising that Satan, or *Shayṭān* in Arabic and Islamic traditions, is also associated with certain sounds; one of which, at the very heart of this article, is the barely audible speech or sound that we call whispering.

Since sound is a central theological and ethical theme in the Qur'ān, it is easy to find several different Arabic words that could be used to refer to whispering or barely audible speech. To make sure that I have not omitted any occurrences in the Qur'ān, I have made a systematic search of the whole text in order to find lexical and thematic elements in the text that relate to whispering. One convenient and easy method is to use one of the numerous online search engines for the Qur'ān that can be found on the Internet (for example that provided by <http://www.islamicity.com/quransearch/>). Another is to use dictionaries, such as Hanna Kassis' *A Concordance of the Qur'ān* or Arne A. Ambros' and Stephan Procházka's *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic* to look up the root for the Arabic word *waswās* (Kassis 1983, 1295; Ambros 2004, 289). However, if we start with Muhammad Asad's English translation of the Qur'ān as published on the Internet, we can identify at least ten passages that contain the word or words 'whisper' or 'whispering' (i.e. 6:112, 121; 7:20; 8:11; 19:98; 20:103, 120; 50:16; 68:23 and 114:4–5).

The most common word for whispering in the Qur'ān is the onomato-

poetic *waswās*, a word that occurs five times in the Qur'ān (four times as a verb and once as a noun). Besides the passages that directly relate to whispering, the Qur'ān also has a large number of references to 'secret words' (*sirr*) or thoughts that have been concealed. However, to hide an action or thought – for example, by uttering it in a low voice – is believed to be in vain, since according to Islamic tradition God knows everything (cf. Q 64:4). To speak into someone's ear in order to weave a plot is associated, according to Jacqueline Chabbi, with such words as *ajwā*, *tanājī* and *najwā* (cf. Q 17:47; 20:62; 21:3). According to the Canadian Arabist Andrew Rippin's analysis, the term *waswās* should mainly be seen as one of Satan's many tempting attributes. Besides whispering, Satan also calls on man (13:21), speaks (14:22; 59:16), uses words (81:25) and makes false promises (2:268). In the exegetical literature, it is even argued that Satan on one occasion intervened and made the prophet Muhammad recite the so-called 'Satanic verses' praising the pre-Islamic deities venerated by the Meccans prior to the rise of Islam. These verses were removed from the Qur'ān because they were not perceived as an authentic revelation but as the work of Satan.¹ To quote Rippin, "'Whispering" is to be seen as a part of Satan's overall verbal approach to humans' (2006, 693). For example, Muslims believe that it was Satan who whispered in Adam and Eve's ears, by this cunning procedure persuading them to break their promise to God. According to Islamic literary traditions, Satan was able to enter into paradise disguised as a snake, an animal that is generally associated with jinns in Islamic literature and folklore (Tritton 1934). Consequently, Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree and were thrown out of paradise (7:20; 20:120). As in Q 114:4–5 and in stories about Adam and Eve, Satan is generally portrayed as the evil whisperer, one who instils evil thoughts into the hearts of men and makes them forget about God (i.e. he creates disorder and chaos by misleading mankind).

From this brief account of the Qur'ān, it is clear that whispering is associated above all with Satan, who by his whispering has the power to seduce men and women, leading them down the broad path that will take them to hell and damnation. Furthermore, it is not possible for mankind to hide anything from God by speaking in a low voice or by whispering. God is seen as omniscient, meaning that he knows everything, making it impossible to hide anything from him. The conclusion to be drawn is that whispering is

1 On this particular episode and its relationship to the complex discussion about the collection of the Qur'ān and the theological principle of abrogation (*nāsikh* and *mansūkh*), see for example Burton 1970.

associated with Satan and with negative or un-Islamic behaviour, and all believing Muslims should abstain from it.

Whispering in Islamic Prophetic Literature and Jurisprudence

At a first glance, it seems to be more difficult to find direct references to whispering in the *ḥadīth* literature (Juynboll 2007) and the Islamic juridical literature. Whispering or *waswās* is not for example included in the detailed catalogue of early Muslim traditions compiled by Wensinck (1927). But the question of barely audible speech or other forms of whispering might be discussed indirectly, in relation to the issue of ‘private conversations’; a matter that is likely to include concealed forms of conversation, such as whispering or speaking in a low voice. This topic is highlighted for example in the following prophetic tradition:

Ibn ‘Umar reported that Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) had said: When there are three (persons), two should not converse secretly [*yatana’āya*] between themselves to the exclusion of the (third) one.²

In contrast to the Qur’ānic context, the private conversation referred to here is first of all not associated with Satan, or the root w-s-w-s, but with the word *na’ā* (*na’y*), which among other things connotes such meanings as ‘to be far, far away, distant, keep at a distance’ (Wehr 1979, 1101). The problem addressed in this *ḥadīth* is that it is impolite to be engaged in a ‘private conversation’ in a group smaller than four persons. It is argued that if two out of three persons are occupied in ‘private conversations’, the third party will most likely feel uneasy and excluded. The topic is not linked to Satan, but to good manners and the social order. Consequently this *ḥadīth* is an important reminder of the fact that there is no general restriction in Islamic theology against private conversations (which may or may not include whispering). Islam is, however, perceived as a religion stressing the importance of all Muslims displaying proper behaviour. It is therefore necessary to instruct all believers how they should behave both in public spaces and in private social gatherings. Guidelines for correct behaviour were often collected in

2 Muslim, *Ḥadīth* No. 2183, Chapter 15 (Kitab as-salam/Book of Greetings), Arabic text 446/English trans. 447 (Sahih Muslim, Vol. IIIb). See also *The Content of Character: Ethical Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad*, compiled by Sheikh al-Amin Ali Mazrui. English translation by Hamza Yusuf (Sandala 2005), 16. On the topic of private conversations see also <http://www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/hadeeth/riyad/17/chap281.htm> (accessed 2011-08-09).

so-called Adab books, which were compiled and written in order to teach Muslims how to behave in certain situations and to give an Islamic perspective and viewpoint on a specific topic (cf. for example Metcalf 1984).

To give one more example that relates to the discussion above: it is mentioned in the *ḥadīth* literature that it is forbidden for a third party to stop and listen to a 'private conversation' between two individuals. This ruling is also found in the *ḥadīth* literature:

Sa'id al-Maqbari related the following:

I passed 'Abdullah b. 'Umar while a man was talking to him. I stood near them. Ibn 'Umar struck me in the chest and said: 'When you see two people talking to each other, do not stand close to them or sit with them without first asking their permission'. I said to him: 'May Allah make you prosper, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman. I only hoped to hear something good from you'. (al-Bukhari 2003, 11.)

Here we see no connection with whispering; the story deals only with the problem of overhearing someone. Still, it is an example of the fact that Muslims should follow certain guidelines in engaging in conversations and human affairs.

If, on the other hand, we leave aside the moral discussions found in the *ḥadīth* literature and turn our attention to the juridical literature and the so-called *fatwā* genre (the Islamic responsa literature; for a detailed presentation of this genre see for example Masud et al. 1996), it is possible to find another theological aspect related to the question of whispering and *waswās*. Numerous compilations of so-called question and answer books (i.e. books containing non-binding juridical answers issued by Muslim '*ulamā*'), as well as contemporary online sites offering Islamic answers and guidelines, contain among other things examples of Muslims' questions about their ritual ablutions and prayer. For example: believers who feel 'doubt, uncertainty, unfounded thoughts and hallucinations' and who are unsure whether they have performed the obligatory rituals properly, are often said to be victims of Satan's evil works. In this theological literature (cf. for example Al-Juziyyah, n.d.), a sense of having done something wrong, incorrect or incomplete is often associated with *waswās* and with Satan's negative influence over mankind. It is he who plants doubt, making believers unsure of their intentions and of whether they have followed all the prescribed rules and regulations. According to Rippin's outline of the concept of Satan in the Qur'ān, for example, it is believed that Shayṭān is

‘especially prevalent at prayer’ and that ‘each person has a Satan resting on his shoulder as a constant tempter’ (Rippin 1997, 408). In the course of my fieldwork, I have observed that at prayer some Muslims say parts of the prayer in a low voice (i.e. they whisper); some of them even use their fingers to count the number of prayers, an act that is often interpreted as symbolically beating Satan with their prayers. Despite these methods and precautions, it is believed that Satan can make the believer uncertain and doubtful, a feeling that can easily cause moral doubts and become a problem for the individual believer. Al-Jaziyyah writes:

Such people wash themselves, recite with their tongues, listen with their own ears, yet still have doubt about their actions; whether they have actually done any of them or not! Satan makes them even doubt their own intentions, which they certainly know, deep in their hearts. Instead, they accept Satan’s whispering, that they have not made the intention for *Salaah* for example, to argue against their own certainty. It is all an exaggeration in their obedience to Satan, and acceptance of his *waswasah*; so whoever reaches this level of obedience to Satan has achieved complete obedience to him. (Al-Juziyyah, n.d. 32.)

As a consequence of this negative influence, the individual becomes a slave to Satan’s will. Hence:

A person under Satan’s whisperings accepts the devil’s words, harming himself/herself, sometimes by plunging himself/herself in cold water, or by opening the eyes under cold water, washing them until they become sore (Al-Juziyyah, n.d., 32).

This shows clearly that there is believed to be a connection between *waswās* and the problem of compulsive and neurotic ritual behaviour.

However, yet another illustrative example that may be related to Rippin’s words and the quotation above is found on the Sunnipath, a prominent Sunnī Muslim website in English. In a question-and-answer section uploaded on this particular website, we read that the (unnamed) questioner can ask a *muftī* for guidance on how to perform the *ghusl* (the major ablution). He asked this question because he was worried that he had done something wrong or missed some important detail, even though he testified that he

had spent a long time in the shower to get rid of all ‘pollutions’.³ The *mufti*’s answer reads:

A detailed explanation isn’t really necessary. Ghusl is simple: make an intention and then wash everything. The key point to remember is that you are not required to have certainty that you have washed everything. The fuqaha explicitly state that as long as you think that ‘most likely I washed everything’, you have fulfilled your obligation before Allah Most High, even if, in actual fact, you missed a tiny portion of your body. The question you should be asking when making wudu and ghusl is not ‘am I really certain that I completely washed that part?’ but ‘did I most likely completely wash that part?’ If the answer to the latter question is ‘yes’, then you should simply ignore your doubts and get out of the shower.⁴

In his answer, the *mufti* stresses that it is Satan who causes these concerns and doubts, and that the questioner should not be worried or disturbed by this fact. To avoid a feeling of inadequacy, however, it is necessary to seek Islamic guidance and ‘true knowledge’ about Islam, and it is of the utmost importance to turn to God and seek his protection against the evil whisperer (cf. Al-Ghazali 2007, Chapter 11). To ward off Satan’s negative influence, it is also necessary that believers avoid exaggeration (for example in performing the ritual ablution discussed above) and stick to the established norms (i.e. the Sunna of the prophet).

If we compare the passages that address whispering in the Qur’ān, the discussions found in the prophetic and juridical literature are more closely associated with ritual behaviour and questions of how to be a good Muslim. Whispering is hardly mentioned in the prophetic literature, but the traditionalists indirectly speak of how Muslims should behave in private conversation, and what rules and regulations should govern their behaviour when engaging in public conversation. To overhear a private conversation is generally bad; but a private conversation can itself be negative, for example if the parties are engaged in backbiting or slander. In the prophetic literary genre, whispering is not directly associated with Satan but with human error; the instructions help the individual to avoid human shortcomings in order to become a good Muslim. The juridical literature and the fatwas

³ On the negative effects of ritual and symbolic ‘pollution’, see for example Larsson 2009.

⁴ ‘Waswasah in Ghusl’ by Shaykh Hamza Karamali, retrieved from <http://qa.sunnipath.com/issue_view.asp?HD=3&ID=14642&CATE=372> accessed 9 August 2011.

analyzed above, however, show a close resemblance to the argumentation found in the Qur'ān. Whispering is associated in this literary context with Satan and his power to tempt (i.e. to whisper) and instil unbelief, uncertainty and ritual anxiety.

Whispering in Online Islamic Discourses

Leaving the Qur'ān and the prophetic literature aside and turning to more popular expressions, we again find a number references to whispering and the whisperer (i.e. Satan) in texts that relate to exorcism and other forms of so-called popular belief (Muslim 2011). Without going into the complex issue of differentiating between legalistic and popular beliefs in Islam (see for example Muslim 2011 for a critical overview of this discussion), it is for example possible to find videos uploaded to the video-sharing site YouTube.com that provide information about *Shayṭān* the whisperer and people who are supposedly possessed by the devil or other demons or spirits.⁵ Since the videos change rapidly, with old ones being removed and others uploaded, I have not done a systematic search for videos that contain references to Islam and whispering. The following brief sketch should therefore mainly be seen as one example of how Muslims can discuss whispering and the problem of the whisperer (i.e. Satan) who is present among so-called ordinary Muslims. While this is not the right place to develop methodological questions, it is evident that there is a growing need for a more systematic use of videography or ethnographic video collection in the study of contemporary Islamic and Muslim debate (for one such methodological discussion, see Knoblauch 2011).

My example is a video called *Satan and His Army: Devil Whispers* that was uploaded to YouTube.com. In this video the viewer is given the message that it is *Shayṭān* who deceives Muslim males and makes them worship this life, money and women rather than God. Women, however, are also tricked by Satan, who whispers to them that they should stop wearing the *ḥijāb*, put on perfume and beautify themselves in order to look like supermodels, instead of emulating pious Muslim women; in other words, he wants them to break the laws and rules laid down by God. According to this video, it is the devil who seduces women and makes them think that they are supermodels who should display themselves in indecent ways in public, thereby breaching the thin line between order and chaos. Thus it is so-called weak Muslims who destroy the *umma* by listening to *Shayṭān*'s evil whispering.

5 For a discussion of exorcism (*rukya* in Arabic) and spirit possession in Islamic traditions, see Fahd 1995 and Muslim 2011.

The damaging outcome of Satan's work is the uprooting of gender norms, the spreading of a godless state and finally eternal damnation in hell – at least according to the video *Satan and His Army: Devil Whispers*.⁶ A similar conclusion is also found for example in the Islamic booklet *Waswasah: The Whispering of the Shaitan* by Imam Abu Abdullah Shams Deen Ibn Qayyim Al-Juziyyah (no date), as well as in other videos uploaded on YouTube.com.

My selected example above should not necessarily be seen as representative of all Muslim opinion. In analyzing the content, it is important to remember that the video does not include any information about the sender or the purpose of the video. However, this problem is not unique to this particular video; even after a systematic search of the internet it is very difficult to know if the selected examples are representative or not, and even more difficult to say anything substantial about how the videos are analyzed, understood or used by those who browse for Muslim videos. While writing this article (late 2011 and spring 2012), however, it was also possible to view other videos containing references to *waswās* and Islamic theology. Regardless of whether the producers of these videos were using Arabic, French, English or some other language, the films were in general related to the negative effects of Satan and ritual anxiety, and in some cases whispering was discussed in relation to demon possession and exorcism.

Compared to the discussion referring to the Qur'ān and the prophetic and juridical literature, in the YouTube video whispering seems to be more closely associated with negative and sometimes Western influences. As in the Qur'ān, here too whispering is clearly associated with Satan, and the discussion also resembles the juridical literature and its emphasis on the belief that it is Satan who causes ritual anxiety among Muslims. However, it is also clear that the whisperer is associated with negative influences generally found in Western cultures. The video suggests that it is Satan who seduces Muslims to behave in non-Islamic ways, and makes women abandon the path of Islam. The producers of the videos are thus combining the legalistic tradition found in the Qur'ān and the prophetic and juridical literature with the popular beliefs that prevail among many so-called ordinary Muslims.

By Way of Conclusion

If we try to outline the theological discussion about whispering presented in this short text, it is clear that it is an audible expression related to the evil

6 See <http://wn.com/Satan_And_His_Army__Devils_Whisper> accessed 10 August 2011..

force of Satan (i.e. the whisperer), as well as to questions of order, disorder and morality in society. Furthermore, it is believed that Satan as the whisperer can cause compulsive and neurotic ritual behaviour in believers, so that they distrust themselves when it comes to Islamic rituals and practices. The examples selected for analysis illustrate the belief that Satan can make people do unlawful things, such as breaking the covenants with God, distrusting themselves or exaggerating their performance of Islamic rituals. Whispering is thus linked to and associated with questions of morality, correct behaviour in public, and the control of evil urges.

While the Islamic texts and videos analyzed here do not spell out this connection, whispering seems to occupy a suspect, intermediate position between silence (not-speaking) and saying something aloud (speaking). In many religious contexts silence is held to be a virtue; this is true of Christian monasteries, but in Islamic contexts too it is often emphasized that it is wrong to speak for no reason, i.e. to engage in idle talk (or *lawh* in Arabic). As in other religious traditions, in Islam the '*ulamā*' consequently argue that believers should either be silent or speak in a loud voice, demonstrating that they have nothing to conceal or hide. To whisper, conversely, is seen as an indication that the speaker is not willing to state his opinion in a loud voice that can be heard by all those present, or that the whisperer is trying to split the community into groups and factions (something associated by most Muslims with Satan). According to this oppositional scheme (silence – whispering – speaking aloud), it is wrong to whisper; it indicates that one is not prepared to stand up for one's opinions and that one wants to split the community into contesting groups and fractions. Consequently, whispering is closely associated with gossiping, backbiting and slander, in other words with the negative aspects that all believers should strive to control if they want to stay on the path of God.

It is also clear that Satan has the power to convince Muslims to question or doubt God's intentions and laws. Just as he (i.e. Satan) seduced Adam and Eve into eating from the forbidden tree in paradise, he makes believers take individual initiative and introduce new traditions, not found in the Qur'an or in the Sunna of the prophet Muhammad (see for example Al-Juziyyah, n.d., 37). By this means, Satan will cause *fitna* (division) and conflict within the community and condemn it to damnation.

Analogously to Mary Douglas's theory of pollution and danger, it is clear that whispering is perceived in most Muslim contexts as something suspect, negative and dangerous, with the potential to threaten the social and theological order. It is nevertheless also clear that whispering offers

different challenges in different Islamic literary genres. To sum up my findings: it is clear that in the Qur'ān whispering is associated above all with Satan and his cunning ways, while in the prophetic and juridical literature the focus is on practical and ritual aspects, with whispering being indirectly related to the problem of private conversation and the question of how to behave correctly in public according to Islamic interpretations. In the juridical literature, moreover, the whisperer is a problem because he causes ritual anxiety among Muslims. It is believed that it is the *waswās* that makes Muslims doubtful and anxious when it comes to performing Islamic rituals. For the jurist it is essential to prevent or at least minimize the risk of anxiety in the Muslim community. Finally, in popular discussions of the sort illustrated by the YouTube video, juridical and ritual aspects were also very present. In this genre whispering was associated with ritual anxiety and demon possession, but it is also possible to argue that in the eyes of the producers of the video the negative aspects of Satan are closely related to a Western and non-Muslim lifestyle. All in all, the sound of whispering can be seen as something dangerous, with the potential to pollute Muslim society.

In conclusion, I suggest that the texts and the video discussed here show that Muslims are concerned with whispering because it is believed that this form of sound has the potential to disturb and cause disorder, and is generally associated with Satan and his evil forces. Whispering as an aural expression is thus part of a theological and symbolic cluster related to questions of order and disorder in Islam. By whispering, the '*ulamā*' believe, the Muslim is entering a liminal and dangerous position that needs to be controlled. Hence it is necessary to lay down rules and regulations that control whispering and the negative influence of Satan in order to avoid disorder and chaos. Whispering is therefore looked upon as an intermediate and therefore suspicious position, seen as distinct on the one hand from silence, on the other from saying something out loud. If Muslims whisper, they are thus doing so to cause splits and tensions within the community. If Muslims listen to Satan (i.e. his whispering), they are also, according to the theologians, bound to leave the path that will bring them to paradise. Although these issues are central to every form of Islamic theology, to the best of my knowledge the theological discussion of whispering and sounds is an unexplored topic in Islamic studies. There is thus clearly a need for more studies and empirical observations that can shed light on how so-called ordinary Muslims understand the problem of whispering, and whether and in what ways they associate these problems with Satan (i.e. the whisperer). From this point of view, the study of whispering in Islamic theology and jurisprudence is only just beginning.

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