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16. Global Eros in Amsterdam: Religion, Sex, Politics

Markba Valenta

Prelude

How should we think about religion in the city? For a long time, we (scholars, moderns, cosmopolitans) simply did not. The city was heterodox, industrial, liberating, avant-garde, sexy, and sexual. Religion was conservative, dogmatic, moralistic, boring, unsexy, and anti-sex. Religion was all the things the city was not. The more modern the city became, the more religion appeared left behind, in the country of bygone times. To become episodic and decorative. A cathedral, as on a postcard, to admire and then pass by, as you might a pretty woman on the street. Or religion appeared irrelevant, something simply to walk around, as around an unwashed indigent. The city was the future and religion was past.

Then religion returned. There were many signs of its imminent rise, but at the time they seemed incidental and unrelated: the public religiosity of the American president Jimmy Carter, Democrat though he was; the Islamic revolution in Iran; an upsurge of South-Korean Evangelical missionaries and West-African Pentecostals; restive Hindu and Sikh nationalists, orthodox Zionists, political Islam and a wave of Catholic democracy movements, along with rising Buddhist suicide attacks in Sri Lanka and the Falun Gong's swelling public visibility. But still we did not see these as more than a collection of eruptions here and there, not central to anything much except themselves and the world of religion. It would take the spectacle of 9/11, George W. Bush's Christian-infused global militarism, and mounting West-European distress about Muslim immigrants for all this to coalesce into something that we would analyze as a social force, a political event, a global process of our time. And then, suddenly as it were, religion seemed to be everywhere.

Urban theory has yet to catch up. Though geographers, anthropologists, and historians have been developing highly interesting work on urban religion, the significance of religion to the material and cultural formations, aesthetics, and politics of cities remains underexposed. Introductory overviews of thinking about the city such as LeGates and Stout's *City Reader* (2011), Simon Parker's *Urban Theory and the Urban Experience: Encountering the City* (2004), or Bridge and Watson's *The Blackwell City Reader* (2010) are unselfconsciously silent on religion. The same is true of more topical and situated overviews, such as Koonings and Kruijt's *Megacities: The Politics of Urban Exclusion and Violence in the Global South* (2009) or Kevin R. McNamara's *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Los Angeles* (2010). In the first instance, this derives from the

fact that those most inclined to write and think about the modern city since the nineteenth century have largely been those most invested in the secular project, most inclined both to perceive the city in its secular guise and to anticipate the decline of religion. Max Weber, one of sociology's founding fathers, is the iconic example: a man who wrote both about religion and about cities but for whom the dynamic relation between flourishing urbanity and religious innovation under modernity was imperceptible and unimaginable. A more contemporary founding father, cultural studies' Stuart Hall, similarly based his work on the assumption that secularity is one of the most important defining elements of modern society. Until, that is, he rather suddenly felt himself confronted by the religious in the present:

You don't understand and I don't understand either how the long history of secular enlightenment ends up with the major opponent of the capitalist global system in a religious formation. We really don't know anything about how this came about. This is a cultural question, if there is a cultural question – what is the place of religion today and why does it move around in this way in relation to social struggles of different kinds? We don't have an idea and I don't know anybody writing about it whom I much respect, I'm sorry to say.¹

As the quotation from Stuart Hall suggests, the fundamental framework within which our cities are analyzed is that of the flow of capital and consumption, even when other topics (planning, aesthetics, sexuality, criminality, ecology, violence) are the explicit subject of analysis. Those cities hailed as being most modern, most dynamic, and most global – such as New York and London, Tokyo and Singapore – are those that are most successful in nurturing and being nurtured by the constellation of power, networks, processes, and desires that we call (neo) liberal capitalism.² The world's iconic slum cities – Rio, Mumbai, and Lagos, among others – are those read as failing most spectacularly within this system; they are analyzed for their ballooning shantytowns, swathes of poverty, lawlessness, violence, and parallel forms of order, control, legitimacy, and identity.

This has important consequences for which cities we study most thoroughly and enthusiastically, for the ways in which we study cities and, ultimately, for the responsiveness of such studies to the urban religious. So, for example, the 2010 *Global Cities Index* defines 'global' as 'how much sway a city has beyond its borders' and is skewed towards measuring corporate business, capital flows, high culture, and formal political institutions. It is significant that a city like Baghdad – in which all these have been largely devastated, but which at the same time is deeply integrated with global movements of people, ideologies, technologies, and money, and whose developments are of considerable significance beyond its borders – will not show up on such an index. At the other end of the spectrum, a collection like Andreas Huyssen's *Other Cities, Other Worlds* (2008) focuses exclusively on global cities of the South while still positioning these as peripheral to the rich cities of the North (presented as the world's 'core cities'), even as Ashley Dawson and Brent Edwards's *Global Cities of the South* (2004) envisages these cities as structurally rife with 'portending disasters'. Work such as that of

AbdouMaliq Simone (2004), which combines a critique of urban injustice with the nuanced analysis of urban improvisation in African cities, framed in their own terms, remains all too rare.

Crucially, it is this logic which sidelines both the majority of the world's cities and issues such as religion in the larger discussion of global cities. The pre-eminent framework for understanding our cities is ultimately one that depends on a logic of wealth, development, and power, while reinstating the divide between North and South, the West and the Rest. Cities that are 'off the map' from this economic perspective are made marginal to the discussion: those cities not impressively rich, nor ballooning phenomenally, nor devastatingly poor and violent.³ A city like Amsterdam, for example. Ranked third in the world on the 2thinknow Innovation Cities index (after Boston and Paris),⁴ claiming the highest diversity of nationalities in the world (followed by Antwerp and New York),⁵ and constituting the heart of one of the largest and most productive urban conurbations in Europe (the Randstad), Amsterdam is highly innovative in its experiments in governing everything from ethno-religious diversity, to urban development, to the aesthetics of public space, and yet it is rarely discussed in urban scholarship outside the Netherlands.⁶ The point here is not so much the significance of Amsterdam in a world of cities, as the fact that cities like Amsterdam are consistently sidelined in discussions of creative and dynamic global urbanism through a process that privileges a small cadre of cities that lend themselves especially well to being encountered in a neoliberal mode or to being consumed as spectacle and/or disaster. This then is a circular process: the world cities of neoliberal capitalism are selected in light of their place within a neoliberal capitalist world, then interpreted in light of neoliberal capitalism in such a way as to affirm the centrality of neoliberal capitalism as the pre-eminent frame through which to read our cities.

As Stuart Hall indirectly suggested, this is the same logic by which religion in the city is sidelined in analyses, as religion is assumed to be irrelevant to understanding neoliberal society, the (ir)rationalities of urban development, and the productively rapacious vagaries of global capitalism.⁷ This chapter seeks to put pressure on precisely these assumptions. The claims it makes are bigger than the space there is to sustain them, so the intention is to suggest engagingly rather than to persuade conclusively. What is suggested is that the dynamics of urban religion in Amsterdam – as it takes social shape in ideologies, architectonics, politics, geographic and economic exchanges – is especially suited to revealing the logic of a city under globalization and neoliberalization. Reading religion in Amsterdam entails reading the processes by which a city takes shape in space and thought as a kaleidoscope of desires, communities, mechanisms, and environments given shape in real time and space by real people, with all their foibles and ambitions. Like coloured bits of glass in a kaleidoscope, these are all being 'turned' into new arrangements, patterns, and possibilities through globalization.

Even as neoliberalism changes global social relations, so urban religion itself is changing. Religion here is neither absolutely subject to the logic of liberal capitalism, nor absolutely distinct from it. This is a highly complex process for which we still lack adequate concepts and analytic tools. One useful approach is to think through what is happening to religion in relation to other domains, notably

those of politics and sex. Different as they are, religion, sexuality, and politics are all what we might call ‘formations of desire’ that in modern society are highly regulated yet also saturated in indeterminacy. They take shape through a mix of creative play and legislative regulatory regimes, by which hard facts on the ground are enfolded into complex dynamics of power, compulsion, aspiration, anxiety, and hope. The concept of ‘play’ here refers not metaphorically but literally to the subtle, incisive elaboration of its importance to human life by D. W. Winnicott (1971). This is particularly relevant, since Winnicott himself partook of and stimulated the ‘spatial turn’ in child psychology, in which a crucial element of development entails a person’s relation to the (potential) space around it, in a fluid fusing and dissolution of imagination, environment, and objects. So we may read religious buildings, the Red Light District, and the city more generally as a potential space in the Winnicottian sense.⁸

At the same time, this framing of our world as a field of desire resonates clearly with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, though unfortunately Deleuze and Guattari appear to have had a rather reductive understanding of religion. So in *A Thousand Plateaus* they present religion as a form of absolutism tied to territory and lending itself particularly well to collaboration with the state. As such, they assert, it is antithetical to the ‘critical nomad’s’ atheistic understanding of the absolute. Nonetheless, Deleuze and Guattari offer an exceptionally fruitful starting point for thinking through the economies of desire that structure our world and through which religion goes to work.⁹

In order to begin untangling this process in Amsterdam, I look briefly but closely at one religious project: the failed attempt to build the Western Mosque. This I juxtapose to some parallel developments in the Red Light District. Both of these are highly politicized. Meanwhile the areas of overlap are striking and suggest a quite different understanding of both religion and sex in the city.

A Story¹⁰

In 1993, a large garage stands empty in Amsterdam. Europe is in the midst of a recession, following an American slump and falling world oil prices. Sales of cars dip precipitously. One company, the Opel Riva dealership in Amsterdam, is taken over by the Stern Group, reorganized, and transplanted. Global capital has opened a space in De Baarsjes neighbourhood of the city.

The Aya Sofia enters it. Like many Muslim communities in Western Europe, the Aya Sofia community is both outgrowing its previous spaces and making the transition from temporary migrant to permanent resident. Permanence means thinking about establishing a more formal religious building. The sale of the Riva terrain to businessman Üzeyir Kabaktepe the next year offers the perfect opportunity. Kabaktepe is the director of Manderen, the investment office of the Milli Görüş movement in the province of North Holland, of which Aya Sofia is a member. While for now Aya Sofia occupies the Opel Riva garage, plans are drawn up for building the largest mosque in the Netherlands, surrounded by stores, commercial spaces, a sports hall, and a cultural centre. This is part of

a spurt of mosque-building taking place just then throughout the Netherlands, with a number of communities across the country competing for the greatest national visibility, largest size, tallest minarets, and most beautiful architectural style, to the distress of some Dutch and immigrant secularists who much prefer invisible mosques in garages.

Unfortunately, the local borough council already has its own plans. While it does not object to a small mosque, it intends to build apartments on the site (an intention that is now being realized as the adjacent Piri Reis complex). Both parties go to court, the borough wants to dispossess Kabaktepe, while Milli Görüş wants to carry out its plans on the ground one of its members owns. After tense street demonstrations by members of Milli Görüş, the mutual distrust increases. The media regularly presents the movement as fundamentalist and therefore threatening, while neighbourhood municipal organizations and leftist migrant organizations are just as resistant.

Yet the legal conflict gives way to secret negotiations after the election of a new borough council in 1998 and a simultaneous shift in the North Holland branch of Milli Görüş. Historically, the Dutch Milli Görüş movement has had close ties with the European head office in Germany and its Turkish home base. These have a strong hermeneutics of suspicion towards both European society and secular culture, fed by their long conflict since the 1970s with Turkey's secularist, pro-European government and the privileged position it gives to Diyanet (Turkey's official Islamic organization). The newest Dutch Milli Görüş generation – in the north, but not the south of the country – changes course, however, and sets its sight on entering the Dutch social fabric. All this is embodied by the new director, Hacı Karacaer, who quickly becomes highly popular in the media for his accommodation of homosexuals and apostasy, loud critique of Muslim scholars who accept husbands beating their wives, and desire to make Turkish immigrants and Muslims a part of Dutch society.

Kabaktepe approaches Frank Bijdendijk, the director of one of Amsterdam's building corporations, to mediate with the borough council. The mediation is a great success and by 2000 Kabaktepe, Karacaer, Bijdendijk, and Henk van Waveren (Labour chairman of the borough council) have entered into a relation of deepening trust based on their mutual vision of creating a syncretic mosque complex that will make a new Dutch Islam visible to all. In 2005, after overcoming a whole flurry of obstacles, Milli Görüş still lacks adequate funds to finance the mosque. Henk van Waveren contacts a sympathetic politician, who proposes an arrangement by which the city of Amsterdam rather secretly but legally buys the proposed mosque lot for two million euros above its taxation value in order to fill the gap.

The better Milli Görüş' negotiations with the borough go, the more the tensions with the German head office increase. In 2004, the new board of the German headquarters decides that the previous board's policy of European decentralization should be reversed and intensifies its claims on the Dutch branch. Nonetheless, in 2006, the first stone for the mosque – a 'Dutch brick' – is laid. The Dutch Minister of Justice speaks, as do a rabbi, a Protestant (woman) pastor, and an imam. Dutch neighbours and Turkish(-Dutch) Muslims mingle, Turk-

ish music plays, and more than one audience member has tears in the eyes. The mosque, designed by a Jewish-French team, will have a classic Ottoman design, layered tiers of cupolas and rising minarets, realized in the red-brick style of Berlage's 'Amsterdam School', and embedded in a host of other facilities that will serve the whole neighbourhood. Now renamed the Western Mosque rather than Aya Sofia, and having one shared entrance for women and men (a first in the Netherlands), it will be as Dutch as it is Islamic: materially, aesthetically, theologically, historically, and socio-politically.

A few days later, Kabaktepe is seriously reprimanded in Cologne by the European head of Milli Görüş for having sold the site to the city and for having the Dutch minister as key speaker rather than someone from the German headquarters. The progressive board of the Dutch mosque is replaced by a more conservative one, Karacaer departs, and some months later Kabaktepe is replaced by Fatih Dağ as financial director. The building corporation and borough council are rather shocked at the influence from Germany and the building corporation asks the new board of Milli Görüş (North Holland) to sign a statement of assurance that the progressive, Dutch-oriented Islamic position of the mosque will be maintained in the future and that ownership shares in the mosque will not be transferred to Germany.

The board signs the statement under pressure, while relations between all the involved parties quickly degenerate. Soon they are in court again. Kabaktepe is accused of extensive fraud; Milli Görüş wants to build its own mosque complex without interference from the building corporation and municipality; and all involved have lost all trust in each other. In late 2007, Dağ says that if they are not able to build the mosque, he will call for Europe-wide protest demonstrations by immigrant Muslims that will be sure to be of interest to Al Jazeera and the whole of the Arab world. The borough council feels threatened and angry. The complicated financial entanglements of the mosque and the building corporation, however, make it impossible to divorce and early in 2009 the court sentences all parties to continue working together. Neither the demonstration nor further collaboration have occurred, and the mosque's property remains a fenced void marked by pockets of quicksand. Even as I write this, the most recent court decision appears to have ensured that the mosque will not be built, due to ongoing conflicts between the architects, the (now independent) mosque corporation, the Milli Görüş organization, and the city borough.

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This is an account of an attempted integration of Islam into Amsterdam through conversion. It becomes in this way an extension of not only Amsterdam's history of religious incorporation and exclusion, but also of the Netherlands' more general logic of modern socio-political relations. But still, there is the question: conversion of what to what?

In the last century, the rise of the welfare state has increased state centralization but also the complex web of corporatist organizations (representing labour, business, ethnic, environmental, and a host of other interest groups) that ad-

vise and lobby, collaborate with and contest the state. So, the issue in Holland is almost always how to manage the resulting pluralist relations and interests. For a variety of historical and social-psychological reasons, the Dutch are classically averse to both public conflict and spectacle. Instead, the typical mechanism for managing conflicting interests is a hidden ('backroom') politics directed at achieving consensus, through a subtle economy of hierarchy and collaboration strongly influenced by relations of (dis)trust between those involved and their ability or inability to 'work' together. This ongoing process of dynamic consensus is structurally reinforced by the unwritten yet deeply institutionalized practice of *gedogen*, a set of informal rules and practices that 'tolerate' what is unwanted or illegal in the interest of maintaining calm and order (as well as saving money). In a crowded society with a high degree of formal regulation, administration, and oversight, *gedogen* provides an essential flexibility, even as the question of which rules shall (not) be enforced against whom remains a constant (potential) source of tension and controversy.¹¹ In recent years there have been experiments with alternative forms of politics that include much more aggressive and performative public conflict, notably in relation to the issues of Islam and immigration, but also to widely shared repudiations of mainstream ('left') politics and politicians as out of touch and overprivileged. In this setting, doing 'politics as usual' itself is a contested activity, even as this is the chronic inclination of all involved.

In concrete, institutional terms, Dutch socio-politics has given birth to a host of semi-public organizations, representative bodies, and advice commissions with varying and shifting degrees of influence in shaping government policy and decision-making. In terms of the urban setting the building corporations are among the most important of these. Their original formation at the beginning of the twentieth century corresponded closely with the increasing formal 'pillarization' of Dutch society that divided it into segregated communities (Protestant, Catholic, socialist, liberal/unaffiliated) linking confessional/ideological traditions, politics, and cultures into distinct domains that each had their own institutional representation and organizations. The building corporation working with Milli Görüş, Het Oosten (The East), was formed in 1911 to meet the need for housing Catholics, many of whom at the time were among the poorest of the Dutch people.¹² Its tasks extended far beyond issues of urban planning and construction to improving Catholic labourers' quality of life, morality, economic responsibility, and social relations with each other. The same was the case with other building societies, which all played an important role in shaping the expansion of Amsterdam following the Second World War. In this way, the tasks of the building societies melded their confessional/ideological origins with a commitment to social welfare and community uplift in a manner that translated the religious/idealist into the organizational, architectural, economic, sexual, and social.

Once pillarization began to be replaced by the Dutch with an undifferentiated 'mass' society in the late 1960s and 1970s, however, the explicit religious/idealist identities of building societies began to weaken significantly. By the 1990s, Frank Bijdendijk conceived the task of Het Oosten in more general terms of ensuring spaces for a wide range of social and low-income minorities, including artists, the elderly, squatters, Chinese, the homeless, and the ecologically minded. The

corporation has invented new rental and spatial arrangements to make all this possible. At the same time, it plays an important role in the fierce contest between the municipality and organized crime for territorial control over the use of buildings, women, and money in the Red Light District. Now half of the corporation's renters are of immigrant background, many of them Turkish. In working with Milli Görüş, the corporation sees a chance to emphasize its shared social interests with its Turkish renters and its respectful acknowledgement of Islam, while contesting those who would present the corporation as an exploiter of immigrants. At the same time, the mosque complex includes accommodations for elderly and youth whose presence embodies not only the vestigially Catholic social vision of Het Oosten but also the Islamic social philosophy of the mosque, while meeting specific social needs of the borough.

As the client base of Het Oosten was diversifying in the 1990s, there also was developing an increasingly vocal discourse of identity politics foregrounding the issue of immigrants' place in the Netherlands as a question of cultural compatibility and adaptation. After 9/11 the rhetoric of this discourse quickly shifted to religion, specifically Islam, to the point that there is a slippage in the rhetoric between Islam and immigrants, foreignness and criminality, terror and welfare dependency. The ideology of civilizational clash is performatively advanced by a variety of populist politicians, who see in it the possibility for channeling a diffuse body of resentments and frustrations among Dutch voters into a focused and highly successful anti-left, anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant political programme. The ostensible objective of this programme is to prevent the entry of more Muslims and immigrants, while requiring all Muslims and immigrants already in the country to internalize Dutch social norms and values to the point that their behaviour and convictions are indistinguishable from those of native-born Dutch. All those immigrants who are imagined to or actively do resist are threatened with social and economic exclusion and, in the extreme case, expulsion from the country. In this rhetoric, religious, cultural, political, and economic facts slip in and out of each other: poverty, segregation, welfare dependency, and petty criminality become signs of disinterest in Dutch culture and society, resistance to Dutch norms, cultural underdevelopment, authoritarian and totalitarian religious orthodoxy, and potentially violent intentions.

In striking contrast to this rhetoric, the developments around the Western Mosque reveal a very different process at work. This is not tied to problems of cultural or religious difference per se, but rather to the more fundamental challenge of integrating newcomers into the complex Dutch system of 'collaboration in difference' that itself is only semi-visible at best and whose rules are unwritten. In this case, as in many others, it depends on a relation of trust established between a minimal number of players: just four people. While each represents significant and distinct economic, ideological, and social interests, the medium of translation between them is not Islamic theology or Dutch culture or democratic ideology, per se, but rather a shared strategic response to current conditions: the recognition that each of them benefits by the construction of a mosque that embodies a progressive Amsterdam/Dutch/Turkish/European Islam that will be locally, nationally, and internationally visible. Critically, this vision is as deeply

territorialized as it is transnational; it blends the geo-historical traditions of two post-imperial 'Islamic' empires – the Dutch (who, until the independence of Indonesia, ruled over the greatest number of Muslims in the world) and the Ottoman – in order to represent a borough (De Baarsjes), a city (Amsterdam), a host-home country (the Netherlands) and country-of-memory (Turkey), as well as a West-European urban Islamicist movement (Milli Görüş) with ties to a rural Asian region (Anatolia), with its continental headquarters in another city (Cologne) and country (Germany). This movement is in competition with the Turkish state's official international Islamic network (Diyanet), even as it is itself ideologically divided into streams that are conservative and progressive, Islamic and Islamicist, anti-European and European-integrationist, Turkish-oriented and Europe-oriented, democratic and developmental, all of which are significantly shaped by their German, Dutch, French, Austrian, and other national contexts.¹³

'Conversion' here does not mean the abandonment of one set of beliefs in favour of another set, any more than religion itself is about belief in any pure sense untouched by social, political, and economic relations. Rather, 'conversion' here is the inscription of all concerned into the domain of globality as the framework and mode of debate, of politics, of relation. It is globality that determines the object of struggle: an Islam at home in Amsterdam and an Amsterdam at home in Islam, with all this entails politically, aesthetically, economically, spatially, culturally, and religiously. The religious in this case is not 'Islam', which emerges as a shifting identity and content, highly adaptable to being converted into both a progressive 'Amsterdam-Dutch' and a conservative, Turkish-transnational 'Islamist' framework. Instead it is the logic of conversion itself that is key, as it organizes relations between urban authority, corporate welfare, urban environment, and a multiplicity of local and global identities, all through the medium of money, legal contracts, personal relations, architecture, and public ritual. This is the case not only for this particular situation, but also for the host of others throughout the city of Amsterdam in which inherited ways of organizing space, ideology, belief, and practice seek to structure and are restructured through a host of new arrivals. In the process, the modern ideal of egalitarian democracy – as this authorizes Amsterdam politics – is converted from a national framework to a globalizing urban one.

A Second Story¹⁴

When we look at the Amsterdam Red Light District around the time the Western Mosque was almost built, it is highly intriguing to observe that there is nearly the same configuration of players as there was in the mosque dispute in De Baarsjes. Once again there is the municipality, there is the building society Het Oosten, and there are Turkish immigrants, many of whom are coming from and have continuing links with Germany. In this case, however, there has never been any form of collaboration between the three. Instead, there is an ongoing contest for control of women, buildings, and the profits that they bring.

In the year 2000, prostitution was decriminalized in the Netherlands. The intended purpose of this was to make prostitution into a job like any other. This would make it possible both to ensure the working conditions of prostitutes and their payment of taxes, while further reducing the influence of criminals and pimps. In theory, once prostitution would be completely legal, both the possibility and the need for pimps would disappear. Correspondingly, pimping as a category of crime was also abolished, along with prostitution.

As a practice, however, pimping flourished. Since the 1970s, prostitutes in the Netherlands had increasingly consisted of women from outside Europe, especially Brazil and Latin America, some African and a small minority of Thai and Philippine women. Technically, they did not have work permits, but since they were prostitutes, this was impossible anyway. Once prostitution was legalized, however, these women were criminalized. That is, the law permitting prostitution also stipulated that the only foreign prostitutes allowed would be European ones. As a result, the legalization of prostitution actually had the effect of *increasing* illegal and hidden prostitution. Fewer prostitutes worked behind the windows, and many moved into apartment buildings, massage parlours, and hotels. Now that the 'natural' sources of labour for brothel owners began to dry up, they started to rely increasingly on middlemen to recruit women for them. In practice this meant an increase in the number of pimps and in the illegal traffic in women, along with the violence and manipulation that goes with it.

In 1998 two groups were fighting one another for dominance of the Wallen: on the one side were gangs with members from newly opened Yugoslavia, Albania and Russia, and on the other was a Turkish group led by two brothers named Halit and Nejat from Istanbul and the Turkish-German Serdar from Dortmund.¹⁵ All the groups imported women from former Communist Bloc countries and put them to work on the Wallen. Eventually, the Turkish group gained ascendancy: more and more women were seen to have tattooed the names 'Halit', 'Nejat', or 'Serdar' on their bodies. In addition, the women who were the girlfriends of these men hired rooms at strategic locations that would allow them to monitor other women working for their boyfriends, in order to ensure that they did good business.

So there are several important points here. The first is the important role that a particular (progressive) Dutch idealized vision of womanhood and prostitution played in these developments. This was the desire that the woman selling her sexual labour be an independent, voluntary prostitute, the mistress of her own body and mind and money.¹⁶ This ideal is in turn importantly linked to the vision of the emancipated sexual woman which is used to criticize Muslims in the Netherlands, and which plays such an important role in the discussions about Islam and debates about mosque-building. So in creating support for the Western Mosque it was vitally important that Hacı Karacaer, the chairman of Milli Görüş, loudly critique the abuse of women and it was important that there be a shared entrance for women and men into the mosque. The critical point is that certain kinds of fantasies around women and around sexuality that are broader than religion and deeply entangled with politics and economics, shape these contests around religious and urban developments in ways that overlap.

The second point is that this is a largely foreign affair in all respects. Not only were Dutch prostitutes increasingly foreign (by 2000, some 70 per cent), but so were their pimps and so are their customers. While 20 per cent of Dutch men have at some point gone to a prostitute, only 10 per cent go with any regularity.¹⁷ This means the vast majority of those supporting the sexual industry are tourists and foreign businessmen. In the Red Light District, more than half of the clients are foreign, perhaps even as many as two-thirds.¹⁸ So we have in a deeply Amsterdam neighbourhood a deeply foreign set of transactions taking place – almost everybody involved is not Dutch – even as this is understood both domestically and internationally to be a deeply Dutch approach to prostitution. As in the case of the Western Mosque, national ‘ways of doing things’ become subject to an international and transnational logic.

Meanwhile Dutch drugs criminals were using the brothels and property to whitewash their money. A member of the Hells Angels, for example, forced the owner of Amsterdam’s most famous brothel, Yab Yum, to sell it to him for less than 25 per cent of its value. It was at this point that the municipality stepped in, in order to regain control of the Wallen by disrupting both prostitution and criminal property possession. In order to achieve this, it approached the housing corporation Het Oosten. After closing one third of the prostitute ‘windows’ and divesting criminals of their illicit buildings, the municipality gave them to the building corporation to manage. The corporation itself then worked together with a fashion bureau called Red Light Fashion in order to develop a fashion presence in the Wallen. Individual designers were installed in the former windows, while the fashion bureau set up a project to mentor young talent and to develop international projects.

Crucially, this fashion company advertizes itself on its website on the basis of its location in the Red Light District, as working in the midst of ‘girls of pleasure’.¹⁹ The fashion company here presents prostitution on the Wallen as a matter of desirable, ‘innocent’ naughtiness, erasing the violence that the city is unable to stop. At the same time, in its promotional film on the internet, the fashion company takes on the iconography of prostitution. In this film, it shows the work of each designer in a ‘window’ – in which mannequins ‘figure’ and play – even as it uses the sexy allure of its association with the Red Light District explicitly to sell itself internationally. In this way – saying it sharply, but with a critical truth in it – the fashion company profits off the prostitutes’ backs. It becomes itself a pimp by ‘stroking’ the prostitutes for their own profit, even as the coalition of designers ‘prostitutes’ itself through its literal self-framing and self-promotion in the former prostitutes’ windows.

In this way, the fashion company inserts itself into international circuits of desire and display, of viewing rituals and of visual consumption. At the same time, the mannequins of the fashion designers now take the place of the prostitutes – not, however, because the prostitutes are gone, but only because they have been displaced to other, invisible and less secure locations. This replicates the municipal logic of the Western Mosque. For the city, the purpose of the mosque was to displace the presence of an independent anti-European, transnational neo-orthodox Islam in the interest of presenting – locally and nationally – an image

of the city that is 'better' than the truth. The fact that this imperative is replicated in the city's management of the Red Light District suggests how little the problem of Islam in Amsterdam is a problem of religion per se. Precisely because of their shared modernity – realized through typically modern organizations – the city and the religious organization could work together with little trouble once trust had been established. Where they differ is not with regard to their modernity per se, so much as in regard to the larger modern global networks to which they respond and the modern projects they seek to realize. Prostitution, in fact, turns out to be much more problematic to incorporate because its organization is to this day more illicit than recognized. Decriminalization is not enough to incorporate it into the modern rationality of urban management, but only because at the very same moment the women who make it possible are criminalized as illegal aliens. In this sense – imagining religion as that which resists modern rationalization – foreign prostitutes are the true religious.

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Western Europe's cities are post-colonial grounds of encounter for modernities and cosmopolitan projects from across the world. In the process of their entanglement, the great European cities – once the epitome of Western metropolitan power and high modernity – are becoming the sites of Europe's conversion by the world modernity. This framework of historicized globality is particularly productive for reading religion in world cities such as Amsterdam. The key point about world cities is not so much that they contain a world of peoples, cultures, and politics within them but that as cities under globality they continually produce, shape, and engage their 'worldliness' as part of the daily business of politics, including the politics of religion (and sex). Politics emerges through the continual (threat of) dissolution and constant (attempt at) consolidation within a city being shaped by processes from far beyond its country's borders. World cities take on the logic and tensions of frontier regions: pre-eminent sites where the nation-state encounters the world as it does along the guarded lines marking the territorial state's limits on the ground. But the city lacks the (imagined) clarity, stability, and permanence of territorial border lines. In a world city it is never clear for long – even less clear than along lines on the ground – who is meeting whom, which culture or religion is where, or what precisely is being guarded, asserted, and contested by what means. The world city, in becoming infused with the world's politics and the world's histories, reinvents these as a politics and history without ground.

Correspondingly, in order to think about religion in Amsterdam, it is not enough to just consider religious life and institutions in the classic sense. Certainly, Amsterdam is one of the most religiously diverse cities in the world, with a greater number of nationalities living in its small domain than even in New York City. The city's churches, societies, and beliefs, however, tell us too little. Where we must look instead is at how the religious in Amsterdam emerges out of the intersection of the city's multiple 'logics of conversion', embodied in religious organizations, urban architecture, public corporations, the sex industry, the

creative sector, governing authorities, and global capitalism. In modern thought – sociology and science – ‘religion’ still is largely conceived as a distinct field, partitioned off from other social and epistemological domains. This is a useful conception for the project of modernity itself – especially modernity’s claims to offer a more truthful truth than religion – but in the process it obscures the centrality of excess, sacralization, ritual, and conversion to modernity itself. Religion in the city resides not uniquely in spaces and social formations marked as religious, but is part of the very fabric of modern urbanity in all its political and spectral materiality.

More specifically, religion manifests itself as institutional tradition, as a rhetorical construct and as amorphous flows of ‘excess’ beyond the grasp of city planning and politics. Religions in cities, then, go to work in and emerge from a larger domain of globality – a domain in and through which religions and cities evolve in conscious relations of agonistic cross-fertilization with religious and urban developments throughout the world.

Notes

- 1 Stuart Hall, speaking at the *Cultural Studies Now* conference, which took place at the Centre for Cultural Studies Research, University of East London, from 19 to 22 July 2007. Hall is quoted here from the transcript of Plenary Session 2 of the conference, available at www.culturalstudies.org.uk (accessed 17 Nov. 2010).
- 2 See www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/08/11/the_global_cities_index_2010 and www.mori-m-foundation.or.jp/english/research/project/6/pdf/GPCI2009_English.pdf.
- 3 See Jennifer Robinson (2002, 2006, and 2011), and David Bell and Mark Jayne (2009).
- 4 See ‘Innovation Cities Top 100 Index 2011: City Rankings’ (www.innovation-cities.com).
- 5 See the article ‘Amsterdam stad met meeste nationaliteiten (177) ter wereld’, in *Trouw* (22 August 2007). See also a press release of the Gemeente Amsterdam: ‘Inwoneraantal Amsterdam blijft groeien en stad telt 178 nationaliteiten; één meer dan in 2009’ (28 June 2010).
- 6 For a notable recent exception, see Fainstein’s *The Just City* (2010, 139–64).
- 7 The arguments made here are stimulated in part by the very useful alternative approach developed by Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift in order to analyze the suffusion of economics with culture, particularly in relation to cities (Amin and Thrift 2004 and 2007).
- 8 See Guldi (n.d.).
- 9 See Deleuze and Guattari (1988, 422–4 and *passim*). Other works shaping the arguments made here include Ludwig (2002), Povinelli (2006), and Mitchell (2007).
- 10 This account is primarily based on news reports, particularly those found in the Dutch national newspapers. To date, more than 1,200 articles have been published that refer in some way to the Western Mosque (*Westermoskee*). Given the limitations of space as well as the nature of the argument being made here, I do not reference specific articles but instead present a distilled compilation. This obscures differences in viewpoints expressed by the various reporters, but it allows a coherent narrative to be told, foregrounding the essential developments and the larger patterns of which they were a part. For a very useful close reading of some of these events, see Uitermark and Gielen (2010) and also the older Lindo (1999). Regarding the divergences and continuities in Dutch municipalities’ governance of Islam more generally, see Maussen (2006 and 2007). See also the national report on Milli Görüş prepared by Flip Lindo for the Ministry of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration, *Activiteiten en doelstellingen van Nederlandse organisaties gelieerd aan Milli Görüş* (2008). On mosque controversies in Dutch cities, see Landman and Wessels (2005).
- 11 With regard to ‘gedogen’, see the useful analysis by Gordijn (2001).
- 12 For a history of Het Oosten, see van Toorn (2008). Further aspects of the history of housing corporations in Amsterdam, focusing respectively on Protestants and socialists, are Beekers and van der Woude (2008) and van der Lans (2008).

- 13 Extensive research is being done on the evolution of Milli Görüş movements across Europe. For a recent example, see Schiffauer (2010).
- 14 This account is largely based on several in-depth newspaper reports, including, in particular, Ruth Hopkins (2005 and 2005). See also Hopkins's website (www.ruthhopkins.eu), which includes other newspaper articles that reference her work. In addition, see the television broadcast 'Reconstructie in zaak vrouwenhandel op de Wallen' in the television programme *Netwerk* (18 June 2007) and the documentary 'Seksslavininnen' in VPRO's television programme *Tegenlicht* (2 April 2006). The newspaper *Het Parool* has a special section focused on 'De Wallen' on its website (www.parool.nl). The neighbourhood newspaper *Buurtkrant d'Oude Binnenstad* and the borough newspaper *Stadsdeelkrant Centrum* on occasion have had articles that address new developments and conflicts related to these issues.
- Academic scholarship on prostitution in Amsterdam's Red Light District is notably more extensive than scholarship on religion in Amsterdam. There is not the space here to give a detailed overview, but see, among others, Brants (1998), Outshoorn (2004), Aalbers (2005), Gregory (2005), and Hubbard and Whowell (2008). For municipal research and publications, see Asante and Schaapman (2005) and Flight and Hulshof (2009). Additional information can be found at the website for the Red Thread, the Red Light District lobby for the rights of workers in the sex industry (rodedraad.nl). For some (Dutch) clients' own often highly functionalist-objectifying descriptions of the window prostitutes in Amsterdam whom they visit, see www.hookers.nl.
- 15 These names were invented by the journalist Ruth Hopkins. We now know that the actual names of the brothers Halit and Nejat are Saban and Hasan Raban.
- 16 See, for example, the Amsterdam municipal memorandum *Prostituee v/m Amsterdam – weerbaar en zelfstandig – Amsterdam 2008-2010 (The Male/Female Amsterdam Prostitute – Assertive and Independent – Amsterdam 2008-2010)*.
- 17 These are the statistics presented by the Red Thread, the lobby organization for sex workers, on their website (rodedraad.nl/prostitutie-in-nl/cijfers.html). The organization, however, points out that all statistics having to do with prostitution continue to have much higher margins of error than other social data.
- 18 See Flight and Hulshof (2009).
- 19 For HTNK's website, see www.htnk.nl (accessed 10 June 2011).

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