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Introduction

Amplifying Islam

Farouq Alzouman took a deep breath and recited the *azan*, the Islamic call to prayer, for the first time in history, on top of the world.¹ The Saudi hero conquered Mount Everest in 2008. Though not the first Muslim to scale the summit, a privilege earned by the Turk Nasuh Mahruki in 1995, the pious Alzouman was the first to carry a Qur'an with him. His courageous romanticism and Islamic pride left young Muslims across the world gaping in awe. Alzouman subsequently traveled to various countries to tell his story and give self-realization pep talks with an Islamic flavor. On one of these journeys, he ended up in a former Protestant church in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. I was there to listen to him in the new Islamic center, and to observe his interaction with the audience. The room was packed. Sitting on the benches of the former church were young Muslims, women to the left and men to the right, of Moroccan, Turkish, Somalian, and Afghan descent. There were also a few Iranians, several Dutch converts, and others. A majority of them were either born or raised in the Netherlands, and all of them were burning with a passion to practice Islam in a different way than their parents' generation—less bound by racial and ethnic categories; brothers and sisters in a predominantly non-Muslim land. They conversed in Dutch and often inserted the exclamations *inshallah* (God willing) and *alhamdulillah* (praise to God), crafting a new Dutch-Muslim piety. Despite being a Persian speaker and accustomed to these phrases, and aware that many of these youngsters' parents also used these expressions in the Netherlands, I felt as if they were overdoing it, being “more Catholic than the Pope.” From my perspective as a “skeptic” and “disbeliever” of monotheism, I thought they undoubtedly romanticized their religion, that they could not hear the silence of God, the proper perception after the *Religionskritik* of the Enlightenment, and were too vulnerable to kitsch. What I identified as their “Islamic enthusiasm”—failing consistently in suppressing my own opinions—ensured that, in their view, Islam would under all circumstances present answers to life's difficulties. Echoing within me were memories of the fateful hubris of my parents' generation, many of whom supported the Iranian

Islamic Revolution that in turn strengthened my generation's spiritual enmity and defiance. An upbringing in Amsterdam, including time spent at a high school named after Spinoza and with teachers who made sport of religion by poking fun at its absurdities, especially Christianity, reinforced these feelings of repulsion for monotheism. While university learning nuanced this negative relation toward religion, it also reinforced a skeptical attitude toward the very notion of transcendence or the divine. Clearly, if "cultural anthropologist" was going to be my identity, I was a very biased one.

Listening to Alzouman, however, I also had a change of heart. Perhaps because, just like everybody else, I had come from elsewhere—from a Muslim country—and was sometimes perceived as different. Although intellectually privileged because my mother was a cultural anthropologist, just like many of the attendees I too had grown up in mixed and migrant neighborhoods and knew something of how it feels to be the "other." This common background helped me to appreciate Alzouman when he energetically said to his audience: "I am so proud of all of you." This was not a sentiment I had heard often and it stood in sharp contrast to the usual disdain for Dutch-Muslim youth. It certainly struck a chord in me, and I could not help feeling compassion—a skeptic would say pity—for his listeners. Alzouman was around thirty years old and spoke with a flawless American English accent. He appeared modern, educated, handsome, strong, and wealthy. And he was a proud Muslim from Saudi Arabia, a country hated by the anti-Islam populist politician Geert Wilders, who had dominated public discourse in the Netherlands a great deal during this Dutch audience's life span. Speaking to the young Muslims in a way that their old-fashioned parents could not hope to fathom, Alzouman was a shining example of what a successful Muslim could be in a globalizing, contemporary world. He was proud of them, he said, because he knew that it was not always easy being Muslim in a non-Muslim land. In his eyes, they were not the pitiful children of migrants lost between worlds, walking the earth in confusion like headless chickens. They were pioneers of Islam who would create a contemporary story of Islam as a source of strength and honor, demanding universal respect through deeds rather than by begging for recognition. Being raised in an era of intense criticism, if not outright anti-Muslim racism, many of these youngsters had always been mere "allochthons"—within, but never truly part of, the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Misunderstood, unaccepted, and above all, too often sorely missing the encouragement, passion, and confidence that Alzouman convincingly displayed. He used his story, of chanting the Muslim call to prayer on the peak of Mount Everest "to call out Allah's name from the highest point on Earth and to pray

where no other human had prayed before,” as a metaphor for being someone in the world, someone courageous, successful, powerful.² This was a vision of Islam, and of what a believer could be and accomplish, that was very, very different from the everyday social reluctance to love and accept Dutch Muslims as equals. For a moment, the azan symbolized spiritual empowerment, not by going back to an era in which it was a victory cry, but through its connection to what Immanuel Kant defined as “the sublime.”³

The indispensability of forms

Alzouman’s performance on top of Mount Everest prompts a question that is of central importance to this book on amplified Islamic calls to prayer in the Netherlands. Did it make sense that this wanderer sang the azan out loud, even though he was not with a group of believers ready to perform the *salat*, the Islamic ritual prayer? And what if he had been all alone? Why should his inner faith manifest itself in sound in a place where the air is pure and undisturbed by the clamor of mankind? In the Netherlands, such a question betrays or harks back to a rigid Protestant style of thinking in which religious content is associated with the mind, conceived as a sealed inner space of cognition and associated with the social concept of the private, while religious form is separated and associated with being outside the mind and located in a social public. In such a spirit we could argue, as Kant did, that the essence of religion lies within the “invisible church” of the heart.⁴ Such an interpretation would be in line with Islam, since God is repeatedly described in the Qur’an as the Knower of Human Hearts: “And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein” (Qur’an 50:16).⁵ This is comparable with Kant’s *Herzenskündiger*, or one who knows the heart,⁶ whom we cannot deceive by outward activities and appearances. What is the point of expressing piety through external means, Kant demanded, when all we truly need is the inner moral law, that is, the essence of religion? What are practices such as calling others to prayer and prostrating oneself to worship other than wishful thinking? “Even prayer,” the great Enlightenment philosopher wrote, “is no more than a wish, inwardly uttered in the presence of a Searcher of the Heart.”⁷ From his pietist perspective, and with a conception of religion that resonates well with Protestant-influenced sentiments in the Netherlands, religion must limit itself to the limits of reason alone. The mediation of religion through forms—worshiping in a special building, chanting, praying, sacrificing, healing, dancing, and so

forth, all the activities that anthropologists of religion find worth studying—become secondary at best and meaningless at worst. Although such a logic is clearly inspired by a Protestant history, it goes far beyond Protestantism, rejecting all claims to supernatural hearing, dividing immanence and transcendence as sharply as possible. In other words, the invisible “church of the heart” is also an inaudible one. A man who claims to speak to a transcendent deity or who claims that it speaks to him has not studied the proper limits of reason and, in some cases, as when a father believes that he must sacrifice his innocent son, should be considered insane. In this line of Enlightenment thinking, a man chanting the call to prayer on a dangerous mountain may well also be a madman. A cultural anthropology of religious experience, from this perspective, adds nothing to the knowledge of true religion. One does not need to seek out faraway peoples, nor climb great heights, to study religion. The result of such investigations, wrote Kant, “is one which, even without traveling to the mountains, everyone could have met with among his fellow citizens—indeed, yet closer to home, in his own heart.”⁸ But this was not true for those such as the mountain climber Alzouman or, even better, the Malaysian astronaut Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor, who heard the call to prayer in outer space:

Everyone will experience a miracle in space. I heard a “call to prayer” in space. I actually heard the “call to prayer” in the Space Station. Other astronauts had no idea . . . but I physically heard the call. . . . [The call is not surprising] in space as you feel the presence and strength of God in every second. . . . I felt very close to God while in space.⁹

Shukor, who heard where there can be no sound, and Alzouman, who recited aloud where no one could hear, wondered like Kant about “the starry heavens above” and “the moral law within,” but not quite in the same way.¹⁰

Even after the Enlightenment critique of religion, which unmasked religious voices as illusory (Schmidt 2000), hearing has remained fundamental to religious experiences in modernity. This *indispensability of forms*, propagated by anthropologist of religion Birgit Meyer (2012: 11), was anticipated in Kant’s *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, where he suggested that the ideal Enlightened religion, a pure universal Christianity, requires “a total abandonment of the Judaism in which it originated” (Kant 2001: 156). He viewed the latter as too cultic, too concerned with external, public attachments such as rituals, specific clothing, and arbitrary rules. But despite his radical intent and critical analysis, Kant came to the conclusion that a visible church building, a material manifestation of religion, a mediation through forms, cannot be avoided: “A church

which is the union in a moral community of many human beings of equally many dispositions, needs a *public* form of obligation, some ecclesiastical form that depends on experiential conditions and is intrinsically contingent and manifold” (Kant 2001: 138, 6:105). For believers all over the world, including Muslims, this is as plain as day. A religion “of pure religious faith” (Kant 2001: 138, 6:105) can in the end resemble historical Islam only remotely, regardless of believers’ claims. Believers are engaged with both form and content, ritual and belief, the body *and* the mind, which are furthermore embedded in a community. Rather than adhering to Enlightenment iconoclasm, focusing on revealing the absurdities, insincerities, and illusions of religion, scholars of religion from various disciplines have recently renewed the interest in the senses and the materiality of religions, in an effort to better understand what is at stake for believers.¹¹ The point of this appreciation for religious aesthetics is “to study religion through the vector of practices, i.e. concrete acts that involve people, their bodies, things, pictures, texts, and other media through which religion becomes tangibly present” (Meyer 2012: 7) and to move “away from a mentalist understanding that locates experience in a silent interior toward one that places it in a body practically engaged with the world” (Hirschkind 2006: 29).¹²

The very notion of content as idea and form as merely a configuration of sensuous material which presents that essential idea, a view espoused most literally by Hegel, must be rejected.¹³ But neither should form, as an antithesis to the Hegelian view, be promoted to the essence of religion. The ideal of a private, inner conviction should not, therefore, be replaced by a conception of a Muslim other as obsessed with ritual, praxis, and form. It would be a perverted, orientalist reversal to juxtapose Protestants, supposedly characterized by a focus on beliefs, that is, the mind,¹⁴ with Muslims (or before them, Jews) stereotyped by a focus on rituals, that is, the body. The same can be said of equating a particular sensory dimension with a particular religious tradition. Relativist claims that the Western tradition has traditionally been focused on the rationalist eye, whereas non-Westerners have been more bound by the emotional and primitive ear, also need to be rejected. Protestants have been captivated by the ear, Muslims by the eye, and the other way around. We must always resist the simplistic reduction and association of a particular religious tradition with only one of the human senses, which is not only historically false but also creates a divided world of “us” and “them.” We should instead aim for a multisensory interpretation. It is worth repeating that the indispensability of form entails that we take religious aesthetics seriously without excluding private, inner convictions or abstract theological principles. Muslims have, as a matter of fact, separated religious form from content, most

famously in works by jurists, philosophers, and poets that predate the European Reformation.¹⁵ To this day, it is well known among believers across the globe, and frequently asserted, that the Qur'an warns against insincerity, that is, the reproduction of religious form without cultivation of the proper religious mental contents: "Indeed, the hypocrites [think to] deceive Allah, but He is deceiving them. And when they stand for prayer, they stand lazily, showing [themselves to] the people and not remembering Allah except a little" (Qur'an 4:142). And to be absolutely clear: "Woe to those who pray [but] who are heedless of their prayer" (Qur'an 107:4–5). Such verses remind us of Kant's Enlightenment perspective, in which form or enforced obedience to ritual and law is regarded as insufficient to establish "a Kingdom of God on earth."¹⁶ Likewise, if the ideal community of Muslim believers, the imagined *ummah*, is to be an ethical Islamic community, it cannot abandon ritual nor reduce its religion to mandatory praxis alone. As an anthropologist, I have to tread carefully here, because it is not my intention to define what Islam is *really* like. I only want to argue that, to different degrees, believers can and do distinguish religious content from ritual form, while the same or other believers may at other times refuse or simply be unable to do so. In this book, we encounter Muslims who say that they can separate the audible call to prayer from its spiritual meaning. They insist that their wish to amplify the *azan*, to consider this practice as of the highest importance, is not caused by an inability to separate religious form and content.

In any case, a strong and traditional consensus does exist among Muslims all over the world that at least some ritual practices are in fact essential. Calling to prayer using the human voice is one of these very important, ordinarily considered indispensable, practices. We read in a *hadith*¹⁷ of Bukhari, widely considered to be one of the most reliable religious sources on the deeds and sayings of the Prophet, that even when one is without other believers, such as in a desert or, we may add, on top of a mountain, the call should be made out loud:

Narrated Abdur-Rahman: Abu Sa'id al-Khudri told my father, "I see you liking sheep and the wilderness. So, whenever you are with your sheep or in the wilderness and you want to pronounce *azan* for the prayer raise your voice in doing so, for whoever hears the *azan*, whether a human being, a jinn [spirit/daemon] or any other creature, will be a witness for you on the Day of Resurrection." Abu Sa'id added, "I heard it [this narration] from Allah's Apostle." (translation by Muhsin Khan, Nr. 583)

The fundamental importance of the ear, hearing the Islamic call to prayer even when alone, is not surprising since it is a practice connected to the first two

pillars (out of five) of Islam. The verses of the call contain the primary principle and first pillar of Islam, the *shahada* or bearing witness that there is no deity except God and that Muhammad is his Prophet. Because it is a call to prayer, or *salat*, it is also connected to the second pillar, namely the obligation to perform a ritual prayer five times a day. In addition, the very act of calling to prayer dates to the time of the Prophet Muhammad himself and is considered mandatory inside a mosque when Muslims gather to pray.¹⁸ It is so essential that Muslims in countries as different as Morocco, Iran, and Indonesia pronounce the *azan* in a newborn baby's right ear. In Pakistan, the *azan* is even called into the right ear of foals that are brought up to parade in the Shi'ite 'Ashura processions as *Zoljaneh*, the horse of Imam Hussein (Frembgen 2012: 181). And if possible, a believer's dying words should be the last verse of the call to prayer: *la ilah illa Allah*, the proclamation that there is no deity but God.

Amplifying Islam

If the outward call to prayer is considered meaningful in solitude, its reach to a public outside, a community of believers, is even more highly recommended, indispensable, and widely practiced in Muslim-majority countries across the world. But whereas calling and praying on Mount Everest is the soul's summit of purity, and in that sense uncomplicated, things are quite different in our human world below, in the well-organized flat land of the Netherlands. Famous for turning sea into land, no less than a quarter of which is protected by dunes and dikes, the country is densely populated. Unlike France, the Netherlands is known, not for grand cathedrals and revolutionary fervor, but rather for iconoclasm, sober churches, and schisms. It was a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century bastion of religious toleration, but in the minimalist sense of allowing religious others to coexist and worship in clandestine fashion. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Catholics slowly acquired freedoms and were granted permission to construct churches and organize a public presence, but their emancipation coincided with social segregation in so-called pillars. This book shows that these historical struggles over public worship have shaped, both culturally as well as constitutionally, ways of dealing with both visible and audible manifestations of Islam in the present. Despite the contemporary religious diversity of the Netherlands, today on a par with the most secularized nations of the world, can Muslims call to prayer out loud here? In the impure, messy, reality on the ground, the call does not lend itself to neat categorization

qua form and content, or orthopraxy and orthodoxy. And, as a sound that travels inside and outside the Muslim house of worship, the *masjid* or mosque, but also neighboring homes, nor can it always be captured by a sharp distinction between private and public. Heard only now and then, if at all, by most Dutch citizens, the *azan* is as fleeting as it is thought provoking because it is not merely the call to prayer which is amplified but, in a way, Islam itself, questioning the limits of religious toleration and civic decency in the Netherlands. The title of this book, *Amplifying Islam in the European Soundscape*, therefore refers to the politics of Islamic soundscapes in a globalized Western world, to the *Islam of the Global West*.¹⁹ This title should not mislead readers, however, to believe that the pronouncement of the Islamic call to prayer in Europe is a totally new or recent phenomenon, nor are the politics of regulating the sounds of those perceived as religious others. Whether or not the *azan* is “European” is in fact as old as, if not older than, the idea of Europe itself.

In 1311, for example, Pope Clement V decreed that Islamic calls to prayer, which could be heard in parts of contemporary Spain and Italy, should be generally prohibited in “Christian lands”:

It is an insult to the holy name and a disgrace to the Christian faith that in certain parts of the world subject to Christian princes . . . Saracens [i.e. Muslims] meet to adore the infidel Mahomet, loudly invoke and extol his name each day at certain hours from a high place, in the hearing of both Christians and Saracens, and there make public declarations in his honor. . . . These practices cannot be tolerated any further without displeasing the divine majesty. We therefore . . . strictly forbid such practices henceforth in Christian lands. (cited in Constable 2010: 74)

Besides complaints about the symbolic, territorial meanings associated with religious sounds, the late medieval period also reveals other parallels with the contemporary situation such as the thought that church bells can be compared to Islamic calls to prayer (Ibid.: 91). Today, these ideas return in the context of the globalization, diversification, and also standardization of European religious diversity. This context was shaped especially in the second half of the twentieth century, after the destruction of Dutch Judaism during the Second World War, when the Netherlands witnessed the arrival of postcolonial citizens from Suriname and Indonesia, unprecedented secularization, and the arrival of migrant laborers, refugees, and others, bringing together a great variety of religious experiences and practices. The desire to understand these continuing transformations has brought scholars of religion and globalization together.²⁰

Religious globalization produces not only new landscapes but also soundscapes—a term coined by composer Raymond Murray Schafer (1977)—in places that are not intuitively associated with those sounds. Anthropologists have studied such contexts, opening up the “ethnographic ear” (Clifford 1986: 12) for the politics of hearing, including religious soundscapes.²¹ Qualitative anthropological research is particularly well suited to interpreting sounds that acquire meanings through social practices. This is so because, with a little exaggeration, we could say that there are no noises at all, only interpreted sounds. The point here is not to “unmask” experiences of hearing as false or superficial, but to emphasize how the meanings of sounds are powerfully shaped by nonacoustic, social, and political factors. This is especially the case with amplifying Islam, given the loaded meanings attached to public forms of Islamic aesthetics that are contested all across the Global West. “The other offends the senses,” writes Leigh Eric Schmidt (2000: 67). That sums up, in a nutshell, what the issue of the *azan* in the Netherlands is all about: a certain religious group is perceived as “other” and the sounds that this group makes are experienced as offensive by the (diverse) non-Muslim majority, hence the disputes over “noise pollution.” On the other side, demanding the right to amplification and listening to the *azan* brings Muslims together. Other ethnographic accounts of the politics of the technologized *azan* usually dealing with loudspeakers, radio, and television also show that the *azan* is part of home and community-making strategies for local Muslims, whether in Singapore or London.²² In the Netherlands too, the politics of amplifying Islam is a “politics of home” (Duyvendak 2011) and, as the *azan* is transformed from a “foreign” traditional practice into a contentious element in Dutch anxieties over national and cultural identities, part of the “perils of belonging” (Geschiere 2009).

In the Netherlands, loudspeakers for the *azan* have been in use since the 1980s, for example in The Hague,²³ but demands to amplify the call have increased since the 1990s and through the 2000s and the number of purpose-built mosques has risen in the same period. Together, Muslims in the Netherlands have around 450 mosques, but of these some 300 are housed in makeshift (as distinct from purpose-built) locations such as former schools (FORUM Verkenning 2012: 12). Half of all the mosques are run by Turkish Muslim organizations, almost 40 percent by Moroccans, and the remaining 10 percent have a Surinamese migration background. Less than 1 percent of Dutch mosques are owned or run by a different group.²⁴ It has been estimated that less than 10 percent of all Dutch mosques amplify the call to prayer, usually once a week on Friday afternoons but sometimes once or twice daily. Many mosques and Muslims report that if it

could be done without a fuss, they would like to amplify the call, but just not at all costs.²⁵ By the time this book was finished, the azan could be heard in many small towns across the country, such as Middelburg, Deventer, and Zutphen, but also major cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague.

While this research is mainly focused on the Dutch case, a transnational trend is discernible across North America and Western Europe where Muslim communities have begun to use loudspeakers for the azan more often. The call is amplified in Brooklyn²⁶ and is being considered in Ottawa.²⁷ In 2003, the call could be heard in Granada for the first time in half a millennium.²⁸ Loudspeakers were utilized for the first time in Stockholm as recently as 2013.²⁹ Though I have not heard of azan amplification in France, where praying in the street has been officially banned since 2011, the television channel La Locale broadcast the azan for the holy month of Ramadan in 2013.³⁰ So did the much more popular British Channel 4, which ran a specially produced azan video for the same occasion.³¹ To protest anti-Muslim sentiments, Swiss artist Johannes Gees came up with a provocative “sound bomb” performance entitled *Salat* (prayer) in 2007, broadcasting the azan through loudspeakers and megaphones from churches in Bern and Zurich but also in the Alpstein, a popular, romanticized part of the Swiss Alps.³² The toxic politics of xenophobia prevailed, however, and after a controversial referendum Switzerland went so far as to ban minaret construction in 2009. A year later, Dutch artist Jonas Staal had a megaphone installed on the roof of the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, which called for prayer five times a day for a period of three months, not to propagate the azan but to question anti-Muslim sentiments across the West.³³ Resistance to the azan by non-Muslim residents is indeed a general phenomenon. In her introduction to *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, Barbara Metcalf already noted the absence of Islamic sounds (1996: 8). For example, the Queens Muslim Center in New York City received permission to construct minarets and domes but not to amplify the call to prayer, “out of deference to the secular authorities” (Slyomovics in Metcalf 1996: 210).

I hasten to add that complaining about noisy Islam is not an exclusively Western phenomenon. That is another reason why we must reconceptualize debates over the azan in Europe and North America as part of a Global West. In India, for example, the call to prayer has been criticized for fostering “communal tension.”³⁴ In Egypt, “Articles in secularly oriented newspapers routinely complain about the ‘assault on the ears’ produced by mosque loudspeakers and cassette recorders, perceived as the violent imposition of religious discourse onto the nonreligious space of public life” (Hirschkind 2006: 125). In Iran, reports of emptying mosques are accompanied by the observation that the call to prayer is heard less often

“because people complain about the noise.”³⁵ In Morocco, a similar battle for the meaning of Islamic soundscapes is taking place, where debates over loudspeakers are not merely about noise but about ideas concerning the future public presence of religion in the country. For example, Olivier Roy, the well-known scholar of Islam, has said that recent uproar over the Moroccan *azan* is tied to a web of complex social relations including class inequality, divisions between liberals and conservatives, and transnational Islamic movements.³⁶ In a way that recalls the Dutch fear of an encroaching public Islam, but within an evidently wholly different nexus of power relations, there have been calls in Morocco to ban the amplified *azan* “on the grounds that they disturb residents in the neighboring areas not only because of the sound, but also owing to the ideas they spread.” Even though loudspeakers for the *azan* have become much louder than in the past, and in that sense represent a rather recent practice, critics of “modernist” *azan* opponents respond that silencing the *azan* is equal to “strip[ping] Morocco of its Islamic identity.”³⁷

Whereas the amplified *azan* dominates Istanbul via the city’s three thousand mosques, it is just as consistently present—but much softer—in Isfahan. To Muslim ears, the reciting style of a muezzin³⁸ in Fez differs in tone and feeling from one in Tunis. And while Cairo is famous for a cacophony of competing calls to prayer, in Kuala Lumpur a single *azan* covers the shopping district at the iconic Petronas Twin Towers. Everywhere in Muslim skyscraper cities, loudspeakers have allowed mosques to catch up or even compete with the everyday noisiness of urban life. Some religious scholars have historically disputed amplifying the call by loudspeakers as an inauthentic innovation, for example in Pakistan (Khan 2011), but in a noisy postindustrial world it has become common Islamic practice. Less noisy solutions are, however, widely used in all Muslim-majority countries. Calls to prayer can be accessed on television, radio, private *azan* clocks, and—how could it be otherwise—handy applications on smartphones connected to the internet. Complaints about loudspeakers, which were introduced all over Muslim-majority countries in the twentieth century, are most often about the early morning call in countries as diverse as Morocco, Turkey, and Indonesia. In the West, however, the *azan* is—as far as I know—never amplified in the morning or very late in the evening.

Religion and equal rights to the city

As in other parts of the world, stories about complaints of noise pollution alone give a misleading impression of how Western Muslims were—and still

are—transforming their homelands, and are assisted by their governments in that process. As with resistance to Islamic aesthetics, accommodation is a transnational phenomenon. We read in Metcalf's 1996 volume that the East London Mosque was permitted to broadcast calls to prayer, which sparked "public debate about 'noise pollution' when local non-Muslim residents began to protest" (Eade in Metcalf 1996: 223). More recently, not only in Boston, but also in small towns such as Hamtramck (near Detroit), Muslims have successfully negotiated for the right to broadcast the *azan* (Perkins 2010 and 2015; Weiner 2014), while Duke University's decision to reverse its standpoint to allow the call from a campus chapel tower sparked a heated controversy.³⁹ In the Netherlands, mosques made national headlines in 2013 when their right to amplify the *azan* on a daily basis was (re)affirmed by local authorities after non-Muslims complained.

There is no doubt that the positive accommodation of Muslim aesthetics is not without difficulties and this book shows many instances of bitterness and misunderstanding. This should not surprise us, since feelings of home are determined by strong and competing emotions such as nostalgia—elder Muslims of Turkish origin, for example, feel nostalgic for the *azan* in their country of birth, whereas elder non-Muslim Dutch residents may feel nostalgic for their small town as it was in the not yet so pervasively global past. In this context, xenophobic politicians such as Geert Wilders mobilize the idea of a clash of so-called "Muslim" and "Judeo-Christian" civilizations against the public presence of Islam in the Netherlands. Criticizing this ideological opposition is not to say that European Muslim and Christian rule, for example in medieval Spain, never involved silencing each other's religious practices (Constable 2010). But if one were to claim that, today, Islam cannot "fit" in "Christian Europe," or that "the West" singularly oppresses "Muslims," viewing these as incommensurable entities, it would grossly ignore historical and present complexities and revive both xenophobic and xenophile versions of Samuel Huntington's widely criticized clash of civilizations thesis.

Instead of a simple clash, the story of the *azan* in the Netherlands is about the resistance to public expressions of Islam and hesitance in accepting the wishes of Muslim citizens, but, so far, also a positive account of slow, pragmatic accommodation. Rather than a process toward banning these sounds, as in late medieval Spain (this too did not occur overnight) the Dutch norm today is an increase in amplification of the *azan*. In this context, where Muslims have often faced the critical question of why they insist on amplifying the *azan* and why they cannot simply keep their religion to themselves, the *azan* has acquired

an additional meaning alongside its traditional religious one, as a symbol and mediator of the status of Muslims as equal citizens. Like other contested practices, such as male circumcision and the right to ritual slaughter, the azan has sometimes come to stand for equal rights. As will become clear in this book, Dutch Muslims successfully demand azan amplification based on strict legal notions of equality rather than on subtler ideas about accommodating otherness, which are poorly developed in the Netherlands in comparison with the United States.

In the Netherlands, as in the United States, the right to broadcast the azan is constitutionally protected. But from a secular cultural perspective informed by Dutch-Protestant and Catholic memories, the azan can be experienced as agitating. It recalls relatively recent stories like those of Maria, a senior citizen from the picturesque village of Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, who told me about Catholic priests knocking on her door to ask if and when the family would welcome a new child. "Two or three children were not enough! And they did their best to interfere with our lives!" she often exclaimed with great indignation. Although for years Maria had no or barely any contact with Dutch Muslims, she imagined that they too could interfere with her family's life. "Religion should stay behind the door of one's home" was a motto that she defended vigorously and in a tone that implied this was age-old wisdom. But in fact such particular conceptions of the proper place of religion have always been under pressure in the history of the Dutch Republic (1588–1795) and the Kingdom of the Netherlands (since 1815). The presence of others, especially of Muslims, has slowly shifted such thinking on religious manifestations, not only about the present but also to reinterpret the past. In an era of both rapid secularization as well as the flourishing of migrant churches and mosques, purpose-built Hindu *mandirs*, and Buddhist temples, the many voices that come together enable a rethinking of secularism, usually referred to in the Netherlands as the "separation of church and state" (*scheiding van kerk en staat*).

Over the years, I myself have witnessed a shift toward questioning the assumed limits of secularism and public religion among ordinary citizens, but also among secular intellectuals who have become more sensitive to religious citizens' rights to public expression. An instance that comes to mind is a meeting in 2006 in a house near the Oudemanhuispoort, part of the University of Amsterdam's campus and a bastion of its secular left intelligentsia. A host of Dutch academics and intellectuals had gathered to discuss a book in a private, homely atmosphere. Fouad Laroui was presenting his book *De l'islamisme: Une réfutation personnelle du totalitarisme religieux*, which had been translated into Dutch (2006). One of

Laroui's key arguments was that a religion that goes public or infringes on the rights of others to be left alone is dangerous and should be avoided. His tone and critique of public religion was nicely summed up in a review article in *Vrij Nederland*, an influential Dutch magazine:

Against everybody who calls himself Muslim, or Catholic, or believer, I say: please keep it to yourself and the world will become a better place. My whole life I have never answered personal questions about what I believe or don't believe. Twenty years before I read Wittgenstein, I already knew that you don't have to, shouldn't or can [even if you wanted to; *niet moet, mag of kán*] talk about that.⁴⁰ I ask everyone: please, I don't want to know anything about your religion, it does not concern us, do not shout [your beliefs] from the rooftops. That is a personal matter and that is how the Netherlands became the Netherlands. I don't care if people pray five times a day. I wish for them all the freedom of the world. But if one demands of others to do things just as they, then it has to be clear that Islamists do not have that right. That has nothing to do any more with faith, but with decency among citizens.⁴¹ [my translation]

The ideal that religion should be private and stay within the home, as Laroui defended, and that a religion that is concerned with form and ritual is backward, remains one of the dominant and recurring responses to religious others. On the other hand, Laroui's French-sounding ideas were received critically by several of his likeminded secular listeners, including myself. For some decades now, old-fashioned critiques of and sentiments surrounding highly ritualized religion, which historically developed in Europe as a reaction to the pompousness of the Catholic Church, have been changing. Today, the times in which secular intellectuals could be *a priori* expected to wish religions away from the streets and the public sphere have passed. Laroui asked religious citizens to "leave religion behind the home door," but others present, me included, objected that this was simply not possible. It was a secularist wish, not an empirical possibility. The amplified call to prayer in the Netherlands is *de facto* actually all about claiming public space by shouting one's beliefs from the rooftops.⁴² The average Dutch-Muslim citizen rarely seeks an essence of religion in a way, if at all, that sharply excludes such traditions of public worship. To defend his position, Laroui had referred, for example, to Spinoza's normative concept of religion as essentially about universal ethics, an idea that he shared on a highly abstracted level with thinkers as different as Immanuel Kant and Mahatma Gandhi.⁴³ But such conceptions of religion are insensitive to the variety of ways in which people actually practice and experience their religion. Such great ideals of political

philosophy must reckon with empirical analysis, in this case at the very least with the insights of historians, legal scholars, and anthropologists on the dynamics of contemporary religiosity. For a Muslim who may want to amplify the call to prayer or a Christian who wishes to organize a procession in the streets, keeping religion behind closed doors is a form of suppression, whereas for nonreligious or nonpracticing individuals such as myself and Laroui, being asked on the street why I was eating or being called on the telephone to ask whether he was fasting during Ramadan was a breach, albeit a mild one, of the right to be left alone, a cornerstone of liberal ethics. These boundaries, then, needed to be critically reexamined in a way that did justice to both sides. Banning religions from the city, I and others thought, could not be a solution to this predicament.

After key publications such as Jose Casanova's *Public Religions in the Modern World*, in which he argued that the modern process of secularization did not have to contradict the de-privatization of religion in contemporary contexts (Casanova 1994, 2009),⁴⁴ debates on expanding space for religious discourse in the public sphere⁴⁵ have, since the 1990s, been accompanied by an academic concern for the study of public forms of religious organization and worship in urban settings. This shift is clearly traceable in the field of social and cultural geography, among others, and is part of a broader, and normative, conversation about rethinking religion and equal rights to the city.⁴⁶ By 2010, when I began research for this book, studying the spatial manifestations of Islam in the West had become increasingly relevant. Minarets had just been banned in Switzerland's highly controversial referendum (Stüssi 2008; Mayer 2011), in New York City the so-called Ground Zero Mosque controversy sparked protest and debate (e.g., Nussbaum 2012), while in Rotterdam the Essalam Mosque opened after years of disagreement, erroneously hyped in Dutch media as the "biggest mosque of Europe" and epitomized by the successful leader of the Party for Freedom, Geert Wilders, as a "palace of hatred" (Tamimi Arab 2013a). As these anti-Muslim sentiments grew stronger, so did the steady academic interest in European mosque construction.⁴⁷

A review of the literature on mosque construction in the Netherlands shows that, especially from the 1990s onward, more and more purpose-built, and therefore visible, mosques have been constructed. This development has attracted the attention of art historians, who have increasingly included the mosques of Europe and North America in art historical narratives of Islamic architecture (e.g., Frishman and Khan 2002). But although mosques may be located "in" Europe, according to critiques such as Talal Asad's (2003) they are

not truly conceived as being “of” Europe: not truly accepted by wider society, controlled and unfairly regulated by government, and very often protested and discriminated against. Indeed, as mosques became “un-sheltered” and more visible, they also became widely unwanted in the West (Cesari 2005).

Simultaneously, however, with the benefit of hindsight, early accounts of the geography of the Islamic religion in the Netherlands (such as Doomernik 1991) now reveal a consistent accommodation process. Nico Landman’s book *Van mat tot minaret: De institutionalisering van de Islam in Nederland* (from prayer rug to minaret: the institutionalization of Islam in the Netherlands) contains the most important research done in the 1980s and early 1990s. “The time that Islamic guestworkers rolled out their prayer rugs in factory halls lies far behind us,” Landman wrote in his conclusion. And he added:

Slowly, the realization that most immigrants will stay permanently in The Netherlands has settled in. Their religious organizations as well are beyond their temporary phase. The minarets arising here and there in the townscape symbolize that Islam is becoming one of the established religions of the Netherlands. (Landman 1992: 348)

Metcalf’s 1996 volume showed, a few years later, that Landman’s observation was connected to a wider, inter- and transnational development. Much of the literature on mosque construction that was produced thereafter is normatively loaded, implicitly insisting on the right of Muslims to construct their mosques, and focuses on the difficulties worshippers faced. Criticizing and mapping the production of marginal Islamic spaces, particularly in relation to mosque construction in the West, has persisted as an academic concern (e.g., Schinkel 2009, Kuppinger 2010a and 2010b). In the spirit of Landman’s work, I have taken note of positive mosque construction developments as well (e.g., Tamimi Arab 2013b), and do so in this book with regard to the amplified azan.

The intellectual currents described above—empirically and normatively cautious and less dogmatically anticlerical than before—have coalesced in a veritable boom in studies of the complexity of what is often called political or constitutional secularism, that is, the manifold ways the state governs and regulates religion.⁴⁸ Following Bowen et al. (2014), in this book secularism is investigated from the perspective of actual practices of regulating religion on different levels such as media, law, and policy, and municipal interactions with locals. Although I aim to give an ethnographic account of what can be called the Dutch national model of secularism, the ways in which different countries handle religious diversity partly overlap, depending on the practices

under question, the sociological level that is analyzed or the (socio-)logic of a particular institution (schools, armies, and hospitals, to name some). That is why I inevitably build on and refer to secularism as it is practiced (or not) in other countries as well.

Overview

My analysis of “Amplifying Islam” is divided into four chapters followed by an epilogue on religious tolerance. The first two chapters cover contemporary religious pluralism and its history in the Netherlands. The primary concern in these chapters is first to show the importance and specificity of the material manifestation of Islam as sound, and then to embed the call to prayer in a broader history of Dutch religious pluralism.

Chapter 1, “‘A Minaret of Light’: Transducing the Azan?,” deals with the question of why the azan has to be amplified with loudspeakers and emphasizes the particular importance of hearing—rather than seeing—in the search for alternatives that are less disturbing or more acceptable for those who are not used to a Muslim call or would not like to get used to it.⁴⁹ The remarkable architectural proposals to use light signals instead of loudspeakers are discussed as a public alternative. The association of light with inaudible spirituality is investigated from the perspective of mosque aesthetics negotiations by describing these light-azan proposals and then analyzing the extent to which they have been actually adopted. I argue that aesthetic technologies of ordering physical spaces, in this case a transduction of sound into light, but also the use of glass in mosque architecture, can regulate the extent and the quality of Muslims’ presence in European cities. Whether the medium of light can faithfully convey the human voice, however, is bound with questions of religious authority.

Having introduced the question of the azan in the Netherlands and having begun discussing the aesthetics of religious pluralism, Chapter 2, “A History of Public Worship: From Procession Prohibition to Amplified Azan,” takes the reader deeper into the Netherlands’s religious past and shows how the azan is embedded in a longer history of religious pluralism. Taking two contested public rituals as case studies—the Catholic procession and the amplified Muslim call to prayer—I show that the historical trajectories of Dutch Catholics and Muslims became explicitly connected to one another in a constitutional change that signaled a shift from a Protestant hegemony to a more pluralist model of governance of religions. The 1980s Public Manifestations Act ended the

so-called Procession Prohibition of the nineteenth century, thus emancipating public Catholic practices, and simultaneously allowed the use of loudspeakers for the Muslim call to prayer and other forms of audible public worship. The chapter ends by documenting how mosques in various cities and towns in the Netherlands each began broadcasting the call to prayer for the first time.

The third and fourth chapters move to the main issue of this book, namely amplification of the azan with loudspeakers today. Chapter 3, "Conflicting Secularisms: Nativism and the Constitutional Protection of the Azan," describes the contemporary political spectrum of Dutch resistance against the use of loudspeakers for the azan, from the liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy to the orthodox Calvinist Reformed Political Party. Criticizing Talal Asad's influential conceptualization of "secularism," which I have found to be too expansive and unidirectional in terms of analyzing the power relation between the secular and the religious as well as insufficiently based on empirical evidence, the chapter shows that observable connections between constitutional secularism and governance of religious diversity on the one side, and a culturalist secularism that excludes Muslim rights to public worship on the other, are shown to be far from straightforward and in tension with one another. Rather than formulating a negative critique of "secularism," I attempt to show how the Netherlands deals with the particular question of amplifying the azan with the varieties of secularism and practices of governing religions in mind.

Chapter 4, "Regulating Nostalgias: Azan Negotiations in a Dutch Town," departs from the domains of law and policy and political parties and delves into the ethnography of a single case of local mosque negotiations for the azan. In 2012, the Turkish Center Mosque in the small city of Deventer in the eastern province of Overijssel expressed its wish for a daily azan. This resulted in a series of tense meetings and negotiations that lasted more than a year. The chapter provides data for understanding how an abstract concept such as "constitutional secularism," a context-specific mode of regulating religion, actually works in the field. In actual practice this term, and the more popular Dutch expression of the separation of church and state (which is absent in the Netherlands Constitution), was either never used or barely mentioned by respondents. I describe how the municipality, mosque, and protesting neighborhood residents interacted to finally reach a consensus. The chapter is not in the first instance concerned with political party labels of left and right, because that distinction can give us a simplified image of both Dutch opposition and practices of accommodating Islam. This chapter describes the desire for the azan as a kind of nostalgia as well as a demand for cultural recognition, while resistance to the azan, often

nativist in character, was equally accompanied by nostalgia for a lost home in situ. Opponents experienced the azan as noise pollution, as sound out of place. The azan is therefore analyzed as a case of “defilement” of native local space on the one hand, and as a homemaking strategy on the other.

Based on the findings gathered in this book, I suggest in the Epilogue that a sober, minimalist conception and practice of tolerance is necessary for a just handling of the future of religious pluralism. While during some unique events the azan has been amplified in churches to promote mutual respect and interfaith understanding, such strategies can only complement but not supersede what is found in everyday life. In the Netherlands, tolerance legitimized by strictly equal rights, granted by benign forms of secularism, is more decisive in the actual accommodation process of the azan than utopian conceptions of living in harmony with difference.