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Sounds in changing Contexts  
The Muslim Call to Prayer in Vienna

Introduction

“Allahu Akbar” – “God is great”. The man on the other end of the room is calling into a microphone. The speakers in each of the corners of the room amplify his voice, adding an artificial echo which gives the impression of an immense dome opening up over our heads. He repeats the phrase four times in a slow, thoughtful pace, stretching the syllables and decorating them with melodic lines. The other men sitting against the walls of the room listen and silently move their lips. “Rise up to prayer”, the voice echoes out of the speakers. After the man has finished, the others get up, and facing towards the ornamented image of a door in one corner of the room they lift their hands to their ears and start to pray, first by themselves, then, after another call to prayer, together. Leaving the room half an hour later through a back door, I find myself standing in front of a red-brick church, its bell tower rising high towards the sky blanking out everything else. And as an avalanche of cars is released by the green of a traffic light and roars by, I realize that I am in the centre of Vienna, the city where I been living since seven years and with which I thought I was familiar.

The imagined journey described above formed part of the everyday-routine during the six months of my research on the *adhan*,<sup>1</sup> the Muslim call to prayer, based in Vienna, Austria’s capital. The *adhan* is not solely an acoustic event in the urban or rural landscape but also a communicative act between the producers of this cultural sound and their consumers. Both sides of this process influence the quality of the call to prayer – on the one hand through artistic elaboration, on the other hand through aesthetic expectations.

Islam is an acknowledged religion in Austria. In Vienna, the country’s capital, Muslims form about one tenth of the city’s population, coming mainly from Turkey and Bosnia, but also from Egypt, Nigeria, and other countries, and there even exist Muslim communities where most members originate from the Austrian majority population and have no migratory background.<sup>2</sup> Since the Islam-law (*Islamgesetz*) was enacted in 1912 Muslims are theoretically equal to Christians according to their religious practice.<sup>3</sup> The only mosque of Vienna is situated at the banks of the river Danube and was constructed in 1979 (cf. Loidl 1979). It differs from the more than hundred Viennese prayer rooms, which are always integrated into already existing buildings, not only by its outside architecture but also by its orientation towards Mecca, the geographical centre of Islam.<sup>4</sup> But its *minaret*, the tower from

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<sup>1</sup> I found different variations of spelling in my interviews and in the consulted literature – from *ezan* to *athan*, depending on mother tongue and accents of my informants. The version ‘*adhan*’ (the sound ‘dh’ is pronounced like a soft ‘th’) like all other spellings of Arab words is taken from *Enzyklopädie des Islam* (URL 1).

<sup>2</sup> Information taken from the homepage of Statistik Austria (URL 2).

<sup>3</sup> “Law dated 15th July, 1912 [...] In agreement with both chambers of the Imperial Council I herewith order as follows: [...] The adherents of Islam shall be granted recognition as religious community in the kingdoms and crown-lands represented in the Imperial Council in the meaning of the Constitutional Law of 21st December, 1867” (URL 3; my translation). For the full text in German see the homepage of the Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich (ibid.).

<sup>4</sup> James Dickie sees the orientation as one possible definition of a mosque: “[A] building erected over an invisible axis, axis which is none the less the principle determinant of its design” (Dickie 1984: 16).

which traditionally the *muadhin* calls to prayer, is silent most of the time. The *adhan* can only be heard inside of the mosque and the hundred to two hundred Muslim prayer rooms situated all over Vienna. Moving from the original position as acoustic marker in the everyday life in places, where it can be perceived by a public audience, to the more private sphere of the prayer room, the *adhan* also changes in quality and acquires new meanings.

With this paper I want to look at this cultural sound, its social relevance and its relation to individual persons. The central question of the text is: What is the practical meaning of the *adhan* for Muslim migrants in Vienna? With “practical” I point out the role of the *adhan* as a cultural practice which is connected to other communal or individual practice and routines. But other questions will have to be dealt with in order to find the answer to this primary question. What is the *adhan*? What are its qualities and how and where is it produced? What is a cultural sound? How can sounds have social relevance? How do they connect to the individual person? How are they connected to the places at which they can be heard? And – as the introduction above implies – what is the importance of sound in creating feelings of familiarity or unfamiliarity?

The empirical approach I chose for my research was a combination of different qualitative methods. Although some of them will be looked at in more detail in the according sections, I shall roughly outline the content of my methodological toolbox. My main source were qualitative interviews conducted with Muslim men and women, both narrative and topic-centred. I also consulted two religious (Islamic) experts, an ethno-musicologist, and two professional *muadhin* for detailed information on the *adhan*. A second important empirical source were observations of Muslim prayers in different prayer rooms in Vienna to perceive the *adhan* in its practical context. Another tool was to record *adhans* performed during prayers and by my informants during the interviews to compare them to gain insight into the temporal structure and melodic quality of the Muslim call to prayer. To research the perception of specific sounds in an urban landscape I also used the more quantitative method of mapping the range and audibility of a church bell sound, which I combined with quantitative questioning of people in the street after the tolling of the bell. The last element of my methodological approach was my body as access to the acoustic field. Using my ears to participate in the acoustic dimension of the prayer and especially the *adhan*, observing its effects on my own situational perception and realizing the increasing importance of the sound of the church bell and the *adhan* as elements of my daily researcher’s routine offered to me the possibility to participate in the acoustic life-world of Muslims in Vienna.<sup>5</sup>

The following text is structured in three parts which will gradually lead to the consideration of the central question of the meaning of *adhan* for Muslims in Vienna. Part 1 will deal with the phenomenon ‘sound’ and propose a theoretical approach by developing the concepts of the ‘acoustic artefact’ and the ‘acoustic community’ and defining sound and especially acoustic structures as elements of the landscape. Part 2 will describe the ‘acoustic artefact’ *adhan*, its history, its production, and its social dimension. Part 3 will deal with the *adhan* in Vienna, describing the placing of this sound in the urban landscape and the meanings it acquires in this new spatial context.

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<sup>5</sup> More details concerning my methodological approach can be found in my master thesis which was basis for this article (URL 4).

## 1. What is sound?

To understand the *adhan* I want to look closer at the phenomenon ‘sound’ and its different dimensions in this first part. The following three chapters shall thus examine the materiality, the perception and the place of sound in our material environment.

### 1.1 Sound as material culture – the ‘acoustic artefact’

This first chapter will look at sound as the material object of inquiry and develop an analytical perspective on acoustic events from the side of the producer. Although invisible, sound is a material phenomenon for two main reasons. First, without a material medium to transport sonic waves – be it air, fluids or solid matter – there is no sound to be perceived. And second, sound is always the product of material activity. So when I am talking about the *adhan* as cultural sound, it has to be understood as part of material culture like a table, a door, or a lamp. Cultural sounds are thus acoustic results of cultural activity which are always connected to the materiality of another thing. When talking about sounds as material phenomena one has to be aware that their concrete materiality is never concentrated in one spot, but spreads from the point of production. Therefore, I want to use the term ‘sonic sphere’<sup>6</sup> to address this phenomenon. The ‘sonic sphere’ signifies the area in which a particular sound can be heard. The audibility is the anthropological dimension of this term, as sonic waves theoretical spread forever if they are not blocked by an obstacle.

To develop a basis for the analysis of cultural sounds one should differentiate between sounds that are part of the, as David Howes (2006: 166) puts it, “sensory mix” of an artefact; and sounds that are produced “to be heard”. For this second class of sounds I want to introduce the idea of the ‘acoustic artefact’,<sup>7</sup> which I developed as analytical tool for my research. I define the ‘acoustic artefact’ and its difference to other cultural sounds by three main qualities. First, it is a sound which is made – or better, performed – intentionally. It is not produced accidentally as the “squeak” of a door opening after midnight, but is made to be heard like a whistle to call a dog. Second, to be considered as an ‘acoustic artefact’ a cultural sound has to be temporally limited. An endless sound cannot be performed by human force, neither can it be perceived nor researched completely – which makes it pointless to include this kind of sound into the definition of the ‘acoustic artefact’, even if theoretically it might be possible. And third, it has to be repeatable. To design a sound – and the acoustic design is an inherent part of the intentionality of the ‘acoustic artefact’ – the artisan also has to be able to reproduce it. Only by repeating the action which evokes the ‘acoustic artefact’ can they shape its appearance.

The ‘acoustic artefact’ described here parallels the notion of permanent artefacts as outlined by Julian Thomas.

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<sup>6</sup> The term developed during the work on the English version of my final thesis in an effort to distinguish this quality of single sounds from the ‘acoustic sphere’ as a whole, which will be explained later. Concerning the origin of this notion I do not know if I had read it somewhere before or if it just emerged as an obvious name for the phenomenon I wanted to describe.

<sup>7</sup> The idea of the ‘acoustic artefact’ was partly inspired by Jean-Pierre Warnier’s critique on a paper about the sound of the saxophone I wrote for his seminar on the topic “material culture” at the faculty of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna in January 2009. While I followed the physicist’s definition of sound as immaterial wave as it does not transport any matter, Warnier pointed out their material quality from the anthropologist’s perspective.

“A thing will have been formed from a particular material, whose characteristics it will continue to exhibit. [...] A thing will also have taken on a particular form or shape, which is clearly responsible for the way it shows up to us. The end which is to be achieved is also responsible for what a thing is. [...] Finally, some agency is responsible for bringing a thing about: in the case of the artifact [sic!], the artisan who fashioned it.” (Thomas 1996: 71)

This characterization of the artefact can also be applied to ‘acoustic artefacts’. They have the all encompassing quality of air and the penetrating quality of vibration. And they have an acoustic shape which can be perceived both as noise or as music – in the widest sense of the word. And they are formed by the agency of an artisan, who is moulding them according to the end to be achieved. Thus, bearing in mind their extreme temporality and their highly performative quality (all artefacts are temporal and performative), ‘acoustic artefacts’ can be analysed in similar ways as their permanent counterparts.

## 1.2 Experiencing sound – the ‘acoustic community’

After dealing briefly with the materiality of sounds I want to take a closer look at the experience of acoustic events or, in other words, the consumer’s side. With the term experience I am referring to a process including perception and interpretation, which is on the one hand very individual, on the other hand always embedded in and influenced by a social context. I will thus discuss the different dimensions and the individual and communal levels of experiencing sound, and then introduce the concept of the ‘acoustic community’,<sup>8</sup> another analytical instrument to the anthropological research of sound.

### The physical, practical, and evaluative dimensions of experiencing sound

The actual experience of a specific sound is always defined by different aspects. I identify three dimensions – namely physical, practical, and evaluative – which are of importance for this text, and shall be dealt with in this section. To understand the physical dimension of the perception of sound I want to begin by taking a brief look at the human ear. First, acoustic waves have a tactile component, which can be especially sensed in the case of loud and deep sounds, a fact mentioned by Raymond M. Schafer in his book *The Soundscape*: “Hearing and touch meet where the lower frequencies of audible sound pass over to tactile vibrations (at about 20 hertz). Hearing is a way of touching at a distance [...]” (Schafer 1994a: 11).

Second, research on ‘F5 mirror neurons’, a type of cells in the human brain, revealed that perceived sounds trigger a similar neural activity as the visual and acoustic perception of the actions producing these sounds (cf. Rizzolatti/Fogasse/Gallese 2006: 32). Therefore I argue that in human perception, a sound always implies the operation by which it is generated. Third, unlike a microphone the human ear does not register all sounds of its environment equally but is able to filter elements on which it concentrates. Accordingly, one can discriminate between ‘hearing’ and ‘listening’ – the first being more “passive” while the second is more “active”.<sup>9</sup> These three aspects of the physical dimension show how

<sup>8</sup> I first used the term ‘acoustic community’ unintentionally during a presentation of my research during a master’s seminar led by Thomas Fillitz at the faculty of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna in May 2009. In the succeeding discussion one commentator stated how he liked the idea of a community defined by common acoustic sensation which I had intuitively implied with this term. Inspired by this incident I started to consciously work with this idea and developed the concept presented in this article.

<sup>9</sup> Hillel Schwartz criticizes this discrimination as too absolute : “Listening itself might well be indiscriminate and automatic, as for example with telegraph and telephone operators, and hearing might well be specific and

experiencing sound is on the one hand an individual and active perception of movement and change. But there is also another side to ‘hearing’ and ‘listening’.

Besides this physical dimension, I want to discuss two mainly cultural dimensions, namely practice and evaluation, which point to the cultural and social processes influencing the experience of sound. Both of these dimensions are linked to a “culture of the senses” (Corbin 2003: 118), of which I want to highlight three qualities. The first is shown in Howes’ example of the architecture of the European bourgeois balcony and the windowless houses of the West-African Wolof. He explains these two phenomena by stating that “material culture, in addition to materializing social relations and symbolizing the cosmos, gives expression to a particular set of sensual relations” (Howes 2006: 162). The European middle-class’ material culture emphasizes sight as social sense, while the Wolof privilege touching. The ‘culture of the senses’ is thus connected to social and cultural practice. The second quality I want to mention is that there always exists a scaling of the senses. Howes sees this scaling often connected to a social ranking, where “sensations deemed relatively unpleasant or dangerous will be linked to ‘unpleasant’, ‘dangerous’ social groups” (ibid.: 164f.). The third feature of the ‘culture of the senses’ I want to highlight, is its historical change as noted by Constance Classen according to the rise of the importance of sight and the decline of non-visual senses within European cultures (cf. Classen 1997: 409). Therefore, neither sensual practices nor rankings are permanent but constantly changing.

In the case of experiencing sound the ‘culture of the senses’ implies a practical and an evaluative dimension. Treating sounds as material things, the practical dimension can best be understood by using a phenomenological approach like the one proposed by Julian Thomas (1996, 2006). Human perception of things always takes place in a practical context, which in turn affects how a thing is perceived. Thomas uses Heidegger’s categories “present-at-hand” and “ready-to-hand” to signify this difference. The human being always experiences entities, contexts, projects, and relations rather than isolated objects (cf. Thomas 2006: 46f.). The body plays a role in the encounter with things in Thomas’ approach insofar as one develops a ‘bodily understanding’ of things through daily interaction with them (Thomas 1996: 86). Jean-Pierre Warnier describes a similar but even more corporal integration of things with his concept of ‘subjectivation’. “The process of subjectivation is a confrontation with other subjects mediated by moving in a material world. In such a confrontation the subject finds a number of givens that are required for it to structure its own desire” (Warnier 2001: 12). Thomas’ and Warnier’s concepts can also be used to understand how sounds and especially ‘acoustic artefacts’ are encountered and play a role in the personal development of people. They become integrated into a practical process and as part of daily routines also into the body itself, as I will discuss later.

The evaluative dimension of experiencing sound is on the one hand rooted in the cultural ranking of sensations. The phenomenon of the scaling of the senses as described by Howes is thus already taking place on the level of single sensations, some of which are qualified as “music” while others are called “noise”. Brigitta Benzing sees this evaluative processes embedded in a discourse of “aesthetic standardization” (“*ästhetische Normierung*”) which she understands as a result of communication about aesthetic sentiments (cf. Benzing 1978: 82). Another element of the evaluative dimension is emotion. “Emotion” and “emotional” have to be understood here in Kay Milton’s approach to these terms. According to her emotions are

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voluntary, as with hypnotic commands, only some of which would be ‘heard’ and acted upon (the best hypnotist cannot command a person to commit suicide)” (Schwartz 2003: 488). Still, in the light of my personal experience, it is important to note the difference of these two modes of acoustic perception.

neither part of culture nor biology but question the separation of these two spheres (cf. Milton 2007: 67). She sees them as the outcome of a three-stage learning process. First, the body can learn to react differently to stimuli. Second, these bodily reactions are interpreted according to the individual and cultural context. And third, the reaction to this individual feeling is also subject to habits and social norms (ibid.: 68).

The three dimensions proposed here – the physical, the practical and the evaluative dimension – are working together in the experience of sound, that is *how* we hear and *what* we listen to. Therefore, the labelling of the last two dimensions as “cultural” does not imply a dichotomy nature/culture but stresses the intertwining influences of physical and cultural elements on perception. Culture for example has an effect on what is listened to and what is ignored, and especially the three-stage learning process described by Milton shows the interconnectedness of physical and cultural traits and questions their separation.

### **The individual and the communal level of experiencing sound**

The three dimensions described above work on the already mentioned levels of acoustic experience, the individual and the communal. Depending on the personal, social, and especially on the situational context, they work simultaneously, influencing each other although one of them might momentarily be of greater importance and play a bigger part in perceiving a specific acoustic event than the other. I want to discuss these two levels and then introduce the concept of the ‘acoustic community’ which combines them. On the individual level the physical and the practical dimension as well as the emotional aspect of the evaluative dimension are of importance. First, the individual body is a precondition for any acoustic perception and highlights thus its subjectivity. On the other hand, biographical factors, how and under which circumstances somebody practically and emotionally encounters a specific sound and how they have done in the past, play a role in the individual experience (cf. Warnier 2001; Milton 2007).

Looking at the communal level of experiencing sound one first has to acknowledge that hearing can have a social quality in the case of public sounds – a notion I will describe below. Everybody within the ‘sonic sphere’ of an acoustic event has a similar acoustic experience. For example everyone in the audience of a concert might hear the same music although each will have a different perspective onto the musicians – as Michael Bull and Les Back put it: “Sound connects us in ways vision does not” (Bull/Back 2003: 6).<sup>10</sup> Second, the practical context of sounds and especially ‘acoustic artefacts’ is always defined, or at least informed, by social activity (cf. Thomas 1996, 2006; Warnier 2001; Howes 2006; Corbin 2003). And third, evaluation of sounds is always influenced by social and cultural norms (cf. Benzing 1978; Howes 2006).

To integrate these two levels which in a practical context cannot be looked at separately, I want to propose the idea of the ‘acoustic community’ which in the first place is a physical and temporal unity. As indicated by Bull and Back (2003: 4f.) people within the range of a sound are connected in the moment of communal acoustic experience. This unity can be territorial as with the weekly emergency alarm in a town, but can also be only loosely defined by geography, as with the annual broadcasting of the European Song Contest. The members of course connect differently to a specific ‘acoustic community’ due to their individual background and their physical and emotional situation. In the second place the territoriality of

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<sup>10</sup> Bull even calls hearing a “supra individual” phenomenon, meaning that, “what happens in a room must be heard by all those present there, and the fact that one person receives it does not deprive another of it” (Bull 2000: 119).

the ‘acoustic community’, which exists even in the case of radio transmission (as radio waves are always geographically limited), can play a part in the constitution of communities which transcend the acoustic event. As Corbin shows with the example of the church bell, sounds can be at the source of a sense of community and belonging by creating a territorial identity (Corbin 2003: 117). Referring to Dupont, Corbin speaks of the “periodic ‘sacral recharging of the surrounding space’” (ibid.: 119) induced by the tolling of the bell. Of course this effect cannot be limited to the sacral sphere but also has a cultural and an ethnic dimension by reproducing traditional sounds and by creating a sense of community and belonging. This works both ways, as Corbin demonstrates with the example of 16<sup>th</sup> century Finisterre, France, where clerics discussed to increasing the volume of their church bells because they could not “be heard in all the community” (ibid.: 120f.). Not only does the ‘sonic sphere’ of the church bell define the community but also is its reach contested and adjusted according to territorial claims.

In this section I proposed the concept of the ‘acoustic community’ as an analytical tool which combines the individual level of perception with the social level of communal acoustic experience. Both of these levels, and the three dimensions of experiencing sound described in the previous section have to be acknowledged in researching the meaning of an ‘acoustic artefact’ like the *adhan*. What is indicated in this chapter is that the acoustic environment and especially acoustic structures, first, play a part in the constitution of individual and collective identities and, second, feed back on the perception and experience of ‘acoustic artefacts’. Thus, I want to look at sound as element of human life-worlds in the following chapter.

### **1.3 Sound as element of human life-worlds – the ‘acoustic sphere’**

In this chapter I want to focus on the communal level and the practical and evaluative dimensions of experiencing sound – that is common, social, and cultural practices and cultural norms – and look at the role of sound and its spatial quality in everyday life. I will begin by describing the quality of public acoustic space, go on to discuss Schafer’s concept of the ‘soundscape’, Ingold’s temporal definition of landscape, and approaches to the production of places, and then finish by looking at sounds as acoustic structures of the everyday live and at their implications on the individual level.

#### **Private and public sounds**

In an urban context as in the case of Vienna, the range of a sound and thus its audibility becomes crucial for questions of public and private. Of course one has to first consider the penetrating quality of sonic waves – or as Bull puts it: “Sound is no respecter of ‘private’ space as it is multiple and amorphous” (Bull 2000: 116). But on the other hand it is important for this text to distinguish between private and public cultural sounds. In the first place, this distinction can be made along the borders between private and public space, meaning that in the public space, which is accessible for everybody, theoretically everything can be overheard and thus all sounds are public. In the second place, sounds of large volume not only encompass large spaces, but also transcend the borders between the private and the public sphere. The siren of an ambulance and the junior rock band rehearsing at high volume in the living room share this quality and therefore are both elements of the acoustic quality of the public space. The central quality of public sounds is that they can and are in general also meant to be heard in the public accessible space, whether by location or by volume. Thus, even if they are individually experienced, they are social events in the sense of the ‘acoustic

community' and are subject to evaluative processes which legitimate their presence in the public space.

### **The spatial quality of sound**

Besides being material, sound is also a spatial phenomenon as the 'sonic sphere' of an acoustic event always encompasses a territory.<sup>11</sup> In this section I will present two theoretical approaches which can help to understand the spatial quality of sound.

One of the first to scientifically consider sound as an element of everyday life was the Canadian composer Raymond Murray Schafer. He invented the term 'soundscape' to signify the 'acoustic sphere' and empirically researched its quality and development to find patterns and principles of its working (Schafer 1994a: 13). I will present three of his ideas which are relevant to the analysis of the *adhan*. The first idea is Schafer's notion of 'keynote sounds' which addresses in depth the acoustic characteristics of places. He defines them as sounds which "do not have to be listened to consciously; they are overheard but cannot be overlooked, for keynote sounds become listening habits in spite of themselves" (ibid.: 9). 'Keynote sounds' play an important role in the experience of the everyday as they constantly accompany us. The second idea is Schafer's distinction between areas of 'high-fidelity' and those of 'low-fidelity' (ibid.: 43f.), depending on the density of the sound spectrum. The lower the acoustic fidelity the more distracting noises make it difficult to identify single sounds, which is the case in an urban environment. Third, Schafer assesses the spatial quality of sounds by citing the example of the territorial singing of birds (ibid.: 33). Sounds are territorial by generating an acoustic space which implies an "inside", where they are audible, and an "outside", where they are not. Although many of Schafer's findings and concepts reveal a great deal on the level of empiricism, his term 'soundscape' implies a certain separation of the acoustic and the visible, tangible sphere (as in landscape) which calls for criticism. In this regard I will use the term 'acoustic sphere' to signify what Schafer termed 'soundscape', and will propose a more inclusive perspective below.

In his text *The Temporality of the Landscape* Tim Ingold (1993) proposes an approach which integrates sound as part of the material environment. To him, the dichotomy of 'landscape' and 'taskscape' – "an array of related activities" (Ingold 1993: 158), as he defines it – is based on the 'dwelling perspective', the mode of perception of the environment embraced by the people who live within it. This division is also to a part sensual as, "intuitively, the landscape seems to be what we see around us, whereas the taskscape is what we hear" (ibid.: 162). Ingold's 'taskscape' includes the 'soundscape', but unlike Schafer, he breaks down the terminological confinement by regarding "*the landscape as a whole [...] as the taskscape in its embodied form: a pattern of activities 'collapsed' into an array of features*" (ibid.). Therefore, sounds are to be understood as features of our environment like all other objects, only separated by the human senses. They are spatial phenomena and further always embody the space in which they are audible.

In this section I defined sound as an element of space and described some of its spatial qualities. This dimension of acoustic events also raises the question how sounds change and produce places which shall be dealt with in the next section.

### **The acoustic production of places**

A 'landscape' is always in exchange with the people who dwell in it and who design it to their needs. Places are created through the movement of people (and other life-forms) and are

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<sup>11</sup> This is of course not the case for cyber-cultures which cannot be physically located.



“produced and consumed in strategic ways” (Thomas 1996: 91). ‘Acoustic artefacts’ designed and placed to achieve a certain goal are a means to influence the quality of public and private places. Citing Henri Lefebvre, Barbara Bender speaks of “‘spatial practice’, the way spaces are generated and used (usually by those with power)” (Bender 2006: 305). The produced quality of places thus points to the question of power, which will not be dealt with in great detail within this text but nevertheless has to be considered.

Schafer’s statement, “Silence equals Power” (Schafer 1994b: 16), reminds us that especially in urban landscapes the control of the ‘acoustic sphere’ is almost omnipresent: banning honking the horn in hospital areas or even the whole city, banning performing music in the metro, and rules banning noise between 10 pm and 7 am in apartment buildings while thousands of cars roll through the streets producing a roaring backdrop of urban life are acoustic evidence of the distribution of power. But Schafer also points towards the power that specific ‘acoustic artefacts’ themselves yield in stating, that “when sound power is sufficient to create a large acoustic profile, we may speak of it, too, as imperialistic” (Schafer 1994a: 77). Although the notion “Sound Imperialism” does not seem very fitting for anthropological theory because of its confusing implications, Schafer’s idea of the ‘acoustic profile’ expresses very well the relationship of experiencing sound to the power to acoustically designed places. The ‘acoustic profile’ increases either through the volume of a sound, as for the sound of thunder, or through its dissemination, as for advertisement jingles. Of course to promote an ‘acoustic profile’ a certain amount of power is already necessary, but once established the production of a specific sound alone can already be powerful as it transports well known messages and changes the quality of places – and might even allow new ones to emerge.

As discussed above, sound has a substantial effect on the quality of places and how they are perceived. In this process the placing and volume of a sound are as crucial as its specific acoustic form and profile. The next section will thus look at acoustic structures of everyday life and take the church bell as an example of such a structure.

### **Sound as acoustic structure**

Acoustic structures can be understood as regularly recurrent sounds or groups of sounds which propose a temporal framework for everyday practice. The tolling of a church bell, which will be dealt with in this section, is thus an acoustic structure just as the crowing of the rooster in the morning or the horn of the school bus.<sup>12</sup> The role of acoustic structures is indicated by Corbin and Schafer. As already discussed above, Corbin (2003: 117) sees the church bell at the roots of a territorial identity<sup>13</sup> and as a sound which recharges the surrounding space (cf. *ibid.*: 117ff.). Schafer observed the same effect as aspect of a religious ritual.

“The church bell, for instance, is an apotropaic instrument, intended to sanctify a holy place or holy time. It is centrifugal in the sense that it frightens off evil spirits and centripetal in the sense that it draws people together for collective religious observance.” (Schafer 2003: 26)

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<sup>12</sup> My father, who is working in Innsbruck, explained to me how he could tell time by listening to the planes which have to cross the whole city to land on the runway which is situated within the rather small valley of the Inn river. By identifying the different motor sounds of different makes of planes on their daily flights to and from the airport he would know when to leave for work or if there was still time for some reading and a coffee.

<sup>13</sup> This idea also popped into my mind when a friend uttered: “Nowhere do the bells toll as beautifully as at home.”

The “centripetal” effect highlights the social, communal dimension of acoustic structures of human origin.<sup>14</sup> They propose a temporal grid for social activities as religious reunions, or the start and end of the working day.

To look at the effects of acoustic structures I want to present some results of a small piece of research I conducted in September 2009 within the acoustic range of a church tower in my neighbourhood in the 15<sup>th</sup> district of Vienna (Research Diary, Sep 8 to 18 2009). I questioned about 100 persons – mainly ethnical Austrian Catholics – within 15 minutes after the *Angelus*, the daily tolling of the church bell at seven in the morning, at noon, and at seven in the evening.<sup>15</sup> Only 56 percent of the respondents confessed to have actually heard the tolling. This fact can be illustrated by the example of the pastry cook who has a café right next to the church and has been working there for 46 years (Research Diary, Sep 10 2009). Questioned whether she had just heard the tolling of the bell, she answered that she did not perceive it anymore and normally blanks it out. But still she could tell me that she had noticed the previous Friday the church bell was fifteen minutes late for the three o’clock ringing. The same effect of blanking out the acoustic structure from active realisation was also described by another woman who used to live next to a church. The tolling of the bell as a ‘keynote sound’ of the environment not only becomes a ‘listening habit’ and is blanked out (cf. Schafer 1994a: 9), but even more, as the example of the pastry cook implies, is integrated into the body through a process of ‘subjectivation’ (cf. Warnier 2001: 12). This effect can be observed especially with the example of the vegetable salesman at the small market close to the church, who told me he would always hear the *Angelus* at noon on Saturdays, because this was the time when he would close down his stand (Research Diary, Sep 10 2009). Further, all the people working around the bell tower mentioned that they heard the tolling at seven o’clock in the morning, which was the time when they would start their working day. In these cases the church bell as acoustic structure is by some used as a tool – ‘ready-to-hand’ – and thus, is actively *listened to* as part of a daily routine and integrated into practice.<sup>16</sup>

Acoustic structures are noteworthy elements of human life-worlds as they offer temporal structures for individual and communal life. Through practical routines they can become integrated into the body and, as already implied in the idea of the ‘acoustic community’, can even play a part in the emergence of a territorial identity. The next section will thus look at the implications of these ‘listening habits’ for individuals, especially when they are not met.

### **‘Familiarity’, ‘displacement’, and the ‘experiential space’**

Acoustic structures as described in the previous section are not only external things but become integrated into the body through the process of ‘subjectivation’. These integrated sounds form part of a feeling of home, as I will develop in this section by introducing three theoretical concepts. Referring to Tilley et al., Barbara Bender proposes the concept of ‘familiarity’.

“The emphasis has been on how people create a sense of familiarity, how they move around places and spaces, naming them, investing them with memories. [...] By moving along familiar paths [...] people create a sense of self and belonging. Sight,

<sup>14</sup> In the following text I will only talk about acoustic structures of human origin even if not explicitly stated.

<sup>15</sup> As we will see in the next chapter, the *Angelus* can be seen as a Christian equivalent to the Muslim *adhan* – which was also one reason to choose this specific sound of the church bell.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, this does not imply that they cannot be blanked out. But through their integration into practice some acoustic structure is given more attention than others.

sound, smell and touch are all involved, mind and body inseparable [...].” (Bender 2006: 306)

This idea of ‘familiarity’ coincides with the territoriality of sounds examined by Corbin in his text. In the context of 16<sup>th</sup> century France the tolling of the bell becomes more than just a landmark, but an element of a notion of belonging and plays a part in the preservation of the rural community (Corbin 2003: 118). ‘Familiarity’ includes the acoustic quality of places and combines them with other sensual impressions to create a feeling of home. But as Bender points out, through processes of migration people increasingly find themselves in ‘unfamiliar’ contexts (Bender 2006: 307) where some seek the lost sensation of ‘familiarity’. Howes addresses the same topic as Bender, but looks at it from a different angle. He refers to Steve Feld who argues that “‘as place is sensed, senses are placed; as place makes sense, senses make place’ [...]” (Howes 2006: 167). In relation to the ‘emplacement’ of material culture and its perception Howes puts the ‘displacement’ experienced by marginal groups (ibid.: 168). ‘Displacement’ is thus the result of the spatial quality of everyday experience where a change of the spatial or social context (or of both) has consequences on the individual and social level. The spatial dimension of experience is also addressed by Thomas with his concept of the ‘experiential space’.

“[O]ur perception of space relies upon a more fundamental human ability to experience relationality. This results in a spatial order which is centred on the human body, as opposed to a homogenous space of endless extension. This spatial order, which we might call ‘experiential space’, has a certain priority, in that geometrical space can only be discovered through first existing in experiential space.” (Thomas 1996: 85)

While the human body always remains in one specific geographical position, individual persons are always stretched on a mental level, connecting different places of their own biography (ibid.: 85f.). The ‘experiential space’ enables the individual to move freely between these places. Traditional practices, designing of the own environment – both of which allow a sensation of ‘familiarity’ even in unfamiliar places – and transnational cultural processes relating people via different media and personal contacts across long distances (Glick-Schiller 2004: 457) play an important part in this process. They can help to trace back the own historic paths and bridge spatial distance on the experiential level.

The three concepts presented here share the focus on the spatial dimension of experience. This is of importance to this text insofar, as places – or better: the experience of places – become integrated into the body through ‘subjectivation’ and this way travel together with individuals moving through space.

In this last chapter of the first part I discussed sound as an element of human life-worlds. First, I looked at the penetrating quality of sound which can transcend visual borders between private and public. Second, I developed a spatial perspective on sound by combining the theories of Schafer and Ingold. Third, I discussed the implications of this spatial understanding of acoustic events and especially artefacts for the production of places. Fourth, I looked at sounds as acoustic structures proposing a temporal grid for everyday practices. And finally, I proposed three concepts dealing with the question how placed experience produces a sensation of home. After this theoretical approach to develop an anthropological understanding of sound, the second part will deal with the description of the ‘acoustic artefact’ *adhan*, its cultural characteristics and its social meaning.

## 2. The *adhan* as cultural and social sound

The *adhan* is, like the sound of the church bell, an ‘acoustic artefact’ with a very strong acoustic profile and a concrete, distinguished form. It is mainly performed as an acoustic structure in religious, Islamic practices, but there exist also *adhans* outside these contexts, as for example in recordings, presentations, or the annual Turkish national contest. To accurately describe this ‘acoustic artefact’, I want to start from Thomas’ description of the artefact between the poles of agency, end, and form (cf. Thomas 1996: 71). These parameters of the *adhan* will be looked at from two perspectives: first, the one of the artisan, and second, the one of the consumers. This will explain on the one hand the materiality of the *adhan*, on the other hand its meaning in a social context.

### 2.1 The *adhan* – an ‘acoustic artefact’ and acoustic structure

“When the Muslims arrived at Medina, they used to assemble for the prayer, and used to guess the time for it. [...] Once they discussed this problem regarding the call for prayer. Some people suggested the use of a bell like the Christians, others proposed a trumpet like the horn used by the Jews, but ‘Umar was the first to suggest that a man should call (the people) for the prayer; so Allah’s Apostle ordered Bilal to get up and pronounce the Adhan for prayers.” (*Hadith* by Sahih Bukhari, 1/11, 578, in: URL 4)

This passage from the *hadith*, the tradition of Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, contains the history of the development of the *adhan*. It highlights the practical meaning of the call to prayer as an instrument to determine the correct time to pray, as the prayer is one of the five pillars of Islamic religion. With the *adhan* the task to gather the people and remind them of their religious duty is passed on to one person, the *muadhin*. I will thus start this chapter by looking at the practice of the *muadhin*, then go on to describe the form of the *adhan*, and finally investigate its production.

#### The *muadhin*

To look at the *adhan* from the perspective of the artisan, the *muadhin*, I want to first describe this social role. The first feature of the *muadhin* is that their gender is traditionally male, although females are not explicitly excluded from making the *adhan*. In my interviews I found out two different explanations for this. One of them was offered to me by *qur’an* expert Nasem Haeri who identified the classification of men in relation to women as main reason. According to Haeri women were not allowed to attract the attention of strangers, that is men from outside of the family (Expert Interview 11). Thus, women may make the *adhan* among themselves but not in the general public. Another explanation was that the female voice is understood as attractive to men and might distract them from conducting the prayer in full concentration (Interview 10). From a materialist point of view this second explanation is interesting insofar as it focuses on a quality of the public *adhan* – the male voice – which prevails on a global level.<sup>17</sup>

The second feature of the personality of the *muadhin* is the temporal limitation. Reciting the *adhan* to call for prayer is a communal service which can be performed by every man who

<sup>17</sup> In this light it is noteworthy that the many famous *muadhins* as also many winners of the Turkish national *adhan*-competitions have rather high-pitched voices, always trying to hit notes as high as possible – sounding not always “male” in the in Europe prevailing sense of the word (cf. URL 6 and 7 and Brameshuber 2009).

knows the exact words and can pronounce them correctly. In countries like Egypt and Turkey the *muadhin* is an employee paid by the state, who is also responsible for opening and taking care of the mosque. Consequently, he is also the first to be at hand to make the *adhan* and thus, the mosque keeper is at one and the same time the *muadhin* (cf. Interview 6). But as I observed in Vienna, where mainly volunteers take care of the prayer rooms and nobody is there the whole day, this is really mainly by coincidence (cf. *ibid.*). In the Viennese situation the *muadhin* becomes what he appears to have been originally – not a specific person or position but a social practice, conducted by whoever is at hand when the time has come to pray.

The two features of the *muadhin* described here highlight the permanence of the *adhan* as ‘acoustic artefact’ and structure. It is not dependent on individual lives but persists as a social task performed in a context of equality, where, theoretically, everybody is allowed and even demanded to fill in this task, if necessary. The male voice is one constant of the quality of this acoustic structure, but not as important as the formal elements of the *adhan* which will be looked at in the next section.

### **The form of the *adhan***

The distinguishable form of the *adhan* is mainly defined by its text and its timing. The text is the essence of this ‘acoustic artefact’, as it is, apart from additional phrases practiced in some Islamic persuasions, identical all over the world.

“Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar (2x)	Allah is Great, Allah is Great
Ashhadu an la ilaha il Allah (2x)	I bear witness that there is no god except the One God (Allah)
Asch-hadu anna Muhammadan Rasool Allah (2x)	I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah
Hayya ´ala-s-Salah (2x)	Hurry to the prayer (Rise up for prayer)
Hayya ´ala-l-Falah (2x)	Hurry to success (Rise up for Salvation)
Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar	Allah is Great, Allah is Great
La ilaha illa Allah	There is no god except the One God (Allah)”

(transcription and translation: Islam People, URL 1)

The *adhan* is always recited in the Arab language, and therefore the correct pronunciation of the Arab words is the only condition to make an *adhan* according to Muslim traditions (Expert Interview 1, Interview 5). Although there are some rules for the rhythm of recitation in Arab language, these are only compulsory for the educated *imam*, and many of my informants emphasized that everybody may do the *adhan* as an approved social service (Interviews 5, 6, 7, Expert Interview 13). But still, this can be an obstacle especially for Muslims from non-Arabic countries and countries where the *adhan* is not a keynote of their environment and they are not able to apprehend its correct pronunciation that easily, as one informant from Czech Republic pointed out (Interview 8).

For the *adhan* as an acoustic structure the formal element of timing is crucial. As a reminder for the prayer it has to follow the traditional Muslim prayer times. These vary according to the

geographical location and also with the seasons, as they are oriented towards the position of the sun: the first shortly after sunrise, the second at noon, the third when the shadows are twice the size of the original object, the fourth after sunset, and the fifth at the end of dusk.<sup>18</sup> The variation of the chronological time of the five prayers thus increases in directly proportion to the distance to the equator. In, for example, tropical areas the prayers will be more less the same time all year long, while in Vienna they change by about two minutes *every day* (Interview 6). The importance of the timing of the *adhan* was stressed by Nassem Haeri with the Muslim saying, “an *adhan*, but not at the right time” (Expert Interview 11). According to him and also to other informants in the past the *adhan* would also be called to assemble people in times of crisis – a fact which coincides with alarm ringing of church bells. This practice creates through the displacement of the acoustic structure a place and time outside of regularity, a state of emergency which alerts the ‘acoustic community’, as described earlier in the case of the pastry chef (Research Diary, Sep 10 2009).

The constant elements of the *adhan* described above – the permanence, the male voice, the text, and the timing – define the distinguishable quality of this acoustic structure. In the next section I want to look at the performance of the call to prayer which highlights the individual and often artistic elaboration of each *adhan* by the *muadhin*.

### **Performing the *adhan***

Besides the aforementioned formal elements, the concrete fashioning of the *adhan* is up to the artisan, the *muadhin*. Depending on his professionalism he will elaborate his call to prayer more or less exactly. To describe the production of the *adhan* I want to look at three elements of this process: the emotional preparation, the actual production of the melody, and the pauses.

The emotional preparation was emphasized by Ahmed who did the *adhan* regularly at the mosque in Vienna – and might be called ‘professional’ *muadhin*.

“Well, it’s not the same feeling as when you’re singing [...] that’s why you should have the feeling that you are standing in front of God and making it [the *adhan*] for God, not for the people. I don’t make this so the people say, ‘Wow, you have a good voice’. If you do it this way, you won’t get remuneration by God. The intention of your *adhan*, you have to take care that it is pure and only for God. If you believe, you will get help from God to be able to influence the people with your voice.” (Expert Interview 2)<sup>19</sup>

Halith Aslan, a Turkish *muadhin* and participant in the annual national *adhan* competition in Sebastian Brameshuber’s documentary *Muezzin* (Brameshuber 2009) also describes the importance of emotional preparation.

“You know, we normally chant five times a day. But in the competitions it’s different. There is a competitive atmosphere, which does not exist up in the minaret. When the time to prayer comes, you just concentrate on your emotions. But not so in the competitions.” (Halit Aslan in: Brameshuber 2009)

<sup>18</sup> While the *adhan* should be called before the prayer to allow time for preparations like the ritual washing or leave enough time to go to the nearest mosque (Interview 10), there is also the *iqama* (or *kamet* in Turkish), which marks the actual beginning of the prayer. It is recited much faster, with less repetition of the phrases, and is also performed by Muslims praying alone at home. According to my informants, the *iqama* is an obligatory part of the prayer, while the *adhan* is only recommended (Interviews 5, 12).

<sup>19</sup> All interview sections are translated from German by the author of the text.

According to these two professional *muadhin*, to improve the quality of one's *adhan* it is important not to concentrate on its actual production process – the fashioning of the melodic line – but to focus on its spiritual and social task. Part of this emotional preparation is to have the *wudu*, a condition of physical and mental pureness achieved by ritual washing, which is also obligatory for the prayer which follows (Expert Interview 2). A second element of the emotional preparation used to be the climbing of the *minaret*, the tower from which the *adhan* is traditionally recited. This place gives the *muadhin* the physical position to send his call to prayer across the rooftops, reaching as far as his voice is audible to as many people as possible. The *minaret* can thus be understood as the workshop of the artisan, a place designed to fashion the 'acoustic artefact' of the highest quality, as also expressed by Halit Aslan. "If you ask me to chant now, it won't be the same as I do in the minaret. You can never get that emotional concentration" (Halit Aslan in: Brameshuber 2009). The ritual washing and the climbing of the *minaret* are therefore physical practices to achieve the emotional condition for the *adhan*. Today, technological advances have made the way up to the tower unnecessary as most mosques possess speakers installed on top and connected to a microphone (Expert Interview 1). But still, the turning on of the sound system, the awareness, that everything you say into the microphone will be heard, fills in the task of the *minaret*.

The second element, the melodic elaboration, plays a special part in the *adhan*. There are some rules derived mainly from the rhythm of Arab recitation language, but the actual melodic line is left to the interpretation of the *muadhin* (Interviews 6, Expert Interview 13). For the *adhan* as a social service, this is not problematic as all calls to prayer which fulfil the criteria of the correct text and the correct time are socially accepted (Interview 7). The *muadhin* fashions his call to prayer to his own understanding, which is informed by different parameters. Regional musical traditions, especially the different harmonic systems of *maqam*, which are used in many Islamic cultures, have a great influence on the melodic. Although Fared Alkhotani, former director of the Islamic Centre Vienna, and the *muadhin* Ahmed refused to term *adhan* as 'music' (Expert Interviews 1, 2),<sup>20</sup> the connection of the two is already implied in Arab language. "The beautiful voice, that you speak language with a beautiful voice, in Arabic language also is called singing" (Expert Interview 1). As ethnomusicologist Hande Sağlam pointed out, this was also true for Turkish language (Expert Interview 3). This terminological similarity of singing and reciting the *adhan* hints at their close relationship. The notion "beautiful voice" used by my informant was recurrent in my interviews, a fact which will be dealt with in detail later.

The actual learning of the melodic line and movements can best be described by Marcel Mauss' model of the 'prestigious imitation'.

"The child, the adult, imitates actions that were successful and which they have observed being conducted successfully by people, in whom they are faithful and who have authority over them. [...] The individual adopts the sequence of movements out of which the action is composed, which was carried out in their presence or together with them." (Mauss 1936: 369; my translation)<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> According to Muslim understanding there is a difference between 'music', which is mainly produced for reasons of entertainment and usually with musical instruments, and religious chanting as used for *qur'an* recitation and the *adhan* (Expert Interviews 1, 2, 3).

<sup>21</sup> Original: "Ce qui se passe, c'est une imitation prestigieuse. L'enfant, l'adulte, imite des actes qui ont réussi et qu'il a vu réussir par des personnes en qui il a confiance et qui ont autorité sur lui. [...] L'individu emprunte la série des mouvements dont il a est composé à l'acte exécuté ou avec lui par les autres."

Of course the processes of imitation and creation of the personal form of the *adhan* is informed by different role models. In my interviews I could identify three possible influences. Some of my informants told me they learned the text from their parents and at school and that melodic lines are orally transmitted during the formation of *imams* (Interviews 5, 6, 12, Expert Interview 13). Another important influence on the form of any individual call to prayer is of course the fact of living in a place, where the *adhan* is a 'keynote'. Being exposed to different melodies the *muadhin* might pick up melodic movements he will use to fashion his own call to prayer. This might happen as an unconscious process induced by 'listening habits' or as active engagement as described by *the muadhin* Ahmed (Expert Interview 2). The regional traditions of *adhan* which emerge this way are so characteristic, that you can tell the origin of a *muadhin* by his melodic line (Interview 4). A third influence which has to be mentioned are famous *muadhins*, whose recordings can be found easily on the internet<sup>22</sup> and were listened to by many Informants (Expert Interview 2, Interviews 5, 6). Especially in countries, where the *adhan* cannot be heard in public, these are important reference points.<sup>23</sup> Of course, there are many possible influences working on the melodic elaboration. The fact is that most of the *muadhins* do not have a professional formation like the *imam* (Expert Interview 13; Brameshuber 2009). They learn the melody with their ears and are seldom instructed.

An important feature of the melody of *adhan* is the personal style which was emphasized by three of my informants (Expert Interview 2, Interviews 5, 6). The *muadhin* Ahmed told me, that he had worked a long time on the form of his *adhan* until he had developed his own version (Expert Interview 2). Comparing two recordings of his call to prayer I found that they diverged by a half-tone in pitch (according to the European harmonic system based on twelve half-tones) but still had the same melodic line. The two other informants also described how they found their own style and would always do the *adhan* like this. Although they were less professional and their melodic line was less stable than with the example of Ahmed – changing the pitch sometimes in the middle of the *adhan* – in the comparison of two subsequent recordings of both of them their personal styles were easily recognizable (Expert Interviews 2, 2b, Interviews 5, 5b, 6, 6b).

Another element of the personal style is the individual pitch of each *muadhin*. This is also commented upon by one of the observers at the Turkish *adhan*-competition in the film *Muezzin* (Brameshuber 2009) as one of the contestants is influenced by his predecessor and chooses a pitch too high for his own voice. I too noticed this importance of the physical quality of the voice with the two recordings of Ahmed (Expert Interviews 2, 2b). The two *adhans* deviated only by a half-tone; still it could be heard that he was more comfortable and could more easily use his voice in the lower pitch. The materiality of the *muadhin*'s body as tool is thus also reflected in the quality of his call to prayer.

The pauses are the last element of the performance of the *adhan*. Their position is indicated by the verses and they are also made before each repetition. Erkan Ilhan, a professional *muadhin* told me the length of the verse and the pause depend on the individual lung capacity. He might call as long as he has breath and pause long enough to gather air and strength for the next verse (Expert Interview 13). Another practical feature of the pause can be observed in the film *Muezzin*. Some of the contestants turn away from the microphone and put down their hands they had raised to their ears to better hear themselves (Brameshuber 2009). This indicates that the pauses are not only a gap between two verses but part of the performance of

<sup>22</sup> For examples, see URL 6 or URL 7.

<sup>23</sup> Most of my informants had recordings of their favourite *adhan* on their mobile phones.



the *adhan*. As I will show in the next chapter, the pauses are of even more significance as can be understood from the perspective of the artisan alone.

In this chapter I have presented the main morphologic features of the *adhan* as ‘acoustic artefact’ and acoustic structure: the male voice, the text, the regular recurrence, the temporal orientation to the position of the sun, and the melodic line. In the last section I have described the production process of the *adhan* which highlights the *muadhin* as performer and artisan giving an individual dimension to his call to prayer. This rather isolated perspective on the *adhan* as a material object shall be complemented in the next chapter by looking at this sound in its social relevance.

## 2.2 The social dimension of the public *adhan*

As Julian Thomas points out, artefacts are always encountered and can only be understood in their specific contexts (cf. Thomas 2006: 46f.). The pauses of the *adhan* discussed in the previous chapter refer to this context, as they possess two meanings which are connected to two different practices. On the one hand it is the *muadhin*'s opportunity to gather strength; on the other hand the people perceiving his call are expected to repeat the words and to go to pray afterwards. The *adhan* as acoustic structure is thus directly connected to the practice of the prayer and has to be understood in this context. Thus, I want to look at the *adhan* as a means to produce the time and place for prayer and its structuring effect on everyday life, society and self.

### ‘Holy time’ and ‘holy place’ – the *adhan* as motivation to prayer

Regarding the practical context, the *adhan* as acoustic structure is a religious ritual to remind adherents of Islam of the five daily Muslim prayers. Like the *Angelus* described above or the tolling for the Sunday mass in Christian communities it is also “intended to sanctify a holy place or holy time” (Schafer 2003: 26) for prayer. In this section I will look into the elements of preparation and motivation for this spiritual task.

Asked to explain the meaning of the call to prayer almost all of my informants at first gave the rather functional explanation of the *adhan* as a reminder of prayer. But there is a second important element which was revealed to me in one interview.

“I.5:<sup>24</sup> In fact *adhan* only means, that you leave aside all the other things, the mundane things, put them aside and concentrate in God. That’s the real meaning of *adhan*, nothing else. [...]

N.F.: [...] but there are also watches ... I mean you can also look at your watch.

I.5: Yes, but the situation is really different [...] because the watch won’t impress me that much on a spiritual level as the recitation in public, because you also see the situation where all the people go to the mosque, [...] when they call to prayer.” (Interview 5)

The situation described here shows that the *adhan* is not only a reminder but is also part of the emotional preparation for the prayer. This was also emphasized by two other informants (Interview 10, Expert Interview 11) and deserves closer examination. The calling of *adhan*

<sup>24</sup> Except experts, interview partners are kept anonymous. “I.5” refers here to interview partner number 5.

not only changes the quality of a place but produces a new place – as Schafer terms it the ‘holy place’ and the ‘holy time’ for the prayer. This happens mainly on an emotional level. According to Milton’s model of emotions (Milton 2007: 68) the emotional reaction to the *adhan* which produces the ‘holy time’ and ‘holy place’ is based on a three-fold learning process. Only those who not only understand the text of the *adhan* and know its history and spiritual meaning, but who also practice Islamic religion by conducting the five daily prayers can thus achieve the state of emotional preparation for the prayer through the acoustic stimulus of the *muadhin*’s call.<sup>25</sup> This was also expressed by one of my informants describing the changing importance of this sound in his life. “In the past I used to take *adhan* for granted, because I didn’t pray. [...] But when I started to pray, I noticed, ‘Ah, this is a call to prayer’, and I liked it more, and I began to appreciate that in my land, there is *adhan*” (Interview 4). Some of my informants mentioned the emotional preparation for the prayer as letting go of “mundane” activities (Interviews 5, 6). The hearing of the *adhan* and the repeating of its phrases play an important part in introducing the place and time for prayer. On an individual level it is thus both a reminder and a motivation for prayer as expressed by one interview partner.

“For example I stay at home and hear *adhan* [...], I’m reminded, well, now I have to go to pray, not to stay at home and sleep or play around. Well, I go to the mosque. If I have forgotten or don’t have the energy or am not motivated, with *adhan* I am motivated.” (Interview 12)

The motivating effect of the *adhan* is also described by Isa Aydın, a *muadhin* in Brameshuber’s (2009) film.

“One of imam’s duties is to attract people to the mosque. The more people he brings to the mosque, the more successful he is. [...] In the minaret I always think if my call to prayer can make one more person come to the mosque.” (Isa Aydın in: Brameshuber 2009)

The motivating element is thus central to the meaning of the public *adhan* as it plays a role from both the perspectives of the *muadhin* and of the audience. In my interviews I found different leads to the motivating effect of the *adhan*. One is of course the text, which not only calls to pray, but also repeats the Islam credo in its first verses (Interview 5, Expert Interview 11). A second lead is the effect of the ‘acoustic community’ of which some members react to the *adhan* by directly going to the mosque drawing others with them (Interviews 5, 7, 14). The third is the notion of the “beautiful” or “good voice” which was mentioned by some of my informants.

“Even if it is the morning prayer, at three o’clock, and I’m in Egypt and I hear it [the *adhan*], and the *muadhin* has such a beautiful voice, I go to the mosque to hear it. It has a magical effect. [...] Many people can go to the mosque only because of *adhan*. They have heard it, it [...] sounds so good, well, they let everything go and go to the mosque to continue to hear it during the prayer, [...] this beautiful voice, and then they continue to have this nice feeling.” (Interview 6)

“It is recommended that somebody should do the *adhan* who has a good voice.” (Expert Interview 1)

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<sup>25</sup> My personal experience during a stay in a mostly Islamic country illustrates this very well, as I was of course woken up by the daily *adhan* at five o’clock in the morning, but never experienced neither ‘holy time’ nor ‘holy place’.

Although almost all my interview partners emphasized that the voice of the *muadhin* was not important, the recurrence of the notion of the “beautiful voice” reveals its central role in the perception of the *adhan*. As I asked one informant directly, what the “beautiful voice” was, he answered with a comparison to music.

“If you say, okay, you have got a song – let’s leave the *adhan* – a song, a simple song. You can hear for example me singing this song. I don’t have such a beautiful voice. But you can hear ... Michael Jackson singing this song, he has a beautiful voice, then you will say, ‘Yes, I can go on hearing this.’ [...] That’s what I meant by beautiful voice. “(Interview 6)

Given this comparison of a good and a bad singer, the notion of the “beautiful voice” appears to be part of a discourse about the aesthetics of the *adhan* which avoids qualifying some *muadhins* as “good” and some as “not good”. But still, an aesthetic evaluation takes place leading towards aesthetic norms and the emergence of a social aesthetic code (cf. Benzing 1978: 80). As already noted, these norms and codes are partly derived from Arab language and the musical system of *maqam*. But of at least equal if not greater importance is the presence of the *adhan* in everyday life and the above mentioned famous *muadhin* which both create ‘listening habits’ and make comparison possible. I do not want to go deeper into the discussion of the aesthetics here as it is not the subject of this text, but it is important to state that aesthetics is an inherent part of the social dimension of the *adhan*. The melodic elaboration, the pitch of the voice, and the pauses are all part of a process of “framing” (cf. Knoblauch/Kotthoff 2001: 18) of the invitation to prayer which amplify the emotional evocation of ‘holy time’ and ‘holy place’ and increase the motivation to go to the mosque for communal prayer. The *adhan* has thus even parallels to Klaus E. Müller’s “aesthetization of power”.

“Because more easily one acquiesces to the tyranny of the sovereign who not only rules by fear, but who knows to coat his supremacy in beauty which can delight and be admired, or even worshipped [...]”<sup>26</sup> (Müller cit. in: Schomburg-Scherff 1986: 247; my translation )

Of course I am not implying a direct link between prayer and tyranny, but Müller minutely points out how aesthetic sentiment can induce obedience. Aesthetics is thus an inherent part of the *adhan* and not just a side effect or an individual mark of the *muadhin*.

In this section I described the *adhan* as part of an institutionalized break in the daily routine for spiritual contemplation through the prayer. The role of the call to prayer transcends the mere function of an alarm clock; first, by providing the time and place to emotionally prepare oneself to conduct this religious task. Second, through its aesthetic form, the *adhan* also has a motivating effect on the ‘acoustic community’ by drawing those who understand the meaning of this call to the mosque. But the structure provided by the performance of the *muadhin* yields other consequences, too, which will be dealt with in the next section.

### **The structuring of everyday life, social life and the self**

The *adhan* as acoustic structure is a ‘keynote’ in all countries where the majority of the population is of Islamic creed. But as shown with the example of the church bell in the first

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<sup>26</sup> Original:“ [D]enn leichter fügt man sich der Tyrannei eines Herrschers, der nicht lediglich mit Schrecken regiert, sondern seine Erhabenheit auch in Schönheit zu kleiden weiß, an der man sich delectieren und die man bewundern, ja verehren kann [...]“

part of this text, this structure only has an effect on individuals and society if it is connected to praxis. For the case of practicing Muslims the *adhan* becomes an acoustic structure of everyday life through the fivefold daily prayer. This is especially true for the morning *adhan*, which, thanks to its volume, starts the day for the people in the vicinity of the mosque. Although some of my informants mentioned that you would not always hear the *adhan* after you had got used to it, it is still important to practising Muslims as it is connected to and reinforced through the physical practice of the prayer (Expert Interview 3, Interview 12). Thus, even if not always consciously perceived, it remains an important acoustic structure, which shall be looked into on the social and on the individual level.

“Everybody heard it in the streets and then really everybody was silent, because you hear it and then you have to repeat it. [...] Everybody did the washing then, [...] and we all prepared ourselves, put on our clothes for prayer, I mean the women, and then we lined up together and prayed.” (Interview 7)

As described here by one of my informants the ‘acoustic community’ is somehow synchronized in the moment of the call to prayer. Here it is not so important if the individual actually hears the *adhan*, because in a majoritarian Muslim society where the call to prayer is broadcast in public, there will be a communal reaction (Interviews 5, 6, 7, 14). The importance of community (*umma*) in Islam and the *adhan* as social call was mentioned in some of my interviews. The unifying effect of the public call to prayer was especially emphasized by one of my informants as it enables unity in the moment of synchronization, which a simple watch around the wrist of your hand cannot achieve (Interview 5). The synchronization is not limited to perception but is continued in the practice of repeating the words of the *muadhin* and in the communal prayer at the mosque – that is, the response of the ‘acoustic community’. Therefore, the *adhan* is an important part in a social process of synchronization. In this connection Ayatollah Khamenei, leader of the Islamic revolution in Iran recommended that the calling of *adhan* be done by people and not by the common practice of playing recordings (Expert Interview 11). Nasem Haeri interpreted Khamenei’s statement as follows:

“Maybe it is because of this human meaning, because when a human says something from the bottom of his heart, it sounds different. This is my perception, interpretation. It sounds different, when a radio or a not-living thing plays it. [...] It [the recording] has of course something to do with humans, but at least it is not ‘live’.” (Expert Interview 11)

The simultaneity of the production, perception and reaction to the *adhan* is a moment of communication. The members of society simultaneously respond to their cultural task, their culture, and thus reinforce their social bond.

On the individual level the public *adhan* and the prayer also have a structuring effect. Warnier’s concept of ‘subjectivation’ unites the physical and emotional dimension of this process. “One is a subject by being subject to his/her own drives. But those drives are shaped by ‘techniques of the self’ proposed or imposed by society” (Warnier 2001: 19). The practice of the prayer and the *adhan* are from this perspective a physical, material basis for personal development. Through the daily routine of perceiving the *adhan* and conducting the prayer afterwards, this ‘acoustic artefact’ and also the acoustic structure it provides are integrated into the body. This importance of the prayer for personal development was also emphasized by Haeri. “Prayer in Islam has this function to remind one of God, and indirectly one is reminded of oneself, one discovers one’s true self, so to say” (Expert Interview 11). This

process of “discovering one’s true self” is structured by the response to the *adhan*, the practice of the prayer, and its many rules concerning movements, ritual phrases, clothing, personal hygiene, and others. By structuring everyday life<sup>27</sup> the call to prayer thus has also a part in the structuring of the self, especially regarding cultural and territorial identity as discussed above. But this structuring effect is neither specific nor absolute, as the prayer times are merely recommendations.

“Sometimes you are occupied or don’t have the *wudu* and have to wash yourself first before prayer, or you are driving a car, sometimes you eat and don’t want your meal to get cold.” (Interview 8)

“Theoretically, if you hear it [...] then you have to go and do the prayer. [...] In fact ... no, [...] only some people do that, they go straight to the mosque and pray.” (Interview 6)

The structuring of the personality is thus rather flexible and is, aside from geographical and social factors, especially dependent on the individual handling of the prayer times (cf. Interview 7).

Still, the acoustic structure of *adhan* is present and nevertheless has the effect of creating a sense of ‘familiarity’ as described by Bender (2006: 306). As a sound of everyday life, it is also a soundtrack of personal biographies. Just as in the case of the church bell described by Corbin (2003), the public call to prayer becomes part of a feeling of home.

In this part I described the *adhan* as ‘acoustic artefact’ and part of Muslim material culture. As an acoustic structure of everyday life of Muslims it not only provides a means to prepare and motivate for the daily prayers but also has a structuring effect on the society and on the self. The last part will finally deal with the Viennese case, where the *adhan* is taken from its original context and turns from a public into a private sound.

### 3. The *adhan* in Vienna

As I have argued so far and emphasized again in the last section, territoriality and ‘emplacement’ – the geographical location of cultural and social phenomena – are central characteristics of sounds and especially of ‘acoustic artefacts’. But not only material culture, also its perception has a spatial dimension as pointed out in the concepts of Bender (2006), Howes (2006), and Thomas (1996). Talking about the *adhan* – an originally public acoustic event in a society in which a majority is of Muslim belief – in the context of Vienna – a city in a Catholic country where the tolling of church bells prevails – the ideas of ‘familiarity’, ‘displacement’, and ‘experiential space’ become central to the understanding of the practical meaning of this ‘acoustic artefact’. In this last part I want to begin by explaining the situation of the *adhan* in Viennese ‘acoustic sphere’, then describe its retreat from the public to more private places, and, finally, look at the meanings this ‘acoustic artefact’ acquires in the new environment.

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<sup>27</sup> This is especially true for the *adhan* as wake-up call at sunrise and during the *ramadan*, where it indicates the last possibility to eat before a day of fasting till sunset (cf. Interview 6).

### 3.1 A city without *adhan*

As already mentioned at the beginning, the *adhan* can be rarely perceived in the ‘acoustic sphere’ of Vienna. Even the *minaret* of the mosque of the Islamic Centre next to the river Danube, although visible from afar, remains silent most of the time due to complaints made by its neighbours. Fareed Alkhotani explained to me that the silence of Vienna’s only mosque had mainly two reasons: first, there was not a significant number of Muslims living in the vicinity and only some would come to visit the river banks in the afternoon and at weekends in summer; and second, it was part of Muslim mentality not to disturb the neighbours and, therefore, the Islamic Centre decided against broadcasting the *adhan* to the outside until its volume and direction were adjusted to the satisfaction of the local population (Expert Interview 1). From an analytical perspective the Muslim call to prayer is lacking legitimation in the ‘acoustic community’. In an environment where the majority of residents is of Muslim belief this legitimation is achieved by the practice of praying and the *adhan* is thus perceived as a social service instead of an acoustic disturbance. In Vienna the opposite is the case; thus in the beginning the *adhan* was only broadcast at noon, in the afternoon, and at sunset; later only for Friday prayers, when many Muslims were outside the building on the river banks, as the director of the Islamic Centre explained (Expert Interview 1). The pragmatic approach of the Islamic Centre is comparable to the situation in France as described by Chems-Eddine Hafiz und Gilles Devers.

“Being realistic the Muslims in France resigned from pronouncing the call to prayer from the minaret and practice the *adhân* only inside the mosque. The Muslims abstain because of a desire to be discreet, but also because of the feeling that the call to prayer would not have a chance of being accepted because it does not fit into the French traditions. [...] The question could be raised for the Friday prayer but the Muslim community prefers to concentrate on more essential questions.” (Hafiz/Devers 2005: 120; my translation)<sup>28</sup>

The French traditions mentioned here are mainly traditions of the ‘acoustic sphere’, ‘listening habits’ which are part of everyday experience of the residents. A change in the ‘acoustic sphere’ is also a change of the quality and the ‘familiarity’ of the place around a mosque and thus provokes resistance.

On the other hand, this development parallels the case of the church bell in the city, which does not toll at six in the morning as traditionally practised, but in accordance with urban noise legislation at seven. As the *Angelus* prayer is not practised anymore by a majority of the Catholic population, the timing of the bell was adjusted to the daily working rhythm of the population. According to the secretary of a church in my neighbourhood this was also due to protests of residents in the vicinity (Research Diary, undated). Both examples, of the *adhan* as of the church bell, are expressions of an urban ‘culture of the senses’ which esteems sight over hearing – which is disadvantaged through the ‘low-fidelity’ of the ‘acoustic sphere’ of the city – as social sense (cf. Classen 1997; Howes 2006).

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<sup>28</sup> Original text: “Par réalisme, les musulmans de France ont renoncé à l’appel à la prière à partir du minaret et ne pratiquent l’*adhân* qu’à l’intérieur de la mosquée. C’est pas un souci de discrétion que les musulmans s’abstiennent, mais aussi avec le sentiment que l’appel du muezzin aurait pas de chances d’être accepté car il n’entre pas dans les traditions françaises. [...] La question pourrait être posée pour la prière du vendredi mais la communauté musulmane a préféré se concentrer sur des questions plus essentielles.”

### New strategies

Besides the mosque of the Islamic Centre there are no other means to broadcast the *adhan* in the public space. The lack of a public call to prayer in Vienna has thus made it necessary to develop new, more individual practices to remind oneself of the five daily prayers. My informants described different ways to deal with the problem of observing the prayer times. Some of these strategies shifted the task from the ears to the eyes by regarding the time and the position of the sun (Interviews 6, 8). These have of course the disadvantage that one is not reminded but has to remind oneself and that one is not woken up for the morning prayer.

Another set of strategies used a recorded – or ‘conserved’ – *adhan* to fulfil the *muadhin*’s task. These were mainly specially designed digital clocks which I found in every prayer room. Not only did they display the five prayer times, adjusting them every day according to the changing position of the sun, but they also could be programmed to play a recorded *adhan* at the relevant time. One informant also told me he once used a computer program which worked the same way (Interview 6). I myself found a program where you could choose whether your *muadhin* was Turkish, Egyptian, from Mecca, or from Medina, and you could even use your own *adhan*-recordings.<sup>29</sup> Another informant told me she would play the *adhan* on her mobile phone for herself and her children (Interview 14). The advantage of these practices is the emotional preparation for the prayer, although they lack the social, communicative effect of the ‘live’-*adhan*.

A third rather common way are Arabic, Turkish and Iranian television channels. Some of them, like the Egyptian national channel, broadcast the *adhan* five times a day. Programs are suspended during the call to prayer and continue only after the *muadhin* has finished. With satellite-TV these channels can also be received in Vienna and some of my informants stated they often hear the *adhan* this way (Interviews 7, 12).<sup>30</sup> The *adhan* televised via satellite is one of the few possibilities to virtually experience the effect of simultaneity and synchronisation with the *umma* in an ‘experiential space’ as described by Thomas (1996, 2006). But at the same time the televised *adhan* also implies the distance to this community.

“If, for example, my mother watches the television, like that, [...] we hear it [the *adhan*] often and also repeat it, but they have a totally different time, that is an hour earlier. Then I don’t do the prayer, [...] because here in Vienna the time has not yet come to pray.” (Interview 7)

The Iranian broadcasting channel IRIB (*Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting*) which broadcast to Europe solves this problem of deferment by announcing the *adhan* in central European time (cf. Interview 10). This way it creates a transnational ‘acoustic community’ which is bound together through the collective listening experience.

The described practices are only some strategies to deal with the problem of the call to prayer missing as ‘keynote’ in the urban ‘acoustic sphere’. However, in spite of its absence in the general public, the *adhan* continues to exist in new, more private places.

<sup>29</sup> See URL7 for the program or URL 8 for the iPhone application.

<sup>30</sup> One of them even mentioned that she first got to know the call to prayer on Egyptian television (Interview 7).

### 3.2 Leaving the public space

Looking for the *adhan* in Vienna I could only find it inside the about 200 prayer rooms all across the city. I recorded different *muadhins* during all five daily prayers observing their practices, some of which can shed light on the changing practical meaning of the *adhan*. The first practice is the use of an artificial echo dubbed over the *adhan* as also the words of the *imam* during the prayer which was common in almost every prayer room I visited. This echo can also be found on many recordings of *muadhins* and is nothing but the acoustic imitation of a mosque with a big dome. What is remarkable about this practice is that it gives the impression the *adhan* was not only not restricted to a small room, but could be heard beyond its confinements.

A second practice which I observed two *muadhins* conducting is the turning to the left and to the right during the words “Hayya ‘ala-s-Salah, Hayya ‘ala-l-Falah”. This was explained to me as coming from the situation of the *minaret*, where the *muadhin* would always be facing Mecca but would turn to both sides so his voice would reach everybody around the mosque (cf. Expert Interview 1). Inside the prayer room this practice becomes an evocation of the *minaret* to all those who know its original practical meaning. Like the artificial echo, this is an upgrading of the prayer room, which is normally located in former bars or workshops situated in the basements of ordinary apartment buildings.

A special case I observed was a Turkish cultural centre in a building which used to be a fitness centre (Research Diary, Sep 2 2009). A private association of Turkish migrants had collectively contributed to buy the whole building, installing washing facilities in the basement, a café and a food store on the ground floor, a prayer room on the whole surface of the first floor, a cafeteria on the third floor, and a sports hall on the top floor. On each floor you could find speakers which were connected to the microphones in the prayer room. This way not only the *imam*'s sermon but also the *adhan*, when recited into the microphone, could be heard in the whole building. I was once able to observe the effect of this installation during the Friday prayer where the *adhan* is traditionally made twice. The first one was simply called down the stairs during the sermon resulting in some men coming to listen to the *imam*. After the speech was finished the second *adhan* was uttered through the microphone. The effect was that suddenly people from all floors arrived, some still wearing sports dresses, filling the whole prayer room before *iqama* was called and the communal prayer began. The *adhan* pronounced through the speaker system thus had a similar practical meaning within the microcosm of the cultural centre as in the public space in Turkey.

These three examples show how the *adhan* is used to change the spatial quality and produce a special place which transcends the materiality of the prayer room. The implications of this new practical meaning will be looked at in more detail in the last section.

### 3.3 New meanings

Stripped of its function as reminder and motivator, the *adhan* inside the prayer room solely keeps its role as a means of emotional preparation for the prayer. But in this new context it gains the new meanings for Muslim migrants which shall be examined here.



### The *adhan* as souvenir

N.F.: And do you sometimes go to Damascus?

I.4: Yes, of course, I mean, I often go on vacation ... almost every year ...

N.F.: And how is it when you hear *adhan* there?

I.4: It is different. Well, I feel better, I feel, good ...

N.F.: Why?

I.4: Well, because this has, this has ... nothing to do with Vienna, but with the memory ... you know? ... Because I have many ... memories.” (Interview 4)

“I really miss this, when I’m in here Austria and almost never hear the *adhan* in the streets. And there [in Egypt] I still hear it, again five times. Well ... it has so many beautiful memories. When we were children, we would hear the *adhan* and go ... together to the mosque. It is like ... all these memories come again.” (Interview 6)

Especially for Muslims with a personal history of migration from countries with public *adhan*, it is a souvenir of their origin. One interview partner told me that many people coming to Europe would say that what they missed most was the daily call to prayer in the streets (cf. Interview 14). As a ‘listening habit’ it is the accompanying music to many past experiences which re-emerge in the presence of this ‘acoustic artefact’. Of course this may not be the case for all Muslims in Vienna. For example Hande Sağlam stated she had not missed the *adhan* when she came from Turkey to stay in Austria. She interpreted this by mentioning the fact that she did not practise her religion and the five daily prayers (cf. Expert Interview 3). This highlights again the relevance of practice and the context of the encounter with an ‘acoustic artefact’ – to use the terms of Heidegger, if it is ‘present-at-hand’ or ‘ready-to-hand’. The *adhan* which is integrated into the body by daily practice is thus of greater personal importance as the *adhan* which is solely a soundtrack of everyday life.

For the second or third generation of Muslim migrants and equally for converted Austrians, the *adhan* as souvenir has to be understood in the common meaning of the souvenir taken home from a vacation. For these people the public *adhan* is not a memory but an exceptional event, like two young Muslims, both born in Vienna, described.

“It was so loud, you, really everybody heard it in the streets, and then really everybody was silent, because you hear it and then you have to repeat the words. And this was very beautiful of course. Well, it was a unique sensation, because it was ... well a really ... beautiful, the one who recited it.” (Interview 7)

“Fascinating, [...] the voice, the way he ... recited it ... and the people go to do the prayer. They let all the mundane things aside and, well, it’s a good feeling. It fascinated me in a way.” (Interview 5)

In these two examples the *adhan* is not only a sound in the ‘acoustic sphere’ but a social event and is perceived as such. Another interview partner told me about her first journey to Iran where she observed how a great number of people hurried to the mosque carrying their carpets for the prayer (cf. Interview 14). She had not been a Muslim then, but she had had a strong urge to participate in this event. These travellers’ accounts describe souvenirs in the

sense of Serge Tisseron's idea of sensori-motoric 'symbolization' – "the process by which a subject introduces into his psychic envelope his experiences of the outside world" (Warnier 2001: 14). Unlike photographs or recordings which, according to Warnier, are merely "means of bringing within the material envelope of the camera [or of the recording] and within the psychic envelope of the self an experience that goes too fast to be symbolized by sensori-motricity" (ibid.: 17), the *adhan* as acoustic sensation and social event is inscribed into the body through the physical involvement. The call to prayer can thus evoke such experiences of community and belonging, even or especially when it is in the prayer room in Vienna.

Through its territorial quality and its connection to specific places the *adhan* can evoke personal memories amongst its audience. These memories are always invested with emotions, as will be looked at more deeply in the next section.

### **The *adhan* as a feeling of home in the Viennese 'acoustic sphere'**

Although not part of the current Viennese 'keynote' the *adhan* used to be regularly broadcasted from the minaret next to the river Danube until two years before my research (cf. Expert Interview 1). Two of my informants once had the occasion of accidentally hearing the call to prayer as they were passing the mosque.

"Well I was on the U6 [the subway] and then I hear ... accidentally. I think it was the noon prayer. [...] I was in the subway [laughs], didn't go straight to the mosque. But I was pleased, that for the first time in Europe I hear the *adhan* in the streets. It was such a comforting feeling." (Interview 6)

The other one, a refugee from former Yugoslavia, also talked about this sensation calling it a "feeling of home". "Well, the moment I heard it, it was like if I was not in ... Floridsdorf [a district of Vienna] but in my homeland – like ... well more less like beaming, something like that, that I can beam myself from one place to another" (Interview 5c). The association with the idea 'beaming' (or teleportation) referred to by my informant illustrates the situation of Thomas' 'experiential space'. The special place created through the *adhan* in this moment is a combination of different elements of his biography. On the level of experience this place becomes a bridge across which he is able to return to his homeland. But, as he explained to me, the call to prayer in Vienna had this effect mainly outside the mosque.

"If in this moment I associate nothing with Islam, or if the environment doesn't remind of Islam, it has more effect. The farther you are away, for example from people who also practice the Islam [...] the more effect it has. [...] The farther you are away from something, the more you search its closeness, for example to home, to religion or to whatever." (Interview 5)

The *adhan* which in his place of origin was a permanent part of his environment and had become a 'listening habit' only gets this new meaning in the situation of 'unfamiliarity' and 'displacement'. Its retreat from the public space is thus also an expression of migration. In the personal narrations it describes the migratory process on the level of everyday experience and allows one to trace back this process. The prayer room plays a special part in building this experiential bridge which will be examined in the final section.

### **The prayer room as the new place of the *adhan***

Through its absence in the general public the prayer room is the primary place in Vienna where Muslims experience the *adhan* as a social event. Through the restriction of its acoustic territory the call to prayer thereby not only loses its ability to remind one of the prayer but

also the motivating effect. In the more private sphere the practical meaning of the *adhan* undergoes a reversal as a scene that I observed in a prayer room will illustrate.

One day the *imam* who always did the *adhan* was late for the evening prayer. The old men who always came to the prayer room and who were already assembled were getting nervous and starting to discuss in Turkish. Finally one of them pointed out the window where the sun was going down. He got up, went to the *mihrab*, the ornamented portal indicating the direction of Mecca, and started to call the *adhan*. After some minutes during which several performed their voluntary prayers he called *iqama* and everybody lined up for the communal prayer (Research Diary, Sep 25 2009). What I realized that moment was that the chain of cause and effect is reversed with the retreat of the *adhan* to the prayer room. Not does the *muadhin* call the people to come, but the people come to hear him call his *adhan*. In this context, together with the evocation of the minaret by the movements of the *muadhin* and the communal practice of answering to his words the call to prayer becomes part of a ritual of remembering one's home and of enacting cultural continuity.

Especially for migrants the 'holy time' and 'holy place' created in the prayer room become also a time and place to withdraw from the stressful world outside.

“When you come inside, I mean into the mosque [...], you can say, it's another world. [...] Outside everything is about money, about work, about university, life. Well you have so much stress, but there is nothing for the soul. But then you get there, you find friendliness, you find, the people like each other. [...] Then you hear *adhan*, then it's so comforting. And then you pray together – it's so much better than praying alone for example.” (Interview 6)

“For example I have many problems, I'm depressed and I hear then *adhan*. *Adhan* says [...], 'God is great, there is only one God, and Mohammed is his prophet.' Well, man, then you forget your problem, because all these problems sound little, you know? Because there is one God and he looks after us.” (Interview 4)

But the quality of being sealed off in the prayer room has two sides, as it not only enables withdrawal but also expresses the social position and standing of the *adhan* in the Austrian society. This becomes sensitive in the experience of the inside and the outside of the prayer room.

“N.F.: And when you hear the bells in Vienna, what do you think?”

I.4: Well I instantly think we should have the same. The bell is a call to prayer and the *adhan* also is a call to prayer. [...] When you hear *adhan* only inside, then you feel somehow isolated.” (Interview 4)

The prayer room is thus both place of confronting the personal biography as a place for critical reflection about the present situation. The *adhan* has a special part in this context as it is an acoustic element to produce a 'familiar' place. The acoustic bridging to one's origin puts everyday experience into the context of migration. The discrepancy of one's country of origin and the place of arrival finds expression in the prayer room as does their linkage.

#### 4. Summary and conclusion

In this text I examined the meaning of the *adhan* for Muslims in Vienna. I started in the first part by looking at the phenomenon sound from an anthropological perspective, developing the concept of the ‘acoustic artefact’ – an intentionally produced, temporally limited, and reproducible sound, which is shaped by the artisan to achieve certain ends. On the side of acoustic consumption I described on the one hand individual aspects as the physical and emotional elements of perceiving sound, on the other hand, communal aspects as the social and cultural elements of hearing. With the concept ‘acoustic community’ I developed a tool to relate collective and individual sound experience with group identity and ideas of belonging.

Starting from the theoretical approaches of Schafer (1994a) and Ingold (1993), I identified sound as a spatial phenomenon and as an inherent part of the environment. Sounds and especially ‘acoustic artefacts’ are thus instruments to change the quality of places and produce new ones. Especially recurrent sounds – acoustic structures – play a role in individual and collective practice and let personal and communal identities emerge. The ability of sounds to produce places and induce territorial identities is especially crucial in the context of movement and change, where familiar or unfamiliar sounds can lead to feelings of home or ‘displacement’. With Thomas’ concept of the ‘experiential space’ (Thomas 1996) I showed how these changes and movements can be traced back on the level of experience.

In the second part I described the production and the perception of the Muslim call to prayer. The *adhan* is an ‘acoustic artefact’ fashioned by the male *muadhin*, who follows the prescriptions of the traditional text and the timing. The melodic line, which is only orally transmitted and has no strict rules, implies the artistic freedom of the *muadhin* to personally design his artefact. As a means to pronounce the five daily prayer times the *adhan* is thus an acoustic structure in Muslim communities. On the practical level it is not only a reminder but also produces a ‘holy place’ and ‘holy time’ for the emotional preparation for the prayer, and through its artistic elaboration by the *muadhin*, figures as a motivation to accomplish this spiritual task. In its position as acoustic structure in the public space the *adhan* also provides a temporal grid for individual and communal practices. With the institution of the prayer it synchronizes the Muslim community on a daily basis reinforcing the social bond. But besides the communal effect, the *adhan* also provides a structure for the cultural and territorial identity through its regular presence and becomes a ‘listening habit’ that creates a sense of ‘familiarity’.

In the last part, I examined the situation of the *adhan* in Vienna. Here this acoustic structure is lacking the legitimation through the collective practice of the prayer among the majority of the population and thus is only present in the private sphere of the prayer room. While the task of reminding of the prayer times is transferred to other, more individual practices the *adhan* is still pronounced inside the Islamic cultural centres. There, several practices can be observed to change the spatial quality and produce a new place which transcends the materiality of the prayer rooms: artificial echoes dubbed over the *muadhin*’s voice, the calling in all directions reminding of the minaret, and speaker systems broadcasting the call to prayer all over the building thus creating a kind of micropublic. In the Viennese ‘acoustic sphere’ the *adhan* acquires new meanings. It is a souvenir of the past and far away places or evokes a feeling of home. Inside the prayer room it becomes part of a ritual where people come to listen to the *muadhin* and not because they follow his call to prayer. The *adhan* opens up for them the ‘experiential space’ bridging the distance to their past and their origin providing a possibility to reflect their present situation.

As I have outlined on the previous pages, acoustic structures like the *adhan* not only exist as part of everyday life but have an effect on individual and communal practices. Be it the tolling of a bell or the call of the *muadhin*, the horn of a school bus or the noise of the garbage men on a Tuesday morning moving ten trash cans from the courtyard to the front door where their droning truck stands waiting. Of course these acoustic structures can just pass by ignored, becoming listening habits one will not really miss once they have disappeared. But some if not many of those structures socially possess or are individually charged with practical meanings – just in the way the church bell provides a structure for the working day. They become part of the personal and collective daily rhythm and are thus acoustic structures for the individual and the society informing the emergence of personal and collective identities.

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### Internet Sites

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## Research Data

Interview 4, Jul 10 2009; profession unknown, est. age 35, male.

Interview 5, Jul 29 2009; two students, est. age 18, male.

Interview 5b, Sep 8 2009; student, est. age 18, male.

Interview 6, Jul 30 2009; doctor, est. age 35, male.

Interview 6b, Sep 6 2009; doctor, est. age 35, male.

Interview 7, Aug 7 2009; pupil, est. age 14, female.

Interview 8, Aug 13 2009; student, est. age 30, female.

Interview 10, Sep 19 2009; profession unknown, est. age 45, female.

Interview 12, Sep 23 2009; student, est. age 30, male.

Interview 14, Oct 17 2009; 4 women from 20-50 years old, professions unknown, notes only.

Expert Interview 1, Apr 22 2009; Fareed Alkhotani, Director of the Islamic Centre Vienna.

Expert Interview 2, Jun 25 2009; Ahmed, *Muadhin* at the Islamic Centre Vienna.

Expert Interview 2b, Jul 9 2009; Ahmed, *Muadhin* at the Islamic Centre Vienna.

Expert Interview 3, Jul 3 2009; Hande Sağlam, Project assistant at the Institute of Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology at the University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna.

Expert Interview 11, Sep 23 2009; Nassem Haeri, Qu'ran Expert at the Imam Ali Centre, Vienna.

Expert Interview 13, Sep 2 2009; Erkan Ilhan, Imam in Vienna, notes only.

Research Diary, July-October 2009.