



The Sound of Discord

#AnthroIslam

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https://soundcloud.com/allegra_lab/east-london-mosque-call-to-prayer

The sound file you're listening to is a recording of the muezzin's evening call to prayer at the East London Mosque in Whitechapel. The prayer-call competes with the sound of heavy traffic passing along Whitechapel Road. The East London Mosque is one of the few mosques in Britain permitted to broadcast calls to prayer (*azan*). Built in the early 1980s, the mosque soon found itself at the center



of a public debate about “noise pollution” when local non-Muslim residents began to protest against this daily broadcast.

According to John Eade*

The controversy about “noise pollution” entailed issues of what was culturally acceptable (...). Since the East London Mosque was located on a busy main road linking the City of London to the vast metropolitan eastern sprawl, the azan made only a brief, if novel, contribution to the buzz of inner city life (...) Of course, what the clergy considered “reasonable”—two calls to prayer during the working day—fell far short of the demand by the Muslim correspondent for the complete cycle of azan both day and night (...). The borough council, the source of permission to the East London Mosque, had not extended that right to the other mosques in Tower Hamlets. Now, in response to the public furor over the broadcasts, it proved unmoved by arguments favoring the azan and neither extended the right to the other mosques nor allowed the East London Mosque to implement the full daily sequence of calls to prayer.

In spite of this controversy, the permission to broadcast the *azan* was never withdrawn from the East London Mosque, which remains one of the very few mosques in Europe authorised to do so. Ironically, the call has become a distinctive feature of Tower Hamlets to the extent that it is not rare to find tourists who especially come in the proximity of the mosque to listen to it in the evening, as the rythm of the city gradually slows down.

* John Eade. 1996. [“Nationalism, Community, and the Islamization of Space in London”](#). In *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*. Barbara Daly Metcalf (eds). Berkeley. University of California Press.

Many more recordings from the London Sound Survey at www.soundsurvey.org.uk