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Regulating Nostalgias: Azan Negotiations in a Dutch Town

A better environment begins with oneself. Many Dutchmen are irritated by the pollution of public space by Islam. In some places our streets increasingly resemble the streetscapes of Mecca and Tehran: headscarves, hate-beards, burqas, men in weird white dresses. Madame President, let us for once do something about this. Let us reconquer our streets. Let us make sure that the Netherlands will finally again look like the Netherlands.

Geert Wilders in the Dutch Parliament, 2009

In the winter of 2013, I attended a dinner in the dreamy town of Delft. The hosts and friends were a mixture of so-called hipsters, industrial design graduates, and one left-leaning economist—not the kind of people that support conservative Dutch political parties. I was asked about my research and mentioned the example of using loudspeakers for a daily azan in Deventer, a small town in the province of Overijssel. One of the guests, Julie, knew all about it because her sister lived a block behind Deventer's Center Mosque. "They were really pushy and insensitive to the neighborhood," she said indignantly, speaking of the Turkish-Dutch Muslims in the town. The others politely refrained from commenting. On another occasion, I spoke about the Deventer azan case with Marieke, a young interior designer working in Amsterdam. "I think you have to see it as driving a car," she said. "It's common sense to drive on the right side of the road. If anyone changes the driving direction, that will lead to a crash. I don't understand why people [the Turkish Muslims] can't see that." I nodded and Marieke appeared at ease and calm. For her it was common sense, or at least the first thing that came into her mind, that the daily afternoon amplification of the azan would be a step too far. In anthropological parlance: Muslims should refrain from such demands because they violate an existing cultural consensus.

In her immediate reaction, whether or not the law or local government affirmed the right to amplify the call did not play any role.

Julie and Marieke are progressives with cultural roots in the Dutch 1960s, with the “live and let live” attitudes of their parents’ generation. According to sociologist Jan Willem Duyvendak, such examples of indignation or hesitance to affirm Muslims’ rights to public worship may seem surprising, due to an often exaggerated notion of the Netherlands as a highly pluralist and tolerant society. In fact, on the basis of several corroborating surveys, he argues that in terms of shared values, the Netherlands today is one of the most homogenous countries in Europe (2011: 88). Its citizens see themselves as agreeing on many basic, progressive values, while the presence of especially conservative Muslims is seen as spoiling cultural unity. In other words, the unwanted presence of Muslims actually undermines the self-conception of the Dutch as essentially progressive, and the idea of religious tolerance—for which the Dutch are famous—has been repeatedly questioned and examined, not only by scholars but also more broadly in Dutch civil society and beyond, in light of the irritating presence of public Islam. Marieke did not appear to think that describing Muslims as individuals who are driving on the wrong side of the road betrays a nativist bias or intolerance. That was simply how things were. It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that ordinary citizens like Julie and Marieke, who are not at all conservative or extreme, usually prefer not to hear the *azan* in their backyards. They do not, however, impolitely dwell on such matters. Likewise, Dutch Muslims of all backgrounds have told me, on many occasions, that it would be an unwise provocation to amplify the call to prayer because Dutch non-Muslims are not used to the *azan*. This argument is possible because of the view that Islam does not absolutely require a loud *azan*. Muslims can practice their religion, therefore, without attracting too much negative attention with the call to prayer. Since only 5 percent of the Netherlands is Muslim, and an even smaller portion actually practices Islam in a mosque, many nonpracticing and less than strictly observant Muslims told me that the whole issue should not be blown out of proportion. None of these everyday conversations with Muslims and non-Muslims, however, ever led to someone claiming that the *azan* should be explicitly banned by law.

In the previous chapter, we saw that political parties ordinarily categorized as right-wing or conservative have been rather active in trying to limit or ban the *azan*, though without any serious proposals or amendments to the constitution. We should also take into account that, at the local level, members of those same parties can assist mosques to amplify their call to prayer. While a member of

parliament engaged in noisy media politics may apply a culturalist notion of secularism and propose a ban on the Muslim call to prayer, an alderman or *wethouder*, literally an “upholder of the law” who works at the local level, may employ a constitutional notion of secularism that facilitates amplifying Islam in the Netherlands. The logic of a negotiation for the azan in a small town, and the task of an involved alderman looking for a practical and lawful solution, is very different from the language and interests of culturalist critics of the public presence of Islam. Faced with demands by mosque leaders, local bureaucrats (*ambtenaren*) and politicians try to balance competing demands without stepping outside the rules set by the Public Manifestations Act. Following John Bowen et al. (2014), we could say that different actors engaged at different sociological levels employ different “practical schemas” with respect to the azan.¹ My empirical data suggests that it is inaccurate to conceptualize the state and Muslims as two homogenous blocs in a face-off (compare Bowen et al. 2014: 4), nor are secularism or liberalism in a face-off with Islam. Instead, what we find on the ground is a multilayered Dutch state that calls for a qualitative ethnographic approach that does justice to its internal contradictions and contingencies. As indicated in the previous chapter, the facile political categories of left and right are also not helpful here. It is not my intention in this chapter to set up Muslims and non-Muslims, natives and nonnatives, as monolithic, opposing categories either. Divisions around the azan are, however, de facto centered around thick, commonsensical notions of the idea of home (e.g., Ghorashi 2003), a form of nativism that makes it difficult for “allochthons” to feel at home in the imagined community that is the Netherlands. At the same time, pressure from Muslim citizens to change definitions of what *home* means in Dutch streets, particularly in the case of the azan, is experienced by the majority of the “autochthonous” population as insensitive and as environmental pollution. Therefore, since this chapter is about a group conflict shaped by stereotypes, I conclude with a reflection on the possibility of undoing “us versus them” thinking in relation to the praxis of constitutional secularism in the Netherlands.

The main goal of this chapter is to document local azan negotiations and describe how they slowly shifted aural boundaries in a small Dutch town. In Chapter 3, the emphasis was on theoretical debates regarding constitutional secularism and Dutch laws and policies that enable Dutch Muslims to amplify the azan, despite various complaints. My claim about the positive value of secularism as correcting bias against religious minorities now needs to be further corroborated by a specific ethnography of azan negotiations. How do state actors, mosques, and neighborhoods actually interact to come to an agreement

on the use of loudspeakers? In other words, how does constitutional secularism, defined as the separation of church and state in Dutch public discourses, actually function on the ground?

Before moving on to the case study, I start with an explanation of how the azan, perceived as both noise pollution and as a way of realizing home in a small Dutch town, can be productively interpreted through the concept of nostalgia. Rather than any notion of secularism, the complaints and demands in actual negotiations revolved much more around sentiments of feeling at home or feeling alienated. Turkish-Dutch Muslims in particular often explicitly used the word nostalgia (*nostalgie*), claiming that the azan reminds them or their parents of Turkey but also that broadcasting it can help them to feel at home in the Netherlands. My analysis of the soundscape dispute in a small town like Deventer builds on two books that analyze home feelings in the Netherlands more broadly, *The Perils of Belonging* (Geschiere 2009) and *The Politics of Home* (Duyvendak 2011). The documentation of Deventer's azan negotiations begins with the first informational meeting that was held one evening in the summer of 2012 with irritated neighborhood residents, followed by a history of Turkish guest workers and the construction of the Center Mosque. We then turn to negotiations in the autumn of 2012 and the views of the mosque's chairman, Orkan Yücel. A poll was finally conducted in January 2013 to assess how many residents objected to the azan and whether an agreement on a daily azan could be reached.

Nostalgia and pollution in a small Dutch town

To develop a more complete understanding of how the Netherlands is dealing with religious diversity, ethnographic data from the major cities of the South and North provinces of Holland, Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam, need to be balanced with developments in small towns and cities in other provinces. It is precisely in small towns that the globalization of the local is experienced as very intrusive, and also where residents with not-in-my-backyard sentiments often express feelings of "white powerlessness" (e.g., Maly et al. 2013; Byrne 2007) in the face of powerful economic and political institutions and encroaching globalized Islam. Such feelings are mobilized and provoked by Party for Freedom leader Geert Wilders. In 2013, for instance, he spoke about the threat of economic downfall at the hands of a "Brussels elite." It was not

the economy, however, but Islam that was “the greatest problem that faces our nation.” Such political parties feed the “old demon” of racism, which, contrary to popular Dutch belief, never disappeared (Gray cited in Essed and Hoving 2014: 13–14). That is why Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving chose an image of an endangered, typical Dutch landscape for the cover of their volume *Dutch Racism*. As black clouds gather, ecological disaster is impending (Figure 8). The toxic politics of racism are endangering the Netherlands in a time of European economic and political crisis.

But contrary to the volume editors’ perception of racism as quintessentially polluting, the image can also be interpreted as depicting how alien environmental pollution threatens an “autochthonous” conception of the Netherlands. The black clouds would then symbolize the immigrants whose kids will go to “black schools” (*zwarte scholen*), as they are called in the Netherlands (this includes schools with many Muslim citizens of Turkish and Moroccan descent). Immigrants are coming to change a nostalgic Dutch landscape comprising an open field, grazing cows, and a beautiful array of white clouds: a landscape and a skyscape that can still be seen throughout the Netherlands, but also in paintings from the “Golden Age” (*de Gouden Eeuw*; the seventeenth century) engrained in the cultural self-understanding of the Dutch. In response to such a danger of pollution, the function of defending what is perceived as local and nostalgia

Figure 8 Cover image of *Dutch Racism*. Frits Weeda. Diemerzeedijk, 1962.

for a homogenous nation is to affirm a conception of the self under threat (cf. Duyvendak 2011; Boym 2001). Indeed, psychologists have consistently described nostalgia as a resource for the self: “Nostalgia serves a diverse array of functions, ranging from its buffering effects on loneliness to its enhancing effects on explicit self esteem. The breadth of these functions suggests that nostalgic reverie serves to affirm the self, protecting it from threat” (Vess et al. 2012, see also Sedikides et al. 2009; Wildschut et al. 2006). In social psychology, nostalgia is linked to the individual’s experience of crisis in a society where one may not feel at home, and in some cases to clinical depression and psychosomatic symptoms. Feelings of nostalgia are also frequently associated with sound, especially music, by psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists, and can be understood as coping strategies (e.g., Khorsandi and Saarikallio 2013; Gazzah 2008; Zentner et al. 2008; Jäncke 2008; Juslin and Sloboda 2001). For Dutch natives, nostalgia for a past home can provide a sense of group identity, and can counter feelings of being alienated in one’s own neighborhood. At the same time, nostalgia functions as a coping strategy for immigrants in their new home to construct and recall memories, to fantasize, and often to undergo bittersweet processes of coping (cf. Akhtar 1999). For immigrants, refugees, and their children, nostalgic sentiments can dominate everyday life even decades later, and help to preserve and (re)construct ancestral identities. As a response to (perceived) loss, nostalgia makes the present meaningful by functioning as an existential resource (Routledge et al. 2011; Duyvendak 2011: 28).²

In Chapter 1 we saw that avant-garde solutions to the azan are rarely backed by the ordinary everyday worshiper who does support the use of loudspeakers. He—they are usually men—is much more interested in retrieving the familiar azan, which challenges Dutch ideas about the local with a transnational Turkish Muslim presence (cf. Kendall 2009: 305). The Center Mosque in Deventer too reproduces the familiar forms of typical “Ottoman” mosques: its minaret and accompanying amplified azan are based on what can be seen and heard in the streets of Istanbul. Both the Turkish-Dutch citizens, who feel that they are represented by a mosque, and the Dutch population that recognizes itself in the windmill next door appeal to primal forms of belonging (cf. Geschiere 2009: 223), which are experienced as natural and needing no explanation because they are connections of blood and soil, *Blut und Boden*. Nostalgic feelings of home are at the same time future oriented: they project an ideal from the past for a future home, spelling out rules of homemaking in the here and now. When such nostalgias compete, the matter quickly becomes one of making or breaking home feelings by appropriating territory (Maly et al. 2012;

Weiner 2014: 163). In the Netherlands, migrants who express their feelings of nostalgia or homesickness for their or their parents' country of birth in a way that is critical of the Dutch situation frequently receive the angry response that if they do not "feel at home" they should "go home." Duyvendak sums this up as that "The native position is not in question, along with their views on what is required to feel at home in the Netherlands" (Duyvendak 2011: 100).

Echoing Mary Douglas (2002 [1966]), Duyvendak also writes that Muslims "spoil" (2011: 101) the home feelings of Dutch natives, and that mosques, headscarves, and the call to prayer are symbols that are perceived as being "out of place" (2011: 85). The concept of autochthony, used in all layers of society, helps to create the strong feeling that "natives" (*autochtonen*) have the right to prescribe which religious aesthetics are out of place and which are not. The realization that little can be done to stop the construction of a mosque or the use of loudspeakers for the azan is then met with great indignation, frustration, and a sense of not being heard. These emotions are expressed by describing the azan as a kind of noise pollution (*geluidsoverlast*, *geluidshinder*, *herrie*). The Dutch words for noise pollution indicate a transgression of commonly accepted sonic boundaries and have the benefit that noise pollution can be rather easily interpreted as a neutral concept, so that it does not appear biased against a specific religion. However, when Muslims invoked the parallel with noise caused by cars, trains, and so forth, the response was a rejection of an equation of the azan with ordinary secular sounds. This comes as no surprise, recalling Douglas's analysis of noise pollution as cultural, symbolic, and political.

Therefore, in the Netherlands, the association of the azan with noise pollution cannot be disconnected from more general negative evaluations of Islam as a religion, fear of violence, and pejorative imaginings of Muslims across Europe. The religious aspect of the azan is experienced as transgressing the hygienic distance between non-Muslims and Muslims as an impure sacred. Douglas stresses that relations with the sacred "are bound to be expressed by rituals of separation and demarcation and by beliefs in the danger of crossing forbidden boundaries" (2002: 27). "Pollution behavior" (2002: 43), such as setting clear boundaries of private and public, may help to ameliorate the threat, but amplified sounds can partially undo the distinction. Isaac Weiner aptly describes this for the American context as sound "spilling over and across imagined boundaries between public and private, between self and other," and "in ways that have often felt uncontrollable and uncontainable" (2014: 2). Sound easily transgresses pollution boundaries, which is why it is so often described as testing the limits of tolerance. As one elderly lady, sitting in her home in the town of Amersfoort, told

a television crew: “I feel vomited out [*ik voel me uitgekotst*] of the neighborhood!” The proximity of a mosque and the intrusion of the azan had made her feel sick, emphasizing her loneliness in a neighborhood where she had little meaningful encounters with the Muslim others.

For those who are strongly agitated by the azan, it is not merely an annoying but an unwanted sound that turns the listener into an unwilling object of sacred Islamic attention. Their irritation suggests that the sound of the azan is associated with the sensation of touch, turning the Islamic soundscape into a type of physical threat, albeit a very soft one.³ Nevertheless, because touch is the “most personal of the senses,” according to musicologist Raymond Murray Schafer, and because hearing is “a way of touching at a distance” (1994: 11), sound can be experienced as intimate and, when disliked, intrusive. Similarly, the simple definition of dirt as matter out of place and hygiene as a matter of aesthetics (Douglas 2002: 44) fits well with the rejections of the azan in Deventer as noise pollution. The transgression of common sense, as in driving on the wrong side of the road, is associated with impurity and danger, provoking anxiety and fear.

The first informational evening on the amplified azan

The dispute about Deventer’s Center Mosque began in the summer of 2012, after the mosque had mailed a letter to neighborhood residents in which it announced that the call would soon be amplified on a daily basis:

Dear neighbors,

We want to inform you about our intention to amplify the azan (the call to prayer). . . . Depending on the period in the year, it will be once or twice a day. The azan lasts for about 2 or 3 minutes (with a maximum of 5 minutes). Our equipment is, in terms of volume, in accordance with existing agreements with the municipality of Deventer.

Mosque chairman Yücel anticipated negative reactions and told the local newspaper *de Stentor* that “We don’t want to engage in a battle with the neighborhood to sound the azan at all costs.” Neighbors likewise emphasized that they were not looking for trouble. One woman said to the paper: “I am not against the mosque, not at all. . . . That they want to broadcast the call to prayer every Friday is fine, but to have to hear that every day goes a bit far, I think.”⁴ In a critical article, one of the newspapers’ editors, Berend van de Sande, agreed that

the “Friday azan by now belongs to the neighborhood, just like the church bells on the Sunday morning” but that a daily azan would be “a step too far.”⁵ These initial moments in the azan negotiations later proved to be crucial. Scholars of noise annoyance have repeatedly concluded that the nature of relations between neighbors, good or bad, and the perception of noise avoidability determine the experience of annoyance (Bröer 2006: 27–29; Bosnak 1998). Residents respond better to policies of noise annoyance management when they appreciate prior procedures in which they were allowed to express an opinion (Schuemer and Schreckenber 2000). On the other hand, resistance to the azan existed prior to any negotiations—its undesirability had been a topic of discussion when the mosque construction was planned.

Non-Muslim residents I spoke with frequently expressed dismay at the letter’s religious content. It was important for azan opponents to preserve a right to indifference toward Islam, and they wanted to discuss the matter without going into the specific content of the call. One man joked: “For all I care they can call to prayer for the flying spaghetti monster. To me, it doesn’t matter what their religion is.” Despite the fact that parts of the neighborhood were on summer vacation at the time and had not seen the letter, the mosque received around seventy e-mail replies, many of which were negative. In response, those who had complained were invited to an “informational evening” so that the mosque chairman could explain the intention and desire of the mosque. My first visit to the mosque was for this meeting in July. Visitors were greeted warmly and offered something to eat and drink. It was obvious that the event organizers were doing their best to appease their guests. They had refrained from inviting the mosque’s members, and limited the Turkish presence to just a few people who were interested and had helped organize the evening. As the visitors gradually arrived, the mosque chairman and an assistant started up their PowerPoint presentation. Around forty neighborhood residents were present. Most of them seemed calm, but I was astonished to see an elderly man entering the room with an angry look on his face. It began to dawn on me just how upset some neighbors were.

Orkan Yücel, the middle-aged chairman of the mosque, explained the program for the evening. He wanted to talk about the basics of the Islamic call to prayer, the desire to amplify the call, and how often the mosque would like to do so. The chairman spoke in a soft and calm tone, but his message that the mosque would amplify the call on a daily basis irritated the audience. They had basically come to the informational evening to protest that decision. The old man who was visibly angry stood up and objected in a loud voice. It was not

long before I found myself in a tense atmosphere in which the chairman was repeatedly and harshly criticized for “deciding without discussing the matter with the neighborhood” and for “not respecting agreements made earlier.” The residents were angry that the letter that had been sent to them suggested that the matter was already decided, and the evening was intended to be informational rather than dialogical (Figure 9).

The chairman explained that the mosque had decided on a compromise, namely to limit the daily azan to once instead of twice a day. By doing so, Yücel felt that he respected both the non-Muslim as well as the Muslim residents’ demands. Two young men stood up and asked the chairman whether this meeting would affect the decision to amplify on a daily basis at all. The chairman answered that residents should be informed, but that ultimately it was the mosque community’s right to decide since it was their property and the azan would not exceed the volume for which a permit is required (in fact, a permit is not required for religious sounds). “If you have already decided, then this meeting is useless,” the young men countered and left the building. A moment later, another man who had been silent so far stood up and said in a loud voice that the evening was pointless because there was no real interaction between the opposing parties. As he left, he shouted, “You Muslims are always like this!” At this point some in the crowd tried to hush him. A few residents clearly wanted to avoid talk of Muslims being “good” or “bad.” They simply repeatedly stated their desire not to hear the call to prayer as neutrally as possible: “Everyone has a right to their religion . . . [but] we don’t want to hear it when we are sitting in

Figure 9 First informational evening on the azan in Deventer (author on the right). Photograph by Ronald Hissink, Summer 2012.

our backyard. That's all." Rather than criticizing religion, they tried to debate the azan merely as noise rather than as sacred sound. The azan opponents wanted to avoid being perceived as bigoted against a religious minority, and understood that anti-Muslim statements would not be accepted in public debates.

Weiner has made a similar observation in the United States, where Christian exclusivity was not defended in public debates around the azan in Hamtramck. In his fieldwork, he found that "even the most extreme advocates of Christian exclusivism recognized that those arguments would not be welcomed by Hamtramck's council. . . . Secular modes of governance required an alternative set of public arguments" (Weiner 2014: 175–76). This was even more the case in secularized Deventer than in Hamtramck (a town connected to Detroit), where Christians could not resist delving into the azan's religious significance and debating theological differences with Muslims (2014: 181). None of the azan opponents in Deventer made references to Christianity in order to reject the azan. The right to be free from religion was clearly more important to them than defining Islam as a threat to Christianity. The mosque chairman joked a few times that maybe one day opponents would find the azan beautiful, which made people smile or laugh, but they remained steadfast in their refusal to engage in any kind of *verstehen* of Islam. The result of the residents' performance of supposed indifference toward the meaning of the azan, both from a religious perspective and from the perspective of the former guest workers, was that much of the evening was about coming to a formal agreement.

The chairman also said that, from a religious perspective, the amplified azan was not mandatory. This too is worthwhile to compare with Weiner's research, in particular his description of American Jehovah's Witnesses who refused to differentiate between aesthetic religious forms and essential beliefs. They could not, in Weiner's description, distinguish the practice of proselytizing with megaphones in public parks from their inner beliefs. This contradicts the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses were happy to stop using megaphones after they felt vindicated by the Supreme Court and found that it was not an effective way of proselytizing (*Saia v. New York*, 1948; Weiner 2014: 135). The particular form of the practice of using megaphones attached to cars to spread their message was, in hindsight, not so essential after all. The same can be said of the Turkish-Dutch Muslims in Deventer, who insisted on the right to amplify the azan, but never claimed that using loudspeakers was essential from a religious perspective. Departing from a strictly Islamic perspective, mosque goes in Deventer differentiated between the amplified azan and the ultimate inner content of their religion.⁶ The desire to amplify the azan had more to do with

the Turkish-Dutch residents' right to public religion and with nostalgic feelings about Turkey, but it was also linked to the wish to continue a religious practice which they saw as important—though not essential in an absolute sense—in Islam. The chairman also resorted to defending the desire to amplify the azan with a nativist argument, rather than one based exclusively on civil rights: “We have been here for fifty years and it is therefore our right to publicly practice our religion.” The fact that the use of loudspeakers was not mandatory from a religious perspective, however, was seen as an opportunity by opponents to convince the mosque not to broadcast the azan. The non-Muslim Dutch residents were careful to steer the discussion away from ethical topics such as the sense of feeling at home, nostalgia, and cultural recognition. They repeatedly asked why the call had to be broadcast if it was not absolutely necessary for the religion. Some openly wondered if, given this theological fact, it fell under the rubric of religious liberty.

Accustomed as they were to the Dutch *poldermodel*, a culture of pragmatic and inclusive negotiation that is the basis for what political scientist Arend Lijphart (1999) described as the consensus model of governance, the residents felt that the Turkish-Dutch chairman did not understand their way of doing things and used language that was too authoritarian. He spoke as if he was “commanding,” something that does not belong in a “democracy” and causes a great sense of “anxiety.”⁷ When the disagreements began to escalate, a former chairman of the mosque who was also seated in the audience jumped in to ease the situation. Orhan Arslan spoke in a tone that gave the residents more confidence that the mosque would indeed listen to their wishes. The former chairman, who was a municipal councillor affiliated to the progressive GreenLeft party, had more experience in dealing with such situations than the new chairman, who worked in Information Technology. Finally, an agreement was reached that, as a test, the mosque would broadcast the daily call only for a week, and that neighborhood residents would come together again after the summer vacation for another negotiation. A few days later Lenie, one of the Dutch neighbors, said:

The event, the way everything went, the communication style, has caused much unrest. That includes people who did not attend the event. What I noticed at the informational evening is that some said that they are integrated and speak the language, but that again communicating was the main obstacle. The fact that one speaks the language does not mean that one can communicate. For that one needs a basic understanding of the culture and I believe the chairman lacked such an understanding. It was thanks to the former chairman jumping in that

a real conflict was averted. What I personally think is that we, as neighborhood residents, are not taken seriously. That feeling still exists.

Another issue was that the residents complained that, when the mosque had sought a construction permit for the building more than a decade ago, it had agreed not to amplify the call more than once a week on Fridays. This point turned the discussion at the informational evening into a dispute over the legal standing of oral agreements made in the past; were they binding or not? According to Daaf Ledeboer, a municipal councillor from the Liberal Party, the chairman could not demand to amplify the call on a daily basis because of these former agreements. The chairman was unprepared for such an argument, since he did not know about earlier agreements or about the specifics of Dutch law. Ledeboer's argument was flawed, since the *azan* is constitutionally guaranteed, but created an opportunity to argue against the *azan* in the heat of the moment. The discussion was thus pushed further toward a legal debate, rather than a moral one. Before coming to the meeting, Ledeboer, who lives in the neighborhood, had already written to the municipality with questions about the mosque's demand for the *azan*. Mayor Heidema (Christian Union, a conservative, centrist party) had responded that it was "wise to start a dialogue with the neighborhood" and that "currently the sound volume does not exceed what is legally allowed."⁸

Turkish guest workers and the construction of the Center Mosque Deventer

A few days after the informational evening, the mosque chairman sent an invitation to the neighborhood for an *iftar* meal, an attempt to make peace with the neighborhood, and the holy month of Ramadan provided the opportunity. At the same time, he felt hurt and later confided to me that he had avoided making sharp statements at the first informational evening, but that he could have. He mentioned the neighborhood residents' proposal that the mosque be built away from the city on a "deserted field, where no one would be disturbed by the building or the *azan*. . . . I could have used these things also to criticize them, but I didn't." Although Yücel said he preferred to leave such memories behind, they influenced his determination to demand the daily broadcasting of the *azan*. He furthermore connected these feelings to the history of Turkish guest workers in Deventer. The chairman's argument about the nostalgic longings of

his parent's generation did not, however, impress his opponents. Moreover, the old guest workers did not speak out in favor of the azan themselves, nor had they previously pushed the neighborhood to accept a daily azan. As in many mosques across the Netherlands, second- and third-generation immigrant Muslims are more vocal than their parents. Since Muslim communities today do not consider themselves to be guests or foreigners, the elders' wish for a nostalgic azan becomes mixed with a struggle to belong. The younger chairman thus spoke on behalf of his father, but also on behalf of his own generation and that of his children; the demand for the azan found itself, as is often the case with nostalgia, between the past and the future (cf. Pickering and Keightley 2006). The desire of those who would rather silence the azan, on the other hand, is motivated by an aggressive desire to forget: to see the Turkish-Dutch "integrate"—or better yet "assimilate"—and forget about their past, be it religious, cultural or linguistic.

It is easy to forget the sober conditions of life, even poverty, in which the Dutch working classes lived shortly after the Second World War. Fascinating film footage collected by Paul Scheffer and René Roelofs in their 2013 documentary *Land of Promise* shows the poor living conditions of migrant workers in the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Sweden, who had left behind even more abominable situations in Turkey, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Morocco, among others.⁹ The film's power lies in the shocking footage of small and dirty guest worker pensions as well as examples of explicit racism and abuse. Images of the denigrating hiring experiences of guest workers from Morocco bound for the Netherlands, being treated like cattle by Dutch contractors and local bureaucrats, speak for themselves and stand against Scheffer's narrative which attempts to somewhat relieve feelings of historic guilt in the contemporary Netherlands. By portraying migration as essentially painful and diversity as a natural cause of social melancholy, resulting from a sense of loss both on the part of migrants longing for home and the people of the host nation longing for a simpler past, the film aims to take into account multiple sides of the story of migration. Scheffer thus prepares the shocking images of blatant racism and violence to make them palatable to a general Dutch public that finds it hard to swallow the word racism (Tamimi Arab 2012; Essed and Hoving 2014). He does not criticize the European obsession with national culture or the idea that postcolonial migrants are viewed as the cause of an imperiled "Englishness," "Dutchness," "Frenchness" and so on (cf. Gilroy 2005: 115, 118). Nonetheless, his collected footage is a sober reminder that guest workers encountered unabashed racism in their land of promise during the "live and let live" 1960s and 1970s.

The story of the guest workers actually begins with towns like Deventer. Turkish workers were brought to the town in the 1960s by pioneering companies such as Thomassen & Drijver-Verblifa, a manufacturer of cans. Before hiring Turkish men for its factories, the company had employed people from Spain and Italy. In 1953 it had also hired former Moluccan soldiers who fled during the Dutch war against Indonesian independence. Fleeing from the Russian Red Army in 1956, Hungarian refugees ended up in the Netherlands by chance and worked for the company as well, but many of them later migrated to Canada. These were temporary solutions. The company grew significantly in the 1960s and needed cheap labor from abroad. Spanish workers were appreciated, also for being “culturally closer” to the Dutch (Muus 1986: 2). Because of the authoritarian Franco regime, however, the company soon lost interest in Spain. Another argument in favor of expanding the pool of guest workers was that the company would be vulnerable if it was dependent on a single nationality of workers. In 1964, preparations were made; recruitment in Turkey began in 1965 and continued until 1973.

We get an impression of the circumstances from a study by Philip Muus in which he examined Turkish employees’ wish to either stay in the Netherlands or return to Turkey (1986). Muus interviewed the personnel chief of Thomassen & Drijver-Verblifa, who had been personally responsible for hiring workers from Spain, and subsequently from Turkey. Excerpts from Muus’s interview reveal how the concept of the guest worker came into existence:

Then we said [in the 1960s], and I think that T&D [the company] can in general be proud [of this], that if we begin such a phenomenon, we must do so with a policy. Even though at that moment we did not know exactly what fish we were going to catch. We spoke in terms of short contracts, it was an idea of a year or two and then something would happen, but what that was we did not know. . . . Then we said, if we bring these people here, we should draft a policy for the manner in which we will do so. That policy can be summed up by saying: they are the guest workers. If we are the host, then we want to house these people in company pensions, in fact, to ensure hygiene, medical assistance . . . so that we have the feeling that we are doing this in a responsible manner.

Then we began hiring in Turkey, those were indescribable scenes. One would be notified that you had to be somewhere in Turkey. The attaché was in Ankara, and in Trabzon, those were the two places where the hiring effectively took place. But that meant that there, somewhere in Ankara, they had gathered a hundred people there, while we usually talked of hiring a group of fifty to sixty men. These people had often traveled two or three days; they would arrive

in Ankara two days earlier; yes, it was terrible. One does not need to be very sentimental or emotional to think so; in a small space . . . a hundred people were crammed, standing stiff against each other, with a bundle or a package or a small plastic bag, with god knows what . . .; almost all of them from the countryside, the territories for scouting and recruiting. Then you would select from this group. It was a given that you should not be impressed by the medical check, which proceeded like assembly line work; . . . Anyway, the people came in, a sad bunch. We would select with the help of our translator. They would be given a piece of newspaper that they had to read. One would get the impression that the majority were illiterate. On top of that there was the insane situation that selectors from other companies said that in Turkey many people suffer from varicose veins, and those selectors said: you have to have their trousers lifted to see if they have varicose veins. . . . It was really beastly, it was a kind of slave trade. Once we had seen them, those people were driven back into that small space and at the end of the day you had to select sixty of those guys. In itself that would lead to the most horrible scenes: guys who wanted to thank you, offer gifts or whatnot, others who would come in crying and asking whether they could not try to join us. Three weeks later they would arrive at Schiphol airport, totally alienated people who had no clue; documents in the Turkish language; when you would see them on the escalator . . . those people entered a different world. (my translation, Muus 1986: 12–14)

The original idea of the worker as a guest was that he should ultimately return to his country of origin. The leftist government of the 1970s held to the idea that the Netherlands was “definitely not an immigration country” (Maussen 2009: 126). It was only in the 1980s that Dutch governments began to shift toward the idea that the Netherlands had *de facto* become an immigrant country.¹⁰ During this period, the government replaced the term guest worker with the category of ethnic minority (Penninx 1979). According to Muus, though some Turkish workers did eventually return to Turkey when the company offered a sum for their departure, most stayed and brought their families over through a reunification program. Sometimes they were united with their families after more than ten years of living in the Netherlands. We can gauge how difficult the workers’ situation was from the personnel director’s description of their yearning for home:

Those people lived separated from their families for years. [But] they had an idea that they could enjoy a higher living standard in the Netherlands, better opportunities than in Turkey. I repeatedly had the feeling that their separation from their families led to continuous negotiations [with their employers] about whether they could . . . go on vacation for a second time, or whether the vacation

could . . . be extended. And furthermore there was the phenomenon of weekly telegrams: child in hospital, father was ill, come immediately. There was a general need to be with the family. (Muus 1986: 15)

Only rarely do the old men of the mosques talk publicly about their emotions surrounding their migrations. An exhibition at the Fatih Mosque in Amsterdam, whose members share a history similar to that of Deventer's former guest workers, gave a glimpse of this past. Photographer Mary Schermer asked the mosque elders whether she could make and exhibit their portraits, holding in their hands a photograph from the time of their arrival in the Netherlands, and accompanied in the present by one of their grown children. After careful consideration—some of the men did not understand the request, or mistrusted the artist's intention of putting them under the spotlight of an art exhibition, while others dismissed the very idea of a photographic exhibition in the mosque's entrance hall—Schermer was given the opportunity to visually document their stories.

Her pictures, exhibited in the mosque in 2012, evoke nostalgia or even melancholy. The minimalist captions betray difficult times and loneliness, stories like that of Osman Üre and Mevlut Erarslan (Figures 10 and 11). Üre arrived in the Netherlands in 1971 at the age of thirty and worked for a sugar factory and then a Ford factory.

Figure 10 Osman Üre, the father, and Aydin Üre, his son. Mary Schermer, Fatih Mosque Amsterdam, 2012.

Figure 11 Mevlut Erarslan, the father, and Huseyn Erarslan, his son. Mary Schermer, Fatih Mosque Amsterdam, 2012.

He was reunited with his family in 1976. Erarslan also arrived in 1971 when he was thirty-four to work at the same Ford factory, but his family settled in the Netherlands as late as 1987. Standing next to the old men in Schermer's portraits are their son or daughter, symbols of their success and future prosperity, who are portrayed as supporting their fathers. The images invoke both loss and prosperity, a longing for the past but also a sense of being established in the present, displayed in the very building that the elders acquired three decades ago. While Scheffer's exhibition is only very modestly positive about contemporary European immigration societies, about the value of migration and, on a deeper level, diversity itself, Schermer's photo project tells an alternative story of both nostalgia and establishment. The children in the portraits represent a deeper embeddedness of the former guest workers in the Netherlands. It is these offspring of the former guest workers, who are better educated and well versed in "Dutch" ways, who decide to actively push for the right to construct a mosque or to demand the azan on their parents' behalf. Though the second and third generations may also criticize and expose their parents' shortcomings in art, literature, public debates, and so forth, they also often describe their fathers as pioneers who laid the foundations for a future in the Netherlands despite the meager resources at their disposal.

Notwithstanding the common narrative that guest workers became more pious as they aged, or that they did so under the influence of the Dutch society,

workers practiced Islam in modest prayer spaces in their work environments from the moment of their arrival, for instance in the Deventer factory. Landman (1992) has documented how, as the decades passed, Muslims in the Netherlands felt a growing need to have more than just a prayer mat in a factory, to own a mosque of their own: "From mat to minaret." Guest workers had often settled for so-called garage mosques in the early years, small spaces that they creatively converted into mosques. Sometimes an old school or a church was given or sold to a mosque community. Also, modest buildings were constructed for practical religious purposes but without significant references to Islam on the exterior. In the meantime, small communities of former Turkish guest workers have cooperated for years to construct visible houses of worship. The Center Mosque in Deventer is one such mosque. It is built in a neo-Ottoman style, includes a minaret, and has a colorfully painted prayer space. It was realized thanks to the efforts of the local Turkish-Muslim community, which had to pay 750,000 guilders (340,000 euros) in the late 1990s to buy the 5,000 square meters of land on which the mosque was to be built.

The neighborhood, however, was angered by plans to erect a mosque on the Smyrnastraat in Deventer and initiated legal procedures (Landman and Wessels 2005). When the location for a new mosque building was determined in 1997, residents immediately organized to protest the decision. The municipality tried to accommodate complaints by hosting public hearings, but this only led to an increase in parking spaces on the mosque's property (to minimize mosque goers using street parking). A spokesman for the mosque association conceded that the mosque would not amplify the *azan*, which surprised an alderwoman on behalf of the Labor Party and "led her to object that this was a rather far-reaching concession by the Muslims" (Landman and Wessels 2005: 1129). In 1999, the municipality finally expressed its intention to agree to the zoning plans for the mosque. It received almost five hundred written complaints from the neighborhood.¹¹ Among these were that the mosque did not fit its surroundings, that the mosque would encourage "ghettoization" of the neighborhood by attracting more Turkish residents, and that the value of homes would decrease. However, the College of Mayor and Aldermen of Deventer concluded that the objections against the mosque were unfounded.¹²

The local newspaper reported at the time that there was a "fear that the mosque will attract even more allochthonous [non-native] residents and that the balance between 'white' [*blank*] and 'dark' [*donker*] will be lost."¹³ In addition to protesting against the mosque, neighborhood residents worried that the mosque

would amplify the azan. Anxious that mosque construction could be jeopardized, mosque chairman Kasem Akdemir responded by explicitly stating to the NRC newspaper that there would be no amplified call to prayer.¹⁴ An informal agreement was made, however, that the call to prayer would only be amplified on special occasions or on Friday afternoons. The non-Muslim neighborhood residents later remembered this promise as significant in their acceptance of the mosque. However, construction could begin only in 2001 when a regional court decided in favor of the municipality and ruled that the objections against construction were spurious. The mosque finally opened in 2003. Landman and Wessels show some of the complexity of the situation when they mention that the organizers of the opposition “accepted their loss sportingly. After the judge had rejected their appeal, they sent their congratulations . . . and stressed that their fight had not been against the mosque itself, but against the location and what they saw as manipulations by the authorities” (2005: 1130). However, a decade later the new mosque chairman, Orkan Yücel, did not mention anything about a fair acceptance of the mosque. He remembered the opposition to construction as opposition to the mosque and to Muslims.

The second informational evening

A few months after the first (but before the second) informational evening about the azan, I interviewed the mosque chairman again. The mosque had broadcast the azan for a week as a test, but because many residents were on summer vacation, another test week was held in the fall. According to Yücel, especially the older men’s desire to amplify the azan had much to do with a nostalgia for home, namely Turkey. The chairman also repeatedly emphasized in private and public conversations that “a feeling of ‘home’ is good for the contact with the city.”¹⁵ The young did not express the same need, the same intensity of longing for a lost home, as did their elders for the azan. But because of the conflict that ensued from the wish to amplify the call, young Turks in the neighborhood came out to defend their right to publically call to prayer.

OY: So it’s not just a matter of nostalgia, but also a matter of “The Netherlands is also my country.” I myself have an azan application on my iPhone that I use as a practical tool. I use the free version because I don’t need to necessarily listen to the entire azan. . . . The iPhone application is one of the fine instruments to use for the practical, religious, function of the call. But

the amplified azan that we want for our mosque is much more a matter of feeling at home. There is no desire at all to amplify the azan five times a day, and I don't think this will change in the future. We would however like to broadcast the call louder than we are doing now, but for now this is as far as we can go. The speaker volume can be set much louder. In theory we could broadcast the call so loud that the whole town would hear it. We don't need to do that, but it could be just a little louder.

PTA: Why do you want to broadcast the azan every day and not just on a Friday?

OY: Initially, I intended to realize the amplified azan, to broadcast it with a higher volume, only on Fridays. I thought that if I would demand a daily azan, the end goal of just the Fridays would be reached. But now I have changed my mind. I fear that if I just do this for Fridays, my successor will have a hard time if he wants to amplify the azan on a daily basis.

PTA: And what if the municipality does not cooperate with the mosque because of complaints by the neighborhood?

OY: I really don't want to mobilize our members to get the right to the azan. That would cause problems and conflicts, especially among the youngsters. I do have a community of a few thousand people backing my efforts. . . . In an extreme case, [if the azan was banned,] we would demonstrate in the city for our rights, but I don't think and don't want it to go that far.

Yücel hoped that the neighborhood would get used to the azan, that their irritations and fears would lessen and that he would slowly be able to increase the volume in time. To the public he insisted, however, that the volume would not be turned up, which they had a hard time believing. The chairman said that the current sound level was around 50 decibels, comparable with everyday speech and far under the 70 to 80-decibel noise pollution limit that requires permission from the municipality. Since he did not need a permit for broadcasting the call, he thought that neighborhood residents should not have too much to say in the decision-making process. It was, after all, the mosque's property and not theirs.

Such confidence is tied to Yücel's social position in the Netherlands. Thirty-nine years old and a father of four, he came to the Netherlands when he was sixteen years old and witnessed the construction of the Center Mosque in Deventer in his twenties. In 2011, he was appointed chairman of the mosque. When I asked why he became chairman, he answered that he had "worked twenty years for the Netherlands; now I want to work for Islam for two years." He intended to visit Mecca when his term was completed and dreamed of repatriating to Turkey, to a town close to Ankara where his brothers still live. Compared to the previous

generation, he had clearly climbed the socioeconomic ladder. The difference in education, his experience in the Netherlands, and a general feeling of being in control—Yücel owned his own company—made him more capable than the elders to claim the mosque's right to the city. He believed, for instance, that the old men of the mosque were too soft on the municipality when it did not respect their wishes. Rather than asking for permission from local government officials in a passive manner to amplify the azan, he thought Muslims in the Netherlands should pursue and demand rights actively. This was also easier for him because, thanks to the pioneering guest workers, the mosque had already been constructed with hard-earned savings. This is significant, because it shows that even though Muslim emancipation is enabled by constitutional guarantees, this does not mean that political rights are automatically activated in practice: public religious presence is directly tied to socioeconomic emancipation. In addition, the mosque belonged to Diyanet, the Turkish Religious Affairs Directorate, and was thus linked to the Turkish state as well as connected to the many other member mosques in the Netherlands and Germany (on Diyanet see Sunier and Landman 2015; Laurence 2012).

In the meantime, Marco Swart, an alderman of Deventer affiliated with the Liberal Party, visited neighborhood residents and the mosque to talk about the azan. The municipality preferred not to intervene and emphasized the need for negotiating with the neighborhood.¹⁶ The leader of the Labor Party, Diederik Samsom, also visited the neighborhood during his election campaign, and advised a cautious approach: "In my personal opinion, the Center Mosque does not need to sound the azan every day. But I do think that such a matter should be taken care of harmoniously. Not with a judge and a sound level meter in the hand."¹⁷ Samsom did not want to get too involved and did not explicitly defend the right to religious calls to prayer. This is related to the fact that media attention pushes Dutch politicians toward more nativist positions (Verkaaik and Tamimi Arab 2016). Samsom provides a good example of this behavior: the national Labor Party leader went so far as to express a personal opinion that the mosque "does not need to sound the azan every day," while a local Liberal Party alderman actually helped the mosque to achieve its wishes, illustrating the complexity of Dutch politics and governance on the ground.

That a different political stance is possible was exemplified by President Barack Obama and New York City's mayor, Michael Bloomberg, during the 2010 controversy regarding a prayer space in an Islamic community center near Ground Zero. Bloomberg stated unequivocally that "There is nowhere in the five boroughs [of New York City] that is off limits to any religion."¹⁸ In contrast

to Samsom, and under far greater political pressure, Obama spoke out against anti-Muslim rhetoric:

This is America, and our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakable. The principle that people of all faiths are welcome in this country, and will not be treated differently by their government, is essential to who we are.¹⁹

However, Obama too qualified his strong support for the so-called Ground Zero Mosque by questioning the “wisdom” of planning to erect a mosque on a location that could ignite fear and polarization. Unlike Obama, Samsom tried to circumvent the issue by speaking about harmony but not defending the azan’s constitutional protection in the Netherlands. By saying that the mosque did not need to call to prayer on a daily basis, Samsom subtly suggested that harmony required Muslims to refrain from too public a presence.

Despite some politicians’ calls against the azan and responses from ministers, including Labor Party Minister Lodewijk Asscher who stated that the Dutch Constitution allows the amplification of the azan (Chapter 3), azan negotiations happen mainly on the local level without interference from state actors at the national level. This is in contrast, for example, with aviation policies regarding noise nuisance, which are very actively debated by macro-actors, including the President of Schiphol Airport (Bröer 2006: 80). Also, while there are general constitutional laws in the Netherlands, Dutch society does not share a tradition of constitutionalism on par with countries such as the United States. It is therefore not surprising that Samsom insisted on building consensus in the neighborhood rather than looking immediately at what constitutional norms dictate. In practice, a decentralized approach in the Netherlands means that municipalities negotiate about the azan on the ground. This allows pragmatism to prevail, though the constitution (*de Grondwet*) looms silently but effectively in the background.

In preparation for the second informational evening on the azan in Deventer, alderman Swart decided to intervene by first talking with the mosque’s chairman. Yücel said that he “was not sure if he could trust him, though he seemed a flexible, experienced, person.” He was worried that the alderman would push toward reducing the azan’s frequency or setting an upper limit on its volume. His mistrust of the alderman was caused partly by the fact that Swart had once said on television that the Turkish-Dutch should speak Dutch at home—most migrants of the first-, second-, and even post-migration generations viewed this as intrusive and incompatible with their sentiments toward their ancestral past, even if they did speak Dutch at home. After meeting with Swart, Yücel was

nevertheless positive about the alderman's advice on managing the main groups that he needed to satisfy, mosque members who insisted on amplification as well as azan opponents.

The second informational evening was held in November 2012 at the Center Mosque Deventer.²⁰ The local television channel RTV Oost covered the meeting on television that night, beginning a news report by comparing the sound of the Deventer church bells with the sound of the azan, and with a reporter asking one of the mosque's neighbors why he does not want the azan. "I remember that we had agreed that the call would only be broadcasted on Fridays. . . . Now they want to turn up the volume too high. . . . If I wanted to hear something like that, I would go to Turkey," the neighbor answered. The chairman of the mosque is then interviewed to find out why the mosque wants to broadcast the call on a daily basis. "I have heard that some people have tears in their eyes when they hear the call," the chairman explained (whether this really happened could not be confirmed).

It is their homesickness of more than fifty years that is at play here. It is the request of these elderly, and as the chairman of the Center Mosque I have to also listen to the people who have lived and worked here for fifty years, who have done something for this society. I have to give them something back in return. It's just two minutes per day that we are asking for, purely for the older generation.

The reporter ends his video with the chairman's statement that he does not want to turn the matter into a legal battle, even though the mosque has a legal right to broadcast the azan even multiple times a day.

In total, around 120 people came to the second informational evening. The atmosphere at the entry was tense. People entering the room were asked by a reporter accompanied by a television cameraman if they were "for or against the azan?" Everybody was welcomed by Swart, who chaired the gathering. The alderman began by emphasizing that he himself lived in the neighborhood and that his role was to solve misunderstandings between the residents. He spoke about the history of the mosque and the mosque board, and shared what he had learned, namely that at the time of construction an agreement had been made about the azan: to broadcast it once a week, not too loud, and also on special occasions. This had been an important condition for the neighborhood's acceptance of the new building. However, Swart explained, the elders now wished to hear the azan more often.

He received a host of different reactions. One resident complained that the alderman had not answered the phone. Another asked what the “real cause” of the wish for the daily azan was. A third said that she enjoyed the many religions and cultures in her neighborhood, but that she experienced the daily azan as an unnecessary provocation. In response, the alderman referred to his own Indonesian background and familiarity with an Islamic country. Though he was not a Muslim himself, he could empathize with the elders’ need for the azan. At one point, Swart also described the Center Mosque as “moderate” and added that because of his perception of the mosque as moderate rather than “radical,” he had chosen of his own free will to assist the mosque.²¹ Swart was a representative of the state, but also wanted to participate in the negotiations for the azan. He was a neighbor of the mosque like the others, but his position gave him more influence to shape the outcome of the negotiations (Figure 12).

Despite efforts by the audience as well as by Swart and Yücel to foster a harmonious atmosphere, a commotion started when a few in the audience spoke in Turkish. Non-Turkish speakers criticized this as being “threatening.” As chairman of the evening, Swart responded by asking for respect toward the elders who could express themselves better in their mother tongue. Because of such incidents and simmering emotions, the general atmosphere remained tense, as it had during the first informational evening. The mosque chairman emphasized that Dutch law allows the mosque to amplify the azan on a daily basis. “However, we think it is important that the neighborhood can live with

Figure 12 Second informational evening about the azan. Photograph by Ronny te Wechel, Fall 2012.

the azan. In fact, without the support of the neighborhood there will be no daily azan.” This seemed to create a feeling of trust among the residents who felt that they had been wronged by not being included in the decision-making process. Both Swart and Yücel emphasized that it was necessary to include the whole neighborhood for better “social cohesion and acceptance.” They stated that a decision by the municipality or a judge would, in the long term, harm the social cohesion of the neighborhood, and that the mosque wanted good relations with its neighbors.

Overall, the audience seemed confused and continued to ask each other and the organizers many questions, such as, “Are we going to make the rules [for the future] tonight?” “Why doesn’t the municipality just decide? It was chosen democratically and could spare us this trouble.” “How loud will the azan be? Sometimes [it was quite loud], and sometimes I heard nothing.” “Why do you want the azan seven days a week?” “I am annoyed by the ruckus caused by Go Ahead [the local football team]. I have learned to live with that as well. Why can’t you live with the azan?” “Can the azan be in Dutch?” “Can you imagine that the call to prayer for a faith that is not yours is disturbing to hear in one’s own home?” to which someone responded: “Yes. I feel like that when I hear the church bells.” Both sides spoke of “tolerance,” being “fair,” “us and them,” “trust,” “the unknown,” “separation of church and state,” and “sound in one’s living room.” Alderman Swart reacted to the “us versus them” rhetoric by repeating that it is “important to listen and not immediately think for the other.” At the end of the meeting Yücel thanked everyone for their attendance and, despite some objections from the crowd, the tense atmosphere had somewhat lessened; there was even applause for comments about “respect” and “living together.”

Polling for an outcome

After eight months, two informational meetings, and a two-week trial run, the neighborhood and mosque had not yet come to a consensus. The conflict attracted the attention of professional “mediators,” who visited the mosque in January 2013 and had a “beautiful meeting” where “the mediators could speak about the potential of mediation for all involved parties to have a good dialogue and outcome.”²² More practically, the municipality now deemed it necessary to get involved by assisting in polling the neighborhood about the azan.

Alderman Swart wanted to agree on a fixed volume to prevent confusion in the future, but critical residents like Pascal were not reassured: “Whether we like

or dislike the call is not the point. The feeling dominates that this has already been decided, while participation is feigned and [there is a pretense] that we are being heard. . . . A missed chance for the mosque, really bad for its image, and they certainly don't have to come to me again with one of their markets, eating together in the neighborhood, or whatever." Those who received a letter about the poll had a month to respond.²³ Alderman Swart and the mosque chairman asked a notary to oversee the polling process to ensure that it was "anonymous and fair."²⁴ Michael, one of the residents who said he was against public religion, told me that he thought the poll was biased toward the azan. He protested the inclusion of Muslim residents among those polled, and also that the right to vote for or against the azan was determined by measuring locations (homes and streets) where the azan could be heard rather than a simple radius around the mosque. The municipality had prepared a chart of the azan's soundscape and published the map with exact sound levels in the local newspaper. Michael spoke against this acoustic model, which meant that not everybody could vote against the azan: "Why can't they just use the old fashioned method of asking everybody who lives in the neighborhood?"

Indeed, the supposedly objective "acoustic model"—following Christian Bröer's terminology (2006: 25)—that was employed by the municipality had serious shortcomings. Bröer's comparative study of noise pollution caused by Amsterdam and Zurich airports shows how state policies affect perceptions of noise pollution, and that the same sound levels can lead to very different reactions depending on time and place. In past decades, the expectation in the Netherlands has been that noise pollution caused by airplanes can be fully accounted for by the so-called acoustic model of explaining noise pollution. Bröer, however, shows that from the time that Dutch Royal Airways began operation, and with increasing passenger flights from the 1960s, nonacoustic factors have had a decisive impact on the perception of noise pollution. This argument does not underplay the impact of acoustic (physical) aspects of noise pollution, but stresses that noise pollution can only be fully understood by merging perspectives from the natural sciences with approaches from the social sciences and humanities. He concludes his book with the statement that, for sounds below extreme decibel levels, "policy determines nuisance." In our case of the azan, it is not so easy to arrive at a similar conclusion that it is state policy that has determined nuisance, because the degree to which the state has been involved in Dutch aviation is of a different, much greater, order than its regulation of Muslim soundscapes. But the broader thesis that politicized perceptions have a decisive impact on the experience of noise pollution does

apply in the case of the azan. From this perspective, state policies and media affecting Muslims in general, from guest workers to Muslim and “allochthonous” citizens, have co-shaped the language and aesthetic sensibilities toward Islam and its embodiment in the forms of headscarves, mosques, and also the azan.

In the history of Dutch aviation and noise pollution, municipalities employed the so-called objective acoustic model because it enabled normative judgments in a concealed way. The mapping of sound levels fits a “planological” approach (Bröer 2006: 80) that was dominant in the twentieth century, a strategy employed by the Netherlands state in cooperation with appointed experts, without serious consultation with local citizens. Similarly, in Deventer, the complexity of complaints against the azan was reduced to a single measure, namely the approximate extent to which one could hear it in one’s living environment. The planological approach produced a map that determined who had a right to protest (or support) the azan and who did not. Opposed residents, who admitted that they did not always hear the azan, saw this as an exclusionary move by the municipality. Rather than being against the azan because it was too loud, they objected to the azan because it constituted sounds that they considered “out of place,” sounds that did not belong to their town. The “objective” approach thus hid cultural struggles over the definition of community boundaries.

While during the informational evenings protesting residents avoided a moral debate on the place of Islam in the Netherlands and insisted on the right to be indifferent toward the azan, when the municipality employed an objectivist approach, they grumbled because it would be indifferent to their halfheartedly expressed symbolic objections to public Islam. In other words, the symbolic debate dominated the azan negotiations, exploring new limits of religious toleration, even though this was sometimes denied for the strategic reason of complaining about noise pollution rather than about Islam. Complaining too explicitly about religion would have exposed azan opponents as bigots. Nevertheless, there clearly was a slippage between nonreligious, profane noise and religious, sacred noise (cf. Weiner 2014: 28). Weiner observed a similar situation among American Catholics in the nineteenth century, who believed that opponents to their church bells were concerned not simply about noise but much more specifically about their “high church ritualism” (2014: 54). Their Protestant opponents thought that church bells were old fashioned, but considered other profane sounds such as emerging factory noises to be inevitable and necessary. In comparable fashion, azan opponents in Deventer insisted that the azan was not “necessary.” The recurring question of why Muslims cannot just use pocket watches (Chapter 1) implied that a distinction could be made

between sounds that belong to “contemporary time” and can be regulated but not completely silenced, such as those made by cars and motorcycles, and sounds which are “out of time” and should therefore be silenced—or never made into an object of discussion at all—such as the *azan*. The nostalgia felt by Muslims for the *azan* was hence seen as a longing for sounds that are not *of* Dutch space *and* time. In a way, then, the desire to disallow the *azan* was a wish to evade the ethics of memory that come with nostalgia (cf. Margalit 2011) and to silence not just a Muslim ritual but also the yearning of Turkish-Dutch fellow citizens for a Turkish homeland.

Another complaint about the poll was that it required only those against the *azan* to vote. In other words, if one did not return the municipality’s mailed letter, that would be counted as a vote for the *azan*. If less than half of those who received a letter responded, the municipality would automatically allow the *azan*. Michael thought this was a manipulative process, and expressed indignation that an alderman of the Liberal Party had agreed with this format, which placed the mosque in the comfortable position of being portrayed as open to objections and yet rather likely to get what it wanted in the first place:

One would expect a dirty political tactic like this from the GreenLeft or the Labor Party, the parties who have ‘multi-culty’ [a pejorative way of saying multiculturalism] on their priority lists. But no, it is the Liberal Party that is playing this dirty game with the mosque board. I think that the VVD alderman has been indoctrinated by the Muslims. . . . This way the alderman can give the neighborhood the impression that they are heard, while in the meantime he can shape the poll in such a way that the outcome is favorable to the Muslims.²⁵

Ironically, it was a local representative of the Labor Party who expressed worries about alderman Swart’s approach by asking, does not the *azan* need greater and explicit support?²⁶ Not all residents, however, were worried by the poll’s format, and there were no serious, organized complaints about the polling process. Joyce, for example, said:

I live two blocks behind the mosque and I have never had a complaint about the *azan* on Friday. I did attend the meetings out of curiosity, and did send an e-mail to the mosque that, in principle, I am not looking forward to a daily *azan*. I did that also because it seemed at the time that the mosque would simply go ahead with their plan without consulting us. I found out that there were people in the neighborhood who did have complaints about the sound of the *azan* on Friday. They spread a letter calling us to “resist the daily broadcasting of the *azan*!” During the meetings, I noticed that there were many misunderstandings, and

not wanting to understand each other. It was clear to me though that the mosque wanted to have good relations with the neighborhood. . . . Afterwards I heard that there would be an investigation about the wishes of the neighborhood. If the majority does not want the daily azan, it will not be carried out. I don't know what the current status is. . . . My neighbors did not attend the meetings, and they are not worried about the matter.

During the second meeting I realized again that the problem is not so much with the azan, but the inability of certain people to see things from someone else's perspective. But also clinging on to the old and not moving with the new. In that sense, the elder autochthonous neighbors looked much like the older mosque members. Both desperately want to hold on to what was in the past, leaving no space for a compromise. During these meetings, I have seen something of what is going on in the Netherlands: the intolerance towards each other caused by a fear of the new. Unfortunately, the scared people [religious and non-religious] make a little more noise than those without such anxieties, making the problem look much bigger than it is. I have also met other neighbors and mosque goers who think like I do, and we tried to use the microphone to make the others consider our way of thinking. Many seemed deaf [to our words], but it was still a hopeful experience for me.

Joyce's view was shared by Matthijs, who lives in the neighborhood and believes that the ruckus around the mosque was "making an elephant out of a mosquito." He went a step further by writing to the local newspaper that "the argument that public expressions of religion should not be allowed is not tenable."²⁷

In March 2013, the independent notary announced the results at City Hall.²⁸ Of the 495 homes that were offered the opportunity to speak out anonymously against the daily azan, 167 took the trouble to do so. Although not everybody who disliked the azan may have filled out the polling form, and though the neighborhood also has Muslim residents, azan opponents did mobilize a third of those polled. Because they did not meet the 50 percent requirement, the Center Mosque's wish to amplify the azan every day sometime between noon and 2:00 p.m. was honored. Part of the agreement was the installation of a sound limiter to make sure that the azan would not be heard beyond the mosque's immediate surroundings. A few dissatisfied residents threatened to take the matter to court and the local Liberal Party supported them, supposedly for the purpose of clarifying what was allowed and what was not, even though the sound regulations were well known. Perhaps because of a weak legal position, or simply a wish to put the issue to rest, no further actions were taken. In fact, azan controversies in the Netherlands have so far never made it into a courtroom.²⁹

The fire

Over the years, mosques in the Netherlands have repeatedly been vandalized (Van der Valk 2012). The Center Mosque also fell victim to an attack in August 2013, a few months after the azan negotiations came to an end.³⁰ An explosion on a summer night damaged the entrance to the mosque association's grocery market and caused the collapse of one of the decorative domes. The leaders of the mosque, as well as Deventer's police and mayor, tried to avoid media attention as they did not want to escalate the situation in an otherwise quiet and peaceful neighborhood. According to the mosque chairman and the police, there was no evidence that it was an act of arson and there was no proof that it was because of the azan. Skeptics, however, pointed to the fact that the mosque's cameras did not cover that part of the building and there were all kinds of conspiracy theories in the neighborhood, for instance that it was "because of the competition the Turkish grocery market at the mosque posed to [non-Turkish] shops in the neighborhood," while others said that "the atheists" had done it, probably because a local group called the Atheist Secular Party had protested the azan (Chapter 3). It was indeed easy for a potential culprit to evade detection; the mosque chairman confirmed that the video cameras had not captured any perpetrators but added that one side of the mosque did not have a camera. The police said that no combustive substances were found, but the firemen told the chairman that it was possible that someone could have set the fire. In any case, a security video did show an explosion, and the chairman said that because of the extensive damage they initially believed that a Molotov cocktail or even a hand grenade had been used.

When I visited the mosque after the attack, Yücel showed me the damage and suggested that the fire had probably been ignited "by itself." He also mentioned, however, that the mosque's community was trying to find an explanation: "Is it because of the azan, they wondered." How a concrete wall, with no connections to gas pipes or electricity cables, could suddenly explode into a huge fire remained mysterious. I frowned with disbelief, but Yücel assured me that the event had nothing to do with hatred against the mosque or the azan: "To be honest, I have been through a lot because of the azan but no such threats." He felt that the incident was just an unfortunate accident. Nevertheless, Yücel said the mosque intended to install not one or two but four new cameras. When the mosque was constructed, he said, "we didn't want to give people the feeling that we are looking into their living room," but the fire pushed the mosque toward increased surveillance.

The whole episode of the azan had exhausted the chairman:

Do you realize what it meant to be the person on whom the azan of a community of Muslims depended? . . . People have noted that my hair has gone grey in the past two years. It was very stressful. I was not trained for such a job. This is something for politicians, religious scholars, people who are trained to speak before an audience. I am just a business man, and an allochthon.

The chairman also informed me about his plan to return to Turkey, to a country “where the azan can be heard everywhere five times a day” he joked. When I asked why he was leaving, he explained as follows:

We have a good life here, our own house, a store with employees and so forth. After twenty-three years, I have seen enough here, I have learned and experienced a lot here. Luckily I’m young enough to go to Turkey with my children. I have seen that the pressure on allochthonous people here has increased and the economy is not in great shape. Here we are shoved to the side in a very gentle way. I have seen that with my two elder children, one fourteen and the other ten years old . . . I have packed our belongings, and am ready to go this week. . . . Of course it was nostalgic to do away with belongings and such. . . . It was a very hard decision, but I believe that life in Turkey will be much easier.

Yücel deduced from conversations with one of his younger sons that he did not feel one hundred percent safe with his Dutch teacher in school. He somehow felt excluded. In response, Yücel sent his son to school in Turkey, and said that the boy had remarked that the teacher there was kinder to him:

You don’t notice these things. Your children go to school and they are too young to explain these things well. But then you realize that the child had felt something [a subtle form of being excluded]. . . . It is not like it used to be. Tolerance is gone. And everything just gets more difficult and my children are very important to me. . . . I have no illusions about Turkey. My sons, who are there already, have remarked that there is more dust in their new school than in the Netherlands. But even though facilities may not be always better—Turkey has many such problems—I have made the decision to go.

The chairman was satisfied that the mosque did not receive new complaints since daily azan amplification had begun, but still lamented the loss of “tolerance.” The history of mosque construction and azan negotiations had made him skeptical, and he considered himself lucky to be able to repatriate to Turkey. “There are many others who would like to go back to Turkey, but they can’t [because of the financial costs and their children’s ties to the Netherlands].”

Alongside his complaints about intolerance and discrimination, Yücel also remarked that the social fabric of Turks in the Netherlands was not what it used to be. People lived too individualistically, he said, in comparison with his home town in Turkey where community bonds were still strong. He also found the Netherlands too liberal. There were “too many atheists,” and he did not like the fact that gay teachers worked in schools. Yücel cited a sexual culture that was too open, where people “kiss each other in public,” among the reasons for his desire to leave. He insisted however that the primary reason for wanting to leave was the inability to feel at home as he did in Turkey, a country “where we will not face discrimination.” On the other hand, the Turkish-Dutch community, he reiterated, was here to stay because it had become rooted in the Netherlands. Those who stayed, the chairman said, should have the right to hear the azan at least once a day:

It was not our intention to call to prayer from a great distance. . . . For example, last week I was going to the mosque by bike and then heard the azan. I’ve tried to convey that feeling during our informational evening. But that is something that cannot be said in words, you have to experience it. In Turkey I hear the azan everywhere. Even when you do not pray, the azan shakes you awake.

For his last deed as chairman, Yücel wanted to initiate the construction of a small building across the mosque for the ritual washing of the dead. It would be on mosque terrain, but the municipality had already objected:

It’s like the azan all over [again]. This time they say that ten years ago there was an agreement that no additional structures would be built. I have already had many conversations about this, because there is insufficient space in the hospital and there are other practical problems. This is my last project here. It’s just a small building of about twenty square meters in a very quiet area surrounded by trees. It’s to wash the dead and pray for them before their burial. We don’t want to do it on the other side of the mosque where there is a snack bar. . . . We applied for a construction permit, but it has been rejected. I have visited the municipality and they said that they can’t do anything for me, and that I just have to accept that the project cannot be realized. I replied that I would not accept that. It is not my request, but the request of the people living here. Then I was told that I needed to go higher up, I have again been in contact with alderman Marco Swart. . . . Not everybody is willing to invest so much time in these things. The last [mosque] chairman sent a letter six years ago requesting a construction permit. He didn’t get the permission and that was the end of it. But I have said that I will make a political issue out of it for our community in the

next municipal elections. . . . They are simply picking on us. I will do whatever I need to do to apply for a construction permit. . . . They are scared that others will come here as well [to wash their dead] and talk about lack of parking spaces.

The chairman was moving to Turkey, but retaining his business in the Netherlands. His children would continue to attend school in Turkey while he planned to travel back and forth, also to finish his duties for the mosque. He had a lot on his mind, but agreed to meet me a final time so that the story of the azan in Deventer could be committed to writing. When we finished our conversation, during which the daily azan was coincidentally broadcast, the chairman and I shook hands and he departed for the quiet streets of Deventer on his bicycle.

Beyond integration and recognition?

After the azan negotiations in Deventer, I was invited to present the story at the Cultural Anthropology department of the University of Amsterdam. The audience criticized me for presenting a somber black and white image of misunderstandings and conflicting demands. The narrative about Deventer had become too stereotypical. One of the objections was that the multicultural town had once again been portrayed as a site of crisis, while another professor thought that Mary Douglas's concept of pollution was problematic because it assumed simplistic notions of group boundaries. An anthropologist, I was advised, should look for the particular overlaps and complex identities of the individuals in the field. By showing the multidimensionality and hybridity of particular identifications, the anthropologist could undo the stereotype. Paul Gilroy offers a similar critique of ethnographic portrayals of groups in stereotypical ways; he questions the analytical value of contrasting groups with each other and suggests that scholars begin by showing the contradictions within rather than between groups. One could do so by writing narratives of cross-cultural understanding and fluid boundaries of identity, engaging in micro-ethnographies that dissolve facile notions of the self and the other. I conclude this chapter by acknowledging the complexity within the groups of this study, but argue that this does not justify ignoring conflicts between groups. I will leave it to the reader to reflect on the possible effects of an anthropology that describes dichotomous relations between competing groups. What is certain, however, is that we must be careful to avoid steering our fieldwork observations toward normatively desired outcomes.

One obvious way to deconstruct the opposition between “autochthonous” non-Muslim citizens and “allochthonous” Muslim believers would be to describe members of the former group who do not object to the *azan*, or would even like to hear the call to prayer on a daily basis. Of course, such individuals are found in Dutch society. A more interesting manner in which we can complicate group boundaries, however, is by destabilizing the very idea of the allochthonous Muslim. Dutch anthropologists have shown little to no interest in individuals with Somalian, Moroccan, Turkish, and Iranian backgrounds, among others, who have never been religious, or who are in the process of rapidly losing their religion. How do they—minorities within the Dutch “allochthonous” and “Muslim” minorities³¹—feel and think about an amplified *azan* in their neighborhood?

Many Iranian-Dutch with whom I spoke during my fieldwork, for example, reacted critically to the *azan* or to mosques in general. They were skeptical about the status of disbelievers in Muslim communities, symbolized for them in Qur’anic verses such as 2:171, “The example of those who disbelieve is like that of one who shouts at what hears nothing but calls and cries cattle or sheep—deaf, dumb and blind, so they do not understand.” And yet, these *azan* opponents, who range from outspoken atheists to non-Muslims who still claim a form of Islamic spirituality, can nonetheless describe the call to prayer as beautiful or even nostalgic. As post-Muslims, they have different relations to the *azan* than nonbelievers or non-Muslims with a longer Dutch and Christian background. This can also hold for individuals who are part of groups known to identify more strongly with Islam, such as the Turkish-Dutch community. I can mention the example of Ayhan and Deniz, two young Turkish-Dutch men who were born and raised in the Netherlands. Ayhan told me that he was not really a Muslim, but a “deist” or “theist” (after consulting Wikipedia on his smartphone). “I don’t feel anything when I hear the call to prayer,” he once exclaimed. He did not oppose mosques that wanted to call to prayer, but it was not an issue that he felt strongly about either. Deniz, on the other hand, reported strongly negative emotions in relation to the *azan*, but even he could interpret the call more positively at times. Excerpts from an interview with him show that a complex emotional relation to the *azan* exists not only within groups, but can even be found within a single individual:

D: The feeling that I have is that Islam was forced onto me . . . forced down my throat. . . . The *azan* is “in your face.” When I hear the *azan*, I feel slightly anxious. I’m reminded of the fact that I am not what the community wanted me to become.

PTA: Do you feel this every time you hear the azan?

D: No, for example when I was in Istanbul recently, I thought to myself that it is actually beautiful. But when I was a child visiting my family in Turkey it sometimes gave me an unpleasant feeling, and when you asked me about the azan it reminded me of how the Turkish community would treat me. They would push you, and ask "Are you a Muslim or not?" At the time I often didn't dare to say no. You had to believe. If one has such ambivalent feelings towards Islam, like I do, then the azan can be experienced in a negative way.

PTA: Do you feel the same when you see a mosque in the Netherlands?

D: Not anymore, but when I was a kid, mosques made me feel uncomfortable. But now, maybe if I heard the azan while sitting in my living room, I would even like the sound. I am more mature now, and can distance myself from the past. I'm not scared of religion. If I want to read the Qur'an, I can do that. If I want to visit a mosque, that's possible as well. But when I was a teenager, I could not identify with Islamic things. I did not fit in the groups of young Turkish-Dutch boys. I liked to read English comics, and they didn't, for example. But, I also didn't believe in God, and they did.

PTA: If Turkish-Dutch people want to use loudspeakers for the azan today, do you have an opinion on that?

D: The [white, autochthonous] Dutch feel anxious about it, like I felt when I was a child, probably also because of ignorance. Some may be even more scared than I was when I was a child, because I did have an idea of what the azan was about, because in a way I am a "Muslim." I don't think that religion should be pushed into everybody's face all the time. I think that the azan should not bother others in society. . . . So even if Muslims say that it is their right to use loudspeakers for the azan, I am against it.

The point of this digression is not to argue that some minorities within minorities also reject the azan, but that complex emotions toward the Muslim call to prayer are a social fact. These can go in multiple directions, for or against the azan, and are felt by people of different ethnicities and backgrounds. What does this say, however, about pluralism in the Netherlands and stereotypical conflicts between groups? How, in other words, should social scientists write about the existing diversities in the Netherlands, and to what extent must we analytically diversify diversity?

By overemphasizing the feelings of "autochthons" and "allochthons," giving these populist feelings and categorizations too much analytical credit, I risk blaming diversity itself as causing feelings of nostalgia rather than, for instance, criticizing the racism of the autochthonous population and its moral incapacity

to feel more sympathy for their neighbors, or analyzing other broader and structural causes of feelings of alienation (cf. Gilroy 2005: 150). Duyvendak's *The Politics of Home* opens by claiming that "it is precisely this increased diversity" which must explain the nationalist obsession with cultural homogeneity (2011: 1). The border between empirical analysis and normativity is extremely vague here. That is why I appreciate my anthropologist colleagues' concern about portraying the site of the multicultural as one that is essentially in crisis. One of the problems with accounts that seem to blame conflict as inevitably arising from diversity is that they implicitly suggest a previous situation of homogeneity and do not explicitly criticize the imagined nostalgic past in which peace and order prevailed. As I showed in Chapter 2, when it comes to religious pluralism, no such previous situation ever existed. When nostalgia creates a false image of the past, it channels a "desire to purify groups and homogenize communities" (Gilroy 2005: 37). Duyvendak too distances himself from the argument that diversity is the cause of melancholy by describing it as the "alleged" (2011: 85) cause of a crisis of home feelings among Dutch autochthons and as a "dominant framing" of the issue (2011: 96).

In contrast, Scheffer reifies the populist discourse by presenting alienation at home as caused by diversity, an unfortunate melancholic reality of immigrant societies. In his documentary on the arrival of guest workers in Western Europe, plurality is lamented in this way as inevitable but harmful. This style of reasoning largely ignores that pluralism is a fact, as Rawls believed, but also that it is a product of liberal democratic societies. Religious pluralism is the necessary outcome of freedom. To lament multiculturalism and increased pluralism as inevitably causing discord and conflict, as Scheffer does, is therefore highly misleading, turning the fact of pluralism into the problem of pluralism. That said, based on my fieldwork I think it would be a mistake to deny that, despite subtleties within groups such as the autochthonous population living around the Center Mosque, the demand to amplify the azan resulted in a conflict between groups, only to be settled bitterly and undoubtedly scarring those who live together in that neighborhood. As we have seen, the grand ideals of brotherhood, conviviality, and cosmopolitanism were not the decisive factors that shaped the outcome of the azan negotiations. Normative calls to transcend too simplistic categories of the self and the other therefore do not take away the reality that, in fact, such easy categorizations can be made and felt strongly, as was the case in Deventer. While anthropologists may write about going beyond discourses of cultural assimilation and integration on the one hand, and cultural

recognition on the other, such visions should not underestimate the power of the politics of home and the multiple, and competing, nostalgias of nativism. As the azan case study shows, there is still much room for the folding, unfolding, and refolding of these dialectics.

The question is then forced on us: what if people are not interested in fully overcoming easy categorizations of themselves and others? And what if they do not even speak of a “clash of civilizations” or a “crisis of multiculturalism” but demand simply to practice and tolerate what they consider familiar? Of course, not everyone was dead set against the azan, not even all of the azan opponents. In 2015, one of the mosque’s neighbors summed this up by saying, “I don’t mind the azan, as long as the Dutch culture is dominant here.” The group conflict did allow us to better grasp how constitutional secularism actually functioned on the ground when people asserted competing conceptions of home by demanding or resisting the azan. While populist discourse may emphasize the emotions and while social scientists such as Duyvendak may take these emotions seriously, this did not, nor should it, undermine the normative priority of civil rights over the passions of the multitudes. On the other hand, the reader may have noted that constitutional secularism as a concept was barely the issue in this chapter, though popular phrases about the proper (private) place of religion and the so-called separation of church and state were sometimes used by respondents. Constitutional secularism functioned above competing demands for integration and recognition, and above competing nostalgic memories of home. It was the gorilla in the room, preventing critics of the amplified azan from disregarding the local Muslims’ wishes but only for as long as the latter actively insisted on their rights.

After Deventer, azan negotiations are ongoing in other towns and cities, and calling for prayer on a daily basis has again been contested. A mosque in Zutphen, a town in the province of Gelderland, has asked to amplify the call on a daily basis,³² while the spokesman of the recently built Ulu Mosque in Utrecht has insisted on amplifying the azan twice a day.³³ The Turkish Cultural Center of Enschede, a mosque only 60 kilometers from Deventer, also announced a daily azan. A statement of intent was drafted when it sought a construction permit, stating that calls to prayer will be limited to a “minimum,” but the mosque changed its opinion in 2015 and proceeded to demand a daily azan.³⁴ As I finalized these words, residents in Zutphen and Enschede protested and attended informational evenings about the azan. Despite their proximity, the agreement made in Deventer in 2013—to use loudspeakers once a day to amplify the call to prayer—was deemed impossible in Enschede in 2016. An alderman of the Liberal Party, Jeroen Hatendoer, was charged with the thankless

task of ameliorating tensions between local Muslims and opponents of the azan, which included members of his own party, local autochthons who proclaimed that church bells were part of Dutch culture, but also citizens affiliated with the Syriac Orthodox Church. This time, protests against the azan were much more intense and better organized. Hundreds of citizens attended not one or two but three sound tests, debated with each other in closed meetings and in rather grueling public hearings at the municipality, two of which lasted over four hours. Several local political parties explicitly asked the mosque to give up its ambition to amplify the azan for the sake of preserving the peace. The Labor Party was among them, announcing on its website that in “the community of Enschede, there is currently no support for calls to prayer” and that “the Labor Party does not object to the construction of a mosque . . . but does object to a call to prayer that can be heard in public space.”³⁵ Despite intense criticism, the mosque nevertheless continued to negotiate for the azan through discussions of such minute details as whether they would amplify three times a week with a volume of 57 decibels or only one time with a volume of 63 decibels.³⁶ Only the social-liberal GreenLeft party and the city’s mayor explicitly defended the right to call to prayer as constitutional. The mayor, a member of the liberal Democrats 66, warned local politicians that he would “defend the Constitution” in case they tried to ban the call to prayer.³⁷ In the final agreement with the Turkish Cultural Center, three years after the discussions about the azan in Deventer had been concluded and begun in Enschede, the mosque would amplify the call only once per week and with a maximum of 57 decibels. This result was disappointing for the Turkish community, who initially hoped for an outcome similar to Deventer. Some azan opponents also felt disappointed that the call would be amplified at all, and spoke of a Pyrrhic victory after the “countless hours and conversations with the municipality and the mosque board.” These feelings of disappointment reveal that, despite formal agreements, the larger question of religious tolerance and the ethics of hearing remains unresolved.