



Research Report

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Religious Speech as Resource. A Research Report

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Abstract: Religious speeches aim at *social* efficacy. They are therefore an important resource for religious communities and groups. The article pursues a cultural concept of resources, which does not ask about the benefit of a resource, but about its values in and effects on societies. The crucial elements are the social dynamics, actions and relationships that are closely related to culturally shaped interests in and use of resources. This concept is brought into conversation with more recent research on Christian and Islamic preaching cultures. Anthropological research in particular has repeatedly pointed to the social value attributed to preaching. This interdisciplinary article shows the yield of the dialogue between anthropology and practical theology.

Keywords: Sermon, Christianity, Islam, resource, function, social efficacy ResourceComplexes, ResourceCultures, ResourceAssemblages

Zusammenfassung: Religiöse Reden zielen auf soziale Wirksamkeit. Für religiöse Gemeinschaften und Gruppen sind sie deshalb eine wichtige Ressource. Dieser Aufsatz verfolgt ein kulturwissenschaftliches Konzept von Ressourcen, welches nicht nach dem Nutzen einer Ressource fragt, sondern nach deren Werten in und Wirkungen auf Gesellschaften. Entscheidend sind die sozialen Dynamiken, Handlungen und Beziehungen, die im engen Zusammenhang mit den kulturell geprägten Interessen an und der Nutzung von Ressourcen stehen. Dieses Konzept wird mit neueren Forschungen zu christlichen und islamischen Predigtkulturen ins Gespräch gebracht. Vor allem anthropologische Forschungen haben immer wieder auf die sozialen Werte, die der Predigt zugeschrieben werden, verwiesen.

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Der interdisziplinäre Beitrag untersucht, worin diese besteht und zeigt den Ertrag des Dialogs zwischen Anthropologie und Praktischer Theologie.

Stichwörter: Predigt, Christentum, Islam, Ressource, Funktion, soziale Wirksamkeit, RessourcenKomplexe, RessourcenKulturen, RessourcenGefüge

Introduction

Religious speeches are resources in and for religious communities and groups, for they aim at social efficacy. In principle, the rhetorical situation is a social situation insofar as every public speech is addressed to a group of people. This group does not simply form the backdrop of the speech. Rather, in the process of the speech a group of listeners is created, legitimized and transformed into a community, sometimes by actively excluding others. This rhetorical fact also applies to religious speech, especially to preaching. Every non-virtual, ‘analog’ sermon takes place before, in and for a congregation or religious community. And this is, first of all, independent of the quantitative and qualitative composition of this congregation or community. Conversely, this means that religious speech is a strategic instrument for establishing, representing and transforming religious community. Religious speech is employed by religious communities to pass on their knowledge, to negotiate their values and norms and to relate to other religious and non-religious communities.

Unlike the research situation in social and cultural anthropology, within German-speaking practical theology this social efficacy of religious speech has hardly been discussed recently. By evaluating the purpose and effect of religious speech, German-speaking homiletics solely focuses on the individual. A statement by Winfried Engemann can serve as an example for this: “All homiletic art is in vain if the individual cannot see anything from the communication of the sermon, if it does not gain any importance for his existence.”¹ The sermon should be relevant for the individual; otherwise it threatens to remain irrelevant altogether. It has a virtue and purpose for the faith of the individual.²

1 Winfried Engemann, *Einführung in die Homiletik*, 2nd edition (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2011), 256. Translation by the authors of this article.

2 Correspondingly, empirically oriented reception research in German-speaking homiletics is also predominantly oriented towards the individual. Cf. e.g. Helmut Schwier and Siegfried Gall, *Predigt hören. Befunde und Ergebnisse der Heidelberger Umfrage zur Predigtrezeption* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008); Helmut Schwier and Siegfried Gall, *Predigt hören im konfessionellen Vergleich* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013).

There are good and, especially for German-speaking theology, comprehensible reasons for this view. For example, one can refer to the importance of the systematic-theological concept that describes Protestantism as “religion of conscience” (“Gewissensreligion”),³ or also to a reading of Schleiermacher informed by subjectivity theory. That means: Homiletics is essentially geared towards an understanding of Protestant religion as a religion of inwardness and the individual.

This approach based on the theory of the individual threatens to obstruct the view of the social dimension of religious speech. The social is often a blind spot of homiletics. This is striking considering the Lutheran understanding of the church as religious community that is determined by preaching (speech) and sacrament (ritual) (*Confessio Augustana*, Article 5 and 7). Religious speech is an essential resource that constitutes the church as a community.

Recently, anthropological research on religious speech in modern societies has shown the social significance of the resource ‘religious speech’. The importance of religious speech for these processes has been repeatedly demonstrated in particular in research on religious revivals in Islamic societies and the socio-cultural transformation processes associated with it, as well as in research on rapidly growing Pentecostal and charismatic communities as well as Evangelicals in non-European Christianities and their socio-political dynamics. Corresponding studies show that the sermons in these contexts are a highly significant resource linked to dynamics of value creation and valorization. These studies do not suggest a decline in the significance of sermons, as is often the case in Western European contexts.

This article follows up on this trace. In a first section, a cultural understanding of resources will be presented. The article presents the resource concept as it is used by the Collaborative Research Centre 1070 “ResourceCultures. Socio-cultural Dynamics in the Use of Resources”. Within the framework of this CRC 1070, the two authors are carrying out a cooperative project between social and cultural anthropology and practical theology on “Religious Speech as a Resource in South and Central Asia. Instruction, Medialization and Commercialization”.⁴

³ For the homiletics especially received by Dietrich Rössler, *Beispiel und Erfahrung. Zu Luthers Homiletik*, now available in the collected essays: Dietrich Rössler, *Überlieferung und Erfahrung. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Praktischen Theologie*, ed. Christian Albrecht and Martin Weeber (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 20–32.

⁴ See <https://uni-tuebingen.de/en/research/core-research/collaborative-research-centers/sfb-1070/>, accessed May, 15, 2020. In this Collaborative Research Centre, archaeologists, geographers, historians, economists, anthropologists and theologians have been working on a new concept of resources since 2013.

In a second chapter, this concept is brought up for discussion with more recent research on preaching cultures in different religious communities and societies. The focus of the presentation is on contemporary Christian and Islamic preaching cultures. The selection is based on systematic aspects and is therefore exemplary. A guiding principle is to interrogate to what extent religious speech can be identified in the relevant studies as a resource through which social dynamics and effects can be identified. Where necessary, historical studies on the corresponding religious sermon cultures are referred to for further perspectives. This also applies to religious self-portrayals, sermon collections and homiletic theoretical texts. At certain points in the argument, however, links and references to practical theological, especially homiletic, works are given. In conclusion, we systematically focus on two aspects: firstly, the question of what the insights gained mean for a theological understanding of the sermon and secondly, what perspectives can in principle be gained from a scientific cooperation of anthropology and practical theology.

1 Dimensions of a Cultural Studies Concept of Resources

What do we mean when we speak of “resources” in this article? What are the characteristics of the resource concept which this article is based on? We begin with a central definition: “Resources are the means to create, sustain and alter social relations, units and identities within the framework of cultural ideas and practices”.⁵

What is meant?

Conventionally, resources are first understood in a material and naturalistic sense. We think of raw materials such as oil, gas, water, land or even gold and metals. This naturalistic view of resources is often combined with an economic one. If raw materials are seen as resources, they usually form the basis for the production of goods in the economic sense. According to this approach, resources are characterised by scarcity, are subject to competition between individuals and raise questions of access and distribution: How accessible are resources? How is

⁵ Roland Hardenberg, Martin Bartelheim and Jörn Staecker, The ‚Resource Turn‘. A Sociocultural Perspective on Resources, in *ResourceCultures. Sociocultural Dynamics and the Use of Resources – Theories, Methods, Perspectives*, ed. Anke Scholz et al. (Tübingen: SFB Publications, 2017), 13–23, 14.

access to resources regulated? Who has power over the distribution of resources? This economic perspective on resources gives rise to a number of discourses on the question of their significance for a society. These include debates on wealth and poverty, modernization discourses on the development (or ‘non-development’) of certain groups or entire nations, and the importance of sustainable use of resources for the economy, health, environment, etc.

This economic perspective does not only dominate the discussion and the handling of material resources. This perspective is also often applied to immaterial resources such as education, social networks or even religion. Here, too, questions of utility, rational choice and allocation come to the fore: Who benefits from religion, which religious means are chosen as means to an end, and who has access to these means?

In practical theology, pastoral care discourses for example, suggest that religion is a resource for coping with the experience of illness with regard to the individual human being. In the background are insights from psychology suggesting that ‘religious resources’ address individual needs and experiences. Based on a functional concept of resources, Mathias Allemand and Mike Martin, for example, understand religious resources as ‘religious experiences and practices, beliefs, religious knowledge or integration into a religious community’,⁶ which are important for coping with individual challenges (e.g. those elderly people are facing). Or, in religious education studies, consideration is given to how students can discover religion as a resource for improving their personal lives. In the sociology of religion, rational choice theory served as a justification to speak of a ‘religious economy’.⁷ However, this view, according to which religious content is like goods that are rationally chosen and consumed by individuals, has come under heavy criticism in recent years.⁸

Closely related to an economic concept of resources is the concept of religious capital. Already in economics, capital theory was extended from tangible to intangible resources.⁹ In the social sciences, this approach is reflected in the con-

⁶ Mathias Allemand and Mike Martin, “Religiöse Ressourcen im Alter” in *Religiöse Begleitung im Alter: Religion als Thema der Gerontologie*, ed. Ralph Kunz (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2007), 25–43, 25. Translation by the authors of this article.

⁷ Cf. Rodney Stark and William Simms Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Lang, 1987).

⁸ Cf. Carl L. Bankston III, “Rationality, Choice and the Religious Economy: The Problem of belief,” *Review of Religious Research* 43, no. 4 (2002): 311–325; Steve Bruce, “Religion and Rational Choice: A Critique of Economic Explanations of Religious Behavior,” *Sociology of Religion* 54, no. 2 (1933): 193–205.

⁹ Cf. Julia Storberg, “The Evolution of Capital Theory: A Critique of a Theory of Social Capital and Implications for HRD,” *Human Resource Development Review* 1, no. 4 (2002): 468–499, 469.

cepts of ‘human capital’,¹⁰ ‘social capital’¹¹ or ‘spiritual capital’.¹² Extending Max Weber’s sociology of religion, Pierre Bourdieu speaks of ‘religious capital’ and ‘religious fields’.¹³ According to Bourdieu, the latter function like an economic field because there is competition for resources; in this case competition evolves around the goods of salvation and competing parties are religious specialists and those seeking salvation. Economists such as Laurence Iannaccone also understand ‘religious capital’ to mean, for example, knowledge, knowledge of religious institutions or access to ritual specialists which must be ‘invested’ in order to “become a major source of religious satisfaction”.¹⁴

From an economic perspective on resources, religion also often appears as a kind of market where individuals provide for themselves according to their needs. The term ‘religious market’ was first used in the debate on religion in America,¹⁵ later in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union,¹⁶ and was associated with rational choice approaches to religion.¹⁷

The resource concept newly developed in the Collaborative Research Centre takes up these approaches, but shifts the accent by no longer operating with individualistic cost-benefit models. The naturalistic-economic concept is trans-

10 Cf. Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital. A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education*, 3rd edition (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

11 Cf. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Waquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

12 Cf. Peter L. Berger and Robert W. Hefner, “Spiritual Capital in Comparative Perspective” (see: <http://50-57-135-149.static.cloud-ips.com/archive/spiritualcapitalresearchprogram/pdf/Berger.pdf>; accessed May, 15, 2020). Or also the remarks made in connection with the last EKD membership survey: “Church membership in the Protestant Church provides positive resources for living together in modern civil societies and thus provides a social benefit“ (Gert Pickel, “Sozialkapital und zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement evangelischer Kirchenmitglieder als gesellschaftliche und kirchliche Ressource,” in *Vernetzte Vielfalt. Kirche angesichts von Individualisierung und Säkularisierung*, ed. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm and Volker Jung (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2015), 277–301, 284. Translation by the authors of this article.

13 Pierre Bourdieu, “Genese und Struktur des religiösen Feldes, in *Das religiöse Feld. Texte zur Ökonomie des Heilsgeschehens*, ed. Stephan Egger et al., transl. Andreas Pfeuffer (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 2000 [1971]), 39–110.

14 Laurence R. Iannaccone, “Religious Practice. A Human Capital Approach,” *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 29, no. 3 (1990): 297–314, 299.

15 Cf. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967); Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, “Religious Economies and Sacred Canopies. Religious Mobilization in American Cities,” *American Sociological Review* 53, no. 1 (1988): 41–49.

16 Cf. Douglas Rogers, “Introductory Essay. The Anthropology of Religion after Socialism,” *Religion, State and Society* 33, no. 1 (2005): 5–8.

17 For example Lawrence A. Young, ed., *Rational Choice and Religion. Summary and Assessment* (London: Routledge, 1997).

formed into a cultural studies concept. Questions are not concerned with the benefit of resources for a society, but their values and effects on societies.

What does that involve? Five points are particularly relevant for this redefinition of resources.¹⁸

Firstly, in this approach the concept of resources is consistently understood as coming from social practice. While universal basic needs define what things all people need to live or survive, it is socially learned and constantly changing practices that make it clear what people in certain societies regard as necessary for their lives.

Secondly, these practical interests are culturally shaped, i.e. they are the expression of shared, sometimes very controversial, systems of symbolic communication.¹⁹ These cultural ideas and practices are subject to historical changes. What a resource is can thus only be understood in a diachronic perspective and in relation to the symbolic and normative orders of concrete communities.

Thirdly, resources are those material and immaterial ‘things’ to which societies attribute specific values because they are the means for creating, renewing and changing the respective forms of coexistence. What constitutes an essential value for one community may be trivial for another, or may become increasingly trivial, perhaps even a curse. Resources have particular, historically, socially and culturally variable values. Values here, refer, on the one hand, to significant differences of meaning of material and immaterial resources within specific symbolic orders. On the other hand, the term values refers to the concrete social ideals (e.g. solidarity, honor, righteousness, etc.) to which certain actions correspond or which are to be realized through the use of resources. Gold, for example, does not only have the value that is attributed to it by a stock market. Gold can also have values because its symbolic implications (e.g. scarcity, colour, hardness) mean that it is used in rituals (e.g. birth, wedding, coronation) to create relationships that are supposed to be characterised by, for example, economic security, purity or durability.

Fourthly, all social action basically needs resources, but not all actions have the same significance for society. The Collaborative Research Centre therefore focuses on those resources that are particularly important for the respective form of coexistence, i.e. those that point to the central values of a community. Through public use of these resources people make the meaning of their own actions visi-

18 See Hardenberg/Bartelheim/Staecker, *The ‚Resource Turn‘* (n. 5).

19 Cf. Roland Hardenberg, “Beyond Economy and Religion. Resources and Socio-cosmic Fields in Odisha, India,” in *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 7 (2016): 83–96, 84.

ble to others and thus not only confirm inherent values but also generate them.²⁰ This valorisation is a process that manifests itself in various public actions, such as elaborate infrastructure measures and investments, the production of objects, monuments, and texts, the preservation of memories through archives, museums or collections, the display of things and services, and the sacralisation or depositing of objects. In the religious context, there are examples of such forms of handling that reflect the importance of resources and the values associated with them, such as the construction of churches, the creation of valuable storage facilities, the preservation of large ritual complexes, or the extensive time and work spent on religious speeches and related events.

Fifthly, such resources, which form the basis of social action, are not simply readily available, because even raw materials usually have to be processed before a community can use them to realize its values. Seen in this light, resources are never given naturally, but are ‘made’ by people in their respective societies. This means: Not everything is a resource, but everything can become a resource. The question is therefore: How does something become a resource for a society or community? And what significance does the resource have for the self-image and identity of this community? Why does it attribute this specific value to it? And how does the resource change the community? What is decisive are the *social* dynamics, actions and relationships in the use of resources.

In summary, the concept of resources in cultural studies is based on this approach, following a conceptual opening and dynamization. Resources are not static, unchangeable ‘things’ that simply trigger social processes. They are processes themselves. This means that resources affect social conditions on the one hand. On the other hand, they themselves are changed by it, in their attribution of value, in their use, in their materiality, etc.

Resources do not occur in isolation, as they are embedded in complex social action contexts. Against the backdrop of this concept we hold that resources are always part of *ResourceComplexes*. *ResourceComplexes* are structured arrangements of material things, people, knowledge and practices for the use of resources which evolve over time and have a specific geographical distribution. They are specific constellations of resources having the potential of being activated for communities through networks consisting of various human and non-human actors.

In other words: The use of resources is embedded in a network of objects, people, institutions, knowledge, practices, paths, places, etc. that influence each

²⁰ Cf. David Graeber, *Die falsche Münze unserer Träume. Wert, Tausch und menschliches Handeln*, transl. Michaela Grabinger et al. (Zurich: diaphanes, 2012), 83.

other.²¹ And this in a concrete space, at a concrete time. In order to determine the specific values of a resource in and for communities one has to look at the whole complex of resources. To illustrate this with an example: In India, rice is used in many Hindu temples to create a link between the deity worshipped in that place and the believers. For this purpose, the rice is cooked, offered to the respective deity in a ritual, then sold or distributed and usually eaten in community. The use of rice as a sacred food (*prasad*) requires a ResourceComplex of different people (potter, cook, priest), material things (pots, ovens, cookware), knowledge (cooking technology, ritual practices), infrastructure (material as well as immaterial distribution systems) and of course the temple as a place of the presence of the divine.²²

If one takes the ResourceComplex ‘religious speech’ into consideration then one can argue that the actual preaching act is integrated into a differentiated network of persons, actions, places etc. This complex is central to an adequate understanding of the value of the resource. What comes to mind are speakers, the attribution and legitimation of their religious-rhetorical authority, the place and time of the speech as well as the associated processes of sacralization, the relevance of sacred texts and religious tradition, the ritual contexts of the speech, the use of certain media as well as the medialization and possible commercialization of the speech itself, the embedding in further forms of religious communication, etc.

In order to describe the dynamic, contingent aspects of ResourceComplexes, the Collaborative Research Centre has developed the concept of *ResourceAssemblages* (RessourcenGefüge). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari originally coined the philosophical term ‘assemblage’. The basic idea is that assemblages or, in French, ‘agencement’²³ are arrangements that give coherence and consistency to heterogeneous elements.²⁴ Assemblages depend on ontological premises, i.e. on

21 Mitchell G. Ash speaks of a “resource ensemble” (Mitchell G. Ash, “Science and Politics as Resources for each other”, in *Wissenschaften und Wissenschaftspolitik. Bestandsaufnahmen zu Formationen, Brüchen und Kontinuitäten im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Rüdiger vom Bruch and Brigitte Kaderas (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002), 32–51, 33.

22 Cf. Roland Hardenberg, “From Durkheim to Hocart: Sacred Resources and the Quest for ‘life’,” *Durkheimian Studies / Études Durkheimiennes* 23 (2017): 40–56, 49.

23 Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Tausend Plateaus. Kapitalismus und Schizophrenie II*, transl. Gabriele Ricke and Ronald Voullié (Berlin: Merve [1980] 1992).

24 Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975–1995*, ed. David Lapoujade, transl. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), 179. See also Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2016), 19–21: (1) “Assemblages have a fully contingent historical identity, and each of them is therefore an *individual entity*: an individual person, an individual community, an individual organisation, an individual city. Be-

ideas about the nature and the agency of the components.²⁵ The connections between the individual elements can be based on materiality,²⁶ but also on certain mental or spiritual similarities or differences between the components. What constitutes their power to act or their absence, in turn, depends on ideas about who or what has intentionality²⁷ or what the causes of concrete events are. This in turn is determined by what knowledge is perceived as relevant in a community in order to use certain resources.

The aim of the studies on ResourceComplexes and ResourceAssemblages is to generate models that make it possible, on the one hand, to work out the specifics of developments in concrete spaces and times and, on the other hand, to achieve comparability. We call such models *ResourceCultures*. These models generalise the interplay of three components: the cultural definition of resources, the social practice of resource use and the associated socio-cultural dynamics on groups and identities, i.e. influences that affect large areas of society far beyond the specific resource context (e.g. stratification, migration, medialisation, consumption, globalisation). Since the method of comparison emphasizes both differences and similarities, it should be possible to compare, with the help of certain parameters, ResourceCultures from very different times and spaces that nevertheless have

cause the ontological status of all assemblages is the same, entities operating at different scales can directly interact with one another“. (2) “Assemblages are always composed of heterogeneous components. [...] To properly apply the concept of assemblage to real cases we need to include, in addition to persons, the material and symbolic artifacts that compose communities and organisations“. (3) “Assemblages can become component parts of larger assemblages. Communities can form alliances or coalitions and become a larger assemblage, a social justice movement, for example, and organisations can form industrial networks and complex governments“. (4) “Assemblages emerge from the interactions between their parts, but once an assemblage is in place it immediately starts acting as a source of limitations and opportunities for its components (downward causality). [...] The downward causality is needed to account for the fact that most assemblages are composed of parts that come into existence after the whole has emerged“. See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Rhizom* (Berlin: Merve, 1976).

25 Cf. Phillipe Descola, *Jenseits von Natur und Kultur*, transl. Eva Moldenhauer (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2011).

26 Cf. Andreas Reckwitz, “The Status of the ‘Material’ in Theories of Culture: From ‘Social Structure’ to ‘Artefacts’“, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 32, no. 2 (2002): 195–217; Daniel Miller, *Materiality: An Introduction in Materiality (Politics, History, Culture)*, ed. Daniel Miller (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–50.

27 Cf. Bruno Latour, “On Actor-network Theory: A Few Clarifications,” *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 369–381; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). For an elaboration of these ideas and concepts, especially ResourceAssemblage and ResourceCultures, see Roland Hardenberg, “The rise of a new millet assemblage in India”, in *RessourcenKulturen*, ed. Tobias Schade et al. (Tübingen: SFB Publications, forthcoming).

characteristic features. For example, it could be asked why some ResourceCultures are particularly short-lived or long-lived, why they are spatially limited or very expansive, why they have a socially stabilizing or strongly differentiating effect, why they are hardly represented or become the object of comprehensive symbolic orders.

In terms of preaching, this means: If the sermon is understood within the framework of this concept as a resource with social dimensions and if the concrete local, historical and socio-cultural context is described in terms of a ResourceComplex as a concrete interplay of resource, social practice and socio-cultural dynamics on groups and identities, then different ResourceCultures of preaching can be identified and compared across cultures and times. Thus, similarities and differences can be made visible. This approach is especially helpful for comparative research on sermons sensitive to denominational and religio-cultural differences. Religious communities are often founded in the context and environment of the appearance of religious speakers, their messages and practices. The speeches promote the formation of the identity of the respective group. They establish, transform, stabilize and renew this community, sometimes also in processes of demarcation and separation. They are of central importance for the self-image of numerous religious communities and each has a specific value. This attribution of value occurs in socio-culturally different patterns. It is the result of cultural negotiation processes and relates to a concrete community and its specific cultural embeddedness. For on the one hand, preaching is essentially a local-parochial practice which is always socially constructed through the relationships and traditions of a concrete community; on the other hand, preaching is always shaped by cultural patterns through which the community is connected to the respective society. Integrated into a comprehensive ResourceComplex, religious speech proves to be dynamic, for the concrete interplay between community and resource is subject to processes of change. Comparisons can be made within the concept of ResourceCultures.

This cultural studies approach to resources will be exemplified in the following chapter. Based on the idea of the ResourceComplex, those processes, practices, ideas, etc. are to be reconstructed which are decisive for a dynamic valorization of the sermon as a resource. Two aspects are central: First, the importance of the local-parochial community for the sermon (2.1) and second, the embeddedness of the preaching in specific cultural, rhetorical and aesthetic practices and traditions (2.2). These two perspectives make it possible, on the one hand, to grasp the respective patterns of interaction between preacher and listener which are important for the process of valorization. On the other hand, it will become apparent that these perspectives also include the dynamics and transformation processes the sermons are subjected to. In the final chapter, an assessment is

made of the insights that can be gained and the points of comparison that may be relevant in relation to ResourceCultures.

2 Religious Speech as a ResourceComplex – Perspectives from Empirical Research on Preaching

2.1 The Importance of the Local-parochial Community for the Social Effectiveness of Resource Preaching

If one looks at the social and cultural anthropological research on preaching cultures, especially in the Evangelical and non-European Christianities as well as in Islamic communities, it is first of all noticeable that preaching cultures are to a large extent negotiated as local cultures. Against the background of the research design of numerous social and cultural anthropological studies this is immediately plausible: Participant observation requires intensive personal relations established over long periods of time in particular places. Moreover, there is usually a kind of ‘zooming’, i.e. the increasing focus of forms of participation and observation on increasingly specific phenomena.²⁸ For this reason, long-term field research often has a concrete temporal reference to specific places, persons, communities or networks that form the framework of the investigation. However, this fact is more than a response to a methodological decision. Rather, a decisive moment in the social efficacy of religious speech comes into play here – the respective sermon is delivered at a concrete place, at a concrete time, to concrete persons, in specific socio-cultural contexts. For Christian homiletics Leonora Tubbs Tisdale already some time ago raised this fact, framing it as a demand: “Good preaching not only requires its practitioners to become skilled biblical exegetes. It also requires them to become adept in ‘exegeting’ local congregations and their contexts.”²⁹ Preaching is therefore an “act of constructing ‘local theology’ – that is, theology crafted for a very particular people in a particular time and place.”³⁰ With this plea Tisdale does not aim – as one is inclined to assume spontaneously – at a provincialization of homiletics and thus also not at a sermon that makes ob-

²⁸ Cf. James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1980), 34.

²⁹ Leonore Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), xi.

³⁰ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology* (n. 29), xii.

jective truth claims for its local tradition and socio-cultural context. Instead Tisdale emphasizes “that preaching can be both local in its address and global in its vision, both fitting for a particular congregation of God’s people and faithful to a transformative gospel.”³¹ For: “Preaching needs to attend more carefully to cultural context in order that the gospel may be more clearly heard and understood by all sorts of people in all sorts of settings.”³²

Richard T. Antoun exemplified this perspective in a pioneering study on Islamic preaching, namely on the Jordanian village of Kufr al-Ma.³³ From 1959 to 1967 Antoun spent several stays in Kufr al-Ma. During this time he accompanied the local imam and preacher Shaykh Luqman (pseudonym)³⁴ in order to reconstruct the role of the preacher in his local environment and the importance of this local environment for the authority and legitimacy of the sermon. In this way, he provides insights into the functioning and dynamics of a concrete local ResourceComplex. The study explicitly pursues three goals: First, the documentation of concrete Friday sermons (*khutba*) in this local context.³⁵ Twenty-six sermons have been transcribed and translated by Antoun,³⁶ and he has participated in a far greater number. Antoun describes the predominant content of these sermons as “ethical in intent”.³⁷ By embedding the content analyses³⁸ in the representation of local conditions such as the gradual changes in this social environment, Antoun works out how the preacher functions as a ‘cultural broker’. Thus, the second goal of the study is addressed. The essential point is “to analyze the process by which the Islamic message is handed down and interpreted by the culture broker (here the rural Muslim preacher) in his particular environment,

31 Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology* (n. 29), 33.

32 Ibid., 35.

33 Richard T. Antoun, *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World. A Jordanian Case Study in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). For a description of the locality see *ibid.*, 45–60.

34 For his biography see Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 75–89 and for his daily routine *ibid.*, 82f.

35 “This book will focus on the process of parochialization and will document the great diversity of ‘normal’ Islam in one peasant village in Jordan; but it does not deny the critical role of universalization or the cultural contribution of peasant cultures to civilization” (Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* [n. 33], 43f.).

36 Cf. Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 90–92.

37 For example Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 9f. See also 92–95: „Even when the topic of the sermon is overtly ritual (Ramadan, the month of the fast or pilgrimage) or theological (the night journey and ascent of the Prophet), an intertwined theme is always ethical (e.g., the pilgrim who leaves on the pilgrimage without paying his debts will not have his pilgrimage accepted by God, and the fast of Ramadan who slanders his neighbor has thereby broken the fast”, 95).

38 Antoun speaks of a „in-depth study of the content of Islamic sermons” (Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* [n. 33], 9).

the Jordanian village, and [...] to compare that process, however briefly, with similar processes outside both Jordan and the Muslim world. That process is ‘the social organization of tradition’ and involves the necessary selection from and interpretation of tradition.”³⁹ The content analysis is integrated into the analysis of the dynamic interplay of official vs. popular religious traditions and the accommodation of tradition.⁴⁰ In this sense, preaching is a phenomenon of ‘folk religion’⁴¹ and the place where ‘official’ religion and local religious practices – if one assumes with Antoun a bipolar relationship of both – come into exchange. The sermon is, among other “linking institutions and roles”⁴², of fundamental importance for local actors in socio-cultural processes of accommodation and transformation.

Whereas the first goal of the study can be characterized as documentary and the second goal is analytical, the third goal is described by Antoun as “humanistic and experiential”.⁴³ For elaboration: “These sermons also provide meaning at the deepest experiential level from the side of both intellect and emotions. The Quranic verses, Traditions of the Prophet, and prayer formulae that lace the sermons together ‘are’ the ultimate reality for both the preacher and his listeners.”⁴⁴

By looking at these three goals together, the study is able to show that it is precisely the multidimensionality of a local ResourceComplex that institutionalizes and legitimizes the effectiveness and authority of preaching: On the one hand, the strategic relevance of local knowledge authorizes the preacher to be a mediator between people’s Islam and government’s Islam. At the same time, however, the intimate knowledge of local family structures can also become a burden for the preacher. The local context proves to be ambivalent and is therefore strategically highly significant: “The community predicament involves the necessity of maintaining harmony among neighbors and kinsmen on whom one has been

39 Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 4.

40 Cf. especially Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 17–31, also with examples from Catholicism and the movement of the Amish. According to Antoun, locally active preachers, teachers and judges are the „figures who must accept, reject, reinterpret, or accommodate the diversity of local custom with the ordinances of religion, be they ritual, ethical, legal, or theological” (ibid., 17).

41 In his understanding of folk religion, Antoun follows the content and methodology of David Clark’s 1982 work on the relationship between ‘official’ Methodism and the local religious practices of believers, historically and empirically evaluated and presented at the fishing village of Staithes in North Yorkshire. See David Clark, *Between Pulpit and Pew. Folk Religion in a North Yorkshire Fishing Village* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press 1982). For the justification of this “cross-cultural” perspective see Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 11.

42 Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 15.

43 Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 6.

44 Ibid.

dependent in the past and will be dependent in the future.”⁴⁵ At the time Antoun conducted his research legitimization by a special theological education was still of secondary importance.⁴⁶ The need for such a theological education is part of a socio-religious transformation process that began in the late 1960s and is thus also changing the resource of preaching.⁴⁷

At the same time, however, the local practice of preaching proves to be an interplay of the specific conditions of a local congregation and a normative and ritualized practice that is legitimized by the return to the sermons of the prophet. The Friday sermon is strictly formalized. Structure,⁴⁸ form, place, language⁴⁹ are highly regulated. Antoun emphasizes the importance of this fact for an appropriate understanding of local sermon cultures especially by drawing a comparison with the tradition of the so called American Folk Preacher.⁵⁰ While there the emphasis is on the freedom of the listener in the ritual, “the Islamic *khutba* in *Kufr al-Ma* stands for ‘ritual order,’ as befitting a sermon whose main thrust is orthopraxy (i.e., norms governing day-to-day interpersonal relations between family members, kin, neighbors, and co-religionists, and including norms against community and social functionalism).”⁵¹

Inspired by Antoun, Patrick Gaffney, member of the Catholic Missionary Congregation of the Holy Cross and ordained priest, also starts from the emphasized

45 Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 63.

46 Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 9. Cf. also 139–142, where it is emphasized that a lack of professional training does not have a negative influence on the effect and power of the sermon. An overview of the personal library of Skaykh Luqman, December 1979, can be found in Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 99f.

47 Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 86: „The sermons [...] relate to a relatively stable period in the village’s life”.

48 On the two-part nature of the Friday sermon – it actually delivers two sermons in one – and the formalization of the introduction see Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 72–75.

49 Anoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 103. In analysing the language of preaching, Antoun, following Maurice Bloch, argues „that as language becomes more formal and »restricted« it loses its capacity to deal with special problems (Antoun, *Muslim Preacher*[n. 33], 10). Bloch argues that the formalization of speech acts serves the goal of heteronomization: „The most important social effect of this merging of the specific into the eternal and fixed, is that it moves the communication to a level where disagreement is ruled out since one cannot disagree with the right order. The move towards the formalized therefore becomes a move in the direction of unity” (Maurice Bloch, Introduction, in: *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society*, ed. Maurice Bloch [London/New York/San Francisco: Academic Press, 1975], 1–30, 16). On functions and descriptions of “sacred language” cf. Brian P. Bennet, *Sacred Languages of the World. An Introduction* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2018).

50 Cf. Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 87.

51 Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 102.

importance of local structures in his study on preaching in Egypt,⁵² when he evaluates the authority of preachers necessary for the social efficacy of preaching.⁵³ “Thus in order to understand Islam in ‘local contexts’ the task must be to combine a recognition of immediate social spheres with those relationships of continuity that make for participation in a greater totality. This entails the description and analysis of key facets of what members of a given local community regard as its explicitly ‘Islamic’ elements within a larger framework of shifting social, ideological, political, and economic circumstances.”⁵⁴ From November 1977 to August 1979, Gaffney was in Minya and investigated in particular the *al-Fūli* mosque, a so-called government mosque (*masjid hukūmī*). The objects of this analysis are the sermons that were connected with the student uprising at the end of the 1970s, including those that were delivered on the occasion of the visit of President Sadat in December 1978.⁵⁵ In the following years, Gaffney returned there at regular intervals, as far as politically possible. In this way, he was able to evaluate the transformation of local ResourceComplexes in the context of political and social changes from a diachronic perspective.

Following Max Weber’s distinction of magician, priest and prophet, Gaffney distinguishes between three types of preacher, each with specific authority. On the one hand the figure of the saint or saints (*walī/ walīya*), whose knowledge is above all of an esoteric nature.⁵⁶ Secondly, the figure of the *‘ālim* (scholar), whose knowledge is above all of a formalized nature and who gains authority through his formalized knowledge. Thirdly, the *mujāhid* (holy warrior) is mainly concerned with practice and for him practical knowledge has priority over theoretical knowledge, or rather the latter must always prove itself in practice.⁵⁷ Only an approach based on multidimensionality can adequately reflect the difficult relations between preacher and congregation. “From the outset we have stressed that the role of the Islamic preacher in Egypt cannot be adequately described by any single model drawn from classical socioreligious theory.”⁵⁸

52 Patrick D. Gaffney, *The Prophet’s Pulpit. Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1994). For both Antoun’s and Gaffney’s study it must be noted that the political constellations have changed significantly since its publication.

53 Gaffney, *The Prophet’s Pulpit* (n. 52), 3: “[M]y concern was to discover the structure and the local practice, the familiar, the current, and the representative behavior within a given society.”

54 Gaffney, *The Prophet’s Pulpit* (n. 52), 30.

55 Cf. Gaffney, *The Prophet’s Pulpit* (n. 52), 127–133. The religious conflicts with the Copts are also a background to the sermons analysed.

56 Cf. Gaffney, *The Prophet’s Pulpit* (n. 52), 36–38.

57 Cf. Gaffney, *The Prophet’s Pulpit* (n. 52), 40–43.

58 Gaffney, *The Prophet’s Pulpit* (n. 52), 183.

Thus, the local function of the preaching persons in and for the ResourceComplex of preaching cannot be grasped one-dimensionally and it is possibly precisely here that lines of conflict run. This can also be observed in other contexts. This fact is particularly helpful for a non-political understanding of the role of preachers in migrant communities. The Frankfurt anthropologist Susanne Schröter, for example, has reconstructed this for the German-speaking area using the example of thirteen Islamic communities in Wiesbaden.⁵⁹ Time and again, this study emphasizes the central importance of religious speeches and speakers in these communities and that they represent an important resource. The speeches shape the specific identity of each community. A one-dimensional description, e.g. through a reductionist use of categories such as ‘fundamentalist’, is not able to capture the meaning and momentum of religious speech. For example, the majority of the members of the community who adhere to the Omar Ibnulkatab Mosque have a Berber-Moroccan background. When an imam from Morocco, who was very popular in the congregation, started to preach mainly about politics in a sermon, he was admonished by the local board. But the preacher replied only: “I preach as I want to’. Then the local board member told him, ‘You cannot preach as you like. You must abide by the rules of the congregation here. We are not a political congregation, we are a religious congregation, and you only have to talk about religion, about character traits, about good character traits, about community service and so on, and not about politics. We do not want that and I will forbid that’.”⁶⁰ The congregation decides on the adequate use of the resource ‘preaching’ (valorisation). For the resource ‘preaching’ refers to common values and shared knowledge, for example in the process of medialisation.⁶¹

Schröter is also able to show that the sermons serve to cultivate the culture and language of origin. For this reason, too, they have the function of creating and assuring identity. At the same time the congregations are integrated into a “transnational community”.⁶² This happens above all in the process of medialisa-

59 Susanne Schröter, »Gott näher als der eigenen Halsschlagader«. *Fromme Muslime in Deutschland* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2016).

60 Schröter, »Gott näher« (n. 59), 213. Translation by the authors of this article.

61 The *theological* examination of the contents of the sermon is explicitly pushed into the background. On the relationship of anthropology as cultural studies and theology see e.g. Schröter, »Gott näher« (n. 59), 117. In the exemplary analyses of selected sermons in mosques in Germany presented by Constantin Schreiber one misses differentiated homiletic-rhetorical categories that would help to evaluate the specific character of religious speech. The interpretation is therefore often one-sided. Cf. Constantin Schreiber, *Inside Islam. Was in Deutschlands Moscheen gepredigt wird*. With the collaboration of Hamza Jarjanazi (Berlin: Ergon, 2017).

62 Schröter, »Gott näher« (n. 59), 252.

tion. The special value attributed to the resource ‘religious speech’ is also reflected in the fact that many congregations organise sermon events lasting several days and often invite Islamic star preachers (Internet, Youtube, television).⁶³

The sermons described by Schröter are integrated into a comprehensive setting of community events and community forms of religious communication, e.g. women’s breakfast events, youth centres, Muslim scouts, pastoral care. In this way, the multi-perspectivity of the ResourceComplex sermon is also clearly recognisable here and an isolated view of the sermon events is avoided by the resource concept.

Concerned with a deeper understanding of Christian preaching and congregation culture Peter Meyer applied this approach to local preaching practices.⁶⁴ The empirical foundation of his study is formed by three sermons from urban regions of the USA in the summer of 2008 (American Baptist Church, United Church of Christ and Presbyterian Church)⁶⁵ and three sermons from the 2009 Passion season, recorded in West German congregations.⁶⁶ These sermons are placed in their congregational and socio-cultural context by means of 19 guideline-based interviews (with listeners and preachers), participatory observation and audio-visual analysis. As a phenomenon of spoken language, sermons are explicitly examined for their “life-world context of origin” (“lebensweltlichen Entstehungszusammenhang”).⁶⁷ In other words, Mayer asks all those involved in the sermon about their individual experiences, biographical socialisation and corresponding imprints, local-congregational arrangements and implementation horizons, the guiding ideals of preaching and the expectations and attitudes associated with them. Thus, the sermon itself becomes understandable as “practice of lived religion”.⁶⁸

Of particular interest in our context are the socio-cultural differences between the German-speaking and the US-American congregations and sermon cultures that become apparent in the study. While in the German-speaking area the sermon is assigned to the sphere of the institutionalized church, i.e. a clearly defined functional area with limited reach,⁶⁹ in US-American congregations, sermon is the

63 Cf. e.g. Schröter, »Gott näher« (n. 59), 139; on Internet and television preachers cf. *ibid.*, 190 (Abul Baraa), 211 (Yusuf Qaradawi).

64 Peter Meyer, *Predigt als Sprachgeschehen gelebt-religiöser Praxis. Empirisch-theologische Beiträge zur Sprach- und Religionsanalyse auf der Basis komparativer Feldforschung in Deutschland und in den USA* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

65 Cf. Meyer, *Predigt* (n. 64), 282.

66 Meyer, *Predigt* (n. 64), 713–745 you can find the transcriptions.

67 Meyer, *Predigt* (n. 64), 2. Translation by the authors of this article.

68 Meyer, *Predigt* (n. 64), 5. Translation by the authors of this article.

69 Cf. Meyer, *Predigt* (n. 64), 372.

expression of a specific social group to which the individual feels personally committed. The self-chosen, local congregation and not a large-scale institution ‘church’ is the frame of reference of the sermon. While in German parishes the person preaching is regarded as the professional representative of the religious institution ‘church’, to whom competence in dealing with old texts is attributed, in the US-American context the person preaching acts more as friend and partner. German listeners tend to keep a distance to religious forms and language games. Although the Bible is regarded as the formal norm of worship – a text must be preached about – it is at the same time distant from and alien to contemporary life. It must be professionally opened up for the present. US-American church members take the reference to biblical narratives and their linguistic gesture more for granted. ”Moments of high intensity of experience”⁷⁰ are given preference over intellectual contents and the same goes for the narrative gesture of the sermon. And while in the German-speaking context the so-called political sermon is met with ambivalent perception, in the American context current socio-political relevance is naturally ascribed to the biblical text. According to Meyer, these (and other) culturally determined differences suggest that one should be careful about the transfer of homiletic concepts for the purpose of optimizing practice – “individual phenomena (such as the US sermon experienced as ‘eventful’) cannot be implemented like a piece of craftsmanship in another place”.⁷¹ Different cultural contexts cannot simply be ignored for homiletic theory building. They are, however, revealing for sermon research. Meyer’s study uses the example of local preaching to show the cultural, rhetorical and aesthetic logic of ResourceCultures and its significance for dealing with the resource ‘preaching’. This aspect is to be deepened in the following section.

2.2 The Importance of Cultural, Rhetorical and Aesthetic Traditions and Practices for Preaching as a ResourceComplex

The sermon is a cultural-aesthetic ResourceComplex combined with other aspects of cultural expression (literary, rhetorical, musical, media).⁷² Within research, this aspect is best tackled by reconstructing the performance of the sermon. Here it becomes particularly clear that the sermon is an interactive event. The congrega-

⁷⁰ Meyer, *Predigt* (n. 64), 451. Translation by the authors of this article.

⁷¹ Meyer, *Predigt* (n. 64), 279. Translation by the authors of this article.

⁷² See the anthology by Sabine Dorpmüller et al., eds., *Religion and Aesthetic Experience. Drama – Sermons – Literature* (Heidelberg: University Publishing, 2018).

tion ‘co-preaches’ – through heckling, answers, singing etc. Hearing is an active process, not a passive experience.

In particular the tradition of the so called American folk preacher, addressed by Antoun, is used again and again in this context to describe cultural, local and denominational differences that are reflected in the preaching performance. Bruce A. Rosenberg referred to this already in 1970 in his often quoted study on the USA: “Most northern Presbyterians [...] think that nearly all preaching is from a prepared text, while just as many southern Baptists must assume that all sermons are delivered directly by their pastor without any manuscript at all.”⁷³ The unscripted sermon contains, for example, parts that are repeatedly sung, either by the preacher and/or the congregation.⁷⁴ “The quality of the congregation appears to have a great effect upon the sermon, influencing the preacher’s timing, his involvement in his delivery, and sometimes even the length of the performance.”⁷⁵ Accordingly, sermon analysis cannot be limited to an analysis of the printed text or the word heard. Rather, it must be supplemented by musicological and theatrical perspectives, for example, questions of melody (here: pentatonic),⁷⁶ rhythm – “perhaps the most important aspect of the preacher’s musical art” –,⁷⁷ the description of the call-and-response style, questions of harmony, form and improvisational style. The preparation of a sermon, in turn, serves less the preparation of a manuscript, nor the literary-rhetorical consultation with religious and theological authorities, but rather aims entirely at the moment of execution – “the moment of composition is the performance”.⁷⁸ If oral expression and ritual performance are so central to the sermon, then individual talent and personal charisma become an essential aspect of the ResourceComplex of preach-

73 Bruce A. Rosenberg, *The Art of the American Folk Preacher*, 9th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), re-published under the title: *Can These Bones Live? The Art of the American Folk Preacher*, rev. ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988). Antoun also takes the facts quoted here as the starting point for his analysis of listener reactions, cf. Antoun, *Muslim Preacher* (n. 33), 101.

74 “It is sometimes difficult to know exactly when the preacher is chanting (rather than talking) or when he is singing (rather than chanting)” (Rosenberg, *Art of the American Folk Preacher* [n. 73], 40).

75 Rosenberg, *Art of the American Folk Preacher* (n. 73), 35.

76 Cf. Rosenberg, *Art of the American Folk Preacher* (n. 73), 39.

77 Rosenberg, *Art of the American Folk Preacher* (n. 73), 42.

78 Rosenberg, *Art of the American Folk Preacher* (n. 73), 47. Cf. *ibid.*, 102: „[T]he great individual talent of the American spiritual preacher lies not in his memorization of a special diction or of thousands of formulaic systems, but in his ability to compose spontaneously the vocabulary at his command to fit his metrical pattern.”

ing. In the religious self-image of preachers this is often interpreted as divine legitimation and authorization.⁷⁹

This significance of the sermons' own cultural logics and therefore the plurality of ResourceCultures has recently and repeatedly been introduced into the international, Christian-ecumenical discourse on the relevance of the sermon in different Christianities, aiming at sketches of a cross-cultural homiletics.⁸⁰

In the most recent research on the popularity and effectiveness of Islamic sermons, the aspects of interaction, performance and musicality described above also occupy a prominent position.

For example, Julian Millie spent nearly two years researching the sermon as an oral practice in Bandung (West Java).⁸¹ In contrast to the above-mentioned works (Antoun and Gaffney), he is exclusively concerned with the dissemination of the sermon outside the mosque. He investigates the phenomenon that preachers⁸² are invited to numerous social and societal events to preach there (family occasions, *rites de passage* up to internal company motivation training). According to Millie, this embeddedness of the sermons in pluralistic everyday practices is due to a specific connection between two goals: On the one hand the passing on of traditional religious knowledge and corresponding moral attitudes and on the

79 In his study, Gerald L. Davis conveys the self-image of Bishop Elmer E. Cleveland, Ephesians Church of God in Christ, Berkely with the following words: "Preachers are born. They are not called, they are born. [...] When you're born, preaching is in you. And when the time comes it stirs, God stirs it up. Bible says, »Stir up the gift that is within you, which are given you from God.« So when I begin praying and I really got converted, why then it started up and I began preaching." (Gerald L. Davis, *I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know. A Study of the Performed African-American Sermon* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1985], IX).

80 Frank A. Thomas in particular emphasizes the importance of this research for a necessary transformation and expansion of the homiletic discourse beyond the European context, also and especially because preaching in the respective Christianities do not represent a form of communication left to decay, but rather a resource for the growth, integration and identity construction of these groups. See Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016) and the collection of sermons: Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, eds., *Preaching with Sacred Fire. An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present* (New York/London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010). In addition to Rosenberg's early analytical study, the fundamental works of the so-called 'father of black preaching' Henry H. Mitchell should also be mentioned in this context: Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching. The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990). This volume brings together previous works: Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (San Francisco: Harper and Row 1970) and Henry H. Mitchell, *The Recovery of Preaching* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977).

81 Julian Millie, *Hearing Allah's Call. Preaching and Performance in Indonesian Islam* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2017).

82 These preachers are both men and women, cf. Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 12–14.

other hand entertainment – “Islamic oratory appears as a pious activity that is also enjoyable.”⁸³ Accordingly, one can observe “synergies being created between preaching traditions and contemporary culture industries.”⁸⁴

This is a good example of the character of sermons as a ResourceAssemblage, since here elements from different contexts – preaching and culture industries – come together and yet form a new, albeit heterogeneous, unit. The effectiveness and popularity of sermons lies precisely in the strategic connection “of cultural materials and references within the knowledge of [the] audiences.”⁸⁵ In this way, the sermon affects “by mobilizing many voices, languages, and registers, and by calling upon many genres of verbal performance, not all of them religious”.⁸⁶ This includes singing and reciting Quranic verses, storytelling in local dialects, the use of a special, local-regionally used youth language (*gaul*), humorous interludes, “songs from the popular charts”,⁸⁷ interaction with the listeners⁸⁸ such as the “responsive loop”⁸⁹ and the targeted use of body language (body movement). Millie calls this sermon style “multivoiced” due to the combination of various elements.⁹⁰

In addition, there have always been and still are preachers who do not incorporate much of popular media cultural styles into their preaching, but rather – for the sake of valorizing the content – cultivate an ‘official’ style of speech.⁹¹ According to Millie, this “turn to diversity in religious communication” can be observed since the 1970s.⁹²

Millie compares the two styles and types of preaching outlined above in detail using two exemplary preachers (Kyai Haji Al-Jauhari and Shiddiy Amien).⁹³ The comparison focuses on three aspects: Firstly, the “generic variation, meaning the intertextuality and polyphony generated by orator’s use of languages, dialects, registers, speech act types, performance genres, ways of speaking, existing texts, and discursive structures”. Secondly, “the preachers’ skillful deployment of affective strategies” and thirdly, “the reflexivity that enables preachers to establish

83 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 27.

84 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 7.

85 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 47.

86 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 47.

87 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 53.

88 Cf. e.g. Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 58–60.

89 Cf. Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 122–124.

90 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 58.

91 Cf. Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 67–85: “Preaching “without Performing”.

92 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 40.

93 The selection is explicitly based on the two different rhetorical concepts. Cf. Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 72f.

sympathetic dialogue with their listeners.”⁹⁴ What seems decisive to us is that these two concepts of popular and official preaching are kept apart by their respective images of the listener.

For the listeners, however, the participation in such different ResourceCultures of the sermon enables them to experience themselves as being equally connected to tradition and modernity, as being part of local-regional and national contexts. The listeners are present in ‘two bodies’: “The regional focus signals a distinction between two different listening subjects: a media consumer attuned to norms of national publicness and one engaged in daily undertaking of an embodied nature. Many Bandung Muslims feel comfortable embodying both subjectivities but are aware of the differences between them.”⁹⁵

In order to grasp the social dimension of preaching, in our sense the efficacy of the resource, sermon styles cannot therefore be described without taking into account the specific cultural practices of the listeners. Preachers have to “engage with the cultural competencies of his listeners.”⁹⁶ It is only in this way that community is constructed by the preaching event. Millie describes this process as “embodied sociability”⁹⁷ or “embodied participation” due to the performative character of the sermons.⁹⁸

In his recently published study, Max Stille also examines this performative-aesthetic logic of sermons.⁹⁹ Like Millie, he does not focus on the strictly formalized and also linguistically ritualized Friday sermons, but rather takes a look at the sermon gatherings that are extremely popular in Bangladesh (*oyāj māhfil/wa’z māhfil/waz mahfils/sermon gatherings*).¹⁰⁰ His contribution can be seen as a good example for describing such sermon gatherings as ResourceComplexes. These are a visible and audible practice of public religious life, usually based on the meteorological calendar. This means that the meetings, which sometimes last up to six hours, usually take place in winter and not during the monsoon season. They are mainly organised by local committees. Often there are several preachers,

94 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 49f.

95 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 24.

96 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 25.

97 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 33.

98 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 5.

99 Max Stille, *Islamic Sermons and Popular Piety in Bangladesh. The Poetics of Popular Preaching* (London et al.: I.B. Tauris, 2020). For sources (live events, sermon recordings, transcriptions, YouTube, etc.), translation and transliteration issues see *ibid.*, 23f. The work is based on field research in the years 2012–2015.

100 On the sequence of events, especially the beginning, cf. Stille, *Islamic Sermons* (n. 99), 80ff. An overview of the different genres: Max Stille, “Islamic Non-Friday Sermons in Bangladesh *Südasiens Chronik – South Asia Chronicle* 4 (2014): 94–114.

the most important one at the end. The focus of Stille's research is the special poetics of these speech events. To this end he uses the term 'genre' – "genres as open systems of texts, defined by multiple and varied criteria, which can be formal, structural, or thematic."¹⁰¹ He focuses on the emotionality of the sermon. This is also staged here by turning the listeners into co-performers:¹⁰² by means of questions, to which the listeners answer, by increasing the volume of the answer, by incorporating gestures etc.: "Preacher and audience are equally responsible for a successful performance."¹⁰³

The aim of the study is thus – on the basis of the *waz mahfils* – to evaluate the aesthetic-literary and historical situation of sermons as a specific genre of religious communication. For this purpose, "key linguistic and narratological features of the sermons" are analyzed.¹⁰⁴ Among the linguistic features are the so-called code switching – each of the languages used (Bengali, Urdu, Farsi, Rohingya, English, Arabic) has a specific function –, the (re-)citation of Quranic verses as well as aphorisms and poems in other languages (e.g. Urdu) and translations: "Translation is part of the preachers' poetic prose and evolves dynamically over the course of the sermon. Preachers build upon and shape the language perception, competency and connoisseurship of the listeners".¹⁰⁵ The main part of the sermon consists of narratives, both about the Prophet, Islamic saints and everyday events of the listeners. "By including such narratives, the preacher's speech during the sermon is always related to another act of telling, such as hagiography or the transmission of the word of God to the early Muslim community."¹⁰⁶ At the same time, the narratives serve as a moral guide, because they offer role models to the listeners.¹⁰⁷ In addition to these linguistic and narratological aspects, there is also the musical aspect, especially the melodicality of the sermon. "The melodic voice is crucial to explain the deep interrelation of religious, bodily and emotional experience in *waz mahfils*."¹⁰⁸ The analysis of the

101 Stille, *Islamic Sermons* (n. 99), 15.

102 Cf. Stille, *Islamic Sermons* (n. 99), 17.

103 Stille, *Islamic Sermons* (n. 99), 87 (see also *ibid.* 56, with reference to the above-mentioned study by Bruce Rosenberg, see above n. 73).

104 Stille, *Islamic Sermons* (n. 99), 75.

105 Stille, *Islamic Sermons* (n. 99), 212.

106 Stille, *Islamic Sermons* (n. 99), 113.

107 For example, in one sermon, the prophet is described as a person capable of compassion: „The Prophet can [...] feel compassion as a social emotion. This makes it possible for preachers to give motivation to – and therefor narrate – the unfathomable compassion of the Prophet" (Stille, *Islamic Sermons* [n. 99], 135).

108 Stille, *Islamic Sermons* (n. 99), 212.

so-called “prose chanting”¹⁰⁹ identifies the voice, rhythm and dynamics as constitutive for the sermon and its sociality. “For the collective experiences of sermon congregations, their sonic dimension is by far the most important. Synchronization of emotional experience is achieved through rhythmic patterns of communication between preacher and audience.”¹¹⁰

In this way, the sermon becomes part of popular culture and “shapes subjectivities and ways of imagining and embodying community.”¹¹¹

Through the medialization and globalization of certain popular cultural patterns, individual preachers then can become significant beyond the local area. The growing diaspora of Bengali-speaking people also promotes this process. The “diaspora draws on long-established cultural resources: the travelling preacher not only mediates between the religious texts and their interpretation and relation to the listeners’ horizon, but is also a mediator between regions and classes.”¹¹² In the sense of our concept, the diaspora becomes an essential aspect of the ResourceAssemblage of preaching, which dynamizes and culturally transforms the resource.

Charles Hirschkind reconstructed this connection of local cultural, rhetorical, and aesthetic practices with medialization phenomena and the resulting growing public influence of sermons in an influential study on cassette sermons in Egypt.¹¹³ Both, Millie and Stille, refer to this work, both in agreement and disagreement. Fifteen years ago, this study was the starting point for perceiving Islamic sermons in particular as a resource for the transformation of societies, and not only to focus on their negative image, which builds on the suspicion of fundamentalism. It is based on several months’ stays in Cairo from 1994 to 1997.

While Millie’s focus is on the analysis of a situational group of listeners, i.e. the concrete preaching event and thus the heterogeneity of the listeners, Hirschkind shows how a common ethos of preachers and listeners is created through the sermon. Listeners and preachers are connected by the presupposed and intended agreement to ethically develop their own person and society. The sermons are “part of a complex ethical and political project”¹¹⁴ which aims at “social responsibility, pious comportment, and devotional practice”.¹¹⁵ In the sense of our concept

109 Especially Stille, *Islamic Sermons* (n. 99), 157ff.

110 Stille, *Islamic Sermons* (n. 99), 17.

111 Stille, *Islamic Sermons* (n. 99), 3.

112 Stille, *Islamic Sermons* (n. 99), 40.

113 Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape. Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

114 Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 4.

115 Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape*, 5.

of resources, one could also see in this the values which the participants in the sermon adhere to.

Basically, it is about a religious revival and renewal. In many Islamic countries, the cassette sermons were of central importance for this, because often TV and radio are subject to state control, cassettes ('small-media') became important for the distribution of sermons. "These media were one of the major factors contributing to the emergence of a Muslim counter-public relatively untouched by state control and organized according to transnational communication patterns."¹¹⁶ There are two reasons for this strong impact: accessibility and easy reproducibility. According to Hirschkind, a decentralized counter-public has also emerged in Egypt.¹¹⁷ Because sermons serve the (self-)formation of ethical subjects,¹¹⁸ listening is a religious activity, or more precisely: a practice of self-empowerment, as Hirschkind argues following Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault. The responsibility for the success of the sermon and thus for the processes of value creation and valorization therefore always lies with the listener, not only with the preacher. The listener is held to change his moral-ethical behaviour. The hierarchy between listeners and preachers becomes more fluid due to the medium. Modern mass communication and social disciplining are intertwined. The cassette sermons are derived from classical sermons, because they have developed from the Friday sermons but also transformed themselves taking up impulses from pop culture. They "combine classical sermon elements with languages and narrative forms rooted in such diverse genres as modern political oratory, television dramas, radio news broadcasts, and cinematic montage."¹¹⁹ The latter in particular also leads to a visualization of rhetoric. "Instead of citing texts, [the preacher] presents scenes of speech, scenes crafted through a continuous shifting between direct and indirect discourse, between narrative and impersonation."¹²⁰ In summary, Hirschkind speaks of "rhetorical innovations",¹²¹ to which the cassette

116 Jan Scholz et al., "Listening Communities? Some Remarks on the Construction of Religious Authority in Islamic Podcasts," *Die Welt des Islams* 48, no. 3/4 (2008): 457–509, 461. Cf. Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 4: „[L]istening to cassette sermons is a common and valued activity for millions of ordinary Muslims around the world, men and women who hold regular jobs, study at the university, send their kids to public schools, and worry about the future of their communities”.

117 Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 36f.

118 Cf. e.g. Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 82f. Hirschkind also speaks of "cassette-based techniques of individual self-fashioning" (ibid., 55) and of "ethical self-improvement" (ibid., 74, and 98).

119 Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 11. Speeches by Gamal Abdel Nasser and the music of Umm Kulthum were particularly influential.

120 Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 162.

121 Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 11.

sermons owe their popularity and impact. The sermons also serve as entertainment.¹²²

Cassette sermons cannot trace their claim of authority back to any institutional legitimatization. This is why the significance of the preacher is heightened in the process of medialisatation. “As a media personality speaking within the space and time defined by cassette media practices, [the preacher’s] discourse cannot be authorized by the institutions of the mosque and the Friday sermon”.¹²³ Hirschkind exemplifies this by referring to the blind preacher Shaykh Abd al-Hamid Kishk. He “has the status of a virtuoso performer”,¹²⁴ because of his “rhetoric of visual realism and a style of representation deeply indebted to cinematic technique”.¹²⁵

Overall, the cassette sermons succeed in integrating “modes of attention and styles of consumption”.¹²⁶ They are interwoven with modern consumer society and its patterns of reception as well as with fundamental aesthetic-cultural logics. This is an example of the importance of concrete socio-cultural dynamics, which on the one hand shape the sermon as a resource, but on the other hand are also influenced by this resource. This interplay is often decisive for the popularity of certain resources.

This aspect, as must be pointed out in conclusion, is time and again also brought to the fore when explaining the success of Evangelical preachers. So Uta Andrea Balbier has in several texts pointed to the market conformity of Billy Graham’s early sermons and sermon performances, which was essential for his initial successes. “Graham’s mission was characterized on one side by a highly traditional message combining conservative values and a fundamentalist theology and, on the other side, by his modern revival techniques, his use of mass media, and his appearance as an American, suburban, middle-class consumer.”¹²⁷ It was

122 Cf. Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 8.

123 Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 146.

124 Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 156.

125 Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 157. On the significance of individual preachers with media presence in connection with religious renewal movements, for Egypt: Jacqueline G. Brinton, *Preaching Islamic Renewal. Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016) and Susanne Olsson, *Preaching Islamic Revival. Amr Khaled, Mass Media and Social Change in Egypt* (London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2015).

126 Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 11.

127 Uta Andrea Balbier, “Billy Graham in West Germany: German Protestantism between Americanization and Rechristianization 1954–70,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen / Studies in Contemporary History* 7, no. 3 (2010): 343–363, 344 Cf. also Uta Andrea Balbier, “Selling Soap and Salvation”: Billy Graham’s Consumer Rhetoric in Germany and the United States in the 1950s,” *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 59, no. 2 (2014): 137–156. On Graham’s biography see, among others, Grant Wacker, *America’s Pastor. Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA /London: Bel-

thanks to this that Graham was received and met with acceptance in the 1950s in German-speaking countries and in the local churches with their longing for a re-Christianization. Graham's culture of preaching and religion at this time was linked to the adoption of the US-American consumer model. "Graham embodied the idea that religiosity and a generous 1950s consumer lifestyle were compatible. At a time when German Christians' kitchen appliances were changing as quickly as their travel culture, Graham reconciled their faith with the new world of consumption."¹²⁸

With the transformation of West German consumer orientation and the establishment of an anti-American attitude (especially in connection with the Vietnam War), this acceptance waned: an example of how socio-cultural dynamics also have an impact on the valuation of resources.

To the same extent, therefore, that cultural patterns are globalized, styles of preaching are also globalized, without, of course, the connection to local contexts being dissolved.

3 Summary

The first section presented a resource concept that focuses on the social dimension of resources, their values in and for communities and their embeddedness that makes them recognizable as social processes. The second chapter then evaluated the extent to which research on recent preaching cultures will describe the social impact of these. Two perspectives proved helpful: the focus on the local context and the relevance of cultural-aesthetic patterns. The dynamics between the person preaching and the listeners were always implicitly negotiated, as were socio-cultural transformations (e.g. medialization and globalization). The potentials of the cultural-scientific description of resources, ResourceCultures, ResourceComplexes and ResourceAssemblage for a multi-perspective description of the sermon were shown.

In conclusion, the question should now be asked which further-reaching perspectives can be identified from here. Five are mentioned.

First: German-speaking homiletics as well as some authors of the sociology of religion mentioned at the beginning strongly emphasize the '*benefit*' of preaching

knap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014). In the German-speaking context, research on Graham, and on evangelical preachers and televangelism in general, is rather sparse. Reference is made to the study by Felix Krämer, *Moral Leaders. Media, Medien, Gender und Glaube in den USA der 1970er und 1980er* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015).

128 Balbier, "Billy Graham in West Germany" (n. 127), 360.

or religious practices for the individual. The sermon should edify, heal, ethically orientate or address the individual's need for 'meaning'. This emphasis on the 'benefit' of faith for one's own life shows traces of a neo-classical, economic concept of resources – religion for the purpose of individual life-win-maximization. In contrast, the concept and studies presented here emphasize the 'value' of a resource in and its effects on a community. This brings the social efficacy of speech into focus. Religion and preaching are a resource because they are embedded in social values and practices.

Secondly, paradoxically, the social efficacy of the sermon often depends on charismatic, rhetorically gifted individuals. Both belong together for the resource religious speech: a speaker who is gifted from the point of view of the listeners and has a concise performance and a community that gives value to his speeches. The strategies of attributing value can vary, historically, culturally etc.

Thirdly, on the one hand, this attribution of value is based on the content of the sermon. Listeners and preachers share the same experiences and are committed to the same values. They understand their world view as divinely legitimized. And this is exactly what creates a sense of togetherness and social identity. On the other hand, however, this attribution of value is based on performance, which is characterised by a combination of formalised guidelines, cultures of remembrance, local practices and pop-cultural innovations.

Fourth, preaching cultures are oral performances. Voice, volume, modulation, melody, etc. are essential elements of the sermon,¹²⁹ in our sense of the ResourceComplex. Comparative sermon research also shows the impact of the auditory element for the success of the sermon. Hirschkind in particular explicitly opposes Western-style "sensory hierarchies"¹³⁰ and Millie argues: "Researchers have only recently made progress in considering the place of listening in Islamic public life. The listener has not been taken seriously in the discourses of secular modernity and, [...], has even been an object of suspicion and derision."¹³¹

Fifth: Resources can always be understood as dynamic processes. When resources are valued, i.e. they are created, maintained and used, both social relationships and the resources themselves change. This also applies to the sermon. The interaction of religious, political, rhetorical, ethical and aesthetic aspects is

129 Linda Gale Jones and Tahera Qutbuddin, among others, show that this perspective can also be fruitful for historical research on preaching. Cf. Linda Gale Jones, *The Power of Oratory in the Medieval Muslim World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 106f., 244–247, etc.; Tahera Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration. Art and Function* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019), 91–164.

130 Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape* (n. 113), 15.

131 Millie, *Hearing* (n. 81), 163.

not static. Therefore, transformation processes can be better described and compared using this cultural studies concept. Thus, the decline in the importance of worship and preaching in the constituted churches in Germany is on the one hand an expression of social and cultural change, and on the other hand indicates that the churches seem to be disconnected from these changes. In many free churches and migration congregations, however, the sermon is attributed a high value and it triggers or picks up on numerous social dynamics. This also applies to many mosque communities. Here complex socio-cultural processes become apparent, in which the handling of the resource ‘religious speech’ changes and with it possibly also the resource itself as well as society and the religious community. If one compares this development by means of the concept ResourceCultures with the developments in other countries and religious systems, one finds out: The first tendency – namely the declining appreciation of the resource ‘religious speech’ respectively ‘preaching’ – is rather the exception. The second – high value attribution – on the other hand, the norm.

The concept presented here draws attention to the socio-cultural embeddedness of resources. For the sermon this means: What a religious speech is, how it is understood, what task is attributed to it, what purpose it has – all this is always the result of socio-cultural negotiation processes. To put it in a nutshell: *the sermon itself does not exist*. Every essentialist attribution in the sense of “The sermon must ...”, “Preaching should ...” proves to be difficult. Sermons exist only in a plural mode and thus only concretely, namely in relation to a concrete religious community, at a certain place, in a certain time, to certain persons. At the same time, however, it can be assumed that the different cultures of preaching, that is ResourceCultures, influence each other.

This insight opens theologically a double space: an empirical and a normative one. Empirically, it is now possible to explore different speech practices comparatively, both within the Christian community and in interreligious and intercultural comparison.¹³² Research on preaching is essentially interdisciplinary research, and with regard to recent preaching cultures, the dialogue be-

132 On the interdisciplinary possibilities that are opened up by the further development of the concept of ResourceComplexes into ResourceAssemblages, see Sabine Hess and Maria Schwertl, “Vom ‘Feld’ zur ‘Assemblage’? Perspektiven europäisch-ethnologischer Methodenentwicklung – eine Hinleitung,” in *Europäisch-ethnologisches Forschen. Neue Methoden und Konzepte*, ed. Sabine Hess, Johannes Moser and Maria Schwertl (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 2013), 13–37, 14: “Rather, the discussion is about which subject areas and theorems are (can be) assigned to each discipline and are (can be) considered a legitimate disciplinary acquis, or are turned around differently, which knowledge of different scope is expected from which discipline and is claimed by it itself.” Translation by the authors of this article.

tween anthropology and the various theologies has proved to be particularly helpful.¹³³

With regard to questions of theological normativity, on the other hand, this concept makes it possible to visualize denominational and religious-cultural differences resulting from empirical comparison.

133 On the dialogue between Christian theology and anthropology cf. Joel Robbins, “Anthropology and Theology: An Awkward Relationship,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2006): 284–294; J. Derrick Lemons, ed., *Theologically Engaged Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).