

Silent *Adhan*: Exploring the Muslim call to prayer in Metro Vancouver

by

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Abstract

The *adhan* is the Muslim call to prayer which is recited five times a day to call the faithful to pray. In contrast to many Muslim majority countries in the world where the *adhan* is audible and a part of the public soundscape, the *adhan* is not publicly recited regularly in Canada. Due to Covid-19, limited public recitations of the *adhan* have been allowed since 2020, during the Ramadan period of fasting.

In this thesis I explore the absence of the public recitation of the *adhan* in Metro Vancouver. The *adhan* and its public recitation has not attracted specific scholarly attention in Canada. It is a lacuna in the scholarship surrounding Islam in Canada.

This thesis centers the *adhan* and its public recitation through an interdisciplinary methodology using research-creation (an original short film – *Silent Azaan* which forms a part of this thesis) and an analysis of an online archive of documented public *adhan* recitations in Canada in 2020 hosted at the www.30masjids.ca web platform.

During the *Ramadan* fast in the Spring of 2020, the convergence of Covid-19 and a ban on indoor public gatherings resulted in Muslims seeking approval for limited recitations of the *adhan* in some cities in Canada. These 2020 recitations across Canada provide some insights into how further inclusion of the *adhan* into the public soundscape might be received by municipal governments and various publics. I argue that multiculturalism narratives provide an unsatisfactory framework for inclusion of the *adhan* in the public soundscape. These narratives serve to mask Canada's roots as a white settler colonial nation, but multiculturalism may persist

as a “most acceptable”, “least controversial” paradigm around which Muslims, governments and various publics can coalesce for further future inclusion of the *adhan* in the Canadian public soundscape. This thesis examines the complexities involved and lays out a foundation for future debates on the topic, something which was lacking when I began.

Lay Summary

This thesis explores why the *adhan* (Muslim call to prayer) is not publicly recited in the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia, Canada. The absence of the *adhan* in the soundscape raises issues about religion, society, culture, racism, urban planning, immigration, and belonging.

Preface

This thesis is an original intellectual product of the author, Zoolfikar K B Suleman.

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List of Supplementary Material

Silent Azaan (Short film by Zool Suleman)

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Dedication

To Mark who wished for me to find “geographical enlightenment” and to Andrew who generously charted a path, both of whom are remembered.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Making sense of an absence

This thesis explores an absence. The absence of the *adhan* from the soundscape of Greater Vancouver. The *adhan* is recited within many mosques but not publicly amplified outside mosques. The *adhan* is a central aural marking of the various times of the day and night for Muslims. Five times during a twenty-four-hour period, as the sun dawns, rises, sets and returns, it reminds believers about their submission to Allah. It regulates the pace of daily Muslim life in all facets. It is not just a “religious sound” but a key expression of Muslim identity and a mark of Muslim belonging. It is the absence of the public amplified recitation of the *adhan* which I am exploring. When I reflect upon why I chose this topic for my thesis, in part, it was because I saw the *adhan* as being emblematic of larger absences and exclusions of Islam and Muslims in Canada. These exclusions were not only aural but also within the conversations about what constitutes belonging. The public recitation of the *adhan* plays a role in structuring daily life in Muslim majority countries, but not in Canada. If the *adhan* could be recited publicly in Canada, would it play a similar life structuring role for Muslims? When I first began to engage with this question in 2009¹, it seemed as if each question I asked led to another. More than a decade later, the questions have not stopped.

¹ I began by reading Lee, 1999 and worked my way through some of the footnotes. My friend Mark Goertz, a librarian, assisted me with some research and wished me to find “geographical enlightenment”. He died suddenly in 2010. (Accessed on April 3, 2022: <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/remembering/obituary.aspx?n=mark-goertz&pid=144374003>). Professor Andrew Rippin is also thanked in my Dedication. He was immensely helpful in providing a set of research sources for my thesis as an Independent Study course instructor. He passed away on November 29, 2016 (Accessed on October 1, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Rippin)

When speaking to friends and colleagues about my curiosity on this topic, I have been met with puzzlement as to why I would ask, bemusement at my curiosity, ignorance about the whole topic, disinterest, and all too often, easy answers. An urban planning professor told me that there was nothing to study, “all you need is a line in the sand and pray towards Mecca”. A lawyer told me that it was simply about the separation of “church and state”. A Muslim religious elder was uncomfortable with my question. As I sought a faculty to apply to and advisors, I was sent to and from those who specialized in religious studies, anthropology, human geography, law, urban planning, and architecture. All of these experiences eventually made it clear that interdisciplinary studies was to be my home for this journey.

1.2 Being Muslim post 9/11 in Canada – Positioning the Self

I came to Canada at the age of nine in 1972. I was part of the “Asians” who were expelled from Uganda by President Idi Amin (Singh, 2018; Mamdani, 1993).² Within those “Asians”, I was a member of the Ismaili Muslim community³, a Shia interpretation of the faith of Islam (Karim, 2021; Asani, 2011; Hirji, 2011; Purohit, 2007). “Being Muslim”, for me, involved attending *jamatkhana* (an Ismaili prayer space)(Dossa, 1985; Karimi, 2010), being involved in various Ismaili community related events, and struggling with what an Ismaili identity meant (Dossa, 1985; Gova, 1992) within the larger Muslim *ummah* (Denny, 1975).

² See also the Uganda Collection archive at Carleton University (Accessed: February 5, 2022)

<https://carleton.ca/uganda-collection/>

³ See The. Ismaili site for more information (Accessed: February 5, 2022) <https://the.ismaili/global/about-us/the-ismaili-community>

The events of September 11, 2001 (“9/11”) (Jiwani 2005; Thobani, 2007, 2018; Zine, 2012) brought my Muslim identity into sharper relief. By then, I was a lawyer practicing immigration and refugee law and on September 11 and in the many months that followed, I relived some of the traumas that I had felt when fleeing Uganda as a targeted “Asian” and upon arriving in Canada as part of a special designated class of refugees. Post 9/11 Islamophobia was a specific expression of the racism, xenophobia, nationalism, and empire that I felt when I first arrived in Canada but found hard to articulate as a child.

1.3 Resisting law and embracing multidisciplinary approaches

I have tried to resist incorporating law as a disciplinary method in this thesis. In part, because law seems a predictable pathway for a lawyer to approach the topic and I wish to travel further afoot. In part, because I have already engaged with law in responding to 9/11 and the heightened Islamophobia which followed and persists.

In 2005, I formed a non-profit organization named MARU⁴ which engaged in intersectional advocacy and education on issues relating to migration, art, and race. MARU engaged in a variety of initiatives ranging from a study about the impacts of racial profiling (Gova and Kurd, 2008)⁵; a national campaign to “stop racial profiling” and pass new legislation in the Parliament

⁴ Accessed April 2, 2022. Internet Archive Way Back Machine.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070222224333/http://www.maruworld.org/>

⁵I, on behalf of MARU, secured funding from the Law Foundation of British Columbia and Professor Catherine Dauvergne (then at the University of British Columbia, Faculty of Law) secured additional funding for this study.

of Canada⁶, and various talks and educational events⁷. I also authored articles for law publications and played a formative role in the BC Civil Liberties Association hosting a conference on Racial Profiling⁸. More recently, I have been involved as one of the founders and volunteer lawyers with the Islamophobia Legal Assistance Hotline⁹ project. This project aims to assist those who are subjected to Islamophobia and to educate the public about Islamophobia.

Within these activities which engage with law, I have found that often the larger multidisciplinary layers are obscured if not actively discouraged. It is as if practicing lawyers must stick within “the law” in order to address the tectonic shifts in how “being Muslim” plays out in everyday life post 9/11. My research and reflection on the absence of the *adhan* have provided, for me, a necessary alternate pathway to reflect upon and dialogue with my past (and ongoing) work within and adjacent to law.

We were principal investigators for our respective funders, and we co-supervised Alnoor Gova and Rahat Kurd in this research and publication.

⁶ MARU played an instrumental part in Member of Parliament, Libby Davies (NDP, East Vancouver) introducing a Private Member’s Bill for First Reading, Bill C-296, An Act to eliminate racial profiling, on Thursday, November 18, 2004 (38th Parliament, Hansard Number 027). Accessed on April 2, 2022.

<https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/38-1/bill/C-296/first-reading> In conjunction with the Bill being introduced in Parliament, a website (www.stopracialprofiling.ca) (Accessed on April 2, 2022

<https://web.archive.org/web/20061208102947/http://www.stopracialprofiling.ca/> was also launched to create a national movement. The site included a form to report incidents of racial profiling, as well as information and resources to educate the public about racial profiling.

⁷ Examples: a speech for Canadian Voices (Accessed on April 2, 2022: <https://www.canadianvoices.org/zool-suleman-and-jason-gratl/>), a book launch event (Accessed on April 2, 2022: <https://www.sfu.ca/humanities-institute/public-events/archive/2015-16/islamic-identity.html>), and a panel (Accessed on April 2, 2022: <https://centrea.org/2015/11/discussion-in-response-to-abounaddara-lets-talk-syrian-refugees-islamaphobia-and-canadian-identity-post-harper/>

⁸ I had conversations with then (2007) Executive Director, Murray Mollard, to encourage the BCCLA to take strong position against racial profiling and to host a conference (Accessed on April 2, 2022

https://bccla.org/our_work/racial-profiling-a-special-bccla-report-on-racial-profiling-in-canada/)

⁹ Accessed on July 20, 2022

(<https://web.archive.org/web/20220129111335/https://islamophobia热线.ca/en/#content>)

Chapter 2: Understanding the *adhan*

2.1 Framing the question

The question I ask in this thesis is “why is the *adhan* not recited in Greater Vancouver?” In many parts of the “Muslim world”, itself a contested idea (Aydin, 2017), the *adhan* is performed and can be heard in the public soundscape. It marks several points in the day and calls the believer to prayer.

For me, the absence of the *adhan* draws attention to how Muslims are excluded from full participation in Canada society. Why has almost nothing been written in a scholarly setting about the performance of the *adhan* in public in Canada? Why is it that most Canadians do not question the public sound of church bells and see them as belonging within the public soundscape? Why do Muslim communities not ask for the *adhan* to be performed? What would happen if the mosques suddenly began to publicly recite the *adhan*? How would governments, publics and other religious communities react? When limited public performances of the *adhan* were permitted due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020¹⁰, how did Muslims and non-Muslims react? How did municipal governments, who have the legal jurisdiction related to local noise, justify the performance of the *adhan* when they had not dealt with this issue before?

¹⁰ The *adhan* was publicly performed in Halifax, Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Hamilton, Ottawa, Edmonton, Calgary, Surrey, Burnaby, Vancouver and Victoria during parts of the month of *Ramadan* in the Spring of 2020.

To answer some of these questions, we need to begin to understand more about Islam and the *adhan*.

2.2 What is the *adhan*

The *adhan* is the Muslim call to prayer, for a majority of those who identify as Muslim. It can also be spelled as *azan*, *adhaan*, *athan*, *azaan*, *adzan* and *ezan* depending on the geography and tradition in which it is recited. The *adhan* is recited five times a day by a *muezzin* (one who recites the *adhan*), often (but not always) from a minaret (Gottheil, 1910). The *adhan* is recited five times a day at *fajr* (prayer at dawn), *dhuhr* (prayer at midday), *asr* (prayer in the afternoon), *maghrib* (prayer at sunset), and *isha* (prayer at night).

There are two dominant versions of the *adhan*, a Sunni version and a Shia version, which reflect the largest interpretations and practices of the faith, including over 70% of self-identifying Muslims in Canada (Shah, 2019). Sunni Islam is the largest branch of Islam and is followed by approximately 85% of Muslims. Shia Islam is the second largest branch of Islam (Kazemi, 2015). The differences between Sunni and Shia Islam, in part, can be traced back to the issue of whether the Prophet Muhammed designated his son in law, Ali ibn Talib, as his successor. For Sunni Islam, there was no transfer of divine guidance traceable to the Prophet after the Prophet died, while for Shia Islam the transfer of some type of divine authority is central to Shia belief and practice. This difference is evident in the *adhan* where there is a Sunni version and a Shia version, with the Shia version specifically referencing Ali.

The Sunni version of the *adhan* is as follows (Sells, 2007):

allahu akbar (God is most great)

(recited four times)

ashhadu an la ilaha illa llah (I testify that there is no god but God)

(recited twice)

ashhadu anna muhammadan rasulu llah (I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of
God

(recited twice)

hay 'ala s-sala (come (alive) to the prayer)

(recited twice)

hayy 'ala l-falah (come (alive) to the flourishing)

(recited twice)

allahu akbar (God is most great)

(recited twice)

La ilaha illa ilah ((there is) no god but God)

(recited once)

The Shia version of the *adhan* is as follows (Sells, 2007):

allahu akbar (God is most great)

(recited four times)

ashhadu an la ilaha illa llah (I testify that there is no god but God)

(recited twice)

ashhadu anna muhammadan rasulu llah (I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God)

(recited twice)

[*ashhadu anna 'aliyyan waliyyu llah*]

[I testify that 'Ali is the Wali of God]

[*ashhadu anna 'aliyyan hujjatu ilah*]

[I testify that 'Ali is the proof of God]

hayy 'ala s-sala (come (alive) to the prayer)

(recited twice)

hayy 'ala l-falah (come (alive) to the flourishing)

(recited twice)

hayy 'ala khayri l-'amal (come (alive) to the best work)

(recited twice)

Allahu akbar (God is most great)

(recited twice)

la ilaha illa ilah ((there is) no god but God)

(recited twice)

As can be seen much of the *adhan* is similar with the key differences being the references to Ali, and the addition of *hayy 'ala khayri l-'amal* (come alive to the best work), and the additional

recitations of *la ilaha illa llah* (there is no god but God) in two places in the Shia version. Sells (2007) notes that the two references to Ali in the Shia *adhan* “may” be added indicating that they are not compulsory in all Shia recitations.

Howard (1981) provides a detailed account of the development of the text of the *adhan* in the first few centuries after the death of the Prophet. He notes the various disputes on what text was permitted and recited in both the Sunni and Shia versions of the *adhan*, focusing on the phrases: *hayy ‘ala l-falah* (come (alive) to the flourishing) and *hayy ‘ala khayri l-‘amal* (come (alive) to the best work). Some reports state that the Prophet instructed for wooden clappers to be used to call the faithful to prayers, but there are also reports of the *adhan* coming to the second Caliph (‘Umar ibn al-Khattab) in a dream and then being approved by the Prophet (Howard, 1981).

Padwick (1961), in her study of Muslim prayer manuals also notes an account of the *adhan* being shouted “at the top of their voice at dead of night” to chase away disease during epidemics (at page 31).

The various interpretations of the faith, have differing accounts of how the *adhan* was introduced, accepted, and developed, for example:

The Imami account of the introduction of the *adhan* presents an entirely supernatural picture. The Prophet on his ascension into heaven took part in the heavenly *salat*. Gabriel gave the *adhan*, the prophet led the *salat*, and the angels and prophets participated in it. This is followed in the next tradition in al-Kafi by an account of how Gabriel came down and taught the Prophet the *adhan* while ‘Ali was present. The Prophet then gave ‘Ali

instructions to teach Bilal the *adhan*. This account neatly connects the *adhan* to the Prophet's ascension into heaven, whereas in the other version of that event he disputed the number of prayers his community would have to say. 'Ali is then made party to the Prophet's instruction in the *adhan* and himself teaches Bilal. According to this version, the *adhan* was fixed in its complete form from the moment of its inception. (Howard, 1981: 226-227)

Bilal ibn Rabah was one of the earliest converts to the faith of Islam. Bilal is said to have been chosen by the Prophet to recite the *adhan* in various hadiths¹¹. One of the well-regarded *hadith* collections by Sahih al-Bukhari notes: "Then Bilal was ordered to pronounce *adhan* for the prayer by saying its wordings twice"¹².

Many observers, believers, and non-believers of the faith, make a casual and causal connection between the recitation of the *adhan* and the existence of the minaret; the minaret being a high tower from which, in many places, the *adhan* is recited. The relationship between the recitation of the *adhan* and connection to a minaret was examined by Gottheil (1910) who noted that the references to the "minaret in Arabic literature are very few" and traces the etymology of the term "minaret" to that of a light tower. In his careful review of the origins of the minaret, Bloom

¹¹ A *hadith* is a collection of the sayings and actions of the Prophet. There are various collections of hadiths from a variety of scholars from the different interpretations of the faith. See, British Library Hadith Collection Accessed on April 15, 2022, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/hadith-collection>)

¹² Sahih al-Bukhari 03, Book 10 Hadith 1 (USC-MSA web reference Vol. 1, Book 111, Hadith 577 (Accessed on April 15, 2022, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/10>)

(1991) concludes that it is mistaken to join the development of the *adhan* to the development of the minaret:

the data from the eighth and ninth centuries shows that the history of the tower attached to the mosque is independent of the history of the call to prayer. The call to prayer is nearly as old as Islam, but towers were not attached to mosques in the Umayyad period at all (apart from the exceptional case of the mosque of Medina), and they were not regularly attached to mosques until the ninth century. Furthermore, there is nothing to indicate that muezzins used these towers at all. Indeed, Shi'ites believed that the call to prayer should not be given from any place higher than the roof of the mosque, so that specifically Shi'ite mosques (e.g., those of the Isma'ili Fatimids) had no towers for the call to prayer.

The *adhan* is referenced twice in the Quran. First at surah *Al-Ma'idah* (The Table Spread), *ayat* (verse) 58 (5:58): "And when you call to prayer, they take it in mockery and as play. That is because they are a people who do not understand." In the commentary for this *ayat* (Nasr, 2015) writes (relying on *hadiths*):

"It is reported in connection with this verse that some Christians or Jews in Madinah would mock and cast ill omens upon the Prophet or the believers when they heard the call to prayer (IK, Q, T, Z); or that the disbelievers mocked the call to prayer as a religious innovation or as having an ugly sound (Q, R, W). They mock in this way only *because they are a people who do not understand*. According to al-Razi, those of real understanding know that prayer is the best of all human acts, and he quotes the saying,

“The noblest movement is prayer, and the most beneficial is stillness in fasting.” [Note: Letter references are from the original text and refer to various interpretive sources]

I note this commentary and its reference to “ugly sound” as an early reference to one of the key objections to the performance of the *adhan* in contemporary urban settings, as being “noise” and sound pollution.

The call to prayer is also referenced in the Quran in surah *Al'Jumu'ah* (The Congregational Prayer), at *ayat* 9 (62:9): “O you who believe! When you are called to the congregational prayer, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave off trade. That is better for you, if you but knew”. Hakimelahi (2008) comments on this section by noting that the “call” in this section is *al'nidha* “meaning ‘to announce’” and that the *adhan*:

has been legislated for calling people. Therefore, the *adhan* is not an obligation and neither is it a condition for the correctness of the prayer. In this vein we can note the narration of Ubayid ibn Zurarah who narrated from his father that he asked Imam Sadiq about a man who forgot the *adhan* and the *iqamah*. The Imam said that he should continue his prayer because the *adhan* is recommended and it is not obligatory.” (Haimelahi, 2008)(at page 60)

The style of *adhan* recitation can vary. In an exploration of the soundscape in Abu Dhabi, Chester (2019) writes (partly relying on Sells, 2007)¹³ that there are two basic styles of recitation: the *tartil* (a steady chant) and the *tajwid* (more melodic flourishes).

Chester's *adhan* field recordings project¹⁴ and recent book (Chester, 2021) represent some of the most current scholarship on the public performance of the *adhan*. In this auditory field of study, it is interesting to note the evolution of how the auditory samples, for scholarly purposes, are presented over time. In the case of Chester, a web map and archive (Chester, 2019 "sound mapping") of field recordings, while in Sells (2007) a link to the publisher's website with a user code and password are used. YouTube, as a popular means of access, also has many examples of the recitation of the *adhan* with a simple search for "YouTube *adhan*" resulting in over 792,000 results¹⁵.

Hollywood also "recites" the *adhan*. In her thesis, Gressit-Diaz (2017) explores the intersections between Hollywood films, the "sonification" of Muslims, and Hollywood's Islamophobic representation of the faith. She writes:

The *adhan* and Islamic language are frequently used to sonically indicate the motivation behind the violence of Muslim terrorists.... After the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003

¹⁴ Accessed April 16, 2022, <https://dianachester.com/portfolio/sound-map-of-the-islamic-call-to-prayer/>

¹⁵ YouTube search conducted on April 16, 2022, had the following result "About 792,000 results (0.44 seconds)". The top result had over 5.5 million views as of April 28, 2011 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_LN0hznp-A Accessed on April 16, 2022).

the adhan was absorbed into what J. Martin Doughtry has termed “the belliphonic,” or “the spectrum of sounds produced by armed combat,” as well as the “sonic material that is less directly or conventionally associated with warfare,” including “recorded devotional chants”

...

However, the overwhelming use of the adhan to communicate Islamophobic ideology has redefined the role of the adhan within Hollywood soundscapes, making its occasional use as sonic geographic identifier insignificant. The fact remains that, since 9/11, within filmic soundscapes, the adhan has been disestablished as a simple facet of normal Islamic life, and reassigned in ideological meaning and rhetorical use, both of which demonize the faith, and dehumanize the faithful, of which the adhan has become the sonic symbol.

(at page 68- 69)

I was familiar with Hollywood’s Islamophobic representations of the *adhan*, but I first heard the live public performance of the *adhan* when, as an adult, I travelled to New Delhi, Dubai and Istanbul. I felt a resonance within me when I heard it. It reminded me of the daily prayers (*dua*) of my faith practice.

2.3 Muslims in Canada

Islam and Muslims are often thought to be monolithic, having similar practices and beliefs. The reality is that Muslims have a variety of beliefs and practices within the faith of Islam. Even what constitutes the faith of Islam can be a point of contention.

Noted scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Nasr, 2003) writes about the core beliefs of being a Muslim:

The Islamic message is, therefore, none other than the acceptance of God as the One (al-Ahad) and submission to Him (*taslim*), which results in peace (*salam*), hence the name of Islam, which means simply “surrender to the Will of the One God”, called Allah in Arabic. To become Muslim, it is sufficient to bear testimony before two Muslim witnesses that “There is no god but God” (*La ilaha illaLlah*) and that “Muhammad is the Messenger of God” (*Muhammadun rasul Allah*). These two testimonies (*shahadahs*) contain the alpha and omega of the Islamic message. One asserts the unity of the Divine Principle and the other the reception of the message of unity through the person whom God chose as his Final prophet.” (at page 3)

Shahab Ahmed (Ahmed, 2015) writes:

The greatest challenge to a coherent conceptualization of Islam has been posed by the sheer diversity of—that is, range of differences between—those societies, persons, ideas and practices that identify themselves with “Islam.” This analytical dilemma has regularly been presented in terms of how, when conceptualizing Islam, to reconcile the relationship between “universal” and “local,” between “unity” and “diversity.” (at page 7-8)

Thobani (2021), echoing parts of Said (2003), locates the terms Islam and Muslim within the *longue durée* of the accepted and critical discourses in the “West” before and after the events of 9/11. In her introduction she writes:

Islam and the figure of the Muslim make an uncanny appearance at crucial moments in the making of this West. Whether in the specter of the Anti-Christ, false prophet or demonic blasphemer; Moor, Saracen or Turk; Oriental, Semite or Muselmann; or more recently, terrorist, Jihadi, Hijabi or radical Islamist, the constancy of this phenomenon is staggering.

These tropes have existed and continue to exist in Canada (Gova and Kurd, 2002) (Nagra, 2011) (Siddiqui, 2015). They are applied to a very diverse range of Canadian Muslims. Shah (2019) references a 2016 Survey of Muslims in Canada (Envionics, 2016) to state the following religious identification for Muslims in Canada: 64% Sunni, 8% Shia, 1.5 % Ismaili, 4% Ahmadiyya, 2.88% “Just Muslim/follow the prophet”; 2.23% Other; and 17.5% “Refused to Answer/NA”. Statistics Canada in a 2021 report on religiosity in Canada from 1985 – 2019 (Cornelissen, 2021) notes that Muslims constitute 3.7 of the Canadian population (approximately 1.4 million people). 82% of the Muslims surveyed viewed the “importance of religious or spiritual beliefs in how to live one’s life” as being “somewhat important or very important”. 42% of the Muslims surveyed indicated that they prayed “in groups at least once a month”. These statistics reinforce the importance of faith and its practice for Muslims in Canada.

The scholarship on Muslims in Canada has been growing over the past two decades with publications dealing with “the Muslim Question in Canada” (Kazemipur, 2014), cultural politics (Zine, 2012), feminist perspectives (Hussain, 2016), human geography (Razack, 2002), and identity and belonging (Aziz, 2015). In Canada, The University of Toronto¹⁶, Memorial University¹⁷, Simon Fraser University¹⁸, and Carleton University¹⁹ have all recently established centres focusing on Islam and Muslims. Political realities related to a growing Muslim population have led to politicians and leaders referencing Muslims on a variety of occasions such as Nowruz²⁰, Ramadan²¹, and Eid²².

Given the broad range of diversity within the Muslim communities in Canada, one of the limitations of this thesis is that it has not explored the gendered²³, queer (LGBTQ+) and generational (youth and elderly) aspects of the public recitation of the *adhan*.²⁴

¹⁶ The Institute of Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto (Accessed April 4, 2022, <https://islamicstudies.artsci.utoronto.ca/>)

¹⁷ Producing Islam(s) in Canada Workshop (Memorial University, Department of Religious Studies) (Accessed on April 4, 2022, <https://www.mun.ca/religious-studies/more/producing-islams/>)

¹⁸ Centre for Comparative Muslim Studies (Simon Fraser University)(Accessed on April 4, 2022, <https://www.sfu.ca/ccms/about.html>)

¹⁹ Carleton Centre for the Study of Islam (Accessed on April 4, 2022, <https://carleton.ca/islamstudies/>)

²⁰ Premier’s statement on Nowruz (Accessed on April 4, 2022, <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2022PREM0018-000383>)

²¹ Statement by the Prime Minister on Ramadan (Accessed on April 4, 2022, <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2021/04/12/statement-prime-minister-ramadan>)

²² The Hon. Andrew Scheer, Leader of Canada’s Conservatives and of the Official Opposition, issues statement to celebrate Eid-al-Fitr (Access on April 4, 2022 <https://www.conservative.ca/the-hon-andrew-scheer-leader-of-canadas-conservatives-and-of-the-official-opposition-issues-statement-to-celebrate-eid-al-fitr/>)

²³ “Sufficing With a Woman’s Adhan” by Sayyid Ali (Accessed on October 18, 2022, <https://iqraonline.net/sufficing-with-a-womans-adhan/>)

²⁴ Feminist, LGBTQ+, and intersectional perspectives on Muslims in Canada need greater attention than can be provided in this thesis. (See: Women’s Mosque of Canada, Accessed October 14, 2022, <https://www.womensmosque.ca/herstory>) (See also: El-Tawhid Juma Circle, Accessed on October 14, 2022 <https://www.jumacircle.com/>)

In my experience the terms Islam and Muslim are often bandied about as if the speaker and the audience share the same understanding. Admittedly, when shared with followers of the same interpretation of the faith, there can be much understanding. Between differing interpretations of the faith, and those who are not of the faith, my experience has been that a shared understanding is often the exception, and not the rule. In the polite big-M Multicultural discourses of Canada, Islam has shifted from being a part of a mosaic, to a part of the equity/diversity/inclusion machinations that have seized government and the academy more recently. Islam and Muslims are increasingly also included within frameworks of pluralism²⁵.

This wide range of Muslim belief and practice within Canada, reflects Canada's immigration patterns over the past 150 years²⁶, particularly after racist selection criteria were changed in the 1960s (Thobani, 2007) (Kazimi, 2011) so that applicants from non-European parts of the world had an equal opportunity to apply and qualify. The absence of specific scholarly investigations about the public performance of the *adhan* is not entirely surprising because until the early 1990s demographics (Kazemipur, 2014) (Figure 2.1, at page 27) did not dictate that the majority culture pay much heed to the specific religious concerns of growing Muslim communities in Canada.

²⁵ Global Centre for Pluralism (Accessed on April 13, 2022 <https://www.pluralism.ca/who-we-are/#what-is-pluralism>) "Diversity in society is a universal fact; how societies respond to diversity is a choice. Pluralism is a positive response to diversity. Pluralism involves taking decisions and actions, as individuals and societies, which are grounded in respect for diversity."

²⁶ 150 years of immigration in Canada (Accessed April 13, 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm>)

One of the results of this recent growth of Muslim communities in Canada is that they are participating more in public life²⁷. In addition, Muslims are engaged more vociferously in public debates around dress codes, racial profiling, Islamophobia and the full freedom to practice their religion²⁸.

A recent series of high-profile hate crimes which resulted in the death of Muslims, who were targeted because they were Muslims, has galvanized portions of the Canadian public, Muslims and non-Muslims. The killing of six Muslims and the injuring of 19 other Muslims by a gunman during the evening prayer on January 29, 2017, resulted in national outrage and sympathy and the declaration of a National Day of Remembrance of the Québec City Mosque Attack and Action against Islamophobia²⁹. On June 6, 2021, four members of a Muslim family were killed, and another member (a nine-year-old son) was seriously injured when a 20-year-old man drove his truck into them as they were out for an evening walk, in London, Ontario. The driver has been charged with murder, and attempted murder in what is alleged to be an act of terrorism³⁰. Since June 2022, the Senate of Canada's Human Rights Committee³¹ has commenced a series of hearing on Islamophobia in Canada.

²⁷ "Muslim Canadians Who Won in the 2021 Federal Election", Muslim Link, Tuesday, September 21, 2021 (Accessed on September 21, 2022, <https://muslimlink.ca/news/muslim-canadians-who-won-in-the-2021-federal-election>)

²⁸ The National Council of Muslim Canadians is a public organization that advocates for various issues of interest to Muslims in Canada. (Accessed on September 21, 2022, <https://www.nccm.ca/programs/>)

²⁹ National Day of Remembrance of the Quebec City Mosque Attack and Action against Islamophobia (Accessed on September 21, 2022, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SI-2021-17/page-1.html>)

³⁰ "Trial of man charged in killing of Muslim family in London, Ont., to be held in a different city", CBC.CA (Accessed on September 21, 2022 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/trial-of-man-charged-in-killing-of-muslim-family-in-london-ont-to-be-held-in-different-city-1.6531656>)

³¹ Senate of Canada, Meeting Detail for June 13, 2022 (Accessed on September 21, 2022, <https://sencanada.ca/en/Committees/RIDR/NoticeOfMeeting/580591/44-1>). Also, CBC news story, "Muslim

These high-profile crimes which targeted Muslims in conjunction with increased Muslim participation in the public and political spheres could have significant implications should Muslim communities seek to have the *adhan* publicly performed in Canada. Unlike in earlier decades, in the 2000s and onwards, Muslims have clearly signaled that they are mobilized and that they have the demographic power and political capacity to shape public discourse. The challenge would be, in my view, on how they would frame the request for the *adhan*. Would it be framed as a freedom of religion issue, a multicultural issue, an equality issue or, perhaps, all of the latter? In the context of the Covid pandemic which gripped Canada in early 2020, some Muslim communities were able to convince municipal governments that the public performance of the *adhan*, specifically the *maghrib* evening (prayer at sunset), should be permitted during the month of *Ramadan* (Said, 2020). These public performances of the *adhan* provide an unexpected but rich set of “data” to be explored in this thesis.

community in BC calls for concrete action to address Islamophobia” (Accessed on September 21, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/islamophobia-in-b-c-1.6576808>)

Chapter 3: Constructing the Absence

3.1 The *adhan* in the soundscape

My initial research journey into the *adhan* started with the work of Tong Soon Lee (Lee, 1999).

Lee writes:

For Muslims, the *adhan* is sacred. As a social phenomenon, the *adhan* unifies and regulates the Islamic community by marking the times for prayer and creating a sacred context that obligates a specific religious response. Upon hearing the *adhan*, Muslims are obliged to put aside all mundane affairs and respond to the call physically and spiritually. Indeed, the *adhan* is seen as a microcosm of Islamic beliefs as it "covers all essentials of the faith" (Fiqh us-Sunnah at-Tahara and as-Salah 1989:95) (at page 86-87).

Lee explores the public performance of the amplified *adhan* in Singapore and the "sometimes stormy, relationship between technology and the spatial organization of life" (at page 86). This "spatial organization" within the article connects to the "Islamic Soundscape", urban planning, religious and social politics, and the interplay of technology to both extend the reach of the *adhan* and the intercultural tensions which it eases and exacerbates. The article examines what the practice was before 1975, and after 1975, when Muslim communities agreed to limit the

volume of outside loudspeakers in existing mosques, redirect loudspeakers to inside the mosque area for future mosques, and agreed to the *adhan* being broadcast over radio five times a day³².

Lee's main points are that in urban settings, the "social space" included Muslims and non-Muslims. While for Muslims the space into which the *adhan* was amplified was a "sacred acoustic environment", for the non-Muslims it was "intrusive" and a form of noise pollution. The regulation of the sound space in Singapore applies to all religious activities and in this sense it is not targeted at Muslims (at page 89-90). Lee argues that in urban settings, the *adhan* "defined a physical space through the acoustic phenomenon, that, in turn, defined the Islamic sacred and social space" (at page 92).

Lee's work led to the writings of Lily Kong (Kong, 1990, 2001, 2006). The first paper is a review of literature and trends in the study of geography and the study of religion. It traces how they interlink and develop into a geography of religion, which in turn can be embraced within "the folds of cultural geography". This geography of religion (one but not the only axis of investigation) in turns highlights conflicts between and within religious groups over urban sites,

³² In Cairo, since 2019, the amplified *adhan* has become a part of a national project to limit noise created by various mosques located near to each other, reciting the amplified *adhan* at differing times during the day. While there are five recitations a day, historically the exact time of each recitation could vary according to each mosque. In Cairo, a single signal from a central source is broadcast to each mosque at the same time, five times a day. Each mosque is provided with a wireless device which receives the signal sent from the government managed source and controls the volume of the broadcast by each mosque. As of October 2021, 3,538 mosques in Cairo broadcast a unified *adhan* and the government planned to roll out the unified *adhan* to other cities in Egypt (See: "Experimental Unified Adhan Applied in Cairo Mosques", February 28, 2019. Accessed on September 25, 2022, <https://iqna.ir/en/news/3468028/experimental-unified-adhan-applied-in-cairo-mosques>). (See also: Cairo In One Breath, <https://onlookfilms.com/project/cairo-in-one-breath/> (Accessed on August 31, 2022).

religious sites, new religious buildings, the uses of space within urban/suburban/rural locations for the practice/presence of religion and more. In the case of the *adhan* all these issues come to the fore eventually. The latter two papers are situation within the specific context of Singapore and the role of technology/media (loudspeakers, amplification, radio, and television). Media is viewed as both representing and constituting religious life.

What Kong identified as an “under-researched” intersection between technology and the sacred in 2001, has in the last two decades become a rich and growing field. In the context of the Middle East, Fahmy (2008) in a speculative essay lays out various trajectories for “researching sounds and soundscapes of the past”. Noting the work of Hirschkind (2001) and the ethics of listening, Fahmy argues for moving away from the ocular and towards the oral, with the *adhan* receiving particular attention. Linking the historical study of church bells to the *adhan*, Fahmy writes:

For over a millennium, the most defining sound in the soundscape of a Muslim community is the call to prayer. More than any other sound, the *adhan* embodies and defines the religious community by virtually setting an acoustic border for the worshipers living within its sonic range. Aside from its obvious religious purpose, summoning pious Muslims to prayer, the *adhan* also functioned as an acoustic clock, synchronizing and dividing up time for the entire community, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. (at page 309)

Three examples of this type of historical sound research are articles by Ergin (2008), Khan (2011) and MacPherson (2011). Ergin researches the soundscape of 16th century Istanbul

mosques. Through historical records tracing back to 1583, Ergin draws connections not only between how many people worked as Qur'an reciters but also how the Muslim soundscape played a crucial role in community of believers in that time. Ergin, also connecting church bells to the public recitation of the *adhan* writes:

The centrality of the recited Qur'an and call to prayer for the communal identity of Muslims led Oleg Grabar, one of the founding figures of Islamic art history, to remark: "Islamic culture finds its means of self-representation in hearing and acting rather than in seeing...[for]it is not forms which identify Islamic culture . . . but sounds, history, and a mode of life." (at page 213)

McPherson's (2011) article on the political history of the *adhan* being recited in Turkish is another historical exploration of the Muslim soundscape. In 1932 the Turkish government mandated that the *adhan* could only be publicly recited in the Turkish language instead of Arabic as a part of defining Turkish nation making project that projected the state as being secular and modern. The Turkish language *adhan* only lasted for about 20 years before being restored back to the Arabic language. McPherson's detailed study of the Turkish *adhan* and its assorted styles, is an informative window into the unique Turkish style of recitation that persists today.

In the context of pre-Partition India starting from the 1920s, and later Pakistan, Khan (2011) traces how the British in colonial India regulated religious sound under the broader category of "religious insult".

Rather than isolate ritual sounds, the British created a broader category of offenses called "religious insults" (Thursby 1975). Grouped under this rubric were acts as diverse as hate speech, music played before mosques during prayers, desecration of places of worship, and in some cases, Muslim sacrifice of cows considered sacred to Hindus. This led to a diverse range of legal measures ...included press and publication acts, public safety ordinances, and judgments that addressed specific sources of conflict, such as "music before mosques" or "cow sacrifice," to adjudicate contentious relations between religious communities, recast as the problem of "communalism". (at page 578-579)

This category of "religious insult", with various changes to the law of India over time, continues to have relevance today (Stephens, 2014).

The review of the literature related to the public *adhan* brings forward some key issues. The *adhan*, as an aural practice, is central to the practice of the faith for many Muslims. In increasingly urban settings, Muslim sonic space collides with the soundscape of non-Muslims. Some of the public view the publicly performed *adhan* as noise or sound pollution. The state plays an all-powerful role in the regulation of religious noise and can try to change the language of the *adhan*, or how and when it is recited, or whether such noise constitutes "insult". The contestations over the public performance of the *adhan* are not only present today but stretch back to the time of the Prophet Muhammed. The *adhan* is being regulated and modulated, via the use of technology (shifting to radio broadcasts, etc.) in a variety of traditionally Muslim and non-Muslim geographies, including Canada.

3.2 The *adhan* in Canada

In the Canadian context, *Race, Space and the Law* (Razack, 2002) is one of the foundational texts in relation to the subjects in its title. Published more than 20 years ago, it centers race in discussions about how spaces are created/mapped and uncreated/unmapped in Canada. Razak argues for an interdisciplinary approach writing:

If there is anything we have learned about racial projects it is that they come into being and are sustained through a wide number of practices, both material and symbolic. The study of the creation of racial hierarchies demands nothing less than the tools of history, sociology, geography, education, and law, among other domains of knowledge.

(at page 7)

What Razack, and the other scholars in the collection do, is “unmap” space by asking questions about how spaces came to be, and the world views these spaces rely upon. Citing McCann (1999) who in turn interprets the work of Henri Lefebvre, Razack writes:

First, space emerges out of spatial practices, the everyday routines and experiences that install specific social spaces.

...

Second, conceived space entails representations of space, that is how space is conceived by planners, architects and so on.

...

Third, lived space is space ‘directly lived through its associated images and symbols... [i]n lived space (representational space), the users of the space interpret perceived space (spatial practices), and conceived space (representations of space). (at page 9)

Razak points out how “race also strangely disappears in some geographical work on cities” (at page 16) when the focus, for example, becomes about labour or gentrification or heritage buildings. Citing Jane Jacobs, Razak writes that to analyze race/space it is important to map how spaces are linked. Further, it is vital to explore how “systems of domination operate at the local level”, the lived experiences. Space is a social product and how it is framed can hide “legal and social practices that reproduce racial hierarchies (at page 17). These hierarchies can be slippery to analyze and looking at practices on the ground level can help to identify what spatial configurations are cited as being accepted and which are not accepted. For example, if the publicly recited *adhan* is viewed as “noise” it becomes an unacceptable “problem” requiring regulation. However, if the publicly recited *adhan* is presented as being as essential as the prayers which take place within the mosque, then the issue could be one of freedom of religion.

Isin and Siemiatycki (2002), in the collection edited by Razack, focus upon Muslim space making by exploring how municipal staff in Toronto deal with mosque spaces. The authors conducted a survey in 1997 in which they asked administrative staff at the 35 municipalities that comprise the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) whether there had been a conflict between “diaspora groups and their municipal government” (at page 196). In at least nine instances, there had been

disputes in relation to establishing or enlarging a mosque. With growing immigration and linkages to global diasporic communities, Muslims are facing contestations over how space in the city can be claimed and used. These struggles cannot be contained within the idea of “universal liberal citizenship”, because Muslim groups call “into question citizenship’s racialized and orientalist grounds.” The authors write:

Muslim attempts to create space for mosques in Western cities thus become part of what Jane Jacobs describes as “the racialized politics of differentiation”. The Canadian Muslim identity is constructed by the dominant culture as both a religious and a racialized minority [emphasis added] – with its predominant South Asian, African, and Middle East composition. This outsider image constitutes a resistance to Muslim citizenship claims. It is also a critical sphere of engaged citizenship as Muslims resist their collective exclusion from the urban space. (at page 195)

More recent scholarship in the Muslim space in the Canadian context (Dwyer, 2016) focuses on a suburban religious landscape in Richmond, British Columbia. In Richmond, a suburb of Greater Vancouver, the municipal government designated a three-kilometer section of Number Five Road as a place where religious buildings of various faiths could be built. The North-South oriented land is on the outer edges of Richmond and consists of farmland. The row of religious buildings is on the Eastern side of Number Five Road and serve as an edge between the main centre of Richmond and a major highway that traverses from North to South. The resulting grouping of more than twenty buildings of various faiths, including two mosques, has been dubbed a “Highway to Heaven”.

The authors note the “Highway to Heaven” has been cited by the Municipality of Richmond as a multicultural success story where various faith communities exist in harmony. In this sense, Richmond, by extolling the virtues of the multicultural harmony, has created an urban planning site which is “colourful”, “authentic” and easily consumable (at page 685). On the ground however, there is pragmatic co-existence between the various faith groups, often defined by an absence of conflict rather than multiculturalism. This multiculturalism that Dwyer, and others, refer to is of course, not neutral. In Canada, multiculturalism is state policy (Brosseau, Dewing 2009).

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which forms Part 1 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, includes Fundamental Freedoms at section (2), Equality Rights at section 15 (1) and an Interpretive Right at section 27. The section 2 Fundamental Freedoms include rights to “freedom of conscience and religion”, “expression”, “peaceful assembly” and “association”³³. The Equality Right mandates equality “before and under the law” and prohibits discrimination based on “religion”³⁴. The interpretative right at section 27 states: “This Charter shall be interpreted in

³³ 2 Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association. Justice Laws Website (Accessed on October 4, 2022, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-12.html>)

³⁴ 15 (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. Justice Laws Website (Accessed on October 5, 2022, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-12.html>)

a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.”³⁵

The Province of British Columbia has a *Multiculturalism Act*³⁶ which creates a series of policies related to “cultural diversity”, “cross cultural understanding” aimed at “fostering harmony among British Columbians of every race, cultural heritage, religion, ethnicity, ancestry and place of origin”. The British Columbia law authorizes a Multicultural Advisory Council, mandates annual reports on how the policy intention of the law are being met and provides for funding for multicultural programs. Many provinces across Canada, have similar laws and policies.

The City of Vancouver has an entire, multi-tiered webpage³⁷ on the topic of “Multiculturalism” and includes a reference to a “Racial and Ethno-Cultural Equity Advisory Committee”. *Eid al-Adha*³⁸ is an “official” observance recognized by the City of Vancouver, as are the *Day of Remembrance and Action on Islamophobia*³⁹ which marks the day of the Quebec City mosque “terrorist attack” of January 29, 2017. The City of Surrey⁴⁰ and the City of Burnaby⁴¹, two other

³⁵ Canadian Multiculturalism Act. Justice Laws Website (Accessed on October 5, 2022, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-18.7/page-1.html>)

³⁶ Multiculturalism Act (Accessed on October 2, 2022, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/00_96321_01)

³⁷ (Accessed on October 4, 2022 <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/multiculturalism.aspx#:~:text=Vancouver%20is%20a%20mix%20of,strength%2C%20vitality%2C%20and%20prosperity.>)

³⁸ (Accessed on October 4, 2022, <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/celebrating-diversity-and-inclusiveness.aspx>)

³⁹ (Accessed on October 4, 2022, <https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/day-of-remembrance-and-action-on-islamophobia.aspx>)

⁴⁰ (Accessed on October 4, 2022, <https://www.surrey.ca/about-surrey/diversity-inclusion>)

⁴¹ (Accessed on October 4, 2022, <https://www.burnaby.ca/our-city/diversity-and-inclusion/intercultural-policies-and-initiatives>)

cities in Greater Vancouver which are the focus of this thesis, also have similar websites relating to multiculturalism

I have provided the above context and network of laws and policies as only the tip of the iceberg on how deeply embedded official multiculturalism is within all layers of Canadian government and society⁴². Multiculturalism can be used as a means by which to mask issues of race. In the case of mosques, multiculturalism can become a strategy of “containment of racialized Others across firm and visible borders that are both symbolic *and* spatial” (Isin and Siemiatycki, 2002) (at page 193). The “Highway to Heaven” religious buildings are an example of how this containment strategy can be implemented. With this containment, difficult questions about why these religious buildings, where many racialized Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Jews and Buddhists congregate to pray, cannot be accommodated in other locations in Richmond remain unstated. By extension, in the case of Muslims, the *adhan* becomes twice contained, first within the mosque and second, in relation to a mosque which is a part of an enclave of segregated religious buildings.

Bannerji (2000) in her collection of essays that needs reading and re-reading, peels the onion of Canadian multiculturalism. For Bannerji, multiculturalism is a type of badge that identifies those “who hold no legitimate or possessive relationship to ‘Canada’ ” (at page 111). Multiculturalism hides power relationships in which “social relations of domination that continually create

⁴² The Supreme Court of Canada has a complex set of jurisprudence on the intersection of *Charter* rights and “religion” which is outside the scope of this thesis. One of the leading scholars in this field is Benjamin Berger, whose work can be found here https://works.bepress.com/benjamin_berger/ (Accessed on October 5, 2022).

‘difference’ as inferior and thus signifies continuing relations of antagonism” (at page 97). Multiculturalism helps to hide the dominant narrative of the two founding cultures of Canada, English and French, with its attendant racism and “colonial ethnocentrism” (at page 96). For Bannerji, multiculturalism is a “pawn” for a capitalist state rooted in a white settler colony to “mediate fissures and ruptures more deep and profound than those of the usual capitalist state” (at page 96).

Acknowledging the earlier work of Bannerji and others, Thobani (2007) writes that Canada, like Britain and Australia, views itself as essentially a national white space. Multiculturalism serves to mask the continuity of white privilege while the justification for white privilege is being eroded. Multiculturalism becomes “the solution to the crisis of whiteness that had emerged in the post-war era as the colonial world exploded into violence” (at page 154). While official multiculturalism grew as policy from the 1970s onwards, the recognition of cultural minorities, Thobani writes, was “intended to further the nation’s unity, not its transformation” (at page 156). Thobani points out, for the nation state of Canada, it is multiculturalism that is the official channel through which subjectivity is allowed to form, not anti-racism:

Multiculturalism has had the effect of constituting people of colour as possessing an excess of culture that marked them as outsiders to the nation.

...

The adoptions of state multiculturalism has had enormous influence on the shaping of popular perceptions of cultural diversity as a ‘problem’ and as an issue for national concern, consideration and management. It has reified culture as the most salient factor in

intergroup dynamics, deflecting attention from the disquieting legacy of white supremacy and casting people of colour as cultural problematic” (at page 162)

Post 9/11, the Bush administration posited Muslims as being in a clash of civilizations with the international order being “freedom loving” subjects and the “Islamic terrorists” as being death oriented (Thobani, 2018). It accentuated the differences between the West and, what Stuart Hall famously coined as, “the Rest”. Thobani writes:

Yet the differences between the two nation-states are as revealing of the cultural politics of the west as are their similarities. The USA and Canadian national identity and culture, although clearly identifiable as ‘western’ in the manner identified by Hall, are also not identical. Whereas Canada adopted multiculturalism as state policy since the 1970s, the USA emphasized its pioneering spirit and rampant capitalist values dedicated to ‘freedom’ to produce its cultural identity as unique, a beacon to nation-states around the world. The racial ideologies of these nation-states are thus complex, they are also internally contested as ruling elites contend with the specificity of their interests, and with the demographic changes and shifting population base they have to manage...” (at page 165).

As demographics change due to immigration and birth rates, Muslims are becoming a larger portion of the Canadian population. With this growth comes increased political strength and the capacity for Canadian Muslims to shape public policy and to exert Muslim interests. This gradual assertion of Muslim interests is currently taking place within a Canadian “multicultural” rationale. Speculatively, this future assertion of Muslim interests in Canada could include a push

for a permanent publicly recited *adhan*. In this process, it is possible that limitations of multiculturalism as a unifying policy could be further unmasked since the policy's accommodative limitations would be tested and exposed.

3.3 The *adhan* in the USA

Thobani's reference to the United States of America provides an interesting entry point to three specific case studies related to the public performance of the *adhan* in the USA, where approximately 3.45 million Muslims reside (approximately 1.1% of the population of the USA)⁴³. The contemporary American examples are useful to this thesis because while they provide a differing political context, they also highlight how the main arguments in support of or in opposition to the *adhan* are framed in the USA.

Isaac Weiner's *Religion Out Loud* (2013), explores in detail the case of Hamtramck, Michigan where a Muslim immigrant community formed in the 1980s (mainly from Yemen, Bangladesh, and Bosnia) came into conflict with a predominantly Polish Catholic community that had immigrated to the city in the periods before and after World War II. The issue was the public performance of the *adhan*. Weiner's analysis frames the differences as being between three groups: "exclusivists" who saw the problem not as "noise" but rather "an existential threat to America's Christian heritage" (at page 174); "privatists" who saw the issue as one of keeping

⁴³ "New estimates show US Muslim population continues to grow", Pew Research Centre, January 3, 2018 (Accessed on September 23, 2022 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/03/new-estimates-show-u-s-muslim-population-continues-to-grow/>)

religious practices private and quiet (at page 177); and the “pluralists” who saw the *adhan* as a way to engage with diversity (at pages 182-186).

In Hamtramck, the Muslim applicant for the public performance of the *adhan* was successful and the *adhan* is publicly performed in Hamtramck, Michigan⁴⁴. This success was not grounded in any one approach. While “pluralists” did rally in support for the public recitation of the *adhan*, the “pluralists” did not ground their arguments in a single “theory” about the *adhan*. For some it was a gesture of being open to new cultures, for other it was about exerting democratic rights, and yet for others it was about minimizing antagonisms. In addition, the *adhan* request politicized communities further and the politicians on council recognized that the wishes of an increasing Muslim population could not be ignored. The Hamtramck example brought to light the main conundrum of the debate, are minority religious rights to be protected from the will of the majority (via the American *Bill of Rights*) or are minority religious rights to be contested and won democratically (via a vote of the majority, either in the public or in council) (Weiner, 2013, at pages 188-191).

On January 15, 2015, Duke University in Durham, North Carolina had scheduled a single public performance of the *adhan* before the Friday (*Jumu'ah*) prayers from the church chapel tower at the centre of the campus⁴⁵. The outrage to the announced event fueled by negative attention from

⁴⁴ “Hamtramck, USA” is a documentary released in 2020 that explores the municipal election in Hamtramck and highlights the issues which Weiner (2013) refers to in his book (Accessed September 22, 2022 <https://www.hamtramckdocumentary.com/the-project>)

⁴⁵ “Duke announces changes to Friday’s call-prayer”, Duke Today (Accessed on September 22, 2022, <https://today.duke.edu/2015/01/callchange>)

Franklin Graham, a conservative Christian evangelical leader, resulted in the *adhan* being cancelled (Sayers, 2015; Muir, 2017) by Duke University authorities.

Omid Safi, a prominent scholar, and the Director of the Duke Islamic Studies Centre from 2014 to 2019 expressed his disappointment at this turn of events in the *On Being* blog (Safi, 2015) couching his thoughts in the language of diversity. He wrote⁴⁶:

This is a conversation about public accommodations, and the acknowledging of diversity.

As I see it there are three basic options before us:

- Adamant secularism, insisting that there be no religious symbols in the public space. [Might fly in Europe, not so in America]
- “My way” religiosity: There should be religion in the public space, but it should be my religion and only my religion.
- Pluralism: There should be a symphony of religious symbols and practices in the public arena.

This is why this is ultimately not a conversation about Islam for me, but one about America. What kind of society do we want to be?

As for me and my house, I choose the side of Pluralism.... So as I see it the options are simple: to be visible and a meaningful participant in the public arena, or to be relegated to a basement level of existence.”

In addition to these two controversies about the public performance of the *adhan* in the USA, it

⁴⁶ “Unwavering Pluralism and the Beloved Community in the Face of Duke’s Decision” (January 16, 2015) [www.OnBeing.org](https://onbeing.org) (Accessed on September 22, 2022 <https://onbeing.org/blog/unwavering-pluralism-and-the-beloved-community-in-the-face-of-dukes-decision/>)

is important to note that in July 2022, the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota permitted the public performance of the *adhan* three times a day (no *fajr* or *isha* prayers)⁴⁷ as of September 2022. The population in the city consists largely of Muslims from Somalia. The language of “belonging” and openness to other religions permeates the cited Al Jazeera news report. The Associated Press story⁴⁸ about the same event, includes Muslims speaking about Citizenship rights but also about building conversations with neighbours.

It is interesting to note that Safi’s three options echo the three options that Weiner also uses to categorize the debates in Hamtramck, Michigan: (1) those who want “pluralism” which would permit the public performance of the *adhan* (one or more times a day); (2) those who was want to protect the status quo (“exclusivists” or “my way” religious expressions); and (3) those who want to keep the public apart from the private practice of faith (“privatists” or “adamant secularism”). In the Minneapolis example, the “pluralists” seem to have been victorious.

Clearly, the growth of concentrated Muslim communities in certain cities in the USA is resulting in Muslims seeking further rights of religious practice such as the *adhan*, via municipal governments that are sympathetic. The fight for the public *adhan* in the USA is taking place at

⁴⁷ “Islamic call to prayer shows Muslims ‘belong’ in Minneapolis”, Al Jazeera, July 5, 2022 (Accessed on September 23, 2022 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/5/islamic-call-to-prayer-shows-muslims-belong-in-minneapolis>)

⁴⁸ “Muslim Call to Prayer Approved in Minneapolis” Associated Press Archive on YouTube. 13 May 2022 (Accessed on September 13, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NaNIUd9Ib4>). The transcription provided with this YouTube video news report is very interesting since it highlights how the Muslims view the approval of the public performance. Some of the excerpts are: (1) "We are part of the community as American citizens, and we feel, we were feeling like we didn't get our full rights yet because part of our full rights is the adhan, the prayer."; and (2) "And we hope that through calling the adhan public it would actually bring more interest from the neighbors in knowing about the religion of Islam."

the municipal level where noise ordinances are managed. Similarly, noise issues are dealt with at the municipal level in Canada but it is unclear if the USA trend would have any relevance to Canada.

3.4 The *adhan* in Europe

There is strong body of scholarship which documents how the creation of Muslim spaces of worship are resisted and outlawed in Europe. A key starting point is Metcalf's edited collection, *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe* (Metcalf, 1996). Metcalfe notes in the introduction that lack of a publicly recited *adhan* is a "particular absence" and that as Muslims claim more public space, that claim is defined and shaped by Muslims having faced racism in their host geographies.

Subsequent scholarship such as a special issue of *The Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2005) focusses on "Mosque Conflicts in European Cities". In the introductory article, Cesari (2005, "Introduction") notes the mosque in Europe represents the evolution of Islam from the private to the public sphere and theorizes that the resistance to mosque construction in any European city relates to how long Muslim communities have been settled in those cities and frames the resistance in the language of dialogue and evolution. For Cesari, the "question of Islam" should not be a question of urban policy, but rather a "matter for the existing laws which govern religious practice" (Cesari, p. 1020-1021). Cesari appears to be arguing for a reliance on laws which protect religious practice or mandate equality, usually at levels of government other than the municipal level, as the proper resting place for disputes about "religion" rather than seeking guidance from "urban policy". While I appreciate the differentiation, I do not find the statements helpful in determining the how one differentiates between the two, urban policy is not separate from the zoning and noise laws which govern

religious practice. Further, religious practice can either be recognized and encouraged through the law or limited by it.

Specific to the public performance of the *adhan*, Arab (2017) provides some of the most recent scholarship in an exploration of the sonic dimension of Islam in Europe. Focusing on the Netherlands, where an amplified public *adhan* is constitutionally protected by national laws, it has been a part of the soundscape since the 1980s. Arab writes that “the demand to amplify the call have increased since the 1990s and through the 2000s [as] the number of purpose-built mosques has risen” (at page 9). In the Netherlands, “azan amplification [is] based on strict legal notions of equality rather than on subtler ideas about accommodating otherness” (at page 9). Less than ten percent of mosques amplify the *adhan*, and even then, usually only for the Friday (*Jumu'ah*) prayers (at page 9). In a broad sweep of how prevalent the public recitation of the *adhan* is in Europe he points to examples in Granada (Spain), Stockholm (Sweden), and broadcasts of *adhan* on television in France and Britain during the month of *Ramadan*.

In the publications which focus on Europe, there are some themes which emerge. First, there is the tension between the local and the national, and the urban and the suburban (Saint-Blancat & di Freidberg, 2005; Cesari, 2005, “Mosques in French Cities”). While Muslim religious communities seek local accommodations to construct/expand mosques or for specific practices, like the public performance of the *adhan*, these requests overlap with national discussions on what it means to be Muslim. Second, as Muslim immigration patterns changed between the two World Wars and after World War II, there was increased immigration to Europe and this change in demographics led to sufficient concentrations of Muslims to effect voting results.

Third, law makes a difference. In the case of the Netherlands, legal guarantees of equality have helped Muslim communities to amplify the *adhan* publicly, though also within limits as to which time of day.

In relation to Canada, the European context appears to be predictive that as the number of Muslims in Canada increase, and as Muslims can make the power of their votes felt, they will be able to assert more of their religious identity. Like Europe, the *adhan* has mainly been a local and urban issue, there is little to suggest at present that it will soon become a national issue in Canada. While during the Covid-19 pandemic in the month of *Ramadan*, the publicly recitation of the *adhan* was quickly approved on a limited basis, across various cities in Canada, this does not mean that these approvals will persist. As in Europe, much depends on the local dynamics.

3.5 Summary

Before exploring how the public performance of the *adhan* had been justified and received in Canada during the Covid pandemic (since March 2020), it is important to summarize some of our journey so far.

The literature shows that ideas of “Islam”, “Muslim” and even “*adhan*” are not stable, monolithic concepts, nor are the attendant practices which attach to these terms. Rather, these terms and the meanings/practices they embody have shifted over time and continue to shift and evolve. The public performance of the *adhan* whether it be in the “Muslim world” or in the “West” attracts critics and naysayers. Some of those opposed to the public performance of the

adhan are Muslims and thus the issue cannot just be attributed to simplistic ideas about racism or xenophobia.

At the same time, in my view, the urban planning, human geography, cultural anthropology, sonics/soundscape and other literatures I have cited appear to put too little emphasis on the role of race and how race is intertwined with culture/belonging, especially in the “West”.

Multiculturalism and diversity paradigms being utilized to understand why the *adhan* has had limited public performance in Canada since March 2020, while explanatory, feel underwhelming. By contrast the critical scholarship of scholars such as Bannerji, Razack, and Thobani feel bracing and sharp edged. They provide other vectors within which to locate the dislocation of the practice of the *adhan* in Canada; vectors related to foundational myths about who created Canada, with which motivations, and how the evolving story of Muslims in Canada is being contextualized and accommodated.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Interdisciplinarity is defined as “a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession... . [It] draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights through the construction of a more comprehensive perspective” (Klein & Newell, 1997). Unlike traditional disciplinary silos, interdisciplinary studies take an integrative approach and seeks insights from a variety of disciplines.

This study of the *adhan*, I submit, is an example of the possibilities that interdisciplinarity research offers, which strict disciplinary silos would limit. In the bibliography for this thesis there are references to publications in the fields of religion, history, urban geography, architecture, ethnomusicology, anthropology, sociology, politics, law, art and more. The *adhan* provides multiple points for research exploration which would be limited with a siloed, disciplinary, or comparative approach.

Szostak and Buchberger (2019) (at pages 10-11) note that multidisciplinary research is an iterative approach. First, a question is identified. Second, literature from different disciplines can be evaluated in relation to the identified question. Third, a researcher can then employ mixed methods to perform their own research. Finally, findings related to the research can be formulated. The steps are a guide and can be revisited as the research and mixed methods point to different areas for exploration.

For this thesis, the research question I identified was, “why is the *adhan* not recited in Greater Vancouver?” I then engaged in a literature review from different disciplines to understand the contexts for the question. The result of the review was to confirm that there was no scholarship on this question specific to Canada and Vancouver. The review also provided different possible entry points by which to further engage in research. It became clear that issues related to soundscapes, human geography, belonging/exclusion and racism were part of a matrix for further consideration.

4.1 Research-Creation

I explored different methods by which to engage in research and chose “research-creation” as a method. Research-creation, which is also referred to as “arts-based research”, incorporates an “artistic work as an integral part of the study” (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012); “in research-creation approaches, the theoretical, technical, and creative aspects of a research project are pursued in tandem, and quite often, scholarly form and decorum are broached and breeched in the name of experimentation” (at pages 5-6). The same authors create a working taxonomy of four “different modalities in which research and creation are linked within current academic practices”: (1) research-for-creation; (2) research-from-creation; (3) creative presentations of research; and (4) creation-as-research (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2015)(at page 49).

When I first began to explore the *adhan* as a subject of research, I was considering my exploration as an art project/installation which would be exhibited in an art gallery space in Vancouver. I approached the then Curator at Centre A: A Vancouver International Centre for

Contemporary Asian Art in 2015 and he was interested in what I had begun to refer to as “The Adhan Project”. I also began to explore possibilities for how to fund the creation of such an art project, which would include a sound intervention/installation, community engagement and a possible set of publications. I began to research various art projects that seemed to be applicable including Christoph Buchel’s “The Mosque” (an art installation/functioning mosque in Venice) at the 2015 Venice Biennale⁴⁹, and Ajlan Gharem’s installation “Paradise Has Many Gates” (a chain link mosque)⁵⁰. What I was envisioning is what Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) define as “creation-as-research” where methods such as video-making, staging events, intervening in public spaces, and crafting inclusive spaces for conversation are a part of the research process.

What became clear is that for me to create “The Adhan Project” as a part of my thesis research, I would face obstacles in securing approval under the university’s research ethics guidelines. The project I had envisioned would be iterative and evolve but the guidelines required a more fixed research plan, or a series of approvals being sought over time at every stage. In addition, to secure the ethics approval and conduct the project as I envisioned it, it would take several years.

⁴⁹ “Artist draws controversy turning church into Venice’s first mosque”, The Guardian, May 8, 2015 (Accessed on September 26, 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/08/biennale-artist-turning-church-into-venices-first-mosque>)

⁵⁰ “How a chain-link mosque at the Vancouver Biennale became a community hub”, The Art Newspaper, August 12, 2018 (Accessed on September 26, 2022 <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2018/08/13/how-a-chain-link-mosque-at-the-vancouver-biennale-became-a-community-hub>); Paradise Has Many Gates on Vancouver Biennale website (Accessed on <https://www.vancouverbiennale.com/artworks/paradise-has-many-gates/>)

The tension between art creation and academic research ethics requirements is ongoing (Lowry, 2015). As Lowry notes, good research can result in good or bad art, but bad research has to withstand methodological assessment, he writes:

Good research-creation pulls professional academics – artists-researchers along with other humanists and social scientists – outside zones of comfort and away from monitored disciplinary divisions or divisions of labour. It challenges us to think about what constitutes knowledge, how new ideas, ways of knowing, and forms of innovation draw on deep-seated cultural traditions. (at page 43)

Considering the challenges and limitations, I decided to reiterate and shift the scope of my creative project to create a short film which would explore the church bell/*adhan* linkages that appeared in the written literature. The digitally created film would also be based in a Vancouver urban setting and ask some questions about urban soundscapes and belonging. *Silent Azaan* (<https://digitalstories.ca/video/silent-azaan/>) was the film I created⁵¹, and it forms the research-creation component of this thesis.

4.2 Creating *Silent Azaan*

In May 2018, I enrolled in a film story workshop hosted by the organization EastVan Digital Stories and led by filmmakers Lorna Boschman and Sebnem Ozpeta at the grunt gallery in East

⁵¹ Accessed May 1, 2022, <https://digitalstories.ca/video/silent-azaan/>

Vancouver. In preparation for the workshop, I began by searching for sounds on the internet, recitations of the *adhan* and church bells. Lorna had been clear in her email to participants that permissions to use any music had to be secured before the music could be presented publicly. Searching the web for sounds which could be licensed was a learning experience. I did not know before how sites existed from which urban, city sounds, from a variety of geographies could be licensed. After listening to many sound files for church bells and the *adhan*, I settled upon and licensed two sound files: “*church bells plain bod doubles*” (location unknown) for the church bells and “*VFAC_ElHussein_MasgidElMuayyadSheikh*” (a performance of the ‘*Asr* (afternoon) *adhan* from the el-Muayyad Sheigh Mosque in the El-Hussein neighbourhood in Cairo, Egypt).

The grunt gallery is in the Mount Pleasant neighbourhood of East Vancouver, and I selected a mosque and a church nearby as the buildings which I wanted to film for my project. I used my cell phone camera as the digital recording device. The closest mosque was one neighbourhood to the west, in the Fairview slopes. The Jamia Masjid on West 8th Avenue was the ideal location to be filmed. It was on a relatively silent street with no traffic and had bulbous green painted domes atop basic square minarets in keeping with the 3-4 story height of the residential and commercial buildings on the same street. In a sense, it was a very symbolically “Muslim” mosque with its domes, colour palette, signage, and arched entrance way. The mosque façade clearly symbolizes “Muslim” and “meeting the Muslim community” for politicians who stand in front of it for various public events and other politically framed photo opportunities. The site of the mosque was initially a cultural centre for Pakistani-Canadians and was founded in 1963 by the Pakistan

Canada Association. It also served as the birthplace for the BC Muslim Association⁵² and was then converted into a mosque in the mid-1980s, where “the historic architecture remains amidst the changing landscape of Vancouver”⁵³.

A five-minute car ride away from the mosque, Saint Patrick’s Parish, a Roman Catholic church is located at East 12th Avenue and Main Street. Located on a busy street corner, the brick church, newly built in 2002, has a tall steeple with a spire. Saint Patrick’s was a parish founded in 1909⁵⁴. It included a church and an elementary school when founded and in 1938, a secondary school was added. As the old church fell into disrepair a new church was built and completed in 2002. The film focuses on the steeple and façade of this new building which includes a recreation centre with capacity for 600, a boardroom with capacity for 20 people, and Shamrock Hall, which can hold up to 200 people⁵⁵.

On the day of the workshop, I met with Lorna and Sebnem Ozpeta who both co-led the workshop. It was fortuitous for me because Sebnem was born and raised in Turkey. She was interested in my project for the afternoon, and I was grateful to learn from and have the guidance of an artist to whom I did not have to explain much when it came to the public performance of the *adhan*, since she had heard it as a part of her daily soundscape while growing up in Turkey. What was interesting to me, in addition to her care and attention to my project, were her views

⁵² Pakistan-Canada Association website (Accessed on September 28, 2022, <https://pakcanbc.com/al-jamia-masjid-vancouver>)

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Saint Patrick’s (Accessed on September 28, 2022, <https://stpatsvan.com/about/history>)

⁵⁵ Ibid., at <https://stpatsvan.com/about/facilities>

on the *adhan*. She was familiar with the Turkish styles of recitation and the spelling of *aqaan* in the film title, rather than *adhan*, reflects her input. I told her about my research and, as an artist and instructor, she was supportive of the film I wanted to make. I think my other workshop participants were a bit puzzled by the subject matter of my film, but this just might be my projection upon them. In all fairness, there was little opportunity to converse with them once Sebnem and I got busy on the film project.

There were many editorial choices to be made once digital film data was transferred from my cell phone to Sebnem 's computer. What was the story that I was trying to tell? How much of the chosen sounds would be layered into the film and what type of soundscape was I trying to create? Since there was no narration, I wanted to use text to inform the viewer about what the *adhan* was and to direct the viewer's thoughts to some key questions which I was investigating about the *adhan*. I do view the film as creative research, but I do not view the film as art. The film is not the end piece of "The Adhan Project" I had envisioned in 2015 but rather, in 2018, it was the first of a set of ongoing iterations and "conversations" that would continue beyond this thesis, or as the continuation of a "living form" Fisher (2015) (at page 49).

The film project, which is 2 minutes and 56 seconds in length, starts with an exterior shot of the green bulbous dome atop a short minaret of the mosque, as the Cairo *adhan* is heard on the soundtrack. The below text appears on the screen to the left of the mosque dome projected against the sky:

The *aqaan* is the Muslim call to prayer.

It is recited to the public.

It is outside the mosque.

Five times a day.

At the :23 second mark the text changes and is replaced by the following:

It calls the believers to come and pray.

The azaan is recited in many parts of the world.

In Vancouver, it is silent.

Just before the line “In Vancouver, it is silent” appears (at :30) the recitation of the *adhan* stops and all that can be heard is the wind and street noises. The film then fades and transitions at the :46 second mark to the spire and steeple of Saint Patrick’s church and the church bell sounds begin. The camera scrolls down from the top of the steeple and then pans to the left to show the façade of the church and the name of Saint Patrick’s Church, A.D. 2000 carved into the concrete horizontal crossbeam at the entrance to the church. The camera then scrolls back up to the apex of the roof arch above the name to a cross at the top of the roof line, which clearly marks it as a Christian church. At 1:58 the film transitions back to the green dome of the same mosque filmed at the beginning, only this time there is only ambient, neighbourhood noise and the blowing wind and no *adhan*. As the camera pans left to the domed arched entryway of the mosque, the following text appears:

Is it noise?

Is it religion?

Is it belonging?

The images end at 2:38 and the film shows the credits against a black background. The closing credits state: “Silent Azaan is a part of a multiyear, multidisciplinary research/creation project – The Adhan Project – created by Zool Suleman”.

When I look at the film now, several years later, I find the images of the church in contrast to that of the mosque to be very telling. One is a large solid brick building of a Catholic church established in 1910 and rebuilt as a more prominent building in 2002 on Main Street. The other is a building that appears to have a shoebox like structure. In 1965 the building was converted into a mosque by the Pakistan Canada Association and is referred to in media reports as the oldest mosque in Vancouver. The mosque has a stucco façade to which the domes are added atop basic square minarets, which are about three stories in height. The minarets function as symbols on either side of the main structure which is situated on a lot the size of a large house, on a largely multi-residential side street.

The contrasting of the *adhan* with the church bells and the silence as the video returns to the mosque is jarring and communicates, in a blunt fashion, the questions that the video is asking. However, I think *Silent Azaan* represents an interesting first attempt to creatively articulate the urban geography and sonic questions that I was struggling with in my thesis studies. How would the public *adhan* sound if it were played outside a mosque? Why are the sounds of church bells seen to be “normal” or “accepted” within the soundscape in Vancouver? What does the contrast between the two sounds juxtaposed against images of the facades of the two religious buildings reveal, if anything? What answers does the viewer provide in their own mind to the written

questions which are asked in the film? *Silent Azaan* provides an important entry point for future public engagement on the topic of this thesis.

4.3 Mining a Canadian *adhan* archive

The Covid epidemic created a once in a century event in Canada which resulted in a shutdown of all public activities, including religious gatherings, and coincided with the yearly cycle of *Ramadan*. Both governments and publics were not sure as to how to react to the quickly changing circumstances. This was a time when uniting the public and building a national consensus to fight against the epidemic was paramount. In Vancouver's West End neighbourhood where St. Paul's Hospital is located, for example, health care workers were recognized for their service, with members of the public clapping, banging pots and generally cheering them on at 7pm each evening. Noise that was welcomed and widely celebrated in the media⁵⁶.

At this time of rupture and disorientation in the Spring of 2020, the leadership of some Muslim communities requested that the public recitation of the *adhan* be permitted as a special gesture of unity at a particularly difficult time, since Muslims could not gather for the evening prayer to break the fast and eat together, a major ritual during each evening in the month of *Ramadan*. Municipalities with significant Muslim populations or mosque locations responded with granting

⁵⁶ "Vancouverites are cheering outside nightly for our health care workers", Vancouver Is Awesome, March 22, 2020 (Accessed on October 2, 2022, <https://www.vancouverisawesome.com/local-news/cheering-outside-nightly-health-care-workers-vancouver-video-2188691>)

permission for the public performance of the *adhan* during the month of *Ramadan* (Said, 2020). The reaction of Muslim communities in those cities was positive.⁵⁷

The website www.30Masjids.ca documented many of these public recitations of the *adhan*. I have “mined” this archive methodically as a part of the methodology for this thesis. The site contains archival video documentation of various public recitations of the *adhan* in Canada during *Ramadan* in the Spring of 2020 during the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic when public gatherings were prohibited. While archival research is recognized as a method (Ventresca and Mohr, 2002), recent scholarship under the rubric of “sound and the public” provides an interdisciplinary approach to the nexus of sound/citizenship/territory. As Peterson and Wang (2017) write:

Sound, it seems, is very good at creating horizons of membership that territorialize, or demarcate their limits, whether through technologies of measurement and control or by designating another person’s sound as noise. In this way, sound in public is also a domain of policing relative inclusion and exclusion, of constituting citizenship along axes of race, class, gender, and nationality. (at page 256)

⁵⁷ “Islamic call to prayer being heard for the first time across Canada”, CBC (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/islamic-call-to-prayer-ramadan-al-rashid-edmonton-1.5576598>) (Accessed September 6, 2022)

This nexus of sound, publics, and territory⁵⁸ is evident on the www.30Masjids.ca site which is a documentation project about visits to various mosques in Canada during the month of *Ramadan* since 2011, pre-dating the Covid-19 pandemic, created by Himy Syed.⁵⁹ It is a unique web archive driven by the focus and personal zeal of its creator who refers to himself as a “Canadian Muslim Historian”.⁶⁰ He has aggregated and curated documentation (video recordings, municipal documents, media reports, social media posts, and commentary) focusing on the publicly recited *adhan* in Canada during the month of *Ramadan* in 2020. The site is a type of imaginative “sound mapping” which goes beyond grids and cartography and which tags events, locations and dates across Canada (Anderson, 2016). It is an emerging and innovative way to create archived documentation and engage communities.

⁵⁸ “30 Masjids in 30 Days of Ramadan 2022” (Accessed on October 19, 2022, <http://30masjids.ca/map/>). This is an example of how this site documents its “mapping” process and marks territory.

⁵⁹ “Vancouver man visits 30 mosques in 30 days”, CBC News, June 26, 2017 (Accessed on October 15, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/30-mosques-30-days-1.4177617>)

⁶⁰ <http://30masjids.ca/about/> (Accessed on October 15, 2022)

During this period in 2020, the website www.30masjids.ca, documents public recitations of the *adhan* in Halifax⁶¹, Toronto⁶², Mississauga⁶³, Hamilton⁶⁴, Ottawa⁶⁵, Windsor⁶⁶, Calgary⁶⁷, and Victoria⁶⁸, but none in the province of Quebec⁶⁹.

⁶¹ “Day 4 – VIDEO – Public Adhan Al Maghrib – The Call to Sunset Prayer – UMCC- Ummah Masjid and Community Centre – 2510 St Mathias Street – Halifax, Nova Scotia” (30Masjids.ca) (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/day-4-video-public-adhan-al-maghrib-the-call-to-sunset-prayer-umcc-ummah-masjid-and-community-centre-2510-st-mathias-street-halifa/>)

⁶² “Night 24 – VIDEO – Public Adhan Al Maghrib at the Oldest Masjid in Toronto” (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/night-24-video-public-adhan-al-maghrib-at-the-oldest-masjid-in-toronto-call-to-the-prayer-after-sunset-jami-mosque-islamic-centre-of-toronto/>) (See also: “Toronto mosques to broadcast call to prayer during Ramadan amid COVID-19 restrictions. CBC.ca April 30, 2020 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-mosques-call-to-prayer-speaker-ramadan-1.5550122#:~:text=CBC%20News%20Loaded,Toronto%20mosques%20to%20broadcast%20call%20to%20prayer%20during%20Ramadan%20amid,sunset%20ev ery%20day%20during%20Ramadan>)

⁶³ “Night 7 – VIDEO – Public Adhan Al Maghrib – Call to The Sunset Prayer” (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/night-7-video-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-sunset-prayer-jame-masjid-mississauga-islamic-propagation-centre-of-ontario-5761-coopers-a/> and “Day 13 – VIDEO “Letter read out at Council from ICP Interfaith Council of Peel to Mississauga City Council in Support of the Call to Prayer issue” <http://30masjids.ca/30-more-day-13-video-letter-read-out-at-council-from-icp-interfaith-council-of-peel-to-mississauga-city-council-in-support-of-the-call-to-prayer-issue/>). These video documentation pages also include the text of correspondence, Twitter social media posts, and city council communications.

⁶⁴ “Day 6 – Hamilton City Council Okays Broadcast of Adhans/ Calls to Prayer at Noon and Sunset during Ramadan 2020” (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/day-6-hamilton-city-council-okays-broadcast-of-adhans-calls-to-prayer-at-noon-and-sunset-during-ramadan-2020/>). This is an example of a city that permitted the *adhan* to be recited publicly more than once a day, as did the City of Victoria in British Columbia. The Hamilton video documentation posting includes copies of correspondence from the city, Twitter social media links (which in turn link to a video recording of the City of Hamilton April 29, 2020, virtual council meeting). The Hamilton video documentation also includes the Twitter account of a reporter, Kevin Werner @WerkHCN which notes that one of the Hamilton city councillors raised the issue of church bells and how they are accommodated.

⁶⁵ “Night 9 – VIDEO – First Ever Public Adhan Al Maghrib – Call to The Sunset Prayer – Ottawa Main Mosque” (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/night-9-video-first-ever-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-sunset-prayer-ottawa-main-mosque-ottawa-muslim-association-251-northwestern-ave/>). In this video an Imam from the mosque addressed the camera and explains how the *adhan* fits into an inclusion and multiculturalism paradigm.

⁶⁶ “Night 13 – LIVESTREAM – First Call to The Prayer after Sunset – Windsor Islamic Association” (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/night-13-livestream-first-ever-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-prayer-after-sunset-windsor-islamic-association-wia-1320-northwood-street/>). This is an example of a virtual, livestreamed public recitation of the *adhan* which was recorded and posted to the site. It also include YouTube and Twitter social media documentation of the recitation.

⁶⁷ “Night 17 – VIDEO – Public Adhan Al Maghrib – Call to The Prayer After Sunset” (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/night-17-video-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-prayer-after-sunset-green-dome-mosque-al-madinah-calgary-islamic-assembly-amcia/> and “Night 16 – VIDEO – First Ever Public Adhan Al Maghrib – Call to The Prayer After Sunset” <http://30masjids.ca/night-16-video-first-ever-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-prayer-after-sunset-north-east-islamic-center-akram-jomaa-2612-37th-avenue-ne/>) and “Day 15 – “Calgary approves request for Masjids across Calgary to broadcast Adhan Muslim Call to Prayer for remaining day of Ramadan 2020” (<http://30masjids.ca/30-more-day-15-city-of-calgary-approves-request-for-masjids-across-calgary-to-broadcast-adhan-muslim-call-to-prayer-for-remaining-days-of-ramadan-2020-alberta-muslim-public-a/>). The Calgary documentation is from more than one site and includes documentation of the approval from the Mayor

More specific to the Greater Vancouver region, which is the focus of this thesis, there are video recordings of the al-Jumia Masjid⁷⁰ (which is the focus of *Silent Azaan*), the MAC Centre Vancouver located at 2122 Kingsway⁷¹, the Masjid al-Salaam at 5050 Canada Way in Burnaby⁷²

of Calgary, Naheed K. Nenshi on May 8, 2020. Mayor Nenshi was one of the first “big city” Muslim mayors in Canada.

⁶⁸ (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/day-20-video-masjid-al-iman-started-broadcasting-adhan-from-the-masjid-to-the-public-2218-quadra-street-victoria-british-columbia/>)

⁶⁹ “VIDEO – Day 7 – Some provincial government across Canada made exceptions for Muslims to broadcast their call to prayer, known as the Adhan, during the holy month of Ramadan. However, Quebec ignored the request for the last two years” (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/30-more-video-day-7-some-provincial-governments-across-canada-made-exceptions-for-muslims-to-broadcast-their-call-to-prayer-known-as-the-adhan-during-the-holy-month-of-ramada/>). This documentation page includes broadcast news reports from the Twitter social media account of City News Montreal @CityNewsMTL. Also note that in the recent 2022 provincial election in Quebec, Parti Quebecois candidate Lyne Jubinville referenced the *adhan* when she stated: “But don't count on us to build you mosques and let your muezzins launch the call to prayer in the middle of the street when our churches are for sale and our bells are increasingly silent.” *Le Devoir*, September 28, 2022 (Accessed on October 3, 2022, <https://www.ledevoir.com/politique/quebec/759339/une-candidate-pequiste-attaque-vivement-l-islam>) [Note: the original text was in French and has been translated by Google Translate into English]. [Further Note: On the theme of church bells/*adhan*, this issue also came up in discussions by municipal officials in Hamilton, Ontario where the Resolution before City of Hamilton council dated April 29, 2020, referred to granting permission to perform the *adhan* twice a day as a “symbolic gesture”. When Councillor Brad Clark asked what the rules were on church bells in the City of Hamilton, Mayor Fred Eisenberger replied that there were no rules for church bells being rung in Hamilton but that he, Mayor Eisenberger, had asked that all churches ring their bells every day at 6pm on behalf of frontline workers (Twitter exchange noted by journalist and Hamilton News reporter, Kevin Werner on his Twitter account @WerkHCN, sourced from <http://30masjids.ca/day-6-hamilton-city-council-okays-broadcast-of-adhans-calls-to-prayer-at-noon-and-sunset-during-ramadan-2020/>)

⁷⁰ “Night 19 – VIDEO – First Ever Public Adhan Al Maghrib – Call to The Prayer After Sunset – Al Jamia Masjid Vancouver” (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/night-19-video-first-ever-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-prayer-after-sunset-al-jamia-masjid-vancouver-pakistan-canada-association-655/>). This is a richly documented recitation with documentation of correspondence from the Mayor of Vancouver, various Twitter social media posts, Facebook posts, and two long interviews with the members of the Pakistan Canada Association responding to questions about the *adhan* and its public recitation.

⁷¹ “Night 23 – Laylatul Qadr – VIDEO – Public Adhan Al Maghrib – Call to The Prayer After Sunset – MAC Centre Vancouver – Muslim Association of Canada – 2122 Kingsway” (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/night-23-laylatul-qadr-video-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-prayer-after-sunset-mac-centre-vancouver-muslim-association-of-canada/>). This is an example of a public recitation of the *adhan* on a very busy city street and how it enters the soundscape but is hard to discern with all the other streetscape noises.

⁷² “Night 21 – Laylatul Qadr – VIDEO – First Ever Public Adhan Al Maghrib – Call to The Prayer After Sunset – Masjid al-Salaam and Education Centre” (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/night-21-laylatul-qadr-video-first-ever-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-prayer-after-sunset-masjid-al-sa-laam-and-education-centre-5060-c/>) (See also: “Burnaby mosque seeks to broadcast call to prayer during Ramadan”, *Burnaby Now*, May 11, 2020 (Accessed on October 2, 2020 <https://www.burnabynow.com/local-news/burnaby-mosque-seeks-to-broadcast-call-to-prayer-during-ramadan-3122223>)). This is another data rich documentation of the recitation of the public

and the Jamea Masjid at 72nd Avenue and 124th Street in Surrey⁷³. The public recitation of the *adhan* was welcomed by the Muslim communities in British Columbia⁷⁴ but the approval of the public recitations also included negotiations with municipal authorities over noise issues⁷⁵.

For the purposes of this research, I reviewed more than 20 recordings of the publicly recited *adhan* on the site. I also traced links on the web pages related to the *adhan* performances to read, view, listen to and analyze various municipal documents (press releases, municipal orders), media reports (television, newspaper, radio), and social media postings (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube).

adhan in Burnaby, BC. It includes Twitter social media posts which link to news reports, a YouTube video of the recitation, and documentation from the local city council.

⁷³ “30 MORE – Surrey Jamea Masjid at 72nd Avenue & 124th Street FINALLY gets permission for Adhan Al Maghrib but only for five nights starting May 18, 2020 (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/30-more-surrey-jamea-masjid-at-72nd-avenue-124th-street-finally-gets-permission-for-adhan-al-maghrib-but-only-for-five-nights-starting-may-18-2020/> and “Night 26 – LIVESTREAM – First Ever Public Adhan Al Maghrib – Call to Prayer – Surrey Jamea Masjid” <http://30masjids.ca/night-26-livestream-first-ever-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-prayer-after-sunset-surrey-jamea-masjid-72nd-avenue-124th-street-surrey/>). Surrey is one of the largest municipalities in British Columbia. These two video documentation links provide links to two recitations at two locations. In addition, there is documentation of how the BC Muslim Association lobbied the municipal government for permissions, Facebook, YouTube and other social media posts. The first “30 More” post also includes a recording of a radio interview on a local radio station (1.7.7 Pulse FM) on May 14, 2020, which has a conversation between the radio host and a member of the Muslim leadership about the resistance from Surrey council to authorize the public recitation.

⁷⁴ “Adhan – A public Call to prayer at various Mosques in BC” (al-Ameen, May 20, 2020) (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <https://www.alameenpost.com/articles.aspx?categoryname=community&newsid=11048>)

⁷⁵ “Surrey Mosque Fights City Over Right to Sound Call to Prayer Throughout Neighbourhood”, Pulse 107.7 Radio, May 14, 2020 (Accessed on October 2, 2022, <https://www.pulsefm.ca/mosque-fights-city-over-right-to-sound-call-to-prayer-throughout-neighbourhood/>)

In terms of the technology, most of the mosques are not built to accommodate the public performance of the *adhan* with few having external amplification systems, either affixed to the outside of the mosque structures or minarets. In several locations in Greater Vancouver where the *adhan* was performed, the reciter prayed into a microphone and a portable amplification system. This was similar to approaches taken across the country.

At the al-Jumia Masjid in Vancouver, the recitation was via a portable speaker placed on the external landing of the building underneath the entrance arch way, which served to create a sonic resonance and projected the amplified sound into the street. The MAC Centre, which is located on the second floor of a two-story commercial building on the busy Kingsway thoroughfare in Vancouver, simply opened a second-floor window and set up a single speaker through which the *adhan* was amplified onto the street. At the Jamea Masjid in Surrey, a portable sound system was set up near the mosque in the parking lot next to a residential area and the *adhan* was recited to the almost empty parking lot. At the Masjid al-Salaam in Burnaby, the *adhan* was also recited via a portable amplification system into the inner courtyard of the mosque building.

In all cases, it was clear that a sonic “first” was taking place but, in several instances, participants and organizers were unsure of how to proceed. Those who observed did not seem sure about how to behave. Were they engaged in a solemn religious event, a celebration, a performance of some sort, or all the latter? It is evident from the film documentation that the assembled knew that something historic was taking place and each performance was recorded, even if with a shaky digital phone camera video recording. What did not take place, due to Covid restrictions, is the

gathering of large crowds who, but for Covid, would usually be heading towards the entrances to the mosques to gather for prayer and to break the fast.

It was as if “race had suddenly emerged in the geographical works of cities”, to quote Razack (2002) again. The “emergence” was from inside the mosques to the outside public soundscape. But this emergence was hesitant and tentative, for while the social spaces of the mosques were being installed/instituted with a new practice (the public recitation of the *adhan*), this practice was limited and proscribed. The recitation of the *adhan* had been permitted for the *maghrib* prayer only, for a limited time duration, during the 2020 *Ramadan*. In these circumstances, it is difficult for the Muslim communities involved to enshrine a public religious practice.

It is difficult to take ownership of a sonic space when you do not have ownership of it, but rather, it is permitted at the discretion of local politicians. It is also difficult to assess how the emergence of this temporary Muslim soundscape in the city would be greeted by those who work and reside close to the mosques, were it to become permanent. A time limited, singular performance for a few days is vastly different from an *adhan* recited five times a day with sound systems built to amplify from the exterior of the mosque.

What the *adhan* performances have done is enlivened and embodied an experience for Muslim communities which might previously have been seen as “foreign” to Canada (Gressitt-Diaz, 2017). The performance of the *adhan* has now made the “foreign”, not only domestic, but present in various Canadian neighbourhoods. As in the case of the Hamtramck, Michigan where a “Bangladeshi factory worker” wanted to re/construct a sense of “home” by having the *adhan*

publicly performed and connect to the place he had “left behind” (Weiner, 2014)(at page 163), the unforeseen and residual consequences of activating such embodied experiences should not be underestimated.

Whether the 2020 public performances have created a precedent or an expectation for future public *adhan* recitations, is too early to tell. A new Muslim soundscape does appear to be emerging even if on a limited basis during *Ramadan*. The *adhan* was publicly performed in 2021 during *Ramadan* in Calgary⁹⁴. At one mosque in Calgary, it was performed by a Muslim RCMP officer in full uniform with his service revolver⁹⁵ in the mosque parking lot. In a filmed interview before the recitation took place, RCMP Corporal Nader Khalil stated that the community had reached out to him and “[t]he RCMP was all for it...It just shows the diversity of this country and the beauty of this country, and we should be thankful. Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Atheists, whatever faith we’re from. We should be thankful that we live in such a beautiful country that allows us to worship in peace and in harmonies.”⁹⁶ The Corporal’s comments appear to be part of a narrative embraced by many Muslims that the public performance of the *adhan* proves the beauty of Canada as a multicultural mosaic of cultures and religions and why Muslims should be grateful to be living in Canada.

⁹⁴ (Accessed on October 3, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/night-2-video-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-prayer-after-sunset-green-dome-mosque-al-madinah-calgary-islamic-assembly-amcia/>)

⁹⁵ (Accessed on October 1, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/night-5-video-call-to-the-prayer-after-sunset-rcmp-corporal-nader-khalil-calling-adhan-al-maghrib-in-full-uniform-akram-jomaa-islamic-centre-2612-37th/>)

⁹⁶ Ibid. [Note: This transcription of the interview is from the YouTube transcription included at the bottom of the posted film recording.]

Chapter 5: Frameworks of accommodation

... frameworks within which Muslim mosque leaders framed their 2020 requests? In the specific context of Greater Vancouver, Haroon Khan, a trustee of the al-Jumia Masjid is quoted as saying that the recitation was a sign of “hope to our community and all communities.” “It doesn’t matter what your race is, it doesn’t matter what your religion or where you stand, publicly or privately. We’re all brothers and sisters together and we’re all in this COVID-19 fight together”.¹²² Vancouver Mayor Kennedy Stewart in his “Message from the Mayor” dated May 11, 2020, grounded his message in “collective faith, discipline and unity”.¹²³ Vancouver City Councillor Peter Fry posted on Twitter on May 12, 2020: “Great reminder that we are a multicultural city of settlers from around the world and we are at our best when we celebrate and embrace diversity”.¹²⁴

As quoted previously, Isin and Siemiatycki (2002) argue that the “Canadian Muslim identity is constructed by the dominant culture as both a religious and a racialized minority” [emphasis added] (at page 195). Places of worship become sites of contestation because it is at these sites, like mosques, that groups “establish *collective, cultural expressions of identity*” (at page 197). The struggles over space, be it physical space or aural space, “are simultaneously cultural and political because globalization ensures the presence of large immigrant groups who are subjected

¹²² “Vancouver’s oldest mosque to broadcast call to prayer for first time in its history”, CBC.ca May 12, 2020 (Accessed October 5, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/al-jamia-masjid-mosque-vancouver-call-to-prayer-1.5565850>)

¹²³(Accessed on October 3, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/night-19-video-first-ever-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-prayer-after-sunset-al-jamia-masjid-vancouver-pakistan-canada-association-655/>)

¹²⁴ Ibid.

to various forms of racialization for the functioning of the global city. Thus, the claims of racialized immigrants to citizenship are fought on the terrain of the city, which can be interpreted as ‘rights to the city’“ (at page 196).

Haroon Khan eases the challenging work required by the dominant culture to understand and accept the complex identity of Muslims (race/religion/immigrant/citizen) by too neatly framing the public performance of the *adhan* as not being an issue of race, but of religion alone.

Politicians Stewart and Fry, avoid the issue of race by framing the permission granted as being rooted in messages of unity, multiculturalism and diversity. Why the mosque in Vancouver is not permitted to routinely perform the *adhan*, publicly, during *Ramadan*, without special municipal approval, is a question which is not asked by either the Muslims or the politicians involved. The aural expression of a Muslim faith practice, like the *adhan* becomes the exception, not the rule.

This silence, or evasion, makes clear Muslims and municipal politicians may be having two separate conversations on the same topic – the claiming of Muslim aural space in the city. What would happen with a request to perform the *adhan* publicly five times a day? The latter question in my view, is inching its way onto the agendas of municipal governments in Canada, as larger cities with significant and growing Muslim populations, are making themselves heard via the ballot box.

In the City of Surrey, the leadership of the BC Muslim Association had made a request to the Surrey Mayor and Council to publicly perform the *adhan*, for a two-minute duration, for 10 days during *Ramadan* in 2020 commencing on May 13, 2020. Surrey’s General Manager communicated to the group that permission had been granted by the City of Surrey for only one

public performance on the last day of *Ramadan*. The BC Muslim Association continued to lobby the municipal government and on May 18, 2020, the City of Surrey granted approval for five public performances beginning May 18¹²⁵. In the radio interview posted to the site of Pulse 107.7¹²⁶, radio host Vanessa Ybarra wonders why the City of Surrey resisted the public performance of the *adhan*. The City of Surrey had been supportive of members of the public making noise in support of healthcare workers during the Covid pandemic, Ybarra points out during the interview, then why did the City of Surrey resist the public performances of the *adhan*? In the interview, Asad Ghondal, the Chairman of the BC Muslim Association's Surrey/Delta branch, politely declines to engage the question¹²⁷.

Imam Yahya Momla of the Masjid al-Salaam mosque in Burnaby is quoted as saying that the public recitation of the *adhan* was “a show of unity and solidarity with the city and British Columbia that we will overcome the COVID-19 challenge and these difficult times together. The *adhan* is also our unique way of paying homage to the courage, sacrifice and bravery of our first responders.”¹²⁸ In his reasoning it appears that the Covid pandemic not only led to the public performance, but that the performance of the *adhan* is also a homage to the those who assisted during the Covid pandemic. In his inclusive response, he blurs the edges between the Muslims

¹²⁵ (Accessed on October 3, 2022 <http://30masjids.ca/30-more-surrey-jamea-masjid-at-72nd-avenue-124th-street-finally-gets-permission-for-adhan-al-maghrib-but-only-for-five-nights-starting-may-18-2020/>)

¹²⁶ “Surrey Mosque Fights City Over Right to Sound Call to Prayer Throughout Neighbourhood”. Pulse 107.7 radio site. (Accessed on October 3, 2022, <https://www.pulsefm.ca/mosque-fights-city-over-right-to-sound-call-to-prayer-throughout-neighbourhood/>)

¹²⁷ (Accessed on October 3, 2022, <http://30masjids.ca/night-26-livestream-first-ever-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-prayer-after-sunset-surrey-jamea-masjid-72nd-avenue-124th-street-surrey/>.)

¹²⁸ “Burnaby mosque seeks to broadcast call to prayer during Ramadan”, Burnaby Now, May 11, 2020. (Accessed on October 3, 2022, <https://www.burnabynow.com/local-news/burnaby-mosque-seeks-to-broadcast-call-to-prayer-during-ramadan-3122223>)

who pray during *Ramadan*, and first responders, Muslim or not. This strategy of “inclusion” can also be seen in how other mosques across Canada justified the public call to prayer. At the Ottawa Mosque, for example, the Imam of the mosque stated that the public recitation of the *adhan* was a sign of unity, respect and multiculturalism.¹²⁹

In Brampton and Mississauga, the negative reactions to the public recitation broke out into the open and the antipathy of some, to the *adhan* recitation, could not be muted. In Brampton, Mayor Patrick Brown had requested a report to city council from staff since Makki Masjid in Brampton had already begun public recitations of the *adhan* without formal council approval. Mayor Brown had urged “staff to use their discretion” until the report was presented¹³⁰. In Mississauga, Mayor Bonnie Crombie had brought forward the request for a public performance of the *adhan* as a an informal “walk-on” item on the agenda as “the matter of broadcasting audible expressions of faith”, not specifying which faith or anything specific to Islam¹³¹. Subsequently, an online petition calling for the reversal of the decision gathered 20,000 signatures. The petition was eventually taken down, but it included language about how the public performance of the *adhan* “could create significant divisions within the multicultural society of Mississauga” and re-traumatize “veterans who served in the Middle East and heard this everyday”.

¹²⁹ (Accessed on October 4, 2020 <http://30masjids.ca/night-9-video-first-ever-public-adhan-al-maghrib-call-to-the-sunset-prayer-ottawa-main-mosque-ottawa-muslim-association-251-northwestern-ave/>) (See also: <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/ottawa-mosques-allowed-to-broadcast-call-to-prayer-at-sundown-during-ramadan-1.4919472> Accessed on October 4, 2022).

¹³⁰ “Mississauga councillors critical of Mayor Bonnie Crombie’s handling of call to prayer motion” Mississauga.com May 8, 2020 (Accessed October 4, 2022 <https://www.mississauga.com/news-story/9972651-mississauga-councillors-critical-of-mayor-bonnie-crombie-s-handling-of-call-to-prayer-motion/>) [Note: some of the stories in this publication related to the topic of the *adhan* had to stop public comments being posted to the website due to “violations of the commenting code of conduct.”]

¹³¹ Ibid.

A competing petition thanking Mayor Crombie and the City of Mississauga for approving the public performances also referred to how the public performances tackled “the issue of Islamophobia”.¹³² Mayor Crombie and Council members referred the matter to the Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee after much “unsolicited feedback” and the committee was to study the topic of “the matter of broadcasting audible expressions of faith”.¹³³ Both Brampton and Mississauga have large immigrant populations from the Indian sub-continent and its diaspora. These communities are also politically active. The tensions between some members of the various religious communities in Greater Toronto could not be contained and came into the open over the issue of a publicly recited *adhan*^{134 135}.

¹³² “‘Haters will be haters’: Calls to prayer stir controversy in Brampton and Mississauga, Mississauga.com May 7, 2020 (Accessed on October 4, 2022 <https://www.mississauga.com/news-story/9971662--haters-will-be-haters-calls-to-prayer-stir-controversy-in-brampton-and-mississauga/>)

¹³³ “Mississauga’s diversity committee set to look at decisions to relax noise bylaws to allow call to prayer in Ramadan” Mississauga.com May 5, 2020 (Accessed on October 4, 2022 <https://www.mississauga.com/news-story/9970607-mississauga-s-diversity-committee-set-to-look-at-decision-to-relax-noise-bylaws-to-allow-call-to-prayer-in-ramadan/>)

¹³⁴ For example, a member of the Peel District School Board, Ravi Hooda posted an Islamophobic Tweet in response to Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown announcing that the public performance of the *adhan* would be permitted. Mr. Hooda was dismissed from his school board position (“ ‘Disturbing, Islamophobic’ tweet about call to prayer prompts firing of Peel school council chair” CBC, May 5, 2020 (Accessed on October 2, 2022 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/brampton-call-to-prayer-peel-1.5556043>)

¹³⁵ The Hindu Forum Canada based in Mississauga, Ontario wrote a letter of complaint dated May 2, 2020, to the local media accusing local municipalities for “mixing religion with politics” and asking the Canada’s secular foundation be respected. The Hindu Forum Canada changed its position on religious noise and the secular/religious divided soon after lodging its public complaint and instead sought for Hindu temples across Mississauga to be permitted daily outdoor broadcast of hymns for three Hindu festivals. Allegations of racism against the group were raised by Canadians United Against Hate but a noise exemption was granted so the Hindu temples could broadcast religious hymns every night at 7pm for five minutes between August 11 and September 1 in 2020. “Mississauga Hindu temples’ outdoor hymns expose public divide during pandemic” (Globe and Mail newspaper, August 14, 2020) (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-mississauga-hindu-temples-play-hymns-outdoors/>)(Accessed September 6, 2022).

What is clear is the issue of the public performance of the *adhan* will not soon disappear from the public soundscape. In 2021, during *Ramadan*, the *adhan* was publicly recited in “about 40 mosques in Edmonton, some in Calgary and at least one in Mississauga, Ontario”.¹³⁶ In the same story, Yasin Cetin, a community outreach worker with the Muslim Association of Canada’s Islamic School in Edmonton is quoted as saying that City of Edmonton has granted permission for the continued recitation of the *adhan* during *Ramadan* in the future.¹³⁷

To revisit the experience of the USA, there were three groupings that emerged in response to requests for the *adhan* to be publicly performed: (1) the “pluralists” who wanted to embrace different religions and cultures; (2) the “exclusivists”, who want to protect the largely “Christian” status quo; and (3) the “privatists”, who wanted to the public realm to be kept apart from the private practice of faith. In the Canadian context, which differs greatly from the context of the USA, we have laws that enshrine multiculturalism and these laws, in my view, only provide two main pathways forward with relation to the *adhan* and its public recitation: (1) the “pluralist” view, which in the Canadian context would be similar to state sanctioned multiculturalism; and (2) the “exclusivists”, who wish to maintain the largely “Christian” status quo. While the “privatists” position might also find a foothold in Canada with those who argue that public spaces should be secular (Stonebanks, 2019), in my view, in most of Canada (excluding Quebec)¹³⁸, the “pluralist” and the “exclusivists” positions are much more likely to

¹³⁶ “Emotions show as call to prayer is broadcast during second Ramadan in lockdown”, Canadian Press, April 19, 2021 as posted on CBC.ca (Accessed on October 4, 2022 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alta-ramadan-athaah-1.5993384>)

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ This thesis does not address the complexity of Muslim communities and the public recitation of the *adhan* in Quebec. Any attempt to address this latter topic would require a thesis in itself.

find traction with municipal politicians and local publics. I am not suggesting that the “pluralist” position will be successful, or that “success” will come without contestation, since any claiming of sonic space and the “territorialization” that accompanies it, will be viewed as “threatening” by many in the public.

As can be seen, the “pluralist” or what in Canada we would call the “multiculturalist” position, was an integral part of the “Highway to Heaven” religious building zone in Richmond (Dwyer, 2016). Similarly, the various approvals provided for the *adhan* to be performed during Ramadan is yet another set of examples of how multiculturalism was instrumentalized by both Muslims and municipal politicians. But in both instances, religious building zones or the public performance of the *adhan*, neither the affected religious communities nor the politicians, nor the public at large appears to have any interest in unmasking the national white space (Thobani, 2007) under which these permissions are granted in the first place. The references to “unity” and “harmony” by Muslim leaders and politicians in support of the public recitation of the *adhan*, do not aid in the transformation of the white settler colonial underpinnings of the Canadian state. The inclusion of the *adhan* within the soundscape, is framed as “problem” to which the solution is a temporary and limited grant of permission which allows municipal governments to “manage” the problem, as Thobani has theorized. Both players in this complex relationship know their roles, Muslim communities ask for permission (in the subservient pose), and municipal governments grant permission (in the dominant pose). In the *adhan*, Muslims supplicate themselves to *Allah*, but in seeking permission to perform the *adhan* these same communities are, arguably, supplicating themselves to representatives of the nation-state at the municipal level.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

When I first became interested in this topic in 2009, it was because of my curiosity and the absence of the *adhan* in the Canadian soundscape. In the intervening period, the topic of the public recitation of the *adhan* has gained public policy relevance in Europe, the USA and in Canada. In 2022, with the Covid pandemic leading to the *adhan* being publicly performed in Canada on a limited basis, there is now real “data” on how the *adhan* might enter the Canadian urban soundscape, but also “data” on why the performance of the *adhan* might continue to be permitted in the future.

The claiming of Muslim space is not only physical. Identity formation and religious practice can manifest in many forms. The *adhan* makes a claim on the aural space and the soundscape which it creates extends Muslim claims to the city beyond the wall of mosques. In this sense, the *adhan* projects into new urban spaces and by doing so starts to challenge who has “rights to the city”. My research-creation film, *Silent Azaan*, explored the possibilities of a Muslim space and asked some preliminary questions in 2018: Is it noise? Is it religion? Is it belonging?

The *adhan* is a part of Muslim religious practices. By some interpretations of the faith, it is a necessary part of daily prayer, but there are also sources that view the *adhan* as being an addition to the daily prayers, not central to them. In the documentation of the public recitation of the *adhan* in 2020 across Canada, clearly Muslim communities in Canada do view the *adhan* as being central to their sense of what it means to be Muslim, a term that embodies both faith and culture. Some of the social media commentary by Muslims references how the public recitation

of the *adhan* has reawakened memories of hearing the *adhan* in their countries of origin before they immigrated to Canada. These memories, once rekindled, will be hard to extinguish.

The issue of the *adhan* being “noise” can be traced to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, it is not a new objection. In the context of Canadian cities, it is important to distinguish between the categories in which the *adhan* could be placed. If it is “noise” then it is subject to municipal noise bylaws which govern much of the lived environment within cities. If it is “religion”, then it becomes harder for municipalities to govern. “Religion” can lead to rights claims which might find a basis in provincial and federal laws such as the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. “Religious noise”, or “broadcasting audible expressions of faith”, as the Mississauga city council framed it, traverses a multi-jurisdictional socio-legal framework which is not easy to define or govern.

What the public performance of the *adhan* has done is put issues of “belonging” and “citizenship” on the municipal agenda and beyond that – the public sphere. The challenge for the Muslim leadership and for city councils will be on how they choose to address the challenges which the *adhan* presents. As Thobani (2007) and Bannerji (2000) have argued, multiculturalism, as a policy, was created as a salve to soothe and hide the wounds and fissures created by Anglo/Franco colonial histories. “[T]he Rest”, as Stuart Hall names them, have been corralled into identifiable minorities “with their ethnic or traditional or underdeveloped cultures” (Bannerji, 2000)(at page 96). As Thobani (2007) has pointed out, multiculturalism constitutes “people of colour as possessing an excess of culture” and this “excess” marks “them as outsiders to the nation” (at page 162). In a sense to perform the *adhan* within the mosque walls, contains

this “excess of culture” but to unleash it onto the public soundscape is to unleash the “outsider” to the actual outside and this unleashing creates its own dissonance, in the aural and the socio-political sphere. As Bannerji (2000) writes:

Speaking here of culture without addressing power relations displaces and trivializes deep contradictions. It is a reductionism that hides the social relations of domination that continually creates “difference” as inferior and thus signifies continuing relations of antagonism. (at page 97)

The public recitation of the *adhan*, if it persists beyond the Covid pandemic and/or to grows to include more than a recitation once a day and not only during *Ramadan*, has the potential to become a flash point for a very contentious public conversation. As was seen in Brampton and Mississauga, if Muslim communities are allowed to make public “noise” other communities may also choose to assert claims to the public soundscape. How these various communities would be accommodated, is yet to be seen.

To the question which I asked in *Silent Azaan*, “is it belonging?”, I think the answer is multi-tiered and more nuanced than a simple “yes” or “no”. In part, for Muslim communities, it is about how they wish to belong and be accepted more fully. There is no one answer to this question, since there is no monolithic, homogenous “Muslim community”. Each Muslim community will need to seek its own answer within the context of where they are located in Canada, and how hospitable the political climate is in that location, but also how much each

Muslim community wants to expose the power dynamics that exist in the Canadian state and how multiculturalism/diversity serve to make opaque that which is fairly transparent.

It is important to remember Said's (2003) thoughts in the 1994 Afterword to *Orientalism*, where he states,

The construction of identity – for identity, whether of the Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction in my opinion – involves the construction of opposites and “others” whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from “us”. Each age and society re-creates its “Others” (at page 332).

Bannerji (2000) has probed this notion of community which I include in the phrase “Muslim community”, and she points out that “community” is not a natural formation but one that arises “out of ideology and cultural and political practices, out of commonalities of difference and commonness” (at page 154). The very idea of a “Muslim community”, in part, is a response to the Canadian states “othering” of Muslims as being “different”: “People who are thus ‘othered’ also bond together *vis a vis* these designatory processes in a defensive move, while being penned within a political and cultural boundary” (at page 155).

The challenges related to seeking a more frequent public recitation of the adhan also opens up questions for Muslim communities in Canada. Are Muslim communities willing to explore what binds them in seeking a larger sonic space in Canada? Are they willing to step outside the

frameworks created for them by the Canadian nation state? It is too premature to answer these questions definitively since the contexts are very dynamic with many factors at play. If the public recitation of the *adhan* in the Spring of 2020 makes anything clear, it is that for Muslims there is a yearning for the recitation to continue as another public feature of their religious practices in Canada.

As we can see, the response to why there is an absence of the *adhan* in the public soundscape of Canada, touches upon many different issues. I can now better understand the responses I received when I began my research. The urban planning professor was not incorrect, for some Muslims the *adhan* is not necessary and there is nothing to study, “all you need is a line in the sand and pray towards Mecca”. The lawyer’s hypothesis that restrictions on the public recitation of the *adhan* were related to a separation of “church and state” might also make sense if one shares the “privatists” view of the role of religion in the public sphere. Finally, it is the discomfort of the Muslim religious elder to my initial questions which have the most resonance for me now. I understand that discomfort better. The question I had started to research did not contain a simple or easy answer. What this thesis has done is examine that complexity and lay out a foundation for future debates on the topic, something which was lacking when I began.

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