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## “Sacred Noise”: The Case of the *Ezan* in Ljubljana\*

»Duhovni hrup«: primer *ezana* v Ljubljani\*\*

Prejeto: 12. september 2016  
Sprejeto: 7. oktober 2016

Received: 12th September 2016  
Accepted: 7th October 2016

**Ključne besede:** religijski zvoki, *ezan*, zvonjenje, razmerja moči, muslimani, Ljubljana

**Keywords:** religious sounds, *ezan*, bell ringing, power relations, Muslims, Ljubljana

### IZVLEČEK

Prispevek obravnava stanje, v katerem anticipacija novega zvoka v javnem prostoru spodbuja politične, družbene in ideološke polemike. Prikaže kako je religijski zvok *ezana*, muslimanskega klica k molitvi, še preden se je vključil v zvočnost mesta Ljubljane, razburil javnost, na kakšen način so se vzpostavile politike moči v družbenih in verskih domenah ter kakšni diskurzi nasploh spremljajo zvočnost muslimanov v Sloveniji.

### ABSTRACT

This paper considers the situation in which the anticipation of a new sound in public space gives rise to political, social, and ideological debates. It demonstrates how the religious sound of *ezan* (the Muslim call to prayer) caused public discomfort even prior to becoming a part of Ljubljana's soundscape, how power politics affected society and its religious sphere, and what kind of discourses take place in regard to the sounds associated with the Muslims in Slovenia.

\* The article is partly the result of the postdoctoral research project *Acoustemology of Bell Ringing*, funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS) and supported by the international research project *City Sonic Ecologies: Urban Soundscapes of Bern, Ljubljana and Belgrade*, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) within its SCOPES programme.

\*\* Članek je nastal v okviru postdoktorskega raziskovalnega projekta *Acoustemology of Bell Ringing*, ki ga financira ARRS ter mednarodnega raziskovalnega projekta *City Sonic Ecology: Urban Soundscapes of Bern, Ljubljana and Belgrade*, ki ga financira Nacionalna znanstvena fundacija Švice (Swiss National Science Foundation, SNSF) znotraj programa SCOPES.

The past decade was marked by growing international interest in sound studies.<sup>1</sup> These studies explore how sounds construct time, place and space<sup>2</sup> and how specific acoustic environments reflect the historical, cultural, religious, social or political order of a particular space. A specific sound often interests researchers when it gains more attention from the community than other sounds. Some sounds (including anticipated sound) become the centre of a broader public debate, whereby a negative attitude towards sound is often encouraged and manipulated and, in connection with the context (for instance, political or religious), sound is presented as an annoying, foreign, threatening etc.

In recent decades there have been a great many public debates and research studies on public religious sounds and the way they cross the border between the religious and the secular and between public and private space. Questions have been raised of their social, political and ideological relations to various segments of society. One such religious sound that has also been part of a public debate is the Muslim call to prayer, or *ezan*.

This study focuses on one specific religious sound and its relation to a space and community: the sound of the Muslim call to prayer, or *ezan*,<sup>3</sup> and the city of Ljubljana and its inhabitants. However, since Ljubljana does not have a mosque or a minaret (as a place for public sound production), the subject of this research is not yet actually part of the city's soundscape; therefore, this research observes the interaction between the space/community and the sound as it is imagined. This is why the case study that forms part of this paper uses a discursive analytical approach to communication in online media texts and in online forums and blogs. The first part of the article presents already established knowledge, theories and concepts on the relations among religious sounds, place, space and community; the second focuses on the context in which the inhabitants evolved their relation to the imagined sound and other religious sounds. The tracking of public means of communication reveals many discourses that are re-

1 The foundations of sound studies were laid in the 1960s and '70s by the Canadian educator, musician and environmentalist Raymond Murray Schafer (see his project and book *The Tuning of the World*, New York: Knopf, 1977). Contemporary sound studies (including eco-musicology and acoustic ecology or acoustemology), especially those driven by musicologists, ethnomusicologists and anthropologists, are concerned with the interaction of sound, space, humans and animals, as well as the individual's experiences of sound. But the relation of music to religious sounds that function as sound signals (like bell ringing and *ezan*) is very much undefined in scholarly discourse, even more so in light of the fact that these sounds are nowadays created technologically. However, if we follow the concept of music ecology that "attempts to contextualize music as sound and relate musical sound-material to other sonic realities", this question is not of vital importance. Maria Anna Harley, "Notes on music ecology as a new research paradigm", published February 3, 2007. Accessed on April 11, 2016, [http://wfae.proscenia.net/library/articles/harly\\_paradigm.pdf](http://wfae.proscenia.net/library/articles/harly_paradigm.pdf).

2 Raymond Murray Schafer called the combination of sounds in an environment a 'soundscape', in analogy to the term 'landscape'. Criticism of his approach, which is primarily sound-centred and physically distanced from agency and perception, has led to an understanding that listening to sounds is an 'engagement with place and space-time'. Steven Feld, "Acoustemology," in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 15.

3 Various variants such as *adhan* or *azon* are used in the Islamic world; however, I use the word *ezan*, as it is used in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which is the cultural connection explored in this paper. The *ezan* is traditionally recited five times a day by the muezzin, a person appointed at a mosque to recite the prayer. Islamic theology does not consider *ezan* to be musical expression; nevertheless, the muezzin is chosen for his singing or vocal skills, and the *ezan* is performed as a melodious tune. The *ezan* is traditionally recited or performed from the minaret, a tall, slim tower that is separate from or architecturally connected to the mosque. In contemporary times, the physical presence of the muezzin is most often replaced by loudspeakers broadcasting a recording of the *ezan*. Through examples in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ankica Petrović also explains that *ezan* can be influenced by a local traditional singing style. See more on the musical expression of *ezan* in Ankica Petrović, "Paradoxes of Muslim Music," *Asian Music* 20/1 (1989): 130–131.

lated to or even outweigh the issue of the Islamic sounding. This paper shows what is communicated and how it is communicated through people's relations to the currently imagined sound of *ezan* in Ljubljana's soundscape.

## Religious Sounds, Church Bell Ringing, *Ezan* and Their Relation to the Acoustic Space and Acoustic Community

Scholars have developed different theoretical concepts to understand the relation of a certain sound to other sounds that form the everyday acoustic environment or 'acoustic space'. Applying Murray Schafer's concept to religious sounds in urban space, a 'soundmark' or a community sound is a sound characteristic of the city and has a special cultural and historical meaning for the community. On the other hand, it is a 'sound signal', a sound that carries a message for the individual or the community. The message can be symbolic (reminding people of their pious obligations) as well as temporal (reminding people that it is time to pray, marking the time of day).<sup>4</sup> While in major acoustemological and soundscape studies like R. Murray Schaffer's *Tuning of the World*, Barry Truax's *Acoustic Communication* or Steven's Feld *Time of Bells*<sup>5</sup> bell ringing is shown to be an important and salient soundmark in contemporary Europe, the position of the *ezan* is different. *Ezan* is the sound of a religious and ethnic minority, i.e. the Muslim community in Slovenia, which has so far been relatively invisible in public space. The *ezan* would become the second public religious sound in Ljubljana, alongside the dominant sound of bell ringing.<sup>6</sup> It would therefore be a new and different sound in the city.

Barry Truax, whose work follows and upgrades Murray Schafer's concept, emphasises the role of sound's communicational process. For him, sound is a mediator between the acoustic environment or space and the listener and refers to the community of people for whom "acoustic information plays a pervasive role" in their lives. The sound that carries acoustic information has a "significant role in defining the community spatially, temporally in terms of daily and seasonal cycles, as well as socially and culturally in terms of shared activities, rituals and dominant institutions".<sup>7</sup> It is obvious that religious sounds fit this definition perfectly and that in traditionally Christian societies (like the Slovenian), church bell ringing provides an acoustic linkage between the acoustic community and the information that the ringing carries. Even though Truax emphasises the positive relationship between the sound and the acoustic community, this is not always self-evident. For example, a recent study of the relationship between Ljubljana's inhabitants and church bell ringing revealed that even though people recognise the acoustic information

4 Murray Schafer divides sounds into three categories: 'keynote sounds' as sounds from the background, 'sound marks' as sounds that define a certain environment and have a special meaning for the community and 'sound signals' as sounds that carry a special message for society. Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, 9–10.

5 Steven Feld, *The Time of Bells 2* (Santa Fee: VoxLox, 2004) and Barry Truax, *Acoustic Communication* (New Jersey, Ablex Publishing Corporation Norwood, 1984).

6 Ljubljana's everyday public religious sounding includes the sounds of one Orthodox and one Protestant church, which also use bell ringing as their main sonic public device. Occasional religious sounds in Ljubljana include those of the Hare Krishna community and the 'progressive spiritual' religious community, the Trans-Universal Zombie Church of the Blissful Ringing.

7 Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 58.

conveyed by bell ringing, they can be annoyed by it.<sup>8</sup> In connection with that, we can also predict the acoustic situation around the location of the future mosque. The majority of the Muslim population does not live in the vicinity of the location, so they cannot even form the majority of the acoustic community. Thus, the sound will primarily be heard by a population that does not understand its acoustic information and does not even want to hear it. The existing acoustic community, living near the location of the planned mosque, will face two religious sounds - Catholic and Muslim - so the sound of *ezan* will physically and symbolically enter the acoustic range of the bell ringing.

## A New Religious Sound in the City: Constructing a Place of Belonging and a Space of Power Relations

When the sound of the *ezan* enters the existing acoustic environment of the city as a minority religious sound, the power relations between the dominant and the marginalised group are established (or strengthened, if already established). Hayden and Walker,<sup>9</sup> who studied religious sites in the world that are shared or contested by different religious communities, have developed a model for measuring the dominance of a religion or religious community, using specific indicators. Even though their examples are connected to contexts with a long tradition of religious pluralism and their research is focused on specific religious sites that are shared by different communities, it became clear that the indicators of dominance they reveal are also part of the space I am researching.<sup>10</sup> Hayden and Walker discuss such indicators as 1. perceptibility, which includes the visibility, audibility and scale of the religious site, and 2. centrality, which refers to the "location within the settlement".<sup>11</sup> Throughout history, religious authorities wanted their religion to be presented as massive, centrally located and visible and audible at the greatest possible distance. So the height and number of church towers or minarets and the loudness of the bell ringing or the *ezan* visually and aurally reflect the dominance of one religion over another.

8 For a detailed study of Ljubljana, its inhabitants and their relation to bell ringing, see Mojca Kovačič, "Akustemologija zvonjenja," *Glasnik slovenskega etnološkega društva* 56/1, 2 (2016): 53–63.

9 Hayden and Walker developed the concept of 'religioscape' by drawing partly on Arjun Appadurai's idea of 'ethnoscape', which refers to the "distribution in spaces through time of the physical manifestation of specific religious tradition and the populations that build them". A specific religious tradition can also be physically manifested through religious sound. Robert M. Hayden and Timothy D. Walker, "Intersecting Religioscapes: A Comparative Approach to Trajectories of Change, Scale, and Competitive Sharing of Religious Spaces," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81/2 (2013): 399–426.

10 Hayden and Walker also developed a related concept of antagonistic tolerance (AT model) as a pattern of coexistence among different religious groups in which tolerance is meant as enduring the presence of the other but not embracing it so long as one group is clearly dominant over others. See Robert M. Hayden, "Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites in South Asia and the Balkans," *Current Anthropology* 43/2 (2002): 205–231. This concept was soon widely criticized as too general, one-sided or false. It was criticized mainly for its essentialist concept of identity, for ignoring the longer periods of lack of conflict at the same sites and for legitimizing religious nationalism. Various scholars oppose this concept with their studies on coexistence among different religious groups and on sharing common religious site, see Glenn Bowman (ed.), *Sharing the Sacra: The Politics and Pragmatics of Inter-Communal Relations around Holy Places* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012) and Elazar Barkan and Karen Barkey (ed.), *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites. Religion, Politics and Conflict Resolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

11 Hayden and Walker, "Intersecting Religioscapes: A Comparative Approach to Trajectories of Change, Scale, and Competitive Sharing of Religious Spaces," 413.

While the presence of Muslims in Europe is no longer questionable, their visibility or audibility is still problematic or is even becoming more so. In many European cities, the construction, shape, height or visibility of the minaret and the broadcast of the Muslim call to prayer present a challenge to societies and politics, since these (along with Muslim cemeteries and the *hijab*) are the most noticeable signs of Muslim presence within society. In 2008 and 2009, the EU initiative “Religion and Democracy in Europe” was conducted and one of its studies focused on the problem of mosques in Europe. The study was directed by Stefano Allievi and conducted in different countries through Europe. The results and reports show that issues about mosques are present and acute in many European countries. As observed by Allievi, “the issue of mosques has led to more and more frequent disputes, debates and conflict, even in countries where such conflicts were previously unknown and mosques were already part of the landscape”.<sup>12</sup> *Ezan* or *adhan* (the latter form is used more often in other EU countries) is part of each report that relates to a specific country. Allievi deals separately with the *adhan* as one of the elements of conflicts over mosques and stresses that, although the *adhan* is closely connected to the issue of minarets, it “affects another important aspect: that of ‘acoustic space’, a form of symbolic communication, which also has its traditions and its forms of dominance”.<sup>13</sup> The ‘stories’ about the inclusion of *adhan* in a specific acoustic space in Europe are unique, and Allievi finds that, even if *adhan* is considered a constitutional right in a given country, it is local authorities that decide on the permission, volume, and frequency of the *adhan*. He presents the Netherlands as the only country that gave official recognition to *adhan* in 1987 and that gave *adhan* a position equal to that of bell ringing. The German Federation of Cities and Municipalities also recommended equal treatment on this issue, but Allievi stresses that the use of loudspeakers is still excluded from these rights and recommendations. But in both cases as well as in other countries, the performance of *adhan* is often permitted in a limited way (i.e. on Fridays in Norway, twice a day in Amsterdam). But there are many more examples of *adhan* not being practiced at all. On the one hand, Allievi notes that the issue of *adhan* must not be that central to the Muslim communities, as there are not many requests or disputes about it; on the other hand, though the “principles of religious liberty underpinning European constitutions make it is less easy to say no to mosques, refusal to allow the *adhan* is frequent”.<sup>14</sup>

With the secularisation of public life and space, religious sounds not only question the dominance of one religion over another, but also the boundaries between religious and secular space, as well as between public and private space – the latter even more so with the electrification of bell ringing and the amplification of the sound of the *ezan* that have occurred in the last few decades. While automated bell ringing affects the urban soundscape more in an aesthetic sense (people sometimes point out that manual bell ringing produces a softer and gentler sound), the amplification of the *ezan* through loudspeakers would constitute an extension of the “acoustic profile”<sup>15</sup> of the

12 Stefano Allievi, ed., *Mosques in Europe. Why a Solution Has Become a Problem* (London, Alliance Publishing Trust, 2010).

13 Stefano Allievi, *Conflicts over Mosques in Europe. Policy Issues and Trends* (London: Alliance Publishing Trust, 2009), 48.

14 *Ibid.*, 49.

15 Truax, *Acoustic Communication*, 59.

sound. The volume can also be controlled, which makes it easier to control the existing soundscape. Amplification also represents “a crucial rupture” and “ignites debates on the ‘proper place’ of religion in urban space”<sup>16</sup> in many cities throughout the world.

## Islam as Part of Ljubljana’s Religioscape

According to data from 2002,<sup>17</sup> 47,488 people identified themselves as Muslim (around 2.4% of the total population).<sup>18</sup> This makes Muslims the second-largest religious community in Slovenia, after Roman Catholics. The majority of first-generation Muslims in Slovenia are people from Bosnia-Herzegovina, followed by Albanians from Macedonia and Kosovo. They are mostly economic migrants who came during Yugoslav times or as refugees from the wars that marked the breakup of Yugoslavia.<sup>19</sup> As Špela Kalčič points out, Islam plays an important unifying role for them, “[representing] a common denominator on the basis of which a new ethnic identity is established, which is conceived as a transnational community of Muslims of different nationalities living in Slovenia and that comes mainly from the territory of the former Yugoslavia”.<sup>20</sup>

Slovenia’s Muslims are officially represented by the Islamic Community in the Republic of Slovenia, which is organisationally and nationally connected to Bosnia-Herzegovina.<sup>21</sup> Muslims of Bosnian nationality (as well as citizens from other former Yugoslav republics) do not have official minority status and their presence is a politically sensitive issue. Their numbers exceed those of the two officially recognised minority communities in Slovenia (Italian and Hungarian), but the political position is such that the status of the official minorities is related to the discourse of autochthony, i.e. the Hungarians and Italians have for centuries inhabited the territory of what is today Slovenia, for which reason they have been granted minority status and related rights. Nevertheless, because of the relatively ‘invisible’ presence of Muslims in public space, which is “restricted to the intimate intra-group”,<sup>22</sup> Špela Kalčič asserts that Islam

16 Jelena Tošić, “The loudspeaker of faith in the ‘calm’ city: Islam and urban diversity in the contemporary Balkans,” in *The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity (Islam and Nationalism)*, ed. Arolda Elbasani and Olivier Roy (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 87.

17 The Statistical Office of Slovenia also has what it calls a census from 2011, but due to the automatic extraction of data from existing institutional registers, the questions of ethnicity and religion are not covered.

18 The relative nature of the 2002 census data should be emphasised, as a direct correlation between the definitions of ‘nationality’ and ‘religion’ is questionable for a number of reasons. Špela Kalčič, “Slovenski muslimani: kdo so, organiziranost in državnopravno normiranje v antropološki presoji,” *Dve domovini: razprave o izseljenstvu* 26 (2007): 12–13.

19 Due to a lack of political will to integrate refugees, most of them moved back to Bosnia-Herzegovina after the war or have since moved to Western European countries, the USA or Canada. Kalčič, “Slovenski muslimani: kdo so, organiziranost in državnopravno normiranje v antropološki presoji”, 10–11. For an anthropological analysis of the negative consequences of the ‘temporary refugee protection’ status that migrants from the former Yugoslavia obtained in Slovenia, see Natalija Vrečer, “Human Costs of Temporary Refugee Protection: The Case of Slovenia,” in *A Captured Moment in Time: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, Vol. 10*, ed. Adrienne Rubeli and Nina Vucenik (Vienna: Institut für Wissenschaften vom Menschen, 2000). Accessed on April 11, 2016, <http://www.iwm.at/publ-jvc/jc-10-04.pdf>.

20 Špela Kalčič, *Nisem jaz Barbika: Oblačilne prakse, islam in identitetni procesi med Bošnjaki v Sloveniji* (Ljubljana: Faculty of Arts, 2007), 17.

21 According to the 2004 figures, the Muslim community, which is officially represented by the Islamic Community in the Republic of Slovenia (ISRS), consists of 7,000 families, or around 28,000 people (see Ahmed Pašić, “Islam in moderni zahod: primerjalna študija integracije islamskih skupnosti v modern zahodne družbe”, Ljubljana, MA thesis. University of Ljubljana, 2005, 71).

22 Kalčič, *Nisem jaz Barbika: Oblačilne prakse, islam in identitetni procesi med Bošnjaki v Sloveniji*, 8.

in Slovenia has never been strongly associated with Bosnian ethnicity; rather, it was and still is more connected to the global situation that leaves Muslims perceived as ‘Others’ within Europe, as terrorists, and to the current wave of asylum seekers within the ‘migrant crisis’.<sup>23</sup>

The Muslim community first launched an initiative to build a mosque in 1969. Over the years, the idea of building a mosque grew into that of building a cultural and religious centre. Most of the initiatives have been opposed by local communities and, in one case, by a state institution as well. In 2001, the City of Ljubljana (MOL) agreed to the construction proposal and suggested a location. Owing to protracted bureaucratic procedures, the Slovenian Environment Agency did not give its consent to the proposed location until 2003. Shortly thereafter, City Councillor Mihael Jarc and his supporters began to collect signatures for a referendum on the construction, collecting around 12,000 signatures in one month. The initiative was rejected, with MOL and the Islamic community applying for a *constitutional review* of the initiative. The court explained its decision with reference to the constitutional right of religious freedom and religious equality:

*the right to freely profess a religion includes the right of individuals and religious communities to individually or in community profess a religion in buildings that are usually and generally accepted (traditional) for the profession of their religion and the performance of their religious rites.*<sup>24</sup>

Soon afterwards, MOL withdrew its permission for the previously agreed location, giving such reasons as anonymous threats, problems in gaining land from the owners and the opposition of local inhabitants.<sup>25</sup> In 2003, public debate on the issue reached its peak. Since the parliamentary elections were to take place the next year, the pre-election period seemed to be a perfect time to activate a debate about the mosque. This debate was indeed used “for nationalistic political mobilisation”.<sup>26</sup>

In 2006, the Muslim community was given a new location, and the contract for the sale of the land was signed two years later. In the meantime, the collection of signatures for a referendum initiative began again. While the wording of the first initiative had been directed towards the location of the planned construction and the construction itself, the second (again initiated by City Councillor Mihael Jarc, supported by the head of the Slovenian National Party Zmago Jelinčič) was concerned mainly with the visual appearance of the mosque – more precisely, the existence and height of the minaret. MOL rejected the referendum initiative as incomplete.

The position of the main Slovenian religious institution, the Slovenian Roman Catholic Church, has been largely invisible. However, former Archbishop Franc Rode did issue a statement in 2003, signalling his opposition to the mosque by saying that a church was a spiritual centre while a mosque was a political centre. This elicited strong

23 Detailed information on the migration of Muslims to Slovenia and the anthropological evaluation of statistics can be found in Kalčič, “Slovenski muslimani: kdo so, organiziranost in državnopravno normiranje v antropološki presoji”, 7–29.

24 Decision U-I-111/04-21, 8 July 2007. Constitutional Court. Accessed on April 12, 2016, <http://odlocitve.us-rs.si/documents/b7/8d/u-i-111-04-english2.pdf>.

25 Ibid., 117–118.

26 Kalčič, *Nisem jaz Barbika: Oblačilne prakse, islam in identitetni procesi med Bošnjaki v Sloveniji*, 115.

negative reactions from the public and the media. Since then, the Church's comments on the issue have mainly invoked the spirit of tolerance towards other religions.

Construction of the Islamic religious and cultural centre has already begun. According to the project plans, the centre will cover 11,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The minaret, which was already built at the time of the writing of this article, is 40 meters high. There are plans for the *ezan* to be broadcast, but details about its performance have not yet been presented. In response to journalists' questions about the possible intrusion of the *ezan* into the lives of the local residents, the mufti and Ljubljana's mayor argued that the sound would not be too loud and that "the land [was] located along the railway line and that the passing trains [were] louder."<sup>27</sup> This clearly indicated the Muslim community's wariness about breaching the subject of sound, as it revealed that the function of the *ezan* in Ljubljana's context would be of symbolic value for the Muslim community, meaning mainly a "declaration of existence in public space, and recognition thereof".<sup>28</sup>

### Public Response to Religious Sound and Religious Power Relations

The chronology described above of the events and the relations of the community to the construction of the Islamic cultural and religious centre in Ljubljana clearly show the role of the aforementioned indicators of dominance in the space under discussion. The first location-related issue arose when the centre was planned for the western part of Ljubljana, near Ljubljana bypass and its route into the city centre. People argued that the location was the gateway to the city and that a mosque would give foreign visitors a false impression of what Ljubljana represented in religious and cultural terms. In other words, the mosque should not ruin "the central European *veduta* of Ljubljana nor could the subalpine landscape be mixed with Arab-Islamic architecture".<sup>29</sup> Hayden and Walker believe that a change of location or a reorientation within the settlement to change the 'centrality' is a clear expression of a "tactic of manifesting a change in dominance".<sup>30</sup> Such comments also reveal the general relationship with and attitudes towards Muslims in Slovenia, a still-existing "frontier orientalism discourse"<sup>31</sup> in which a Muslim represents a person from the Orient, which is in turn related to the historical image of the Ottoman Turks. This discourse is specific to Slovenia, being connected to mythico-historical "violent images of frontier Orientalism [...] related to Turkish invasions, about which Slovenians are thoroughly acquainted at school and which are later successfully fertilised and further strengthened through media representations of radical Islamism and the political situation in the Middle East, with which Islam and Muslims are frequently equated [...] Based on this simplified image of Islam and Muslims,

27 "Živeti skupaj in spoštovati različnost," *Mladina* (10 Sept. 2013). Accessed on April 6, 2016, <http://www.mladina.si/148182/ziveti-skupaj-in-spostovati-razlicnost/>.

28 Allievi, *Conflicts over Mosques in Europe. Policy Issues and Trends*, 48.

29 Drago Kos, "Razprava v mestu," in *Sociološke podobe* Ljubljane, ed. Drago Kos (Ljubljana: Faculty of Social Sciences, 2002), 22.

30 Hayden and Walker, "Intersecting Religioscapes: A Comparative Approach to Trajectories of Change, Scale, and Competitive Sharing of Religious Spaces," 413.

31 "After Gingrich, frontier Orientalism is related to the discourses that have occurred in those areas of the European periphery which were, in the past, in direct and long-term contact with the Muslim empires, for example the Ottoman Empire". Kalčić, *Nisem jaz Barbika: Oblačilne prakse, islam in identitetni procesi med Bošnjaki v Sloveniji*, 75.

the fear of conflict and loss of culture or national identity can be successfully spread.”<sup>32</sup>

When the Muslim community put forward a proposal for the new (current) location of the mosque in 2006, a new wave of public debate emerged. The contract for the location was signed in 2008 and, as the location had already been agreed, opposition focused on the issue of the minaret. The central debate at this point became the existence of the minaret, its height (it was argued that it should not exceed the height of church towers) and lately also the *ezan*.

Since there are not many articles or media discussions that explicitly adduce the sound of *ezan*, I have selected and analysed three of them that most evidently refer to it, either in the title of the forum or the content of the article, and thereby encourage people to express their attitudes towards religious sounding in public space. The first of the three is the forum titled “Ljubljana – mosque – the call to prayer will occur!” (Slo. *Lj-džamija – klic k molitvi bo!*), started in 2013. The second is the forum “Loud Muslim prayer in Fužine” (Slo. *Glasna muslimanska molitev na Fužinah*) that opened in 2012, after the evening broadcasting of *ezan* from the roof of the apartment block in Fužine, which is the area in Ljubljana where many former Yugoslav residents and their descendants live.<sup>33</sup> The third observed online content is commentaries on the newspaper article “We will perform the call to prayer in concordance with the regulations” (Slo. *Izvajali bomo klic k molitvi v skladu s predpisi*).

The forum *Lj-džamija – klic k molitvi bo!* is still running and comments are still being added (1,472 comments up to now), but the content of the comments strays very far from the topic originally initiated.<sup>34</sup> Even though the ostensible topic is the religious sound of the Muslim call to prayer, most of the comments do not directly refer to the *ezan* itself. On the one hand, this shows the strong relationship between religious sounds and other socio-political discourses; on the other hand, it reveals the marginal role that sound plays at this stage. The *ezan* accounts for approximately one-tenth of the comments referring to sound, mostly in the first part of the forum. Commentators generally do not declare their religious or ethnic affiliation (although they occasionally identify as Christians). Only in one case is it obvious that the commentator is Muslim. The forum that refers to the broadcasting of *ezan* in Fužine (*Glasna muslimanska molitev na Fužinah*) was opened only for 10 days and already drew 471 comments. As in the first case, these comments also pertain to wider discourses and only some of them explicitly refer to *ezan*. The newspaper article *Izvajali bomo klic k molitvi v skladu s predpisi* has 38 comments, and since the article is very closely connected with the question of the legalisation of religious sounds in general, the comments raise similar issues. The comments in both contents are further classified by the most frequent categories of discourse, and each discourse is characterised with one or more examples.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>33</sup> The broadcasting of *ezan* is a sound activist action similar to one performed in Switzerland in 2001 called ‘sound bomb’. The latter action was posted on *YouTube* with the explanation that it was performed in order not to “provoke or upset people. Slovenia is the only country in Europe that still doesn’t have a mosque and probably the only country where Muslims have to pray in a sports hall.” Tomaž Majer, “EZAN, poziv k molitvi, Ljubljana, Slovenija”, accessible at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpdPLIT3cHw>.

<sup>34</sup> The other comments present a number of discourses about Islam and Muslims in Slovenia and Europe (e.g. the Islamisation of Europe, multiculturalism, and the common Yugoslav past).

No comments mention musical details about *ezan*, so we can conclude that most commentators are not acquainted with the musical or aesthetic characteristics of the call to prayer. Most likely they have heard it on television; a few also mention having visited Islamic countries. In an aesthetic sense, most commentators describe *ezan* as “shouting”, “yelling”, “howling” or even, in one case, “yodelling”. The commentators rarely connect the *ezan* with prayer, and few describe it as “beautiful” or “singing”:

*Horrible rockets, what can I say? Especially when they are shouting<sup>35</sup> 24 hours a day.*

*It is an artistic form – beautiful.*

*I must be strange, but this singing is actually very pleasant to me. Church bells can hide the beauty and melodiousness of the human voice – of course in the case that this is sung by a trained person.*

The rhetoric of Otherness is very present in comments, whereby Islam is understood as an invasion of Arabic, Turkish or Bosnian culture and as being in opposition to Slovenian culture, Christian tradition and autochthonous inhabitants. Many commentators refer to the sonority and point to bell ringing as the traditional sound of Slovenianness. One can assume that such an opinion is not necessarily restricted to religious individuals.<sup>36</sup>

*I personally do not care when they want to or must go on their knees... They should communicate by SMS... and leave us, autochthonous people alone!*

*Bell ringing has a thousand-year-old tradition in Slovenia. This howling is foreign to our environment. I do not understand why they had to come here. If they have come here to live and work, then they have to adapt themselves to our culture, otherwise they should kindly go back to live in their own cultural environment [...]. Those who legalized this shouting are national traitors, in my opinion...*

*We should not let Muslims come to Slovenia. Slovenes are a nation of Christians. Churches and bell ringing is our tradition. Islamist should go to Turkey to pray.*

It is very noticeable that the discourse on religious noise encountered in the discussions about bell ringing entered the discussion about *ezan*. The media and online communication channels intensely problematized bell ringing after 2006, when the state authorities changed the legislation that regulated the field of environmental noise. The official order has been changed to remove bells from the list of possible sources of noise. The new regulation has triggered a wave of complaints and media

<sup>35</sup> Shouting is a pejorative expression most often associated with the *ezan*.

<sup>36</sup> My postdoctoral research on the perception of bell ringing among Ljubljana's inhabitants also shows that many non-religious people understand bell ringing as an indicator of tradition and part of their national or cultural identity. Kovačič, “Akustemologija zvonjenja,” 60.

discussions that unveil two problematic aspects of the sounding of bells: bell ringing is perceived, on the one hand, as a physically disturbing noise and, on the other hand, as an ideological interference in the soundscape of the community.<sup>37</sup> The commentators refer to the religious noise discourse either by comparing the two religious sounds, which leads to the demonstration of power and domination of Christian religion over Islam, or they stress the need to treat both religious sounds equally:

*If bell ringing is music, then this shouting is a song. Since bell ringing is not music, then it is difficult to call this shouting a song. So we have to limit the noise of both of them and we won't have to dress like uncles from the desert.*

*It looks like these are the same as Christians – in fact, church bells ring even more often!*

*If it has to be, it should be temporally coordinated with bell ringing, which is where the competition is!*

*As long as regulations on public order and peace are adhered to, there is no problem. The same applies to bell ringing. It is only that they are allowed to violate public order and peace.*

*I also agree: if the bells can bang, then loudspeakers from mosques can as well.*

*We have to accept the bells of all churches and build the mosque, but prohibit the loudspeakers.*

After reviewing all the comments, some conclusions can be drawn: expressing one's relationship to the *ezan* often leads to expressing one's attitudes towards religious sounds in general. This is done either in reference to the power relations between the 'traditional' Christian religious sound and the sound of the 'religious Other', or people express an equal (negative or positive) attitude towards religious sounds in general. The most notable thing is that a commentator's tolerant stance towards the *ezan* often stems from his or her opposition to bell ringing as noise-making or as opposition to Christianity as symbolically represented by bell ringing. A broader debate on bell ringing and noise is very often developed in the same forum. But frequently, the sound is of marginal importance and merely establishes a channel for discourse on Islam in general, as well as for the attitude of the population towards religious and ethnic diversity.

## Conclusion

The acceptance or non-acceptance of a new sound in an existing soundscape is a strong indicator of how communities share common space. A study of sounds in place,

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<sup>37</sup> This topic is discussed in detail in Mojca Kovačič, "Akustemologija zvonjenja," 53–63.

space and time can tell us whether different sounds are adopted, habituated, tolerated, shared, endured or refused. A variety of religious sounds in space demonstrates social diversity or bears witness to the coexistence of different religions or cultures; it also mediates contacts between different identities.<sup>38</sup> Public and media political discourse influences people's perceptions, experiences or evaluations of the public presentation of religion, including religious sound. On the other hand, these discourses "do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or 'constitute' them"<sup>39</sup> and can thereby also influence the future manifestation of religion, including the sound. In the case of Ljubljana, some decisions made by official instances prevailed over the public initiatives that wanted to prevent the public existence of an Islamic religious centre in Ljubljana. At the time of the writing of this article, the minaret is already built and it is only a matter of time before the sound of *ezan* will become part of the city soundscape.

The absence of the sound of the *ezan* in Ljubljana and the mono-dominance of bell ringing in acoustic space illustrates the past, present and future relations between different identity groups living in a common space. The study of media and web communication presented here does not reveal new discourses about the position of Muslims in Slovenia; rather, it identifies the (imagined) sound as being a part of these discourses. The fact that negative attitudes towards the *ezan* are already present at a time when the sound cannot yet be heard in Ljubljana can only reinforce our prediction that the debate will recommence after the sound has become part of the city's soundscape. That said, relatively benign positions on the *ezan* can be found. These stem mostly from opposition to the dominance of Christianity in space and society, the intrusion of religious sound into secular space and the intrusion of noise into private space. But the inclusion of the *ezan* in Ljubljana's city soundscape is not marginal: everyday sensory engagements with religious diversity are very important at a symbolic level. They challenge the identities of city residents and inspire them to reimage their faith and nationality. When the *ezan* begins to sound, a number of questions will be raised: can Muslims be Slovenians at the same time, and do different interpretations of (one) God exist? The audibility of the *ezan* will therefore keep these questions at the forefront of residents' minds.

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38 Isak Weiner, *Religion Out Loud: Religious Sound, Public Space and American Pluralism* (New York: University Press, 2014).

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## POVZETEK

V zadnjih nekaj desetletij je zaznati močan porast zanimanja etnomuzikologov in muzikologov za študije zvoka v prostoru. Razvile so se nove discipline, kot na primer glasbena ekologija, ki tudi glasbo koncipira kot ‚zvočni material‘ v razmerju z ostalimi zvoki, ki sestavljajo naše dojemanje kraja, prostora in časa. Zvočnost razkriva tudi zgodovinske, kulturne, verske, družbene in politične značilnosti določenih prostorov ter njihovih prebivalcev. Novi zvok v prostoru pogosto vzbuja pozornost ljudi, ki se nanj odzovejo različno, odvisno od stopnje identifikacije z zvokom, njegove sporočilnosti, ali pa tudi glasbenih in akustičnih lastnosti. V pričujočem članku se posvečam novemu zvoku – zvoku ezana oziroma muslimanskega klica k molitvi, ki bo šele postal del zvočnosti mesta Ljubljana. Čeprav zvočnost torej še ni manifestirana, je pri prebivalcih mesta, vključno s predstavniki politike, povzročila odzive, ki skupaj z ‚vprašanjem‘ gradnje mošeje ali islamskega verskega in kulturnega centra v Ljubljani odstirajo številna družbena, politična, ideološka in kulturna

razmerja prebivalcev do muslimanske skupnosti, ki živi v mestu. Sprejemanje ali ne-sprejemanje novega zvoka v obstoječi zvočni prostor je namreč eden od kazalnikov kako si različne identitetne skupnosti delijo skupni prostor. Rimskokatoliška vera izraža dominantnost v Ljubljani tako z zvonjenjem cerkvenih zvonov, kot tudi z nenavzočnostjo drugih religijskih zvokov v prostoru. Kronologija gradnje islamskega verskega in kulturnega centra v Ljubljani, medijski diskurz in študija komentarjev na spletnem forumu potrjujejo da je zvočnost del širšega družbenopolitičnega odnosa do muslimanov (npr. del obmejnega orientalizma, straha pred terorizmom, straha pred islamizacijo prostora). Pri tem pripadniki večinske družbe v Sloveniji muslimane percipirajo predvsem v luči sodobnih procesov (npr. begunstvo ali pa grožnja terorizma), ne pa tudi v luči njihove zgodovinske navzočnosti v skupnem prostoru. Po drugi strani, nov zvok odstira splošno problematiko religijske zvočnosti v javnem, zasebnem ter sekularnem prostoru, in se v tem ne razlikuje od zvočnosti zvonjenja cerkvenih zvonov.