



When the mosque goes Beethoven: Expressing religious belongings through music

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Abstract

The present article will provide insight on music as a vector of religious belonging: a female choir at a mosque in the Lake Geneva Metropolitan Region has reinterpreted Beethoven's Ode to Joy with new text about the glory of the Messenger, and a regional political and religious event which has united music from Syria, Kosovo and Tunisia in order to put on stage the cosmopolitan characteristics of Swiss Muslims. Religious and national belonging as well as cultural references can be expressed in different ways through ritual practices (prayer), celebrations, food or clothing. These practices, influenced by gender and age, are highly diverse. Celebrations that are performed in public also depend on the local and global political context, the specific social situation and the specific place (location, public, legal framework etc.). As part of a broader research project on "(In)visible Islam in the city," a research team directed by Monika Salzbrunn has observed various forms of celebration – both religious and secular festive events – in which Muslim citizens are involved. At what audience are these musical performances directed? Can we really separate an analysis of religious belongings from an analysis of political and/or cultural performances?

Keywords

Celebration, belonging, music, Islam, performance, urban studies, religion, politics, Switzerland

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Introduction: Celebrations as research subject and as entry points to the field

For decades, research on migration has centred on topics like work, integration and transnational families (Salzbrunn 2008). Only recently has a cultural turn led to cultural and religious aspects emerging on the agenda. Migrants who had been considered as a mere workforce are now being perceived as Muslims (Salzbrunn 2008, 2015) – by researchers as well as by journalists. Furthermore, after the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels, Muslims who openly show their religious belonging are increasingly subject to distrust or hostile reactions in their everyday life. These negative perceptions of the “other” emerge in a context of growing fear of community-building, particularly in France (Woznicki 2009). As a reaction to ignorance or to hostile perceptions of their presence, several individuals and groups are putting their religious belonging on stage, notably during celebrations. As part of a broader research project on “(In)visible Islam in the city. (Im)material expressions of Muslim practices in urban spaces,”² we have observed various forms of celebration in which Muslim citizens are involved, namely religious and secular festive events. We decided to use these events as entry points to the field instead of focusing on their organisers. Celebrations as a starting point allow us to analyse the way religious events are constructed by various celebrative agents as well as the political purposes being negotiated (Zerubavel 2003, Salzbrunn and Amiotte-Suchet, forthcoming). By focusing on celebrations, we analyse how Muslims take root in urban territory, in particular through their visible and audible presence.

Hence, approaching urban areas through the observation of (festive) events allows us to focus on social relations in a political arena without predefining the groups involved in the given situation. Furthermore, it contributes to “locating migration” (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011), researching modes of incorporation of social networks in a specific locality (Salzbrunn 2011) that can be part of transnational spaces (Anghel, Gerhartz, Rescher and Salzbrunn 2008).

“Event lenses” versus “ethnic lenses”

For several decades in the not too distant past, ethnic identities were taken for granted and ethnic groups were researched as homogeneous entities – this despite the pioneering work of Fredrik Barth (1969), who analysed the constructivist character of social groups. In the past ten years, the perception of minorities within minorities (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2012) and awareness of super-diversity (Vertovec 2007, 2011) have helped to clarify the inner struggles and differentiation processes within groups that used to be defined a priori by researchers. Assuming a certain homogeneity and defining a group from an etic perspective means that the researcher wears “ethnic lenses.” Removing these lenses allows us to realise that there can exist “ethnicity without groups”

² The research project, lasting from 1.3.2013 to 30.9.2017, is financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation and directed by Prof. Monika Salzbrunn. Dr. Talia Bachir-Loopuyt and Barbara Dellwo are also part of the project. During fieldwork in the Swiss French part of the Lake Geneva region, Monika Salzbrunn particularly focused on various forms of celebrations.

(Brubaker 2002) and to explore various meanings of ethnicity (Loveman 2014). Taking events instead of pre-defined groups as entry points to the field offers an alternative, innovative point of view and allows us to understand celebrations as a stage where multiple aspects of belonging are performed (Salzbrunn 2014a, 2014b, Salzbrunn and Sekine 2011). Analysing events (Bensa and Fassin 2002; Bessin, Bidard and Grossetti 2010; Olazabal and Lévy 2006) avoids an essentialising perspective. It keeps our mind open for unexpected, disruptive elements occurring during celebrations (Quéré 2006). Consciousness for the unexpected or for certain particularities in an event has already been mentioned by Foucault (1994). The event, with its preparatory phase, its performances (Turner 1988), its disruptive elements and its post-phase can be considered as part of a general struggle for recognition (Fraser 1995, Ferrarese 2009). Each actor gives a certain meaning (Deleuze 1969) to her/his performances in a certain context (Rogers and Vertovec 1995) and in the given social situation (Clarke 2005), in our case during the celebration. In that sense, the event can also allow us to observe how strategic groups emerge around a common political goal (Bierschenk/Olivier de Sardan 1998, Nanz and Pause 2015).

Wearing “event lenses” instead of “ethnic lenses” also helps to question supposed homogeneities and to investigate common civic or political practices and interests by emphasizing multiple belonging processes in various social situations. As Yuval-Davis, Kannabiran and Viethen state (2006: 3), “Citizenship and identities, as well as ‘cultures and traditions’ – in fact all signifiers of borders and boundaries play central roles in discourses of the politics of belonging.” According to them, politics of belonging are situated temporally, spatially and intersectionally (2006: 7). When belonging is expressed through music and food, it expresses feelings and emotions. Furthermore, it touches multiple senses, which requires development of adequate methods like multisensory ethnography (Pink 2009). These are considerably under-researched topics in migration and diaspora studies despite the emotional or affective turn which the social sciences are currently undergoing. Furthermore, artistic practices in super-diverse societies remain a topic urgently needing more profound exploration after the pioneering works of Martiniello and Lafleur (Martiniello 2008; Martiniello and Lafleur 2009). Following Connell and Gibson (2003: back cover), “In a world of intensified globalisation, links between space, music and identity are increasingly tenuous, yet places give credibility to music, (...) and music is commonly linked to place, through claims to tradition, ‘authenticity’ and originality, and as a marketing device.” In the present article, we will observe another dimension of the relationship between music and place: Music can also express the incorporation of and identification with a specific place, especially in a context of migration (Salzbrunn and von Weichs 2013).

Our ethnographic research material deals with celebrations in a local, regional and translocal context of religious belonging, and particularly with music as a means of political and cultural expression. Before presenting two celebrations in detail, we will provide useful context information about Muslims in Switzerland in order to better situate the empirical examples.

(In)visible Islam in urban spaces: The Swiss context

The mosques in the larger cities around Lake Geneva regularly organise events to mark major religious holidays. The focus on certain religious events as opposed to others, the degree of openness to a broad public (Muslim or non-Muslim), and the choreography of the events vary greatly. This variety is, among other things, due to the high diversity of origins of Muslims living in Switzerland, who make up 5.1% of the population.³ Moreover, the canton of Vaud, which borders Lake Geneva, is characterised by a strong presence of foreign residents; 42% of the population of Lausanne, the canton’s capital, is foreign.

Table 1. Muslim residents in Switzerland according to nationality in 2013

Nationality	Percentage (%)
Swiss	34
From the Balkans (Macedonian, Serbian, Bosnian and Herzegovinian, Kosovan)	39
Turkish	13
North African nationalities (Moroccan, Tunisian, Algerian)	4
From EU countries (notably French, German)	3
Central Asian (Afghan)	1
Sub-Saharan African nationalities	2
Middle Eastern nationalities	2
Eastern Asian nationalities	1

Source: Office Fédéral des Statistiques / Swiss Federal Statistics Office, 2015

The great diversity of origins of Muslims living in Switzerland is reflected in the way these population groups take root in towns and cities, both spatially and materially. Far from being one group (and far from sharing a common sense of belonging), Muslims living in Switzerland cannot be defined and delimited by simple observation of their diverse backgrounds. Even though there is only one place in Lausanne called the “Mosque of Lausanne,” the city also has a “Muslim Cultural Complex of Lausanne” (with a place of worship), Albanian, Bosnian and Turkish cultural centres (with small places of worship) and many areas regularly or occasionally rented by different, more or less formalised associations or groups. In many cases, the concept of group membership or belonging varies considerably among individuals. Sufi brotherhoods in particular are characterised by mystical secret practice. Expressed allegiance to a particular sheikh is central and followers of the brotherhood are not formally registered anywhere. However, during the holidays, the circle of those invited may exceed the central core of practitioners.

In the following, we present several case studies in order to illustrate some of the various ways that Muslim religious practices and culture are made visible and audible. These practices are only shared by a minority of people: The proportion of Muslims

³ Source: Swiss Federal Statistics Office, 2013.

participating in regular events (prayer, sermons etc.) or in particular celebrations in connection with religion is estimated to be less than 15% of the Muslim population.⁴

Methods: Understanding multiple belonging through the ethnography of celebrations

As already mentioned, a perspective rooted in the sociology of organisations would not allow us to grasp the complexity of multiple belonging put on stage during religious events. We need to develop alternative methods based on a multisensory ethnography in order to analyse the complexity of the struggle for recognition put on stage.

Hence, in terms of methodology, our approach aims at 1. providing an alternative to “container thinking,” 2. focusing on religious and/or political practices in a specific social situation (situational analysis, Clarke 2005) and 3. considering musical performances and soundtracks (Connell and Gibson, 2003) as political statements. The following questions have led to these assumptions: 1. Which alternatives can we provide to methodological nationalism (Glick Schiller and Wimmer 2002) or ethnicism and container thinking? 2. How can we treat migration phenomena without creating or reifying the “other”? 3. How can we research religious discourses and practices without reifying religion? 4. How can we study the transnationalisation of music (Connell and Gibson 2003) in a translocal way, including taking mutual incorporation processes into consideration? We will show how festive events create commonality in a context of an “eventisation of faith” (Pfadenhauer 2010: 382). Festive events are researched here as political arenas where local struggles of participation in a super-diverse society (Reuschke, Salzbrunn and Schönhärl 2013; Vertovec 2007, 2011) take place. During the project, which was financed by the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Lausanne during the first phase (2010-2012) and funded by the Swiss National Research Foundation between 2013 and 2017, more than 100 religious and secular events were observed. The aim was to analyse whether religious forms of belonging were mobilised during these specific social situations or not, and if so, in which ways they were expressed. The main method was ethnography, particularly multisensory ethnography. Semi-guided interviews and informal talks were conducted in parallel. The present cases illustrate different ways of staging multiple belonging in a context of political tension. Following an inductive perspective, we do not seek to provide a representative study, but to understand the actors’ agency during situations of celebration. Concerning ethical issues, the researchers attended either public events or semi-public celebrations to which they had been explicitly invited in their position as researchers.

⁴ This figure is slightly higher than among Christians; there is a similar percentage of practicing Muslims in other European countries. For Switzerland, cf. Gianni, Giugni and Michel 2015: 81-104. The intensity and frequency of religious practices (such as prayer and observance of Ramadan) vary considerably depending on various factors (origin, age, gender, environment etc.); the statistical average is thus of little significance. This fact highlights the importance of conducting qualitative surveys in the long term.

When the mosque goes Beethoven: The Ode to Joy revisited

The first example presented here is the celebration of “Al-Isrâ' wal-Mir^â” (commemoration of the Night Journey and Ascension of the Prophet).⁵ According to the mailing lists and official announcements, the evening celebration is “open to everybody, Muslims and non-Muslims.” People were urged not to hesitate to invite their “family, friends and neighbours.” In reality, I am the only person from outside the circle of regulars at the mosque, and several people are taking care of “the guest” in a very hospitable manner.

About 400 people of all ages are present; day care for children under six is installed in the basement while the women gather in the large space with a balcony overlooking the main hall of the mosque. The opinions of the mosque’s authorities differ on issues such as the use of music or taking pictures.

During our research team’s first visit, we were constantly accompanied, photographs were banned and the Imam struck a harsh, authoritative tone. This time, the Imam is absent, and the atmosphere is very relaxed during the festive event.

One of the leading women of the mosque takes care of me and invites me to pose for pictures with women from Algeria and Indonesia or with young Swiss converts. The evening’s programme (a presentation of the mosque’s activities and a call for volunteers; a talk about the night journey and ascension of Mohammad, prayers, meals etc.) is punctuated by musical performances of various kinds. Several musical groups and choirs are part of the mosque, including groups of children and teenagers. Since people who attend the mosque belong to thirty nationalities, the Imam, the president and the representatives of the mosque express themselves in French (the official language of Western Switzerland) and/or Arabic. Here, a large part of the regular visitors of the mosque are from the Maghreb countries. This lends this mosque a special feature in the Swiss context, as the majority of Muslims living in Switzerland are from the Balkans (Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia) and have low literacy in Arabic. Organising events and celebrations is considered one of the three pillars of the mosque’s activities (education, events/festivals and social affairs) according to the facilitator introducing the institution that evening. Several members of the mosque are also members of the Swiss Muslim Association, which is becoming increasingly influential due to the fact that one out of three Muslims in Switzerland has Swiss citizenship.⁶

⁵ This event commemorates the miracle of Mohammed’s night journey from the al-Haram mosque in Mecca to the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem a year and a half before the Hegira, as well as the miracle of the ascent through the seven heavens (Qur’an 17: 1).

⁶ According to the Federal Statistics Office, 32% of Muslims in Switzerland had Swiss citizenship in 2014. This is due to the increasing number of naturalisations of immigrants from the countries of the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo and Albania who arrived in the 1990s following the war, but also to conversion by Swiss nationals.

During the Lebanese meal that is served around 9:45 p.m. in large common dishes, a group of girls starts singing. The first song is Beethoven's Ode to Joy, with lyrics⁷ composed in French especially for the occasion:

Under the banner of the messenger
Walk together towards the light
And when the people fell in love with love for our father
We will fight until our last eternal breath (...)
Surrounded by green meadows and snowy Alps
The mosque defends and embraces the values of the messenger
Surrounded by green meadows and snowy Alps
The mosque defends and embraces the values of the messenger
Like a flower among silver stars
It fills Swiss horizons in countless beauties
Like a flower among silver stars
It fills Swiss horizons in countless beauties
(...)
Where ignorance rages, is science a weapon?
That protects us wherever we go against any flaw
Where ignorance rages, is science a weapon?
That protects us wherever we go against any flaw
Pay tribute to all those who have taught us Islam
May God grant paradise to those men and women
Pay tribute to all those who have taught us Islam
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The text of the following verses refers to “leading the battle” to success. The mosque is described as a boat sailing against the tide and passengers are called to unify and display good conduct, whatever their differences, “unite our hearts, regardless of our differences, no matter what our colour.”

Multiple belongings (Muslim religion, the local mosque, Switzerland etc.) are expressed through metaphors or implicitly through the lyrics. Individuals feel that they belong to a particular people – a minority⁸ among the minority of Muslims in Switzerland – seeking to acquire knowledge. Science is highly valued, explicitly and implicitly, through the tribute to teachers of Islam, as well as ethics and “the values of the messenger” (thus the Prophet Mohammed). The feeling of belonging to a group is strengthened by common action, namely a fight (against ignorance).⁹

It is interesting that a heterogeneous gathering of individuals of diverse national origins is offset by a reference to a common “father.” Is this the influence of the Christian majority environment? Finally, the national, European and physical environment is

⁷ Ethnography conducted by the author in a town in the Lake Geneva area in 2013.

⁸ Comprising only 4% of the Muslim population, Muslims from North Africa (and thus Arabic speaking Muslims) are a minority among Muslims in Switzerland, who are mostly non-Arabic speakers from the Balkans (39%) and Turkey (13%), cf. supra. Moreover, Muslims attending a place of worship are also a minority, estimated at 15% of the Muslim population (see Gianni, Giugni, Michel 2015).

⁹ The pre-Islamic period is often regarded as one of ignorance (Jahiliyya), hence the allusion. Science (ilm) is highly valued (see the entry devoted to science by Mohyiddin Yahia in Amir-Moezzi 2007: 797-800).

present in the lyrics: the walk leads through the mountains, the snowy Swiss Alps and the green plains, echoing the images of the Swiss national anthem.¹⁰

Through these physical descriptions of their surroundings, actors clearly situate themselves in Switzerland and declare that they are ready to fight “until the last breath.” In the next verse, the mosque takes the form of a flower blooming among the silver stars, filling the Swiss horizons with “a thousand and one beauties.” Here, a noble struggle for knowledge and Muslim values is described and sung to the melody of Beethoven’s Ode to Joy – a melody that represents the European anthem. Finally, the mosque becomes a “boat sailing” through thick and thin. The song then clearly localises Muslims in a European environment, specifically in Switzerland and on Lake Geneva. The performance of this choir of young girls is accompanied by “you-you”¹¹ shouts by their mothers, who look on excitedly from the balcony. Many of them record the performance on their tablets or smartphones. The top of the mosque looks like a huge dance floor where women let themselves go to the rhythm of the music. The audience’s excitement intensifies even more during the second song, sung in Arabic. Here, the rhythm inspires everyone, although not all of the attendees can understand the lyrics.¹² This event demonstrates the organisers’ willingness to locate their presence in the symbolic and metaphorical universe of their place of residence – at a local, regional, national and

¹⁰ The first stanza of the Swiss national anthem also contains vivid descriptions of the landscape:

When the morning skies grow red
And o'er their radiance shed,
Thou, O Lord, appeareth in their light.
When the Alps glow bright with splendour,
Pray, free Swiss, Pray,
For you feel and understand,
For you feel and understand,
That he dwelleth in this land.
That he dwelleth in this land.

Lyrics in French:

Sur nos monts, quand le soleil
Annonce un brillant réveil,
Et prédit d'un plus beau jour le retour,
Les beautés de la patrie
Parlent à l'âme attendrie;
Au ciel montent plus joyeux,
Au ciel montent plus joyeux,
Les accents d'un coeur pieux,
Les accents émus d'un coeur pieux.

Source: <https://www.admin.ch/gov/fr/accueil/conseil-federal/histoire-du-conseil-federal/hymne-national-suisse.html>

¹¹ These exclamations of joy made by women are very common during celebrations of all kinds (such as weddings and concerts) in North Africa.

¹² Although Muslims from North Africa make up only 4% of all Muslims in Switzerland, they are overrepresented in certain places and associations and underrepresented or absent in others. During the celebrations in the mosque, they were very numerous and visible.

European level. The musical programme of the festive event was particularly rich in 2013, although religious leaders in this area have differing views on the role and permissibility of music.

During other events, especially when the Imam is present, the music is more solemn and the audience, particularly women, is more restrained. The physical presence of a representative has a direct and visible impact on the musical programme and the ambiance among the faithful. It is interesting to note that this is primarily an internal party at the mosque. Although a poster hung on a wall outside the mosque explicitly mentioned that a broader audience was invited, in practice, few visitors attend such events. The mosque also organises meetings for external audiences, cooperating with chaplaincies, high schools and universities.¹³ During these occasions, the framework is much more formal and includes scholarly presentations by the Imam and the chairman of the mosque, followed by a question and answer session. At the end, a Lebanese meal is shared by all on the platform usually reserved for women. During these gatherings, the Imam does not tolerate the slightest noise and makes his authority known at all times. His assistants document the encounter with photos, which are then shown to politicians who wish to learn about the institution's activities. The mosque is clearly seeking to claim the status of a representative institution at the cantonal level. Over the past ten years, this has become increasingly difficult because other regional institutions have united to form a cantonal union, whereas two mosques located in two major cities in the canton have not become members. We will see below how this cantonal union expresses the plurality of affiliations of its members through music during religious and political events.

Oud, rap and cowbells: How Muslims seek to seduce through music

About ten years ago, several Muslim organisations sought to unite in order to provide the Cantonal Government of Vaud with a single representative institution as a spokesperson for Muslim interests in the region. Indeed, several demands, including a separate Muslim section in the cemetery, required different groups of Muslims to speak with one voice. The great disparity of backgrounds and language skills made this a difficult task; there was little contact between Albanians, Bosnians, Turks and Arabic-speaking Swiss converts. In addition, leaders from the mosque in Lausanne refused to be associated with this initiative from the beginning, arguing that they already represented the Muslims of the region. Because of this, the union sought to establish itself as an alternative partner and organised a number of religious and political events in order to do so. In the beginning, elected municipal officials and politicians, officials in charge of city services, project managers etc. were invited to evening presentations. With time, the union began to rent larger spaces such as a high school auditorium or large party rooms in order to be able to invite a much larger audience. Most of these events were held in the canton's capital Lausanne, but sometimes, a smaller city was chosen in order to emphasize the regional character of the initiative. In terms of timing, the religious festival of Eid el-Kebir

¹³The author of this article has also observed formal events of this kind in the same place.

was chosen as the ideal time to organise a public event. We will see below in the ethnography of the event that reference to religion gradually disappeared in favour of cultural references linked to the country of origin (or, more recently, the musical taste) of the Muslims attending the festivities. Thus, the president of the union referred to the official reason for the event – a religious holiday – but said that the exact date of Eid was reserved for “family parties” and that this shifted date allowed Muslims to invite their non-Muslim friends to the party. In fact, it is mainly politicians and association leaders engaged in interreligious dialogue that make an appearance. As in the example above, music is consciously included in the program in order to stage the cultural belonging of local Muslims. In the early 2010s, two musical performances made regular appearances on the programme: the “Oud player” Abdel Mounhein (whose name did not always appear on the program) and “Albanian folklore” (played by the group “Elire,” whose name was not always visible, either).

In both cases, the way the performances are presented already indicates that they were selected in order to cover a cultural area through musical styles and not because of the individual artist. The Oud player Abdel Mounhein, who is originally from Tunisia, often played at the beginning of the event, followed by official speeches. He sometimes entered into a musical dialogue with a violinist, notably with Jallouli Mohammed in 2010 (Mohammed’s name was not on the agenda either; he was simply announced as a “violinist”). The audience that attends the union’s official celebrations is largely unfamiliar with the music of the Middle East or North Africa, and is thus generally unresponsive to performances. This has to do with the fact that many of the Arabic-speaking Muslims prefer to go to the mosque and are thus absent from the festive, supposedly unifying event. However, as soon as the Albanian folklore group comes on stage with their colourful costumes and instruments, the audience lets loose and begins to clap and sing. In fact, the Albanian group has no religious affiliation and plays at weddings and festive events co-organized by tourist offices or city governments in the Lake Geneva area.¹⁴ Their music immediately moves the citizens of Albania and Kosovo, regardless of their religious practices. Our regular observations of these annual events have revealed that a large part of the crowd attends the event just to see the dances and listen to Albanian music, leaving as soon as the group has finished. Furthermore, when young Muslims recently began to form a network in order to be more closely involved in the decision-making and organisation of regional events, officials allowed them to get involved in planning the musical programme of the 10th anniversary of the union in 2014. This time, communication and advertising efforts were sharply increased in order to fill a hall seating 800. The only artist with experience performing at this festival who kept her place on the programme was the Muslim comedian Samia Orosemane, who is well known in francophone Europe. Instead of inviting Tunisian and Albanian musical groups, the

¹⁴ This was particularly the case during the “La Grande Table” event in Morges, cf. Salzbrunn Monika, Dellwo B. and Aleman S. (in Press) *Urban Events as Localized Performances of Global Belonging: The Case of “La Grande Table” in Morges (CH)*. In: Knierbein, S. and Viderman, T. (eds). *Becoming Local. Transforming Spaces, Redefining Localities*.

young organisers chose rappers or singers who chant the Qur'an, including Lotfi Double Kanon, who regularly performs at an annual gathering of Muslims in Le Bourget, France. Considering the broader context, namely that some people consider music to be forbidden in Islam, the choice was quite daring.¹⁵ It was made possible thanks to organisers' commitment to motivate young people to attend the event and to actively participate in the association. One youth responsible for the organisation of this event justifies his choice as follows: "We are a young population and therefore we need to appeal to artists close to us, our concerns."¹⁶ This year, the desire to represent the plurality of the origins of Muslims in this Swiss region thus appears less pronounced than the idea of ensuring better generational representation.

In the middle of the festivities, something that is seen as disruptive by some of the people present suddenly occurs: The sound of cowbells ringing extremely loudly finds its way into the hall. The bells are not carried by cows, but by young men passionate about this instrument and who were hired to perform during this (religious) event. Musical performances with cowbells have a long tradition in Switzerland, and this group of professional young men often plays at family or village celebrations. According to one member, it was the first time they had been invited to play at a Muslim celebration. The buzz is followed by another event that reflects the desire to link regional Swiss references to Muslim references: A gigantic cake decorated with green and white icing and burning candles is brought on stage. It is decorated with cantonal symbols: the coat of arms and the official cantonal motto, the crescent representing Islam and sheep reminiscent of Eid (the sacrifice of sheep by Ibrahim). The base is made out of a Swiss flag, a white cross on a red background. Green is the colour commonly used to represent Islam, but it is also the colour of the canton Vaud (together with white).

This shows that not only the music at the event, but even the decoration of the cake was carefully designed to represent an Islam of Switzerland. In fact, this event marks a key moment for self-representation and a demonstration of good will concerning issues of integration and diversity management. It takes place in front of a large group of elected local and regional politicians, government officials (responsible for multicultural affairs, religion, antiracism, etc.) and regional public figures engaged in intercultural dialogue (members of the Council of States, persons responsible for intercultural projects, pastors engaged in interreligious dialogue, etc.) during an important period of negotiation for Muslim rights in the region (such as a Muslim section in the cemetery and halal food in schools). The event's programming continues to evolve. In 2015, the festivities took place in the same location as in 2011, a high school auditorium rented for the occasion. Performances included the singer Mosa Moustafa and a magic show by Magic Mouss, known for his performances on French television shows.

As is often the case in these types of associations in Switzerland, a Muslim convert was chosen to be president of the group, in large part due to his mastery of French and his familiarity with national and local negotiation processes. However, like many converts,

¹⁵ Interview with the person responsible for the programme, conducted by Christine Rodier in 2015.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

he is not quite familiar with the cultural universe in which the majority of Muslims living in the city have grown up. His role is primarily political and his trajectory embodies the will of local Muslims to make the evidence of their local and national incorporation visible. This strategy, illustrated by the staging of multiple belonging through music, is certainly a response to a climate of increasing xenophobia. It is part of many responses developed by Muslims in Switzerland to the referendum of 29 November 2009 that banned the construction of minarets, approved by 57.5% of the population.

Conclusion: Muslim celebrations in the Lake Geneva Region. A mirror of multiple belonging and plural religion performed during translocal events

In the present article, we have shown to what extent events constitute a suitable entry point to the field and an object of relevant analysis in order to study multiple belonging. Many studies that address minority recognition strategies in a political context tend to reify them. In contrast, in our study, the diversity and heterogeneity of Muslims posed a methodological challenge from the beginning. Rather than focusing on separate groups organised on a linguistic or geographical basis, it was more relevant to look at the staging of multiple belonging during celebrations located in a particular context.¹⁷

In a country where the construction of minarets was banned by popular referendum in 2009, negotiations on specific rights are proving to be particularly sensitive. Certain Muslims¹⁸ in Switzerland involved in organising cultural and religious events have therefore increased their efforts to stage their “Swissness,” highlighting their cultural wealth in order to be considered serious and benevolent spokespeople (who are not dangerous, a fact especially important in a geopolitical context affected by terrorist acts). Hence, events are part of a broader struggle for recognition, illustrating through cultural and musical references the multiple politics of belonging in which groups and individuals are involved. We assumed earlier that celebrations are always embedded in a local and translocal context. Both empirical examples confirm this: We have seen references to the Umma in the lyrics of the music, a universal melody with a strong symbolic meaning at the European level (Ode to Joy), metaphorical allusions to the Swiss national landscape (as in the anthem) and the evocation of Muslim values. Finally, there is

¹⁷ Thus, we have not focused our study on places of culture or worship connected with a specific linguistic or ethno-national origin (such as the Turkish, Bosnian or Albanian centres that exist in the Lake Geneva area).

¹⁸ As mentioned in the introduction, no study can claim to represent all “Muslims in Switzerland” – this category only exists as a statistical definition, but not in practice. Many of the people we encountered have inherited a Muslim family culture but do not practice or do not consider themselves Muslims and/or conceal their cultural heritage in order to make it invisible. The events presented here are frequented by a proportionally small number of Muslims. No event can be taken as representative or exemplary. Given the plurality of belonging and the diversity of the groups, it is only possible to illustrate the diversity of visible practices (or those deliberately organised for the sake of visibilisation) and speeches based on concrete empirical examples.

the celebration of the place (which is part of a translocal space) that is rooted in a particular region: the mosque as a flower or as a boat.¹⁹

Concerning the second example, the celebration as a “showcase” for the association, we observed a hybridisation or reflected combination of musical, culinary and performative practices. Muslim singers well known in the translocal²⁰ francophone network were hired to perform alongside regional non-Muslim artists (such as bell ringers) in order to illustrate belonging and the multiple and multifaceted ties of the attendees. This staging primarily addresses local and regional decision makers, whom the organisers try to seduce through music and food, in addition to the usual discourses. A multi-sensory and spectacular programme was set up at a time when fears of the Other, and especially of Muslims, often obscures the diversity of this population group (which is in fact not a homogeneous group, as we have shown in the introduction). In the introduction to the present article, we asked if it was possible to separate an analysis of religious belonging from an analysis of political and/or cultural performances. The empirical examples have clearly shown that there exists no religious practice or celebration without a political and cultural meaning. Moreover, the religious aspect of the celebration (which was labelled as being religious) appeared less important than political struggles for recognition, which were expressed culturally, in particular through music and food.

Finally, these celebrations served to illustrate a specific strategy in a struggle for recognition, since the vast majority of Muslims in this region of the Lake Geneva area remain “out of the mosque” and hence invisible (Salzbrunn 2013). Locating migration (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011) and considering events as “pathways of migrant incorporation” (Salzbrunn 2011: 166) as well as entry points to the field help us to adopt a dynamic vision of groups that gather in order to attain a common goal in a specific social situation. Situational analysis of celebrations thus contributes to providing credible alternatives to container thinking and methodological nationalism.

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¹⁹ This translocal space includes references and cultural and religious practices from multiple locations (including places of residence and places of origin of the persons concerned).

²⁰ This network includes cultural and religious gathering places in Switzerland, France and, to a lesser extent, Belgium and Quebec.

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