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A History of Public Worship: From Procession Prohibition to Amplified Azan

If solemn assemblies, observations of festivals, public worship be permitted to any one sort of professors . . . neither Pagan nor Mahometan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth because of his religion.

John Locke, A Letter Concerning Toleration, 1689

For a greater understanding of religious pluralism in the Netherlands, we need to embed the call to prayer in a broader cultural history of public religion. To do so, I compare the emancipation history of Dutch Catholics with that of Dutch Muslims, and observe that Catholic and Muslim emancipation are juridically and historically connected. After dealing with the public debate over what can be named the Catholic-Muslim emancipation analogy, the Protestant history of opposition to public Catholic rituals is considered in order to understand the historical background to the emancipation of Dutch Muslims today. First, I describe how the Procession Prohibition (*processieverbod*) for Dutch Catholics came into existence in the nineteenth century. I then explain how the Procession Prohibition came to be abolished as recently as 1988 with the implementation of the Public Manifestations Act. Leading up to this change were court cases which resulted in a juridical negation of the Catholic right to processions, followed by parliamentary debate, and finally constitutional change. The formal end of the prohibition on processions not only concluded a history of Catholic-Protestant enmity, but also signaled the arrival of religious newcomers. A point of particular interest for our purpose is that during the debates in the 1980s, there were explicit references to the right to the Muslim call to prayer, and this right was eventually codified in law. That is why this chapter focuses on the Catholic procession and the Muslim call to prayer, rather than on Muslim processions in the Netherlands, which are very rare. Furthermore, there is the

important analogy between the azan and Catholic church bell ringing, which I also discuss, because it reveals the falsity of the popular narratives of church bells as inherently Dutch. Finally, I provide an overview of the history of the Muslim call to prayer in the Netherlands.

The consequence of the emancipation of both Catholics and Muslims in the Netherlands is that public religion has become much more “accepted” in recent Dutch history, not in a maximalist moral sense but in the minimal legal sense of indifference to what religious others do publically. This may strike the reader as strange, given the intense criticism—if not outright racism—against European Muslims in the last few decades. Yet it is the historical reality. In Chapters 3 and 4, we will see that, despite protests by politicians and citizens, public Islam has acquired more space today than in recent times, while this historical chapter reminds us that the emancipation of religious groups can proceed alongside persistent discrimination and mutual animosity. Before delving into the past, however, I begin with two stories of public religion today, one about a procession and the other about an amplified azan.

Two stories of public religion

The Passion

In 2011, the small town of Gouda in the province of South Holland celebrated Easter with a Christian procession in its streets. During the event, which was called The Passion—the English term was used—and has been repeated annually ever since, a 6-meter long cross was carried through the town as a crowd watched a live outdoor musical performance; people at home could follow the proceedings on national television. Participants’ responses were positive and viewer ratings were good,¹ so the following year The Passion was held in one of the Netherlands’ major cities, Rotterdam. The event attracted visitors to the city and reached more than a million viewers at home.² It was an unusual public display of religion in the Netherlands, and participants frequently expressed their surprise to the television presenter that such a procession was possible at all.

In 2013, The Passion was held in The Hague, the political capital of the Netherlands. The organizers included the Evangelische Omroep and the Omroep Rooms-Katholiek Kerkgenootschap, two Christian media platforms, as well as the Dutch Protestant Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The Netherlands Bible Society and local municipalities, including the police, were

also co-organizers. This time, it reached over two million viewers at home and attracted thousands to the procession at night.³ The same long cross was carried throughout the city, glowing white in the dark. The musical, with spectacular lighting effects and amplified sounds, was staged in a modern, urban, and everyday setting, accompanied by kitschy pop music in Dutch that was familiar to the crowd. The stage was based at the Hofvijver, a pond in the city center adjoining the medieval building complex of the Binnenhof that houses the Dutch Parliament. Jörgen Raymann, a famous television presenter of Surinamese descent, was the evening's host. "Good evening Netherlands," he said, and the crowd consisting of young and old cheered. "We are here at the Hofvijver, the center of power of the Netherlands." If Jesus were here today, would he have clashed with the established order, Raymann asked, "or would he have been 'tolerated' (*gedoogd*) in Dutch fashion?" The procession had "a special significance this year," he continued, because The Hague was a "city of peace and justice [referring to the UN's Peace Palace and the International Criminal Court], a world city where different nationalities, cultures, and faiths have lived together for centuries."

The procession passed by the Peace Palace and went on from there toward Plein 1813, the square of 1813 with a monument that commemorates the victory against Napoleon and the subsequent establishment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. A statue depicts King William I taking an oath to the constitution. Ironically, it was the same Protestant king who, in the early nineteenth century, initiated what came to be called the Procession Prohibition or *processieverbod* for Dutch Catholics. This did not matter; the square and government buildings indicated to viewers at home that the procession was part of the nation. The history of the prohibition was not mentioned, and the procession marched on to Palace Noordeinde, the current working palace of the Dutch monarch, before finally returning to the Hofvijver.

Several politicians participated in the musical as actors, and Dutch police officers also played a part. The latter's uniforms and cars, symbols of authority, were used as a metaphor for the soldiers of Rome. The police also accompanied the procession on motorcycles and on foot. In contrast, in the nineteenth century, authorities on horseback had used force to prevent Catholics from holding processions. Such aversion against a public display of religion seemed entirely absent in *The Passion*, a forgotten ghost from the past. And yet, a presenter following the procession told the television audience that she had never seen such a procession, and that she could see how special the event was for participants. When she asked one of the cross bearers why he was

there, he replied that he was a Protestant who wanted to be in the procession together with others. Throughout the event, no connection was made between Catholicism and processions, which had been an ordinary association in the time of William I but also during much of the twentieth century. Moreover, a nonbeliever and a Muslim were also interviewed on television, to demonstrate the diversity of the crowd. A young lady marching expressed her thoughts about televising the procession in “such a grand way” to the presenter: “I think it is very special. I think it is beautiful to show to all the people in the Netherlands, who are here or watching at home, that the cross still has meaning in our time.” A student walking with the procession said that he had not expected it to have “such an impact.” These surprised reactions testify to a past in which abundant processions were taboo, but in this case the story of Christ was told by overtly appealing to the senses through storytelling, music, and visual arts, and shared carrying of the cross. The evening ended with the figure of Jesus literally standing on the water of the Hofvijver, singing in glimmering light as the crowd cheered.

The call to prayer in Terborg

Umar Mirza and his television crew visited the Mimar Sinan Mosque of Terborg in 2012. One of the many episodes of *Mijn Moskee is Top* (My Mosque is Great), a Dutch show about mosques in the Netherlands, was on this very small Muslim community in a mostly rural area close to the German border. Terborg has two churches, one belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church⁴ and the other to the Catholic community, and, since 1983, one mosque. After the Reformation, local Catholics continued their services in a clandestine church. Not until the nineteenth century could they construct a purpose-built church for themselves, and the current St. George Church was realized in the early twentieth century. The Mimar Sinan Mosque, named after the principal architect of the great Ottoman mosques of Istanbul, was housed in a former industrial building, described by *Mijn Moskee is Top* as a “former garage-ish looking building.” By adding two minarets, one of which has two loudspeakers on top, the building was made to appear like a mosque on the exterior. “How did a mosque come to be in a place like Terborg?” Mirza asked the mosque’s spokesman, a board member and former chairman. “Our parents came here in the 1970s to do ironworks [at a local factory].” Other Turkish guest workers had come as early as the 1950s. Their need for a space for prayer resulted in what Mirza called a “guest worker mosque.” The Turkish community had to raise funds at the time of construction

but could not do so without the help of their non-Muslim neighbors. Despite this assistance, locals objected to the mosque's wish to use loudspeakers for the call to prayer five times a day. As a compromise, the spokesman said, "We came to an agreement that the mosque could amplify the call every day in the afternoon." Mirza was surprised: "What did you just say?! Once a day?! . . . Do you know how special that is?" The mosque spokesman smiled: "There is nothing special about that. For us that's normal." Mirza: "This is not Turkey! In The Hague, in Amsterdam, in the entire country, it is only allowed to call to prayer once [a week]! But here you can do it every day!?" Mirza was not exactly right about what is and is not permitted with regard to the call in the Netherlands, but many Dutch Muslims I spoke with between 2011 and 2015 assumed the same thing, namely that a daily azan was out of the question. The mosque in secluded Terborg had been using loudspeakers on a daily basis for years, but thanks to a television show with a national audience, Mirza was now bringing to the attention of other Dutch Muslims that it was indeed possible to amplify the azan on a daily basis in the Netherlands. An agreement was reached based on "good relations with our neighbors," the mosque spokesman explained. To verify this, Mirza knocked on the door of one of the mosque's Dutch neighbors. An elderly lady came to the door and told him that the mosque had always amplified the azan. "It does not disturb you?" Mirza asked. "No," she replied calmly, "in the beginning it was several times a day, but now [it is] only once in the afternoon."

Although the mosque and television show did their best to depict harmonious relations between mosque and town, there had been a few troubling incidents such as racist slurs pasted on the mosque once and, on September 11, 2001, someone had thrown a brick through one of the mosque's windows. Some in the mosque thought that it was a disgrace that they could not call to prayer five times a day. "Don't the church bells ring during our prayers as well?" a mosque visitor told a journalist in 2002. According to a local alderwoman, negotiations for the call to prayer were a troublesome issue. "We had to get together with the whole neighborhood . . . and they thought that five times a day was getting too crazy. Of course, they [the Muslims] said that church bells could also ring [often]. I then clearly stated to them: you are in the Netherlands. . . . Sounding church bells is a centuries-old practice here. This is a society that has built up each other's rights together. You have no choice but to respect that. Not everything that you ask for is possible."⁵ By 2012, the process of "de-churching" (*ontkerkelijking*) was taking its toll on the Catholic church in Terborg. (De-churching is a Dutch word that can simultaneously refer to secularization, rejection of institutional religion, the

closing down of church buildings due to dropping attendance rates, and to the pursuit of [alternative] private religious experiences.) The lack of young people after de-churching in Terborg was a significant contrast to the mosque, which remained connected to Turkish-Dutch youth. But even though the church was in decline, its bells still rang louder than the mosque's daily—but only in the afternoon—amplified call to prayer.

Comparing Catholic with Muslim emancipation

The two vignettes above reveal a rather changed Netherlands, one which has shifted over the centuries from Protestant hegemony to a pluralist, constitutional, liberal democracy, disestablishing Protestantism in the process (Bader 2007: 54; cf. Bouma 1999; Hollinger 2003). Declaring independence from Spanish and thus Catholic rule in the sixteenth century, and maintaining this as a founding narrative for most of their existence, neither the Dutch Republic (1581–1795) nor the Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815–present) allowed religious others, in particular Catholics, to unequivocally engage in what John Locke termed “public worship.”⁶ Tolerance was interpreted strictly and in a minimalist sense: religious others should not exhibit their religion to the public eye (too much). Even the great thinker of freedom, Spinoza, who was born in Amsterdam, focused his attention on personal and private religious liberty. In his *Tractatus Politicus* we find, in contrast to Locke, a rather strong curtailing of religious liberty for the sake of state hegemony in religious matters:

Although everyone should be granted freedom to say what he thinks, large congregations should be forbidden, and so, while those who are attached to another religion are to be allowed to build as many churches as they wish, these are to be small, of some fixed dimensions, and some distance apart. But it is important that churches dedicated to the national religion should be large and costly, and that only patricians or senators should be permitted to administer its chief rites. ([1677] 2007, TP, section 46)

However, the basic right to or at least the aspiration toward an autonomous *foro interno*, the inner space of religious conscience, was an important achievement in itself. The right to be free from inquisition was a first step toward the right to practice one's religion in public, in *foro externo*. William of Orange, the pater patriae of the Netherlands, is reported to have said, in opposition to Phillip II of Spain, that he could not accept the principle that monarchs rule the souls of their

subjects. As early as 1579, the Union of Utrecht—the de facto constitution of the new nation—affirmed religious autonomy against inquisitions:

Each person shall remain free, especially in his religion, and . . . no one shall be persecuted or investigated because of their religion. (my translation, cited in Labuschagne 1994: 70)

An autonomous conscience, however, did not necessarily include the freedom to act on one's religious preferences in public, and well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was not an acceptable idea, not even for a radical freethinker such as Spinoza. The public Protestant church of the Dutch Republic allowed only one official and public understanding of Christianity, while Protestant dissenters and Catholics could be tolerated as long as they did not challenge the public church⁷ (Rooden 1996: 151–52). The result was that Catholics, defined as enemies by the independent Dutch state, were forbidden to construct churches for over two centuries.

The history of religious toleration in the Netherlands shows that constructing houses of worship has been an important indicator of the social status of Jews and Catholics in the country (Sunier 2004). In that sense, Muslim emancipation through mosque construction is not something that can be compared with the history of Dutch Catholics for analytical purposes alone, but is rather the latest episode in a continuous history that has shifted from Protestant hegemony over public space toward pluralism. Acknowledging that history does not merely repeat itself nor follow a teleological trajectory, it can be argued that Muslims from North Africa and Turkey, who found themselves in a postwar welfare state in the twentieth century, are in many ways in a fundamentally different position than Catholics were in the nineteenth century (Sunier 2004: 565). But while there is “no perfect historical analogy for the settlement of millions of Muslims and the development of complex layers of religious organizations” in Europe (Laurence 2012: 17), mosque struggles over the boundaries between private and public are reminiscent of those of Catholics and Jews in the nineteenth century, and build on the legal rights achieved thanks to a critical remembering of the past.⁸

To illustrate this point with another example, we may take notice of the right to religious education in the Netherlands, a right that Catholics and Protestants successfully defended in the nineteenth century. Muslims have followed suit, basing the right to Islamic primary and secondary schools on the same laws. Making such analogies and juridico-historical connections are not new: Cornelis Klop, a Protestant sociologist and philosopher, proposed a Catholic-Muslim

emancipation analogy in 1982. In 1999, he reiterated the importance of accommodating public manifestations of Islam, and compared the fear of Muslims to the public sentiment against Catholics in the nineteenth century (Klop 1999; cf. van Rooden 1996: 45). Others have followed suit in the 2000s, including anthropologists and sociologists, political scientists, and philosophers (e.g., Casanova 2012; Sunier 2004; Laurence 2012; Nussbaum 2012).

Moreover, in the Netherlands the comparison between Catholic and Muslim emancipation has not merely been a scholarly innovation, but a sociocultural phenomenon in itself. Because the memory of Catholic emancipation is still alive, small mosques in factories, homes, and garages have often been described as “clandestine” mosques (*schuilmoskeeën*), even though the Dutch Constitution does not oppose the construction of mosques. So, no mosque needs to be clandestine. In everyday conversations and newspaper articles about Muslims in the Netherlands, references to the clandestine Catholic churches (*schuilkerken*), some of which are now public tourist attractions, show that citizens themselves draw on the history of clandestine Catholic spaces for prayer to interpret Muslim devotional spaces (Beekers and Tamimi Arab 2016).

At the same time, the analogous use of the term “emancipation” for describing Muslims’ greater spatial integration of Islam in the Netherlands has been contested. Public expressions of difference are frequently interpreted as failed integration into a dominant culture rather than as emancipation. Therefore, when a Muslim politician in The Hague described the use of loudspeakers for the Muslim call to prayer as “integration,” he met with great resistance (Chapter 3). Dutch politicians who declared “multiculturalism” dead, as former Deputy Prime Minister Maxime Verhagen did in 2011, claim that the current anxieties of the populace about “foreigners” (*buitenlanders*) should not only be taken seriously but could be considered understandable and justified (*begrijpelijk, terecht*).⁹ In this vision, the Dutch nation must proclaim its *Leitkultur* or guiding culture, and acknowledge the specifically Christian roots of the nation.¹⁰ A decade before European leaders such as the German chancellor Angela Merkel, the French president Nicolas Sarkozy, and the United Kingdom’s prime minister David Cameron all declared multiculturalism a failure,¹¹ the political shift away from Dutch multiculturalism was exacerbated in the year 2000 after the publication of a very influential essay on the “multicultural drama.” In hindsight, it is noteworthy that the author Paul Scheffer explicitly distanced himself from the Catholic-Muslim emancipation analogy: “The role of Islam cannot be simply compared to that of Christian religions [*christelijke godsdiensten*] in the Netherlands.”

The Dutch Catholics, after all, had a common history with Dutch Protestants and fought their emancipatory battles in the “same language.” The Netherlands was pillarized according to religious factions, but shared the “single roof” of the nation. Muslim newcomers, however, are so different that the house itself, roof and all, has become strained. Everyone still fits in the building, but no one really feels at home together. For Scheffer, migration and multiculturalism are acts in a painfully alienating drama. We may compare his critique with the academically popular idea that Europe’s religious diversity is new, unprecedented, and of an interreligious nature, rather than merely intrareligious as it supposedly was prior to the arrival of Muslims, excluding colonial histories and the rich history of Dutch Judaism. From such a homogenized perspective of Dutch and European religious pluralism, we could continue to suggest that new conceptions of state governance of religions are required (e.g., Bhargava 2010b).

What can be exaggerated in such lines of thought is Muslim and Catholic religiosity as totally, rather than partially, incommensurable. An anthropology that does not deconstruct such a view of Christian-Muslim difference, making a space for comparison and analogy, will also fail at deconstructing xenophobia and nativism. This is because the Dutch construction of Christian natives (*autochthons*) and Muslim nonnatives (*allochthons*) rests precisely on exaggerating differences and downplaying family resemblances between these groups (cf. Beekers 2014). From a perspective in which there never was a “radical mistranslation” (Hacking 1981), however, Scheffer’s claim that Muslims speak a different language than Catholics is a half-truth at best. Therefore, if we consider the severity of past intrareligious hostility between various Protestant and Catholic groups, European and Dutch histories of religious pluralism appear rich in reserves that can be useful for reflecting on contemporary Muslim emancipation.¹²

Scheffer does compare Muslims and Catholics in a book he published after his famous critique of multiculturalism, albeit in an uncharitable way. There he argues that, in the past, the Catholic community’s place in the nation was in doubt and that the same holds true for Muslim migrants today, who will nevertheless slowly become part of the imagined Dutch nation (2007: 160). Their situation, he writes, is similar to that of Irish Catholics in nineteenth-century United States:

[The Irish] resisted against all reforms, whether it concerned the abolition of slavery, the rights of women or the introduction of public education. . . . What is interesting is that resistance against Irish immigrants was one between a reform-minded majority and a traditional minority. It does not require a great power of

imagination to fill in Muslim migrants from Morocco of the twentieth century for the Catholic Irish of the nineteenth century. (my translation, 2007: 311)

In other words, nativist resentment on the part of the majority is caused by the migrant's insufficiently progressive values. It is striking that Scheffer makes the Catholic-Muslim comparison to locate the source of American nativism in the Irish Catholics' lack of immersion in "Protestant Enlightenment" (2007: 311). Put bluntly, the enlightened native Dutch of today must tolerate the backward ways of the Moroccans. Of course, Scheffer claims in his book that a complex multidimensional phenomenon such as emancipation must originate from, and be achieved by, all sides. However, his comparison leaves the dominant native position hardly questioned (in contrast, for example, with Casanova 2012 and Nussbaum 2012).

Dutch religious histories are vital for understanding contemporary views of Muslims as not fitting in the nation, because they unravel an all too homogeneous image of who constituted the Netherlands in the past, an image that leads to the bifurcation of Dutch and Muslim identities. But generally speaking, to young adults in the Netherlands today stories of Catholic emancipation seem very distant. Their grandparents, however, do remember the northern bitterness toward Catholics,¹³ when in the pillarized Dutch society of the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, religious segregation formed the status quo (Jong 2011: 44). Even though Dutch Catholics possessed a strong religious identity and constituted at least a third of the population, they were barely included in the imaginings of the nation as a whole (Rooden 1996: 32). Protestants and Catholics did not speak to one another, bought their groceries from different shops, sent their children to different schools, and ran their own newspapers and political parties. They constituted "heavy communities" (Dam 2014), which coexisted side by side. Importantly, for Catholics this meant a continuation of their emancipation and increasing public presence. All sorts of interactions between religions did take place, as they had from the seventeenth century when Rembrandt had contact with various religious groups in Amsterdam. Nevertheless, at times fierce theological debates further separated people from each other, even within families. At the national level, Queen Wilhelmina (head of state from 1890 to 1948) openly questioned whether Catholic citizens were "loyal to the Pope in Rome or the Dutch nation where they belonged?" (Jong 2011: 44) Catholicism was seen, in the pillarized nation, as "an obstacle for the moral development of citizens" and as "a false community within the nation" (my translation, Rooden 1996: 200). Similarly, today's public

discourse questions the loyalty of Dutch-Muslim politicians and citizens of Turkish or Moroccan descent—are they *truly Dutch*? Although this question is now being asked by the populace rather than the royals, former Queen Beatrix or the current and officially Protestant King Willem-Alexander and his Roman Catholic wife, Queen Máxima (cf. Sunier 2004: 559).

When the differences between the so-called pillars (Catholics, Protestants, liberals, and socialists) started to fade, known as the period of de-pillarization (*ontzuiling*) after the Second World War, the Netherlands also witnessed the construction of its first mosques. Slowly, former guest workers, who prayed on mats in factory halls, began to construct purpose-built mosques (Landman 1992). As guest workers decided to stay in the Netherlands, Dutch constitutional secularism also changed. International discussions of the disestablishment of Protestantism from the state were already familiar—for instance the American model of “perfect separation” required “non-establishment”—but it was only after the Second World War, during de-pillarization, that these discussions began to really pressure the Dutch toward constitutional change. Equality in the law resulted, not from moral acceptance in any grand sense but rather from increasing indifference to Catholicism. However, these constitutional changes, which I will discuss shortly, did not merely update an old law to a contemporary situation: in Chapters 3 and 4, I show that the consequences of the constitutional shift in governance of religious diversity are still playing out. A procession such as The Passion, then, is a very new phenomenon that builds on the historical Catholic procession, transforming it into a procession of Catholics, Protestants, and others all together, an unthinkable situation only decades ago. The amplified call to prayer first began in the Netherlands in the 1980s when the constitution was changed to become more pluralistic, and the demand to amplify the *azan* has only increased since then.

The Procession Prohibition

Like Muslims in the Netherlands today, Catholics in the nineteenth century had the right to construct churches. When religious liberty (*godsdienstvrijheid*) was proclaimed in the Netherlands in 1795, enthusiastic Catholics rang their church bells as a symbol of reclaimed freedom. However, the official separation of church and state (1796) and the constitutional arrangement of religious liberty (1798), granting Catholics the right to construct churches, did not reform the ban on church bells. Even though the more liberal constitution of 1815 allowed

openings for church bell ringing, local Protestant complaints quickly led to municipal bans. The purpose of the separation of church and state was not to destroy the power of the Protestant church of the Dutch Republic, which was not a powerful institution comparable to the Church of Rome. Although accepted forms of public religion continued to be limited, the separation was intended to “end social and political discrimination based on religion” (Rooden 1996: 28). In this sense, the development of Dutch constitutional secularism resembles the American model more than the French, where revolutionaries sought to free themselves from the economic, political, and religious grip, among others, from the Church with a capital “C.” These historic differences continue to have an impact today: public expressions of Islam in the United States and the Netherlands, though under constant scrutiny, have been more accepted than in France.

As in the French experience of church bell ringing in the nineteenth century (Corbin 1998), in the Netherlands church bells were associated in negative ways with Catholicism but did not involve a similar revolutionary intensity and violence.¹⁴ As is often with the *azan* today, church bells were experienced as aural intrusion into public spaces, difficult to ignore for those who did not wish to hear the sounds of religious others, namely, Catholics. Church bell ringing was experienced as religiously offensive, as noise pollution, or simply as antipathetic (Margry 2000: 139) and had already been banned several times during the existence of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Opponents of the *azan* today frequently claim that church bell ringing is and has always been an unproblematic aspect of the national culture. Margry’s study shows that this view is far from the truth, and does not take into account the various uses of church bells, the fact that people could distinguish different types of bells, and that ringing was a contested practice. In an exact parallel with contemporary reactions to the anticipated presence of the Muslim call to prayer, announcements of *Angelus* ringing angered residents who complained preemptively about decreasing property values (Margry 2000: 352; also Chapter 4).

After the French Revolution, church bell ringing in the Netherlands was limited to marking time and for funerals, and ownership of church towers and bells was transferred to local municipalities. In practice, though, Catholics did ring the *Angelus* and called for prayer, also as a way to resist authorities. The sound of the *Angelus* would reach non-Catholics as well, and to add injury to insult believers would take off their hats in public or even kneel to pray in the streets. These public displays of religiosity shocked the nation. However, in

other parts of the Netherlands, for example Rotterdam, church bells had been effectively prohibited. Only in the nineteenth century did they ring for the first time since the Reformation (Margry 2000: 141), and church bell ringing in general increased in the second half of the century. It is worth citing Margry at length here:

How highly Catholics esteemed church bell ringing can be seen in a childhood memory from the 1830s of the physician-historian Nuyens. During that time he was confronted with what was according to him one of the most intense emotions among Catholics: the fiery wish that their church towers would have bells that were allowed to ring on ecclesiastical occasions. This feeling was further strengthened according to Nuyens because even the boldest Catholic doubted that they would ever be allowed to do so. (quotes are my translations, Margry 2000: 141)

For example, when Catholics applied in 1810 to construct a church in a town in the province of Utrecht, there were complaints that the sounds of the church bells would pervade and disturb services in the neighboring Protestant church (Margry 2000: 152). Although the Catholics had a formal right to build their church, more than four decades passed before it was realized and construction was allowed only after the House of Representatives (*De Tweede Kamer*) decided to interfere. Just like mosque construction negotiations today, antipathy toward Catholic church bell ringing and public displays of religion, such as processions, was used by opponents to obstruct church construction.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Catholics were perceived as “backward” (*achterlijk*) and persisting in “superstitions” (*bijgeloof*) (Margry 2000: 28; Rooden 1996: 116). The Catholic community protested against discrimination but also organized hate speech against Protestants. They saw the procession as militant, a metaphor for a victory march against Protestants (Margry 2000: 35). That a foreign power, Rome, had declared processions to be triumphs against heresy obviously did not help (Margry 2000: 45). The *azan* has similar connotations today, associated with Ottoman conquest and invading Arabs, or simply terrorists. This was most explicitly the case in the Swiss minaret ban of 2009, in which minarets were depicted as missiles (Nussbaum 2012; Mayer 2011).

Once Catholics acquired larger church buildings, it became more feasible to hold processions inside churches. Processions could also be organized on walled-in church property. What Protestants especially resented was the public procession through urban streets. To Dutch Protestants, Catholic opulence agitated the senses. Where processions were tolerated, they were required to be

sober. Singing, for example, was forbidden, as were religious garb (Margry 2000: 81–82). Earlier, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Catholics were known as “silent citizens” (ibid.: 13). Like the Muslim call to prayer, processions have medieval and even ancient origins,¹⁵ and during this period the memory of local medieval processions was kept alive in a uniquely Dutch way. Catholics did not gather in large groups but informally, individually or in small groups, with an “introvert piety” (ibid.: 129). By going outside and simply walking along the former routes of important processions, the memory of the ritual was kept intact. Margry describes these as imaginary reproductions of the original procession. As early as 1573, only seven years after the start of the Iconoclastic Fury, Catholics in Gouda organized a so-called Silent Walk (*Stille Omgang*), a silent procession (ibid.: 175). In nineteenth-century Amsterdam, which had housed clandestine Catholic churches for centuries, the silent procession grew into the nation’s largest public ritual, “a symbol for the national unity of Catholic Netherlands and simultaneously an immanent protest against limitations of public religious rituals” (ibid.: 131). The atmosphere of the silent procession was that of a protest demonstration. Although they were performed in silence, Protestants experienced them as loud (ibid.: 398). This aural aspect of historical processions is easily overlooked but made explicit in the Dutch case by the intentional silence of the Silent Walk, standing in sharp contrast with the rather loud The Passion procession in the twenty-first century.

In the nineteenth century, the connection of Protestant provinces such as North-Holland with the Catholic southern Netherlands, forming a single nation, reinforced and kept the memory of processions alive (ibid.: 178). As we saw in the previous chapter, the silent alternative to the Muslim call to prayer, the light-azan, fails as an attempt to replace the azan. The memory and present consciousness of the aural call is vibrant; it serves as a reminder that the light-azan is inauthentic. In a similar vein, Margry describes the focus on the spiritual aspects of Catholicism, in a context in which public expressions of the religion were taboo, as “spiritualizing strategies” (ibid.: 393–94) that functioned as religious innovations in a time of contested public worship. In a globalized age, however, with easy access to Muslim-majority countries where the azan is common practice, it is unlikely that an innovation such as the light-azan will become anything more than a makeshift solution.

After French rule in the early nineteenth century, the new constitution of 1815 allowed public manifestations of religion which could only be banned for the sake of public order and security. Catholic Belgium also became part of the new Kingdom of the Netherlands during this time, but the biased Protestant

King William I soon decided that public processions should be limited. A period of uncertainty followed, in which it was unclear whether processions were allowed or not (ibid.: 223). Although the constitution seemed to allow processions, a royal decree of 1822 functioned as an effective obstruction and even ban on processions. Processions could not be held more than a few times a year, and were banned in locations where a procession tradition had not existed during the Ancien Régime. The latter requirement was especially difficult for Catholics to prove. In addition, troops were deployed to intimidate Catholic churches to prevent processions (ibid.: 228). Rather than becoming a civil right, the allowed procession thus acquired a nativist-culturalist character. Where it had or was believed to have existed in the past, it was permitted, but innovations were forbidden. In Chapter 3, we will see that this style of thinking has persisted into our time and is evidenced in critiques of those who equate the right to ring church bells with the right to amplify the call to prayer.

By allowing processions in the southern provinces and banning them in the north, differences between Protestants and Catholics were emphasized and strengthened. Margry notes that during this period, the king and his government followed an Enlightenment tradition of state control of religion. Influenced by the French Revolution and the modernizing policies of Joseph II, the enlightened Habsburg monarch, the separation of church and state was primarily interpreted as a one-sided exclusion, especially of Catholic churches, rather than a mutual exclusion of powers as was the ideal in the United States. The attempts of William I to enforce his Protestant preferences backfired, however, and were among the causes of Belgium's secession in 1830.

After repeated conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, in which Catholics were deemed to have provoked non-Catholics with ornate processions and church bell ringing, a new and general government perspective needed to be developed. Johan Rudolph Thorbecke, the Netherlands' greatest liberal, achieved a milestone in virtually single-handedly drafting the new constitution of 1848 that limited the powers of the Dutch monarch, effectively turning the Netherlands into a parliamentary democracy. A commission led by Thorbecke followed the very open formulation of the constitution of 1815 and did not include clauses that could easily limit processions. In contrast, public opinion held that the "Protestant Netherlands" was not used to processions and that the constitution should not facilitate Catholic expansion. Dominant Protestant pressures finally led to what became known as the Procession Prohibition (*processieverbod*) in the constitution of 1848. The Procession Prohibition, which allowed the government to ban processions in the entire country, was one of the

new laws that Thorbecke vehemently opposed. He thought that the government would be regarded as a “bigoted and intolerant or intolerance empowering lawgiver” (cited in Margry 2000: 292). Nevertheless, the majority of the House of Representatives considered processions to be anachronisms in an enlightened age, and resisted Thorbecke’s criticism. The new Law of Church Societies of 1853 (*Wet op de Kerkenootschappen*) gave teeth to the Procession Prohibition by adding a clause that included the possibility of prosecuting disobedient Catholics. In the 1870s, the legal persecution of procession organizers escalated with Catholic allegations of power abuse against the government, for example when a priest was pressured to publicly repent for organizing a procession but was still convicted. In response, Catholics sometimes reacted with violence against authorities (ibid.: 300). Not only were allowed processions limited, the wearing of Catholic clothing in public, even for funerals, was also banned. Religious clothing was banned not just for Catholics, but also for Protestants who preferred not to wear church clothing themselves rather than being forced to see Catholics in religious garb!

The right to ring church bells, however, was accommodated. In addition, in order to uphold the Procession Prohibition but also manage Catholic desiderata, the Dutch High Court decided in 1856 that a private or “closed-off” space (*besloten ruimte*) could be defined broadly to include church perimeters (ibid.: 136). This made it possible to hold processions outside church buildings on what was often publicly visible church terrain. Processions that could be proven to have been part of a legal and continuous tradition prior to 1848 were also allowed. But in 1875 the Dutch High Court made a decision that furthered the prohibition: the routes, times, and number of processions should follow an exact scheme in accordance with state authorities (and were therefore limited). By documenting and expanding existing lists of permitted processions, made in the 1850s, the government attempted to entirely control and regulate the “sacral infrastructure” of public spaces (ibid.: 325). This led to a messy situation in which it was once again unclear which Catholic rituals were allowed and which were not. At the same time, new nonreligious “processions” such as fanfares were allowed, while police and troopers were deployed to block processions, if necessary by force. The police came to be known as “hunting” for processions (*processiejacht*) that attempted to circumvent state control (ibid.: 319). Margry describes how violence against police officers and convictions of Catholics made it painfully clear that a better *modus vivendi* between religious factions was necessary (2000: 321). In contrast, in our vignette of The Passion in The Hague in 2013, we saw that police officers not only accompanied but also participated

in the show as actors. In the nineteenth century, such a “neutral” police presence during processions was impossible (*ibid.*: 333).

Margry describes Catholic emancipation as a paradoxical process: on the one hand, church construction was permitted, but on the other, as the Procession Prohibition exemplifies, religious segregation and curtailment of religious liberty intensified (*ibid.*: 371). Peter van Rooden similarly observes that the redistribution of church buildings after the separation of church and state, and the emancipation of Catholics compared with the situation prior to the nineteenth century, led to “sharp conflicts” and “strong anti-Catholic feelings,” particularly in the south where Protestants had been using, not a few or some, but all old church buildings, that is, formerly Catholic buildings (Rooden 1996: 29). Persecution of Catholics led to a stronger Catholic identity (Margry 2000: 377), ultimately with a quantitative increase in Catholic public rituals, while Protestants were appeased by the formal Procession Prohibition. Although church bell ringing and processions were often banned, Dutch authorities practiced pragmatic and consensual negotiation strategies, tolerating many exceptions (*ibid.*: 373). This conflicted, of course, with the above mentioned hunt for processions, and led to critical questions in the House of Representatives. How could it be that violence was used in one case and pragmatic accommodation applied in the other (*ibid.*: 278)?

The Catholic struggle for public space was extended from church buildings to bell ringing and, more controversially, processions, in the same way that Muslims have defended their right to use loudspeakers for the *azan* after fighting the more important struggle to construct mosques. The further emancipation of Muslims, when more purpose-built mosques were constructed and the *azan* was amplified, has coincided with greater resistance to and friction with public manifestations of Islam. In similar fashion, Protestant resistance to Catholic rituals did not decrease but rather intensified with the latter’s emancipation. Conflicts were often experienced by Catholics as caused by stubborn Protestants who could not get accustomed to a new Netherlands in which religious liberty applied to all. Dutch Muslims have pursued the call to prayer in an activist manner (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4); processions were similarly important for Catholic self-consciousness and higher emancipatory expectations. Protestants, on the other hand, pointed to the dangers for the nation when Catholics glorified Pope Pius IX, who explicitly rejected religious liberty (Forst 2013: 395). For example, in 1871, they held a public feast in Amsterdam to mark his silver anniversary.¹⁶ Even though Dutch Muslims today do not follow a single central leader or institution, their incorporation into the nation has faced similar resistance, especially when mosques have invited conservative foreign imams to the Netherlands.

From Protestant hegemony to pluralism

One of the ways in which the histories of Catholic and Muslim emancipation connect is by a significant change to Dutch constitutional secularism in the 1980s. A new law, the Public Manifestations Act (*Wet Openbare Manifestaties*), simultaneously marked an end to the long history of discrimination against Catholics and opened up possibilities for hitherto unfamiliar religious rituals such as the Islamic call to prayer. The most important aspects of this constitutional change, ending the ban on processions, pluralizing the idea of public religious manifestations, explicitly equating the Islamic call to prayer with other protected practices such as church bell ringing, and favoring a decentralized approach in which municipalities are given space to negotiate with local religious organizations and their neighbors, will serve as a backdrop for the argument of the following chapters.

Bart C. Labuschagne, a philosopher of law, introduces his 1994 dissertation on religious liberty in the Netherlands with a question about the azan. What if Muslims were to decide in the near future that they wanted to amplify the azan more often?

In the past years in many cities in the Netherlands mosques have risen. Next to traditionally present church towers minarets help determine the religious skyline in various larger and smaller cities. The established Sunday chimes are more and more acquiring a Friday pendant: the call from the minaret to gather in the mosque. Based on the clear analogy with the weekly ringing of church bells on Sundays, the weekly call from the minaret is protected equally by the power of religious liberty. Indeed, religious liberty does not hold only for established, predominantly Christian religions, but also for traditionally non-established religions such as Islam. It can be questioned, however, whether this religious liberty protects an eventual daily call to prayer, or even several calls a day from the minaret. In Islamic countries the daily call to prayer usually occurs five times a day, beginning before sunrise. In the near future it is not unthinkable that in neighborhoods of large cities where many Muslims live, the need would arise for a more frequent call to prayer. (my translations, 1994: 1)

No mosque in the Netherlands amplifies the azan five times a day or in the early morning, as far as I have been able to determine. But as Labuschagne predicted, the need for a more frequent call or at least a weekly call has grown, and not just in large cities (see Chapters 3 and 4). According to him, the Christian-Muslim

analogy is clear. He specifies this later in his dissertation: "This history [of public religion in the Netherlands] can give an insight into the way a dominant culture frustrated the expressions of another religion (in this case the Roman Catholic), something that could be of interest especially for 'newer' or less dominant religions" (1994: 131).

Constitutional change in the Netherlands proceeded slowly throughout the twentieth century. In 1918, Charles Ruijs de Beerenbrouck became the nation's first Catholic prime minister, and the Dutch High Court altered the conditions for a legal procession. Before this change, Catholics had to prove that such a tradition had historically existed in that location. Now the burden of evidence was placed on the prosecutors, who had to prove that such a procession had *not* existed (Labuschagne 1994: 136). Margry described this change as a "time bomb under the Procession Prohibition" because situations prevailing before 1822 and 1848 were very difficult to prove, as there were poor archives and no living witnesses (2000: 387). In 1919, after decades of reluctance, Dutch Catholics organized the first National Catholics Day (*Nationale Katholiekendag*). In the ensuing years, as the event came to be repeated annually, the celebration shifted from having a more defiant emancipatory character to a public liturgical-theological one (Margry 2000: 162).

In the 1950s, Catholics interpreted historical processions so broadly that virtually all places where processions had existed during the Middle Ages could be included in the right to conduct processions. In the same period, the State Commission Van Schaik, led by the prominent Catholic politician Josef van Schaik, prepared a report for revising the constitution.¹⁷ The commission rejected the Procession Prohibition of 1848:

The constitutional lawgiver must not take as [a] norm the contingent relations, which existed a century ago, but that which in our society should be just [*recht*].

(cited by Labuschagne 1994: 118)

The state commission held that public manifestations of religion do not limit the freedom of members of other religions or persuasions. Religious manifestations could only be curtailed for the sake of public order and peace. However, as late as 1957, a procession in the Netherlands caused an uproar. The Catholics involved in organizing it were prosecuted and a pastor was found guilty. The case was brought to the Dutch High Court (Margry 2000: 419; Labuschagne 1994: 136), which had to decide whether the Procession Prohibition was compatible with Article 9 of the 1950 Treaty of Rome, the Convention for the Protection of

Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The treaty article has two parts and runs as follows:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice, and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

The High Court decided that the Procession Prohibition did not contradict the European convention on human rights, even though the latter explicitly mentions the right to manifest a religion in public. It did not see why the nineteenth-century prohibition was in contradiction with what could be “reasonably” done to preserve “public order” (Labuschagne 1994: 138). With this judgment, the Procession Prohibition was again legitimated. Meanwhile, advice for a constitutional revision in 1969 prepared by the State Commission Cals-Donner,¹⁸ led by Jozef Cals, who was Catholic and had briefly served as prime minister, and Andreas Donner, a Protestant jurist who had served as President of the European Court of Justice, again recommended that public manifestations of all religions be allowed and that all religions should be treated as equal before the law (*ibid.*: 123). An interesting addition was that a “religious conviction” (*godsdienstige levensovertuiging*) was accorded the same protection as the right to “behave” (*gedragen*) according to that faith. Only the preservation of public order could be considered a reason to limit or ban a public religious practice.

Finally, a new constitution with a revised understanding of the freedom to worship was agreed on as late as 1983, to come into effect five years later. With this, the Procession Prohibition was finally abolished, a century and a half after the first royal decree against processions by William I. For Dutch Catholics, Labuschagne notes, this was a step forward in terms of religious toleration and a recognition of the rights of a traditionally nondominant religion. In addition, “This could mean a great deal for other nondominant religions, which may have expressions and practices that can likewise penetrate public life deeply” (*ibid.*: 139). Proposals for the new law of 1983 treated the variety of religions in the Netherlands in principle on an equal footing.

Not only was the ban on processions abolished, but rules regarding church bells were also softened. In the Law of Church Societies of 1853, church bells

could be banned “in municipalities, where there are churches of more than one denomination [*kerkgenootschap*], for the sake of public order and peace” (Article 8.1). This clause was eliminated in the 1980s, but municipalities retained the right to ban religious sounds in case of disturbance of public order or for the sake of traffic or public health. It is questionable whether an issue such as traffic constitutes a justifiable limit to a fundamental right such as religious liberty—indeed the base issue of parking spots has been often used to obstruct mosque construction (e.g., Landman and Wessels 2005; Maussen 2009; Erkoçu and Bugdaci 2009)—and the Netherlands is unique in this formulation of the law. Public order and health, however, are more serious concerns that may be justifiably used by a municipality to limit a particular religious practice. What if, for example, riots would ensue if a mosque decided to amplify the call to prayer five times a day? Or what if the call to prayer, supposing it was very loud in the early morning, caused psychological or even physical health issues for non-Muslim neighbors or even Muslims themselves? These are quite extreme hypothetical situations, but are not unthinkable for lawgivers. In more practical terms, Labuschagne predicted that if it came to pass that Muslims wish to amplify the call more frequently, the “big question that remains is of course how to weigh the interests of believers against the interests of neighboring residents” (1994: 163).

In the first formulation of the 1983 Public Manifestations Act, the *azan* was not mentioned specifically but interpreted a posteriori as “sounding bells” (*klokgelui*), namely, as analogous and translatable to the existing Christian practice. However, at the time some members of Parliament feared that the new law could be used to ban the Muslim call to prayer, since it was not explicitly mentioned and its coverage within the law required an interpretation that allowed for comparison and translation. In 1988, House of Representatives members Gerrit-Jan van Otterloo (Labor Party) and Jacob Kohnstamm (Democrats 66) suggested that the new law should be amended to include religious practices similar to church bells, such as the call to prayer from a mosque. Kohnstamm also argued that, in the case of a procession or other expressions of public religion, municipalities should be reluctant to make too many formal demands of religious organizations. When a religious organization wants to hold a procession or amplify the *azan*, “a single notification is the maximum which can be demanded.”¹⁹ In Chapter 4, I discuss the case of a mosque in Deventer that sent such a notification to its neighbors, and the response of the neighborhood that deemed this approach inappropriate. In practice, the legal equation of church bells with the *azan* turned out to be very significant. Kohnstamm and van Otterloo anticipated as much when they argued in parliament against Minister Kees van Dijk (CDA, Christian

Democratic Appeal) that it was necessary to explicitly mention the azan, rather than rely on a charitable interpretation of what is thought to be an acceptable religious expression equivalent to church bells. Referring to the greater religious diversity of the Netherlands, van Otterloo stated that municipalities should not be given too much power to regulate public religions in an arbitrary manner. Recent municipal practice, van Otterloo stated, showed that the Muslim call to prayer needed explicit protection.²⁰ During the parliamentary debate, Jan-Kees Wiebenga (VVD, Liberal Party) pointed out that the Muslim call to prayer is amplified with loudspeakers and that this was not mentioned in van Otterloo's proposed amendment to include the azan, which he had described as "oral" (*mondelinge oproep*):

No doubt an imam [the term muezzin was not used in parliament] in other countries takes care of an oral call from minarets. . . . As far as I know that happens very often mechanically. The phrase "oral call" then does not represent reality.²¹

Van Otterloo agreed with Wiebenga that the inclusion of "oral" in the amendment could be abused to prevent the amplified azan and it was decided that the phrase would be deleted from the amendment. Minister van Dijk agreed to have a vote in the House on whether the amendment would be accepted. The House accepted the amendment the following day, January 28, 1988. Only three small orthodox Protestant parties, the Reformed Political Party, the Reformed Political League, and the Reformatory Political Federation, voted against the amendment.²² The final Article 10 of the Public Manifestations Act, which came into effect in April that year, states that the

sounding of church bells [*klokgelui*] for religious or philosophical [*levensbeschouwelijk*] ceremonies and funeral ceremonies, including calls to practice [*belijden*] religion or philosophy of life [*levensovertuiging*], are permitted.

It is worth mentioning the comment made by the Minister of Justice, Frits Korthals Altes (VVD, Liberal Party), during the technical discussions about processions, church bells, and the call to prayer. There was a sense that the new constitution had definitively ended a period of religious intolerance:

It delights me that there is now complete agreement in the entire House and the government about the fact that the Law of Church Societies shall be withdrawn, and with it a period of turmoil in our nation's history was brought to an end.²³

In its final form, however, the law does leave room for municipalities to determine whether or not the volume of the azan is "reasonable," so that in

principle they can restrict the amplified call but cannot ban it without very strong local political pressure and consensus. (A ban is considered unreasonable if it means that a religious group cannot profess its faith and also cannot perform the rites and practices of that religion.) Even though van Otterloo made sure to protect the azan constitutionally, a decentralized pragmatic approach in which municipalities could make contextual judgments was agreed upon as necessary.

The Islamic call to prayer in the Netherlands

In the next two chapters, we observe how municipalities navigate the space they were given, not to ban the azan in toto but nevertheless to regulate it.²⁴ Since there are no scholarly studies of the practice of the call to prayer in the Netherlands, I proceed with a brief history. There are four phases in the history of the Dutch azan: first, colonial encounters; second, post-Second World War migration; third, the first use of loudspeakers for the azan in 1986 and the Public Manifestations Act; and fourth, the increased construction of purpose-built mosques since the 1990s to the present. Long before the general public acquired some familiarity with the Muslim call to prayer, however, the Dutch had been in contact with Muslims at least as far back as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Kaplan 2007; GhaneaBassiri 2010: 9–12). It is impossible to discuss the early history of Dutch-Muslim contact here; a few words must suffice, merely to indicate the complexity of this issue.

Colonial encounters

The Ottoman Empire under Sultan Ahmed I was the first political entity to recognize the independence of the new Dutch Republic, which could trade in Istanbul under its own flag. In the same period, Morocco too allied itself with the new country; after all, they shared a common Spanish enemy. In 1610, a “Treaty of Friendship and Free Commerce” was signed between the Moroccan Sultan and the Republic. Even though Muslims rarely visited the Netherlands in this period, they were sometimes included in representations of Dutch religious diversity, for example in paintings and poems, and played a part in constructing the ideal of Dutch religious toleration (Kaplan 2007: 10). Having brought Turkish and Moroccan workers to the Netherlands after the Second World War, such historical bonds have become more interesting for Dutch citizens. In 2010, the Dutch state officially celebrated the four hundredth anniversary of

Moroccan-Dutch diplomatic relations, and in 2012, the Netherlands and Turkey celebrated four hundred years of Turkish-Dutch relations. In 2013, there were approximately 400,000 Turkish-Dutch and 370,000 Moroccan-Dutch citizens residing in the Netherlands (Central Bureau of Statistics 2013).

Familiarization with the call to prayer, however, first became pervasive through colonial encounters with Islam. Though merchants and others may have heard the call to prayer, not only in Istanbul but also among the few Muslim visitors to the Dutch Republic, the scale of the colonial encounter of the Dutch Republic—and later the Kingdom of the Netherlands—with Islam was of another order altogether. That is why we can broadly designate the colonial era as a first phase of familiarity with the azan and then proceed to greater historical precision, namely, how the azan was received in the homeland in subsequent periods. Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim constituency in the world, was a Dutch colony until after the Second World War, but so were Suriname and the Dutch Antilles, which are home to Muslims, Jews, and Christians to this day. We can infer from newspaper articles, however, that before the Second World War there was minimal familiarity with the call to prayer in the homeland.

Dutch articles about the azan from the 1920s and 1930s are often about the use of loudspeakers in Mecca and Istanbul but also in Singapore, described as a sign of the modernization of Islam.²⁵ An article from 1934 stated that King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia had ensured a radio broadcasting of the call to prayer: “Believers in the entire world will be henceforth called to prayer from the microphone.”²⁶ Another article from 1930 announced that in “Constantinople,” the muezzin had “died for good” due to the modern use of loudspeakers. “The tradition of the muezzin, prosaic sign of the times, must now make place for the lifeless loudspeaker!”²⁷ Earlier, in 1908 and 1909, the famous Dutch orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, who converted to Islam to gain access to the holy city of Mecca, had given instructions to the Dutch consulate to record the everyday sounds of Jeddah. These wax cylinder recordings included the call to prayer and are among the oldest if not *the* oldest recordings of the call to prayer in the world. They reveal a far softer, distinctly human sounding and unamplified call to prayer, in an otherwise much quieter, but not silent, urban soundscape than what we are used to today. The cylinders are kept at the National Museum of Ethnology and Leiden University, where the unamplified call to prayer was silently preserved until interest in Islam intensified in the twenty-first century.²⁸ A few decades after Snouck Hurgronje’s recording of the call to prayer, Dutch

journalists visiting Cairo and Istanbul in the 1930s reported disappointment at finding modern and “European” looking cities with neon lights and loudspeakers.²⁹ They had hoped for an oriental setting suggestive of the *One Thousand and One Nights*. Some Muslims also responded to the modernization of the call to prayer with hesitation. For example, in 1938 a Dutch journalist wrote that “the Mohammedans in Singapore were at first surprised about this violation of the old customs, but the sound of traffic had become so loud that no one could hear the call to prayer; now it can be heard again.”³⁰

Also often mentioned in Dutch newspapers is the translation of the call to prayer from Arabic to Turkish, by order of Atatürk, from 1932 to 1950.³¹ The Arabic word “Allah” was replaced with the Turkish “Tanrı” until more than a decade after Atatürk’s death, and the call is also mentioned in the Republic of Turkey’s national anthem: “These azans, whose *shahadas* [my italic; declaration of the oneness of God and prophethood of Muhammad] are the foundations of my religion, May their noble sound last loud and wide over my eternal homeland.” In Chapter 4, we will see that the azan has a nostalgic dimension for Turkish-Dutch Muslims. It comes as no surprise that such feelings of nostalgia are interwoven with nationalist notions of the Turkish homeland.

The call in Indonesia is also mentioned in Dutch newspapers of the first half of the twentieth century, for example in an advertisement about a musical performance.³² In colonial exhibitions on Indonesia, however, the role of Islam was generally downplayed (Shatanawi 2014) and interest in the azan was minimal if present at all. There was no “civilizing mission” as was explicit in the French colonies, no serious attempt to Christianize Indonesia, and unlike the French, before the Second World War the Dutch did not build a mosque on their home soil. Nevertheless, there are articles about Islam written in Dutch by Indonesians, introducing basic aspects of Islam to a Dutch audience: “The imam delivers his *khutba* [my italic] (sermon) on Friday. Furthermore, each mosque has a muezzin that calls to prayer. . . . For the very indispensable good relation between Dutchmen and Indonesians it is necessary that Islam and its professors are in no way disturbed.”³³

Post-Second World War migration

The second phase of Dutch familiarity with the azan is that of post-Second World War migration and the period after Indonesian and Surinamese independence, a time when orientalist fantasies about Muslim rulers continued to abound.

In a Norwegian story that was translated and published in a Dutch newspaper in 1966, the call to prayer in Cordoba was described in the style of adventure fiction. The “Moors” had “wondrous customs,” among which was the *azan*.³⁴ But the globalization of Islam had begun to reach the Netherlands. The first Dutch mosque was established in 1955 by a small community from Pakistan. Over the next two decades, Muslim guest workers, mainly from Turkey and Morocco but also former colonial subjects from Suriname and the Moluccas, came to the Netherlands and created makeshift houses of worship and gradually, from the 1970s onwards, designed mosques (Roose 2009). However, there were not many mosques during this period, so the call to prayer was performed mostly privately, at home, inside what were called “garage mosques” (*garagemoskeeën*), or simply in a small space inside a stationary train or a factory that was for workers’ use. At the same time, television and increasing access to air travel introduced the call to the Dutch population. In 1967 a journalist wrote about his experience in Istanbul listening to what was “for our ears such a strange sounding call to prayer.”³⁵ Another wrote about the call to prayer in Cameroon, which opened up a “strange [*vreemd*] world.”³⁶ A retired high school teacher recalled, while speaking to me, his first visit to Istanbul in the late 1970s: “When I heard the call to prayer for the first time in the morning, I was completely surprised and even frightened by the sound. I was disappointed in Islamic culture at the time. I thought many of the mosques were not beautiful and I missed the frescos of Giotto, the Therasas in ecstasy, the requiems. . . . How those Muslims had maimed the Aya Sofia [in Istanbul] by destroying Byzantine mosaics, not to mention putting up hideous-looking lamps. . . . 1453 [the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople] was a tragic year. I have fonder memories of the call in Cairo, and later when I visited Indonesia, I heard the call from a distance in the dusk and thought it had a beauty to it.”

While Muslims were migrating to the Netherlands, the Dutch began their 1960s rebellion against authority, particularly against church authority (Verkaaik 2009, Chapter 3). In 1968, a journalist wrote that both church bells in the Netherlands and the Muslim call to prayer in Indonesia were “anachronisms,” because “they were symbols of being forced [*moeten*] rather than allowed [*mogen*] [to decide on one’s life].” These religious rituals were considered too “schoolish,” too traditional and didactic in their approach to religion. They did not belong in a world becoming enlightened [*mondig wordende wereld*]: “In a modern society one specific church may not impose its will on all people. It must take into account that there are people of other persuasions. Indonesia

too is becoming a modern society in which Islam must learn to live with other believers.” He had been woken up by the azan in Sulawesi at 4:30 am, and had “for the first time” realized how disturbing church bells could be for non-Christians, though he had to hear the azan to come to this realization.³⁷ By describing church bells and the azan as anachronisms, the author implied that there was an ongoing process of secularization in which religion retreats into the private sphere, reminiscent of the nineteenth-century idea that Catholic processions are unenlightened and therefore anachronistic. To describe this normative stance, which did not coincide with the reality of public religion, the author ironically uses the same verb *moeten*, being forced to do something, to criticize being forced to tolerate noisy religion: religions “will have to” (*moet er rekening mee houden; zal moeten*) learn to respect others. This view, which was and still is prevalent in the Netherlands, is similar to American Protestant and post-Enlightenment notions of the properly interiorized faith, as described by Isaac Weiner in his study of religious sounds in the United States: “Noisy religion has been criticized for placing too much emphasis on material form rather than substantive content. It has been considered the sign of an immature faith, overly concerned with external behavior rather than interiorized commitment and insufficiently respectful of the rights of others” (Weiner 2014: 6).

The Public Manifestations Act

In his study of the United States, Weiner shows a movement toward a more pluralist secularism that is capable of criticizing and undoing a historical Protestant bias. Such a shift also occurred in the Netherlands in the 1980s, the third phase of the Dutch history of the azan. In this period, the revised legal understanding of constitutional secularism and the Public Manifestations Act of 1988 enabled the amplifying of the Islamic call to prayer. Prior to this, the small town of Tiel in the middle of the Netherlands and larger cities such as Leiden and The Hague had begun to allow the amplified call in 1986, but not every day.³⁸ Mosques and municipalities often came to an agreement on amplification once a week on Friday for the *jum‘ah* or congregational prayers.³⁹ In 1986, a loudspeaker was installed in Leiden at a Turkish mosque (i.e., one attended by Turks) at the Hooigracht and another at the Moroccan mosque on the Rembrandtstraat.⁴⁰ They broadcast the azan on Fridays for a test period of six months.⁴¹ The volume reached the mosque’s direct environment only, which explains why many non-Muslim residents of the city, to this day, have never heard the call. According

to the Leiden municipality official Snouck Hurgronje (not to be confused with the Dutch orientalist), Tiel was the first town in the country to allow the call to prayer. Leiden was at the “forefront,” he said, of a “special experiment,” when it decided to allow the call to prayer. The Turkish organization of the mosque visited Mayor Cees Goekoop to thank him.⁴² Neighborhood residents were informed about the experiment by letter, and there were no complaints against the azan during the six-month public notice period. The municipality concluded that the Muslims in Leiden could continue to call coreligionists to prayer on Fridays, but the latter had expected otherwise: “You have misunderstood us,” they wrote in a letter to the municipality. “Normally we call to prayer five times a day; we are, however, satisfied if we could do it three or four times a day.” Snouck Hurgronje responded that that was not part of the agreement. “No, three or four times a day. That’s not likely. They should not expect so much.” He made a comparison with Catholic churches that called for prayer only once a week on Sundays, in order to justify why the Muslim call should also be heard only on Fridays. Mr. Guneji, representing the mosque at the Hooigracht, persisted and said that they would like to amplify the azan several times a day. He would make an exception for the morning and evening prayers, though, so as not to disturb people. The goal, however, of calling to prayer several times a day was never achieved.

The Aksa Mosque in The Hague was also one of the first mosques to construct a minaret and use loudspeakers for the call to prayer. A 1988 newspaper article that made reference to the mosque described this change as follows: “In a society with more cultures and religions, tolerance towards each other is a necessity. That has been an important motive for the House of Representatives [in making] the call to prayer from the mosque legally equal to the sounding of church bells.”⁴³ The article also quoted Christian organizations that, despite some reluctance, supported the change in the name of freedom of religious worship. Pastor C. A. ter Linden in The Hague thought that the amplified azan was a “consequence of the freedom of worship.” He advised that, as with church bells, the volume of the azan should be adjusted so that others may not be disturbed, “not out of fears for a lack of tolerance, but . . . from respect for each other and keeping the other in mind. We live after all in a plural society.”

According to the newspaper article, the mosque did not receive any complaints at the time. However, there were voices of dissent against equating the azan with church bells. For example, Klaas Beuker of the (small and now dissolved) Roman Catholic Party of the Netherlands said that it was a disturbing sign of the times

that “we have to consider this [the azan] normal and must accept everything.” House of Representatives member Meindert Leerling, speaking on behalf of the Reformatory Political Federation, stated that because of the “Christian culture” of the Netherlands, the government should prioritize calls to prayer through church bells: “That has nothing to do with discriminating [against] Muslims and is also not a limitation on the freedom of worship.” Despite these views, the city allowed the mosque to amplify the call in anticipation of changes in the law that came later that year, equating church bells with the call to prayer. Abdulwahid van Bommel, a Dutch-Muslim convert, was skeptical at the time. He believed that municipalities would still exercise power to prevent mosques from making the call to prayer. In the next two chapters we will see that in hindsight his view, although understandable, was exaggerated, because in practice a municipality cannot easily ban the azan, although it may disallow the azan if Muslims do not actively demand and insist on their rights.

Today the Aksa Mosque lies at the heart of The Hague, close to the central station and the city hall and next to the main shopping district. It is located in Chinatown, which began with the settlement of Chinese immigrants in the 1970s and continued to flourish after the mosque had opened in 1979. Not far from the mosque is the seventeenth-century New Church that preserves the cenotaph of Spinoza, one of the figures who is glorified in Dutch narratives of toleration and freedom of thought. Spinoza’s former house and a statue of him are in the neighborhood as well, right across from The Hague’s red light district. In short, the city center boasts a highly diverse population and iconography. Less than four decades ago, neither Chinatown nor the Aksa Mosque existed. A monument in the neighborhood reminds visitors of the historical presence of a Jewish population. The mosque had originally been built as a synagogue, but during the Second World War around 14,000 of the 17,000 Dutch Jews in The Hague were murdered. Although a few thousand survived, secularization and migration to other cities and countries led to the synagogue’s closure. Turkish guest workers squatted in the abandoned building and the city eventually gave them permission to turn it into a mosque, adding two minarets to the neoclassical building in 1985.

Now, men come from around the city to perform ritual prayers or *salat* on Friday afternoons. Young, middle-aged, and old men come together on their bikes and scooters. Some wear hip, fashionable jackets, skinny jeans, and sneakers. The elders ordinarily wear suits. The mosque is filled to capacity, including the second floor which was originally meant for Jewish women, and

people also find a niche for prayer on the staircase. The first call to prayer echoes from the loudspeakers and one of the mosque's active members starts laying mats on the floor outside for those who will not be able to find a place inside. It is his weekly ritual. Bystanders sometimes look curiously into the mosque's alley to see what is going on. On one of these occasions, a middle-aged man standing and watching told me about his grandfather, who used to be one of the board members of the synagogue. "Thank God my grandfather is not here to see what has happened," he said, looking at the Muslims performing *salat*. When I asked him what he thought about the amplified azan, he responded that "they have their right to a house of worship, and why not include the right to call to prayer?" Not everyone agreed. A local Chinese shopkeeper was not necessarily fond of the mosque. "I'd rather have a Buddhist temple in Chinatown," he joked with the television crew of *Mijn Moskee is Top*. Another young passerby looked at the people praying, listened to the call, and said indignantly: "This is not normal anymore. This is not the Netherlands anymore." This despite the fact that the Aksa Mosque has called to prayer consistently for all his life.

Constructing visible, mostly silent, mosques

The fourth and current historical phase of the azan in the Netherlands, from the 1990s onwards, is characterized by the construction of more visible mosques with minarets. Other strategies continued as well, such as turning unsustainable churches into mosques. For example, the mosque in Leiden at the Hooigracht moved into a former church in 1993. It began to broadcast the azan in its new location once a week on Fridays, as it had done for several years, but there were complaints from the neighborhood. A municipality official responded: "Our current standpoint is that the mosque does not need a permit for the [sound] installation. After all, churches do not require a permit to sound church bells, so why should mosques?" After a test week, the mosque proceeded as before without receiving new complaints.⁴⁴

Although the law allows the amplified call, Muslims often choose not to exercise this right because of strong negative reactions from their non-Muslim neighbors. The demand for the azan is usually made after receiving permission to construct a mosque or after construction is complete. Most Muslims in the Netherlands who wanted to use loudspeakers initially agreed not to amplify the call at all or to do so only on Fridays, out of fear that resistance to the call would result in mosque construction being blocked. For example, the Haci Bayram

Mosque in Alphen aan den Rijn, a small town close to Leiden, was opened in 1997. The mosque's single minaret was described as having "symbolic value" and the call to prayer was to be amplified only once, on Fridays.⁴⁵

Since the start of the twenty-first century, demands for amplification on Fridays alone or daily in the afternoons increased. Several political parties have made objections to the *azan* (Chapter 3), including the Liberal Party, whose member Jan-Kees Wiebenga, as noted above, made sure to remind van Otterloo in parliament to consider the use of loudspeakers. Despite a change of course in the Liberal Party, in practice the current phase has been mainly one of ongoing pragmatic negotiations. Renewed and explicit challenges by Dutch politicians to the concept and reality of multiculturalism have coincided with an increase in mosques that amplify their call, or demands to do so. Chapters 1, 3, and 4 show how challenges to Muslim belonging in the Netherlands have exacerbated the desire for a public call to prayer, whether audible or visual, as a way to manifest one's religious identity. This is not fundamentally different from the case of Dutch Catholics who fought for their right to processions and church bell ringing. Indeed, one of Margry's important conclusions about conflict between Protestants and Catholics is that greater visibility and audibility resulted in greater public outrage and passionate debate about what can and cannot be tolerated, and who belongs or does not belong to the nation (2000: 371–377).

The new Dutch pluralism

Since the continued existence of "pillars" in the Netherlands became uncertain due to an ongoing de-pillarization (*ontzuiling*),⁴⁶ public expressions of the Catholic faith have, for the first time in Dutch history, become fully accepted in Dutch law and are no longer deemed problematic by Dutch society at large—an "emancipation completed,"⁴⁷ according to Peter Jan Margry. Dutch Muslims' emancipation, however, is still in a process of unfolding. The *azan*'s equal legal status to church bells and processions does not mean that the sound of the *azan* is the same, physically or culturally, as that of church bells. (It seems unlikely, for example, that the *azan* could be used to raise the alarm for firefighters as church bells once did.) People do often think that church bells and Islamic calls to prayer are comparable as religious practices, an idea that underlies the legal right to broadcast the *azan*. In Chapters 3 and 4, I deal with the strengths and limitations of this constitutional protection.

Less controversial than the call to prayer are the loud and visible processions that Muslims in the Netherlands have sometimes organized. The Surinamese-Hindustani Taibah Mosque has celebrated the birth of the Prophet by fusing “sound car religion” (cf. Weiner 2014) and a traditional walking procession. Occasionally driving through Amsterdam is a convoy of honking cars, with megaphones, flowers and balloons, and bearded men carrying two flags, the flag of the Netherlands and a green flag to represent Islam. They are accompanied by police, while unsuspecting bystanders often have no clue what the fuss is about. The megaphones proclaim in Dutch: “Today we Muslims celebrate. Today we commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.”⁴⁸

In 2013, the traditional Catholic silent procession in Amsterdam attracted seven thousand people⁴⁹ and was also guided by the Amsterdam police. According to the Society of the Silent Walk, “Through the silence and the absence of outward display, the participants feel bound to each other and [set] apart from the worldly city through whose attractions they pass.”⁵⁰ In other words, the contemporary examples with which this chapter began, The Passion procession and the Muslim call to prayer in Terborg, are not exceptions to a nonreligious secular society per se. Margry has noted an increase in processions since the 2000s and believes that the visual and audible presence of Muslims has also motivated others, such as Catholics, to perform their religion out loud and in the streets.⁵¹ Next to Christian and Muslim rituals, there are organized interreligious walks, and almost everyone in Amsterdam has at least once seen and heard the colored robes and chants of a Hare Krishna procession in the city center. Besides the construction of mosques and new migrant churches, purpose-built Hindu mandirs, synagogues, and even a Sikh gurdwara and a Mormon temple have all been realized in the past two decades. Combined with continuing secularization and de-churching among the majority of Dutch Christians, a simple conception of the contemporary kingdom as essentially Christian has become empirically untenable, while the new religious pluralism is simultaneously pushing the Netherlands far beyond the Protestant Fatherland of the Enlightenment.