

KATHOLIEKE UNIVERSITEIT LEUVEN
FACULTEIT THEOLOGIE EN RELIGIEWETENSCHAPPEN



**‘NO KEY TO THE WOMEN’S AREA’; GENDER
PARTICIPATION IN MOSQUES IN ANTWERP**
A STUDY OF FEMALE INVOLVEMENT IN ISLAMIC LIFE

Masterproef: eindverhandeling
tot verkrijging van de graad
van Master in de wereldreligies

door

ARTHEMIS SNIJDERS

Promotor

Prof. Dr. Mehdi Azaiez

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Moskeeen en moslima's zijn hot topic, zowel in de politiek als in de media. Er wordt echter vaak gesproken over de hoofden van moslima's heen. In andere Westerse landen zijn er initiatieven ontstaan waarbij moslima's en jonge moslims hun misnoegen hebben geuit ten opzicht van hun lokale moskee. Deze thesis onderzoekt of deze sentimenten beaamt worden door moslima's in de provincie Antwerpen. Het stelt hun mening en hun persoonlijke ervaring centraal. Hoe belangrijk is de moskee in hun leven? Zijn er belemmeringen die hun ervaring niet optimaal maken? Hoe staan zij tegenover gender gesegregeerd bidden?

Deze thesis probeert allereerst een zo breed mogelijk beeld te schetsen door middel van een literatuurstudie, met literatuur verwijzend naar zowel het theologische aspect van vrouwen en de moskee, als het sociologische onderdeel, namelijk de anthropologische studie van moslima's. Er wordt een kritische feministische lens toegepast waarbij de keuzes en de zelfbeschikking van de vrouwen in het onderzoek gerespecteerd worden en centraal staan.

De methodologie die gehanteerd wordt is twee-delig. Er is een praktisch theologisch kader, om te vertrekken vanuit de menselijke ervaring en dit uiteindelijk te vertalen naar de Islamitische traditie en qua onderzoeksmethode is het een *mixed methods* onderzoek met een transformatieve aanpak.

Aangezien een sociologisch onderzoek niet log gezien kan worden van de sociale en politieke context wordt dit beschreven met betrekking als zowel de islam in Vlaanderen als moslima's specifiek. Daarna zal het de resultaten van een kwantitatieve websurvey als een kwalitatief onderzoek van diepte interviews presenteren. Er werden in beide onderdelen vragen gesteld die betrekking hadden op hun emotionele connectie met de moskee, de praktische elementen en gender segregatie. Na deze presentatie volgt er een hoofdstuk over discussie en aanbevelingen die zijn vastgesteld vanuit de analyse van de resultaten van beide onderzoeken.

Moslima's in een Westerse context botsen tegen veel letterlijke en figuurlijke muren aan, van *gendered islamophobia* in het dagdagelijks leven, tot aan patriarchale structuren binnen de moskee. Een moskee die een betere gender balans heeft en toegankelijker is, niet voor alleen vrouwen, maar ook kinderen en jongeren kan een veilige haven bieden. Daarnaast kan het ook de gemeenschap versterken met een visie op de toekomst en volgende generatie. Een beter verzorgde vrouwenruimte kan daarin nog crucialer zijn en kan een veilige ruimte bieden waar vrouwen zichzelf kunnen zijn en tot rust kunnen komen als volwaardige dienaars van God.

“Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward”

Q33:35

Revealed after Umm Salama asked the Prophet Muhammad : "Why are men mentioned in the Qur'an and why are we not?"¹

¹ Fatima MERNISSI, *De politieke harem, Vrouwen en de profeet*, De Geus, 1991, p. 139

Foreword

First and foremost, I would like to thank God. My journey to and from faith eventually led me to Islam, where I found my peace and sanctity. Without having this refuge and divine inspiration, this thesis would not have been realised.

Secondly, I would like to thank all of the Muslim women around me who encouraged me, helped me and supported this research. They gave me the drive to continue this. The many messages I received from Muslima's in Belgium and beyond who were also adamant that the time for change had come gave me the reassurance that I was on the right track. Despite it being a mere master's thesis, it felt like it might be the first cog that is set in motion in the bigger wheel of change, which is rolling towards a more gender inclusive mosque and even wider Islamic setting. The inclusion of women does not stop at the mosque, but rather it starts there.

My husband, my male ally, who has supported me throughout this master's program and has always stood behind and next to me in my quest for social and gender justice receives my eternal gratitude. From running alongside me on our pilgrimage between Safa and Marwa, to keeping watch for guards while I completed my prayer in the 'men's area' in the Sultan Ahmet mosque in Istanbul. This research is just another part in that quest to fulfil our purpose as *khalifa fi'l ard*, which is to establish an equal and just world for all, but most of all for our unborn daughter.

Major thanks to professor Jasser Auda who sent me a copy of his book without hesitation and without whom I would not have been able to gather all the *ahadith* and verses on women and the mosque. His commitment to helping women reclaim their place in the mosque is admirable. Same for Hind Makki, who not only is a role model in terms of activism, but whose heart is truly in the cause.

Professor Azaiez receives a special thanks for always allowing me the freedom to explore critical approaches within the Islamic (feminist) tradition and for valuing my criticism. It opened up a world of Islamic theology for me that I was not familiar with and eventually allowed me to attend summer schools in Bosnia and Granada, where I have been able to meet many Muslim academics and theologians who have inspired me to pursue this academic career further *insh'Allah*.

ولا غالب إلا الله

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C. Interviews

Interviews with:

- ◇ Fatima, 5th July 2019
- ◇ Khadija, 5th July 2019
- ◇ Malika, 8th July 2019
- ◇ Natalia, 8th July 2019
- ◇ Elke, 10th July 2019
- ◇ Nabila, 11th July 2019
- ◇ Betul, 11th July 2019
- ◇ Ilhan, 14th July 2019

E-mail interview with Hind Makki, 13th August 2019

1. Introduction

“Where is the women’s area?” “Do they even allow women at that mosque?” “They’re only open on a Friday for women.” “I went but the door was locked.”

These are questions and statements many Muslim women have either heard or uttered themselves when it comes to praying at the mosque. For many outside of the Muslim community, the Islamic house of worship might seem like an integral part of the faith, but for the women it is not always that simple. This is why initiatives have arisen to allow women more and better access to the mosque in countries such as the United States, South Africa, the United Kingdom and many others. As with many other trans-national movements or sentiments, they never seem to be constrained to one particular region and time, that is why I chose to research the experience of Muslim women, in a specific region, namely Antwerp province, to see if any of these sentiments and feelings were echoed or shared.

Through a quantitative web survey, which focussed on several issues regarding their mosque experience I tried to get a general feel of the women and how they personally relate to the mosque, how they experience it in terms of emotions, but also the more basal affairs such as the provided facilities at the mosque. The underlying research question here was; if anything is hindering women from having their ultimate religious experience at their house of worship: what exactly is the cause of this? The purpose of having this as a quantitative survey, was to try and get as many women as possible from all corners of Antwerp province to share, although through a limited scope, their opinions in order for this research to have the potential to be transformative in its approach and outcome.² Although Belgium might not have experienced its own 'Muslim women's mosque movement' yet, the response regarding the online survey was overwhelmingly positive and many women seemed prepared to share their thoughts, praises and frustrations. Confirming the hypothesis that the current women's experience is not as optimal as it could be.

This quantitative survey was subsequently complemented by a qualitative study of 8 Muslim women. The reason for this follow-up qualitative research, was that the quantitative survey did not allow for much depth. Through a series of yes or no questions, it was too difficult to assert the women's underlying emotions, sentiments and get to the crux of potential issues and problem. The focus here was on how the women feel when they go to the mosque, why they go and the importance of the mosque in their lives. The strength in the qualitative research is that this was a very diverse group of women, from more varying ethnicities, ages and profiles and although their piety might not be reflected in the frequency in which they visit the mosque, the high importance remains a strong stable throughout. The women were also asked; what does your ideal mosque look like? This in terms of governance, facilities and services offered. This offered many different perspectives, although very often overlapping and revealing where the short-comings were in the current state of affairs in Antwerp province.

²John W. CRESWELL, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications, 2017, p. 105

The qualitative research was also very necessary for the second research question in this paper; namely that of gender segregation. Through these interviews it was possible to extract why exactly women choose for this option. The topic of Muslim women and mosques cannot be separated from that of gender segregation. In the dominant political climate, gender segregation when performed by Muslim women in particular, is often viewed through a secular-liberal lens³, and therefore quickly labelled as 'enforced', anti-feminist and with orientalist connotations. In this research I have tried to step away from such notions and applied a critical lens, as suggested by feminist theorists, who view women's choices and actions when it comes to religion and piety as part of their agency.

The research question here was therefore: a women's only prayer area; gender segregation or safe space?⁴ For this part of the thesis I also partly relied on the quantitative research. In the online survey I added several questions about women's personal praying experience to see which was the most preferential for them. It was important for me to stay within the confines of the known Islamic tradition, which meant adhering to the arguments surrounding gender segregated and mixed prayer within the traditional jurisprudence of praying and the *Sunnah* (tradition or 'way') of the Prophet Muhammed, which will also be discussed further in this paper. This because the ritual of praying for many Muslim women is very personal and divine experience, I did not want to potentially upset my participants by introducing different ways of prayer, such as complete gender mixing, a very contentious subject in many Muslim circles.

This thesis is presented as follows; chapter 2 will include an extensive literature review, which underpins and shapes the theological and theoretical framework of this paper. Chapter 3; a methodology, focusing on the concept of practical theology, mixed methods methodology, as well as a further explanation of the quantitative and qualitative research. Chapter 4, an overview of the social and political context. Chapter 5, a presentation and analysis of the quantitative data gathered and chapter 6 the qualitative research. Finally, chapter 7 will include discussion, recommendations and conclude the paper.

³Saba MAHMOOD, *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*, Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 191

⁴The concept of 'safe spaces' and what exactly this constitutes with reference to this paper, will be further elaborated on.

2. Literature review

The literature review for this thesis seeks to address several key issues. Not only is it a point of reference for the broader setting of this research, it also seeks to explain various concepts used in this paper. Firstly, it will address the theological perspectives pertaining to women and the mosque. This is done in threefold, with a focus on the Qur'an, the *Sunnah* and the Jurisprudential literature.

After which, the focus will shift to the sociological and feminist framework. The anthropological nature of studying Muslim women must happen through a critical lens taking into account the socio-political context of the research. Notions such as agency and piety are further elaborated on in a feminist context. The reason for adding this is because this paper wants to step away from superimposed biases that view Muslim women as passive receivers, rather than active agents making choices.

Subsequently, literature is reviewed on gender segregation in an Islamic setting. This is done from a historical perspective, as well as an orientalist account. Many of the negative undertones towards gender segregation tend to emanate from our cultural archive.⁵ Contemporary debates from within the Islamic tradition are also addressed.

Safe spaces are a concept, which has arisen from feminist activism and which is often juxtaposed with gender apartheid. In the qualitative part of the research, participants were asked how they experienced women's only prayer spaces and whether this felt 'safe'. This term is therefore further explained through the literature reviewed.

Finally, this chapter ends with studies done on Muslim women and the mosque. These studies are unfortunately very rare, but do contain good data, which can be incorporated into this research.

2.1 Women and the mosque; a theological perspective

From a Muslim practical theology perspective, the social science study of religious praxis should be accompanied by a theological component.⁶ Hence why this chapter will offer an understanding of the theological background, which still shapes much of today's attitudes towards and by female Muslim worshippers.

2.1.1 Qur'an

According to Jasser Auda various Qur'anic verses speak about Muslim worshippers, men and women alike, to encourage them to visit the mosque.⁷ These verses include but are not limited to⁸:

⁵Edward SAID, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books Ltd, 2003, p. 41

⁶Amjad HUSSAIN, *Muslim theology and religious studies: Relational, practical, and inter-faith dimensions* in *Religious Education* 104, no. 3 (2009): 239-242, p. 242

⁷Jasser AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque; The role of women in Islam's house of worship*, Claritas Books, 2017, p. 25

⁸Other verses include: (7:29) (7:31) (72:18) (22:26) (17:1) (5:97)

“O children of Adam, take your adornment at every mosque.” (7:31)

“The mosques of Allah are populated merely by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and establish prayers and give charity and fear nothing except Allah, for it is expected that those are of the rightly guided.” (9:18)

Trouble however occurs in a multitude of translations of another verse (3:96)⁹ relating to the specific mosques in Mecca, Medinah and Jerusalem, including those by Pickthall, Sahih International, Asad, when the word *al-nas* (the people) is referred to as 'man' or 'mankind', exposing the biased assumptions of the translators.¹⁰ Thus, leaving way for an exclusionary interpretation, albeit just on the basis of linguistic grounds. The Sublime Qur'an, by Laleh Bakhtiar, that was specifically introduced for a more gender-inclusive translation, translated *al-nas* here as 'humanity'.¹¹

To further on this, two verses, namely (24:36–37)¹² and (9:108)¹³ use the word *rijal* (Modern Standard Arabic for men, High Arabic for men and women) to refer to worshippers, however in the context of the mosque these have been translated by all but one as just 'men', according to Auda, this has meant that women have been excluded as a result.¹⁴ In other verses in the Qur'an this has not been the case.

However, according to Auda, a gender exclusionary exegesis occurs much earlier than this. Ibn Kathir (d. 774H/1373CE), one of the great exegetes, commented on this same word in *Surat al-Nur*; '*rijal*', by saying:

“As for women, their praying at home is better for them ... But it is permissible for them to attend the congregational prayer offered by men, on condition that she does not harm any man by manifesting adornments or wearing perfume.”¹⁵

It must be said that Ibn Kathir applies a quite literalist and traditionalist manner of exegesis, relying firmly on the *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammed)¹⁶, which further explains his exegesis for this particular verse. This *hadith* will also be discussed further on in relation to female prayer. It is clear from the above examples that no verses in the Qur'an itself, in the original Qur'anic Arabic lay any restrictions on women entering mosques, however misconceptions might have occurred through translations or

⁹“Indeed, the first House of worship established for people [al-nas] was that at Mecca - blessed and a guidance for the worlds.”

¹⁰J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p. 26

¹¹ Laleh BAKHTIAR, *The Sublime Quran*, Chicago, Library of Islam, 2009, p. 52

¹²“Such light is in mosques which Allah has ordered to be raised and that His name be mentioned therein; exalting Him within them in the morning and the evenings. [Are] persons [rijal] whom neither commerce nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allah and performance of prayer and giving of charity.”

¹³“A mosque founded on righteousness from the first day is more worthy for you to stand in. Within it are persons [rijal] who love to purify themselves; and Allah loves those who purify themselves.”

¹⁴J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque* p. 27

¹⁵Ibn Kathir in J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque* p. 27

¹⁶Syed Hussain NASR et al, *The Study Quran; A new Translation and Commentary*, New York, 2015, p. 1921-1922

restrictions might have been placed by exegesis. The following chapter will discuss what the *Sunnah* of the Prophet says about this.

2.1.2 Sunnah

Ibn Umar reported:

I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say: When your women seek your permission for going to the mosque, you grant them (permission).¹⁷

Salim narrated it from his father ('Abdullah b. Umar) that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said:

When women ask permission for going to the mosque, do not prevent them.¹⁸

The above are just two *ahadith* (pl.) which speak about women in regards to the mosque. The difference in *hadith* and *sunnah* is, is that by *sunnah* one is referring to the established practice of the Prophet Muhammed, whereas a *hadith* can just be relaying one particular instance. In reality there are various of these *ahadith*, which clearly state that women should not be prevented from mosques, there are even *ahadith* which describe life and interaction between the Prophet and women inside of the mosque. Auda brings forth a rather large selection of these to further prove his argument that women have always been, not only allowed, but also welcomed into the mosque. In his chapter on the *Sunnah* of women in mosques, he firstly mentions a *hadith* from Sahih Bukhari, of a freed female African slave, who embraced Islam and who was allowed to set up a tent inside the mosque and take shelter, the fact that she stayed there for several months, lead legal scholars such as Ibn Hazm to draw the conclusion that women who have their menses cannot be excluded from the mosque either.¹⁹

On the specific topic of menstruating women in the mosque, which is still contentious to this day and deemed impermissible by some scholars, Fatima Mernissi, mentions Imam Nasa'i²⁰ who in his *hadith* collection has recorded the following (a similar account is also found in Thirmidhi):

Maimunah said:

"The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to lay his head in the lap of one of us and recite Qur'an while she was menstruating, and one of us would take the mat to the Masjid and spread it out when she was menstruating."²¹

This is, however, when issues become more complicated, despite the many authentic *ahadith* regarding women attending the mosque, praying, spending time with the Prophet, even staying overnight in the mosque, legal rulings, which mostly were constructed and derived after the death of the prophet Muhammad seem to contradict the above mentioned examples from both the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

¹⁷Sahih Muslim 442 Book 4, Hadith 153; <https://sunnah.com/muslim/4/153>

¹⁸Sahih Muslim 442 Book 4, Hadith 150; <https://sunnah.com/muslim/4/150>

¹⁹J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p. 30-31

²⁰F. MERNISSI, *De politieke harem*, p. 93

²¹Sunan an Nasa'i - Vol. 1, Book 3, Hadith 38; <https://sunnah.com/nasai/3/38>

2.1.3 Fiqh

Legal rulings; *fatawa* and *fiqh* are an undeniable part of the Islamic theological tradition. Following a specific *madhab* (law school) is for many Muslims a necessary part in their religious praxis, as it offers an instruction on the *haram* (forbidden) and *halal* (allowed) in practicing their faith. Different schools have various approaches on how they come to a legal ruling, but the contentious part is always, how do they interpret the verses and the Prophetic sayings, furthermore which *hadith* do they choose to use to derive their rulings from. There is no denying that these rulings are often the product of a specific time and bias. The majority of scholars within Sunni and Shi'ite theology were in agreement that women, especially young attractive women should pray at home, as not to cause *fitna* (social unrest).²² The most restrictive Sunni school when it comes to women and the mosque is the Hanafi school, the Maliki's and Hanbali's opt for a more moderate and lenient stance, but still are opposed to the idea.²³ Imam a-Shafi'i even went as far as to say that the *ahadith* in which the Prophet tells men not to prevent their women are not applicable to all.²⁴ This selective choosing of which *hadith* is deemed more valid than others, reveals a patriarchal bias, which arose after the death of the Prophet and subsequently shaped the jurisprudence literature which in turn led to women's exclusion.

According to Auda, two specific *ahadith* have also been of particular credence when it comes to prohibiting women from praying at the mosque.²⁵

'Amra, daughter of Abd al-Rahmin, reported:

I heard 'A'isha, the wife of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). say: If the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) had seen what new things the women have introduced (in their way of life) he would have definitely prevented them from going to the mosque, as the women of Bani Isra'il were prevented.²⁶

Umm Humaid, a companion, narrated that the Prophet (s) told her: "Your prayer in your house is better for you than your prayer in the congregation."²⁷

In terms of the research in this thesis, the latter *hadith* is actually seen by a lot of Muslim women as an exemption from the obligation of praying in the mosque, with which they are very happy, because they have busy lives and often also take care of the children. However, when this *hadith* is used to prohibit women from the mosque entirely, or not pay any heed to the facilities for women is when it becomes problematic.

Mohammad Akram Nadwi, the author of a 40-volume book called *Al-Muhaddithat*, on the female scholars in Islam, has also translated an important work of Ibn Hazm (994-1064 CE), an Andalusian scholar from the *Zahiri madhab*: 'On the lawfulness of women

²² Asma SAYEED, "Early Sunni Discourse on Women's Mosque Attendance." in *ISIM Newsletter* 7 (2001): 1.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p. 40

²⁶Sahih Muslim, Book 4, Hadith 16; <https://sunnah.com/muslim/4/161>

²⁷Al-Bayhaqi in J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p. 40

attending prayers in the mosque'. The reason for this translation into English was his own personal experience in the United Kingdom, where he often heard stories from female students being turned away from mosques to pray.²⁸

With regards to the *hadith* in which Ai'sha relays that if the Prophet had seen what women had been doing in the mosque, he surely would have stopped them, Ibn Hazm offers a six point argument to negate this and by doing this even goes against Abu Hanifa and Imam Malik, who both argue that 'a woman's prayer is better at home', albeit in varying degrees on the basis of this *hadith* among others.²⁹ His argument is that the Prophet Muhammad never actually witnessed himself what exactly the women were doing in the mosque and their supposed innovation, so how can a ruling be derived from an assumption?³⁰ There was no divine command, nobody has any idea on what this innovation entails but it cannot be worse than fornication, not all women need to be punished for a minority and Ai'sha herself was not of this opinion, therefore to base a legal ruling on this would be 'silly'. If the Prophet did not stop women, why would we go against the *Sunnah*?³¹ Other scholars, such as Ibn Qudamah and Ibn Hajar had similar opinions to Ibn Hazm on this issue.³²

As for the *hadith* advocating that a woman's prayer is better at home, Auda and Ibn Hazm offer different perspectives to refute this. Auda argues that this *hadith* is contextual, meaning it was a specific saying relating to, in this case Umm Humaid's personal circumstances, because there are no other *ahadith* which claim anything similar or would deny women the reward of praying in congregation, the contrary!³³ Ibn Hazm claims that all the *ahadith* relating to the fact that woman's prayer is better at home, this includes other narrations as well, are not sound and have faults with the transmitters.³⁴ Even if they were sound, it would be wrong to conclude that there would not be a reward in praying at the mosque for women and the extra effort they would go through to make this happen. It would actually constitute a sin to stop this from happening.³⁵

As well as the works by Auda and Nadwi, several female Muslim scholars have been calling for a deeper engagement with the Qur'an, *Sunnah* and specifically the jurisprudence to claim that a liberatory reading can be found by returning to the original sources. An example of this is the approach by Al-Hibri and that is to assert that the Qur'anic laws are egalitarian and gave rights to women, but they were corrupted by patriarchal human interpretation.³⁶ This purely Qur'anic approach has come under a lot of criticism, as it presents an apologetic view, without acknowledging the situation Muslim women are in

²⁸Mohammad Akram NADWI, *Ibn Hazm on the lawfulness of women attending prayers in the mosque*, Interface Publications, 2015. p. vii

²⁹M.A. NADWI, *Ibn Hazm on the lawfulness of women attending prayers in the mosque*, p. 18

³⁰M.A. NADWI, *Ibn Hazm on the lawfulness of women attending prayers in the mosque*, p. 22

³¹M.A. NADWI, *Ibn Hazm on the lawfulness of women attending prayers in the mosque*, p. 23

³²J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p. 41

³³J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p. 46

³⁴M.A. NADWI, *Ibn Hazm on the lawfulness of women attending prayers in the mosque*, p. 24

³⁵M.A. NADWI, *Ibn Hazm on the lawfulness of women attending prayers in the mosque*, p. 25

³⁶Jerusha T. LAMPTEY, *Divine Words, Female Voices: Muslima Explorations in Comparative Feminist Theology*. Oxford University Press, 2018, p.13

today, according to Kecia Ali.³⁷ Her approach is to engage with the full tradition, including the *ahadith* and the *fiqh*, to unearth the patriarchal structures and concretise a new methodology, which engages with tradition without presenting it as too rosy.³⁸ The 'feminist approach' of Ali is also most in line with the works by Auda and Nadwi, which call for a revival and overhaul of the current tradition.

2.2 The anthropological study of Muslim women

As this thesis is interdisciplinary, part theological and part social science, it is necessary to acknowledge previous studies on Muslim women. When dealing with this particular group of women; Muslim women and more specifically in a context of their religious praxis, various assumptions and biases arise. As Lila Abu-Lughod points out in 'Do Muslim women really need saving?' is that when it comes to speaking about women's rights, the majority of people think these should be defined by the notions of "choice and freedom", however that these two particular values are deeply compromised within Muslim communities.³⁹ A good example of this, is the matter of veiling, women who choose to cover up are often, from a western liberal point of view, seen as 'brainwashed' or coerced.⁴⁰ The choices of Muslim women are constantly under scrutiny, especially in a post-colonial and post 9/11 context.⁴¹ Muslim women are then stuck in a double binary, where on the one hand they want to challenge certain patriarchal norms, in the context of the mosque for example, and on the other hand their choices from a western liberal perspective are not deemed as 'free' enough, if then talking about gender segregation. With reference to the research done in this paper this recognition is of high importance, as it does not seek to be a critique of 'Muslim patriarchy', but rather a centring of the female Muslim perspective and experience, without trying to impose a certain bias on their choices and therefore reducing their experience to 'passive receivers'. Saba Mahmood emphasises this point in 'The Politics of Piety' where she writes that post 9/11, the 'secular-liberal inquisition' is out to make Islam confess.⁴² Therefore all studies done on Muslim women carry this burden, meaning that there is an underlying suspicion and assumption of misogyny and patriarchy that must somehow be revealed and the secular-liberal standards will be the measure of this.⁴³ Secular liberalism as defined by Mahmood is therefore more than just a doctrine of the state or a set a juridical conventions; it encompasses so much more that it becomes to define a 'form of life'.⁴⁴ In the Flemish context where the actions and choices of Muslim women are constantly subjected to this measure, examples include veiling or women only spaces such as gyms or swimming hours, one cannot sidestep the implications that research on Muslim women, even more so on the topic of religious practice and gender segregation can have if this point is not addressed.

³⁷ J. T. LAMPTEY, *Divine Words, Female voices* p. 14

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Lila ABU-LUGHOD, *Do Muslim women need saving?* Harvard University Press, 2013, p. 17

⁴⁰ L. ABU-LUGHOD, *Do Muslim women really need saving?* p. 18

⁴¹ S. MAHMOOD, *The Politics of Piety*, p. 189

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ S. MAHMOOD, *The Politics of Piety*, p. 191

2.3 Notions of agency and piety within a feminist framework

As mentioned above, Muslim, or even just religious, women often find themselves trapped within a dichotomy, which has already judged their choices for them. If it fits within the dominant secular feminist framework, they are seen to be using their 'agency', however if their choices are somehow shaped by their religious beliefs or even religious conservatism, their agency is quickly taken away from them and their actions can certainly no longer be viewed as feminist. Agency is therefore automatically linked to resistance.⁴⁵ Orit Avishai in 'Doing religion in a secular world' conducted a study on Jewish Orthodox women in which she questioned exactly this dichotomy. She argues that there is a false paradox which juxtaposes on the one hand compliance, subversion and subordination against on the other hand resistance and agency, however the situation is far more complex than this.⁴⁶ Her approach on 'doing religion', shaped by Judith Butler's performance theory on 'doing gender'⁴⁷, tries to leave this paradox behind by also viewing agency as a "pursuit of religious ends or as nonstrategic action, instead of merely the "pursuit of extra-religious ends".⁴⁸ This is also in line with Mahmood's vision that to view agency as merely strategic action, only exposes the intellectual biases of the researcher, instead of the lived realities of the religious subjects.⁴⁹ This particular understanding of agency is also applied in this research. The women's choices, even if they are shaped by a certain understanding of religious, in this case, Islamic dogma, are choices made out of agency, nonetheless. The concept of freedom is subjective in that, for a religious woman adhering to religious concepts can be empowering, although according to Avishai this doesn't even have to be the case when dealing with a feminist sociological study of religion. It is not necessary to always pinpoint either empowerment or subversion, simply observing how members "do, observe and perform religion" will suffice.⁵⁰ What then exactly is piety? Piety, in this case can therefore be viewed as a 'counter-conceptual' idea that is diametrically opposed to western liberal conceptions of freedom and autonomy, but rather a willing subjugation to religious doctrine, in this case the Islamic tradition.⁵¹ Piety does therefore not negate agency, but rather denotes a conscious choice to something other than the supposed notions of freedom as prescribed by the secular-liberal. This rings particularly true when it comes to the concept of religiously inspired gender segregation, a concept often viewed as 'oppressive', but rarely takes into account the conscious choices of religious, in this case Muslim, women as active agents, making choices based on their conception of piety.

2.4 Gender segregation; different narratives

⁴⁵Orit AVISHAI, "Doing religion" in a secular world: Women in conservative religions and the question of agency in *Gender & Society* 22, no. 4 (2008): 409-433. p. 412

⁴⁶Pamela J PRICKETT, *Negotiating gendered religious space: The particularities of patriarchy in an African American mosque* in *Gender & Society* 29, no. 1 (2015): 51-72, p. 52

⁴⁷O. AVISHAI, "Doing religion" in a secular world, p. 413

⁴⁸O. AVISHAI, "Doing religion" in a secular world, p. 429

⁴⁹Saba MAHMOOD (2004) in O. AVISHAI, "Doing religion" in a secular world, p. 429

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Christine JACOBSON, *troublesome threesome: feminism, anthropology and Muslim women's piety* in *Feminist Review* 98, no. 1 (2011): 65-82. p. 70

2.4.1 The origins of Islamic gender segregation

In many mosques, especially in Belgium, there seems to be a degree of gender segregation. In the Antwerp province there is only one mosque which does not, which is the Bosnian mosque in Deurne, however when there are too many women to pray alongside the men, then the women have the option to pray in a different room, where it is only them and more spacious.⁵² In the 'Islamic world', Makkah and Medinah, and also Al-Aqsa are widely understood to be the only places which do not segregate genders to the extent that the women would have to pray in a different room or even a separate mosque. As always there is a degree of segregation or integration⁵³, where women would pray in a different designated women's area, however this would be inside the mosque or out in the open space. The situation in Makkah and Medinah today is, although different from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the closest to what is established in the *Sunnah*. As previously mentioned, there were many *ahadith* that spoke about women being present in the mosque, in the same room as the Prophet, doing various activities. According to Nevin Reda in 'Women in the Mosque – Historical perspectives on segregation', this changed after the death of the Prophet, not with the caliph Abu Bakr as-Siddique, but with Umar ibn al-Khattab (634-44).⁵⁴ During his reign mosques were built in Kufa and Basra and although there was no indication of an explicit gender segregation inside the mosque, these mosques did have a separate entrance for men and women.⁵⁵ She makes reference to the construction of the al-Aqsa mosque, which had several *maqsurat* (wooden barriers) in it, not only to signify gender partition, but also to separate the people from the imam and *mihrab* (niche which denotes the direction of prayer), to which many scholars objected.⁵⁶ This was according to Reda, most likely the first occasion of gender segregation, although it is not sure how widespread it actually was back then.⁵⁷

Marion Katz, in her book 'Women in the mosque; a history of legal thought and social practice' gives a detailed account of the presence, or absence of women in the mosque in various parts of the Middle East and North Africa, this is of relevance for this research, because ultimately most of the mosques in Antwerp province still have some linguistic, legal and cultural connection to their place of origin, be that Morocco or Turkey, the only real exception being the 'convert mosque' 'De Koepel'. Katz also mentions in her book that contrary to what is mentioned in the *Sunnah*, in Spain and North-Africa several accounts were given about a separate area for women, first by a Medinan historian called Ibn Zabala, at the time of the caliph al-Mahdi (777-78) and second during the period of al-Andalus, where the Ummayyad caliph Hisham I was reported to have built 'roofed arcades at the back of the Great Mosque of Cordoba as a specific place for women's prayer'.⁵⁸ Debates on *maqsurat* were not uncommon in North-Africa, especially after

⁵²Chapter 5 Quantitative Research Results

⁵³Rachel WOODLOCK, *The masjid is for men: competing voices in the debate about Australian Muslim women's access to mosques in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 21, no. 1 (2010): 51-60. p. 54

⁵⁴Nevin REDA, *Women in the mosque: Historical perspectives on segregation in American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 21, no. 2 (2004): 77-97. p. 79

⁵⁵N. REDA, *Women in the mosque*, p. 86

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Marion KATZ, *Women in the mosque: A history of legal thought and social practice*, Columbia University Press, 2014. p. 120

incidents took place where the women would take up space, which was deemed to be the men's during Friday prayer.⁵⁹ Around the 11th century various famous mosques already had specific spaces allocated for women; the two main mosques of Fez, Qarawiyyin and mosques in al-Andalus.⁶⁰ Katz does however always state that there was no way of knowing whether women would be confined to this specific spaces or whether they were free to also visit the main areas of the mosque.⁶¹ Other areas of the Middle East and North-Africa region show varying accounts, whereas in Egypt and Iraq women were present, but this was not prolific, in Syria and in Palestine women took up various important roles within the mosque, in women's spaces and in mixed spaces. This of course cannot be seen separate from the law schools and their stance on women's presence and space in the mosque.

2.4.2 Orientalist perspectives

Orientalism in this chapter is as defined by Said: a set of truths held by the West, which pertain to the 'Orient' that are inherently stereotypical and generalising, such as Oriental despotism and sensuality.⁶²

With regards to the specifics of Ottoman Istanbul, there are hardly any accounts from the Ottomans themselves, however a lot of the orientalist literature did survive, which would explain why, from a Western perspective at least, there seems to be such a negative understanding of the practice of gender segregation. What is interesting to note is that in the 14th, 15th and 16th century, European travellers did not have a negative view on gender segregation in the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, it was seen as modest, in line with Biblical commandments and with a reference to a higher social class, because this was the case in the social circles in Europe.⁶³ At the height of the Ottomans' power (early 16th and 17th century), the orientalist attitude made a drastic shift, gender segregation was now seen as the pinnacle of Muslim misogyny and assumptions arose that women were completely banned from mosques as well as the understanding that women would therefore also be excluded from Paradise.⁶⁴ This narrative, although rarely contested, persisted and was exacerbated during the colonial period, where it became an example of 'Eastern despotism' and the reason why modernity would not flourish.⁶⁵ One has to bear in mind that women in places such as the United Kingdom certainly did not have equal rights, or anything remotely close. With the rise of tourism these ideas only got more enshrined, with some European visitors even living under the assumption that Muslim women, according to Islamic theology, would not have souls.⁶⁶ These orientalist perspectives, although some in different forms, still live up until this day. The West's 'cultural archive', as Edward Said names it, is full of these orientalist stereotypes about Muslim men and women. The idea that women would willingly choose to segregate is

⁵⁹M. KATZ, *Women in the mosque*, p. 123

⁶⁰M. KATZ, *Women in the mosque*, p. 124

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²E. SAID, *Orientalism*, p. 204

⁶³M. KATZ, *Women in the mosque*, p. 173

⁶⁴M. KATZ, *Women in the mosque*, p. 174

⁶⁵M. KATZ, *Women in the mosque*, p. 177

⁶⁶M. KATZ, *Women in the mosque*, p. 178

henceforth incomprehensible to many and another example of Muslim women being subjugated.

2.4.3 Contemporary debates

From inside as well as outside of the Islamic tradition there are many debates around the topic of gender segregation. Whereas there are genuine grievances from women who are not happy with being segregated, it has also become as contentious issue and a political tool to either reinforce the above-mentioned stereotypes or denounce them. The dynamic of denouncing orientalist stereotypes by condemning gender segregation does however ultimately take on the form of reinforcing them. The former imam of the Holy mosque in Makkah recently issued a statement that gender segregation is an 'innovation' and 'a type of phobia towards women'.⁶⁷ Naturally, this statement is in line with the recent gender reforms of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which are in principal positive, however the fact that the women's voices and choices have been excluded (and in some cases imprisoned), show that this is just another manifestation of a patriarchal and internalised orientalist discourse. In a study done by Rachel Woodlock on mosques in Australia, she calls for a return to the *Sunnah*, as it is described in this paper, namely to allow women full access to the mosque and to the praying spaces.⁶⁸ By referring to Nevin Reda and Khaled Abou el Fadl, she describes a phenomenon named as the 'interpolation of patriarchy', which occurred after the death of Prophet. In this time *hadith* were collected which reflected more the social attitudes towards women of the people at the time, rather than being valid and authentic *ahadith*.⁶⁹ Which in turn lead to the separation of women and men and ultimately the exclusion of women altogether. Her solution here is a revision of the *fiqh* to review gender segregation. She does however admit, that mosques, especially in Muslim minority contexts, where there is islamophobia and discrimination, should be designed according to the needs of the women in the community, as it should act as a 'safe space'.⁷⁰

2.5 Women's only prayer areas as 'safe spaces'

Gender segregation is often viewed as enforced and therefore quickly labelled as anti-feminist. The question is how to approach gender segregation if this is made out of choice? This is where the concept of safe spaces comes in. Ruth Lewis et al conducted a study of feminist women-only spaces to conceptualise what these exactly entail and their value. The study focused more on the notion of '*safe to*' rather than '*safe from*'.⁷¹ Rather than purely an emphasis on the 'unsafe' nature of the public space, it centred the women inside the women's only space and studied what they felt like they could do. 'Safe to' took meaning for the women in various ways such as a 'freedom to be yourself', an emotional type of safety, which allowed the women to 'be how they can be'.⁷² These sentiments are

⁶⁷ARAB NEWS; <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1502966/saudi-arabia>

⁶⁸R. WOODLOCK, *The masjid is for men*, p. 58

⁶⁹R. WOODLOCK, *The masjid is for men*, p. 56

⁷⁰R. WOODLOCK, *The masjid is for men*, p. 59

⁷¹Ruth LEWIS et al. *Safe spaces': experiences of feminist women-only space* in *Sociological Research Online* 20, no. 4 (2015): 1-14. p. 3

⁷²R. LEWIS et al, *Safe spaces': experiences of feminist women-only spaces*, p. 9

reflected by the women in this paper when it comes to women's only prayer spaces. Safety in a women's only context was never interpreted as security, but rather 'freedom'. However, the fact that this would be seen as a safe space, still is a signifier of an unsafe outside context, for if there was no patriarchy, would there still be a necessity for a women's-only space? In addition, where does this leave the mosque, as a house of worship which should be a safe haven for all?

2.6 Comparable studies

Not many studies have been done regarding women's experiences and perceptions of the mosque. The Muslim Council of Britain in collaboration with the University of Cardiff have only recently set out an online survey to gauge how 'women-friendly' mosques are in the United Kingdom. These results have not been published yet. It has however already rolled out a program to get women to participate more in mosques, knowing that the participation is generally low.⁷³ One research done which did specifically focus on the diaspora experience is that of Jamila Hussain, in which she chose fifteen mosques in the Sydney area to arrange an interview with the imam (two refused), and conducted forty-one surveys with Muslim women to find out how happy they were the arrangements at their local mosque.⁷⁴ In addition, sixteen imams and many other women were informally spoken to about their experiences.⁷⁵ The research is divided into several parts, which this research mirrors. Many of the same issues arose, such as the difference between purpose built and not purpose built, converted mosques.⁷⁶ Other topics included; the women's space, *wudhu* (washing) facilities, gender segregation, access for the elderly and disabled, women's classes, ability to consult the imam and women's participation in the mosque association. These are the topics that Hussain denotes as the markers of what constitutes a women-friendly mosque.⁷⁷ It was important to follow this line, to be able to establish whether the experience of women in Antwerp province is any different or similar. The history and trajectory of migration to Australia is of course different, however the second and third generation Muslim women might have overlapping sentiments. All of these topics have therefore been discussed in both the quantitative and qualitative research of this paper and will be engaged with this literature in the final chapter on discussion. This research does differ, because it did not engage the imams, it only focussed on the women. This was a conscious decision, because of the centring of the women's narrative. For further research engaging the imams would certainly be necessary in order to bring about any positive changes in the mosques themselves.

In 2016, the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding published a report on mosques in the United States. Based on research done by Pew research and their own studies, which included several focus groups throughout the United States, they brought forward a document with practical recommendations and solutions to problems, which were

⁷³MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN; <https://mcb.org.uk/project/women-in-mosques/>

⁷⁴Jamila HUSSAIN, *Finding the women's space: Muslim women and the mosque. in Beyond the hijab debates: New conversations on gender, race and religion*, 2009, p. 57

⁷⁵J. HUSSAIN, *Finding the women's space*, p.58

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

encountered by the people in their focus groups.⁷⁸ In the research specific trends and themes were established such as the need for mosques to engage young people, women and converts more and to offer them a welcoming space.⁷⁹ The gender element is particularly relevant to this paper as to see if there is an overarching sentiment of women in the United States and women in Antwerp province. As with the previous research mentioned, this is a group of mainly diaspora Muslim women whose needs and wants can be substantially different to those of the first generation. Their recommendations on women are eight-fold:

- Invite women to serve on the board.
- Organise a women's committee
- Beautify the women's area
- Ensure the main *musalla* (prayer area) is available to women
- Match resources and space allocation for women
- Encourage the imam to be accessible
- Address the issues that women face (through for example a Friday sermon)
- Support women's activities⁸⁰

This research was from the outset primarily focused on gender, however as the study progressed it became clear that the gendered aspect was certainly not the only stumbling block. The other recommendations made by the Institute will be discussed in the final chapter with reference to the research results. How the design and methods were realised can be read in the following chapter.

⁷⁸Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), *Creating a welcoming, inclusive and dynamic mosque*, 21 Oct 2016, p.1

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰ISPU, *Creating a welcoming, inclusive and dynamic mosque*, p. 4-5

3. Methodology

In terms of the methodology for this research, I have chosen to apply a mixed methods approach, which means a quantitative as well as a qualitative social science approach, in combination with practical theology. All of these methodological frameworks will be elaborated on, with a focus on the actual process of the research, the strong points and the potential pitfalls and flaws.

3.1 Practical (Islamic and feminist) theology

Practical theology as defined by Swinton and Mowatt is:

“Practical theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world.”⁸¹

Despite the fact that this is first and foremost a Christian methodology, for the purposes of this research it is incredibly relevant, as it centres the human experience, which in this case is the Muslim women's experience.⁸²

After the qualitative (and in this case also quantitative) research is complete, it establishes key themes and offers a theological reflection on those themes to offer a transformative, hermeneutical and even liberatory understanding of the tradition and/or scripture. It engages with the scripture, which in this case is not only the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, but also the jurisprudence, which have been discussed in the literature review. Such a methodology has not yet been entered into the field of Islamic studies. However, as Amjad Hussain argues, the study of Muslims or Islam from the field of sociology of religion has often superimposed a secular vision, assuming meaning from merely the social context, be that economics, power, identity, but not taking into account the practical theological application of Islam.⁸³ He does argue that for a Muslim, because there is no divide between belief/faith and the actual practice of religion, practical theology would be superfluous, however I disagree.⁸⁴ This vision is too utopian, as it discounts the negative experience that women and minorities might be subjected to. Practical theology, by centring the human experience, can offer a critical reflection on practices, which negatively affect the community and even offer a feminist solution from within the tradition, which draws back on the religious sources. In the chapter on discussion and recommendations to improve women's mosque experiences, these critical reflections will be elaborated on.

This of course does not apply to the individual choices made by the women in the study, but rather the negative experiences at the behest of others, out of their direct control. To stay within the feminist framework, the women's actions and choices, albeit influenced by

⁸¹John SWINTON and Harriett MOWATT, *Practical theology and qualitative research*. SCM press, 2016, p. 6

⁸²J. SWINTON and H. MOWATT, *Practical theology and qualitative research*. p 5

⁸³A. HUSSAIN, *Muslim theology and religious studies*, p. 240

⁸⁴A. HUSSAIN, *Muslim theology and religious studies*, p. 239

their religious beliefs and piety are conscious choices, made willingly out of agency.

3.2 Mixed methods methodology

3.2.1 Research design

The mixed methods methodology applies a combination of two different styles of research, namely the quantitative and the qualitative. There are various types of designs and typologies according to Tashakkori and Teddlie. The mixed methods design chosen for this study is the ‘sequential mixed designs’ approach. This entails:

“In these designs, mixing occurs across chronological phases (QUAL, QUAN) of the study, questions or procedures of one strand emerge from or depend on the previous strand, and research questions are related to one another and may evolve as the study unfolds.”⁸⁵

In terms of this study this has meant that the quantitative research, which preceded the qualitative research allowed for deeper questions to be formulated for the in-depth interviews, which later followed. Certain outcomes, such as a discrepancy in how women view the function of the mosque, were allowed to be elaborated on in the qualitative element. Sequential mixed methods designs allow for the questions to be answered in an exploratory and confirmatory fashion in a chronological order, these designs are also less complicated for a solo investigator, rather than other mixed method designs.⁸⁶ In terms of the definition of Creswell, this research would follow the methodology of ‘sequential explanatory’.⁸⁷

3.2.2 Theory

Creswell also explores the usage of theory in mixed methods methodology, in which he refers to social science approaches, but the theory chosen for this study follows the “Transformative Paradigm Theory”.⁸⁸ He quotes Mertens:

“The transformative approach applies to people who experience discrimination and oppression, including (but not limited to) race/ethnicity, disability, immigrant status, political conflicts, sexual orientation, poverty, gender, and age.”⁸⁹

In this study the group researched are women in an environment which is still shaped by patriarchy. The gender aspect is thus undeniable and shapes the experiences of the women questioned. By opting for a transformative approach, it takes into account the sensibilities and power dynamics of the group that is studied with the hope for social change. Creswell references Sweetman and addresses several criteria that need to be addressed when opting for this approach. These are (not limited to):

⁸⁵Charles TEDDLIE and Abbas TASHAKKORI, *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*. Sage, 2009. P. 136

⁸⁶C. TEDDLIE and A. TASHAKKORI, *Foundations of mixed methods research*, p. 137

⁸⁷C. TEDDLIE and A. TASHAKKORI, *Foundations of mixed methods research*, p 145

⁸⁸J.W. CRESWELL, *Research design*, p.105

⁸⁹J.W. CRESWELL, *Research design*, p. 106

“Did the data collection and outcomes benefit the community?” and “Did the results facilitate social change?”⁹⁰

The transformative paradigm theory can be implemented in various fields, such as feminist and critical race theory. For this paper, this is a feminist studies research, engaging with practical theology using a transformative approach for the mixed methods data. To just allow for the feminist perspective would make the outcome of it being truly transformative difficult, as to allow for the structures within a religious discourse and praxis to be able change, it is necessary to engage with the tradition or scripture.

3.2.3 Analysis

The mixed method analysis style this research follows is that of ‘parallel mixed data analysis’ in two independent separate processes.⁹¹ The quantitative analysis is that of descriptive statistics and the qualitative data is subject to a thematic analysis, after which the results are linked and combined to further explain the phenomenon.⁹²

3.2.4 Motivation

The reasons for choosing mixed methods and specifically the transformative paradigm theory is that the hypothesis, which is not only based on studies from abroad, but also informal conversations with other Muslim women in the area, departs from the assumption that there are issues surrounding the gender participation in mosques, that are in need of resolving. This research was also presented as such to the women in the community, it was welcomed and deemed as necessary by many respondents.

3.3 Quantitative research: web survey

3.3.1 Reasons for choosing the web survey

The reasons for opting for the web survey was to reach a large group of Muslim women to get a general overview on their views, experiences and possible grievances with their local mosque. As the research results suggest, the majority of the women do not attend the mosque regularly, thus by sending out the web survey via social media and various networks of women, it was possible to reach a group which would not be likely to be found in the mosque themselves. The limitations of the web survey are that there can be a high number of non-response and incomplete surveys.

3.3.2 Method

The web survey was first sent out via various different key persons within the Muslim community. These included Muslim women involved in social and community work, theologians and Islamic studies teachers across Antwerp province. Different mosques were contacted who agreed to sending out the survey via their mailing list or social media page. Besides this, the survey was also posted by me on social media, in closed women's groups, some specifically for Muslim women, other for Muslim converts. This method can also be described as ‘probability sampling’, where a relatively large number of units

⁹⁰J.W. CRESWELL, *Research design*, p.108

⁹¹ C. TEDDLIE and A. TASHAKKORI, *Foundations of mixed methods research*, p. 231

⁹²Ibid.

from a subgroup is selected in a random manner, so that every member is represented.⁹³ Probability samples strive to achieve representativeness, in which the sample reflects the selected population.⁹⁴

3.3.3 Research questions

The web survey was divided into four parts:

- Your experience of the mosque
- The facilities at the mosque
- Your personal praying preference
- Personal background information

The underlying research question is that if anything is limiting women in having their optimal mosque experience, what is it? Aside from this there is also a focus on the gender segregated praying. How do the women experience this, is this positive or negative?

The first research question connected to the first part of the questionnaire is: 'How do women experience and relate to the mosque?' This is why the questions were focused around, their feelings and their personal practice.

Hypothesis: The mosque is central in the Islamic faith, for women as well as for men. Despite there not being an obligation, women are still drawn to the mosque and find that it has relevance in their lives. From previous studies, it shows that there are elements that can make this experience less positive, such as child friendliness or an underrepresentation of women.

The second research question is: Are the facilities at the mosque adequate? Could they be hindering women in their experience?

Hypothesis: From other research and informal conversations with Muslim women, facilities at mosques do not tend to be centred around giving women the best experience possible. These facilities can vary from praying spaces, to classes and the approachability of the imam. There might be a positive reaction to some of the facilities, but certainly not all of them.

The third research question is: What are women's praying preferences? Is a gender segregated area perceived as positive or negative?

Hypothesis: Many articles, as well as the documentaries referred to in this study have problematised women's only (praying) areas. These are often experienced as being not connected to the main congregation, although not the absolute majority of women experience it this way. It is expected that the women in this study will mirror this sentiment with a relatively high percentage opting for a different praying area, but certainly not a majority.

Finally, this paper seeks to establish how often women frequent the mosque and if this

⁹³C. TEDDLIE and A. TASHAKKORI, *Foundations of mixed methods research*, p. 152

⁹⁴Ibid.

frequency could go up, would there be any improvements?

3.3.4 Data collection and analysis

▪ Respondents

Eventually, the survey gathered the data of 237 total respondents, however these included non-completed surveys. The total number of completed surveys was 133, thus 104 incomplete surveys. Many participants abandoned the survey, only filling in a few questions on the first page and not running through the entire process. The incomplete surveys contained such little data that for this research the choice was made to abandon them. The reason for limiting the respondents to the Antwerp province area was mainly due to time constraints. Nonetheless, many women from outside Antwerp province also wanted to participate.

▪ Timeframe

The web survey was launched on the 1st of May 2019 and taken offline on the 4th of August 2019. It stayed online during and after the month of Ramadan and this was a conscious decision as this is a time where many women frequent the mosque more often.

▪ Analysis

The data gathered is analysed in a purely descriptive manner⁹⁵. As every question section, or even specific question contains qualitative elements⁹⁶, in which the respondents can offer their own personal perspective, it is difficult to draw variables. This was also not the intention of the research. The intention was to get a general overview of women and how they experience and relate to the mosque.

3.3.5 Limitations and bias

Several issues have arisen with this research. Firstly, the sample size. The sample size is 133, which means that in terms of internal validity, the results used can accurately represent the women in the study, however in terms of external validity, this sample size is too small to make generalising statements about the entire population of Muslim women in Antwerp.⁹⁷ Although there is no official number of the amount of Muslims in Antwerp province, sociologist Jan Hertogen from the University of Antwerpen, estimated the amount of Muslim to be 149,938 in 2017.⁹⁸ Aside from this, there seems to be an overrepresentation and underrepresentation of specific communities. The women from the Moroccan community make up 71,43% and the women from the Turkish community only 6,02%, which is not completely reflective. Nonetheless, is generalisation in quantitative research ever deemed as ethical? Suggestions made by Zyphur and Pierides are to rather than seek for representation, quantitative research should orientate itself towards “enacting and actively producing images of a specific situation in which it is sensible to invoke a description a category of subjects/objects.”⁹⁹ Which is what this research seeks to do, however time and resource constraints have limited the research in terms of its full capacity. The web survey does show that the women questioned have issues, so therefore further research is an absolute necessity in order to illicit social change.

⁹⁵J.W. CRESWELL, *Research design*, p. 290

⁹⁶C. TEDDLIE and A. TASHAKKORI, *Foundations of mixed methods research*, p. 204

⁹⁷J.W. CRESWELL, *Research design*, p. 224

⁹⁸J. HERTOGEN; <http://www.npdata.be/BuG/374-Moslims/Moslims.htm>

⁹⁹Michael J. ZYPHUR and Dean PIERIDES, *Is quantitative research ethical? Tools for ethically practicing, evaluating, and using quantitative research.* in *Journal of Business Ethics* 143, no. 1 (2017): 1-16, p. 8

3.4 Qualitative research: personal interviews

3.4.1 Reasons for choosing personal interviews

In order to truly capture the human experience, the decision was made to choose for personal interviews as well as the quantitative research. Baarda describes the benefit of qualitative research as the fact that you have examples which will allow you to describe the character of an issue or situation better.¹⁰⁰ In these semi-structured interviews the women in the research were able to tell their story, centring their personal narrative and experiences. This method is also the most suited to practical theology.¹⁰¹

3.4.2 Method

Via the quantitative web survey, it was possible to send an e-mail if the respondent was available for a personal interview. When the web survey was sent out via social media this question was also asked. Via a personal network of individuals and connections to mosques it was possible to send out several requests for participants. Eventually, the method of 'purposive sampling' was applied, as the participants were selected on the basis of their individual differences, which would be able to provide diversity and various perspectives.¹⁰² After contacting the women via e-mail or social media and further explaining the research and the length of the interview, it was then arranged to meet up in a public place, a neutral environment. The participants were then explained about the anonymity aspect and explicitly agreed to participation by means of 'informed consent'.¹⁰³

3.4.3 Research questions

In accordance with the sequential explanatory mixed methods approach, the research questions followed a similar pattern as the web survey.¹⁰⁴ The purpose of the research questions for the qualitative part of the research was to further investigate why and how with regards to their experiences and choices. The interview covered three main topics:

- Your mosque experience
- Gender segregation
- Your ideal mosque

For the first part the research question is to establish how the mosque is important in the lives of women and if there had been anything to strengthen or damage this relationship.

Hypothesis: After reading the results from the web survey, which stated that many women enjoy going to the mosque, but at the same time their participation was low, and the majority admitted to going more often if improvements were made. It was crucial in this

¹⁰⁰B. BAARDA et al. (ed.), *Basisboek kwalitatief onderzoek. Handleiding voor het opzetten en uitvoeren van kwalitatief onderzoek*, Noordhoff, 2013 p. 35

¹⁰¹J. SWINTON and H. MOWATT, *Practical theology and qualitative research*. p. 58

¹⁰²Joseph A. MAXWELL, *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Vol. 41. Sage publications, 2012, P. 92

¹⁰³ Appendix 3

¹⁰⁴C. TEDDLIE and A. TASHAKKORI, *Foundations of mixed methods research*, p. 145

research to find out where exactly it went wrong. The hypothesis here then is to confirm the importance of the mosque, but at the same time to find a deeper understanding in the short comings.

The second research question is: How do women related to different praying spaces, which do they prefer and why?

Hypothesis: The overwhelming majority in the web survey chose for the women's only praying area. This will most likely be the same for the women. The reasons given might vary from religiously motivated to personal preferences.

The final research question is: What does their ideal mosque look like and how does this relate to the current situation?

Hypothesis: As many of the women from the survey commented suggestions, it is expected that the participants will also have many ideas on how to improve their mosque and make it more inclusive.

3.4.4 Data collection and analysis

▪ Participants

In total there were 8 participants. All of whom have been given a pseudonym in order to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of the research. Anonymity is one of the main criteria for ethically responsible research.¹⁰⁵ The 8 women with fictive names are:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ➤ Ilhan, Somalia, 21 | Fatima, Moroccan, 47 |
| ➤ Elke, Belgium, 28 | Khadija, Moroccan, 43 |
| ➤ Betul, Turkish Kurdish, 20 | Nabila, Moroccan, 27 |
| ➤ Malika, Moroccan, 32 | Natalia, Italian/Ghanaian, 22 |

The group was purposely selected so that there was a diversity in ages, ethnicity, born abroad, converts and whether they were involved with the mosque.

• Interviews

The interviews covered a timespan of a several weeks. Multiple interviews were planned in one week as many of the participants were leaving for the summer vacation. Because of the timing of the research it was difficult to find other women to interview as many of them had already left and would not be back on time. The technique used for the interviews is semi-structured, the structure is provided by a list of questions. The participant is not free in the topic choice, but it was possible to talk about related and even other issues, making for the interview to follow a more natural conversation pattern.¹⁰⁶ Each interview lasted for approximately one hour, was recorded and transcribed.

• Analysis

Creswell describes the analysis of qualitative interviews as a three-step process. Firstly, getting familiar with the raw data, transcribing the interviews and arranging the data into different types according to the information.¹⁰⁷ Secondly, read and look into all of the data. Establish how useful it is and make notes.¹⁰⁸ Thirdly, start coding the data. Coding is

¹⁰⁵B. BAARDA et al. (ed.), *Basisboek kwalitatief onderzoek*, p. 40

¹⁰⁶J. SWINTON and H. MOWATT, *Practical theology and qualitative research*. p. 61

¹⁰⁷J.W. CRESWELL, *Research design*, p. 247

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

a process in which fragments of the text are selected and given a label, indication or code to make analysis easier.¹⁰⁹ This was done manually, as it only pertained to a limited number of participants. The use of a program such as Nvivo would have taken up more time, as it was an unfamiliar tool. After which an analysis was made of the overlapping and common themes according to the content provided, as well as the exceptions.

3.4.5 Limitations and bias

Maxwell describes two potential pitfalls in qualitative research studies, namely reactivity and researcher bias.¹¹⁰ Reactivity is the way that the researcher reacts and potentially influences the setting and the individual that is being studied.¹¹¹ Researcher bias is when the data that is selected for research is at the behest of the bias of the researcher, to fit his/her own theory and preconceptions.¹¹² Eliminating this bias is impossible, but it is necessary to admit it. As a Muslim woman myself, I am aware of my personal biases, despite trying to adopt a neutral point of view. The research; questions and data analysis are always somehow shaped by my perceptions; despite the distance I have tried to create. However, this bias would have existed in a different way if the research was done by a non-Muslim woman with different dimensions.

¹⁰⁹B. BAARDA et al. (ed.), *Basisboek kwalitatief onderzoek*, p. 318

¹¹⁰J.A MAXWELL, *Qualitative research design*, p. 116

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid.

4. The social and political context of this research

This research has to be viewed in this particular time and context. In the past few years various initiatives have arisen pertaining to women and their praying spaces in the Global North. This is not to say that women across the globe have not been claiming their religious space, such as the women only mosques in China. For the purposes of this research however, I will only be focussing on the diaspora experience; second and third generation Muslim women, from various communities. This chapter therefore seeks to explain a selection of the most noteworthy manifestations regarding the praying spaces of diaspora Muslim women, as well as to address the political situation in Belgium in reference to mosques, Muslim women and Islam in general.

4.1 Me & the Mosque and Unmosqued

Two documentaries which have made a big impression on this specific issue in the United States in particular are; *Me and the Mosque* (2005) by Zarqa Nawaz and *Unmosqued* (2014) by Ahmed Eid¹¹³. *Me and the Mosque* really focused on the topic of women and gender segregated praying areas, mosques which used to have shared spaces, but then installed dividers for example.¹¹⁴ *Unmosqued* is a more recent documentary, which looked at mosques in its entirety, the issue of gender, ethnicity, mosque power structures and younger people. Imams were interviewed as well as regular worshippers.¹¹⁵ This documentary also functioned as inspiration for the research referred to in this paper by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, which in turn served as a point of reference for this paper. Both of these documentaries were 'bottom up' initiatives that arose from real grievances within the community aiming for social change, which is also the intention of this study.

4.2 Side Entrance

Side Entrance is an initiative which was started by Hind Makki from the United States, which has gained international notoriety. There is a Tumblr page¹¹⁶ where women from all over world send in photographs of the spaces that they have to pray in. These can include wonderful praying areas, but mostly the spaces are not adequate and making the women feel as if they are worth less than the men. It is now a growing online network and community on various social media platforms. As part of the research for this paper, I personally contacted Hind Makki to find out her motives and the response to her activism. On the question what motivated her, she answered:

“I had an experience in 2012 where I was praying in a mosque that had a very small women's prayer area (6 feet wide by 20 feet long - roughly 2 meters wide by 6 meters long). I thought it was absurd, so I took a photo of it and posted it on Facebook. The conversation that photo generated was very robust and showed me

¹¹³“UNMOSQUED.; [http:// www.unmosquedfilm.com](http://www.unmosquedfilm.com)

¹¹⁴ME & THE MOSQUE; https://www.nfb.ca/film/me_and_mosque/

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶ SIDE ENTRANCE; <https://sideentrance.tumblr.com/>

three things: 1) most Muslim men had no idea that women's prayer spaces in the US were so unequal, compared to men's spaces 2) Men would be our allies in building inclusive mosques if they knew the dismal situation most women's spaces are 3) Women needed or wanted an online outlet to vent their frustration (or laugh at the absurdity) and share their stories. These online conversations were especially cathartic for convert women."¹¹⁷

The reason why Side Entrance holds relevance is because it is extremely recognisable for many Muslim women, also in Belgium. The simultaneous dismay as well as enthusiasm to share their story when the web survey was sent out seems on a par with Hind Makki's experience. It would be interesting to research the response of the men in the community towards this study.

4.3 Political context in Flanders, Belgium

As well as acknowledging the developments inside the Muslim community, it is necessary to frame the debate around mosques from the outside perspective, which is the political context of Flanders. Islam in Belgium has been officially recognised, and therefore eligible for financial support from the government, since 1974.¹¹⁸ Since the official recognition however, it took until 1998 for there to be an officially elected body to represent the Muslim community in Belgium, as before this did not exist, but the government was adamant this was necessary.¹¹⁹ This Belgian Muslim organisation, the Executief van de Moslims van België, had only recently come into fruition, when after state reforms, crucial powers, such as recognising mosques had shifted from federal to Flemish level, further complicating the situation.¹²⁰ Sammi Zemni describes how the problematisation of Islam in Flanders started before 9/11, however afterwards turned into an institutionalisation of islamophobia in media as well as politics.¹²¹ The Muslim community in Flanders is viewed as the 'other', subject to monolithic stereotypes, which have shaped government policy, especially in the case of recognition of mosques. Currently, there are only 26 officially recognised in Flanders.¹²² Considering Muslims make up at least 7% of the population in Flanders, this is hardly sufficient.¹²³ In the last five years not a single mosque has received official recognition and Liesbeth Homans, the current Flemish prime minister in waiting, has openly stated that this will not happen for another five years, despite there being 57 applications that still have not received an answer.¹²⁴ This situation is terribly detrimental for the Muslim community, not only because it is a visible manifestation of structural islamophobia¹²⁵, but also because it

¹¹⁷Interview Hind Makki ,13 august 2019

¹¹⁸Sammi ZEMNI, *The shaping of Islam and Islamophobia in Belgium* in *Race & Class* 53, no. 1 (2011): 28-44, p. 34

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹S. ZEMNI, *The shaping of Islam and Islamophobia in Belgium*, p. 36

¹²²EXECUTIEF VAN DE MOSLIMS VAN BELGIE; <https://www.embnet.be/nl/erkende-moskeeen>

¹²³J. HERTOGEN; <http://www.npdata.be/BuG/374-Moslims/Moslims.htm>

¹²⁴H. RENARD and P. CASTEELS., *Moskeebeleid in Vlaanderen: 'Homans heeft de boel al vijf jaar verziekt'* in *Knack*, 7 august 2019; <https://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/moskeebeleid-in-vlaanderen-homans-heeft-de-boel-al-vijf-jaar-verziekt/article-longread-1494331.html>

¹²⁵Khaled BEYDOUN, *American islamophobia: Understanding the roots and rise of fear*. Univ of

prohibits mosques from paying the rent, paying their imam and improving any conditions in the mosque, without constantly relying on donations from the community. In turn this then has a negative gendered outcome, because the women's facilities will not be prioritised. Muslim women will eventually be the ultimate losers in this political game.

4.4 Muslim women in Flanders, Belgium

Muslim women in Flanders are therefore stuck between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand they are under constant attack because of their Islamic faith through institutional measures such as headscarf bans. Their outward displays of piety are criminalised, their choices are deemed anti-liberal. On the other hand, the houses of worship in which they try to occupy spaces are not adequate and do not fulfil their needs. This due to mosque boards who are not open to change, but just as much because of the financial constraints. There are only a handful of Dutch speaking imams or Islamic scholars, let alone female Islamic scholars to assist them with their needs and questions. Looking for that space in which they can thrive women and as Muslims becomes difficult to navigate.

Speaking out and criticising mosques, as Muslim women, in a context in which islamophobia and orientalism are part of the political and media sphere creates a situation in which their grievances are co-opted and used against the Muslim community as a whole. They are then no longer viewed as active agents, but rather passive subjects for which decisions should be made, rather than involving them personally.¹²⁶ The 'right' choices for Muslim women are then made in view of the secular-liberal as Mahmood describes it. A dichotomy is created whereby the 'conservative' Islamic practices are deemed as oppressive as opposed to the 'free' secular-liberal, without engaging the women themselves. This good Muslim/bad Muslim binary is then played out over the heads of Muslim women in the name of defending their rights.¹²⁷ A recent example of this in Flanders is the meeting between Seyran Ates, the female imam from Germany, and Zuhail Demir. After this meeting, Zuhail Demir took to the press to declare several points that would benefit Muslim women for the next government to consider. These were a headscarf ban for all girls at schools and no more funding for mosques that segregate women.¹²⁸ Neither of these so called liberatory regulations were ever suggested by Muslim women themselves, on the contrary Muslim women in Flanders are still fighting headscarf bans, and as this study proves, the majority of women are happier with a women's only space.

California Press, 2018, p. 104

¹²⁶Jasmin ZINE., "Unveiled sentiments: Gendered Islamophobia and experiences of veiling among Muslim girls in a Canadian Islamic school." in *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39, no. 3 (2006): 239-252. p. 240

¹²⁷Sunaina MAIRA, "" Good" and" Bad" Muslim Citizens: Feminists, Terrorists, and US Orientalisms." in *Feminist Studies*35, no. 3 (2009): 631-656, p. 637

¹²⁸T. VAN BERLAER, *De vrouwelijke imam die haar leven riskeert voor de modern Islam*, in Het Nieuwsblad, 25 augustus 2018

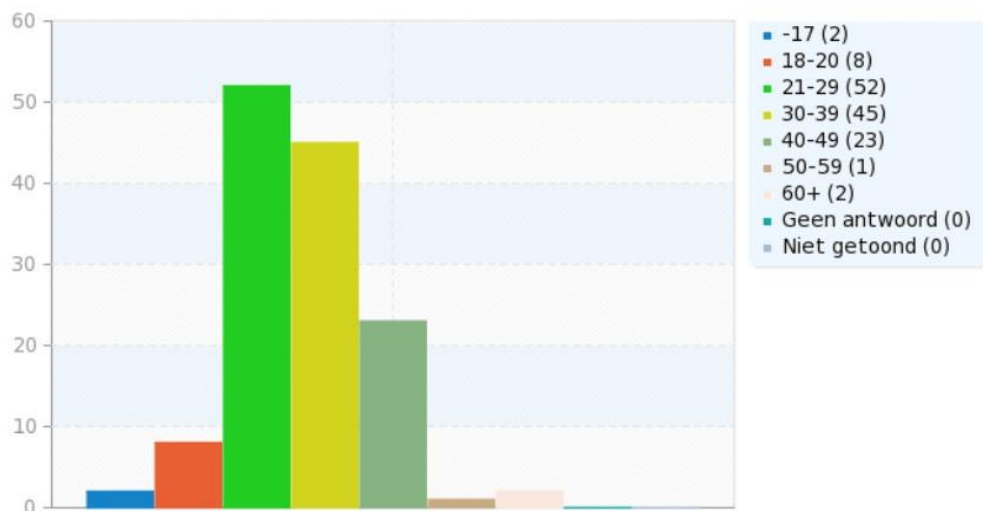
5. Quantitative research results

'The experiences of women with the mosque in Antwerp province'

5.1 Personal information of the participants

5.1.1 Age

The largest age group of the participants in this survey is the 20-29 range, which equates to 39,10%, closely followed by women in the ages of 30-39, 33,83% and then 40-49 – 17,29%. Women from the younger and older age categories are less represented with the oldest 50-59, 60+ and -17 having the lowest percentage. This could have to do with the fact that the survey was primarily spread via Facebook, a medium with which those particular age groups are not too familiar. Also, for the older category, language could have been a potential barrier.



The total number of participants divided into the given age categories.

5.1.2 Ethnicity

The majority of the participants in this quantitative research were of Moroccan heritage, namely 95 participants (71,43%), statistically this is also the largest Muslim community in the Antwerp province. The Turkish community, which makes up the second largest, is mostly found in provinces such as Oost-Vlaanderen or Limburg. In this survey the number of participants with Turkish roots was 8 (6,02%). 14 of the respondents were Belgian by ethnicity, which is (10,50%). This is one of the weaknesses of this particular survey. It is unfortunately not an accurate portrayal and representation of the different

ethnic communities present.

Aside from Moroccan and Turkish, the rest of the respondents had many different backgrounds, such as Dutch, Finnish, Bosnian, Nigerian and Ghanaian, but these were all in minorities.

The question of ethnicity was then also divided into born in Belgium or born abroad.

Belgium	106	79.70%
Abroad	27	20.30%

The women born abroad were represented rather equally amongst all of the age categories but found the least in the younger age groups.

5.1.3 Converts

As with the qualitative research, it was important to see if there might be any differences in the way that 'converts', people who decided to become Muslim. rather than being born into the faith, experience the mosque. This due to perhaps any cultural understandings, especially with reference to gender segregation.

Born as Muslim	111	83.46%
Convert	22	16.54%

5.1.4 Place of residence

The majority of the respondents were from Antwerp city, although many specified this by mentioning a specific district such as; Borgerhout, Deurne, Berchem, Hoboken, Wilrijk.

16 (12,03%) respondents from Mechelen. Followed by 5 from Boom, 2 from Mortsels, 2 from Edegem. Other cities included; Mol, Geel, Stabroek, Temse, Turnhout, Balen, Borsbeek, Merchtem and Lier.

5.1.5 Mosque

Participants were subsequently asked if they have one particular mosque that they visited, or if they frequented several mosques, in which they had the option of listing a maximum of two.

85 participants, which equates to 63,91% have one specific mosque they frequent.

53 participants, which equates to 39,85% visit more than one mosque.

Mosques that appear very often in this survey are De Koepel in Stenenbrug, Masjid Bilal in Borgerhout, Al-Fath in Kiel, Al-Buraq in Mechelen, Al-Mohsinien in Borgerhout, As-Salam in Borgerhout. The above-mentioned mosques are majority Moroccan, which

considering most of the participants also are is a logical deduction. De Koepel is known as the 'convert mosque', this doesn't have a specific ethnic background. Turkish mosques such as Yunus Emre and Huzur also appear on this survey, but not as frequently.

5.1.6 Frequency in visiting the mosque

The final question in this chapter is 'how often do you visit the mosque?'

This has been divided into several categories.

Every day	0	0.00%
More than once a week	5	3.76%
Once a week	20	15.04%
Once a month	26	19.55%
Once every three months	22	16.54%
Once every half year	28	21.05%
Less than once every 6 months	12	9.02%
Once a year	13	9.77%
Never	7	5.26%

The largest group here seems to be 'once every half year', which seems to correspond to the fact that there are two official holidays in the Islamic tradition. Eid al-Fitr after Ramadan and Eid al-Adha. Many Muslims tend to set good intentions for the month of Ramadan to pray in the mosque more often, women are usually no exception in this.

This result is closely followed by 'once a month', 'once every three months' and 'once a week'. It is interesting to note that none of the respondents frequent the mosque every day and 7 respondents 'never' visit the mosque. What is noticeable is that this participation is rather low, considering the women asked do enjoy going to the mosque.

In the commentary section of this part many women left feedback and gave reasons on why they did not pray in the mosque so often. However, because this question is also explicitly linked to 'possible improvements', it will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

5.2 Your experience of the mosque

In this section of the survey I was interested in researching how, on a basic level, the respondents experienced the mosque in terms of emotions. This is really focussing on the human, and in this case female experience. Instead of having just a yes or no option, the respondents were able to rate this according to the Likert scale¹²⁹:

Helemaal niet akkoord - Strongly disagree

Eerder niet akkoord - Disagree

Neutraal - Neutral

Eerder wel akkoord - Agree

¹²⁹C. TEDDLIE and A. TASHAKKORI, *Foundations of mixed methods research*, p. 203

Helemaal akkoord - Strongly agree

I like going to the mosque

Strongly disagree	3	2.26%
Disagree	11	8.27%
Neutral	28	21.05%
Agree	43	32.33%
Strongly Agree	48	36.09%

When analysing the results, three of the respondents do not like going to the mosque. This did not seem related to any specific cause or issue with the mosque. None of these respondents left any remarks on why this might be the case. Among the eleven respondents who disagree there seems to be an even spread amongst the ages, ethnicity and born Muslim/converts. Most of the respondents do strongly agree or at least agree with the notion that they like going to the mosque, which shows the importance of the mosque.

I feel welcome at the mosque

Strongly disagree	1	0.75%
Disagree	11	8.27%
Neutral	28	21.05%
Agree	37	27.82%
Strongly disagree	56	42.11%

The results of this question are very similar to the previous. In similar numbers, the women feel welcome at the mosque. The numbers that strongly disagree and disagree also correlate with the previous question and are a rather small percentage. This is a positive result.

The mosque has a friendly atmosphere

Strongly disagree	1	0.75%
Disagree	15	11.28%
Neutral	24	18.05%
Agree	51	38.35%
Strongly agree	42	31.58%

Less women here seem to 'strongly agree', but rather just agree with the notion that the mosque has a friendly atmosphere. The shift in this question is from the individual to the mosque itself, however this result is still very positive.

When I go to the mosque, I feel part of the community

Strongly disagree	4	3.01%
Disagree	18	13.53%
Neutral	25	18.80%
Agree	32	24.06%
Strongly agree	54	40.60%

In the Islamic tradition there is usually a great emphasis on 'the community'. This statement is to be interpreted in this context, whether the women in the survey experienced this 'community feeling' when they visit their mosque. 40,60% Strongly agree and 24,06% seem to agree with this, making up 64,66% that are positive towards this statement. These results do however vary when only taking into account the converts.

I go the mosque to meet other sisters

Strongly disagree	29	21.80%
Disagree	49	36.84%
Neutral	26	19.55%
Agree	24	18.05%
Strongly agree	5	3.76%

This statement was to understand how important the mosque is in women's lives when it comes to building potential friendships. The results here seem very varied; however, most women do not see this as a reason to go the mosque. 19,55% are neutral and 21,81% would agree or strongly agree. Showing that it does hold some kind of relevance.

The mosque is child friendly; I like taking my children

Strongly disagree	15	11.28%
Disagree	34	25.56%
Neutral	56	42.11%
Agree	17	12.78%
Strongly agree	11	8.27%

As women in general are still seen as the primary caregivers of children, a mosque not being child-friendly could potentially be an aspect to stop them from visiting and praying in the mosque. 36.84% disagree and strongly disagree to the mosque being child friendly and only 20% agree or strongly agree, this is not a positive signal. The reason why many women have answered 'neutral' might be due to the fact that they do not have children themselves.

If me, or any of the other women have suggestions for the mosque, I feel like these are heard

Strongly disagree	11	8.27%
Disagree	28	21.05%
Neutral	59	44.36%
Agree	22	16.54%
Strongly agree	13	9.77%

5.2.1 Comments

Some of the women responded in the comment section by saying that the reason that they answered 'neutral' to the last question was because they had never shared any suggestions, so would not know how this would be received. With regards to the question on children, they did not have any children, so would not be able to judge on whether the mosque would feel child friendly.

A few comments really stood out, and that was by two respondents who were not born Muslims, who both admitted to not feeling at home or welcome at the mosque due to not being part of a community, such as the Moroccan or the Turkish one and not speaking the language. This led me to further investigate the answers from the perspective of converts, to see if there were any discrepancies.

Two other respondents mentioned the fact that the mosque is not always open for women and this being a hindrance. Women who work or are travelling and would like to enter the mosque to pray outside of prayer times, this is not possible for them. Giving them the feeling that the mosque is not woman friendly, let alone child friendly.

5.3 The facilities at the mosque

After establishing how women feel towards the mosque and their relationship with their house of worship, it was important to further investigate the mosques that they frequent and the facilities that are available and/or lacking.

This part contains 10 questions and a comments section for any remarks. The questions have been close ended divided into YES, NO¹³⁰ and OTHER, with the option of elaborating. This has been purposefully done, because there is always room for nuance. Yes, the proposed facilities might be present, but not optimal for example.

There is an adequate praying area (enough space, air-conditioning, good carpets etc).

Yes	93	69.92%
No	31	23.31%
Other	9	6.77%

¹³⁰C. TEDDLIE and A. TASHAKKORI, *Foundations of mixed methods research*, p. 203

Among the comments in the other section:

'No air-condition, too hot when the weather is warm' x3

'Cold in the winter'

'No privacy'

'I notice a big difference between the women's area and the men's main area. It feels like you're praying in a back room.'

'Quality of the sound is bad, divided over several rooms'

For this question, all the comments in the 'other' section are negative. 30,08% of the women therefore do not think their mosque has an adequate women's praying area.

There is a good *wudhu* (ritual washing) area where you can do your ablution.

Yes	71	53.38%
No	45	33.83%
Other	17	12.78%

A small majority here have answered yes, which is problematic, because the ritual washing is necessary to perform the prayers and could be a hindrance.

Among the comments in the other section:

'Too small/ too small in some mosques' 3x

'A dirty area that does not get cleaned'

'Too old' 2x

'No privacy'

8 women commented that they did not know what the standard of the *wudhu* area was, or whether there was a *wudhu* area, because they perform their ablution at home.

It's is possible to follow the Friday sermon properly from the women's area (through speakers or video images).

Yes	110	82.71%
No	12	9.02%
Other	11	8.27%

Whereas this question pertained to the pure practicality of following the Friday sermon, many of the women who commented in the 'other' section brought up the issue of a language barrier. This is a theme which is very recurrent, not only in this research, but also in the qualitative results.

Among the comments in the other section:

'No Dutch/cannot follow' 3x

'Only in Arabic, most worshippers only speak Tamazight'

'Speakers do not work'

'Sometimes the sound installation does not work, or they do not turn it on. I do not feel part of it.'

The prayer area is always open and accessible (during the week, in between prayers).

Yes	44	33.08%
No	79	59.40%
Other	10	7.52%

Around 60% of the women answered that the women's area is not always open. This is of course not desirable for a house of worship. Especially if the men's area is always open. This leaves from the presumption that men have to pray in the mosque and women do not, however this is not a reason to deny them access.

Among the comments in the other section:

6 of the women commented that they did not know whether the women's area was always open and accessible.

'The women can only attend certain prayers, such as; Friday prayers, *janazah* (funeral prayers), the Eid prayers and Ramadan.'

The imam is easily approachable if you have a question to ask

Yes	41	30.83%
No	69	51.88%
Other	22	16.54%

12 respondents from the 'other' section commented that they did not know whether the imam was approachable to ask a question. This leaves a small majority that does not think the imam is approachable or does not know. The imam has a certain role to fulfil for the entire community, it is not positive that one half of the worshippers does not have this access or even know whether this is a possibility.

Among the comments in the other section:

'Depends on the mosque'

'There is a lady on the women's side who is easily contactable and is in contact with the imam or teacher'

'Language barrier'

'Not directly, only via a *mahram* (unmarriageable kin, such as brother, father, husband and son)'

There are classes for women in a variety of subjects, such as; *hifdh*, *tafsir*, *fiqh* or *hadith* (memorisation, exegesis, jurisprudence and hadith)

Yes	64	48.12%
No	50	37.59%
Other	19	14.29%

10 women responded that they did not know whether any classes were available, one gave as reason because they did not understand the language.

Among the comments in the other section:

'During working hours, for older ladies'

'Only Arabic and memorisation'

'Lessons are not in Dutch, nor Tamazight'

'In the mosque where they do speak Dutch, the lessons are not critical. In the Arabic speaking mosque, I cannot understand so I do not follow classes. I follow Islamic lessons outside of the mosque.'

The mosque actively encourages women to participate in activities, the board or the management of the mosque.

Yes	42	31.58%
No	76	57.14%
Other	15	11.28%

Around 60% here answered no, which is once again not a positive signal. An effective gender balance in organisations can be crucial in establishing equality and making sure the needs of all the members are met.¹³¹ Even if the women comment that they do not know, this shows that not enough is being done to get women involved in mosque life and allow them to participate as fully fledged members of the congregation.

Among the comments in the other section:

Nine of the women who commented said that they did not know whether the mosque actively encouraged women to participate.

Three comments pertained to women having their own women's committee and activities but did not mention the board or the management.

¹³¹MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN; <https://mcb.org.uk/project/women-in-mosques/>

The mosque is accessible for women with a handicap/in a wheelchair

Yes	35	26.32%
No	89	66.92%
Other	9	6.77%

Many mosques in Antwerp city and around the province are not purposely built mosques. Often these mosques consist of renovated houses that the first generation 'guest workers' purchased to allow for them to perform their prayers. This has led to first and foremost the women's spaces being an afterthought and often they are upstairs, making it very difficult to access for women with a disability, let alone women in a wheelchair.¹³²

As the results show, the majority of women do not think their mosque is accessible for women with a handicap or in a wheelchair. This is a big hindrance in terms of accessibility and excludes a group of women from being part of the community.

A few women commented that only the men's section was wheelchair accessible, but unfortunately not the women's.

These last two questions are specific for Ramadan, a time where many Muslims make more of an effort to visit the mosque for their prayers and rituals.

It's possible for women to have their *iftar* (breaking of the fast) during the month of Ramadan at the mosque

Yes	57	42.86%
No	44	33.08%
Other	32	24.06%

Iftar is an integral part of the holy month of Ramadan. Traditionally this is done at the mosque, with many mosques offering *iftars* for Muslims who cannot afford it, however the assumption lives that these are only for men. Female converts can experience this time as the loneliest, if the mosque does not offer this, because they do not have Muslim family or friends that they can visit.

Among the comments in the other section:

17 of the women commented that they did not know, others commented that it was either only once or sometimes. One of the women mentioned: 'I heard from a sister that the husbands have to agree to let them come, otherwise they are not allowed to go alone.'

¹³²J. HUSSAIN, *Finding the women's space*, p.58

There is enough space for women to pray during the *Taraweeh* (night prayers in Ramadan) prayers

Yes	79	59.40%
No	41	30.83%
Other	13	9.77%

Although women might not frequent the mosque as much during the year (like many of their male counterparts), during Ramadan the *Taraweeh* prayer, and specifically during the last ten nights, is a ritual which is for both men and women extremely important. If the mosque cannot accommodate the female worshippers, then this can really hinder the spiritual experience.

Among the comments in the other section:

7 women commented that they did not know. Other comments included:

'The space is limited, there are too many women' x2

'The mosque is always full. They make extra space outside, but it can get really cold'

5.3.1 Comments

Three comments were left on this section:

'As a Moroccan woman I do not have any good experiences with the Moroccan community.'

'Our mosque will be renovated in 2020, so we should have more space.'

'During holidays there is not enough space. There are Arabic classes, a weekend school for children, but the classes for women could be more extensive.'

5.4 Your personal praying experience/preference

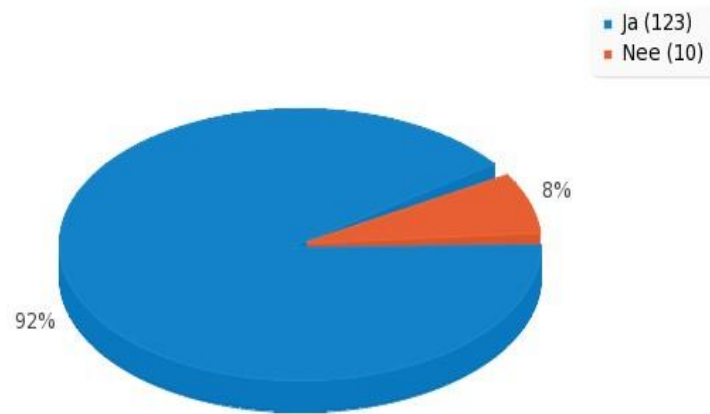
This section seeks to establish what women's personal praying preferences are. Alongside the topic of having an adequate mosque or an optimal religious experience, the aspect of the women's prayer area is one which cannot be left out. Are the women in the survey experiencing the mosque differently, because they are gender segregated or do, they willingly choose for gender segregation themselves?

The purpose of including this in the web survey and quantitative research was to ascertain what the percentage of women is that actively prefers or does not prefer a women's only area.

All the questions are YES or NO, with no option to select OTHER. As with the other sections, it was possible to leave remarks at the end, which many women chose to do, explaining their choices.

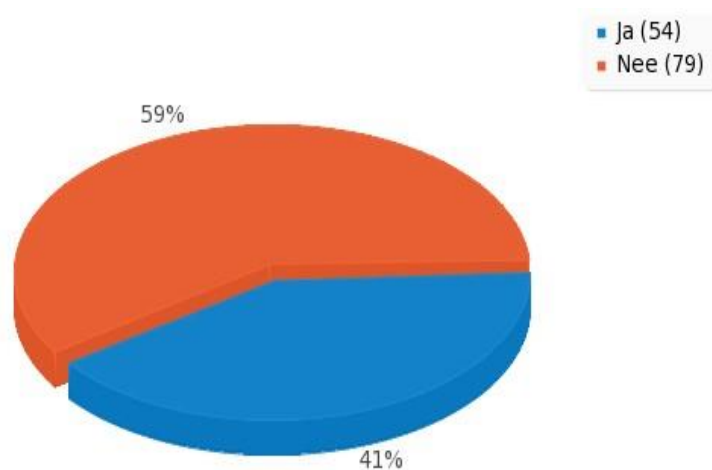
The way that these questions are set up is to not denote one specific preference, but to offer many possibilities, according to what is known to be allowed and established through the *Sunnah* and Islamic jurisprudence.

I like to perform my prayers in a separate room with only women



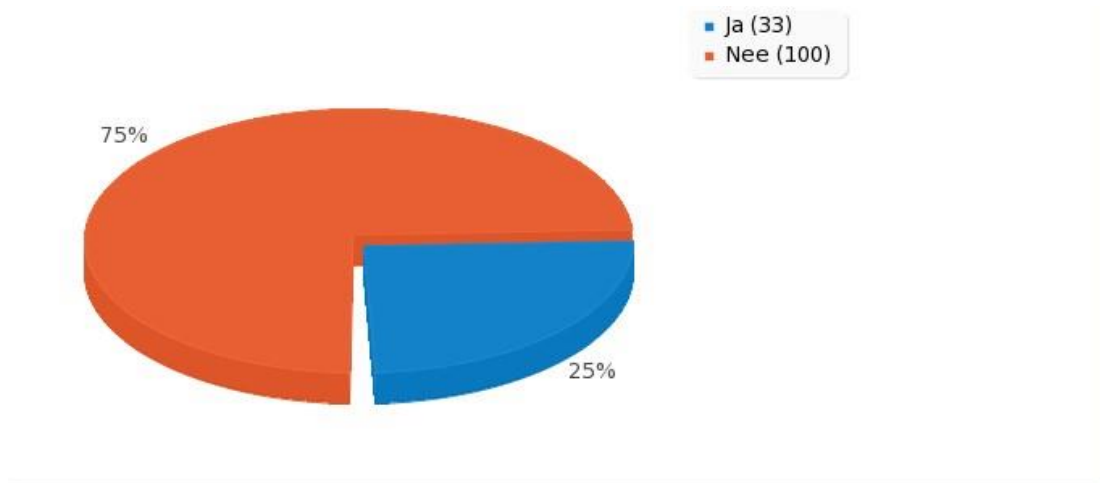
The overwhelming majority of women (92,48%) here enjoy praying in a separate area with only women. This possibly counters the notion that gender segregated prayer would somehow be enforced upon women. All of the mosques in Antwerp province have gender segregated praying areas, if they have a women's area, apart from the Bosnian mosque. It therefore does not seem like gender segregated prayer would be a hindrance to women's religious experience.

I like to perform my prayers in the same room as the men, but with a divider/fence to separate off the women's area



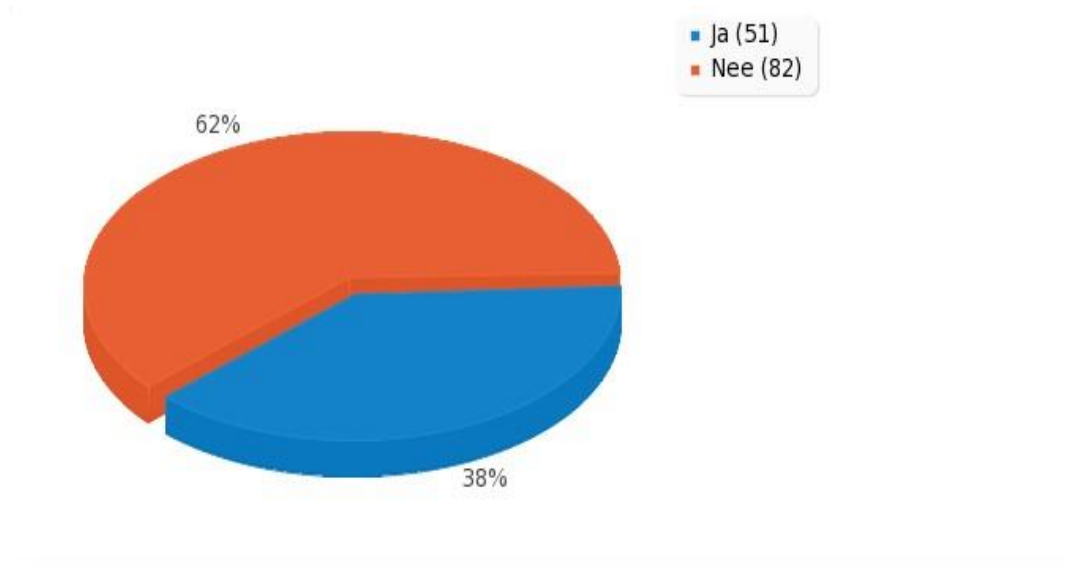
Here we see almost a 60/40 divide with the majority of women answering that they do not like to perform their prayers in the same room as the men, even if it was fenced off. The personal women's only space, although fenced off is no longer private. This seems to be an issue if compared to the results on the previous question.

I like to perform my prayers in the same room as the men, at the back



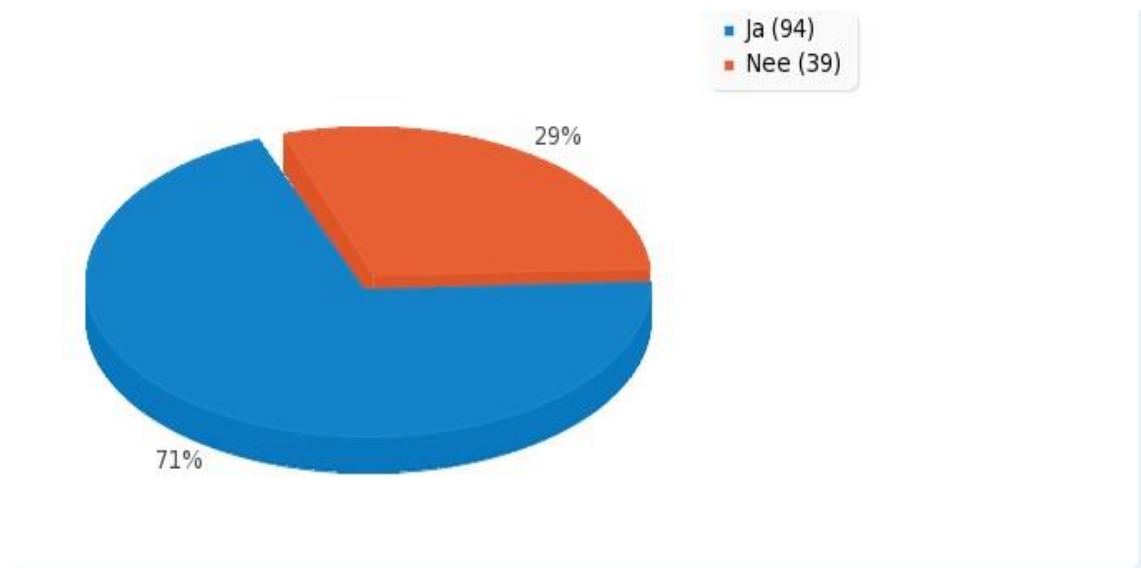
As the women's only space becomes more compromised, so do the respondents that have answered yes. Compared to the first question, there has almost been a complete reversal of the answers.

I would like the option to choose between a separate prayer area for women and praying in the men's area (both options are available in the mosque)



Once again there is an almost 60/40 divide that are not in favour of some kind of space sharing, even if it is only having the option. One of the possible reasons for this may be, is that being given the option might ultimately lead to giving up their own space. If more women gradually decide to pray alongside the men, then the women's space will become obsolete and eventually disappear.

I prefer to pray at home



The last question was included, because it is still a fact that many women pray at home. However, preferring to pray at home does not mean stopping them from going to the mosque, which is still something that happens. In the comments many women elaborated on why they prefer to pray at home, of which several are because of negative associations with the mosque, which is a point of concern.

5.4.1 Comments

Around 12% of the women left comments on this section:

Three of the comments pertained to not having enough time to pray in the mosque. Another three mentioned only wanting to pray specific prayers in the mosque, such as Friday, or Eid, funeral, Ramadan prayers.

'I prefer praying at home, because the mosques in Antwerp feel so unfriendly. I would rather alternate my prayers in the mosque and at home.'

'I prefer praying at home, because I get the feeling that everyone has to dress and pray a certain way the mosque. I don't mind praying in the same room as the men, or behind a divider but at this moment I would rather pray at home, because I feel comfortable there and no one judges me.'

'To the last question; yes and no. If I'm busy then I will pray at home, if not then at the mosque, but I do want the strict segregation between men and women to stay in place.'

'It all depends on the situation, I don't really have a preference, but if I think about my own local mosque, then I would rather pray at home.'

'It would be nice to find a mosque with clear information about the imam and who speaks Dutch. Converts are not welcome at every mosque or association.'

'I prefer praying in the mosque on a Friday when the Friday sermon is spoken in Dutch.'

'We have a Bosnian mosque where there is no problem with the women praying behind the men if there are not enough women.'

5.5 Concluding remarks and observations

The final question asked during this web survey was:

Would you go to the mosque more often if there would be improvements to the areas that you highlighted?

Yes	84	63.16%
No	18	13.53%
No improvements necessary	17	12.78%
Other	14	10.53%

Among the comments in the other section:

Five comments mentioned that it wasn't possible due to small children/work/studies and time.

'Yes, if there were more classes (tafsir, fiqh etc).'

'Yes, if there were other facilities such as a library and a shop.'

'Maybe' 2x

29 of the respondents (21.80%) gave extensive suggestions for improving their local mosque in the open-ended final question.

A selection has been made from the most frequently mentioned. These comments have been grouped together according to theme.

Appeal to young people:

'The mosque needs to be a place that appeals to young people'

'It needs activities that aren't necessarily religion related to appeal to the youth'

'More activities for women and young people'

Dutch language:

'The sermons are not in Dutch so I cannot follow what is being said'

'I would prefer the sermons and lectures to be in Dutch'

'I miss Dutch language when it comes to the Friday sermon'

'Masjid Bilal has classes for women but only in Berber or Arabic'

'There should not only be classes in Arabic, but also in Dutch'

Children:

'I would go more often if I could take my children and if the Friday sermon was in Dutch'

'There needs to be more activities for children, older people, women etc.'

'There needs to be space for children so that women can pray'

5.5.1 Age variables

This does not seem to be an age specific issue, because out of all the age groups that participated in the survey, the amount that would visit the mosque more often if improvements were made is always steady around 60-65%.

5.5.2 Convert experience

The results do however vary when taking into account the answers of women who have chosen to become Muslim, rather than were born into the faith. Especially in the first section which is about the personal experience of the mosque. Whereas in the total amount of women, almost 70% said they feel welcome at the mosque by answering agree and strongly agree, if just the converts are selected this number is lowered to around 45%. Feeling part of the community has an even larger discrepancy. For the total amount of women this lies around 65%, but for just the converts it is around 18%. This could have to do with the fact that many of the mosques are still divided by ethnic lines and converts, whether born in Belgium or abroad, do not ascribe to any of the big communities. More than 80% of converts admitted to visiting the mosque more often if it was improved, in comparison with 63% of all women.

5.5.3 Gender segregation

Despite the claims from outside of the Muslim community that deem women's spaces as inferior and not equal, a vast majority of the women in this survey overwhelmingly chose for the segregated spaces, which is what the greater part of mosques now have. Even the option of having two spaces to choose from did not seem to generate an extremely positive response. On the contrary, the women asked seemed to actively prefer women's only spaces over any other option that was given. Prayer at home still seems to be extremely important to women, but as mentioned earlier, this should never prohibit women from praying in the mosque.

5.6 Conclusion

It is clear from the comments in the survey that the respondents see the mosque as much more than just a place of worship. There is a lot of emphasis on classes, lectures and sermons as well as activities and catering to specific groups such as women, young people, children and the older generation. Most of the mosques, as they are at the moment do not offer these services, let alone serve as a type of community centre. They simply open for daily prayers (for the men) and for the women on a Friday and on holidays. This does not seem enough to attract women to frequent their mosque or make them feel like they should be more involved. The participation figures are low, with most of the women only attending the mosque once every 6 months, followed by once every three months and once a month. Aside from this, it does not seem like the mosques are doing enough to encourage women to participate more, let alone be involved in the board, a women's committee or activities. With only 20% of the women classing their local mosque as child-friendly, this is also an issue that needs to be revised in order to possibly get the participation figures up.

The absence of Dutch language seems to be a very big barrier. For just prayers, Arabic would be enough, but for any other activities non-Arabic speakers seem excluded. The women asked, seem to have a much more holistic version of what a mosque should be than what is being offered to them right now.

Only a small number of women, 12.78% did not think any improvements were necessary to make them visit the mosque more, compared to 63,16% plus about half of those that commented 'other' who are of the opinion that their mosque needs improving. This means that for the majority of women their religious experience at the mosque is not optimal, for whichever specific reason. This also shows that the women want to actively participate more but are encountering barriers.

6. Qualitative Research results

6.1 The importance of the mosque in women's lives

The mosque has a special status in all of the women's lives. Either they truly regard it as a special place, a place of peace and prayer or they even refer to it as a second home. Some of the women questioned are actively involved in the activities, the board or the women's committee. Almost all of the women questioned have busy lives with jobs, studies and/or children, but the mosque always remains a place where they would like to spend more time if they had the possibility.

6.1.1 Internal peace

The mosque seems explicitly linked to a sense of 'internal peace' for some of the women.

For Ilhan, the feeling that she gets from visiting the mosque is beyond anything she can describe. She treats it as a place of refuge to escape from the stresses of the outside world. After completing her two prostrations (which is a custom when entering the mosque), she engages in *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and reads Qur'an. She mentions that this is not the same at home.

“That's a feeling that I can't describe. The most peaceful place that someone can be. Whatever condition I am I go into the mosque, all the things that I am thinking of will be gone. I pray two rak'ah, after that you don't think any more about the outside. You do a lot of *dhikr*, and read Qur'an, while if you are at home you start thinking about other things. The mosque is different and peaceful.”¹³³

Natalia finds that visiting the mosque soothes her and gives her a sense of satisfaction.

“Soothing, it gives me satisfaction. If I don't go then I am disappointed that I've missed it, if I would go more often, then I would get more out of it. Spiritually as well as mentally.”¹³⁴

For Elke, the feelings of satisfaction as well as peacefulness are echoed. On top of this it makes her more connected with her faith, *imaanboost* translates as a faith booster.

“I feel calm and peaceful, completely zen. My battery is recharged, it gives me satisfaction. That feeling of an *imaanboost*.”¹³⁵

This feeling, a sense of satisfaction is often associated with prayer in general, but praying in the mosque, a purpose-built house of worship, seems to hold that extra dimension for the

¹³³Interview Ilhan 14 July 2019

¹³⁴Interview Natalia 8 July 2019

¹³⁵Interview Elke 10 July 2019

respondents of attaining this. The three above mentioned women visit the mosque from once a month, to sometimes on a Friday and sporadically, hardly at all. Regardless of the fact that they do not frequent the mosque that often, it still holds a very special status in regard to the way they live their faith.

6.1.2 Connection to the community

Feeling connected to the community, either through prayer or through activities is a theme which is also recurrent. For some of the women, the community feeling is attained merely through prayer, for others the social aspect is very important.

For Nabila her mosque, which is a local mosque to which she has a family connection makes her not only feel connected to the Muslim community, but more the Moroccan community. This is primarily because this the community that visits the mosque the most.

“I feel connected, connected with the community. With my local community, which is primarily the Moroccan community, sometimes there are also people from different communities, but it is mostly Moroccan.”¹³⁶

Betul is involved in organising activities and lectures for young girls at her local mosque. For her this is a very important part of making her feel part of the community. She gets satisfaction from being there for the younger girls and making sure they have a place they can go to.

“I go to the mosque for the social aspect, for the ambiance, for the Islam, it gives me satisfaction. The fact that I am on the women's board really gives me satisfaction. I feel like I am the big sister of the girls there. The feeling that I get is beautiful.”¹³⁷

Fatima is of an older generation but also involved in the women's activities at her local mosque. She mentions the social aspect as for her this is inextricably linked to the mosque.

“I go to the mosque for the togetherness, the prayer and to learn. I also go for the social contacts; I have made many friends at the mosque. This is why a women's committee is the most important thing.”¹³⁸

From the responses it is visible that the mosque plays an important aspect in the lives of the women for several reasons. Despite the fact that they might not all attend regularly or have the time to attend. This is also regardless of any issues that they might have with the mosque, which is telling on the status and potential value the mosque could have. For the women involved in the women's activities the social aspect is a much stronger factor in adding value to their experience.

6.2 Issues encountered

This chapter elaborates on the experiences that women have had at the mosque and

¹³⁶Interview Nabila 11 July 2019

¹³⁷Interview Betul 11 July 2019

¹³⁸Interview Fatima 5 July 2019

subsequently the suggestions that they made to improve their mosque. Usually, the negatives encountered stimulated the participants to automatically give improvements.

6.2.1 Language barrier

The fact that a lot of the mosques do not have Dutch as their first, or even their second language is an issue for almost all of the participants, regardless of their background, even if they are Moroccan or Turkish, they recognise that there needs to be a common language to engage the wider Muslim community. The issue of a 'mono culture mosque' is also discussed further on. Language is a crucial tool in engaging with the faith, the community and in matters of learning.

Betul is involved in setting up activities and lectures for young women in her local mosque, but admits that there are limitations to this, because of the language in which the lectures and sermons are. At the same time, she admits that it is still very difficult to find Dutch speaking male and female Islamic scholars.

“The negative is that there is no Dutch, because now we are only focussing on one community”¹³⁹

For Nabila, who is actually part of the Moroccan community but not well versed in one of the languages spoken, Dutch is also a really big issue. This also confirms that for her the mosque is more than just for prayer but should also encompass some kind of learning.

“Yes, it would motivate me to go more often. When I visit the mosque now, it's all about purification and peace, but it's not like I exit the mosque feeling like I have learned anything.”¹⁴⁰

Natalia became Muslim at a later age by choice, although she did grow up in an Islamic culture, she is of mixed heritage, but feels most at home at the mosque that speaks Dutch and doesn't connect to one specific community.

I specifically visit De Koepel, because everything is in Dutch so that I can follow what is being said.”¹⁴¹

Malika is also involved in the mosque and over the last few years she has been operating as a board member. While doing this function she realised that Dutch language was not only a necessity in the mosque itself, but also for getting anything realised, like for example permits. Not having this in expertise in house complicated any realisations done to the mosque.

“I became a board member, because I saw that more could be done, because the people did not know how and what when it came to permits. They needed that support and the Dutch language really was an issue.”¹⁴²

¹³⁹Interview Betul 11 July 2019

¹⁴⁰Interview Nabila 11 July 2019

¹⁴¹Interview Natalia 8 July 2019

¹⁴²Interview Malika 8 July 2019

What is interesting to note is that almost all of the women, regardless of their heritage, thought that Dutch language needs to be spoken more at the mosques. They realise that not having this is alienating a group of Muslims, who might not have been brought up with a second language at home or who chose to become Muslim later on in life. The women actively engaged in the only Dutch speaking mosque did not bring up this topic.

Nabila actually emphasised this once more during the interview and her statement encompasses two topics, which leads on to the next theme.

“If there would be an imam that spoke Dutch, then bit by bit I would visit more often. We once had a Dutch speaking imam, but the older generation struggled with this. The community does not want to change, this is problematic for the next generation.”¹⁴³

6.2.2 Lost generation

Considering the importance of the mosque for the women questioned themselves, many of them would agree that the mosque also has an educational task to fulfil. As mentioned previously by Nabila, there seems to be a strong reluctance in the community to change its ways and update existing structures. Something which is leading to a generation being lost, not just a generation of women, but also young people, men and women alike. There is often a mosque school for small children, where they are taught Arabic and Qur'anic memorisation, which some of the women also testify attending, however when they reach puberty, and it is assumed that they should become mature worshippers, there is a very big discrepancy and as Betul describes it, at her previous mosque, she fell into a hole. The realisation that this is happening to young Muslims has not seeped through to many mosque boards, or it has and there seems to be firm disagreement on how and what the purpose of the mosque actually is. These sentiments echo the situation as previously described in the United States, in the documentary 'Unmosqued'.¹⁴⁴

When speaking to Betul about how she got involved in the activities for young girls at her current mosque, she brought up a personal story, which inspired her to not only get involved in the new mosque, but also to take charge of the activities for young girls.

“At my previous mosque I encountered a negative experience, I was 14/15 and I fell into a hole, because there were no activities for young people. Then I discovered my current mosque and I felt right at home.”¹⁴⁵

She proceeded by amplifying the importance on why young people need to find a home in the mosque. According to her, when kids reach puberty, they start asking questions, but most mosques cannot provide the answers. This drives her to keep being involved and to make sure they have a place to turn to at her mosque, even if it might just be once a week.

“I think it's important that young people are encouraged to get involved. They need to have a voice and that this voice is listened to. Also, for so that they can get

¹⁴³Interview Nabila 11 July 2019

¹⁴⁴UNMOSQUED.; [http:// www.unmosquedfilm.com](http://www.unmosquedfilm.com)

¹⁴⁵Interview Betul 11 July 2019

counselling and advice. These age groups are really important, because they are going through many life changes. Even if it's just for one hour a week, following a lecture and asking questions.”¹⁴⁶

Although Natalia is happy about how her local mosque (de Koepel) is a Dutch speaking mosque, which welcomes all different cultures and specifically also converts. She acknowledges the fact that there are services lacking for young people. These could be activities or lessons, or sometimes just a place to turn to.

“There are lots of young people that are interested, but it's not always the case that they can go there (the mosque). It needs to be a place for everybody, but activities for young people are missing.”¹⁴⁷

Her solution to keep young people engaged in Islamic religious life is that the mosque should not just offer 'Islamic activities'. When she looks at people her own age, who are still busy with school or kids at high school, she thinks the mosque should be able to offer those young people a place where they could perhaps study, but at the same time perform their prayers and keep them off the streets.

'For young people, it should be a place where you can come together, not to specifically do things related to religion, but also not to hang out. For example, during exams. That it could offer a place to study in silence, but at the same time you could pray there. There are too many young people who are hanging out on the streets, so that they have a place to go to.’¹⁴⁸

Ilhan sees positive elements at her local Somali community centre, but these are unfortunately not reflected in the mosque. She describes how on weekends they will invite preachers from abroad to come and speak and the young people would be given a chance to bring up specific topics. The mornings would be for the women and the afternoon for the men, but on both sides young people are encouraged to volunteer so they can give back and at the same time learn about their faith. With regards to the mosque she visits, she really misses this element.

“In the Somali community, we sometimes have someone coming to speak from Holland or the UK, they will come and speak, and they always do this on the weekends. They will take a small theme that appeals to the younger generation and leave time for questions. Which is very important, and we see him direct, and its only for women with the sheikh. They also ask if young people want to volunteer, to involve them. So, they can ask questions, and give them to the speaker.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Interview Nabila 11 July 2019

¹⁴⁸Interview Natalia 8 July 2019

¹⁴⁹Interview Ilhan 14 July 2019

6.2.3 Mosque opening hours

The women's area is not always open, most mosques only either allow women in during prayer times or even just on a Friday. Not always having access to the women's area can lead to negative situations. Elke remembers a story which had an effect on her. This event touched her because the girl she was with had taken the decision to become Muslim but was subsequently rejected from almost every mosque they went to.

“I was with a girl who really wanted to convert to Islam. It was just a Wednesday like any other and all the mosques in Antwerp were closed for women, this really was such a shame. We were walking around for ages. Eventually, we did find one that was open.”¹⁵⁰

This made a lasting impression on Elke, fortunately the girl was not too phased, but she felt a sense of shame. That this is the way she had to be welcomed into the faith.

Nabila also mentioned that the women's area at her mosque is only open on a Friday, and sometimes when they have a Qur'an lesson, they will perform their prayers there if necessary. She does reckon it has to do with the fact that the women have an exemption of performing their prayers in the mosque.

“You don't have to perform all of your five prayers at the mosque. You have your religious exemption. If it was any different then there would be a lot more people in the women's area.”¹⁵¹

This can be part of the reason why women's spaces only open on a Friday, however. Many of the women in this research admitting to having busy lives, which stop them from visiting the mosque. Opening the women's space would allow for them to visit also outside of prayer times and Fridays.

Elke admitted to the fact that if her local mosque, close to her work, would be open to women outside prayer times, she would step in to perform her prayers, in between or after work.¹⁵²

6.2.4 Financial issues

With regards to the financial aspect, this cannot be seen as separate from the social and political context of this research. For mosques which receive ample funding from community donations, or from abroad, the official recognition does not seem to be an issue, rather a side issue. However, for mosques that are struggling with fundraising it seems very difficult to keep the mosque and its services going. Even paying the bills is a struggle, let alone updating or expanding any facilities. Unfortunately, the Dutch speaking mosque, which most seem positive about, struggles with this the most.

¹⁵⁰Interview Elke 10 July 2019

¹⁵¹Interview Nabila 11 July 2019

¹⁵²Interview Elke 10 July 2019

For Fatima, there is a real sense that things are not done in a fair way, when it comes to Muslims or mosques in Flanders. She sees a discrepancy in the amount of funding which goes to different religious institutions but is denied to mosques. This has led for her to distrust politics.

“The negative always has to do with finances, we work, and our tax money goes to all kinds of things, to the church, but it doesn't go to mosques. This is why I don't trust politics; everything needs to be shared equally. The official recognition is important, because it takes away problems.”¹⁵³

Khadija also highlights the financial aspect. As someone who is involved in trying to keep the mosque running, she really feels the struggles of not having any support and relying purely on donations. Everyone at the mosque is a volunteer, even the different imams, this could be so much better if they received support from the government.

“Negative aspects primarily have to do with the financial aspect. We have to fundraise, but people don't donate. The finances are hard, because the mosque isn't officially recognised, so it's difficult to pay for the building insurance or any of the bills. We have three imams, one does the *khutbah* (Friday sermon), one does psychological support and one does the prayers, but all of them are volunteers.”¹⁵⁴

The mosque Malika is involved in is the only mosque in her city, which is in Antwerp province, but not in the municipality. As there is only one mosque, several different ethnic communities share the same mosque. This mosque is also not officially recognised and relies solely on donations from the community.

“We get lots of money from the community, which shows that the need is very high. It is a mixed community that share the mosque.”¹⁵⁵

6.3 Suggestions by women for the mosque

6.3.1 Psychological support

Malika is involved in her local mosque and currently they are realising a project for a new and bigger mosque. This mosque would be much more than what it is now. When asking about it, they looked at the demands of the Muslim community and non-Muslims in the area to make the building suit everyone's needs. One of the main points outside of it being a house of worship was counselling and psychological and social support, for Muslims as well as non-Muslims. At the moment the support questions came primarily from girls who became Muslim.

“We get a lot of questions from girls who have converted to Islam, so our future

¹⁵³Interview Fatima 5 July 2019

¹⁵⁴Interview Khadija 5 July 2019

¹⁵⁵Interview Malika 8 July 2019

mosque would have to offer psychological and social support.”¹⁵⁶

Fatima echoes this sentiment, as someone who is active in the 'convert mosque'. She also highlights the fact that the mosque is much more than just a place of worship and it should be more like the Prophet Muhammad's time.

“Psychological support, especially for converts, because they have problems at home, so that they can find refuge in the mosque. A mosque is a lot more than just a place of worship, like the example of the Prophet peace be upon him. Now converts are being left to their own devices”¹⁵⁷

Betul sees an issue in the community where psychological support and counselling are not understood by imams, but at the same time Muslims are not helped by counselling from a non-Islamic perspective. A mosque could offer a type of Islamic counselling, which departs from the faith perspective. Currently, people are just being told to pray their psychological problems away and this worries her.

“A place when you can get psychological and social support for young and older people. Where they won't tell you; just pray a few *rak'at* or that you would have to go to counselling without reference to the Islamic faith.”¹⁵⁸

6.3.2 Women on the board/ a women's committee

The way in which Betul's mosque is set up, is that there are different boards, of women and men, who are each in charge of a different age category. This way every board stays in touch with the people that it is supposed to look after. For her this is the ideal solution, so that there are no internal power struggles, but everyone's voices are equally represented.

“The board needs to represent all the different demographics. Separate for the women, with each their demographics. If you keep the men and women separate, then there is no power struggle.”¹⁵⁹

For Malika, who is one of the only women on her mosque board, the issue is more nuanced. She concurs that an effective gender balance can make the mosque better, but for her it's also a matter of whether people have the right vision and talents that they can bring to the table, rather than just a gender difference.

“A mixed board is necessary, but in principle it is about the vision and the talents people have to offer.”¹⁶⁰

Elke takes it one step further and as well as having a balance of men and women she thinks

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Interview Fatima 5 July 2019

¹⁵⁸Interview Betul 11 July 2019

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Interview Malika 8 July 2019

that a mosque board should also have people of different backgrounds to reflect more diversity. This also fits in with the next theme about mosques which are culture specific.

“A board that has the same amount of men as women, with all different kinds of nationalities.”¹⁶¹

For Natalia it is not only about having the gender balance, but also that they effectively have an equal say and a voice that is heard. This can also be achieved via a women’s committee, as long as there is equality.

“When it comes to the board, the women must be able to have their say, for example through a women's committee. That male and female volunteers have an equal voice in what is going to be said or done.”¹⁶²

Finally, Nabila thinks a women’s committee is a necessity for the mosque. Not only to get women more involved, but also because women can bring a different vision on how the mosque could improve.

“A women's committee is necessary, for the involvement and input of women. It can give a different vision.”¹⁶³

6.3.4 A mosque for all cultures

Aside from the specific issue regarding the Dutch language, there seems to be an overarching sentiment from the women, where they are resisting this concept of a mosque which is specically built for one ethnic community. Despite the fact that some of the women in this research are a member of those.

Ilhan has experienced Eid in many different countries, one of which being Ethiopia, where she described the scene of an Eid prayer in a large stadium with different kinds of Muslims from all over coming together to pray and celebrate. This is something which she thinks is still missing here.

“It is important especially on Eid that you feel a sense of community with other cultures.”¹⁶⁴

Because Natalia is a convert and of an ethnic background that is not represented in the current mosques, she thinks it’s vital that everyone is welcome. She doesn’t want to feel like she in a mosque that is part of one particular ethnic community, it should be welcome and open to all Muslims.

“A place where everybody is welcome. So, not specifically a Moroccan or Turkish mosque that excludes other groups. That you feel that you are at a Turkish or a

¹⁶¹ Interview Elke 10 July 2019

¹⁶² Interview Natalia 8 July 2019

¹⁶³ Interview Nabila 11 July 2019

¹⁶⁴ Interview Ilhan 14 July 2019

Moroccan mosque. It feels a lot more comfortable if you can just enter the mosque without feeling that you're not part of that particular community.”¹⁶⁵

The same goes for Elke, in her ideal mosque all of the Muslims regardless of their ethnic background are represented and treated equally.

“I would rather have one big mosque where everyone is represented, where you feel welcome regardless of your cultural background.”¹⁶⁶

Betul, who is involved in a Turkish mosque, admits that things there could also change for the better to get more Muslims involved in activities and classes. She acknowledges the need for the different languages, but thinks there should be a common language, such as Dutch or English as the main language.

“A mosque has to be for all communities. They should speak Dutch, English, with references to Arabic when talking about *hadith* or Qur'an. Then it has to be subdivided into basic Turkish, Arabic and the languages of the larger communities.”¹⁶⁷

6.3.5 Children at the mosque

Not having ample facilities or a welcoming atmosphere for children was a point raised by women with and without children themselves. The women see that there is a need is taking children to the mosque at a young age as part of an Islamic upbringing and to build a good relationship with the faith and subsequently the mosque.

Ilhan draws a comparison with mosques in Somalia and Kenya, where she saw parents taking children to the mosque, mothers and fathers, from an early age. The mosques would be inviting and accommodating, so that the children themselves would want to go.

“There is one thing we don't have here. In Africa, they have a big area so that children can play. And here there is not enough space for the women to bring their children. In Africa, during the schooldays and in the holidays, the children will come to the mosque with their parents. The little boys will want to come to the mosque even it is their holiday, the girls will go with their mums.”¹⁶⁸

As a mother herself Elke would like to visit the mosque more, but admits it is difficult, because mosques are not accommodating. Her suggestion is to have a play area.

“It needs a play area, where the women who cannot pray can sit with the children, or just quietly sit down and listen to the sermon. There have to be some kind of facilities for children.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Interview Natalia 8 July 2019

¹⁶⁶ Interview Elke 10 July 2019

¹⁶⁷ Interview Betul 11 July 2019

¹⁶⁸ Interview Ilhan 14 July 2019

¹⁶⁹ Interview Elke 10 July 2019

Nabila doesn't have children herself, but she did have a negative experience with the mosque when she was a child. For her it is about creating a positive association with the mosque through learning and activities.

“To start with it would be nice to have an offer of classes, Quran etc. Step two would be to widen this with activities for kids, like scouting, but in an Islamic way. This would be cool. Children have to experience a positive emotion in the mosque.”¹⁷⁰

6.3.6 The need for women scholars and classes

Elke has noticed that the imam is often difficult to approach and her solution would be to have a female point of contact, or even better a female scholar at the mosque, who can answer the women's questions. Many women with questions about their religion currently take to social media or the internet, but the answers they get there are never given by actual scholars or scholars who know this context. Having an accessible female scholar would solve this problem.

'There needs to be a female point of contact at the mosque, because the imam is difficult to access. If you have a female point of contact, then she can go and ask the imam. Or even a female *alima* (female scholar), who can answer your questions. Women have a lot of questions but getting them answered is difficult.'¹⁷¹

For Ilhan, there have to be classes on Islamic studies at the mosque, for children as well as women. She sees this as a necessity in making Muslims resilient against brainwashing by violent ideologies.

'There have to be classes for boys and girls, but also for women, like classes on *tafsir*. It is very important for young people, if you have enough knowledge no one can brainwash you.'¹⁷²

Natalia sees female scholars not only as useful to help the women with the questions they have around 'women's issues', but also because they can play a vital role in being a role model for younger girls.

'It would be nice if we could go to the mosque and that there would also be women who are scholars to answer questions about women related issues, they would also be a role model for younger women.'¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Interview Nabila 11 July 2019

¹⁷¹ Interview Elke 10 July 2019

¹⁷² Interview Ilhan 14 July 2019

¹⁷³ Interview Natalia 8 July 2018

6.4 Gender segregation

Several themes have been established with regards to the women and their feelings towards gender segregation.

6.4.1 Comfort and togetherness

Malika acknowledges that other places have free mixing, but her prayer is something which is sacred and private. According to her this experience would be compromised by a non-segregated prayer. With only women she feels more comfortable in her actions.

“You can be yourself with only women. There are other places that are mixed. I don't have anything against mixing, but your prayer is private, and I feel more at ease with just women.”¹⁷⁴

Prayer is also a private matter for Betul, but when it comes to the mosque, she regards the women's area as one that is more relaxed and freer. After making ablutions women often get dressed in the prayer area and women who don't wear a headscarf especially. Men would be looking at the women getting dressed and undressed before and after the prayer, taking away that element of comfort.

“I would rather pray alone, but in the context of a mosque I would rather pray in a women's area. After you have done your *wudhu* you can take your time getting dressed. There are also women that do not wear a headscarf, so it's easier for them to just get dressed there.”¹⁷⁵

Natalia describes the women's only prayer area as empowering. The feeling of only women coming together to pray creates a feeling of togetherness, that she would not expect to experience in a mixed congregation.

“I think it's positive, it creates a sense of togetherness amongst women. We free mix in society all the time, so for the spiritual moment I think it's important that women can experience this together/alone, knowing that there are also women there who are more comfortable. I personally am also more at ease with just women. In the mosque it's just more comfortable, because of the movements you have to make during prayer to just be around women. It's something else when you enter and you see just women, you will experience that sense of togetherness quicker than if it was a mixed group.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Interview Malika 8 July 2019

¹⁷⁵ Interview Betul 11 July 2019

¹⁷⁶ Interview Natalia 8 July 2019

6.4.2 Practical issues, not moral

Elke does find some practical issues with the women's only area. As is often the case, the sound of the sermon drops, and the women are unable to get it back. They then can't follow what is being said, leading to a complete cut off from the congregation. Entering the men's area is often not an option. She still feels that even when everything is working properly, the ability to not see it live, is still a hindrance. A balcony would be a solution in this.

“What's negative about the women only area is that you're not in the same room as the imam. The connection is missing with the rest of the community. Sometimes the sound or the image drops and then you're just sat there. But even if everything functions properly, there is a sort of disconnect, because you're not seeing it live.”¹⁷⁷

For Ilhan the women's area is preferred on the condition that she can follow the congregation, which in this case can be the sermon by the imam or even just the prayer. If the sound cuts out mid prayer it is nigh on impossible to follow the rest. From a practical point of view, a women's area would be located at the back, making it difficult for women to stay and do their remembrance or additional prayers with men walking past.

“I prefer the women's area, because there as long as I can follow the *jam'ae* (congregation), that it the most important. If you are in the men's area and someone man comes behind you, or the *salat* (prayer) finishes and you want to stay and do *dhikr*, you will feel uncomfortable, because you are blocking them. The door is always behind, so it's difficult.”¹⁷⁸

6.4.3 Prayer comes first

None of the women questioned actually had any objections to praying with the men if it was necessary. The response to the question 'how do you feel about praying with men' was never negative, rather neutral or indifferent. Prayer is an extremely important ritual for all of the women. Prayer comes first over their personal preference, but when given the option women only was preferred by all.

Praying with men outside of a mosque context is not a problem for Ilhan, she recognises that there might be situations where this is unavoidable, as to not break prayer times. However inside of the mosque men and women must be separated, and they must have equal space. This also draws on the notion of the mosque being a 'sacred space'.

“If there is a meeting and it's prayer time, then you have to pray and it is the same room so it's okay. But not in the mosque. In Africa they will always have the same amount of space for men and women, it needs to have enough space for women and children.”¹⁷⁹

Needs break must for Betul. If it's prayer time, she will pray anywhere where she can make it work.

¹⁷⁷ Interview Elke 10 July 2019

¹⁷⁸ Interview Ilhan 14 July 2019

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

“I pray everywhere where I have that option. If not, then I will try different options. I prefer praying with my household. As long as I can pray it’s okay.”¹⁸⁰

“Say there was a mosque without women's area then I would still pray there, because prayer comes first, actually I would rather not.”¹⁸¹

6.4.4 Mixed prayer is not an issue

Both Natalia and Khadija do not have any problems about praying with men, with Khadija even bringing up Makkah and Medinah. In the same sentence they do admit to always giving preference to the women’s area. For Khadija this even has a religious justification.

“I feel neutral towards praying with men, there are places where there is only one space for both to pray, then I would pray there, but if there is a women's area then I will always prefer this.”¹⁸²

“I have also been to Makkah, it's not possible there to pray segregated. So, there it happens that women and men pray together, but if the chance is there then just with women. It's like A`isha, she used to teach men, but she would do this from behind a curtain.”¹⁸³

6.5 Safe space

Either the women in the study concurred with the notion that the women's prayer area was a safe space, or their answer was that the mosque in its entirety is or should be considered a safe space. Which leaves the question, safe from what or safe to do what exactly?

6.5.1 Women's only area as 'safe to':

The principle of ‘safe to’ is divided into two themes here. These consistently arose when talking about why a women’s area would be preferred. This also draws into the previous theme of the ritual of prayer being at the core of what is important here for the women.

focus on worship

As mentioned before, prayer is the most important aspect in this. The women feel that in an women’s area they are able to perform their rituals as comfortably and as safely as possible. The movements connected to the Islamic ritual of prayer also play a part in this.

¹⁸⁰ Interview Betul 11 July 2019

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Interview Natalia 8 July 2019

¹⁸³ Interview Khadija 5 July 2019

For Nabila, if it was a mixed praying area, she would worry more about how she looks and the movements she is making, such as prostrations. Leading her to lose focus in prayer.

“I think so, for me personally also. You feel much more comfortable if it's just women amongst each other. You're less worried about how you look. You start being aware of your actions much more than if there are only women.”¹⁸⁴

Malika reckons she would be able to concentrate less if there were distractions from the opposite gender, defeating the purpose of prayer.

“Does a room full of women have a different dimension? Yeah, in a mixed space there can be different distractions when it comes to the opposite gender. I would be able to concentrate less. You're there for one purpose only and that is worship. In a women's space you feel safe and free.”¹⁸⁵

talk about women's issues

Safety in the women's area is for some women also connected to the fact that they don't have to worry about bringing up certain topics. They can be free to discuss matters such as menstruation, breastfeeding and sexuality. Within the Islamic tradition there is no shame in talking about this in the mosque, but in a mixed context this would be frowned upon.

When asking Natalia whether the women's area was a 'safe space', she confirmed this, by referencing the spiritual dimension as well as the feminist element, which is women being able to talk with their own without male judgement.

“Yes, that is for me the reason that I prefer a space with only women. Spiritually it feels different, more comfortable. Freer? Yeah, you can talk about things, give each other advice. Certain things you talk about as mothers and women. It might be cultural that you're not allowed to talk about certain things, but women in general are more drawn to other women to talk about certain issues, not with men.”¹⁸⁶

Elke reiterated this exact same point, which also points to the women's area being much more than just a place of prayer or prostration. It is seen as a space, in which women can be themselves, talk with no holds barred and engage in spiritual practices.

“It's positive that you can talk more freely about certain subjects and you're freer in your ways of doing. And that you could talk about subjects that only concern women, like for example menstruation, without feeling embarrassed.”¹⁸⁷

6.5.2 The mosque as 'safe from'

The women had different notions of the concept of 'safe'. Several women automatically linked safety to the mosque in its entirety when it was viewed as 'secure', but reserved an

¹⁸⁴ Interview Nabila 11 July 2019

¹⁸⁵ Interview Malika 8 July 2019

¹⁸⁶ Interview Natalia 8 July 2019

¹⁸⁷ Interview Elke 10 July 2019

interpretation of 'free' for the women's area.

Fatima prefers praying with only women, because it makes her feel free, without any worries. You can just rest without being judged or looked at by the opposite gender. However, a mosque for hey, wherever it is in the world, is a safe haven.

“I would rather pray with only women, you feel free. You don't have to look around or worry about how you're lying about. I feel safe in every mosque, not necessarily with only women, but you worry less there.”¹⁸⁸

For Ilhan, the best place to be if anything was going to happen to you, would be in the mosque. Not because of the physical safety aspect, but because it is a sacred space; the house of God. The women's area for her however is the place she feels most comfortable.

“The mosque is the house of God, so you should feel safe. But during this time, it is better to be in the house of God if something were to happen. I am safe in the whole compound, but I am more comfortable in the women's area.”¹⁸⁹

Khadija reiterates this point. That this divine metaphysical notion of safety is present in every mosque, but she isn't able to relax and come to rest properly unless she is in the women's area.

“Every mosque is safe, but the women's area brings you peace.”¹⁹⁰

6.6 Conclusion

All the women interviewed showed a great deal of autonomy and agency, whether they were personally involved in the mosque or not. They have a clear vision of what the mosque should look like and no reservations of sharing that view or holding back on any critique. Their view of the mosque is egalitarian, where not only the women benefit, but also other members of the community that are now excluded, such as young people, converts and children. Their holistic view of the mosque is focussed on all members of the Muslim community, rather than one specific ethnic group. Hence the recurring theme of Dutch language. There is a willingness and a need to learn about their own religion and tradition and to allow other Muslims to experience this as well. This is a phenomenon that Shampa Mazumdar refers to as the *re-shaping* of public sacred space.¹⁹¹

“If there was a mosque without a women's committee, then we would set one up ourselves. We set up this women's committee together. All the trips to Paris, Amsterdam, England, we financed it all ourselves.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Interview Fatima 5 July 2019

¹⁸⁹ Interview Ilhan 14 July 2019

¹⁹⁰ Interview Khadija 5 July 2019

¹⁹¹ Shampa MAZUMDAR and Sanjoy MAZUMDAR, *In mosques and shrines; women's agency is public sacred space* in *Journal of Ritual Studies* Vol. 16, No. 2 (2002), pp. 165-179, p. 174

¹⁹² Interview Fatima 5 July 2019

“With women on the board it's easier to realise things, now we don't have any women on the board, but the women in the women's committee do what they want, and we get stuff done.”¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Interview Khadija 5 July 2019

7. Discussion and recommendations

This final chapter summarizes and concludes both the quantitative and the qualitative research results. It will engage the results with the literature from a practical theological perspective, as well as from a sociological feminist framework. Eventually it will conclude with recommendations that take into account the results, literature, reports and programs that have been set up in other countries to enhance not only female participation in mosques, but also for other members of the community. The results of both the studies done for this paper show that the issue that women have with mosques is not all because of the gendered aspect, but rather a general disconnect, which according to them spans over gender and focusses on age, ethnicity and language. Notwithstanding that there is still a lot of work to be done on the women's issues, such as women's committees, participation on mosque boards and even simply increasing their attendance and participation in the mosque's general activities, or rituals such as prayer. The majority of the women enjoy going to the mosque, they feel welcome and the mosque holds significant importance for them in their lives, however improvements need to be made.

7.1 Engaging the results with the tradition

After discovering where the issues regarding women and the mosque lie, it is imperative to draw back on the tradition and the scripture to find a solution. After all, the situation in mosques will not change if the Muslim community do not recognise this as being an 'insider' solution, rather than one which is superimposed from the outside. As discussed in the literature review, there were no Qur'anic commandments or *ahadith*, which explicitly ban women from mosques. Rather the Qur'an addresses men and women equally as worshippers.¹⁹⁴ The two *ahadith*, which are often brought forward to stop women from entering mosques and many *fiqh* rulings are based upon, both do not explicitly contain a prophetic example of excluding women.¹⁹⁵ As Woodlock states, it might be necessary to contextualise the *fiqh* rulings. Based on the findings of Reda and Kahera, who both argue for a return to the original sources.¹⁹⁶ Both of them draw on the Qur'anic injunctions, which do not exclude women, rather the only two stipulations for entering the mosque are that believers are to perform regular prayers and that anyone entering the mosque is ritually clean, which does not refer exclusively to men.¹⁹⁷ The situation and time from which these rulings were derived are vastly different to our current situation and time, even more so when looking at mosques in Muslim minority countries such as Belgium.

There does seem to be a shift, even in the *fiqh*. Not only feminist Islamic scholars and more traditional scholars such as Auda and Nadwi are concerned with women and mosques, but the European Council for Fatwa and Research released a statement of *fatawa* (pl. non-legally binding advice) in 2014 clearly addressing the current situation, with explicit reference to Muslim minority countries. One of their fatwa's entailed:

¹⁹⁴J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p. 25

¹⁹⁵M.A. NADWI, *Ibn Hazm on the lawfulness of women attending prayers in the mosque*, p. 22

¹⁹⁶R. WOODLOCK, *The masjid is for men*, p. 59

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

“Not only is it impermissible to deny women their rights in mosques, but also those in charge of mosques should encourage women to frequent mosques.”¹⁹⁸

Furthermore, they consequently addressed the issue of classes and women's involvement in administrative affairs:

“In addition, woman has the right to give a lecture or a lesson even if her audience are men. Woman has the right to get involved in mosque administration and its functions as indicated by famous textual proofs.”¹⁹⁹

In order to get the attendance and participation levels of women up in the mosque, it will require a change in how the mosque operates and is viewed. The recurring themes included; child friendliness, equal representation, ethnically specific mosques and opening hours and facilities. Can these problems find a solution within the tradition?

7.1.1 Child friendliness

From the quantitative research, the results showed that only 20% of the women who participated answered that their mosque is child friendly. This was also a theme which was established through the interviews. Children are often discouraged from mosques as they might be distracting, however the *Sunnah* contradicts this practice.²⁰⁰

“Bukhari reported on the authority of Abu Qatadah Al-Ansari that the Prophet (s) prayed while carrying Umamah, his granddaughter. Umamah was the daughter of the Prophet's daughter, Zainab, and Abu Al-'As ibn Rabiah Ibn Abd Shams. When the Prophet (s) prostrated, he would put Umamah down, and before he stood up he would pick her up again.”²⁰¹

This clearly demonstrates the way the Prophet treated children, even during prayer. Making mosques child friendly would not only benefit the children in their Islamic upbringing but would likely increase female attendance as well.

7.1.2 Women on board/women's committees

From the interviews, the majority of women mentioned the need for equal representation on mosque boards, or at least a separate women's committee on a parallel and equal level. Similarly, for the survey where almost 60% of the respondents answered 'no' to the question whether the mosque encouraged women to take part in activities, the board or a committee.

With regards to women's activities, there are many *ahadith* that prove that women in the time of the Prophet engaged in various activities, on Islamic holidays and even on a daily basis.²⁰² Setting up a women's committee or organising activities for women could only

¹⁹⁸EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR FATWA AND RESEARCH; <https://www.e-cfr.org/24th-ordinary-session-european-council-fatwa-research-held-istanbul/>

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p. 70

²⁰¹Bukhari in J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p. 70

²⁰²J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p. 95

really be met with resistance on the basis of cultural assumptions. However, when it comes to women serving on boards, there is an elephant in the room which must be addressed, and this the *hadith* which states that 'a people who appoint a woman leader will never be successful.'²⁰³ Both Mernissi and Auda acknowledge that this *hadith* has done a lot of damage within the Islamic world. Mernissi refutes it on the basis of the narrator Abu Bakra being untrustworthy as he had previously been convicted for lying under oath.²⁰⁴ Whereas Auda argues that this is a purely political *hadith*, which referred to the Battle of the Camel and not a general injunction.²⁰⁵ Additionally, the Qur'an mentions the story of the Queen of Sheba, a female political leader with integrity, honesty and who was respected, even by men.²⁰⁶

7.1.3 Mosques divided along ethnic lines

Naturally, the concept of mosques divided by ethnic lines is not found in the *Sunnah* and certainly not in the Qur'an. The community of the Prophet was one that was made up of different people from various backgrounds and classes. From Arab members of tribal clans to Black slaves, male and female. This is a phenomenon which has occurred in Muslim minority countries, such as in Europe, Australia and the United States with the influx of Muslim migrants. The effects of this development are experienced as negative by many women in the survey as well as the interviews. The language barrier and ethnically specific mosque is a recurring theme. Not only for converts, however the quantitative results show that they feel significantly less connected to the community. Woodlock studied the convert experience in relation to mosques in Australia, where many converts also felt disconnected from the mosque, because of language barriers, not being able to understand the Friday sermon and the imposing of 'an idealised Islamic climate from back home', which the converts could not relate to.²⁰⁷ This subsequently lead to many of the women in the study admitting that they passively boycotted the mosque.²⁰⁸ The interesting part is that in this research, it was the majority of women in the interviews that mentioned the language and ethnic barrier, and not only the converts.

7.1.4 Mosque opening hours and facilities

Knowing that the Prophet never stopped women from entering the mosque and even emphatically stated to not prevent women from going to the mosque,²⁰⁹ it is only logical to deduct that the mosque should be open to women, just as much as it is open to men. As many of the participants in the survey and interviews are women who work/study and or have children, they stated that being limited to specific hours makes it difficult for them to attend more often. Similarly, with the state of the facilities on the women's side, there is no reason why these need to be any less than the men from a theological point of view, considering the men and women used to share the same space.

²⁰³J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p.112

²⁰⁴F. MERNISSI, *De politieke harem*, p. 75

²⁰⁵J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p. 113

²⁰⁶J. AUDA, *Reclaiming the mosque*, p. 115

²⁰⁷Rachel WOODLOCK, *Praying where they don't belong: female Muslim converts and access to mosques in Melbourne, Australia* in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 2 (2010): 265-278, p. 276

²⁰⁸Ibid.

²⁰⁹Sahih Muslim 442 Book 4, Hadith 150; <https://sunnah.com/muslim/4/150>

With regard to classes for women at the mosque or the presence of a female scholar, an issue which arose in both the qualitative and quantitative research. The Islamic tradition has a long history of female scholars, as proven by Nadwi's research on the *Muhaddithat*. More importantly, Aisha Bint Abu Bakr, one of the wives of the Prophet, is well known for transmitting *hadith* and was a respected scholar who taught in mosques after the Prophet passed away.²¹⁰ This example is surely one to be followed.

7.2 Gender segregated praying

Both in the quantitative and qualitative research the women expressed a strong preference for praying in women's only spaces. When the women were asked in the web survey whether they 'liked' to perform their prayers with men with a divider 59% answered no, when asked whether they liked to perform their prayers in the same room but at the back, 75% answered no. During the interviews none of the women expressed a disliking for praying with the men, rather they were neutral. Perhaps this has to do with the phrasing. 'To like', is different than 'to not mind'. Interestingly, when asked whether they would like to have the option of both, 62% answered no and only one of the women in the interviews answered yes, but only because it would be easier with regards to bringing her children to the mosque.²¹¹ Gaining access to the men's space or sharing the same space as the men is therefore for the majority of women asked not a priority, and it would not improve their mosque experience, on the contrary, the idea of sharing the women's space with the men is almost certainly not desirable. This is of course in stark opposition with the recent statement of Zuhail Demir, where she would refuse any official funding towards mosques who segregate genders.²¹²

Why are the women choosing to segregate? Only two of the women in the interviews quoted religious reasons, as well as personal reasons for preferring to pray in an only women's space. One of which was the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad and the other an example of Aisha bint Abu Bakr, who taught classes for men, but from behind a curtain.²¹³ However, at the same time they acknowledged that praying with men was a commonality, which even occurred in Makkah and Medinah. The reasons most women gave for choosing the women's only area had to do with personal concepts of 'freedom'. Free to worship without distractions from the opposite gender, free to be yourself, free to talk about 'women's issues'. Two of the women even pertained to it having a different spiritual dimension and a sense of empowerment when there are only women in one room praying together.

Piety here takes centre stage and this concept, is viewed as 'diametrically opposed to western liberal conceptions of autonomy and freedom'.²¹⁴ Freedom for the women in the

²¹⁰Aisha GEISSINGER, 'A 'isha bint Abi Bakr and her Contributions to the Formation of the Islamic Tradition in Religion Compass 5, no. 1 (2011): 37-49, p. 45

²¹¹Interview Elke 10 July 2019

²¹²T. VAN BERLAER, *De vrouwelijke imam die haar leven riskeert voor de modern Islam*, in Het Nieuwsblad, 25 augustus 2018

²¹³ Interview Khadija and Interview Fatima 5 July 2019

²¹⁴C. JACOBSON, *troublesome threesome: feminism, anthropology and Muslim women's piety*, p. 70

research takes on a completely different meaning that the perceived notions in secular discourse. Freedom is subjective, as Orit Avishai describes it, for religious women adhering to religious practices can be viewed as empowering, although it is not deemed necessary to impose the binary of empowering versus subversion.²¹⁵ The women in the research want to experience freedom in their spiritual practice and in their house of worship. This is best manifested through the concept of women's only prayer space, a conscious decision made out of their own personal interpretations of piety.

In reference to whether the women's area was a safe space, it is necessary to ask the question, 'safe from what' and 'safe to do what'?'²¹⁶ Most of the women did not see the space as 'safe from', but rather 'safe to', safe to be yourself as a woman and as a worshipper. When they interpreted safe as secure, they referred to the entire mosque as a safe space, as this is supposed to be a space which is free from external forces such as islamophobia and ultimately it is the house of God, which adds a divine dimension to the concept of safety. What is important to mention is that the need for safe spaces only ever exist in a context in which the group who feels they need it, are involved in some kind of power imbalance in the public sphere.²¹⁷ For the male worshippers the mosque might be a safe space, but for the women, it can be the mosque and more specifically the women's area, because of the patriarchal context not only of the mosque itself, but also outside of the mosque. The dimension of safety, whether it is security or freedom here is two-fold. This does not negate the women's agency or conscious choices, but it is necessary to refer to the social structures that create the need for a women's only safe space.

7.3 Recommendations and studies from abroad as a guideline

This last chapter will draw a comparison to the few studies done on Muslim women and the mosque and conclude with possible recommendations for the situation in Antwerp. When comparing this research to the study done by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, it is noticeable how similar their outcomes really are. The report established four key themes, namely; Community culture, Programming, Leadership and Physical Space.²¹⁸ By community culture is meant that the mosque is an open and welcoming space to everyone with a sense of belonging.²¹⁹ Programming refers to the fact that a mosque should educate and engage.²²⁰ By leadership is meant a board or management which has ear and concern for all of the worshippers, male, female young, old alike and finally physical space is the fact that the mosque should be a beautiful and clean building space, which makes worshippers feel at ease.²²¹ All of these themes and points were raised in this study by the participants of the quantitative and qualitative

²¹⁵O. AVISHAI, "Doing religion" in a secular world, p. 429

²¹⁶R. LEWIS et al, *Safe spaces': experiences of feminist women-only spaces*, p. 3

²¹⁷Reza ARJMAND, *Public urban space, gender and segregation: Women-only urban parks in Iran*. Routledge, 2016, p. 131

²¹⁸ISPU, *Creating a Welcoming, Inclusive, Dynamic mosque*, p. 19

²¹⁹Ibid.

²²⁰Ibid.

²²¹Ibid.

research. Despite the fact that this paper primarily focused on gender, all of the participants in the qualitative research themselves brought up other themes such as support for converts or reaching out to young people. Once again this is very similar to the study done by ISPU, showing that there is almost certainly an overlap between the diaspora experience of Muslims here and in the United States. Some of their recommendations might be context specific to the United States, but the advice to 'be a community centre mosque', which:

“revolves around prayer, but it also provides activities and opportunities for people to stay at the mosque to socialize, for sports activities, and by having a playground for children and relevant programs”²²²

This is perhaps one of the most relevant for the Antwerp context, aside from the gender specific advice, which has already been mentioned in the literature review.

A program from the United Kingdom which aspires to get women more involved in mosques, is the 'Women in Mosques Development Programme' by the Muslim Council of Britain. They have acknowledged the fact that there is a gender-bias present in mosques in the United Kingdom and see a direct correlation between more women in management or committee functions and female space and attendance.²²³ Aside from this they see this lack of representation as a factor that is holding Muslim communities back in their growth.²²⁴ The training is part jurisprudential, theological, focused on leadership and has lessons from Nadwi.²²⁵ Considering Belgium has a similar central organ representing the Muslim community, such a program could potentially be introduced and have a positive effect on mosques in Antwerp.

²²²ISPU, *Creating a Welcoming, Inclusive, Dynamic mosque*, p. 38

²²³MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN; <https://mcb.org.uk/project/women-in-mosques/>

²²⁴Ibid.

²²⁵Ibid.

8. Conclusion

Muslim women are fighting a double battle. From external forces such as gendered islamophobia, as well as internal patriarchal factors that deny them equality in their houses of worship. In this current context, with patriarchal manifestations such as #MeToo and even #MosqueMeToo²²⁶, Muslim women are in need of a safe haven. Whereas the mosque can provide that safe place from Islamophobia, the women's area can allow the women that freedom to be a fully-fledged female Muslim worshipper. The importance of both of these spaces cannot be denied. It is therefore imperative that not only the women's area receives duly care, but also that the mosque in general becomes much more than just the place of prayer, which is its current role in the majority of mosques.

Muslims in Antwerp; young people, converts, women and children need to be encouraged to go to the mosque, but for this to materialise, there needs to be structural overhaul on our current understanding of what a mosque is and does. For the women in this thesis, a mosque is more like a community centre. It should offer classes, activities, counselling, be open to bringing children and young people, in order to cater for an entire community which rises above ethnic boundaries, rather than for just a select few. These recommendations and suggestions might sound ambitious, but they are possible. This kind of mosques exist in the United States, United Kingdom, the Netherlands and one will be being realised next year in Geel, Flanders, Belgium.

This thesis combined with the research done by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding and the 'Women in Mosques' program from the Muslim Council of Britain can serve as guideline for further investigation and eventually social change. There were many limitations to this research, which have been mentioned, but this could be the first step.

There is a growing demand for equality and representation not only in mosques, but also institutions like the Executief van de Moslims van België. With the current political climate and impasse in which no mosques will be officially recognised for another five years, one cannot tell what the effect will be on the community, but most likely not much progress will be made. Muslim women and the next generation should not become the victims of this.

I wish to end this thesis with the inspiring words of activist Hind Makki, when asked if she had any words of advice specifically for the Belgian/Flemish context:

“Fight for the inclusion of women scholars to join the imams' organizations, especially the women who are already acting as de facto religious leaders as educators and mentors to other women in mosques and Muslim institutions, as well

²²⁶“A movement from Muslim women which allows women to share their experience of sexual harassment during pilgrimage and in other religious settings”; BBC WORLD NEWS; <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-43006952>

as the women who are Religious Education teachers in high schools who hold academic degrees in Islamic studies.

Finally, connect with the global community of your sisters around the world who are repairing the Sunnah of our beloved Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) and striving to build inclusive, welcoming spaces for women and girls in every mosque.”²²⁷

²²⁷Interview Hind Makki 13 August 2019

Appendixes

1. Informed consent

Informed Consent

Medewerking aan onderzoek
Toestemmingsverklaringsformulier.

Hierbij bevestig ik,, vrijwillig deel te nemen aan het onderzoek van Arthemis Snijders, masterstudente Islamitische theologie en religiewetenschappen aan de KU Leuven, in het kader van haar onderzoek naar vrouwen en de moskee in de regio Antwerpen.

In het kader van dit onderzoek neem ik deel aan een interview van ongeveer 60 minuten.

Ik ben op een voor mij duidelijke wijze mondeling en schriftelijk ingelicht over de aard, methode en doel van het onderzoek.

Hierbij krijg ik ook de bevestiging dat de gegevens van dit onderzoek verwerkt zullen worden op een deontologisch correcte manier. Dit wil zeggen dat de gegevens verwerkt zullen worden op een volledig anonieme manier. Alle bestanden worden na het onderzoek vernietigd.

Mijn persoonlijke gegevens worden enkel gebruikt door de onderzoeker om eventueel contact op te nemen voor bijkomende vragen.

Deze gegevens worden slechts bijgehouden voor de duur van het onderzoek en zullen niet voor andere doeleinden worden gebruikt.

Voor vragen weet ik dat ik na mijn deelname terecht kan bij:

arthemis.snijders@student.kuleuven.be

of

mehdi.azaeiz@kuleuven.be

Naam participant

Naam onderzoeker

Datum, handtekening

Datum, handtekening

2. Web survey questionnaire

De ervaringen van vrouwen met de moskee in regio Antwerpen.

Assalaam Aleikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh,

Allereerst bedankt om deel te nemen aan deze enquête!

Mijn naam is Artemis Imaan Snijders, Master student Islamitische theologie aan de KU Leuven. In het kader van mijn opleiding doe ik onderzoek naar de ervaring van moslima's met de moskee in regio Antwerpen (Provincie Antwerpen). Als je buiten de provincie woont dan gaat het deze keer helaas niet.

De enquête zal ongeveer 10 minuten in beslag nemen. De survey werkt anoniem, dus de antwoorden kunnen niet met jou persoonlijk in verband kunnen worden gebracht.

Omdat het van belang is een zo divers mogelijke groep vrouwen te krijgen, zou ik ook willen vragen om deze in te laten vullen door de moeders, tantes en eventueel oma's.

Dit onderzoek is niet alleen belangrijk voor mijn thesis, maar ook zodat we kunnen polsen wat er eventueel verbeterd kan worden zodat vrouwen ook het optimale kunnen halen uit hun moskee-ervaring!

Mocht je na het invullen van de enquête beschikbaar willen zijn voor een diepte interview, of ken je iemand die dat zou zijn, laat het me weten.

Heb je vragen, dan mag je me contacteren op: arthemis.snijders@student.kuleuven.be

Jazakumullahu Khairan.

Er zijn 34 vragen in deze enquête

Jouw beleving van de moskee

Ik ga graag naar de moskee.

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

helemaal oneens

eerder niet mee akkoord

neutraal

eerder wel akkoord

helemaal mee akkoord

Ik voel me welkom in de moskee.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

helemaal oneens

eerder niet mee akkoord

neutraal

eerder wel akkoord

helemaal mee akkoord

De moskee heeft een vriendelijke sfeer.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

helemaal oneens

eerder niet mee akkoord

neutraal

eerder wel akkoord

helemaal mee akkoord

Als ik naar de moskee ga voel ik mij onderdeel van een gemeenschap.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

helemaal oneens

eerder niet mee akkoord

neutraal

eerder wel akkoord

helemaal mee akkoord

Ik ga naar de moskee om andere zusters te ontmoeten.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

helemaal oneens

eerder niet mee akkoord

neutraal

eerder wel akkoord

helemaal mee akkoord

De moskee is kindvriendelijk; ik neem mijn kinderen graag mee.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

helemaal oneens

eerder niet mee akkoord

neutraal

eerder wel akkoord

helemaal mee akkoord

Er wordt naar mij, of andere vrouwen geluisterd mochten wij suggesties hebben over de moskee.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

helemaal oneens

eerder niet mee akkoord

neutraal

eerder wel akkoord

helemaal mee akkoord

[]Opmerking over dit onderdeel:

Vul uw antwoord hier in:

De faciliteiten van de moskee

[]Er is een geschikte gebedsruimte (genoeg ruimte, met verwarming/airco, goed tapijt etc).

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Andere

[]Er is een goede wudhu ruimte om je wassing te verrichten.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Andere

[]Het (vrijdags) gebed en de preek zijn goed mee te volgen vanuit de vrouwenruimte (door middel van een televisie of speakers).

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Andere

[]De gebedsruimte is altijd open en toegankelijk (ook doordeweeks, tussen gebeden in).

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Andere

[]De imam is makkelijk contacteerbaar als je een vraag wil stellen.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Andere

Er zijn lessen voor vrouwen in verschillende onderwerpen zoals bijvoorbeeld hifdh, tafsir, fiqh of hadith.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Andere

De moskee moedigt vrouwen actief aan om deel te nemen aan activiteiten, het bestuur of de management van de moskee.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Andere

De moskee is toegankelijk voor vrouwen met een handicap / rolstoelvriendelijk.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Andere

Tijdens de Ramadan is er de mogelijkheid voor vrouwen om hun vasten te verbreken (iftar) in de moskee.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Andere

Er is genoeg plek voor vrouwen tijdens het Taraweeh gebed.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Andere

Opmerkingen over dit onderdeel:

Vul uw antwoord hier in:

Jouw persoonlijke gebedservaring

Er zijn geen foute antwoorden en het is mogelijk om op meerdere stellingen tegelijk 'Ja' te antwoorden.

Ik verricht mijn gebed graag in een gescheiden ruimte met alleen vrouwen.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Ik verricht mijn gebed graag in dezelfde ruimte als de mannen met een scheiding/hek om de vrouwenafdeling af te bakenen.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Ik verricht mijn gebed graag in dezelfde ruimte als de mannen, achteraan.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Ik wil graag de optie om in de moskee te kiezen tussen een gescheiden vrouwenruimte of om in dezelfde ruimte als de mannen te bidden. (Beide opties zijn in deze aanwezig).

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Ik verricht mijn gebed liever thuis.

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Opmerkingen over dit onderdeel:

Vul uw antwoord hier in:

Persoonlijke achtergrond informatie

Dit laatste onderdeel is om het onderzoek beter te kunnen kaderen en de data beter te analyseren.

Wat is je leeftijd?

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

-17

18-20

21-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60+

Wat is je etnische afkomst?

Deze vraag is open in te vullen, heb je een gemixte of bi-culturele achtergrond geef dit dan ook even aan.

*

Vul uw antwoord hier in:

Ben je in België geboren of in het buitenland?

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

België

Buitenland

Ben je geboren als moslim of bekeerd?

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Geboren als moslim

Bekeerd

Wat is je woonplaats? *

Vul uw antwoord hier in:

Heb je een vaste moskee of meerdere moskeeën die je bezoekt?

*

Selecteer alle mogelijke antwoorden en geef uw commentaar:

Een vaste moskee, namelijk:

Meerdere moskeeën, namelijk (max 2):

Hoe vaak ga je naar de moskee?

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Elke dag

Meer dan een keer per week

Een keer per week

Een keer per maand

Een keer per 3 maanden

Een keer per half jaar

Minder dan een keer per half jaar

Een keer per jaar

Nooit

[] Zou je vaker naar de moskee gaan mocht er een verbetering komen op de vlakken die je hebt aangegeven?

*

Kies a.u.b. een van de volgende mogelijkheden:

Ja

Nee

Voor mij zijn er geen verbeteringen nodig

Andere

[] Heb je persoonlijk nog opmerkingen voor het verbeteren van je moskee ervaring die niet in deze enquête vermeld staan?

Vul uw antwoord hier.

3. Interview Questions

Naam:

Leeftijd:

Etniciteit:

Geboren als moslim: ja/nee

Geboren in BE: ja/nee

Woonachtig in:

Lokale moskee:

Beschrijf je moskee bezoek: sporadisch/regelmatig/nooit/feestdagen:

Ben je op de een of andere manier betrokken bij de moskee?

Moskee ervaring:

Hoe voel je je als je naar de moskee gaat?

Wat is de voornaamelijkste reden voor jou om naar de moskee te gaan?

Wat houdt jou tegen om naar de moskee te gaan (denk hier aan verschillende redenen, van praktisch tot persoonlijk) ?

Zijn er momenten geweest die je ervaring of relatie met de moskee hebben beïnvloedt – positief of negatief?

Gender segregatie:

Hoe voel je je tegenover een ruimte voor alleen vrouwen? Wat vind je daar positief/negatief aan?

Hoe sta je tegenover bidden in dezelfde ruimte met de mannen? Wat vind je daar positief/negatief aan?

Welke van de bovengenoemde opties verkies je het liefst, of wil je dat beide aanwezig is?

Zo, ja/nee, waarom?

Zie je een gebedsruimte voor alleen vrouwen als een 'veilige ruimte'?

Zo, ja/nee, waarom?

Als je liever thuis bidt, is dit uit een specifieke reden mbt de moskee, of iets anders?

Jouw ideale moskee:

Hoe ziet jouw ideale moskee eruit (denk hier aan inhoudelijk/bestuur/de capaciteiten/voorzieningen/het aanbod) ?

Hoe schiet jouw lokale moskee daarin te kort? Is er bijvoorbeeld sprake van een vrouwenwerking – vind je dat überhaupt nodig?

Heb je zelf nog opmerkingen of aanmerkingen over jouw ervaring als vrouw?



Arthemis Snijders

Is geslaagd voor de onderwijsleeractiviteit "Masterproef: methodologische sessies" (A05G2a).

Handtekening Sander Vloebergs (medewerker)

Handtekening Prof. dr. Dries Vanysacker (Coordinator)

Academiejaar 2018-2019

Dit attest dat de methodologische sessies met succes gevolgd zijn moet achteraan in de thesis ingebonden worden (voor de originaliteitsverklaring).

Originaliteitsverklaring
Faculteit Theologie en Religiewetenschappen
KU Leuven



KATHOLIEKE
UNIVERSITEIT
LEUVEN

Bespreek in de loop van het redactieproces van het werkstuk dit document en de thematiek van plagiaat met uw (co-)promotor of eventueel met de ombudspersoon.

Ik verklaar hierbij

- dat op correcte wijze wordt verwezen naar alle bronnen – ook internetbronnen – opgenomen in voetnoten en bibliografie van voorliggend werkstuk.
- dat op correcte wijze wordt verwezen naar alle bronnen van geparafraseerde teksten opgenomen in voetnoten en bibliografie van voorliggend werkstuk.
- dat voorliggend werkstuk volledig eigen werk is en nergens gebaseerd is op materiaal uit externe bronnen waarnaar niet wordt verwezen (daarbij het werk van andere studenten of professionele instanties inbegrepen).
- dat voorliggend werkstuk nergens elders eerder werd neergelegd met het oog op het behalen van een academisch studiecertificaat en nooit in dezelfde vorm.
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- dat ik de facultaire aanbevelingen om plagiaat te vermijden zoals die aan bod komen in de *Richtlijnen voor het schrijven van scripties, masterproeven en proefschriften* heb gelezen, begrepen en toegepast.
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Naam en voornaam Snyders, Arthemis

Titel van het werkstuk 'No key to the women's area': gender participation in mosques in Antwerp. A study of female involvement in Islamic life

Handtekening 	Indiendatum 21 / 05 / 2019
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