Arab, Pooyan Tamimi. "Epilogue." *Amplifying Islam in the European Soundscape: Religious Pluralism and Secularism in the Netherlands*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. 151–162. Islam of the Global West. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474291460.0011>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 11:57 UTC.

Copyright © Pooyan Tamimi Arab 2017. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Epilogue

The Right to Tolerance

All eyes and ears were on Imam Ibrahim Çavdar. He had arrived from Turkey just a few months ago to lead the prayers at the Fatih Mosque in Amsterdam's city center, and found himself performing the azan at one of the most iconic sites in Dutch history: the former St. Martin's Cathedral in Utrecht, now called the Dom Church. Standing at the back of the church, in a corner of the balcony housing the organ, Çavdar lifted his right hand to his right ear and recited the azan into a microphone. The call echoed from the speakers through the medieval church in a city that had once played a pivotal part in the dramatic religious conflicts that finally led to an independent Dutch state.

The country that is now called the Netherlands was founded *de facto* through the Union of Utrecht of 1579, which sought to guarantee freedom of conscience. It was, Rainer Forst explains, the “first time in the history of toleration,” that this freedom was demanded as “an individual basic right” (2013: 164). In this early stage of the development of modern tolerance, it was strongly associated not only with protest and resistance but also with violence: The St. Martin's Cathedral was attacked during the Iconoclastic Fury or *Beeldenstorm* (lit. “statue storm”), which involved destruction of religious images and was a sobering testimony to the enduring religious strife in the region. Visitors to the Dom Church today can see an altar piece from which the heads of saints and even of God the Father were hacked off, and small mourning statues on a tomb that were likewise decapitated. As a result of this dark episode, which came to be known as part of the European Wars of Religion, William of Orange famously proposed a *Religions-Vrede* or “peace between religions.” Tolerance in this period was a “toleration of difference as long as it remained silent: *haereticus quietus*” (Forst 2013: 132). As these events unfolded, tolerance—an ancient concept, first introduced by the Stoics as a virtue of brave endurance—gained traction in the emergence of the modern world, and contrary to prevailing assumptions, *it* contributed to the eventual formation of liberal democracies rather than vice versa.¹

The Turkish imam's call to prayer in the Dom Church was part of the city of Utrecht's 2013 historical celebration of the tricentennial of the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht. According to the festival organizers, the treaty was a "turning point in world history": statesmen of the most powerful European nations came together in Utrecht to effectively end two centuries of religious wars. A grand yearlong program of events, including music, theater, festivals, conferences, and exhibitions, was organized to teach all and sundry about the treaty, the "art of making peace," and "respect for diversity."² On April 11, 2013, Queen Beatrix opened the festivities in the Dom Church after a preliminary concert named "Perpetual Peace" after Kant's famous essay. The program notes portrayed Utrecht as central to the development of the principle of tolerance, a fact that the organizers hoped would inspire the Dutch today to seek interreligious understanding and to care for each other, not only for their own national citizens but also for refugees, migrants, and fellow Europeans, through an attitude of inspired openness. The next day, on April 12, the audience listened attentively to Imam Çavdar's call to prayer and responded with staggering applause.

I was moved. I know that my respondents from the Fatih Mosque—who are by now friends as well as neighbors—were likewise touched. In this moment, the azan had come to stand for a universalist harmony between religions. And yet, I could not resist a skeptical thought: what would happen if Amsterdam's Fatih Mosque in the city center, where Imam Çavdar worked, amplified the call to prayer? In this book, we have seen how azan amplification is often viewed as crossing a red line of tolerance. Whither tolerance? I end with some thought relevant to this unresolved question, about intolerance, religious harmony, and the notion that one has the right to be tolerated.

The intolerance of "schizophonia"

Following Jan Willem Duyvendak (2011), this study not only attended to Muslim minorities' perspectives on the azan, but also to those of the non-Muslim, white majority who reject Islamic sounds on nativist grounds. White opponents of the Islamic call to prayer in the Netherlands, in particular, experience "schizophonia." Musicologist Raymond Murray Schafer introduced this concept to express the dislocation of sounds in time and space due to (competing) soundscapes being (mechanically) reproduced in new locations or times. Schafer's critique of schizophonic soundscapes was inspired by romantic notions of primordial belonging, originality, and nature. The notion

of schizophonia, however, needs to be problematized for it can easily be put to use to silence minority soundscapes in a globalizing world, such as the azan in the Netherlands.³ This same romanticism led Schafer to assert that “Islam waned when it became necessary to hang loudspeakers on the minarets” (1994: 216). He was also negative about loudspeakers in general: “The loudspeaker was . . . invented by an imperialist, for it responded to the desire to dominate others with one’s own sound. As the cry broadcasts distress, the loudspeaker communicates anxiety” (1994: 91).

To my ears today, an unamplified call to prayer recorded in the early twentieth century⁴ may certainly sound more human than the loud call to prayers in contemporary Istanbul, instrumentalized by the increasingly authoritarian President Tayyip Erdoğan in nationalist and Islamist discourses.⁵ Nonetheless, a generalized interpretation of the use of loudspeakers, disregarding the cultural context, betrays a simplified understanding of the processes of secularization and innovative uses of new media in religion. In any case, resistance to the azan in Europe is not merely a matter of deciding whether or not to use loudspeakers; it is not primarily an act of resisting noise, but a form of resisting Islamic soundscapes. In a global media context in which the phrase *Allahu akbar* has come to be widely associated with violence, non-Muslim ears are anxious about Islamic sounds, which simply *do not belong*, amplified or not. This book’s findings therefore resonate with conclusions drawn by Martha Nussbaum on a more general, pan-European, level:

European nations tend to conceive of nationhood and national belonging in ethno-religious and cultural-linguistic terms. Thus new immigrant groups, and religious minorities, have difficulty being seen as full and equal members of the nation. All these nations are the heirs of romanticism, with its ideas of blood, soil, and natural belonging. (2012: 94)

Romanticism underlies excessive resistance to the azan in the Netherlands, and informs people’s nationalist sentiments. This is summed up in the idea of nativism, which I used to describe the intolerance toward Islamic aesthetics in European societies.

The azan as a technique of unifying religious plurality

To undo the intolerance of religious schizophonia, the call to prayer has been employed as a focal point around which to realize a form of religious pluralism.

Not only did Imam Ibrahim Çavdar recite the azan in the Utrecht church, he also sang a classic Jewish hymn and verses from a Sufi mystic together with Lies Müller, who is Jewish and a friend of the Fatih Mosque in Amsterdam. In poetic verses by Yunus Emre such as “Searching, I roam from land to land/ In all tongues I ask for the Friend”—a characterization of God—the emphasis was on the unity of religions in their plurality. While the imam had begun with the azan in Arabic, Müller finished solo in Hebrew with a poem that evoked both despair and the hope that human prayer will endure. Tellingly, the poem was written by Hannah Szenes, a Jewish-Hungarian heroine of the Zionist movement who was tortured and later executed by firing squad in Nazi-occupied Hungary in 1944.

In contrast to the unwanted amplified azan in Dutch cities, the audience shared an intimate experience and was touched by what was heard because of a willingness to listen together. The fusion of religious acoustics—and let’s not forget the majestic acoustics of the medieval church—was employed as a technique to unify religious pluralities. But little did the public know that there had been some bickering behind the scenes, a small crack in the much longed-for unity. According to Mehmet Yamali, spokesperson of the Fatih Mosque, the imam preferred not to sing Szenes’s poem because of the “[Zionist] background” of the poet. A duet of a classical Jewish hymn was chosen instead, because it was strictly monotheist, unrelated to contemporary politics, and in those respects an easier choice. The public performance of unity required careful preparation and selection.

The azan, the Jewish hymn, and poems accompanied a lecture by author Karen Armstrong, who was touring the world to bring attention to the “urgent need for a treaty of compassion.” Armstrong advocated that we must go far beyond a religious peace treaty. This could be achieved by going back to the essence of all religions: compassion. By compassion she did not mean pity, but self-knowledge in relation to religious others as reflected in the Golden Rule: “Do not do unto others what you do not want others to do unto you.” This solution to intolerance is an old, indeed ancient, strategy. Among its many sources are those from Europe, when *una religio in varietate rituum* was proclaimed at least as early as the Humanism of the Renaissance era. Armstrong’s approach was popular in segments of the Enlightenment too, as in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s vision that God loves all his children—Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad—equally.⁶

Such essentialist conceptualization of religions and philosophical traditions achieves unity by reducing the truth of religion to a common core: the Golden

Rule. It is also a path that pluralizes unity because different religions are said to grasp the same divine truth (cf. Forst 2013: 75, 409), though it is not clear what is considered incidental in religion or what should happen to those who do not want to fit their religion or worldview into such a scheme. Armstrong's approach can also be seen as achieving a unity by a fusion of different faiths (including Buddhism, Daoism, and other non-Abrahamic traditions) into a single, universal religion. The problem with this strategy is that intolerance is overcome through "religious dedifferentiation" (Forst 2013: 408) rather than through a respectful conception of tolerance for differences that refuse to be effaced.

Armstrong not only defended religious unity, she flatly rejected the concept of tolerance on the grounds that it is rooted in bearing something or enduring a kind of pain, rejecting the concept for being "too tough." The fact, however, is that in tactile practice an *azan* in a Dutch town requires some toleration, just like an interreligious encounter or cooperation requires careful preparation as well as a willingness to explore the boundaries of tolerance. The imam was being tolerant by playing a role in the performance of religious unity. As a representative of the Turkish State's Directorate of Religious Affairs, he expressed public respect for his Jewish counterpart's voice. He went even further and participated in a duet, but did so selectively, without revealing religious or political differences to the audience. Armstrong's approach required much more: a radical familial love and compassion. She urged an active interest in and engagement with the other, presupposing not only respect for the dignity of the other, which is also a fundamental requirement of tolerance, but also esteem for the other's differing practices, beliefs, and ethical-aesthetic judgments, not just in theory but in practice. Opinions on the extent to which this was achieved in the Dom Church can differ without downplaying the continued importance of being tolerant. For the imam, his assistant told me, "It was already a big step to sing a prayer in Hebrew."

Armstrong's other objection to tolerance, beside it being too tough, was that it fostered an unethical way of living with religious others. Tolerance, in her view, was ultimately rooted in unequal power relations. The powerful tolerate the deviants, who are liberated only to become simultaneously stigmatized by the disciplining power of being tolerated. Indeed, going back in time, none other than Immanuel Kant spoke of the "arrogant name of tolerance." He rejected the authoritarian implications of the concept and wrote in his famous essay on Enlightenment that "complete freedom" was in contradiction with a ruler

or state that grants toleration to religious others (Kant [1784] 1999: 27). The problem with Armstrong's approach, however appealing it may sound, is not her rehearsal of Kant's critique of tolerance, but the fact that she hastily dismisses all forms of toleration rather than selectively reject authoritarian or paternalistic conceptions of tolerance.

Nevertheless, Armstrong's strategy is popular. The use of the azan as a symbol and means for interreligious "dialogue" is a transnational phenomenon, practiced for instance also at an interfaith event in a Los Angeles church. In his study of religious sounds in the United States, Isaac Weiner too expresses reservations about using the azan in this way. His main worry is that the azan is not accepted as an exclusively Muslim practice, but instrumentalized as a symbol of American unity in plurality. The azan then functions to "celebrate and bridge religious differences," writes Weiner, but in the process risks "effacing differences altogether by diminishing their significance" (2014: 185). This strategy leaves little space for Muslims "who might not embrace the pluralistic message that the adhān was purported to announce" (Weiner 2014: 187). We may add other groups to those excluded in this way, such as Dutch nonbelievers or critics of humanism, who would not automatically feel comfortable with Armstrong's prophetic discourse. Because of these thoughts, as I was listening to the azan in Utrecht's Dom Church, I could not help question what it meant to play a part in techniques of unifying religious pluralism. Was this performance comparable to spiritualization strategies that tone down differences, as we saw for the transduction of the azan in Chapter 1?

As an anthropologist weary of cultural essentialism, I do not want to make the normative claim that the azan should stand for its "original" or "authentic" functions at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, for instance to distinguish Muslims from other believers and to create a distinctly Islamic identity. This is, in my view, an interpretive matter to be determined through interactions among believers, Muslim thinkers, and religious authorities. It could be said that to criticize such unorthodox practices as calling to prayer in the Dom Church or transducing the azan is to succumb to orientalist nostalgia for an unchanging Islamic past. This study, however, has shown that the production of Islamic sound- and lightscapes is part and parcel of the politics of home. Therefore, any innovation of the azan that is undertaken to support questionable motives of "integration" should be subjected to critical scrutiny. Religious pluralism can only be pluralistic in the strict sense of the word if it makes space for religious particularity.

Tolerance is best anchored in equal rights

Grand appeals to the Golden Rule also miss the point that protecting religious minorities from discrimination and exclusion requires tolerance (in society) and equal rights (in law). In situations of intolerance, justice requires a political conception of belonging to determine how the state may regulate competing sentiments—overriding excessively strong, romantic, investments in “culture” or “autochthony.” As we saw in Chapter 3, the state may regulate religious presence within the bounds of constitutional safeguards; if pressed, the state must and often does exclude nativist arguments in favor of equal civil rights. In the Netherlands, “belonging” is thus not only a matter to be decided by romanticism, but a political ideal of citizenship codified in law. In Chapter 2, I argued that this understanding is based on a historical move away from Protestant hegemony toward religious pluralism. The Public Manifestations Act of the 1980s not only definitively ended the archaic Procession Prohibition, devised to limit and control Catholic processions in the nineteenth century, it also enabled amplified Islamic calls to prayer and the sounds of any other religious newcomers. However, this development toward equal rights is not unanimously celebrated, not even among the mainstream political parties. Nevertheless, the equality that comes with Dutch citizenship has enabled the *azan* to slowly become part of public spaces in the Netherlands, even if often only in modest ways. We saw this in Chapter 4, where the local government intervened and mediated between a population that wants to preserve an “autochthonous” Dutch soundscape and another that wants to reproduce familiar experiences associated with the Turkish homeland. Rather than culture, citizenship rights determined how these competing demands were to be regulated, effectively steering how people’s feelings of belonging can be managed in the process. This intervention, not only in law but also practiced by municipalities, is necessary because when non-Muslim citizens demand attention for feeling alienated due to the presence of Islam in public life, this does not automatically translate into a willingness to also empathize with disrupted home feelings experienced by their Muslim counterparts.

Besides the constitution standing in the wings, what proved to be decisive for the actualization of equal rights, in the form of amplified calls to prayer, was a practical learning process for both sides as negotiating parties. Citizens did not have to begin with the impossible task of reaching agreement on a conceptual framework of either minimalist tolerance or maximalist compassion. These

practical interactions pushed the limits of what could be expected of each other and designated the boundaries of each other's rights. Often, it was a painful and agonistic process. The anthropological emphasis on what people actually do in such situations can save theorists from foolishly rejecting constitutional secularism without providing alternatives that are successfully implemented in the field. The facts on the ground are that some mosques have amplified the azan in the Netherlands and that some people have learned to tolerate its presence after lengthy negotiations with the local government and the mosque. For such a *modus vivendi* to be achieved requires some kind of consensus between those involved, rather than any strong moral sense of accepting the azan, or even viewing oneself as tolerant. In addition, only if a mosque actively persists on its right to broadcast the azan will its right be realized. Given the difficulties involved, most mosques do not bother to even try amplifying the azan. Mosque representatives have also not taken the issue to a Dutch court, but have so far preferred to negotiate and compromise. Protests against the azan are thus effective in limiting the practice of calling to prayer, including the number of times that an azan can be heard as well as its volume. The daily azan is especially resented in Dutch society because it reconstitutes the rhythm of *everyday* life, unlike the incidental azan for congregational prayers on Friday (cf. Beekers 2015: 226).

Despite a strong resistance to the azan, the “on the ground” realization of equal rights has enabled Dutch Muslims to overcome being tolerated in the paternalistic sense of the word. When an azan is amplified, Muslims are not granted the right to perform a ritual that some state authorities may actually consider out of place. Rather than being tolerated—the way soft drugs are tolerated in the Netherlands, floating between legality and illegality—tolerance for the azan is not based on a policy of *gedogen*, turning a blind eye (or a deaf ear), as it had been when Catholics were not permitted to construct churches and had to congregate clandestinely (in *schuilkerken*, hidden churches). Instead, equal rights ensure that the state cannot easily ban amplified calls to prayer, which it never has until now. Nor can the state consider this particular style of worship as unnecessary, not truly required by religion in general or by Islam specifically. Contrary to what azan opponents often argue, the state largely based its understanding of religious difference on an insight that was defended by Locke in his *Essay on Toleration*, namely that “in religious worship nothing is indifferent” ([1667] 1997: 139). Wearing or not wearing certain garments, kneeling or not kneeling in public, worshiping in spectacular or plain ways;

none of these choices should be rejected as indifferent, but judged depending on people's own chosen styles of worshiping, in private spaces and also outside in the streets. Because the Constitution grants equal rights to all religions, the state can make only nonreligious arguments to limit, or in extreme cases ban, public forms of worship or religious expression, even as subtle forms of (Protestant) bias may remain operative.

But why do we need tolerance for this kind of justice or fairness in treating religions equally? Why don't rights suffice (cf. Brown and Forst 2014: 16)? This book shows that, in practice, the accommodation of the azan does not rely on a discourse of tolerance. Actual tolerance for the azan was legitimized first and foremost by equal rights, preempting a complete regression into a conception of tolerance in which Muslims would have to seek permission for the azan. This means that equal rights, achieved through longstanding processes of rationalizing power, can function for citizens to self-discipline and behave tolerantly, and to effectively regulate aversion (cf. Brown 2006). In effect, public deliberations on amplifying the azan daily disciplined citizens to practice tolerance, but because opponents of the daily azan were not given an *unequal* opportunity to grant permission for the azan to the mosque, the deliberations for them quickly led to feelings of disempowerment. Therefore, rather than strictly separating rights from tolerance, what is still relevant today is Locke's ambiguous formulation of "the right to tolerance" (in the *Third Letter for Toleration*, cited in Forst 2013: 231). Tolerance is in this view more than simply a public discourse or a virtue to be practiced by people on their own accord; it is also a right that can be actively promoted by the state.

Not unlike the admirable ideal of the Golden Rule, intertwining equal rights and tolerance cannot offer a guaranteed solution for overcoming intolerance. At best, it can only legitimize a trend toward the acceptance of a religious sound in society. Indeed, whether the opportunity to broadcast the Muslim call to prayer without censure, not only in the Netherlands but also in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Sweden, will culturally "integrate" the azan into the soundscape of the Global West remains to be seen. Rather than demanding that citizens listen attentively to the azan in the spectacular setting of a historic Cathedral, thus setting the azan apart from everyday life, it requires a normalized presence to become accepted within the context of Dutch urban life. Instead of being heard, it would also need to become inaudible as part of the background sounds of the Netherlands (cf. Weiner 2014: 206).

Reflections on religious sound and tolerance as a *casus belli* equally point toward the importance of hearing loss, instead of active attention. From those places in the world today, such as Nigeria, where conflicts over religious sounds have led to fatal violence, we can perhaps learn in humility that one does not require religious agreement or unity to be able to tolerate each other's sounds. In such situations, "techniques of inattention" (Larkin 2014) can be vital for groups to live with each other at peace with religious difference. These techniques are relevant because they combine objections to religious sounds with other ideas that require the simultaneous acceptance of the same sounds. In doing so, a delicate balance can be maintained in tension, which is by its nature difficult to practice. Comportments so excellent are bound to be rare. Not all citizens are always capable or willing to accept the *azan* despite their objections, for peace, to say nothing of higher-level reasons of justice or a philosopher's sense of fairness. They can nevertheless learn fairness in practice by cultivating the modest virtue of minding one's own business, as much as they can, when confronted with an *azan* that agitates them.⁷ While this kind of tolerance fails in fully overcoming the "toxicity" of practices such as calling to prayer, it can at least have an immunizing effect that ameliorates tensions. Learning this virtue of inattention, an inversion of the pious virtue of Islamic listening (cf. Hirschkind 2006), is a process that involves both public deliberation and the moderate disciplining of citizens' unreasonable emotions.

Figure 13 Breitman-Breitman Architecture. The Western Mosque, Amsterdam. Photograph by the author, Spring 2016.

Figure 14 First Friday prayer at the Western Mosque, Amsterdam. April 1, 2016. Photograph by Yusuf Burlage.

No doubt, strong sentiments about amplifying Islam will be stirred again in the near future in the Netherlands. The recently built Western Mosque, finally open after two decades of controversies (Figures 13 and 14), has not yet decided to broadcast the call from its minaret alongside an Amsterdam canal. Former District Mayor Henk van Waveren (Labor Party) thinks a weekly *azan* on Friday would be an “excellent” idea, but that “it should stay at that”:

What I have said as District Mayor is that if a church can sound its bells, then a mosque must also be able to make itself heard in its own way. But as the Western Church does not ring bells for each moment of the day, a mosque also does not need to call to prayer all day long.⁸

It is true that the Western Church does not ring bells all day long for religious purposes, but anyone living in the neighborhood also knows that it chimes every fifteen minutes, twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week. Besides its sacred and secular clock functions, the bells are also used on occasions of national importance. In short, the sound of the Western Church determines and is very much part of the ambience and character of the capital’s city center. The Fatih Mosque, only a few hundred meters away (Figure 15), has stood silent for over thirty years. In order to arrive at a comparative judgment that the church bells do not ring all the time, one needs to take their aural presence for granted, but the nearby mosque’s silence and minimal visibility as such also needs to

Figure 15 The Fatih Mosque and the Western Church, Amsterdam. Photograph by the author, Winter 2015.

escape notice. From this majority perspective, an amplified azan stands out, unlike the background ambience created by the bells of the Western Church. Thus, if it is really true that religious soundscapes in the Netherlands are changing, as this book suggests, it also remains evident that the azan is widely regarded as remarkable, if not out of place.