

Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque:

A spatial analysis of reconfiguration, challenge, and resistance to traditional mosques space and traditionalists' views on gender and sexuality

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Abstract

Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque opened its doors in the German capital of Berlin in June 2017. Since its public opening, the mosque has proven a source of numerous controversies with traditional Muslims regarding its validity as a sacred place of prayer. The controversies and opposition result from the mosque's adoption and practice of liberal Islam, which challenges the traditional Islamic teachings on gender and sexuality that continue to inform Muslim communities. This thesis examines how the space of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque is used by its members to reconfigure, challenge and resist traditional Muslim views pertaining to the workings of gender and sexuality in the mosque. This study is informed by feminist methodology and employed qualitative tools to generate rich and detailed observations and narratives relevant to the question at hand. The study employs spatial analysis and the concept of sacred space to investigate the space of the mosque and how it is used to reconfigure, challenge and resist traditional Muslim views on gender and sexuality. The findings revealed the dynamism of the space of the mosque as a physical, social, mental, space filled with power relations and its importance as a site of resistance and challenge to traditional Muslim views on gender and sexuality. It also showed the importance of giving more attention to the nascent movement of liberal mosques.

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I dedicate this thesis to those who still dare to dream, even in the darkest prisons of their oppressors.

And to freedom.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque opened its doors in the German capital of Berlin in June 2017. Since the date of its public opening, it has proven a source of numerous controversies regarding its validity as a sacred place of prayer, the most important ritual in Islam. It also has faced strong opposition from conservative Muslims and traditionalist scholars of Islam who claim that the mosque is destructive to Islam and the Muslim community (Ummah). The controversies and opposition are a result of the mosque's adoption and practice of liberal Islam. The mosque allows women to pray together in the same rows as men. It also permits women to do the call to prayer and lead both genders in prayer. Furthermore, it welcomes everyone, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, heterosexual or queer, in the same space, provides access to Islamic divorce, and allows interfaith opposite-sex and same-sex marriage. These practices challenge traditional Islamic teachings on gender, gender relations and sexuality, which continue to inform Muslim communities.

This thesis employs spatial theory to analyse and investigate the spatiality and spatial features of the liberal mosque, Ibn Rushd-Goethe, and the ways in which the members of the mosque together with its spatiality interact to produce a gender-equal and queer-friendly space. This thesis also engages the concept of sacred space to show that even though the space of the mosque is sacred in that it stands out from an ordinary space, it still shares the spatial features of ordinary space in that it is a site of power struggle. My analysis explores the different resistance strategies that members of Ibn Rushd mosque use to resist traditional Islamic norms of gender and sexuality when being inside the mosque.

1.1 Research question

The main research question of this thesis is as follows:

How is the space of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque used by its members to reconfigure, challenge and resist traditional Muslim views pertaining to the workings of gender and sexuality in the mosque?

1.2 Rationale, aim, scope

As with many people, I was affected by the news of the opening of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque. I was glad that some Muslims had managed to establish and operate such a mosque, but also felt confused by the existence of a mosque that contradicts all the Muslim teachings I

have learned from childhood until I left Islam. As such, I followed news about the mosque until it seemed to recede from the headlines. At this point, I stopped thinking about it altogether. When the time came to choose a topic for my thesis, I wanted to write about queer activism in the Middle East. A series of questions about my safety as a lesbian ex-Muslim Arab woman had also long circulated in my mind. What if I visited a Middle Eastern country and something bad happened to me? What if I was arrested and could never again see the people I love such as my sister, nephews, friends, and my wife and our cat. While I was deeply interested in researching this topic, my fears proved stronger than my interest, so I decided to change the topic. But then I asked myself another series of questions. Why do I fear going to the Middle East? Why do queer people risk arrest there? Why are women discriminated against in this part of the world? Why are liberal Muslims and ex-Muslims arrested and put in prison there? As someone who was born and brought up in a Muslim country, I knew that part of the problem was how a majority of people believed so strongly in the laws based on sharia (Islamic law) as the only form of authentic Islam. As such, the fear of returning to my home country and my desire to go back there someday inspired me to research solutions instead of reasons. Ultimately, I thought that perhaps Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque could be one of the solutions. I found hope in how it offers a liberal reading of Islam and a space to practice it in a way that is, practically and not only rhetorically, consistent with the famous slogan of Islam as a religion of peace and justice.

The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to investigate Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque as a source of change for the current gender inequality and queer hostility prevalent in traditional Muslim mosques. As such, it could also help to challenge public conceptions of gender, and hostility against queer Muslims and non-Muslims in Muslim communities and countries. This project does not in any way aim to show that the majority of Muslims are conservative, anti-gender equality and homophobic, rather it emphasises the fact that Muslims are diverse, and that Islam is multifaceted. The thesis also aims to draw academic attention to the nascent phenomenon of liberal mosques with the hope of generating further research about liberal mosques from different perspectives.

1.3 Structure

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter two situates this study of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque within a larger contextual background. It discusses traditional mosques and how gender inequality is demonstrated by women's unequal access to the mosque as worshippers

and imams. It also explores traditional Islamic views on homosexuality and how these influence access to mosques for queer Muslims. It also offers a context for liberal Islam demonstrated by liberal Muslims and liberal mosques. Chapter three introduces the theoretical framework upon which this thesis is based. It begins with an exploration of Kim Knott's engagement of spatial theory and then the concept of sacred space. Both are used to analyse the spatiality of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque and how it is employed by its members to resist traditional understandings of gender and homosexuality. In chapter four, I reflect on myself as a researcher and introduce the different qualitative tools employed in this project. In chapter five, I will empirically and spatially analyse the space of the mosque and how it is used by its members as a site of resistance to traditional views of gender and sexuality. I employ Knott's spatial analysis and engage the notion of sacred space. Lastly, in the conclusion, I will present the main findings of the thesis and indicate directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Situating the study

Most of the previous literature regarding the Islamic mosque revolves around their architecture, history and the practices it hosts (see, for example, Frishman & Khan, 1994; Holod & Khan, 1997; Tayob, 1999a; Bloom, 2018). There is also literature regarding gender inequality in mosques (see, for example, Woodlock, 2010; Bano & Kalmbach, 2012; D'Souza, 2013). What is absent from previous literature, however, are spatial analyses of liberal mosques and how the space of the liberal mosque is used as a site of resistance against traditional views of the Islamic mosque, as well as those regarding gender and homosexuality. Despite this, the present literature about mosques was helpful in establishing a background for this thesis. This background provides the readers with a comprehensive understanding of the spatiality of both traditional and liberal mosques.

This chapter highlights five central themes that in diverse ways provide the background and connect to the case study of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque. The first theme is the importance of the mosque space itself in the life of Muslims, as a site of worship and devotion, as well as serving as a place that represent the unity of Muslims. This presentation is followed by a description and discussion of the functions and symbolism of three essential elements forming the interior and the exterior of the mosque, namely, the mihrab, the minbar, and the minaret, as well as the call to prayer which diffuses from the minaret. The second theme is that of prayer and Friday prayer, which is of utmost importance in the everyday life of devotional Muslims. The third theme concerns women's access to the mosque. I discuss traditional Muslim views of women's access to the mosque and women's leadership of prayer. The fourth theme engages traditional Muslim views of homosexuality followed by a brief account of a queer's access to the mosque. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of liberal Islam, constituting the fifth theme, as demonstrated by liberal Muslims and the notion of liberal mosques.

The purpose of the themes highlighted in this chapter is to provide a solid context for the analytical section of this thesis. It will also offer background for readers who are unfamiliar with traditional Islam so that they may better comprehend the importance of the mosque in Muslim culture. It will also offer background on the current traditional gender power relations permeating Muslim mosques and the place of queer Muslims in traditional mosques. These perspectives will be placed in contrast to information regarding liberal Islam and mosques. From this, readers can understand the extent to which Ibn Rushd-Goethe challenges

gender and sexuality norms of traditional mosques and, as such, enable readers to better grasp the controversies around the mosque and traditionalists' opposition to the mosque.

2.1 Mosques in Islam

“O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid, and eat and drink, but be not excessive. Indeed, He likes not those who commit excess.”

(Quran, 7:31)

A mosque (*masjid*) literally means “place of prostration” (Denny, 2016, p. 179) which is designed such that prayer goes face Mecca, the Islamic holy city¹. The direction of Mecca is known as *Qibla*. Muslims consider the mosque a sacred space. This is not in the sense that God descends and occupies the mosque space on earth, but rather that the mosque “serves as a place of religious meaning for Muslim believers” (Hoel, 2013b, p.30) because it embraces prayer, the “supreme form of devotion and obedience to God” (Tayob, 1999b, p.66), as well as the ritual which unite the faithful Muslims worldwide who “all face a common central point and direct their spiritual energies toward it” (Denny, 2016, p. 178).

Even though prayer, in general, can be performed in any place that is clean, Friday prayer is traditionally performed in a mosque. This emphasizes the importance of mosques as sites of unity between Muslims and as manifestations of their presence at any given place in the world. Similar to the first mosque built by Muhammad with the courtyard of his house at Medina that served as a space for congregational prayer as well as for civil functions and social events (Gaffeny, 2004), present day mosques also serve as sites for annual gatherings and celebrations. These include the birthday of the Prophet² and the mid-Shaban³ (nisf Shaban), the day Muslims believe that God receives an annual record of good and bad deeds of every person on earth. However, even though a big number of Muslims accept these celebrations, other Muslims reject them as innovations (*bidah*) that are not plainly permitted by the Quran, the words of God, or by the Hadith, the words of the Prophet (Tayob, 1999b). Mosques also host social events such as Muslim marriage ceremonies and funerals.

¹ Mecca is regarded as the holiest city in Islam as it is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the site of his first revelation of the Quran. It is also the home of Kaaba, a cubic structure covered in black cloth, which is the most sacred shrine for Muslims and the destination of their annual pilgrimage, the hajj.

² Sunni Muslims celebrate the birthdate of Prophet Muhammad on the twelfth of Rabi' al-awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar.

³ Shaban is the eighth month of the Islamic calendar.

Moreover, mosques are sites of teaching and learning the Quran, hadith and Islamic law as they traditionally host circles (halqa) of people who come to the mosque to expand their knowledge of the religion. Inevitably, these circles are traditionally and commonly led by men; however, there are circles led by women and open for women participants only.

2.1.1 The interior of the mosque – The mihrab and the minbar

The interior of the mosque consists of two essential elements: the mihrab, and the minbar. Mihrab is a niche found in the front wall of a mosque. It is a concave structure which points to the direction of Mecca, the direction Muslims must face during prayer (Tayob, 1999b). The minbar is a staircase leading to a seat that is placed next to the mihrab. It is used as a pulpit for the imam (prayer leader) to deliver a sermon (khutba). This is most commonly on Fridays but is also used to address the congregation on other occasions as well. According to Tayob (1999b, p. 113), the minbar is “the most powerful symbol” in a mosque as it denotes leadership and authority of the person who occupies it. Indeed, it is from the minbar that Friday sermon (khutba al-Juma’a) and important public announcements were delivered by Prophet Muhammad and his successor Muslim rulers (caliphs), as well as regional governors or their representatives. For instance, in the past, the Quranic prohibition on drinking alcohol was delivered from the minbar. In the twentieth century, the minbar was also used as “a channel of political communication” (Fathi, 1981, p. 163). Preachers used it to deliver speeches that both supported and rejected political authority. In 1979 in Iran, for example, the sermons delivered from the minbar played an important role in mobilizing people against the regime of the Shah. Despite its political uses, the minbar is more traditionally a source of religious or ethical guidance where sermons advise on issues such as prayer and family life. (Encyclopedia, 2019).

2.1.2 The exterior of the mosque – The minaret

Not only is the interior of the mosque distinguished by specific elements such as the minbar and mihrab, but its exterior is also marked by the presence of a slender high tower, the minaret. The tall minaret with a star and a moon crescent⁴ at the top is the most visible sign of a mosque today. The height of the minaret derives from the narrative of Bilal⁵, a former

⁴ The crescent moon and star are universal Islamic symbols, standing for what guided the Prophet on night journey from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E.

⁵ Bilal ibn Rabah was one of the first to believe in the prophethood of Muhammad and to call for prayer.

African slave, who climbed to a high place to deliver the call to prayer. The minaret is used to facilitate the call to prayer (adhan), because it helps to amplify the voice for this essential Islamic ritual (Tayob, 1999b).

The call to prayer represents a central ritual act which distinguishes Islam from other religions. Muslims use the human voice to announce the prayer and gather worshipers, unlike Jews who use a trumpet and Christians who employ a bell (Britannica Academic, 2019). Like prayer, the call to prayer also symbolizes unity between Muslims. When Bilal called for prayer for the first time in Medina⁶, Muslims joined together in a community and worshipped one God for the first time. This call to prayer continues to play a major role alongside the mosque, which creates a physical presence of Muslims in a particular location. According to Tayob, (1999b, p.3) “The mosque may be a physical symbol of Islam, but the call to prayer is a ritual act sets that symbol into motion by calling people together”.

The adhan consists of “invocations and attestations” (Fareed, 2004, p. 13). The sunni adhan is chanted by the caller to prayer (muezzin) as following:

allahu akbar

God is most great (four times)

ashhadu an la ilaha illa allah

I testify that there is no god but God (twice)

ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul allh

I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God (twice)

hayya ala al-salat

Hurry to prayer (twice)

Hayya ala al-falah

Hurry to success (twice)

⁶ Many Muslims pass through Medina on their pilgrimage to Mecca and it is the second holy Islamic city. It is home to the Mosque of the Prophet (*al-Masjid an-Nabawy*) where the prophet Muhammad is buried.

Allahu akbar
God is most great (twice)

la ilaha illa allah
there is no god but God (once)
(Denny, 2016, p. 178)

After the muezzin finishes the call to prayer, worshipers reverently stand together in rows facing Mecca to start the prayer (salat).

2.2 Prayer (salat)

“And establish prayer and give zakah (poor-due), and whatever good you put forward for yourselves - you will find it with Allah. Indeed, Allah of what you do, is Seeing”

(Quran, 2:110)

Prayer (salat) is of such great importance in Islam that it is one of the “Five Pillars of Islam.”⁷ Prayer is significant in the life of Muslims as it delineates between Muslim and non-Muslim. This is emphasized by a hadith⁸ narrated in Sahih Muslim⁹ reporting that Prophet Muhammad said, “between a man and polytheism and unbelief is the abandonment of salat.”¹⁰ Given the importance of prayer, all Muslims are obliged to perform prayer under any circumstances, even in poor health or when travelling. As such, different concessions are made to perform prayer in such situations. For instance, a Muslim who is ill is exempt from performing prayer in the usual manner and has the option to sit or lie down while using just their hands, or even eyes, to participate in the prayer ritual. If a Muslim is travelling, they are allowed to shorten the required prayer of the day such that they might only pray three times rather than five

⁷ The five pillars of Islam are the core practices of Islam that every Muslim is obliged to perform: the shahadah (professing that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is his messenger to people), salat (prayer), sawm (fasting), zakat (alms-giving), and hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca, but only to able Muslims).

⁸ Hadith is a report of the sayings and actions of Muhammad. Hadith consists of a chain of transmitters (isnad) and the information being reported (matn). The reliability of each hadith is assessed according to the trustworthiness of its transmitters.

⁹ Sahih Muslim is a collection of sayings and acts of Prophet Muhammad and is considered one of the essential six collections of Hadith. The collection was compiled by Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Naysaburi (817-875 AD).

¹⁰ Book 1, hadith 147.

times. If possible, they can also pray while sitting in their means of transportation (Haneef, 1996).

Muslims are required to pray five times a day: daybreak, noon, afternoon, sunset and night. The prayer consists of a combination of gestures and words, performed in unison, which are referred to as rak'as (prostrations). The number of prostrations depends on the time of day: daybreak prayer consists of two prostrations, noon and afternoon consist of four each, sunset has three, and night consists of four. Worshipers mark the beginning of the prayer by raising their hands to the side of their heads and saying in loud voice "Allahu akbar" (God is the greatest). Then, they recite the opening verse of the Quran and another brief verse, or a group of verses, while their hands are at their sides or folded beneath their chest. Next, they pronounce "Allahu akbar" and then bow while stating "Glory be to God." The worshipers then stand and praise God. Next, they prostrate with forehead and palms placed on both sides of the head touching the floor and utter another "Allahu akbar." Next, they sit further upright with their palms resting on thighs. Then, they prostrate for the second time and utter "Allahu akbar." Finally, they stand, marking the end of one rak'a (Denny, 2016). When the prayer is near completion, the worshipers sit and state the declaration of the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad (tashahud). To end the prayer, the worshipers turn their heads to the right and left and say "Peace be upon you all and the mercy and blessings of God." each time they turn their head (Denny, 2016, p. 181).

Prayer can be performed anywhere, in public or private, and individually or in congregation where one person leads another. However, the majority of prominent Muslim scholars agree on the religious merit of congregational prayer, in that, in addition to its role in bringing Muslims together and strengthening the solidarity between them, it is more meritorious and rewarding than an individual prayer. The Prophet was reported in Sahih al-Bukhari¹¹ to have said, "The Salat (prayer) in congregation is twenty-five times superior in degrees to the Salat offered by a person alone."¹²

2.2.1 Friday prayer

¹¹ Sahih al-Bukhari is a collection of hadith compiled by Muhammad al-Bukhari (810-870 AD). His collection is considered one of the essential collections of hadith. It is also considered by the majority of Muslims to be the most authentic.

¹² Volume 1, hadith 646

Friday prayer takes place at noon instead of the ordinary noon prayer and can be distinguished from other daily prayers by the presence of a sermon (khutba). The Khutba involves a Qur'an recitation that serves as the khutba's topic and consists of two parts with a short break between them (Denny, 2016). The topic of the khutba is chosen by the imam and may concern a particular behaviour, historical event, or a message drawn from a narrative in the Quran. The khutba, then, is followed by two rak'as prayer (Katz, 2013).

Unlike daily prayer that can be performed anywhere, individually or in a congregation of two or more, Friday prayer must be held in a mosque and in a congregation of five, seven, or forty people, depending on the governing Islamic law school (Denny, 2016). Given that Friday prayer must be held in a mosque and in congregation, it offers a guaranteed opportunity for Muslims to not only gain greater rewards, but also erase sins. To that end, the Prophet Muhammad was reported in Sahih Muslim to have said the following:

A man's prayer in congregation is more valuable than twenty degrees and some above them as compared with his prayer in his house and his market, for when he performs ablution doing it well, then goes out to the mosque, and he is impelled (to do so) only by (the love of congregational) prayer, he has no other objective before him but prayer. He does not take a step without being raised a degree for it and having a sin remitted for it, till he enters the mosque, and when he is busy in prayer after having entered the mosque, the angels continue to invoke blessing on him as long as he is in his place of worship, saying: O Allah, show him mercy, and pardon him! Accept his repentance (and the angels continue this supplication for him) so long as he does not do any harm in it, or as long as his ablution is not broken.¹³

The above-mentioned hadith not only emphasizes the merits of congregational prayer in the mosque, but also shows the importance of ablution (wudu') for receiving such rewards.

2.2.2 Ablution

For any prayer to be valid it must be preceded by ablution. This is intended to remove impurities caused by "sleeping, evacuating urine or feces, breaking wind, intoxication, fainting, touching the human genitals with the palm of the hand, and skin contact between mutually marriageable persons, especially if it is sexually arousing" (Denny, 2016, p. 171).

¹³ Book 4, hadith 1394

The process of ablution and the impurities it removes are clearly described in the Quran (5:6) as following:

O you who have believed, when you rise to [perform] prayer, wash your faces and your forearms to the elbows and wipe over your heads and wash your feet to the ankles. And if you are in a state of janabah¹⁴, then purify yourselves. But if you are ill or on a journey or one of you comes from the place of relieving himself or you have contacted women and do not find water, then seek clean earth and wipe over your faces and hands with it. Allah does not intend to make difficulty for you, but He intends to purify you and complete His favor upon you that you may be grateful.

The aforesaid verse of the Quran implies that touching women can result in impurity, and thus invalidate the prayer. However, most Muslim legislators agree that unintended contact between members of the opposite sex who can marry each other does not require ablution (Denny, 2016).

2.3 Women's access to the mosque

“Do not prevent the maidservants of God from going to the mosques of God”

(Hadith)¹⁵

The issue of accidentally touching women is not the only issue pertinent to women's bodies that problematizes their access to the mosque. Other issues related to their gender role, voice and bodies play a role in limiting their access and active participation in the mosque. Historically, during the part of Muhammad's life that he spent in Medina, it is believed that women were allowed to participate in collective prayer. However, women and men are believed to have occupied distinct positions during congregational prayer in the mosque as women stood in the back and men in the front. This is underlined by Prophet Muhammad's report in Sahih Muslim stating: “The best rows for men are the first rows, and the worst ones the last ones, and the best rows for women are the last ones and the worst ones for them are the first ones.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Janabah is an impure status resulting from contact with sexual fluids.

¹⁵ Sahih Muslim, Book 4, hadith 886

¹⁶ Book 4, hadith 881

Another report narrated by Ibn Abi-Hatem Al-Razi¹⁷ suggests that when the location of qibla changed from Jerusalem to Mecca, it required that the worshipers change the direction they face from the north to the south. When this change was announced to the congregation “the women changed to the man's place and the men to the women’s, and we prayed the remaining two prostrations toward the Sacred House” (Katz, 2013, p.198).

In spite of these and many other reports suggesting the permissibility of women’s access to the main prayer area, Muslim women have faced increasing exclusion from mosques. This is based on the thoughts of different Muslim scholars who suggest that women may join the congregation, but it is much more desirable that they pray at home.

2.3.1 Women worshipers as caregivers

One of these scholars is Ibn Qudamah¹⁸ who suggested that women are not required to do Friday prayer “because Friday prayer gathers together men and the woman is not part of the assembly of men”, but she may do so since “her Friday prayer is valid because she is allowed to join the congregation (jama’ah) as the women used to pray with the Prophet in congregation” (Tayob, 1999b, p.75).

Muhammad al-Ghazali’s¹⁹ view is also similar in nature in that women belong to the home, therefore, the best place for a woman to pray is in the home where her primary functions take place (Katz, 2014). In this account, however, women should not be prohibited from going to the mosque when they are done with their domestic duties. According to al-Ghazali (cited in Katz, 2014, p. 269-270):

a well-authenticated sunna establishes that a woman is a shepherd in her home, and is responsible for her flock. There is no doubt that the needs of children, particularly infants, and the preparation of the home to receive the man when he returns home from his work, all of that impedes a woman from regular attendance at the five daily congregational prayers. For that reason, we are of the opinion that she must attend congregational prayers [only] after she finishes her household tasks. If she has

¹⁷ Ibn Abi-Hatem Al-Razi (854/5-938 AD) was a Hadith critic and transmitter, as well as an exegete of the Quran. He wrote *al-Jarh wa-l-ta’dil* (impugning and accrediting) and *Ilal al-hadith* (defects of hadith), which are central to criticism of the Sunni hadith transmission.

¹⁸ Ibn Qudamah (1146-1223 AD) wrote *al-Mughni fi sharh al-kharqi*, explaining al-Kharqi’s book *Mukhtasar* that summarizes imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal’s opinions.

¹⁹ Muhammad al-Ghazali (1917-1996) is an Islamic scholar and writer. He was a member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood from late 1930s until he was expelled from the group in 1953.

performed her duties, her man is not permitted to prevent her from going to the mosque.

There are other reasons, beyond domestic duties and women having no place amongst men, that Muslim scholars suggest as to why women should not frequent a mosque. These are related to the view that a woman is a source of temptation that may contaminate the mosque's space. Such a view is adopted by classical Muslim scholars such as Ibn-Hanbal,²⁰ who when asked about women's attendance at the prayers was reported to have claimed that "people will be tempted, unless she is a woman far advanced in age," or "as for in this time of ours, no, because they are temptation" (Katz, 2013, p.198).

The varied thoughts about the permissibility of women's access to the mosque leaves the issue to be determined by the national, political, cultural, and religious past and present of Muslim nations. Ultimately, if women were allowed to participate in congregational prayer, they have to preserve a certain dress code commonly consisting of loose dress and hair covering, and also pray in a separate place within the mosque. In best case scenarios, women can pray behind men or next to them, separated by a rope or other means (Hoel, 2013a)

2.4 Women's leadership of the prayer

The view of women as domestic creatures whose access to the mosque is conditional and whose presence may threaten the mosque's purity was adopted by contemporary Muslim scholars not to only limit women's access to the mosque, but also to oppose their active role in the mosque. Specifically, it aimed to prevent women from occupying the "prestigious position of imam" (Hoel, 2013a, p.31). According to Ali and Leaman (2008, p.54), an imam is "the one who leads". This person is responsible for coordinating the prayer and reciting the Quran during congregational prayer. The role of the imam is not a clerical one as there is no clergy in Islam such that any Muslim can take on the role of the imam as long as they are conversant with the religion and the process of the prayer (Hoel, 2013a).

It is generally agreed by Muslim scholars that a man is permitted to lead a mixed congregation or a congregation consisting of men only or women only. They also believe that a woman may lead a congregation of only women. Almost all Muslim scholars affirm that a woman cannot lead a mixed congregation or a congregation of men only. However, a few

²⁰ Ahmad ibn-Hanbal (780-855 AD) is the founder of the Hanbali Muslim school of law and advocate of traditionalism in Sunni Islam.

scholars have asserted that a woman may lead a mixed or male-only congregation during voluntary congregational prayers such as tarawih²¹ under specific conditions (Katz, 2013). In general, these conditions include that the woman is the only or best person to perform the recitation of the Quran required for a valid prayer among the men present, or if she is a member of the family, or old. However, these conditions do not guarantee that a woman can lead the prayer in the ordinary way. Some scholars such as al-Mardawi have affirmed that even when a woman leads the prayer, she is not allowed to stand in front of the worshipers, but rather she must stand behind them where she is best concealed. A man, on the other hand, stands in the front, synchronizing the physical motions of the prayer (Katz, 2013).

There are, however, other reports that disagree with the majority of scholars and instead claim that permission has been granted for women to lead men in prayer. For instance, a report states that Muhammad permitted his companion Umm Warqa bint Nawfal to lead the prayer of her family members consisting of an elderly man, as well as a male and female slave. Varied versions of the reports indicate, however, that Umm Warqa was only allowed to lead women in her household (Katz, 2013).

2.4.1 Women's voice as a source of temptation

Regardless of these possible exceptions, women have been constantly deprived access to the role of imam just as they have largely been denied access to the mosque. As ibn-Hanbal stated, this is largely to limit women's access to the mosque: "they [women] are temptation". Most traditional Muslim scholars agree that the sources of temptation related to women are two: women's voices and women's bodies.

To illustrate, this view was adopted by the South African Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) who specified women's voices as a source of temptation. In a series of interviews, members of the MJC explained their objections to the leading of mixed prayer by Amina Wadud, an African American female imam and scholar of Islamic studies, standing in front of men in the Claremont Main Road Mosque in 1994. The main reason relates to their view of a woman's voice as awrah²², literally meaning nakedness, that should be covered or concealed. This is based on particular interpretations of verse 33:32 in the Quran where God demands the wives of the Prophet Muhammad to lower their voices in public so that they do not arouse sexual

²¹ Tarawih is an optional prayer that is performed in the nights of the month of Ramadan.

²² Awrah refers to the parts of women and men's bodies that should be concealed. Men's awrah starts from his naval to his knees. For women, it is her whole body except for her hands and face.

desire in men (Hoel, 2013a). As such, most scholars maintain that a woman who wants to draw attention to something during prayer should clap her hands, while men may shout “Glory be to God!” (Katz, 2013, p. 181).

2.4.2 Women’s bodies as a source of temptation

A number of Muslim scholars also consider a woman’s body a source of sexual temptation. In his response to Amina Wadud leading a mixed-sex Friday prayer at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York in 2005, Muslim scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi asserted that women should not stand in front of men nor share the same prayer space. Defending his stance, Al-Qaradawi said that Islam is a rational religion that acknowledges the instincts and drives of Muslim men. He also noted that it creates a system aimed to protect men from falling into sin. He, therefore, suggests that in order to prevent sins during the special time of prayer when Muslim men communicate with their creator, women should be separated from men. According to al-Qaradawi, this is because God created women’s bodies in a unique way to sexually arouse men so that they will enter marriage and procreate. This renders the bodily movements of prayer performed by women such as bowing and prostration inappropriate in front of men (Katz, 2014).

While women’s access to the mosque is considered permissible under certain conditions by contemporary Muslims scholars such al-Ghazali, unsegregated prayer in which women do not occupy their traditionally assigned places at the back of or in an isolated area of the mosque is considered by the South African Forum of Muslim Theologians, for example, as innovations. The same is true of women serving as imams who lead prayers. These innovations according to the Forum are “taking place under the guise of Islam and in the name of progress [are] detrimental to Muslims” (Gamielien, 2004, p.136 in Hoel, 2013a, p. 31).

2.5 Homosexuality and Islam

“And one of his signs is that he created partnerships for you of yourself, so that you can find peace among them, and he has placed love and mercy between you: these are truly messages for reflective people.”
(Quran 30:21)

Another major “innovation” aimed at destroying the traditional religion according to many Muslim scholars is the access of queer Muslims to the religion. According to classical Muslim scholars, anal intercourse, sexual acts between men (liwat)²³ and tribadism (musahaqa) are considered major sins that come close to the greatest sin of worshiping others than God (shirk). In his list of major sins, Enormities (al-kaba’ir), the classical Muslim scholar Al-Dhahabi²⁴ introduces seventy sins out of which liwat and tribadism rank eleventh right after zina²⁵. Another list of major sins by the medieval Muslim scholar Ibn Hajar’s is more comprehensive than al-Dhahabi’s in that it incorporates hundreds of major sins divided into two parts. Similar to al-Dhahabi’s, Ibn-Hajar’s list includes sexual offences such as zina, liwat, and triabadism (Ali, 2016).

Such lists are based on the Quran’s alleged complete dismissal of homosexuality and Prophet Muhammad’s words against it. According to classical interpretations of the Quran, homosexuals are described as Lut’s people (qaum Lut), referring to the prophet Lut who, according to tradition, preached against homosexuality in the cities of Sodom and Gomorra. These cities were later destroyed after the men of his folk refused to stop engaging in sexual acts with men and repent their sins. The majority of Muslim scholars argue that the Quran’s condemnation of liwat is presented in Lut’s questions to his people: “How can you lust for males, of all creatures in the world, and leave those whom God has created for you as your mates? You are really going beyond all limits” (26:165-166).

2.5.1 Questioning the interpretations of the Quran

The majority of contemporary and classical Muslim scholars, and even some queer Muslims, agree that the Quran and the hadith are very clear in their condemnation of intercourse between two people of the same sex. This is not the case, however, for other queer Muslims who wish to reunite their homosexual identity (and practices) with their religion. It is also not the case for Islamic studies scholars who aim to promote tolerance and acceptance for same-sex relationships in Islam. To reach these goals, queer Muslims, with the help of queer and non-queer Islamic studies scholars, use different strategies. These include raising questions

²³ Liwat is a Muslim legal term for anal intercourse, similar to the English notion of sodomy. The new term enabled medieval jurists to associate Lut’s people with male anal intercourse. Luti, meanwhile refers to a sodomite. These terms do not appear in the Quran.

²⁴ Shams al-Din al-Dahabi is an Islamic law and history expert. In *Tarikh al Islam* (The history of Islam) he relays Islamic history up to 1300 AD.

²⁵ Zina is a term used in orthodox Islam for extramarital and premarital sex for which there is a punishment of either stoning to death or up to a hundred whip lashes.

about the validity of the traditional interpretations of Quran and the authenticity of hadith (Ali, 2016).

In their interpretations of the Lut story, Muhsin Hendricks (2010) and Scott Siraj al-Haqq Kugle (2010) agree that it is incorrect to reduce the “spiritual corruption” (Ali, 2016, p. 104) of Lut’s folk to merely sexual transgression by singling out male-to-male penetration as the only reason for the divine destruction of Lut’s folk. Hendricks (2010) and Kugle (2010) assert that Lut’s story should be read in all its details. They argue that Lut’s people behaved objectionably not because they sought consensual same-sex intercourse. Rather, because Lut’s people rejected his prophethood and aimed at stopping Lut from welcoming strangers and providing them protection, to the extent of trying to force the male strangers into sexual acts with them. Thus, forced same-sex acts were only one of the sins that constituted the infidelity of Lut’s folk. Other sins included robbery and murder. According to Kugle (2003, p.206), “It is not clear that Lut was sent as a Prophet solely (or even primarily) to declare anal sex between men to be forbidden. It is not clear from the Qur’anic text that Lut’s entire prophetic message revolves around sex acts”.

Unlike the story of Lut, which is considered by the majority of Muslims as a clear divine order denouncing same-sex sexual acts, intercourse between women is vaguely mentioned in the Quran. There is no agreement as to whether the Quran even mentions sexual acts between women. According to Kecia Ali (2016, p. 102), intercourse between two women “might or might not be the subject of surah 4, verse 15”. Surah 4, verse 5 of the Quran says “Those who commit fahsha of your women - bring against them four [witnesses] from among you. And if they testify, confine the guilty women to houses until death takes them or Allah ordains for them [another] way.” In this verse, it is unclear which sin the word fahsha refers to. In Arabic, the word “fahsha” does not solely refer to same-sex sexual acts. In fact, the word could refer to a range of impermissible sexual acts (Habib, 2008). Fahsha could mean “obscene sexual behaviour and could refer to bestiality, debauchery, orgy-like behaviours, or possibly, but certainly not exclusively, homosexual activity” (Habib, 2008, p. 33). The next verse of the Quran (4:16) also states that “If two men are guilty of fahsha, dishonor them both. But if they repent and correct themselves, leave them alone. Indeed, Allah is ever Accepting of repentance and Merciful.” Reading the two verses together, it becomes unreasonable to corroborate the claim that this verse refers to homosexual activity at all. In addition, claiming that the two verses are about homosexuality raises questions about divine justice in that if fahsha means same-sex intercourse, then how can one justify that men and

women are punished differently and unequally. This is unlike the case of zina in which both a woman and a man guilty of premarital intercourse are punished with flogging a hundred times.

2.5.2 Questioning the authenticity of hadith

The denunciation of intercourse between males is more clearly presented in hadith than in the Quran. Unlike the Quran, however, the validation of hadith is generally questionable. This is because in the earliest period of Islam, Muslims practiced the religion without referring back to hadith. (Kugle, 2010). This was on account of the fact it was controversial to write hadith down because Muhammad forbade the writing down of reports of what he said or did in his everyday life. As such, he commanded Muslims to discard the reports written in his lifetime for fear that they might be fabricated or regarded as superior to the Quran (Hendricks, 2010). As the Islamic state grew and became an extensive empire, it required a system of regulations. This prompted the recollection of hadith. However, since these reports were collected through people not even born during Muhammad's lifetime, it raises significant questions "about not only their validity but also the science of the collection of hadith" (Hendricks, 2010, p. 41). After reviewing hadith related to homosexuality, Kugle (2008, p.220) concluded that "the hadith that address the issue of punishing men for having anal sex are not linked to any specific case or event in the Prophet's life." In addition, there is no evidence, in the most reliable collections of hadith, namely, Sahih Muslim and Sahih al-Bukhari, that same-sex acts are to be punished like zina, or that a person was punished for engaging in homosexual acts. Moreover, Kugle's review of hadith showed that the majority of hadith condemning homosexuality have either weak or forged chains of transmission (Kugle, 2008). For instance, according to Kugle (2008, p.221), the two hadith which are widely used to condemn homosexuality are "Whomever you find doing the act of the people of Lut, kill the active and the passive participant" and "the one practicing the act of the people of Lut, stone the one on top and the one of the bottom, stone them both together." These were both refused by Muslim jurists, such as al-Jassas since one of the transmitters of the first hadith, Amr ibn Abi Amr, and one of the transmitters of the second hadith, Asim ibn Amr, are considered unreliable (Kugle, 2008).

There are also historical incidences suggesting that a number of hadith were fabricated. For example, after the death of Muhammad, Abu Bakr²⁶ and the Companions²⁷ consulted each other to decide the punishment of a man who engaged in a same-sex sexual act. The fact that they were not sure of which punishment they should administer even though they were close to the Prophet emphasizes how Muhammad never punished any person for same-sex activity, nor classified homosexuality as a crime (Kugle, 2018).

As in the Quran, female homosexuality is rarely mentioned in hadith. According to Hendricks (2010, p. 43) this can be attributed to “patriarchal perceptions of masculinity and femininity, with the latter being inferior to the former”. While female homosexuality is deemed unserious and unimportant since there is no penile penetration involved in the intercourse between two women, male homosexuality is considered more serious. As such it attracts more attention and condemnation in Islamic law, since it “directly impacts on a man’s masculinity” (Hendricks, 2010, p. 43). This is especially true of the penetrated man, who in such a position is reduced to the position of a woman in a sexual relationship. However, there is only one hadith in al-Tabarani²⁸ reporting that Muhammad may have said that a sexual relation between women is deemed adultery. Similar to the majority of hadith addressing male homosexuality, this hadith is not reliable (Hendricks, 2010).

The Quran verses and hadith that some claim to condemn homosexuality are not the only obstacles in the way of Muslims who seek to engage in same-sex relationships that “break conventional Islamic rules but aspire to the highest standards of Muslims ethics, as they understand them” (Ali, 2016, p. 99). Their wish is confronted by “vital theological and juridical principles” (Ali, 2016, p. 99) that are different from those forbidding same-sex acts.

The first of the two principles is that Muslims should not show that their or another person’s behaviour contradicts with Islam. The second principle is that a Muslim who denies the rules of God is committing a greater sin than rejecting these rules. These two principles complicate the discussion of homosexuality in a Muslim context. They render “the adherence to the ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ status quo” (Ali, 2016, p. 99) more preferable to Muslims, who are not ready to confront their close Muslim circles and who willingly choose to not disclose their sexual identity, or who do not want to show their support for Muslim same-sex relationships.

²⁶ Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (born after 570-634 AD) is the first leader of Muslims (caliph) after Muhammad’s death.

²⁷ Companions (sahaba) refer to followers personally acquainted with Muhammad, who as such are accredited status as reliable sources of hadith.

²⁸ Abu al-Kassim al-Tabarani (873-971 AD). His most famous works in the field of hadith are *al-Mu’djam al-kabir*, *al-Mu’djam al-awsat*, and *al-Mu’djam al-saghir*.

This enables them to avoid the potential hypocrisy of approving a relationship that contradicts basic Muslim ethics and teachings (Ali, 2016).

2.5.3 Queer Muslims' access to the mosque

Hostility in traditional Islam towards homosexuality and queerness, as well as the dominant discourse that perceives queer Muslims as “contaminated by Western culture, and in turn pollutes his/ her own culture through such sexual association” (Yip & Khalid, 2010, p. 82) makes it difficult for queer Muslims to easily and peacefully access the traditional mosque. They cannot do so without leaving their sexual identity at the door and concealing any bodily traits and demeanour which suggest queerness or difference from the dominant bodily traits and behaviour. This is challenging for Muslims who do not want to conform to the hegemonic heterosexual masculinity and femininity, and who do not want to return to the metaphorical closet every time they are in the mosque. Therefore, a number of queer Muslims hold negative feelings towards traditional mosques (Yip & Khalid, 2010).

In a series of interviews conducted by Amna Khalid (Yip & Khalid, 2010) with queer Muslims in the UK and North America, most of the participants “rejected the mosques as a spiritual space” and prefer not to frequent them (Yip & Khalid, 2010, p. 101). This is because they consider the traditional mosque an oppressive space where they are scrutinized, under surveillance, and judged by other members if they do not conform to “a certain type of personhood and public performance” (Yip & Khalid, 2010, p. 101). According to Yip and Khalid (2010, p. 101) the mosque was seen by some participants as “a theatre where a circus of rituals occurred, but devoid of soul”.

This leaves many queer and the heterosexual Muslims who support them with three options: living discretely as a queer or liberal Muslim, which some queer or/and liberal Muslims do not mind, giving up religion, or fighting for the right to live openly as queer or/and liberal Muslims. The fight for such rights needs to be based on a new understanding of Islam that is more open and more tolerant and accepting, such as the liberal understanding of Islam. It also requires a space where such an understanding can be practiced. In the next section, I will discuss the two final themes of this chapter, namely, liberal Islam and liberal mosques.

2.6 Liberal Muslims and Islam

According to Annalisa Frisina (2012, p. 702) liberal Muslims are those who believe that “there is no clash between Islam and liberalism: individual freedom, democracy, cultural and religious pluralism, human rights, and gender equality are all sharable values”.

Liberal Muslims think that religious knowledge is not confined to ulema²⁹, but rather, every Muslim has the right to read and interpret the Quran for themselves. Thus, on the one hand, they challenge Taqlid³⁰ which became “anathema to liberals of the early twentieth century, as it symbolized the popular influence of the liberals’ traditionalist opponents” (Kurzman, 1998, p. 8) On the other hand, they support the reopening of the gates of ijtihad³¹ to understand the religion in a way that is consistent with the values of equality and freedom. As such, they use “the tools of modern social sciences and study the Quran through historical and literary analysis” (Frisina, 2012, p 702). They also investigate and question hadith, oppose a literalist understanding of the Quran, and promote “an interpretation of the spirit of the text” (Frisina, 2012, p. 702). Moreover, they assert that Islamic Sharia is “the product of human interpretations” (Frisina, 2012, p.702). They also think that religious interpretations should not be fixed, but rather may develop over time according to various social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. In addition, Sharia should not be the source of legislation. According to (Frisina, 2012, p. 702) “The coercive enforcement of Shari’a by the state betrays the Qur’an’s insistence on voluntary acceptance of Islam”.

According to Frisina (2012, p. 703) the main criticism directed at liberal Muslims concerns their lack of “enlarging their audience (going outside academic circles) and engaging in dialogue with people ‘inside the mosques’”. This alleged shortcoming and sometimes tacit engagement with a broader audience in Muslim public spaces can be understood in the light of the oppressive, violent, and in some cases deadly, responses to their ideas which threaten the authority of traditional Islamic leaders and systems. Many of the liberal Muslim thinkers,

²⁹ Ulema are those whose main job is as protectors, transmitters and interpreters of Islamic religious doctrine and law.

³⁰ Taqlid is the imitation of the interpretations and decisions by Muslim jurists about issues facing Muslims.

³¹ Ijtihad refers to independent personal reasoning and thinking.

such as Mahmoud Mohamed Taha³², Subhi al-Salih³³, and Farag Fuda³⁴ were victims of murderous attacks. Other Muslim liberals, such as Muhammad Shahrour³⁵, have had their work banned in the majority of the Muslim world. While still others such as Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid³⁶ were forced to live in exile (Frisina, 2012).

Even though a number of liberal Muslims were victims of violence varying from mental oppression to murder, this did not stop other liberal Muslims from pursuing their liberal agenda of western roots. This is not to say that liberal Muslims do not exist in Muslim countries, of course they do, but, unfortunately, they are caught between the accusations of blasphemy such as Islam Behiri³⁷ and the public hostility against the introduction of new interpretations of Islam that challenge the patriarchal values dominating the Muslim world. In more recent years, however, the internet and social media have provided liberal Muslims with platforms to anonymous, and therefore safely, introduce and discuss their ideas with others. In addition, it has become extremely difficult to ban the works of earlier and present liberal Muslims given the ease of uploading and downloading their works on the internet.

2.7 Liberal mosques

“There is no liberation without action” (Safi, 2003, p. 48)

The challenge by liberal Muslims of traditional authorities is not limited to the circulation of old and new articles, debates, and video clips on liberal Islam. To promote their liberal Islamic ideas by which all people are equal regardless of sex, sexuality, race, religion,

³²Mahmoud Mohamed Taha (Sudan, ca.1910-1985) was arrested and accused of heresy for inciting chaos in Sudan by handing out pamphlets in opposition to sharia law of the Neimiri regime in Sudan.

³³Subhi al-Salih (Lebanon, died 1986), was the vice president of the Council of Islamic Jurisprudence, as well as part of a Muslim-Christian panel that promoted peace during the Lebanese civil war. He was likely murdered for his political and religious stances.

³⁴ Farag Fuda (Egypt, 1945-1992) was a liberal politician and activist who challenged political Islam and was assassinated following accusations of blasphemy by a committee of ulema at al-Azhar.

³⁵ Muhammad Shahrour (Syria, 1938) is an engineer and exegete who questioned traditional Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir), hadith, and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). Some of his works were banned in Egypt Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

³⁶ Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid (Egypt, 1943-2010) was an Islamic theologian who wrote the *Critique of Islamic Discourse* (1995) and came afoul of Islamic fundamentalists, leading an appeals court to divorce Abu Zayd and his wife, forcing them into exile to the Netherlands, where he came to teach at Leiden University.

³⁷ Islam Behiri (Egypt, 1974) is an Egyptian Muslim author, as well as the host of *With Islam on Al-Kahera Wel Nas*. After his program was used to call for Islam reform, Al Kahera suspended his show and he was arrested and charged of blasphemy. Behiri was sentenced to five years in prison which were reduced to one year after appeals.

nationality, and so on, liberal Muslims, formed spaces, physical and cyber, in order to build local and international communities of Muslims sharing the same liberal values, and to discuss, and share knowledge and ideas about the religion through different events and gatherings. A number of liberal Muslims took the further step of establishing inclusive mosques to which all people, meaning men, women, elderly, juniors, heterosexual, homosexual, are welcomed to pray within one place,

The phenomenon of the liberal or inclusive mosque is a recent one. There are very few around the world (some of them have secret locations). Liberal mosques aim to introduce liberal Islam into Muslim communities. They aim to change Islam from within, specifically from within the mosque, which reflects the social values of the current Muslim society outside its walls. The scarcity of liberal mosques is due to the fact that they are, like Muslim liberal thinkers, under attack, whether verbally or physically. This is often at the hands of traditionalists who oppose their existence and consider it a challenge to the divine order and words. To traditional Muslims, liberal mosques are considered not only a threat to their control and authority over Islam, but also pose a challenge to the traditionalist understandings of Islamic rituals and teachings, which are based on the patriarchal social order that sustains them.

In 2014 in Wynberg, a Cape Town suburb, a liberal inclusive mosque, The Open Mosque, opened its doors. The Islamic theologian, Taj Hargey, established the Open Mosque to fight radicalism (Findlay, 2014) and to provide a “spiritual home” (The Open Mosque, n.d.) where Muslims, regardless of sex, sexuality, gender, or race, could gather in one place to freely worship God. The mosque’s objective is to “restore Quranic primacy by resisting bland ritualism and promoting a rational religion that is rooted in and relevant to 21st century South Africa” (The Open Mosque, n.d.). As such, the mosque welcomes women to pray in the same prayer hall as men, lead prayers, and take part in the mosque’s governance. The open mosque is not sectarian, in that, it is not associated with a specific madhab³⁸ or ideology, and both believers and non-believers are welcome. The opening of the mosque stirred great controversy. Protesters gathered outside on its opening day to demand that the mosque be closed permanently. The second-deputy president of The Muslim Judicial Council, Riad Fataar, told a local radio station, The Voice of the Cape, that the council did not consider the

³⁸ Madhab is a school of figh thought (Islamic jurisprudence) which includes Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali.

Open Mosque “a proper place of prayer” and that they couldn’t “call it a mosque” (Findlay, 2014). In addition, the founder, Taj Hargey said that he received many death threats (Findlay, 2014). Even the front of the mosque was attacked by firebombs, but this did not result in any casualties or force the mosque to close its doors (Eyewitness News, 2014).

Another inclusive mosque is The Unity Mosque which opened its doors in 2009 at a secret location in Toronto, Canada. The mosque was founded by lawyer, public speaker and social commentator El-Farouk Khaki, his husband, performer, writer, and host Troy Jackson, and professor of religion at the University of Toronto Laury Silvers³⁹. According to the mosque’s webpage, it is “a gender-equal, LGBTQI2S affirming, mosque, that is welcoming of everyone regardless of sexual orientation, gender, sexual identity, or faith background” (El-tawhid juma circle, n.d.). The founders say that their intention is to create a prayer space where everyone is equal in theory and practice regardless of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, or religion. The members of The Unity mosque meet every Friday for the congregational prayer at which men and women take turns calling for prayer, leading the prayer, and delivering the sermon. The prayer and the gatherings can also be joined online by anyone. Additionally, the rules of the mosque state that there is no specific dress for the space, such that women are allowed to pray without covering their hair. Men and women may also stand next to, behind, or in front of each other, and everybody is allowed to participate in the discussions (El-tawhid juma circle, n.d.).

The location of the mosque is kept secret for safety and privacy reasons as some members were subject to threats and harassment, while others were outed to their families as homosexuals or as members of the Unity Mosque, which resulted in familial or societal rejection (Abdel-Nabi, 2018). Ultimately, mosques such as the Open Mosque and the Unity Mosque have paved the way for other liberal Muslims to establish additional mosques that aim to provide a space where all Muslims are treated equally. One of these mosques is Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque.

³⁹ In 2015, Laury Silvers left The Unity Mosque to pursue other academic and spiritual interests.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis employs Kim Knott's engagement of spatial theory and the concept of sacred space. This section will first provide a general explanation of Kim Knott's spatial analysis. It will then discuss in greater detail each element of her analysis that is relevant to this work. Specifically, it will address the body as a source of space, dimensions of space: physical, social, and mental, and properties of space: configuration, extension, simultaneity, and power. Next, this section will discuss how even though sacred space stands out from that of ordinary space by the people who believe in and produce its sacredness through rituals, it still shares the same features as ordinary space by having a fundamental role in the production, reproduction, and elimination of its sacredness. It is comprised of social relations which render it a site of a power struggle. This approach will offer readers a comprehensive understanding of space as something that is not fixed, but rather dynamic, social, and infused with power and resistance.

By analysing the space of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque through the lens of Knott's spatial analysis and the concept of sacred space, I attempt to make readers aware of how the space of Ibn Rushd is not a fixed backdrop against which the members of the mosque pursue different activities, but rather a dynamic multidimensional space with different properties, and that is filled with power and resistance. Also, awareness of the different features of ordinary space and sacred space will help readers understand how the spatial features or spatiality of Ibn Rushd-Goethe are used to reconfigure, resist, and challenge current gender inequality and queer hostility in traditional mosques.

3.1 The spatial analysis

I experienced different emotions every time I visited Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque. Every step I took inside, every observation I made, and every conversation with members left me with a new wave of sentiments. This rollercoaster of emotions when visiting a certain place can prove scary if one thinks of the place as just a space of emptiness where a number of people sharing the same ideology meet. Fortunately, I did not have to feel scared as to why my feelings fluctuated between excitement, reservation, curiosity, surprise, peacefulness, happiness, sadness, and hope each time I set foot in Ibn Rushd mosque.

Before embarking on my fieldwork, I was aware that the space of a mosque is more than just a background against which events like Friday prayer and weekly gathering take place. One of the sources that enlightened me regarding the complexity and depth of space is the writings of Kim Knott, Professor of Religious and Secular Studies at Lancaster University.

Based on her readings of the socio-spatial theories of Lefebvre, Foucault, de Certeau and the geographer, Doreen Massey, Knott developed a spatial analysis. She describes this as consisting of “a series of steps for analyzing a place, object, body or group (hereafter, ‘a place’)—and the location of religion therein—by means of its spatial attributes” which constitute “an aide mémoire for spatially interrogating a place in all its complexity” (Knott, 2011, p. 496). Knott’s analysis is regarded as powerful because it “reunites disparate disciplines and fields in a spatial examination which attempts to take seriously issues of embodiment and cognition, representation, production and reproduction, simultaneity, power, and time and history as they inform space” (Knott, 2005, p. 177).

Knott’s theory is also regarded as flexible because it can be utilized to investigate any object and place, and not only to locate religion in secular spaces—the primary reason Knott developed the analysis. According to Knott (Knott, 2011, p. 498) although this analysis “was developed with religion in mind, religion is not intrinsic to it. Rather it is a systematic analytical tool for examining bounded spaces and locating things within them”. In addition, it is not always required nor necessary to apply all the elements of it in every case as “Interesting results may be yielded by pursuing an analysis based solely on the dimensions of space, or its properties, or dynamics” (Knott, 2005, p. 177).

Inspired by Knott’s powerful spatial analysis and its flexible application, I investigate the space of Ibn Rushd-mosque using three of the five elements of Knott’s spatial analysis. Using the first element of the analysis, the body as the source of “space,” I will investigate how the bodies of the members and visitors of the mosque produce and influence the space of the mosque. Next, I will use the second element, dimensions of space, to show that the space of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque is not only physical, but rather is multidimensional because of its physical, social, and mental components. Lastly, I will use the third element of Knott’s analysis, properties of space, to discuss how the space of the mosque encompasses its different dimensions. This will show that the mosque space has a history and demonstrate that the mosque is connected with other similar spaces and will help to explore how power relations play out in the mosque.

Using Knott's method to explore the Ibn Rushd space, I hope I can show the reader that the mosque space is not a container in which people happen to find themselves, or an inanimate background against which people move and act in their everyday lives. The space of the mosque is, rather, dynamic, changing and produced and reproduced of many physical, social, mental, historical, relational elements, and power relations. Before delving more deeply into an exploration of the mosque using Knott's spatial method elements, however, it is helpful to first explain each element I am going to use from her spatial analysis in greater detail.

3.2 The body as the source of "space"

In her spatial analysis, Kim Knott (2005, 2007) emphasizes the significant role that our bodies play in producing, reproducing and altering a space. According to Knott (2005, p.157), our bodies fundamentally affect how we experience and reproduce space and this is because they allow us "to experience and conceptualise the relationships between things, places, persons (as well as regions), and to identify differences".

Beyond this, Knott and Myfanwy Franks (2007) remind us of the importance of not only the different elements of a body, such as shape, sexuality, gender, sex, and organization, but also that "the relationship between organizations and bodies works the other way too" (Knott & Franks, 2007, p.227). This is the case in the sense that a body, as Henri Lefebvre described, serves as a "point of departure and as destination" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.194).

This point is recognized by Elisabeth Grosz who argues that bodies not only shape the world, but they are also shaped by it. In her book *Volatile Bodies*, Grosz (1994) acknowledges that bodies are not merely biological, fixed, and passive objects operating in a certain space. Instead, Grosz (1994, p. XI) believes bodies are "culturally, sexually, racially specific, the mobile and changeable terms of cultural production". As such, we must understand bodies as historical, cultural and as "the products, the direct effects, of the very social constitution of nature" (Grosz, 1994, p. X). Grosz (1994, p. XI) adds that bodies are not "inert; they function interactively and productively. They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable". Knott (2005, p.158) concurs with Grosz when she asserts that "the body is at times the place where a cultural order plays itself out; it may become a representation of that order and will certainly be conditioned and disciplined by it".

By stating that bodies not only reflect culture, but are also subject to cultural limitations, Knott emphasizes that bodies are "subject to strategies of coercion and discipline" (Knott and

Franks, 2007, p.227). This point is stressed further by Michel Foucault who wrote about “docile bodies” in his book *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the Prison*⁴⁰ (1995). Foucault (1995, p.138) argues that the body is a site of “policy of coercions” which control “its elements, its gestures, its behaviour,” as well as a site of disciplinary practices which “dissociates power from the body”. As such, the human body enters a “machinery of power that explores it, breaks down and rearranges it” (Foucault, 1995, p.138). This turns it into a “docile” body which can be “subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, 1995, p.136). This again does not mean that our bodies are passive. They are “the object, target, and instrument of power, the field of greatest investment for power’s operations” (Grosz, 1994, p. 146), and they are also the field on which resistance is worked out. According to Grosz (1994, p. xi), bodies have the ability to “always extend the frameworks which attempt to contain them”, and to “seep beyond their domains of control”.

3.3 Dimensions of space

Moving beyond the body as an essential element for our experience of space and the power relations and resistance played out in the space itself, I continue to analyse “space” by considering its various dimensions, properties, and aspects.

According to Knott (2014) space is not a passive container in which we happen to exist, nor is it a background against which our activities play out. It is “more than the theatre, the disinterested stage or setting, of action” (Lefebvre, 1991, p.210). Rather, any space is multidimensional. It is the sum of its physical and material features, the people who occupy it and use it, as well as the social relations they produce, and the controversies, ideologies and discourses associated with it.

The multidimensional nature of space reflected in its tendency to gather physical, social, and mental “fields” (Lefebvre, 1991, p.11) is actually the first of four “properties of space” – configuration – that form the next element in Knott’s spatial analysis.

3.4 The properties of space

As previously noted, configuration refers to a space’s capacity to enclose different elements together (Knott & Franks, 2007). In other words, a space is formed of “the sum of smaller

⁴⁰ *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the Prison* (Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison) was originally published in 1975.

units - objects, relationships and representations” (Knott & Franks, 2007, p.227). The second and third properties of space which express its dynamism are extension and simultaneity. Extension and simultaneity represent the diachronic and synchronic features of space (Knott & Franks, 2007).

In greater detail, extension refers to how a space is not only what it is in the present. A space also has a past in terms of its earlier forms and the events it once hosted. According to Knott (2009, p.156), extension conveys “the sense of time flowing through space as well as the way in which places contain within them the traces of earlier times and regimes.” This property of space is stressed by Michel de Certeau who describes a place as ‘palimpsest’ that “the revolutions of history, economic mutations, demographic mixtures lie in layers within it, and remain there, hidden in customs, rites, and spatial practices” (de Certeau, 1984, cited in Knott & Franks, 2007, p.227).

The third property of space simultaneously means that “multiple spaces/places exist within it, overlapping and interconnected” (Knott, 2014, p. 127). The connection between different spaces that are of the same type and those which are different may be an “active social one or a passive categorical one” (Knott & Franks, 2007, p.228). To illustrate this point Knott and Franks (2007) offer the example of pharmacies in the UK and beyond. They explain that a pharmacy is not the only one in the world, but that it connects with other pharmacies in the UK and abroad. Some of these pharmacies may share similar dimensions of space, namely, physical, social, and mental, while others do not.

3.4.1 Power

Spaces of all types are generated and transformed by power, the fourth of the spatial properties. According to Knott, the idea of space as a field for a power struggle in which people battle to express themselves and their ways of thinking is central to the works of many authors, such as Lefebvre, Massey and Foucault.

In her article Politics and Space/Time, Doreen Massey (1991, p. 81) asserts that “space is not a ‘flat’ surface” because “the social relations which create it are themselves dynamic by their very nature.” Therefore, “as a result of the fact that it is conceptualized as created out of social relations, space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation”.

In his book *The Survival of Capitalism*⁴¹ (1976), Lefebvre stresses that power pervades space. He notes that “power is everywhere; it is omnipresent, assigned to Being. It is everywhere in space. It is in everyday discourse and commonplace notions, as well as in police batons and armoured cars. It is in objet d’art as well as in missiles” (Lefebvre, 1976, p. 86).

For Foucault, meanwhile, power is omnipresent. It is “always already there,” such that one is never “outside” it” (Foucault, 1980e, cited in Lynch, 2014, p. 23). As such, Foucault does not believe that power is owned by individuals or groups at the top of a hierarchy. Rather, it is the overlapping and intertwined relations between diverse groups in different areas and levels of society which change with circumstances and time. Foucault also suggests that power is not always negative, meaning that its aim is not only to oppress and control people, but rather it is also productive. By productive Foucault means that power produces “resistance to itself; it produces what we are and what we can do; and it produces how we see ourselves and the world” (Danaher, et al., 2000, p. xiv). According to Foucault “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault, 1990a, cited in Lynch, 2014, p. 32). Lefebvre similarly suggests that sometimes, through the exclusion and inclusion of others, a group of people may use a certain space to exercise power in order to preserve the dominant order. In other cases, a group may use space to resist and change it through the negotiations and abolitions of a space’s current boundaries (Knott, 2014).

Power is not only omnipresent, productive, and capable of resistance, but it also is strongly linked with knowledge. According to Grosz (1994, p.148) “for Foucault, knowledge is a major instrument and technique of power; knowledge is made possible and functions only through its alignments with regimes of power; and conversely, power in its turn is transformed, realigned, shifted with transformations in the order and functioning of knowledges”.

Lefebvre also noted the knowledge and power connection in his understanding of space. In his book *Production of Space*⁴², Lefebvre (1991, p. 416-417) argues that:

It is in space, on a worldwide scale, that each idea of ‘value’ acquires or loses its distinctiveness through confrontation with the other values and ideas that it encounters there. Moreover – and more importantly – groups, classes or fractions of classes cannot

⁴¹ *The Survival of Capitalism* (*La Survie du Capitalisme*) was originally published in 1973.

⁴² *Production of Space* (*La Production de l’Espace*) was originally published in 1974.

constitute themselves, or recognise one another, as ‘subjects’ unless they generate (or produce) a space. Ideas, representations or values which do not succeed in making their mark on space, and thus generating (or producing) an appropriate morphology, will lose all pith and become mere signs, resolve themselves into abstract descriptions, or mutate into fantasies.

Analysing space with these features in mind, it becomes clear that it is neither static nor limited in its properties, but rather that space is repeatedly regenerated and reproduced whether materially, socially or discursively.

3.6 Sacred space

For some people, myself once among them, a sacred space is perceived as different in that it is protected by God from worldly wicked forces. As I became more aware of the different struggles taking place within sacred spaces such as the mosque, however, I came to realize that a sacred space is like any other ordinary space. It is not protected by God nor is it immune to contestations, but rather it is produced and sacralised by its members who at some point turn it into a site of struggle over its ownership. My view of sacred space is confirmed by David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal (1995, p. 9). They argue that a sacred space can be identified as a “ritual space” which is “set apart or carved out of an “ordinary” environment to provide an arena for the performances of controlled “extraordinary” patterns of action” or “formalized symbolic performances”. Devotees believe that a sacred space is a site with extraordinary spiritual attributes that make one closer to the divine than from anywhere else, and in which believers can contemplate and celebrate their faith (Rogers, et al., 2013). Sacred spaces do not emerge out of air, rather, they are the products of people’s “imagination, memories, actions, and speech.” As such, they are materially produced and reproduced” (Knott, 2014, p.98). They are “the outcome of the human activity of sacralisation” (Knott, 2014, p. 99) which includes “ritual acts” such as “worship, sacrifice, prayer, meditation, pilgrimage, and ceremonials” (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995, p.10). These are not “an expression of or a response to the “sacred,” but rather “something or someone is made sacred by ritual” according to Jonathan Z. Smith (1987, p. 105). Equally, “the demarcation of a set-apart, special place gives ritual acts their very character as a type of highly charged symbolic performance” (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995, p.10).

Similar to Knott, Chidester and Linenthal (1995, p. 10) note that the body plays a fundamental role in the production, reproduction, and elimination of the sacredness of a

space. On the one hand, “spatial practices – the “techniques of the body,” the formalized “gestures of approach,” and the location and direction of embodied movement – all contribute towards producing the distinctive quality and character of sacred space”. On the other hand, the body can desecrate a sacred space through its excretions such as blood and urine. As such, the production of sacred space has long been linked in religious history to rules concerning its purity that is associated with rituals controlling bodily excretions (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995). Rituals can prove effective in controlling the purity of a sacred space with regards to bodily excretions, but they are less efficient in protecting the sacred space from what Chidester and Linenthal (1995, p.17) called “profane forces,” such as entrepreneurial, social, political, and economic forces. This shows that a sacred space is not an isolated island, but rather, it is a reflection of the larger social reality. This is intricately connected with the point that Lefebvre, Knott, and Foucault made about space as a field of struggle filled with power relations and resistance.

In this manner, sacred spaces are much like ordinary spaces. They are places where various power relations play out through assertion, negotiation or otherwise. According to (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995, p. 15) “sacred space is inevitably contested space, a site of negotiated contests over legitimate ownership of sacred symbols” since it is not merely “discovered, or founded, or constructed; it is claimed, owned, and operated by people advancing specific interests”. It is also open to “unlimited claims and counter claims on its significance” (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995, p. 18) which Chidester and Linenthal described as strategies of contestation; namely, appropriation, exclusion, inversion, and hybridisation.

According to Chidester and Linenthal (1995, p. 19) Appropriation and exclusion are two strategies often used to “dominate sacred spaces by advancing interests of power or purity”. Strategies of appropriation involve reinforcing power by claiming legitimate genuine ownership of the sacred space. Strategies of exclusion often reinforce the claims to the legitimate genuine ownership in the name of protecting the ownership and the purity of the contested space. As such, “a space is sacred if it is at risk of being stolen, sacred if it can be defiled” (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995, p. 19). The other two strategies, inversion and hybridization, are employed to resist power relations dominating the space. On the one hand, strategies of inversion “reverse prevailing spatial orientation – the high becomes low, the inside becomes outside, the peripheral becomes central” (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995, p. 19). On the other hand, hybridization attempts to combine or overcome traditional spatial relations, and as such offers the chance that the very parameters of the system itself may shift.

In my analysis of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque, I will use the different elements of Knott's spatial analysis to investigate how the spatial features or spatiality of Ibn Rushd-Goethe is used to reconfigure and/or challenge current gender inequality and queer hostility in traditional mosques. As such, I will investigate the space of Ibn Rushd as a space that is both shaped by and which shapes the bodies of its members, as a dynamic physical, social, and mental space. As such, it is able to simultaneously possess elements with different meanings, and serve as a space that is not isolated, but which retains past and varied connections with similar and different spaces, and which is also filled with power relations. I will also use the concept of sacred space to show that even though the space of Ibn Rushd is considered sacred by its members, it shares the same features as ordinary space, in that the body plays a role in producing and eliminating its sacredness. The space is also social and constituted of discussions and controversies, as well as serves as a field of contestation strategies, such as conversion and hybridization.

Chapter 4: Methodology and methods

This chapter will offer an account of the methodology and methods employed in this thesis. Influenced by feminist methodology, I begin by sharing some notes from the field. Further inspired by feminist research and the notion of objectivity, I next open myself up to the readers and disclose the reasons behind the emotional development in the chosen quotes. My aim is to make the readers aware that research is a two-way process. The researcher is not an emotionless human being simply influenced by everything around her, but rather, she can be the object of research and research participants may also influence her. Subsequently, I provide an account of the feminist standpoint epistemology that informed my decision to research from the standpoint of a community at the margins of dominant traditional Islam and mosques. In this case, this was the community of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque. I next explain how I employed the feminist standpoint in the case of the Ibn Rushd mosque. I note how this reminded me that I am not in any way in a higher position than that of the community of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque. It also showed me that even though the Ibn Rushd community shares in a liberal Muslim ideology and faces similar degrees of oppression by traditionalist Muslims, they are not identical to one another. They differ in their life experiences, in their practice of liberal Islam, and in their history with traditional Islam. However, this does not mean that the experience of one member of the community is more valuable than that of any other, but rather, the experience of every member of the community of Ibn Rushd is valuable as a starting point of my research. Next, I give an account of my choice of qualitative methods I used in the research, and I explain the different methods employed. These include fieldwork and interviews with research participants. I then provide information about interview questions and length, observations, field notes, and choice of research participants. This is followed by an explanation of the process behind my data analysis. Finally, I give an account of ethical considerations in this research.

4.1 Feminist research and objectivity

Oslo, 06.09.2018

The application was sent to NSD today. I have mixed feelings. For the first time, I feel I'm "above" Islam. I'm the one who's gonna observe its sins and deeds, and not the other way around. It makes me feel stronger knowing I'm the one who will judge this time, not Allah.

But, am I really strong while I still get a sturdy feeling of guilt deep down in my soul for

leaving Islam every time something gets wrong in my life? It hurts. I hope I can finally reach a closure with this religion and get over this painful feeling of guilt.

Berlin, 04.01.2019

I'm attending the Friday prayer in Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque for the first time. It's been years since I attended a Friday prayer. I'm sitting behind the men and women who are getting ready to pray. A woman stepped to the middle and started to chant the azzan; I feel touched inside. She has a beautiful "heavenly" voice. I feel so touched and empowered that I'm trying hard to keep my tears from falling.

Berlin, 13.01.2019

Today I'm paying my last visit to the mosque, for the now. I don't like goodbyes. I'm gonna miss these people. I'm gonna miss the Sundry brunch and the Friday prayer. I'm gonna miss the mosque.

As someone who believed that "pithing of the frog"⁴³ without showing any compassion is "a rite of passage separating the scientists from the non-scientists, or those who have what it takes from those who do not" as it was sarcastically described by Zuleya Tang Halpin (1989, p.286), it was unimaginable for me to include such a deep account of my feelings and motives in my first major research project. Therefore, when I reflect back on these lines from my project diary, I cannot help but feel appreciation for feminist research that enabled me to approach the field as a human being, with feelings and thoughts, and not simply as an emotionless machine separated from its surroundings.

My journey into the field was not only for academic reasons. I wanted to know how the Muslim community of Ibn Rushd-Goethe uses the space of the mosque to negotiate and challenge the traditional understandings of gender and sexuality in Islam. Simultaneously, I was looking for personal solace and closure with a religion that I have always believed to be the main reason behind the many painful discriminations I have endured.

I could not have disclosed this personal and emotional side of the journey in an academic paper such as this without inspiration from the feminist notion of objectivity. This notion

⁴³ This is a procedure in advanced anatomy classes involving the insertion of a sharp object into a frog's mouth to sever the spinal cord and then remove the brain with the result that the frog supposedly is inured to pain.

contradicts with its positivist counterpart that draws a line between the self and the other, as well as between intellect and emotions, in a manner that places the researcher on an elevated plane from those she studies. To that end, emotions, beliefs, values, morals, and so on, should be concealed so that the research yields neutral, unbiased outcomes (Halpin, 1989).

Conversely, objectivity in feminist research, as Donna Haraway (1988) eloquently stated, means “situated knowledge” in that the nature of knowledge and truth is “partial, situated, subjective, power imbued, and relational” (Hesse-Biber, et al., 2004, p. 13) and the “dispassionate investigator” is actually a myth (Jaggar, 1989, p. 163).

We, as researchers, are not separated from the exploration process and we impact the knowledge we produce in multiple ways. This happens from bringing our beliefs, traditions, morals, and more into our projects (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004). As such, it is not realistic to ignore how our subjectivity exists and influences the analysis of our projects. Rather, we should embrace this reality and use it as a way to produce what Sandra Harding (2004, p. 55) calls “strong objectivity”. According to Harding (2004, p.55), strong objectivity is produced when the researcher and those she studies are placed on “the same critical causal plane.” This means that the researcher “must be considered as part of the object of knowledge.” Thus, objectivity is strengthened by disclosing the researcher’s history, positions, influences, beliefs, and morals at every step of the project.

Feminist research not only provided me with a different notion of objectivity that encouraged me to come out of the closet of positivist objectivity. It also equipped me with invaluable epistemological and methodological tool, namely, feminist standpoint epistemology which helped me to identify the starting point of my fieldwork and research, as well as an approach for how to proceed with the research.

4.2 Feminist standpoint epistemology

Standpoint theory acknowledges that every individual occupies a location in a hierarchical society based on their subjectivities and different identities. Accordingly, individual experience the world from different standpoints which they create. As such, exploring the difficulties of this marginalized situation requires approaching research from the standpoint of those who occupy a location at the margin. Oppressed groups occupy an epistemic privileged location from which they not only see their own experience and that of their oppressors, but also “their knowledge emerges through their struggle against oppression” (Letherby, 2003, p. 45). Similarly, in feminist standpoint epistemology, exploring the

challenges of being a woman in an unequal social system requires approaching research from the point of view of women. Standpoint epistemology refuses the positivist subject/object dichotomy that considers the researcher as the only reliable or knowledgeable party that is thus placed on a higher level than that of the research participant. Thus, the feminist standpoint places both the researcher and women on an equal plane where each engages cooperatively in the research process. As a result, standpoint theory avoids perpetuating a hierarchy paralleling that of patriarchy and also or perpetuating what Halpin (1989, P. 285) called “scientific oppression,” in which any research participant who does not resemble the researcher is being “othered.”

According to Harding (2004, p.45), “starting off thought” from the lives of marginalized people rejects the idea of an ideal marginalized life from which standpoint theorists recommend starting. Likewise, feminist standpoint theory repudiates that there is a universal oppressed woman model from which feminist researchers should begin. Instead, feminist standpoint epistemology acknowledges that all women are different, occupy distinct standpoints, and that their lives and experiences are all worthy starting points of research.

4.3 Feminist Standpoint in action

Based on my experience as a Muslim in the Middle East and for a few years in Europe, I am aware that the Muslim community is not homogenous. It is clear that not all Muslims share the same views regarding Islamic teachings and practices. This heterogeneity and its challenge to the dominant Muslim dominant discourse means that there are alternative Muslim communities and discourses that exist. These other Muslim communities are usually on the periphery of the greater Muslim community, which is upheld by more powerful Muslim groups and institutions that set the parameters of what defines Islam, what Muslims can discuss, and what is expected of other Muslims. By employing feminist standpoint, I start from the margin occupied by the Muslim community of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque. This serves to amplify a voice that is otherwise silenced by dominant traditional groups of Muslims and powerful institutions. Employing feminist standpoint theory required me to place myself on equal footing with the Muslim participants and those who consider joining Islam. I found this somewhat challenging before I began my fieldwork. This was not on account of my role as researcher, but rather because I felt like I was an ex-Muslim who left Islam because she knew better. This sentiment soon began to erode not because I suppressed it or willed it out of existence, but rather because I acknowledged it and opened myself up to

a mutual engagement. As such, I was both a sender and receiver of views, feelings, knowledge and experiences of Islam with the members of the community.

By starting from the standpoint of the Ibn Rushd community, I highlighted and challenged the unequal power relations at play. These were the relations that placed the Muslim community of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque at the bottom of the Muslim hierarchy. Employing the feminist standpoint in my research made me attentive to the fact that the Ibn Rushd Muslim community is not a homogeneous entity in which all members share an identical standpoint. Conversely, my research starts from the notion that even though the community members agree on a liberal conception of Islam, their standpoints differ according to their varying backgrounds and histories.

Transitioning to the research itself, as informed by the above mentioned epistemological and methodological tools, I found qualitative methods particularly useful in investigating the community of Ibn Rushd-Goethe's use of the mosque space to reconfigure, challenge and resist traditional Muslim views pertaining to the workings of gender and sexuality in the mosque

4.4 Fieldwork

The fieldwork took place over two weeks at Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque in Berlin, Germany. During this time, I visited the mosque four times and conducted twelve interviews. These were all during brunch time which is arranged on the first two Sundays of each month and before and after Friday's prayer. On my first day, which was the first Sunday brunch of the year, I left my field book note and voice recorder at my apartment. I did not forget them there. I did this intentionally so I could choose to casually spend my first face-to-face encounter with the members of Ibn Rushd-Goethe community without any technical research tools. I took the opportunity to introduce myself and my project and to get to know everyone. I wanted them to know that, regardless of the research project, I was genuinely interested in knowing their stories, activities, and views as human beings and not only as research participants. I also wanted to feel accepted as a human being who was once a member of the Muslim community, and not only as a researcher who was on a specific mission.

On the first day, I took my wife with me, who is German, because I wanted the first meeting with the community to be warm and family like. In addition, my wife offered to help if I needed German translation on that day. She did not have to use her German language skills,

however, since all of the members spoke English or Arabic, which is my native language. Even though I had visited many mosques growing up in my native country, I felt butterflies in my stomach all the way to the mosque, which is located in the big street of Alt-Moabit, near downtown Berlin. I was excited. Indeed, although I was used to coming out over and over again every time someone asks me about my “husband” or “boyfriend,” going through the door of this mosque as an ex-Muslim while holding the hand of my same-sex partner felt like an extraordinary double-coming out of two closets. Needless to say, that was something I had never imagined I would experience in my life.

It also felt like a strong act of rebellion against a place that represents a religion once associated with homophobia and misogyny in my subconscious. Indeed, I was still in the God-defiance mood. My first meeting with the community went well, but not without challenges. The members of the mosque were so welcoming and accepting that I felt an immediate bond forming. Undeniably, I related to them on many diverse levels. I hailed from the same region as many of them and spoke the same native language. Despite my complete lack of German, I was well-acquainted with German people and culture through my wife and her family and friends. On top of that, I spent twenty-six years of my life adhering to the same religion. Despite having much in common with the members of the community, I was not immune from confronting one of the dilemmas listed by Diane Wolf (1996) in her book, *Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork*. Specifically, I encountered the choice between honestly presenting myself or engaging in possible deception with the research participants by hiding my true self given the importance of personal safety.

I thought by disclosing that I had quit Islam, I might jeopardize the “insider” status and all the benefits that come with it, such as gaining the trust of the members of the community (Sprague, 2005). In short, I did not want to be treated as a traitor. Being non-religious, however, is not something that one can hide in a mosque, especially given that we met again for the interviews on Friday, which coincided with the congregational prayer. I did not want to wait for members to discover that I refused to pray with them, and I did not want to pray an empty prayer for a God I no longer believe in. Ultimately, I thought that taking the initiative to tell them I was no longer a Muslim would offer the better means of maintaining trust. And so, I did.

As a result, one of the participants expressed suspicion about my motivations for doing this research since I am no longer Muslim. One of the participants was concerned that I might be

doing this research to portray Muslims and Islam in a negative way. I took the time to reassure him that part of my research showed that Islam is diverse. I reinforced my belief that there is not only one version of the religion which discriminates against anyone who is not male, straight and Muslim. As a result, I also had to disclose more about myself and the good relationships I have with my Muslim friends and very few members of my Muslim family who are practicing Muslims. In general, I found that exposing my hidden non-religious identity was far less problematic than I expected it to be. When this particular member got to know all this information, he lightened up and told me that I could have just hid my identity, but I did not, and this makes him trust me.

4.5 Interviews

As a form of data collection, I found interviews useful for obtaining insight into peoples' thoughts, ideas, and memories in their own words (Reinharz, 1992). During the course of my fieldwork, I conducted twelve interviews. These included ten interviews with the mosque's members, one interview with the founder of the mosque, German Turkish lawyer Seyran Ateş, and one interview with Swiss Yemeni Elham Manea, a writer, human rights activist, and associate professor of political science at University of Zurich, as well as one of three shareholders of the mosque and the first woman to lead the prayer in Ibn Rushd mosque.

I interviewed nine participants at the mosque, which saved me the difficulty of finding a suitable-for-all place to meet. I interviewed one member online because she lived outside Berlin and did not have time after Friday prayer to sit for an interview. I interviewed the founder of the mosque, Seyran Ateş, while she was visiting Oslo because she did not have time for an interview while I was in Berlin. I interviewed Elham Manea online since she does not live in Germany.

The type of interviews varied between unstructured and semi-structured. I also organised two focus groups based on participant availability. The two focus groups consisted of three and two interviewees. Due to time constraints, the unstructured interviews largely occurred on Sundays when the members had plenty of time and mostly came to the mosque to socialize. The semi-structured interviews and focus groups took place mainly on Fridays as the mosque became crowded and there was less free time available. On Fridays, it becomes crowded with members of the mosque who do not come on Sunday but come directly from their jobs and schools for the prayers. It also becomes crowded with people who come to attend and

conduct other ceremonies and activities ranging from marriage to Arabic courses (which take place in administrative office adjacent to the prayer room).

In general, I preferred unstructured to semi-structured interviews because they took the form of conversations. The importance of such interviews was stressed as early as the 1920s. According to Vivien Palmer (1928, cited in p.164), “the conversation of human beings are an important part of the data of social research, as well as an important part of social research technique.” I preferred to conduct unstructured interviews on Sundays when the members of the mosque had more time than on Fridays to elaborate on their views and experiences. This was mostly due to my sincere interest in what the participants had to tell me. I did not want to limit the fruitful information I might receive, so I allowed them to talk without interruption. Unstructured interviews also allowed me to be reciprocal in the process. I could not only ask, but could also answer questions, as well as share feelings, points of views, and information (Bailey, 2018).

In turn, I preferred focus groups over individual semi-structured interviews on Fridays as they provided me with a valuable collective view. Focus group interviews enabled the interviewees to interact by asking each other questions or challenging or supporting each other’s statements. I made sure that the structure of group was homogeneous to avoid disproportional dominance by more assertive participants, which also generated “a comparative element into the research topic” (Sprague, 2005, p.159).

4.6 Interview questions and length

I developed a number of prepared questions⁴⁴ to ask of all interviewees. The individual’s stories and diverse backgrounds, however, triggered more questions, which differed from one interviewee to another. Regardless of the type of the interview, all the questions were open-ended, short, clear, and easy to understand. The length of the individual semi-structured interviews ranged from fifteen to forty-five minutes depending on each participant’s personality and available time. Some of them were extroverts and talkative, while others were more introverted and provided only short answers. The length of the interview of focus groups varied from sixty minutes to two hours. This was due to the participants not only answering the interview questions, but also expressing their views and discussing each other’s opinions.

⁴⁴ See appendix A for the interview guide.

4.7 Observation

In a place that is full of symbols, people, and activities like a mosque, observation becomes a crucial tool to bring the researcher further into her journey of discovering a certain place and the people who occupy it. It is true that a researcher can obtain the participants' accounts by asking them during interviews about their experiences and perceptions. However, this is not the same as the researcher witnessing the activities with her own eyes and actively participating in the setting or group events. By activities, I mean everything the participants do, even their silences, after all, speaks volumes.

As an observer, my location between a participant and non-participant observer travelled back and forth between the two ends of the continuum. I participated in some of the activities, such as cleaning the table after the brunch meeting. However, I did not participate in other activities, such as prayer. It was enough for me to thoroughly observe the prayer, which is the most central and important activity that happens inside a mosque. During the prayer time, I used to sit behind the participants in the prayer room. From this vantage point, I was able to watch them pray without facing them so as to avoid distraction. Sitting in the back also enabled me to observe one side of the mosque that was occupied by people only coming to visit and observe the prayer like I did.

4.8 Field notes

My interviews and observations would have proven a waste for the analysis of my project, if they were not collected and safely kept in my field notes journal. Baily stressed the importance of this by saying that “if you are not writing field notes, then you are not conducting field research” (Baily, 2018, p.125).

I strongly agree with Baily's statement. My field notes journal was my companion not only in the field, but also throughout all stages of the research even before and after I travelled to Berlin. My field notes contained a chronological register of detailing the interior of the mosque, the interactions between its members and visitors, as well as the notes I took during formal interviews and informal conversations. This also includes notations about missing details I still wanted to acquire and ideas I intended to pursue in the future, as well as personal feelings and views. It also included my reflexive thoughts on how my personal beliefs and status influenced my research choices and results. (Bailey, 2018). Even though field notes are personal and I do not have to share them with the research participants or the

readers, I chose to include pieces of them in this thesis, especially the descriptions of the interior of the mosque and the interactions between its members. This is so that the reader can understand the context of the social processes described. My reflections also serve to offer the reader further information when critically assessing my research. Finally, I incorporated a description of how I felt during some stages of the field work. This was to stress the main point of feminist research that researchers are also human beings who have feelings that may be stirred by some of the social events they experience in the field. It was also therapeutic to share my emotions, my weaknesses and strengths with the readers, who, in this specific moment that I am writing these lines, I consider to be close friends (Bailey, 2018).

When in the field, I opted to write down my notes in real time in a notebook that I carried with me everywhere. This was preferable to writing them with my smartphone because even though it is flexible to carry it around and use, there is always a risk that it may suddenly shut down due to weak battery power. I also thought that using a smartphone was inappropriate, especially inside the prayer room where members might think I was invading their space or performing some task other than my work. I did, however, use my smartphone to take pictures of the interior and the façade of the mosque with the permission of management.

4.9 Research participants

Given my interest in how the Muslim community of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque employs the space of the mosque to resist traditional views about female and queer access and status in the mosque, (and my experience of mosques as places occupied only by Muslims), my initial choice of participants was Muslims. When I visited the mosque, however, and saw that the community consisted of Muslims and non-Muslims, I decided to expand my choice of research participants to include all members of the Ibn Rushd mosque who regularly visited the mosque without identifying as Muslim, who were still considering joining Islam, who believed in liberal Islam or who actively engaged in the work of the mosque, regardless of their beliefs. Their presence has a meaning. They, after all, are part of the mosque and are marginalized by association in the community. In addition, they contribute in one way or another to the main objective of the mosque, which is to introduce and practice liberal Islam.

4.10 Data Analysis

My analytical process for the data started with my cutting text down to a manageable size so as not to be overwhelmed. I accomplished this by reading through the text with my research

concerns and using a piece of paper that I placed in front of me to keep my focus and to avoid the disturbing feeling that every word in the transcript was important to include. This helped me to disregard all irrelevant text and keep only what was relevant and related to my research question in the form of quotes. Then, I copied the selected quotes into separate files, one for each research participant. For this step, I had to make minimal clarification edits to the excerpts, which I transcribed verbatim, with regards to grammar and language. Next, I read through the quotes and identified similar ideas expressed by different research participants, or what Carl Auerbach and Louise Silverstein (2003, p.37) refer to as “repeating ideas.” I then grouped each set of repeated ideas under one code based on a specific theme. In some cases, I grouped the same set of repeating ideas under two different codes when the same set of repeating ideas suggested multiple meanings.

4.11 Ethical considerations

Prior to this fieldwork, I applied for NSD approval to comply with the appropriate process for collecting personal information. I also developed an informed consent form⁴⁵ that gives information about the project and its purpose, as well as the rights of the research participants. These included the right to withdraw consent at any time without reason and the right to maintain an anonymous identity. The consent form included my contact information, as well as that for my supervisor and the university data protection officer, in addition to the contacts of the centre for gender studies and the NSD. This was in case the research participants had any questions or wanted to withdraw their consent. All participants, whether I met them online or in person, initialled and dated the consent form and returned it to me by e-mail or in person. All the interviews were also audio recorded. The audio recordings were stored safely in accordance with NSD’s guidelines such that only I and my supervisor can access them.

Even though the majority of the members of the mosque did not care one way or the other about the anonymization of their identities, since they had already appeared on different media reports about the mosque, a few were keen on keeping their identity secret in the final thesis. This is due to fear of prosecution by their conservative Muslim families and community members. The founder of the mosque, Seyran Ateş, and shareholder, Elham Manea, however, wished to have their identities disclosed in the final paper as they are already public figures and known to everyone following the news of the mosque and liberal

⁴⁵ See Appendix B for a copy of the consent form with anonymous identity.

Islam. As such, anonymity would have contradicted their strategy of confrontation. So, I contacted the NSD, and informed them that my data would include personal information which identifies three of the research participants. In addition, Ateş and Manea signed a consent form⁴⁶ which clearly says that they agree that their personal information be disclosed.

⁴⁶ See Appendix C for the consent form for those with disclosed identity.

Chapter 5: Empirical analysis of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque

The empirical component of this thesis is based on my observations and interviews with the research participants. My approach aims to take the reader with me inside the mosque and allow them to listen to the members' voices as experienced by me. I will first give an account of my observations. Subsequently, I will analyse the space of the mosque and how it is used by its members as a site of resistance to traditional views of gender and sexuality. I employ Knott's spatial analysis and engage the notion of sacred space.

5.1 Inside Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque - The first Sunday

I stand on Alt-Moabit Street facing the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque. I cannot, however, see it. All that I am able to see is a sign on the main gate of St. Johannis church stating that the mosque is here. All of my attempts to find the location of the mosque were in vain. I walked around the main building of the church, checked the smaller buildings on the side of the main building, and even unsuccessfully asked a delivery man dropping something off at the church if he knew where the mosque was. I was growing very irritated because I did not want to show up late to my very first meeting with the mosque's congregation. At the same time, I was also becoming excited to finally find the mosque.

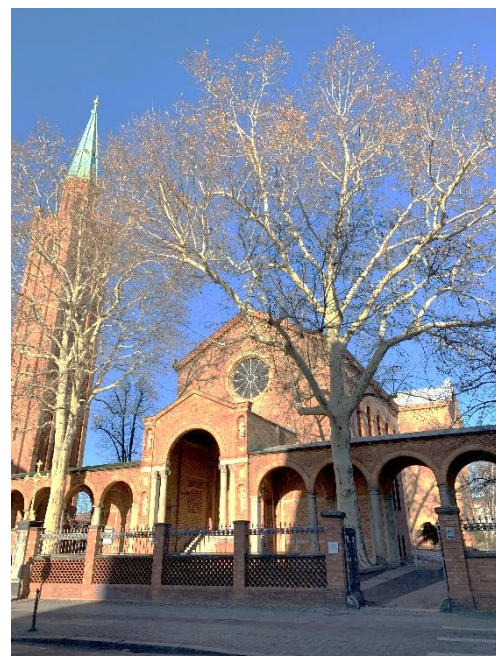


Figure 1 St. Johannis church.

The dilemma of standing a few steps away from the mosque and still unable to successfully locate it was the first sign that this mosque would be quite different from any of the other mosques that I had previously visited. After my unsuccessful searching, I decided to call my contact person, Adel, who then offered to introduce me to the congregation and guide me through the mosque.

Adel asked me to wait in front of the main gate of the church until he came to meet me and show me the way. After only three minutes, Adel showed up smiling and welcoming my wife and I with a hug. His hug was warm, not only because it was accompanied by greetings in my native language (Adel comes from the same country of origin as me), but also because the hug came from him in his role as imam – the leader of prayer. In fact, I have never even attempted to shake hands with a male imam before in order to avoid placing myself in an awkward situation where the imam might then refuse to shake hands with me, let alone give him a hug. Therefore, his hug to my wife and I was very heartfelt and appreciated. Adel then showed us the way to the mosque.

The mosque was on the third floor of the main building of the church. It was not in a separate building as I had originally expected. As we ascended the stairs, we came across different rooms used by the church and a few signs on the wall directing us to the mosque. I was growing more and more excited with each new sign as we got closer to the third floor.



Figure 2 The main entrance of the church with the sign of the mosque.

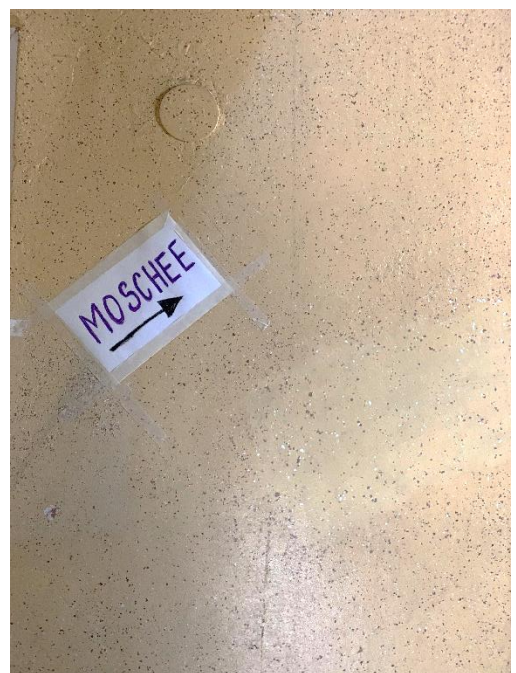


Figure 3 A sign inside the church building pointing to the mosque.

Before I actually went inside the mosque, Adel suggested that I come with him to the management office so he could introduce me to the mosque's members over brunch. The office was a few stairs away from the mosque. It had a few desks used by the management team and a long meeting table around which the members of the mosque gather to have brunch together and talk about different subjects. The members of the mosque warmly welcomed my wife and I, asking us to sit down with them. After brunch, some of the members, men and women, started to tidy the table while others washed the dishes. I talked with them about myself, my project, how I met my wife, and my lack of German. In turn, they also talked about themselves, how they became members of the mosque, and what the mosque means to them. The conversation was so friendly and warm that it removed any fears I had of being judged for my status as an ex-Muslim and Lesbian. They did not even ask me why I left the religion. Then, I asked Adel if I could see the mosque from the inside, and he said of course. He did not go with me inside the mosque. I asked him if I could take pictures of the mosque and later of the office. He again complied.



Figure 4 The meeting room where the members of the mosque meet.

At long last actually inside the mosque, I found myself in a small sunny simple room unlike any mosque that I had ever visited before. Indeed, the essential elements of any traditional mosque either looked quite different or were altogether absent in the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque.



Figure 5 The prayer room.

The first thing that I noticed was the presence of a wooden structure that also serves as the mosque's logo. When I asked Adel about this wooden structure, which I believe I was seeing for the very first time in a mosque, he informed me that this structure was actually something that I had already witnessed in almost all of the mosques that I had ever been to. The only difference now was that it appeared differently in the Ibn Rushd Mosque. This structure is the mihrab. Although it has the same function as the mihrab in traditional mosques, in the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque, the mihrab looks significantly different. In the mosque, the mihrab is constructed as a wooden semi-circle under which many wooden plates of different lengths are connected together. The wooden semi-circle is representative of Islam while the wooden plates of different lengths that lie underneath represent how all Muslims are always still connected to one another, irrespective of their individual differences. Another essential element of the traditional mosque that is absent in the Ibn Rushd Mosque is the minbar. The minbar in the Ibn Rushd mosque does not exist. The imam stands a few steps further from, but on the same level as the congregation during both the khutba and the prayer. Instead of the minbar, there is a stand with a microphone which the imam stands behind in order to address the congregation.

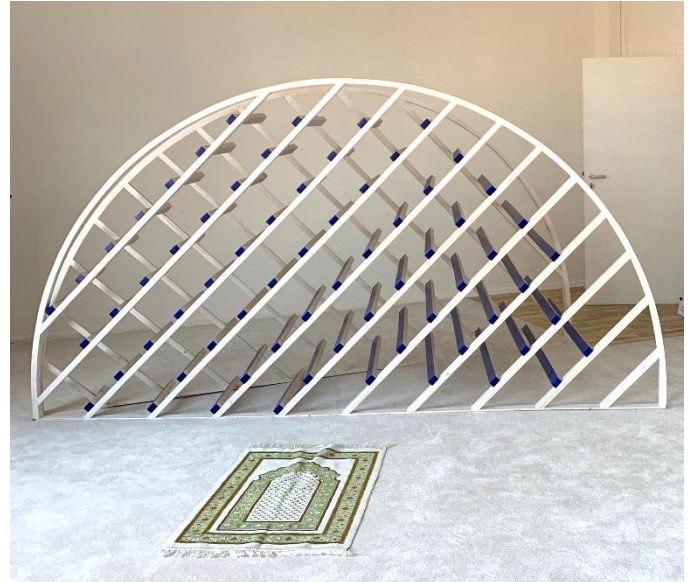


Figure 6 The mihrab.



Figure 7 The microphone which the imam stands behind.

Ultimately, I was surprised both by the absence of the minbar and the new design of the mihrab. What astonished me the most, however, was the absence of a specific space where women often pray alone. In the Ibn Rushd mosque, women and men pray together in the main prayer area. However, this prayer occurs not only with one group of either men or women sitting behind or in front of the other, but men and women also pray next to each other. The row of prayer participants is a mix of men and women, with one praying next to and in front or behind the other. When I saw the main prayer area for the first time, it was empty because it was a Sunday. Still, I began to imagine how it would look the next Friday when it would welcome both men and women. I had already seen how the main prayer area of the mosque looked in television reports from the mosque, but I had never experienced

being in the main prayer area in real life other than when I was a small girl praying next to my father.⁴⁷ Finally, next to the main prayer area, I noticed a small area off to one side where the visitors of the mosque are able to sit and watch the performance of the prayer without participating in it. This was all new to me as I was accustomed to all people present in a mosque during prayer time participating in prayer. For me, when I used to pray, to be present in the mosque without praying would have meant that a person was wilfully defiant and had rejected praying openly. I did not realize back then that this act of not praying with others might also have other meanings.



Figure 8 The area where the visitors sit and see the worshipers.

5.1.1 The first Friday

It has been a long time since I went to a mosque for a Friday prayer. The last time I attended a Friday prayer was in a mosque near my house in my home country. I would go to the mosque like all Muslims who sought further reward and to have their sins erased by upholding prayer, which would eventually bring them closer to God. However, this was not the only reason I went there. To me, praying was not only an obligatory meritorious act of worship, but rather an occasion in which I could meet God and talk with “him”. With my heart full of guilt and shame for what I was, a bad Muslim who did not wear hijab or pray regularly, and who was,

⁴⁷ I was permitted in the main prayer with my father because I was a young girl who was not yet menstruating.

worst of all, a homosexual. As such, I would approach the mosque seeking God’s mercy and forgiveness; where else could a Muslim be closer to God than during a prayer in one of God’s houses? I remember that the messenger of God was reported to have said, “The nearest a servant comes to his Lord is when he is prostrating himself, so make supplication.”⁴⁸ During this final event, I performed supplications so often that I lost count of how often I asked God for his forgiveness and cure while prostrating during prayer on that Friday, but he never answered, and I never prostrated again.

After many years, I was now once again attending a Friday prayer in a mosque, but this time as an observer and researcher who once was a Muslim, yet, still with a heart full of remorse for what I am, for leaving Islam. I was also angry at God, who did not respond to my countless sincere supplications. I was inside Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque, sitting in the back where the worshipers stand, observing the movement inside the mosque and the final preparations for the Friday prayer.

The worshipers were getting ready for the prayer. Women went to the direction of a hanger, which held headscarves (the mosque also offers a different kind of hats for men wanting to cover their heads) and loose pieces of clothing that can be dressed on tight or revealing clothes. Some of the women covered their hair and bodies, others did not. After putting on loose clothes and covering her hair, Samantha, who took on the role of the caller to prayer, came forward to stand in the middle of the mosque. The mosque became quieter and quieter as

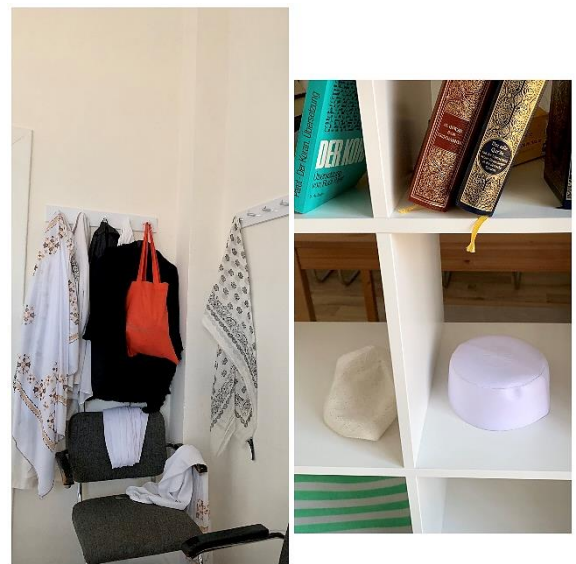


Figure 9 Loose clothes, headscarves, and hats.

she calmly looked to the floor with her eyes closed. The visitors to the mosque, who were sitting on the side, observed her while the worshipers looked to the floor in reverence. Now, every corner of the mosque was silent as if completely empty. Suddenly, Samantha started to recite the adhan (call to prayer) in Arabic with a loud beautiful voice⁴⁹:

allahu akbar

⁴⁸ Sahih Muslim, Book 4, hadith 979.

⁴⁹ The adhan is available on the mosque’s website: <https://www.ibn-rushd-goethe-moschee.de/en/the-mosque/information/>

God is most great (four times)

ashhadu an la ilaha illa allah

I testify that there is no god but God (twice)

ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul allh

I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God (twice)

hayya ala al-salat

Hurry to prayer (twice)

Hayya ala al-falah

Hurry to success (twice)

Allahu akbar

God is most great (twice)

la ilaha illa allah

there is no god but God (once)

As she was reciting the adhan, her voice instigated a feeling of empowerment and reassurance within me. It was my first time hearing a woman reciting the adhan. I was touched. While I tried to hold back my tears, for a split second I wished all Muslim women and men, around the globe, could hear her. Samantha completed the adhan with “la ilaha illa allah” (there is no god but God), and with this last sentence, she also ended the remaining echoes of the voices of those who used to tell me that women’s voice is awra, that is, should be hidden, or concealed.

After the adhan, women and men stood shoulder-to-shoulder in rows, adjacent and with one row behind the other. Then another woman, Dalia, came up in front of the mihrab (niche), and behind the stand with the microphone, to perform the duties of the imam.

This was not my first time seeing a woman preach. I had already attended two or more preaching circles led by women in my home country, but they were in the presence of female

participants only and in the preacher's house. This, however, was my first time witnessing a woman preach to both women and men in a mosque. While Dalia was giving the khutba, more people joined the rows of worshipers. They were those who had come in late, as they came right after work, and were rushing in to show how keen they were on joining the prayer on time. Specifically, one couple that was the last to join the prayer, a woman and a man with a baby, caught my attention as they were out of breath, indicating they were almost running up the stairs to join the prayer on time. The man, who held the baby during the khutba and prostrations, joined the last row first and the woman then joined him a few minutes later after she covered her hair and body.

I listened to the khutba that Dalia gave. I wish I could have understood it, but it was in German⁵⁰. I asked Adel about its topic afterwards and he told me that it was about sadness and how to deal with it. In many ways, this subject was a lot different from usual sermons in traditional mosques which normally consist of a piece of Quran followed by its interpretation and discussion about the lesson learned from it. After the khutba, Dalia stood in front of the worshipers to perform the two supplementing rak'as and everybody behind her followed. Next, Dalia uttered the peace (taslim) and the prayer was over. Everybody shook hands after the prayer. I was a bit surprised to see men and women shaking hands after prayer, given what I have already mentioned in terms of women's physical presence in traditional mosques. Now, women occupied the same place as men, inside the mosque. Also, the issue of touching women, such as shaking their hands, is also the cause of much controversy in a variety of places.⁵¹

As previously stated, the majority of scholars maintain that it is not permissible for a man and a woman to touch each other if they are not mahram (family) to each other. These opinions are based on the words of Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, who stated, "the Prophet's hands never touched those of a woman" and Mu'qal Ibn Yasar who was reported to have narrated that the Prophet also said, "it is better that you be struck on your head with an iron needle than to touch a woman you are not allowed to" (Dar Al-Ifta Al-Missriyyah, n.d.)

After the members greeted each other, they sat on the floor in a circle. This short gathering after the prayer served as a platform to discuss what had been recited in the khutba and to ask

⁵⁰ In September 2019, the mosque began providing Khutba in English on the first Friday of every month. This can be seen on the mosque's Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvyWQOWVIWw&t=77s>.

⁵¹ For example, three young women in Norway refused to accept the hand of Norwegian Crown Prince Haakon when he visited Al-Noor Islamic Centre and mosque to support it following the shooting attack on the mosque.

questions and jointly find their answers. According to Adel and the other research participants, the discussion circles gave them the opportunity to talk with each other about the religion as well as to share opinions, learn more about Islam and express agreement or disagreement of what the imam said during the khutba. This was the case even though it was not common to express outright disagreement. The role of the imam has traditionally been held only by qualified religious authorities or so-called “giants” of scholarship. To me, therefore, it was a surprise that worshipers who might be less educated in religion than the imam would be openly permitted to disagree with the imam. After the discussion ended, everyone went their own way, some went to the office for a drink or to hang out, while others stayed inside the mosque to further converse with one another.

When I left the mosque and was on my way to the office to hang out with the members of the mosque, I noticed a big muscular man sitting next to the door of the mosque. I introduced myself to him and asked him why he did not join the prayer. He said that he was volunteering as a bodyguard to protect the members of the mosque when they were busy with prayer. His words made me a bit sad. How could anyone be that angry to hurt people during their prayer to God? ⁵²

5.1.2 The Second Friday

The second Friday prayer the following week was not different than the first one. It started with Samantha calling for prayer and women and men forming rows. This time, however, the imam role was taken on by Adel. There was something different in Adel’s appearance. He covered his shoulders with a shawl with an Arabic pattern and his head with a small cap. The number of worshipers was the same. There was one worshiper who particularly caught my attention. I noticed him sitting in the middle row and he did not perform any of the movements commonly done during the prayer. This left me wondering about his reasons to join the prayer, as well as how the other worshipers would react. I later learned more about him. His name was Otto, and he was transgender man. I learned that Otto is not a Muslim, but he is interested in Islam and wants to learn more about it.

⁵² We have unfortunately witnessed numerous attacks on peaceful worshipers over the course of this year, such as The Bærum mosque shooting in Oslo, Norway that left one injured and the attacker’s sister dead. There was also attacks on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, during Friday Prayer on 15 March 2019, resulting in more than 50 deaths and dozens more injured.

After the prayer was completed, the worshipers not only exchanged handshakes like the last time, but they also hugged each other. This surprised me even more because it involved not only hands touching, but also bodies. To me, it was beyond imaginable that this would occur in traditional mosques. Then, they formed a circle, discussed the sermon, and exchanged opinions about it.

After the circle discussion ended, I went to the office to expand my observation of the management office where everyone gathered on Sundays and after Friday prayer. There were two specific situations in the office that caught my attention. First, the ladies stood up to make tea and one of the men asked her if she could make tea for Adel. Adel then stood up and told him she should not ask her to make tea for him, and that he could prepare the tea for himself.

The other situation took place when the founder of the mosque, Seyran Ates, entered the mosque. She was surrounded by three bodyguards. I noticed that when she entered the mosque none of the people working there nor the worshipers ran to her or greeted her in any special way. She was treated like everyone else there. This was quite notable as I am accustomed to people running at public figures to greet them in a special way. This is especially true of public figures with a religious background, as some Muslims even bow and kiss their hand. After Ateş left the mosque, the office room was prepared to host the weekly Arabic lesson, which is open to everyone, both the members and non-members of the mosque.

5.1.3 The second and the last Sunday

The two weeks passed quickly. I visited the mosque on a Sunday for a second time. It was my last visit to the mosque before returning to Oslo. This time I did not need to call Adel to pick me up. I knew the way. I went up with my wife to the office where everybody was gathered for the Sunday brunch. They all were happy to see us again and they greeted us warmly. We had brunch and talked about different subjects, including the possibility of joining the mosque in the Pride parade some time. Discussing such ideas with Muslim people in a mosque was unbelievable to me. I felt happy inside. My wife had to leave Berlin for work the next day. She was sad and teary. Adel saw her and gave her a hug. I was telling her goodbye and he was standing there with us. He told me something that I would have never imagined to be said by a Muslim imam, he said: “you could kiss each other, it is fine, we appreciate love”,

and I kissed her. I became teary too because I was going to miss her and because I had never felt that accepted by a Muslim community before.

After she said goodbye to everyone and left, I conducted interviews until it was my time to leave at five o'clock in the evening. Adel asked if I wanted to stay for the seminar about Andalusia and the Muslim presence there. He told me that the seminar would be in German, but that he could translate for me. I was tired and I did not want to interrupt him during the seminar. As such, it was time to say goodbye to the only Muslim place where I had ever felt accepted and loved. I hugged the last research participants and promised to meet again. I hugged Adel and thanked him for everything he did for me, and we promised each other to keep in touch. My steps were heavy as I looked down at the ground and slowly went down the few stairs that separate the office from the mosque. I gave a quick glance at the mosque on my way downstairs. All I felt in that moment was that I was going to miss that place and the people. This was a feeling that I never thought I would have about a mosque.

5.2 A Spatial Analysis of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque

5.2.1 Body as the source of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque

When I visited the mosque for the first time, it was a Sunday and the prayer hall was empty. Except for a few differences in interior design, the mosque looked like any other mosque from the inside: a hall for prayer with carpeted floors, a place for people to store their shoes, a rack with loose clothes and headscarves, a wooden bookshelf with Qurans and prayer rugs, and chairs for those unable to perform the movements of prayer. It is on Fridays, when worshipers and visitors fill the space, that the peculiarity of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque becomes obvious. It is the human bodies that actively create the space of the mosque with all its uniqueness and sacredness.

The visitors to Ibn Rushd mosque are varied. They are Muslim worshipers who go to the mosque every week for Friday prayer. They are individuals who are curious about Islam and its teachings and rituals, as well as school students who are learning about Islam. They are non-Muslim or non-believers who come to the mosque as a sign of solidarity to support the initiative of liberal mosques. The bodies of the visitors are also diverse. They are men, women; they are European and non-European; they are old and young; they are German speakers and non-German speakers; they are black, white, and brown; they are queer and heterosexual. Ultimately, they come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds that shape their bodies in many different ways.

Unlike traditional mosques, which are designed to host visitors in different places according to gender, the management of Ibn Rushd mosque, who are influenced by liberal interpretations of Islam, created their space to allow the bodies of all its visitors and participants to occupy the same place. The result was a space that is physically designed to host all people regardless of their differences and aims for visiting the mosque. This was evident when I entered the praying room for the first time. On one side, there was a small section intended for those who wanted to sit and observe the prayer and the worshipers without taking part in the prayer. In the centre of the room, there were worshipers, women and men preparing for the prayer. As such, a new space of Muslim mosques is shaped and produced on the premises such that all bodies are equal and welcomed in the same place.

The discourses of the body that can be seen at work within Ibn Rushd mosque vary greatly but are quite different from those seen within traditional mosques. In traditional mosques,

bodies are segregated due to a dominant discourse that views the body as gendered and sexualized. As such, men stand in the front and women in the back or more commonly in a separate room so that men do not become seduced or aroused by women's bodies and voices during prayer. In Ibn Rushd mosque the pervasive discourse of the bodies is one of equality and responsibility. Men and women pray together, next to each other, and in front of each other. The dominance of such a discourse was evident when Adel who appeared irritated by some views that undermined his choice to pray behind or next to a woman:

Adel: Some people ask if I don't get sexual thoughts when I pray behind a woman. I tell them I might get sexual thoughts even when a woman is not present. Some people make jokes about me going to the mosque to have fun with women! I tell them I'm a married man, I love my wife, and I don't have any intention to hurt her. People come here to pray only, but, unfortunately, some people think that we have like a gangbang here. It's crazy!

The same view was shared by Burhan, who asserted that praying next to or behind a woman does not make any difference to him as a worshiper:

Burhan: I used to think that it can really affect your thoughts if you are praying next to or behind somebody who is physically attractive, but with time I realized it doesn't make a big difference. Now I'm in a stage where I can handle all that. Sometimes I don't realize who I'm praying next to. So, for me, it doesn't really matter who's standing next to whom, or in front of me or whatever. When you have a connection with God and you're really talking to God, it doesn't really matter what's happening around you.

The gender-equal spatial arrangement, and Adel and Burhan's answers reorient the space of the mosque to its initial sacred use, namely, praying sincerely to God rather than ogling or flirting with other worshipers. As such, they critically deconstruct the dominant understandings of women as distractions or hypersexualised beings who are not allowed to share the space of the mosque with men. This arrangement also takes off the burden put on women's shoulders as responsible for the validity of men's prayer and the preservation of the mosque's purity. Moreover, this deconstructs a fairly critical implication of normative views wherein men appear to be spiritually fragile creatures unable to control themselves in the presence of women. Participants in the Ibn Rushd mosque debunk binaries of gendered

scripts when it comes to sexuality and spirituality – a normative gendered script that in fact renders men sexual and women spiritual (Hoel, 2013b).

This is consistent with Dina and Samantha's opinions about how women should not be held responsible for the validity of men's prayer or for inciting men's sexual desires. Rather, Dina and Samantha hold that men themselves should be responsible for this. Dina considered it a type of punishment that women pray in a different place. Samantha, meanwhile, suggested that if it is men that have the problem of being unable to focus on prayer in the presence of women, then it is men who should leave the main prayer area to pray in a separate place:

Dina: I think it's very right. Very good [that women pray in the same space as men]. Because it makes it clear how equal we are. Because the reason why men and women are supposed to pray apart is that men can't control themselves. But then women are the ones who get punished. They have to be in the back. They have to be in a separate little room even though it's men who have the problem. It's not fair. And then sometimes you just have to get over it. You have to get over it. The fact that the others get to pray next to each other shows how free we are. This is a very important thing in this mosque. Freedom. You can do whatever you want unless you are harming someone, and you don't harm anyone when you pray next to each other.

Samantha: It was totally new to me to learn that at a mosque, you don't pray together. And I never understood why. In every part of life, we are not segregated and all of a sudden during prayer there is something sexual going on? What is this? What's going on? And if you ever feel something when you are praying at a mosque because you accidentally touched someone or whatever, then you have to be responsible and strong enough to push it out of your head.

To access the space of the traditional mosque, women should not only conform to praying in a gender-segregated space, but are also obliged to adopt a dress-code appropriate for the space of the mosque such that they fit in with the traditional normative view of women as sexualized objects who can distract men and undermine the purity of the mosque. As noted in chapter two of this thesis, women are obliged to cover their awra by wearing loose clothes and covering their hair. Given the fact that women and men pray together in the same space at Ibn Rushd, thereby completely contradicting the traditional view of a mixed congregation, it was surprising to observe women in the congregation who still observe the traditional hair

covering. This is especially the case because these women do not normally wear hijab, but they cover their hair only during the prayer. As such, it confused me, and I wondered if the non-segregated space of the mosque provoked them to retain the same old traditional views of women's bodies as a source of temptation and disruption to men during prayer. I also thought that by doing this they only serve to further entrench the traditional view of women as objects that need to be covered. I asked Mariam and Samantha about this, and they told me that they choose to wear hijab for completely different reasons than the fear of invalidating men's prayers by revealing their hair. According to Mariam, covering the hair is not an obligation to comply with so that God will accept her prayer. Rather, her wearing hijab is related to her self-confidence, entering a mode of asceticism, and helps her focus during the prayer.

Mariam: When I don't feel self-confident, I wear the scarf, but I don't wear it because it's written in Quran or something. Even when I was a child, I liked to wear the scarf. I liked to wear the headscarf. I usually wear a headscarf when I pray. I wear very little make up, no necklaces or any other visible ornaments. I just want to pray to God and not focus on the way I look. It's just a feeling I just feel the need to do so not because someone commands or asks me to do it. It's my decision. Sometimes I pray without hijab. The difference is that I'm not that much into prayer when I pray without hijab.

As for Samantha, covering her hair is important as a means of showing respect to God. It is like putting on formal clothes when meeting someone important. However, Samantha does not cover her hair every time she prays, but only does so when she wants to easily move from her everyday life to meeting God in a peaceful place. Samantha explained to me her journey from covering her hair every time she prays to cover it occasionally and the reasons behind this in the following way:

Samantha: I sometimes cover my head and sometimes not when I do the prayer. In the beginning, I always did, and I defended it because I thought prayer was a special situation. It was like you come before God in a special situation. It's like visiting somebody who is important and very very dear to you and wanna be a little bit formal to show your respect. It was a sign of respect. I felt it was a nice thing to do, an important thing to do. And I had never seen any other woman praying without a headscarf. Then I started to try praying without it. In the beginning, it didn't work for me at all. I felt very guilty. Then, I started to feel better about it because I didn't have a scarf around at

home or it was in the wash or it was in the kids' room and kids were sleeping. And I started to occasionally pray without a headscarf, and I realized it was very very different. Very different prayer. Praying without a headscarf is like moving from the everyday life into a quick prayer. While if you put on a headscarf, you move outside of your everyday life into a situation that's shielded and much more peaceful. So, there are two different types of prayers and two different feelings. They are equally valuable, but they are different. Occasionally I feel I pray much more often if I don't put on my headscarf because I move simply from my everyday stuff into praying situation very quickly. But if I want to be really focused on a serious prayer, I might put it on. It's kind of a choice.

After hearing Mariam and Samantha's reasons for covering their hair during prayer, I recognized that their hair covering was not provoked by an internalization of traditional views. I also understood that these actions do not further underpin those views. It is actually the contrary. A woman's free choice to cover her hair only during prayer, while going around in the mosque without covering it, actually contributes to deconstructing the traditional views that women are hypersexual creatures who can desacralize the space of the mosque with their presence. It has this effect by emphasizing that a head covering has meanings other than being "necessary component of the virtue of modesty" (Mahmood, 2005, p.23). It also underscores women's agency as is represented in their freely choosing to cover or uncover their hair.

In addition, the fact that Muslim women are not required to observe a special dress code when they are in the mosque disconnects the genuineness of the prayer from physical representation of the worshipers. It instead connects it to their hearts and the degree of devotion and belief they show in their prayers. This is of the utmost importance to Seyran Ateş who told me:

Seyran: I don't feel any difference because I don't believe I have to cover my hair to feel connected with God. I don't care about the surface, how my hair and my clothes are or how people see me. What is important is how my heart is connected to God. There is no second I think that I have to cover my hair to be a good believer. What's more important is what I have in my heart. Women can be covered, but their hearts are bad and not connected to God.

In addition to disconnecting the genuineness of the prayer from the physical representation of the worshipers and instead connecting it to their hearts and the degree of devotion and belief Muslim women show in their prayers, the fact that Muslim women are not required to observe a special dress code deconstructs the imaginative image of God as a male creature. Observing God as a male creature traditionally means that women should cover their hair when standing in front of him so that he too does not become sexually aroused. This view was explained to me by Elham Manea who told me:

The insistence on women covering their hair in the mosque, even when they are praying alone or in the women's section means that he [God] tells me he is a male, a man, who might get sexually aroused if I do not cover my hair.

Another aspect that captured my attention was that hair covering was not limited to female worshipers only, but also was present for men. I noticed that Adel covered his hair when he led the prayer as an imam. This prompted me to ask him why he did that. He had a practical reason in that he put on the cap to distinguish himself as the imam and the leader of the prayer on that day.

Adel: I don't usually cover my head, but sometimes I need to because people often think that an imam should be distinguished. Four weeks ago, a man who had only converted to Islam two weeks ago came to the mosque and people thought he was the imam because he was wearing traditional Muslim clothes, you know, the jilbab, the long coat, and he had a long beard. He told them he was not the imam, and that I, who's wearing casual, you know, jeans and pullover, is actually the imam. It is similar to when you go to a doctor and you don't find them wearing a white coat, then you don't trust them, they must have a white coat on. Some people think that covering hair is part of prayer. I don't think so. I just put on a hat so that people know I am the imam and the one responsible for leading the prayer and the one they can ask questions to if they have any. People want the imam to be distinguished, so to solve the problem I wear a hat.

In addition to the reasons she stated earlier, Samantha also shares a similar practical reason to cover her hair during the calling for prayer.

Samantha: For calling for prayer I put it on because I have a social responsibility towards people and towards God. When I call for prayer, I don't do it for myself. I do it for God and for people. It's a special social situation. When it's prayer, it is between

me and God. It's not a social situation. It's a situation between me and God, and if you want to condemn me, you can condemn me.

Adel and Samantha's narratives further deconstruct the idea that women's bodies are sources of temptation that must be covered. They achieve this by showing that the body and head covering have other functions and meanings unrelated to women's sexuality and morality. For them, covering their heads have practical reasons related to the roles they take on in the mosque as clothes are perceived in the collective Muslim mind as proof of authenticity and "metaphors of power and authority", not just "body coverings and adornments" (Cohn, 2001, p.405).

By reflecting on the spatial arrangements of the mosque and the narratives of its members, it becomes clear that the bodies of the worshipers of Ibn Rushd confirm Knott's (2005) and Chidester and Linenthal's (1995) views that our bodies fundamentally affect how we experience, produce, reproduce and alter the space. As such, through their bodies, members of the mosque identify the differences between the spaces of the traditional mosque and the liberal mosque. These differences result in Ibn Rushd members viewing themselves as equals and equally pure and conceptualizing the relationship between themselves and the mosque as just and fair. In addition, their bodies play a significant role in producing and reproducing the mosque of Ibn Rushd-Goethe as a sacred space for prayer, and in altering the space into one that is inclusive of everyone regardless of their differences.

Similarly, the bodies of the members of Ibn Rushd challenge the traditional essentialist view of all Muslim bodies as identical except for gender, and which are present in the mosque only for prayer and to learn about the religion within the traditional confines. They confirm Grosz's (1994, p. XI) view that our bodies are not merely biological, fixed, and passive objects operating in a certain space, but are rather cultural and social products, which are not "inert", but they "function interactively and productively. They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable". The bodies of the members of the mosque are not only biological, fixed, passive objects simply placed in the mosque. They are products of different cultures and societies that inform their way of thinking, behavior, outlook, and so on. As such, they are not inert. They do not passively accept the traditional Muslim space of the mosque as male dominated, or God as a male and women's bodies as a threat to the purity of this male dominated space. They do not accept the notions implying that men are spiritually fragile and uncontrollable sexual creatures, and that a certain dress-code related to

the space has only one meaning, which is to protect the space from the impurity women could bring to it. Rather, they function interactively and productively, and act and react to the above-mentioned traditional notions by securing a space for both sexes to pray together, and by allowing women and men to choose what to wear in the space of the mosque. As such, they remove the imaginative notion of God as male, and the religious limits imposed by this male on the bodies of the worshipers. This serves to associate power with their bodies, and transform their bodies from being what Foucault (1995, p. 138) called “docile bodies” that are sites of policies of coercion and disciplinary practices, whose elements, gestures, and behavior, are controlled to bodies that are free and work as sites of resistance to the power that attempts to control them.

In sum, the bodies of the members of Ibn Rushd serve as a “point of departure and as destination” (Lefebvre, 1991, p194). They are a point of departure in that they inform the spatial order of the space as inclusive of both sexes. They are the destination of different body discourses emerging from the spatial order of the mosque and which inform their body representations. In addition, they are sites of resistance to the traditional spatial order and representations of the body in that they offer “ruptures” and reconfigure traditional meanings.

5.2.2 Dimensions of space in the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque

The space of Ibn-Rushed Goethe mosque is multidimensional. It is the sum of its material features, its members and the visitors who use it, as well as the social relations, controversies, ideologies, and discourses associated with it. Indeed, the mosque is not only a background against which Muslims meet and pray. It is a space that is constructed from the mosque’s main elements, such as the prayer hall and its interior, but also from the worshipers who use it as a place where they can connect to God and to other Muslims and non-Muslims who visit the mosque for other reasons than praying. The space of the mosque is also the sum of social relations that connect its members and visitors with one another, and which are different from the social relations that connect the members of traditional mosques to each other. In addition, the space of Ibn Rushd-Goethe is formed out of the liberal Muslim ideology and the equality discourse associated with it. It is also the product of the controversies that the mosque generated from the first day it opened its doors because of how it adopted certain ideas that traditionalists consider antithetical to the authentic traditional Islam.

5.2.2.1 The mosque's physical space

Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque's physical space is different from that of traditional mosques in several ways. First, it is located in a church which offered a space within its building to open the mosque as a means of support. It does not have a minaret which is a defining element of a mosque and a marker of the Muslim community's presence. Also, as previously noted, it does not have a minbar nor the classic mihrab. The absence of the minaret did not surprise me since the mosque is inside a church and it would look odd to have a minaret. The absence of the minbar, however, surprised me as I am used to seeing a minbar in all mosques no matter how small or big. This prompted me to ask Seyran Ateş about the simple design of the mosque which includes only one element from the traditional mosque in a new design, namely, mihrab. In her reply, Ateş stressed that the design of the mosque in Islam is not fixed, but rather, it has developed according to the needs of worshipers and the aims and ideologies of the people managing and occupying the mosque. She explained her point of view in the following way:

Seyran: The traditional mosque you describe is not written in Quran. The prophet was on the same level as the congregation. What happened is that Islam copied a lot of things from the church and synagogues. The minarets for example appeared when Muslims occupied Damascus and the muezzin had to go up to the tower of the church to call for prayer. So, there were no Islamic traditions. The architecture of typical mosques we see in some Islamic countries are human made, and it was contemporary for their time. They made it in the architectural design that fit them at the time. And we do what fit with us. We don't need a minabr inside the mosque. We do what fits us and to treat each other equally.

Ateş' view of the absence of the minbar resonates with Chidester's and Linenthal's (1995) strategies of exclusion and inclusion taking place in a sacred space. The absence of the minbar, which serves as a platform demonstrating the authority of the person who occupies it, suggests the exclusion of any power symbol that may put the imam in a superior position from that of the congregation. The presence of the mihrab in a new design suggests the inclusion of an ideology that accepts all Muslims regardless of their differences. The absence of the minbar and the presence of the mihrab in a new form, therefore, stress the mosque's dedication to equality between all its members.

The absence and presence of certain elements within the mosque is an important factor in establishing meanings of equality in the mosque. The physical existence of the mosque itself, however, is important in establishing a new meaning of Islam in the world.

It would not have been possible for the members of the mosque to practically embrace or establish liberal Muslim ideas without the mosque. It is also worth noting that it is important that this place is a mosque and not, for instance, a non-profit organization representing liberal Muslims. By expressing their liberal ideas in a mosque, the members' ideas gain an element of uniqueness and importance. Indeed, after all, according to Lefebvre (1991, p. 44) "What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies? What would remain of a religious ideology - the judaeo-Christian one, say - if it were not based on places and their names: church, confessional, altar, sanctuary, tabernacle? What would remain of the Church if there were no churches?" Similarly, what would remain of liberal Islam if there were no liberal mosques?

The importance of opening a mosque is explained by Seyran in the following way:

Seyran: I realized that the answer against radicals and radical Islam is not only to criticize them, but also to open a mosque where we can practice what we understand about liberal Islam. That's the reason I established the mosque.

Seyran's narrative emphasizes the importance of the physical space of the mosque with all its elements and members in giving weight to the liberal ideology it adopts. For her, having a liberal mosque is essential in turning the ideas of liberal Islam into reality. It offers a space to the mosque's members to not only discuss liberal Islam and criticize and resist traditional Muslim thinking through words, but also in practice – in a place.

In addition to ascribing importance and a morphology to the liberal Muslim ideology, the physical existence of the mosque contributes to reaching more practicing people. It also serves to build a community with a growing number of practicing liberal Muslims who already resist traditionalist Muslim thoughts using the same tools the mosque uses to reach Muslims. Regarding this point Adel showed his support for establishing a liberal mosque by saying that:

Adel: The idea is brilliant. A mosque has a khutba every Friday, which means 52 times a year a Muslim goes to the mosque and listens to the khutba and prayer. There is no one who is organized and active enough to go to an organization 52 times a year. It is hard. That's why the influence of the mosque is huge. If we let the ultra-orthodox shape people's minds during these 52 weeks, it means we're giving up.

Adel's narrative shows awareness for the extent of the influence of a mosque, no matter its ideology. For him, the importance of the mosque stems from its initial use as a space in which Muslims are demanded by God to gather together every week. To him, the mosque is a perfect channel to promote liberal Muslim ideologies, and also a perfect site to resist traditional Muslim ideologies.

Furthermore, the establishment of the mosque is also important in that it refutes the accusations against the members of the mosque of trying to destroy Islam. This point is explained by Adel as he notes:

Adel: I think the reformation of Islam should come from inside the religion because a reformation that comes from the outside is often considered as an attempt to destroy Islam, "our" Islam. But when it's Muslims who are carrying out the reformation, it's something else. Sometimes, people come to us and accuse us of inventing a new religion, but then I tell them that the same things that you say, we also say. We disagree on certain small things, but we agree on the main elements of the religion.

Adel's narrative confirms the importance of the physical existence of the mosque as a site that protects and gives value to the ideology presented in it. For Adel, it is important that the liberation of Islam from traditional Muslim thinking starts from Muslims themselves. Therefore, what is the best place to symbolize Muslims and their presence other than the mosque? As such, the mosque works as a fortress for its members' liberal ideology and attempts to remove any doubts surrounding the mosque's resistance and reconfiguration/challenging of the space of traditional mosques with regards to women and queer Muslims' access and active participation in it.

5.2.2.2 The mosque as a social space

The space of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque is social in that it is constituted of religious social interactions involving a celebration of events from the Muslim calendar. Social events such as marriage ceremonies take place there, as do divorces and public conversions to Islam. Ibn Rushd-Goethe is different from traditional mosques, however, when it comes to the kind of marriage conducted there. The mosque allows interfaith marriage in which a Muslim woman can marry a man from a different religion or non-religion. Traditionally, this type of marriage is counted as zina, a major sin requiring a hundred lashes for the man and the woman involved. The mosque also allows same-sex marriage, which is rejected even in less traditional mosques, such as Mariam Mosque in Copenhagen⁵³.

The space of the mosque is also social in that it is the site of non-religious social interactions. Sunday brunch is one such example. At this gathering, the members of the mosque sit together in the office room to share a meal and talk about different religious and non-religious topics. After finishing their meal, the members, both men and women, help each other in tidying the place. Sunday brunch reflects its members' dedication to expand their mosque beyond the space of the prayer room and to deconstruct the traditional notion of the public. During the brunch time, both women and men sit together, talk and laugh. In doing so, they challenge the traditional Muslim notion of public arenas wherein gendered segregation as a form of piety and observation of God's commands exist. Traditional Muslim publics include practices where women are required to lower their gaze and voices, to remain mindful of their chastity, to conceal their charms, and to not laugh in the presence of men who are not their mahram (family) (Mahmoud, 2005). The brunch practices of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque shows members' dedication to deconstruct normative gender roles and traditional masculinity. This can be seen by how men and women help each other equally in the cleaning of the room. Specifically, men carry out certain cleaning activities, such as cleaning the dishes, which are traditionally connected to women's duties. Indeed, I have witnessed men helping women with activities requiring physical strength, which confirms their masculinity, such as lifting up the chairs and tables, but I have never seen, in a setting like the Sunday brunch, men wearing an apron and washing the dishes in front of everyone else while women sit and talk with other men and/or women.

Other social interactions involve not only celebrations of certain events from the Muslim calendar, such as the Prophet's birthday, but also include celebrations of events not

⁵³ Mariam mosque, which opened in Denmark in 2016, is Scandinavia's first mosque with female leadership. It organizes monthly Friday prayer and is exclusively for women.

mentioned in the Muslim calendar, such as the celebration of the last day of Ramadan. In 2019, this celebration was on a Friday and involved a session of Sufi whirling done by a woman, followed by Friday prayer. Then, everyone, including non-Muslims, gathered to break the fasting with the Muslim members of the mosque.

By hosting such events, the members reconstruct the space of the mosque to include activities other than prayer or a discussion of religious issues. Through having an event involving Sufi music and dancing in the space of the prayer, they reconfigure the space in a new and creative way. This further challenges the traditional idea portraying Muslim men as sexual monsters, and women as objects of temptation, even when they are covered from head to toe, let alone while dancing in front of men which might be considered by traditional Muslims as an intentional act to sexually arouse men and contaminate the sacred space of the mosque.

The social interactions taking place in the mosque are not limited to the space of the mosque and the social interactions between its members and visitors or with one another. These interactions actually expand the space of the mosque to reach other spaces outside the mosque's walls. This is evident in how the mosque offers workshops at schools to promote its liberal ideology, which challenges traditional Islamic ideologies regarding women. The mosque is currently organizing a workshop called "Women of Medina school workshop", which garners attention for typically forgotten Islamic heroines. As such, students are provided with a new set of role models and belief system that questions traditional Islamic patriarchy.

Furthermore, the social interactions in the mosque also include interactions between heterosexual and queer Muslims. The mosque has a queer centre called LGBT * IQ Center of Competence. This aims to offer queer Muslims a place to freely and safely socialize and worship. The presence of such a mosque renders its space not only gender-equal, but also queer-friendly by openly supporting queer Muslims and helping them to better accept themselves. Regarding this, the mosque's LGBT * IQ coordinator, Tugay Sarac, stated in an interview with Reuters that the mosque helped him accept himself as a gay Muslim man who was on the verge of going to Syria to fight for the Islamic State there and die as a martyr (shahid) and then go to the best place in paradise instead of dying gay and go to hell. Tugay's experience emphasizes the importance of Ibn Rushd mosque's queer-friendly space in not only helping and supporting queer Muslims, but also in saving their lives, which might be

threatened by their constant feeling of guilt that drives them to do anything to avoid going to hell.

The variety of social relations in the mosque emphasizes the role of sociality as a means of resistance. Indeed, the variety of social relations in the mosque reconfigures and challenges the traditional mosque space as it pertains to dynamics of gender and sexuality by allowing women and men, whether queer or heterosexual, to equally engage in the different events and activities which the mosque hosts.

5.2.2.3 The Mosque space as mental space

The space of the mosque is a mental space in that it adopts and defends a certain Muslim ideology, namely, the liberal ideology. The liberal Muslim ideology, as noted in chapter two of this thesis, is premised on the idea that all humans are equal, regardless of their sex, sexuality, gender, faith, and so on. It is also based on the notion that there is no religious authority in Islam, and that all Muslims are free to form their own understandings of the Quran through independent thinking. This challenges traditional Muslim thinking that places all the power and intellectual access to the religion in the hands of a few people, the ulema, who Muslims should follow.

The practice of liberal ideology at the mosque generated both friends and opponents. It attracted those who found the mosque to be a second home because of how it resonated with their way of thinking, values, and beliefs. It also attracted opponents who thought that everything happening in the mosque was an exposure of sins that required resistance through whatever means. Such means could even include violence to protect the space of the mosque from the unauthentic westernized understandings of Quran and Sunna. To the opponents of the mosque, such understandings are detrimental to the order of the Muslim community, which for centuries put the Muslim man in a superior position from that of women and of Muslims who did not comply with traditionalist views on gender and sexuality.

Traditionalists challenge Ibn Rushd's mosque not only for the acts they consider innovations (bida'a) and detrimental to the Muslim community, such as women praying in the same place as men or leading men in prayer, or because it "halalizes" (allows, makes legal) what are

considered major sins, but also because these actions do not occur discreetly or in secrecy. To them, it adds insult to the injury that the members of the mosque do not adhere to the “don’t ask, don’t tell” discourse that many traditionalists find appealing and even favourable. It is also worse that members of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque not only break the rules, they deny them as well.

Traditionalists’ approaches to challenge the mosque are derived from the hadith that reports Muhammad to have said "Whoever amongst you sees an evil, he must change it with his hand; if he is unable to do so, then with his tongue; and if he is unable to do so, then with his heart; and that is the weakest form of Faith" ⁵⁴. As such, traditionalists try to resist the existence of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque first “by hand” (by acting). The mosque has not experienced a physical attack yet, but it has happened to other mosques, such as the open mosque in Cape Town. This explains why there is a bodyguard sitting next to the door of the prayer room, and also why Seyran Ateş is accompanied by bodyguards 24/7. It also explains why it can be difficult to open such a mosque in other countries, especially Muslim countries where traditional Islam is dominant.

If it does not work to resist the mosque “by hand”, then it may be done with “the tongue”. This is the main strategy traditionalists use. The mosque and the founder of the mosque receive death threats regularly. The denunciation of the mosque by Islamic institutions and public Muslim figures inside and outside of Germany is continuous. Even reviews of the mosque on Google are dominated by messages warning people of visiting the mosque because it is not a real mosque, but rather an evil place. If these two strategies of correcting evil fail to work, then the change should be accomplished “by heart”, though this is the least desirable option for those of faith, and in fact, expresses a weakness in faith.

The founder of mosque is aware of the number of controversies that the mosque creates nationally and internationally. However, she thinks that the controversy is the product of fear, not for the religion, but rather of losing authority over the religion. According to Seyran Ateş:

⁵⁴ Reported in Riyad as-Salihin by imam Al-Nawawi, book 1, hadith 184.

The mosque is annoying to countries and not only groups or individuals. They [traditionalists] produced fatwas (explain) against us. Why are they interested in this tiny place? They say it themselves since the first day when we had the opening event that somebody should get a big car and drive over us because we grow fast. Kill them before they grow. All these authorities are interested in power and money and they're afraid that something could happen to their authority like in the Catholic Church for example and the church in general. They are afraid that we might take them down from their thrones to the basics and discuss their authority and the money they take from the congregation.

Seyran's narrative highlights a different and important perspective of the hostility against Ibn Rushd mosque. It shifts the discourse that the traditionalists use as defenders of true Islam to defenders of their own authority and power. It also stresses further how the space of the mosque, no matter how sacred it is, is prone to what Chidester and Linenthal (1995, p.17) refer to as "profane forces", such as power and authority.

Given the above, the mosque is considered as an arena of struggle between two ideologies, the traditional and the liberal, over its ownership as suggested by Chidester and Linenthal (1995). In this context, "ownership" does not mean the literal ownership of Ibn Rushd mosque, but the ownership of the space of mosques in general, including Ibn Rushd mosque, and the authoritative positions that the mosques assign to a number of individuals. It is also about ownership of the dominant discourse of Islam and who gets to pen the narrative. The Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque is an arena where liberal Muslim ideology is defended and promoted, not only by talking about it, but also by practicing liberal Islam through the many activities taking place in the mosque, such as mixed-congregational prayer, and women leading the prayer.

Analysis of the three spatial dimensions of the mosque and its members' narratives emphasizes Massey's (1992) conception of space as something beyond a flat, immobilized surface, and confirms Knott's (2005) conception of space as dynamic. The three dimensions of the Ibn Rushd mosque are inseparable, and instead depend on interaction with each other. According to Lefebvre (1991, p. 416-417), "It is in space, on a worldwide scale, that each idea of 'value' acquires or loses its distinctiveness through confrontation with the other values and ideas that it encounters there." As such, the mosque's liberal ideology, which constitutes its mental aspect, would not have acquired particularity without a space such as

that of the mosque. In other words, it required a space in which liberal Muslim notions and principles are crystallized to practically confront traditional Muslim ideologies. The space of the mosque, as well as its social aspects, different practices and interactions are proof that the ideology of liberal Islam has succeeded in creating its mark on the space of the mosque. As such, it suggests that the liberal Muslim ideology is not just some empty rhetoric or fantasy of its adherents. Lefebvre (1991, p.416-417) also suggests that “groups, classes or fractions of classes cannot constitute themselves, or recognise one another, as ‘subjects’ unless they generate (or produce) a space”. Therefore, the social interactions of its members and visitors suggest that these individuals succeeded in constituting themselves as “subjects” since they created a space dominated by liberal values and beliefs. Without the physical presence of the space of the mosque with its distinct elements, the members of the mosque would not have been recognized as subjects or agents, but rather merely as objects, and the ideology of liberal Islam with all its representations and practices would have lost “all pith and become mere signs, resolve themselves into abstract descriptions, or mutate into fantasies” (Lefebvre, 1991, p.416-417).

5.2.3 Properties of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque

The space of the mosque has a range of notable properties. According to Knott (2007), properties of a space include its configuration, extension, simultaneity, and power. As such, I will first investigate the mosque’s configuration, meaning its ability to hold different dimensions, physical entities, interactions, and representations together. Then, I will investigate the extension of the mosque space, referring to the history of its space. Next, I will discuss its simultaneity. which covers its connection with other mosques that are different or similar. Finally, I will investigate the power relations taking place at the mosque and the different strategies of resistance to unequal power relations dominating traditional mosques.

Configuration refers to the mosque’s ability to hold together the different dimensions previously discussed, as well as the different “objects, relationships and representations” (Knott & Franks, 2007, p.227). The mosque is comprised of numerous elements such as the prayer room or objects within it, such as the mihrab, loose clothes, scarves, and small hats for

hair covering. It also incorporates the side of the prayer room specified for its visitors, the e-mail list and the flyers about the mosque in different languages.

Each of these elements holds different meanings. The mihrab with the different length wooden structures refers to Mecca. This suggests acceptance of all Muslims irrespective of their differences. The loose clothes, scarfs, and hats denote respect for those who are more comfortable and focused during prayer when they cover their hair. The side specified for people who want to know about the Muslim prayer indicates the mosque's openness and welcoming environment. The e-mail list and flyers in different languages refer to the mosque's eagerness to maintain contact with visitors and to welcome them into the space of the mosque. In sum, every element in the mosque is a representation of the relationship between mosque, visitors and members.

As for extension, the mosque is currently inside a church. This means that it is located within a scared place in Christianity, a religion that a large number of Muslims criticize for equating Jesus with God. As such, it is seen by some to contradict the first pillar of Islam (shahada), which expresses the belief that there is no God, but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of God. Even though this set up was unintentional seeing that the church offered the place to the founders of the mosque, establishing the mosque inside the church emphasizes the openness of the mosque to other religions and beliefs regardless of their differences from Islam.

Regarding simultaneity, the mosque does not exist on an isolated island. It is connected to other mosques in Germany and around the world that are similar to or different from it. The simultaneity of the space of Ibn Rushd mosque with that of other mosques, whether they are for or against the mosque, explains the support it receives from the very few similarly situated mosques. It also explains the harsh criticism that sometimes results in attacks from opposition mosques. The existence of the Ibn Rushd mosque is considered by the members of other liberal mosques as an extension of their own mosques as inclusive spaces that should be supported and defended. Similarly, the members of traditional mosques consider the space of Ibn Rushd as an extension of their own traditional mosques. Such mosques claim that the Ibn Rushd mosque lost its way or was manipulated by a group of people who were corrupted by Western ideas and beliefs. These sources of corruption aim to destroy the religion through a domino effect by hitting the first domino which is Ibn Rushd mosque. As such, it is important

to traditionalists to protect the space of the mosque, any mosque, including Ibn Rushd-Goethe.

5.2.3.1 Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque as an arena of power relations

Power is everywhere and it pervades any space. The space of the mosque is no exception. The sacredness of mosques as spaces for worship and devotion does not protect them from the power struggles of the outside world. Even though they are distinguished from ordinary places, the fact that they are multidimensional and are created out of social relations makes them a site of negotiations and contestations over their legitimate ownership by different groups of Muslims. As such, they serve as a field of struggle filled with power in which Muslims battle to express themselves and their ways of thinking. Their social nature also makes the mosques a reflection of the wider Muslim social reality in which power relations are not only confirmed and reinforced, but also challenged, negotiated, and resisted.

In traditional mosques, power is exercised through strategies of appropriation that involve claiming legitimate ownership of the mosques, and strategies of exclusion of anything or anyone that contradicts with the traditional Muslim way of thinking. These strategies control membership according to sex, sexuality and gender, and also limit the views that contradict traditionalist Islam. The purpose of this is to preserve the dominant spatial order inside the mosque and the social order outside of its walls. The strategies of appropriation and exclusion are justified by the leaders of traditional mosques who claim to have the most knowledge of Islam and its teachings. From the perspective of traditionalists, this qualifies them to claim themselves the owners of the space of mosques and the protectors of their sacredness, purity and the authenticity of Islam.

This does not mean, however, that power within the space of mosques is eternally negative or always exercised by the most powerful at the top of a hierarchy. Traditionalist scholars, leaders and members of traditional mosques can oppress and exclude people. However, power can also be practiced from the bottom and serve as a positive source that lifts up the least powerful. It can also prove productive by generating resistance to itself and allowing people to create a meaning of themselves of what they can do and how they see the world. Even though the space of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque is relatively small with a few members, it still represents a site of resistance against the dominant power relations in traditional mosques. Strategies of resistance include transforming the space of the mosque to

a democratic one where every member has the right to freely express themselves, as well as share their knowledge and experiences. The strategies of resistance also include inversion which seeks a reversal of the prevailing social and spatial construction, as well as hybridization which refers to combining or moving beyond the traditional spatial order. Applying the three strategies at the same time – inclusion, inversion and hybridization – the members of the mosque seek to put all members of the mosque, whether male or female, homosexual or heterosexual, on a horizontal line of power relations.

5.2.3.2 Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque as an inclusive space

In traditional mosques, the only person allowed to address the worshipers is the imam. He is required to have expert knowledge of the Quran and the religion to fulfil this role. The imam is responsible for leading the prayer on Friday, giving the sermon, and answering the worshipers' questions. However, not all questions can be asked or answered. According to traditional interpretations of the Quran, Muslims should refrain from inquiring about what is not mentioned in the Quran: "O you who believed, do not ask about things which, if they are shown to you, will distress you. But if you ask about them while the Quran is being revealed, they will be shown to you. Allah has pardoned that which is past; and Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing" (5:101). In addition, Muslims are required to obey the words of God, the Prophet, and those in authority among them (imams in the case of the mosques). According to Quran (4:59), "O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you should believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best (way) and best in result". The traditional interpretations of these two verses makes it impossible for ordinary members of mosques to ask certain questions, disagree with the imam's views, or express or build their own views without risk of disobeying the words of God and his Prophet.

It is different, however, at Ibn Rushd. Adel who used to attend traditional mosques explains the contrast between traditional mosques and Ibn Rushd mosque with regards to freedom of speech and expression of opinion in the following way:

Adel: I used to have discussions with imams and other worshipers in traditional mosques. But they don't want to discuss anything. They just say that it is what it is. I

would tell them that I have a different opinion. They would say, “Good, but don’t say it in our mosque”. I used to go to the leader of the prayer and tell him that I don’t agree with what he said. He would just ask me to stop saying my opinion. Then I went to other mosques where they speak Turkish, but I didn’t understand what they said. After a while, I limited myself to mosques where they don’t speak too much about politics, so I don’t disagree and tell them that and then cause a problem. Then I stopped going to any mosques for three years. Here after the khutba, we all sit together and exchange our opinions. We all participate. Men and women. So, there is an active exchange of opinions. In other mosques, they ask us not to disagree with the imam. Here we wait until the imam is done with her or his khutba and then we discuss it together and ask questions.

Samantha had the same experience as Adel, but the context was in a Muslim voice chat where users primarily informed her about the normative idea that women are forbidden to do the call to prayer:

Samantha: I asked people on Muslim live chat why women can’t call for prayer, and they actually kicked me out of the chat after a while because I kept asking questions and they said you must have understood by now. It’s private and you’re seducing men with your voice. I told them it doesn’t say that in the Quran. It says something about wives of the Prophet, but I’m obviously not a wife of the Prophet. But they said, yes, but as a Muslim you should orient yourself towards the wives of the prophet.

Adel and Samantha’s opinion of the mosque as an inclusive space where everyone thinks freely and independently by sharing thoughts with others is also held by Burhan. Burhan thinks that this inclusive space can be used to not only express ideas, but also one can use these ideas to find solutions to the problems that Islam faces. Regarding this, Burhan told me:

This place (Ibn Rushd-Goethe) is special because here you can sit and think out of the box. Here you can question your faith. That’s why this place is important to me. To go deep inside Islam one needs to sit down and think, but one should not think alone. People who share the same views should sit together and ask questions. Maybe in the future we will come up with solutions to all the negativity in Muslim societies. I think

Islam has been in a difficult situation in every century. Islam survived many tough times. At the end of the day, I just follow my heart.

Samantha also shares the same opinion as Burhan regarding the inclusive space of the mosque as a place where the members can sit, think, ask questions, as well as engage in intellectual discussions. This contrasts with traditional mosques in which knowledge is limited to reciting the Quran and learning the biography of the Prophet. The latter practice reinforces the unequal power relations between members of traditional mosques and Muslim scholarly elites and leaders, who are the only ones allowed to engage in intellectual discussions on Islam, while ordinary Muslims just have to follow them. This point is also illustrated by Samantha who stated:

There was also never any intellectual kind of discussions going on (in traditional mosques). Just praying. Learning and studying Quran like how to recite Quran but there was never an intellectual discussion. I was missing that. I went to a course once, it was only about Muhammad, how he lived, where he went, and all this ... There were only questions and answers. There was no intellectual thinking, doubting, criticizing, or any kind of your own opinion. There was nothing. So, traditional mosques didn't work for me. For the prayer, I could stay home. There was no social interaction. I found this mosque (Ibn Rushd-Goethe) very simple, and I found a group of people who are intellectually interesting, who talked about the Quran openly and gave me simple answers and who told me I could think this or that way. They are very liberal and very honest.

The fact that the space of the mosque is inclusive of all its members' thoughts renders it specifically important for women, who are traditionally silenced on these kinds of arenas. As such, women are often left to just share thoughts with one another, so this inclusivity is so critical because it makes their voices, thoughts, questions, opinions heard by everyone, not only women. It also renders it important to men who were raised to listen only to other men's opinions and as such undervalue the opinions of women. This kind of socialization is expressed in just a brief exchange between me, Omar and Khaled:

Rasha: "Did you ever think about how women experience Islam?"

Khaled: "Not at all."

Omar: "I've never thought about it."

This small exchange reflects the importance of the inclusion of women's thoughts in the space of the mosque. The practices taking place in Ibn Rushd-Goethe helped Omar to train himself to listen to women and resist the way he was socialized as a man, Omar told me the following:

You can't see women's perspective in a certain subject if you don't talk to them. Experiences shape our mind; I was brought up to think like men. Even a glimpse of a woman's perspective changes a lot. I was never able to put myself in the perspective of women. I didn't think about it. Now, I hear a woman saying she feels like a servant who is not doing a real prayer. This is true. But you have to hear it. You have to get this input. I wasn't trained. My mother didn't train me to put myself in another person's position.

The fact that all members of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque are equally valuable and that there is no single authority in the mosque controlling the thoughts of its members is confirmed by Seyran Ateş. She was not treated in any special way when she came to the mosque when I was there. When she entered, nobody moved from their places. Her entrance did not stir any attention. This is completely the opposite of scenes I witnessed in traditional mosques when an elite scholar enters the mosque and almost all men run to kiss his forehead or hand. When I asked her about her position in the mosque and what it means to her and the members of the mosque, Seyran replied:

I'm not an authority who controls the congregation. I'm not even there. I'm like everyone who comes. You saw people were just doing their stuff when I popped up there. They didn't run to me or kiss my hand like it usually happens when an imam enters a place. I'm proud of them that they are also criticizing me or correcting me.

The narratives of Adel, Samantha, and Burhan emphasize the contrast between the liberal space of the mosque and the traditional space of the mosque in which the person is welcomed as long as they agree or accept without discussion what the imam says. Their narratives also emphasize the importance of the inclusive nature of the space of Ibn Rushd where the members of the congregation, no matter male or female, are allowed to sit together, share

perspectives, exchange opinions, freely ask questions, and even question the faith. Omar's narrative emphasizes the inclusiveness of the space as something exclusive in regard to women who are in the contexts of this mosque enabled to speak and share their thoughts, and to men for whom the inclusiveness of the space teaches them to listen. Seyran's narrative represents a practical example of the equal relationships between the imam, even the founder of the mosque, and the congregation of the mosque.

The inclusiveness of the mosque renders its space democratic. As a democratic space, Ibn Rushd-Goethe challenges authority given to the imam as the only person allowed to speak and allows others to speak. It also offers an equal opportunity and right to every person of the congregation, whether a woman or a man, to participate with opinions and questions. By allowing everyone to express their views freely, the democratic space of Ibn Rushd challenges the traditional notion that women's thoughts belong to and interest only women. As such, it trains the male members of the mosque to resist the way they were brought up and to not only listen to and value the opinions of other men. By allowing everyone to speak, ask questions, and think critically and freely about different topics in the religion, it enables the members of the congregation to become agents of intellectual discussions. Otherwise, they are only recipients of information about the teachings of the religion and its historical figures. The democratic space removes the constraints on what should be discussed in the religion. It opens the gates to *ijtihad* and removes the guilt and fear of criticising the Quran and questioning the faith. As such, it transforms the belief in Islam from something that was forced upon the individuals or inherited from family to something that Muslims willingly choose to believe in based on their independent research and critical thinking. In sum, all of these above narratives from members of the mosque confirm that the aims of such a democratic space are consistent with the Egyptian journalist, Mona Helmi's view of the ultimate goal of rituals and worship which is "to create a human being capable of "enlightened criticism on important daily issues" and "revolutionary thought that is against the subjugation of human beings" (Helmi, 1992, cited in Mahmoud, 2005, p.132).

Ultimately, the democratic space of the mosque offers its members the opportunity to freely express themselves, and thus encourages them to play a bigger role in introducing new understandings and interpretations of Islam that are consistent with human rights and equality. Knowing that their voices and opinions matter and can produce change, members enthusiastically study Islam and engage in activism based on a solid knowledge of the liberal

ideology of Islam and other Islamic ideologies. Regarding the merging of Islamic knowledge with activism Samantha said:

Samantha: when I came here there was no such element (activism element). Lately, it's been changing a little bit. I've been taking responsibility because I've been told that Muslim women don't have much of a voice in some countries. And they need a voice. I was more asked and put in this situation to give them a voice. So, I started to write in the blog about the mosque. All the interviews I'm doing, I became more outspoken. The thing is I don't want to put myself against all these radical imams. You know, imams have set arguments and they are good in reciting Quran. It's hard to stand up against them. And I didn't wanna go out there, propose an opinion, and then it was crushed by certain type of people with certain type of argumentation that I don't agree with, but I don't know why and how to respond. Then, I started to come here, I started to preach, I started to lead the prayer, I started to study, for every prayer I had to study, I studied so much because I'm pushed to this situation more and more and I have to know what I'm doing so when I study I feel more able and willing to stand against conservative people.

A similar stance was expressed by Khaled who is of the opinion that he learns a lot in Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque, and he hopes that one day he will share his own knowledge with people around him.

Khaled: I aim for both. I get knowledge here. I learned a lot here. I practice my German. And most importantly, I have changed here. I learn about a different kind of Islam that suits democracy and this country and suits what I believe. With me coming here I feel like I'm doing a real prayer, I feel like I'm doing something good. I'm learning a lot. In the future when I'm 25 or 26, I will be having my own ideas to share with people, I will be having something to talk about. There are people out there who need you.

The democratic space that the mosque offers is not limited only to asking questions, expressing religious views, and planning for future activism, but it is also open to members who need to speak without judgment about their lives and the challenges they face every day. By keeping the space of the mosque safe for everyone to speak their minds, members resist transforming the mosque into a space where only people converting to Islam are welcomed or

a court where people are being judged and punished. In fact, this revives the initial goal of mosques in Islam as a place to unite Muslims. Mariam recounted that she did not find this kind of openness in traditional mosques. At such mosques, she felt excluded after she converted to Islam and that it was difficult for her to share not only religious views, but also personal experiences because she felt she was judged.

Mariam: When I went to the typical mosque for the first time, they were very nice and welcoming everyone was saying Salam to me. Women came to me and asked me if I have any questions. It was very nice. It was nice after I said the shahada. Everyone was congratulating me, and we went out together. It was very nice and warming. When you are on your way to conversion, they are all very nice and want to help you. After you are converted you're kinda left alone. They are pleased when someone is on their way to conversion, when you are converted then you have to go your own way. I didn't like it. It made me sad. It is like when we say in Germany "fallen lassen, wie eine heisse kartoffel" (to drop you like a hot potato). The mosque (Ibn Rushd-Goethe) is good for women like me who have boyfriends and who don't want to get married as soon as possible. In other mosques, I couldn't find answers when I had problems with my boyfriend. They just said it's haram (not allowed to speak about). I didn't have a chance to talk about the problems I had. You're not married, we don't listen to your problems. Here is totally different. When I say I have a problem with my boyfriend, they're like, "Really? What's going on?" They listen to me. They don't say it is bad and we will not talk to you. This goes for everything and everyone else.

Samantha also shares this sentiment with Mariam that the mosque offers an inclusive space to not only talk about religious things, but also to build friendships and be part of a community without judgment. Samantha experienced traditional mosques as unwelcoming and found their members to be mostly uninterested in one another. Samantha expressed this in the following way:

Samantha: I haven't visited many mosques. Just very very few because I never felt very welcomed. I don't speak Arabic so well and they were all Arabic and Turkish mosques so there was a language barrier. And when I went, I was never greeted in a particularly welcoming way. People did their thing and I could go along but nobody ever spoke to me and ask when I am coming again or invited me to have a coffee.

The democratic space of the mosque is not only open to men and women to share their views, questions, doubts, criticism, personal experiences and problems, but it is also inclusive of queer men and women. It provides them a space where they can freely express themselves and talk about their sexuality. They can talk about almost anything without fear of being judged by other non-queer Muslims. This is expressed by Dina who identifies herself among other things as pansexual. For Dina, it is important to feel accepted and safe in the place where she is present. Regarding this Dina told me:

I think it's very important. The fact that I'm pansexual is not a big thing in my life. It doesn't dominate my life at all. I have a lot more different things that define me. But I still feel I want every part of me to be accepted where I go. I need to know that I am safe. And that I don't have to fear anything. I don't wanna defend myself constantly.

The safety and acceptance that queer Muslims feel in the space of the mosque is paired with the mosque's dedication to include in its democratic space not only free open discussion of religious matters from a heterosexual or/and feminist perspective, but also free open discussions from a Muslim queer perspective. This is reflected in the mosque's organization of queer inclusive events, such as the Queer Weekend event that took place from Friday 14.12.2018 to 16.12.2018. During this event, the mosque invited French queer imam and psychologist, Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed to lead the prayer on Friday. This was followed by a talk from Iraqi queer activist Ayaz Shalal about his activism, and then a talk by Hüseyin Albayrak, who became the first runner-up in the Mr. Gay Germany contest. In the evening, imam Ludovic, a psychologist, offered confidential counselling to people who were in need of counselling, especially queer Muslims. On Saturday, Imam Ludovic presented a seminar on homosexuality in Islamic texts. This was followed by a talk on the newly founded Jewish queer community "Keshet Germany" to introduce itself. Ultimately, the day ended with a "Muslim Queer Night", a get together. On Sunday, everybody again joined together for the Sunday Brunch under the theme of Queer week.

Events such as the Queer Weekend expand the democratic space of the mosque to include voices of queer Muslims, which are not allowed to exist in traditional mosques, let alone

acknowledged. This serves a similar function as the inclusion of women's thoughts, which help men understand and value women's opinions and experiences of the religion and the mosque. As such, putting forward queer Muslims' perspectives help the heterosexual members of the mosque to understand and value queer views and experiences of the religion and the mosque.

The inclusion of a Queer imam, activists, a Jewish group, and a contestant in a male beauty contest emphasize the importance of the views and experiences of such individuals. Hosting a queer imam such as Ludovic and queer activist such as Ayaz helps to expand the knowledge of both queer and heterosexual members of the mosque about queerness in Islam. It also highlights the difficulties that queer Muslims face, and the strategies they use. Importantly, these strategies are largely built on the queer friendly interpretations of the Quran. This will also help enthusiastic queer and heterosexual Muslims to vary and diversify their activism, informed by liberal Islam.

The inclusion of a Jewish queer organization to introduce itself practically proves that the space of the mosque is not only inclusive of heterosexual and queer Muslims, but also everyone, even those of different faiths. Finally, the inclusion of a man who was competing in a male beauty contest serves not only to value his views as a gay man, but also as a man who broke the constraints of traditional masculinity, which would view this kind of competition as degrading to men and only befitting of women.

5.2.3.3 The strategy of inversion

The second strategy that the members of the mosque use to resist the unequal power relations in traditional mosques is inversion. By inversion Chidester and Linenthal (1995, p. 19) mean reversing "prevailing spatial orientation, such that the high becomes low, the inside becomes outside, and the peripheral becomes central". This is true in the case of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque where the spatial order is actually an inversion of that of the traditional mosque. As previously noted, women in the mosque stand in spaces that they do not occupy in traditional mosques, namely, in the back of men or in a separated room during prayer. In Ibn Rushd-Goethe, they can stand in front of men, next to or between them. As such, women's presence in the mosque deconstructs traditional notions that sexualize women's bodies and voices and

represents men as vulnerable persons who cannot control their sexual thoughts in the presence of women.

These traditional notions are further challenged not only by the presence of women in the same place as men, but also by women leading them. In the mosque, women are allowed to leave their peripheral position in which they are only listeners to what is said during the khutba and can instead occupy the central point in front of the congregation of the mosque. They can occupy the place of the imam, or the spot where the imam stands, which is normally occupied by men in traditional mosques and associated with authority and power. That women can occupy this spot in the mosque deconstructs the traditional Muslim view of women and men as unequal in front of God since they occupy different spaces and roles within the mosque, such that they are also unequal outside the mosque's walls. This view was explained by Elham Manea who views women's leadership of the prayer as confirmation of the equality between men and women:

Elham: The first time I led a mixed prayer was in London 2013. The feeling [of leading mixed prayer] was beautiful. I felt it was something natural. I felt justice. That we all stand in front of God as only human beings. When I led the prayer in Ibn Rushd mosque, I insisted that a man stands next to me and we both lead the prayer. My message I wanted to deliver is that a man and a woman standing next to each other as equal in front of God and in front of the law. The message I wanted to deliver was about acceptance of human beings with all their differences and respecting their dignity and rights. This also reflects the society which I want to live in. A society in which women have equal duties and rights as men.

The inversion of women's roles in the mosque not only challenges the notion that women and men are unequal in front of God and in law, but also challenges the traditional distinction between sex and gender, such that the roles of each gender are "an organic extension of biological sex" (Hoel, 2013a, p. 26) and that there are "natural" or "God given" gender roles (Hoel, 2013a, p.26). Within these traditional roles, women's biological nature becomes deeply intertwined with nurturing and caring, rendering women ideal for motherly and wifely duties in the domestic domain (Hoel, 2013a). Even when women frequent traditional mosques, these gender roles are evident. In traditional mosques, women usually take their children with them to the women's room to watch them while their husbands pray unencumbered in the men's section. This turns the women's prayer area into a nursery where

children run around and scream and play. As such, it reduces the seriousness of prayer in the women's only section in traditional mosques. Sandra, for example, recounts her experience of praying in a separated room in a traditional mosque in Berlin where she felt she was not performing a prayer.

It felt like we were not allowed to go to prayer. Because there was no prayer. You just hear the prayer. There was no one you could see. You couldn't see anything. You just hear it from somewhere. I also found it interesting that children were mostly on the women's side. Boys and girls. I thought it was not a real prayer because they were coming with their children who were crying and playing. Men come to the mosque to pray, while women come there to take care of the kids. They are not allowed to just fall down and pray. They are in the room taking care of the kids while men are praying peacefully in silence.

For Sandra, praying in a separate room did not feel like a serious prayer, as she felt inhibited in her prayer. To her, a serious prayer is when prayer is performed in a reverent way. This means in the men's section where the imam is and can be seen, and where no children are playing around. Her narrative highlights the prevailing traditional notion that women are inherently mothers, and the only place they belong is in the private domain, that is, in the domestic sphere. In this view, even when women are not in the domestic sphere, they have to perform their motherly and wifely duties. That some women bring their children with them, and that they were not able to pray and had to take care of the children instead suggests that women consider their role as mothers and wives "central to their identity as Muslim women" (Hoel, 2013b, p.84), even more central than praying.

The inversion of women's role in the In Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque from that of addressee to addresser not only challenges the traditional gender roles assigned to women, but it also challenges the traditional leadership roles held by men, specifically their position in religious and public spaces. In fact, one of the reasons that drove many female members of Ibn Rushd-Goethe to leave the traditional mosques they used to attend and join the congregation of Ibn Rushd was that of being able to partake in prayer, as well as participating in a space in which traditional gender roles are challenged to a degree that women can take on the roles traditionally assigned to men, such as calling for and leading prayer, in a space where they

can choose what to wear, can freely speak and express themselves, and ultimately in a space that is inclusive of everyone.

This is further stressed by Khaled and Samantha's narratives about men feeling fed up with the gender roles and patriarchal discourse forced on them and Adel's narrative which foregrounds the skills of the imam to lead the prayer over the sex of the imam. In my interview with Khaled, he talked about the gender role assigned to him since childhood that he decided to challenge:

When you come from a Middle Eastern background, they tell you since you are a kid you are a man and you'll be in charge when you grow up, you are man, you are better. I was not a typical guy. I was different, and this has made me challenge that since I was a kid. Everybody kept asking me to act like a man, but I got enough of it and I decided to challenge them. What they said made me angry, and anger gave me energy to challenge them.

Even though Samantha was not present when I interviewed Khaled, when I asked her why she thinks men come to this mosque even though they do not experience the same degree of discrimination as women, she gave me an answer which resonates with what Khaled told me about fighting the gender roles forced on him.

Samantha: men come here because they're fed up with hearing the patriarchal stuff. They can't hear it anymore. It's going out of their ears; they want to hear something else. They want to hear love and kindness and religion. In all other mosques, it is all about rules, not God. And here, we want to have a spiritual get-together, we want to be kind to each other.

Khaled and Samantha's narratives about men themselves becoming fed up with their gender role as leader and patriarch that is forced upon them encouraged me to ask Adel directly if he feels less of a man when he prays behind a woman. This is a question I would not have asked any man given its sensitivity – some men might even find it degrading. Adel's answer to my question was as following:

When people say that (he is not man enough for praying behind a woman), I tell them, “You live in Germany and the head of the government is a woman, Angela Merkel, so where is the problem!” If a woman is qualified to do the job, then there is no problem.

He further noted:

I don't feel any difference when I pray behind or next to a woman. Many men, like some of my friends, wonder how I pray behind a woman! They tell me God will not accept my prayer, but then I ask them how they know that God will not accept my prayer? If she was the imam, a woman would say the same things that I say as the imam.

Khaled, Samantha, and Adel's narratives suggest a dedication from men to challenge the patriarchal ideas forced upon them as men just as it is forced upon women. As such, the mosque gives them a space to resist and challenge these ideas by engaging in an inversion of gender roles of each sex within the mosque. To Samantha, the focus on the rules regarding the sex of the worshipers or the preacher in a traditional mosque transforms the mosque's prayer hall into a book of rules based on which people are judged. It also shifts the focus from worshipping God to observing the rules. Adel's narratives resonate with Samantha's view of the mosque becoming a rule book. One time, his friends judged him for not following the rules by telling him he is not a man, and another time by telling him that his prayer was not valid because it was behind a woman. Adel's replies to his friends logically debunks their ideas by shifting the focus from the sex of the imam to their skills as an imam.

The fact that women occupy the places traditionally occupied by men breaks the male domination of the “serious” space of the mosque, the prayer hall where men and the imam pray reverently without children running around and making noise. It also undermines the male domination of knowledge production within the mosque as women take an active role and include their views in it. Mariam tells me of her experience in a traditional mosque and how the gender-segregated space made it difficult for her to contribute to the knowledge production even by asking questions.

What I don't like also about other mosques is that I'm not able to talk with the imam directly after khutba. If I have any question, I need to find a child, write down my question, give it to the child and ask them to go and give it to the imam. When you have your own child it's not a problem, but otherwise, you have to ask someone else's

child because you are not allowed to go to the men section. There were no women imam. Only the wife of the imam. And she is not there all the time. She was very conservative. I had to wait for the imam until all men are out and ask him if he has time to talk to me. It is difficult. In the beginning, I had many questions I wanted to ask. In other mosques you feel like a second-degree person.

To Mariam, the gender-segregated space made it difficult for her to reach the male imam and ask him questions which were also part of the knowledge production taking place in the mosque. As such, she felt her position in the mosque was one of inferiority to men. Unlike the male imam, who must be there all the time, the female imam leading women is not present all the time. This further emphasises the questioning of the seriousness of the prayer women do in their section. It also further confirms that women's role as leaders of prayer, even for other women, is not as important as it is for men. In fact, it suggests it is not important at all since the woman imam does not need to be there for the women's congregational prayer to be valid.

The disparity of knowledge production inside the mosque is explained further by Adel whose narrative also suggests the importance of inverting the position of women in the mosque.

In my opinion, men excluded women in many of the mosques I visited. They tell them that it is not obligatory to do Friday prayer in a mosque. And women found it easier to stay at home. Consequently, men are left alone with some people telling them how they should treat women, like that beating them is okay, for instance. If there was a woman there, she would have said no this is not right. Or the guy on the minbar would have felt embarrassed to say such things when there is a woman present. When society is segregated based on sex, it becomes monotonous and incomplete.

Adel's narrative emphasizes the fact that the space of the mosque is actually a site of power and resistance in which men are dominant, but also that women must be present to resist this dominance, as well as the discourses and actions resulting from it. These discourses and actions otherwise further entrench male domination and the marginalization of women. Without such alterations, the knowledge produced there will be incomplete, male interest-vested and lack diversity, like the gender-segregated societies when one observes them from a one-gender perspective.

The importance of women occupying the spaces of leadership which are traditionally reserved for men and their inclusion in knowledge production is further explained by Seyran Ateş:

Sharing knowledge in mixed congregation is more important than just sharing it with only half of the society. To be in the women's section and talk about religious issues is like you are on the children's level. It's like they (women) are not people of knowledge. They may drink tea or coffee or have fun together, but they are not real authority. It's important to me to be part of knowledge production.

Seyran's narrative stresses the point that Adel made about the exclusion of women from the space of mosques and how this results in incomplete knowledge that lacks the female perspective. She also stresses Sandra's point about how the women's only section is considered non-serious. Furthermore, she emphasizes Mariam's point about women who occupy the women's section as being considered second-degree people. This is because women in the women's only section are not considered people of knowledge, thus, they are at the margin of the serious events and discussions occurring in the mosque. As such, Seyran also asserts that shifting and mixing up the positions of men and women inside the mosque contributes to the destruction of the traditional notions described by Sandra and Mariam, and the male domination of the space described by Adel.

As a form of resistance against the male domination of the space of traditional mosques, members of Ibn Rushd mosque use the strategy of inversion. Their strategy of inversion includes inverting the places traditionally occupied by women only or men only, as well as the roles which are performed by men only, such as that of the imam. By inverting the places and roles of women and men in one space, the members of the mosque deconstruct the gender roles they are classically assigned to. Specifically it challenges the notion of men only as leaders or women only as caregivers. This also helps to reconfigure and deconstruct the traditional view that women are not a source of knowledge. Rather, in the Ibn Rushd mosque women are included in the processes of knowledge production.

5.2.3.4 The strategy of hybridization

The third strategy of resistance used by the members of the mosque after the democratisation of the space and the inversion and mixture of women and men's roles and locations is hybridization, which according to Chidester and Linenthal (1995, p. 19) involves mixing, fusing, or transgressing conventional spatial relations of a sacred space. In addition to mixing up the space of the mosque with music and Sufi whirling during the celebration of the last day of Ramadan, and the space of the mosque with Muslim queer activism with its hosting of the Queer Weekend, the space of the mosque is mixed with different kinds of worshiping. Inside the mosque, all Muslims pray in the same way as the Prophet Muhammad did. They start the prayer with saying God is great, recite the Quran, prostrate, and the finish their prayer with saying "peace be upon you" two times. However, there are other people who join the prayer, but pray in their own way. The prayer hall of the mosque is open to everyone who wants to join the prayer even if they do not want to pray in the Muslim way. It is open for people to stand in line with everyone else and meditate or pray in the same way as in different religions. Otto, the man who captured my attention when he was meditating when everyone else was performing the traditional moves of the prayer, explained his reasons and experience of meditating in the same rows as other worshipers in the following way:

The first time I joined the prayer, I asked Adel if it's okay to meditate and not pray because it is strange for me to pray, and he said okay. Some people said I couldn't and that prayer is not a meditation. I was confused. But then Islam has many varieties. Islam is influenced by other religions. When I was sitting to meditate, I was hoping I was not disturbing others or doing something wrong. I felt calm. I tried to focus but I thought about what others are thinking, what the guests are thinking, I was surprised it was very good. I was always waiting for someone to ask me about what I'm doing here. But nobody did.

Otto's narrative about praying in a way that is different from the rest of the congregation without interruption challenges the traditional idea that the mosque is open for Muslims only. It also challenges the idea that only the Muslim way of praying is legitimate. Instead, it shifts the focus from the bodily movements of prayer as a ritual that connects people to God to the meaning of the prayer itself and the devotion to and belief in God that drives people to pray, no matter what the prayer looks like. As such, the mosque becomes a site of unity and equality of not only Muslim men and women, but also of Muslims and non-Muslims who just want to pray to God. The mosque turns into a site of unity with a group of human beings who share the same goals and hopes in producing and disseminating a liberal version of Islam.

Another method of hybridization is through transgressing the conventions of traditional mosques. The different ways that the conventions of traditional mosques are transgressed have already been noted in earlier sections, such as with the discussion of men and women praying in the same room with and next to each other, and women leading the prayer, men and women hugging after the prayer, the hosting of Sufi music and dancing, the hosting of Queer Weekend, and so on. There are two specific acts, however, which represent not only a transgression of conventions, but also massive sins that require hadd punishment⁵⁵: interreligious marriage and same-sex marriage. These are massively condemned in traditional Muslim communities and are legally not permissible in Muslim countries.⁵⁶

It is common for mosques to host marriage ceremonies, but it is prohibited for them to host the ceremony of a marriage that contradicts with the traditional teachings surrounding Islamic marriage. This includes interreligious marriage in which the wife is Muslim, and the husband is non-Muslim. In Ibn Rushd mosque, marriage can be conducted between any two human beings as long as they show their free consent to take each other as lifetime partners and one of them is Muslim. In the mosque, it is permissible for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man. In this fashion, the mosque resists the stigma associated with interfaith marriages which is considered *zina* (illegal/sinful). Interreligious marriage is a major sin in traditional and popular Muslim thinking since the man and the woman fail to meet the basic condition according to traditional Islam requiring a Muslim woman to marry a Muslim man. The mosque gives Muslim women who wish to marry non-Muslim men a religious marriage contract, which might be needed in some cases to reconcile or to protect family relationships that might be affected by such a choice of a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man. It also stresses women's agency and places the choice of choosing their future husbands in their own hands, rather than those of traditional religious interpreters. Moreover, it raises the value of integrity in Muslim societies by preventing marriages in which the non-Muslim husband has to blindly convert to Islam only to marry the Muslim woman he loves. This is something Adel describes as a kind of hypocrisy:

⁵⁵ Hadd refers to punishment laid out in the Quran and hadith for crimes against God.

⁵⁶ Tunisia is the lone exception to this because its president at that time, Beji Caid Essebsi, revoked the 1973 administrative order that prohibited marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslims.

Adel: Of course, all mosques do not accept such a marriage without him [the husband] converting to Islam. This is of course a type of hypocrisy. Is it ok to become a Muslim just to marry someone! This doesn't have anything to do with Islam. There is no text in the Quran saying this.

Adel's narrative suggests that it is much more important to truly believe in the religion than to formally convert to Islam just to please people and abide by the rules around you.

As it is not permissible in Islam for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man, same-sex couples, even if both members are Muslim, are not allowed to marry each other. As mentioned in chapter two, homosexual sexual relationships are considered a major sin punishable by death.

Ibn Rushd mosque provides same-sex couples with a right that they are prohibited from even in some of the mosques, which adopt a non-traditional Muslim way of thinking. Namely, the right to be Muslim and a homosexual at the same time is permissible as is the right to marry whomever one loves in front of God. By conducting same-sex marriages, the mosque confirms in practice to its commitment to embrace all Muslims with all their differences. It offers a space to queer Muslims where they do not feel judged. By giving them the same and equal right to marry the person they love, the space of the mosque reconciles queer Muslims' sexual identity with their religious identity as well as potentially removes the guilt associated with being queer and Muslim. It also turns the same-sex relationship from a major sin into an event that is proudly and openly celebrated in a special place to Muslims, such as the mosque. The mosque does not transgress traditional Muslim conventions simply by only conducting interfaith and same-sex marriages, but also does so by leaving the choice of the witnesses for the marriage contract in the hands of the couple who are to be married. Traditionally, a man's testimony is equal to that of two women. Therefore, a contract that requires the testimony of two people can be done with one man and two women, or two men. Regarding the system of testimony that the mosque uses in which men and women's testimonies are equal, Adel told me the following:

In traditional Islam, a woman's testimony is worth half of a man's. We don't do this here. I asked the couple who were going to marry if they want two women, or two men,

or a woman and a man. They chose a woman and a man. You know a woman will not see less than a man. She sees exactly what a man sees.

As in the case of leading prayer, Adel's narrative logically debunks the idea of women as ineligible for performing roles traditionally associated with men. Since women see the world no differently than men, for Adel, it is not logical that a woman's testimony equals half of that of a man.

Members of Ibn Rushd mosque also use hybridization as a strategy along with inversion to resist the traditional dominant view of the mosque as a space built upon rules and constraints. Hybridization consists of combining different elements within the space of the mosque that are not traditionally found together. In Ibn Rushd, men and women are mixed in the same prayer hall, music and dancing are also performed together in the space of the mosque, and there are simultaneously different types of worship, such as Muslim prayer and meditation. Such combinations create a new space that is inclusive of not only queer or heterosexual Muslim women and men, but also is practically inclusive of non-Muslim men and women who believe in God and want to worship it in their own way. The strategy of hybridization also consists of transgressing the spatial conventions of the traditional mosques. As previously noted, this is evident with women leading the prayer, women and men praying together, and also in hosting ceremonies of interfaith and same sex-marriages with men and women's testimonies holding equal worth. The hosting of interfaith and same-sex marriages not only resists the spatial conventions of the traditional mosque, but also removes the stigma associated with interfaith and same-sex relationships, as well as with those who hold or support them.

The different strategies that the members of the mosque use to challenge, configure, and resist traditional views of gender and sexuality confirm Foucault's (1995) view of power as not always negative but it can also be positive, productive, and not always used to oppress such as is the case in the mosque where its members use power to produce and practice a liberal Muslim ideology which aims at resisting and challenging traditional Muslim views of gender and sexuality which are experienced by some Muslim women, men, and queer as oppressive.

That the space of Ibn Rushd is democratic in that it is inclusive of all people's opinions, feelings, experiences without an authority controlling the discourse at play confirms Foucault's view of power being tightly connected with knowledge in that knowledge

production in Ibn Rushd-Goethe is not limited to a few people manipulating the power of knowledge but rather power of knowledge is equally divided on the members of the mosque

The analysis of the different properties of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque confirm Knott and Franks' (2007) view that space is formed from different small elements with disparate meanings, relationships, and representations. It also confirms their idea that space has diachronic and synchronic features in that past and it is connected with other mosques' spaces whether liberal or traditional through sharing the hosting of prayer.

The analysis also confirms Massey's (1991, p.81) view of space as created by dynamic social relations that in turn render a site full of "power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation". It also confirms Chidester and Linenthal's (1995, p. 15) view that the mosque as a sacred space is a "contested space, a site of negotiated contests over legitimate ownership of sacred symbols" and "it is claimed, owned, and operated by people advancing specific interests".

This is evident in the case of Ibn Rushd and the narratives of its members in relation to traditional mosques. The spaces of both mosques are formed from social relations and are contested spaces with the liberal Muslim group advancing a liberal understanding of Islam and traditional Muslims maintaining traditional Islamic understandings. In addition, one space is full of relations of domination and subordination, such as the traditional mosque space, and the other is full of relations of solidarity and cooperation, such as the space of Ibn Rushd. Moreover, one space is used to exercise power in order to preserve the dominant order through strategies of contestation, such as the appropriation and exclusion (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995) used in the traditional mosque space to dominate the space and eliminate anything that may disrupt the traditional order and discourse. The other space, Ibn Rushd-mosque, is used to challenge, reconfigure, and resist such traditional space through strategies of inversion that invert the positions of Muslim queers and women in the mosque from the periphery to the centre of the mosque. It also resists through strategies of hybridization that involve overcoming traditional spatial relations through welcoming all forms of worship, hosting events such as Queer Weekend, sufi dancing and music, and marriage ceremonies that are otherwise considered major sins.

In addition, that the space of Ibn Rushd is democratic through its inclusivity of all people' opinions, feelings, and experiences without an authority controlling the discourse confirms Foucault's view of knowledge being tightly connected to power which can be "transformed, realigned, shifted with transformations in the order and functioning of knowledges" (Grozs,

1994, 148). This is the case in that knowledge production in Ibn Rushd-Goethe is not limited to a few people manipulating the power of knowledge, but rather the power of knowledge is equally divided amongst the members of the mosque. The different strategies that the members of the mosque use to challenge, configure, and resist traditional views of gender and sexuality confirm Foucault's view of power as not always negative, but also as positive, productive, and not always a tool of oppression (Danaher, et al., 2000). This is the case in the mosque where its members use power to produce and practice a liberal Muslim ideology that attempts to resist and challenge traditional Muslim views of gender and sexuality experienced by some Muslim women, men, and queer as oppressive.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

My initial interest for this thesis was in investigating Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque in Berlin as a site of challenge and resistance to the dominant traditional thinking about the position of women, men, and homosexuality in Islam. Raised in a Muslim country, I knew that mosques were unusual and powerful spaces to the point that the government of my country appointed people to supervise and watch what was said and done inside them. At that time, I did not exactly know why, and my only guess related to political reasons.

When the mosque of Ibn Rushd-Goethe opened its doors, it was met with massive criticism and verbal attacks to the point that its members and founder received death threats. As such, my thoughts about mosques as powerful spaces were further confirmed. This prompted me to investigate the space of the mosque on a deeper level. I went to the mosque and observed, talked with its members, and analysed its space using Kim Knott's spatial method. This method enabled me to investigate the space of the mosque as dynamic and multi-layered, rather than just as a fixed background against which the members of the mosque pray. I also used Chidester and Linenthal's concept of sacred space to investigate the different strategies of domination and resistance taking place in the mosque as a sacred space.

Investigating the space of the mosque through Knott's spatial analysis, as well as Chidester and Linenthal's concept of sacred space, I was able to reach certain conclusions.

First, the space of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque is more than just its façade. Its space is actually the sum of different dimensions. It is the sum of the physical space of the mosque with its different elements that give the mosque its uniqueness. This also ascribes importance to its ideology, the different forms of social relations associated with and taking place in the mosque, and the liberal ideology it embraces and the controversies it instigates.

Second, the bodies occupying the space of the mosque are more than just fixed monotonous bodies that are present in the mosque to perform the prayer and celebrate religious events. The design of the space is informed by them, and they also produce the space of the mosque as a place for prayer. Without them, the space would be meaningless. The bodies of the members of the mosque are where the liberal ideology of the mosque is projected and confirmed. This is the case in that they do not observe the traditional spatial order where

women and men are segregated, nor do they follow the dress-code associated with it. By doing this, they also become sites of resistance to the dominant traditional Muslim views of gender and sexuality.

Third, the space of the mosque has different properties. It is comprehensive in that it can simultaneously hold many different elements and meanings. This did not appear out of the blue. It has a past which is not Islamic, but rather related to a different religion, Christianity. It is also connected with other similar and different mosques, which explains the support it receives and the attacks it endures. Moreover, it is a site of resistance and challenge to the traditional Muslim way of thinking through different strategies, such as turning the traditional space of the mosque into a democratic space, and through the inversion and hybridization of the spatial order of the traditional space.

In this research, I highlighted how the members of Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque use its space to disseminate the liberal Muslim ideology, and challenge the dominant traditional views of gender and sexuality in traditional Islam. By allowing women to call for prayer and men and women to pray together in the same place next to, in front of, and behind each other, the members of the mosque challenge the traditional Muslim view of women's bodies and voices as sources of temptation that must be covered and segregated from men during prayer time so as not to interrupt men's prayer with sexual thoughts. They also challenge the view that men are weak and cannot control their sexual thoughts in the presence of women.

By allowing women to lead men and women in prayer, the members challenge the gender roles assigned to women as caregivers, and men as the only leaders. They also include women in the knowledge production process at the mosque by letting them give sermons and lead discussion circles afterwards.

Furthermore, the members use the mosque to include queer Muslims who are otherwise excluded from the traditional space of the mosque, if they choose to be open about their sexual orientation. They do this by allowing them to not only pray in the mosque, but also lead the prayer, and by organizing seminars on Queerness in Islam to also include the perspectives of queer Muslims in the knowledge production.

In addition, they restore Muslim women's agency in choosing the person they want to marry regardless of religion, and without having to fall into the trap of cheating and lying about the

husband's true faith. They also remove the stigma associated with such a kind of marriage and also with same-sex marriage. These are otherwise considered major sins in traditional Islam. By allowing everyone to speak, and express their views about the religion, they challenge authority in Islam and mosques specifically, thereby producing a new democratic space in which everyone is equal and their views are valued equally.

This research on the mosque as a dynamic space revealed to me that there is still a lot to be accomplished in the field of Muslim mosques. I suggest that future research should pay greater attention to the mosque as a dynamic space that is both influential and influenced by the people who occupy it. Also, such a study should address the mosque not only as a building with distinct architecture or as a site of discrimination against women and queer Muslims. There are many resources regarding the discrimination of women and queer Muslims inside traditional mosques, but very few, almost nothing, about liberal mosques and gender dynamics within mosques, the difficulties they face, and their roles as feminist and queer-friendly spaces. Since most of the attention is given to mosques as sites of unequal power relations, researching liberal mosques would shed light on the other side of the story. It will shed light on the mosques as sites of resistance against unequal power relations. In addition, future research might work as an archive of an important era in which the "old" goal of a liberal Islam is finally taking place within a Muslim sacred space, the mosque. Since what is happening inside the mosques reflects upon the Muslim community outside them, such research would also highlight the importance of liberal mosques as sites of change regarding the current widespread patriarchal Muslim thinking, as well as sites to introduce new modern Muslim thinking in which all people are equal regardless of their differences.

These conclusions about the space of the mosque are not the only conclusions I reached. I also arrived at a personal conclusion and a sense of closure. As stated in the methods and methodology chapter, part of my motivation to carry out this research was to reach a closure with this religion and to get over this painful feeling of guilt. The readers might wonder now what kind of conclusion and closure I reached. They also might wonder if I became a Muslim again after such a wonderful journey in the mosque. Well, I did not return to Islam again, nor to any religion. I do not feel I need to. My journey to the mosque removed the feelings of guilt for leaving the religion. I mean, what kind of religion is it that people believe in out of guilt? I am sure that it is not the Islam I saw on display in the mosque. Regarding the conclusions I reached, the first was that Islam is diverse. To me, this is no longer just a

rhetoric to rehearse after unfortunate events related to Islam. It is a fact. And I saw it. The second conclusion is that it is not the Quran that constrains the reformation of the religion, it is rather the patriarchy taking over the Muslim world that is the problem. This patriarchy informs the dominant interpretations of the Quran. The third and the final conclusion is that I do not need to be a Muslim to be part of the Muslim community. Simply being a human is enough.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview guide:

1. Personal views on Islam/religious practice
2. Experiences of sexuality
3. Experiences in traditional mosques.
4. Feminist engagement? Understanding of feminism and Islam.
5. Participation at the Ibn Rushd mosque (how did they learn about it? How often?)
6. Why do participants attend the mosque?
7. Experience of the mosque space? What does it do?
8. View of the administration of the mosque

Appendix B

Consent form with anonymous identity:

Name of researcher: Rasha el-Sherif (telephone +47 459 18 277, email: rmelsher@student.hf.uio.no)

Supervisor: Associate Professor Nina Hoel (email: nina.hoel@teologi.uio.no)

Are you interested in taking part in the research project *“A Mosque for All”*

This is an inquiry about participation in a master’s thesis project where the main purpose is to explore the implications of the existence of Ibn-Rushd-Goethe mosque in the lives on its participants. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

The project is a master’s thesis, the purpose of which is to discover the influence of the Ibn-Rushd-Goethe mosque in the lives of its Muslim feminist or/and queer participants.

The master’s thesis main questions are *“what are the various ways in which the Ibn-Rushd Goethe mosque informs the fashioning of participants’ selfhood? And “How the space of the mosque is used to challenge gender and sexuality norms?”*

Who is responsible for the research project?

Centre for Gender Research at the University of Oslo is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a Muslim/queer woman/man who regularly visits Ibn-Rushd-Goethe mosque in Berlin, Germany, or you are a member of the administration of the mosque.

What does participation involve for you?

If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you meet in person for personal interview. It will take approx. 1-2 hours. The interview includes questions about childhood, experiences of migration, experiences of sexuality, personal views on Islam/religious practice, experiences of marginalization/criminalization due to personal views and/or sexuality, feminist engagement, understanding of feminism and Islam. Your answers will be audio-taped and the researcher will be taking notes during the course of the interview.

The questions that you will be asked during the interview are of personal nature as they are related to your experience of visiting the mosque. Please answer as honestly and truthfully as you can. Your honest responses will help me understand the influence of Ibn-Rushd-Goethe mosque on the lives of its participants. The key focus of this study is your opinions and experiences. Ultimately your answers will be included as part of academic publications and presentations. However, no one will be able to trace the information you gave out during the interview back to you. All publications and presentations where this interview data is used will use made-up names and will not include any descriptions that might identify you as the participant.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to this information. To ensure that no unauthorized persons are able to access the personal data, I will make sure that the data emerging from the research will be stored in a secure and appropriate manner on a research server. You can withdraw your consent at any time during the research and interview process.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end in December 2019. At the end of the project, personal data, including any digital recordings emerging from the research will be stored in a secure and appropriate manner on a research server.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with The University of Oslo, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Centre for Gender research – University of Oslo via associate professor Nina Hoel. For student projects you must include contact details for the supervisor/the person responsible for the project, not just the student.
- Our Data Protection Officer: Maren Magnus Voll - Data Protection Officer University of Oslo
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Supervisor: Nina Hoel

Student: Rasha el-Sherif

If you have any questions concerning this form of consent please ask the researcher before you sign this form.

If you have read this document and given the chance to ask any questions now, or at a later time or if the document has been read and explained to you, please sign or make your mark below.

- I have been informed by _____ (the interviewer) about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information regarding the study
- I give my permission for the interview to be audio-taped
- I give my permission *for my personal data to be stored after the end of the project for follow-up studies*

- I give my permission or my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. *December 2019*
- I am aware that the results of the study including personal details about sexuality, religion, feminism, will be anonymously processed into academic publications and presentations
- I may, at any stage during the interview, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study

I voluntary agree to participate in the research study described above.

(Signed by participant, place, date)

Appendix C

Consent form for those with disclosed identity:

Name of researcher: Rasha el-Sherif (telephone +47 459 18 277, email: rmelsher@student.hf.uio.no)

Supervisor: Associate Professor Nina Hoel (email: nina.hoel@teologi.uio.no)

Are you interested in taking part in the research project *“A Mosque for All”*

This is an inquiry about participation in a master’s thesis project where the main purpose is to explore the implications of the existence of Ibn-Rushd-Goethe mosque in the lives on its participants. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

The project is a master’s thesis, the purpose of which is to discover the influence of the Ibn-Rushd-Goethe mosque in the lives of its Muslim feminist or/and queer participants.

The master’s thesis main questions are *“what are the various ways in which the Ibn-Rushd Goethe mosque informs the fashioning of participants’ selfhood? And “How the space of the mosque is used to challenge gender and sexuality norms?”*

Who is responsible for the research project?

Centre for Gender Research at the University of Oslo is the institution responsible for the project.

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You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a Muslim/queer woman/man who regularly visits Ibn-Rushd-Goethe mosque in Berlin, Germany, or you are a member of the administration of the mosque.

What does participation involve for you?

If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve that you meet in person for personal interview. It will take approx. 1-2 hours. The interview includes questions about childhood, experiences of migration, experiences of sexuality, personal views on Islam/religious practice, experiences of marginalization/criminalization due to personal views and/or sexuality, feminist engagement, understanding of feminism and Islam. Your answers will be audio-taped and the researcher will be taking notes during the course of the interview.

The questions that you will be asked during the interview are of personal nature as they are related to your experience of visiting the mosque. Please answer as honestly and truthfully as you can. Your honest responses will help me understand the influence of Ibn-Rushd-Goethe mosque on the lives of its participants. The key focus of this study is your opinions and experiences. Ultimately your answers will be included as part of academic publications and presentations. You have to take into consideration that the readers of the thesis will be able to trace the information you gave out during the interview back to you. All publications and presentations where this interview data is used will use your real name and will include descriptions that might identify you as the participant.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to this information. To ensure that no unauthorized persons are able to access the personal data, I will make sure that the data emerging from the research will be stored in a secure and appropriate manner on a research server. You can withdraw your consent at any time during the research and interview process.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end in December 2019. At the end of the project, personal data, including any digital recordings emerging from the research will be stored in a secure and appropriate manner on a research server.

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So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

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If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Centre for Gender research – University of Oslo via associate professor Nina Hoel. For student projects you must include contact details for the supervisor/the person responsible for the project, not just the student.
- Our Data Protection Officer: Maren Magnus Voll - Data Protection Officer University of Oslo
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Supervisor: Nina Hoel

Student: Rasha el-Sherif

If you have any questions concerning this form of consent please ask the researcher before you sign this form.

If you have read this document and given the chance to ask any questions now, or at a later time or if the document has been read and explained to you, please sign or make your mark below.

- I have been informed by _____ (the interviewer) about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information regarding the study
- I give my permission for the interview to be audio-taped
- I give my permission *for my personal data to be stored after the end of the project for follow-up studies*

- I give my permission or my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. *December 2019*
- I am aware that the results of the study including personal details about sexuality, religion, feminism, will **NOT** be anonymously processed into academic publications and presentations
- I may, at any stage during the interview, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study

I voluntary agree to participate in the research study described above.

(Signed by participant, place, date)