They Made Their Sacred Space:

Power and Piety in Women's Mosques and Mushollas

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the concept of gendered space as it applies to prayer spaces in Islam, particularly mosques and mushollas exclusively for women. Gendered space is often articulated as space created by those with power—men— in order to control women's access to knowledge and to put them at a disadvantage, thereby maintaining patriarchal structures. Yet, when groups are relegated to or voluntarily choose the margins, those within may transform the margins into sites of empowerment. I consider the dynamics of religious space, including its construction, maintenance, and activities performed by its inhabitants, by focusing on the Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles, which opened in 2015, and Musholla 'Aisyiyah Ranting Karangkajen and Musholla 'Aisyiyah Kauman, which have been in operation since the 1920s in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This work is based on ethnographies of the attendees of these three sites in order to explore the experiences of the women and the impact both traditional religious spaces and religious spaces exclusive to women have on their spirituality, ideas of authority, and sense of community. The Women's Mosque of America and 'Aisyiyah women's mushollas create opportunities for women to participate in and contribute to Muslim communities by basing their efforts on the Sunnah and examples of female piety and leadership in early Islam. The present research challenges the argument that gendered spaces are inherently detrimental and must be remedied by a de-gendering process. Rather, the accounts of the attendees of the Women's Mosque of America and 'Aisyiyah women's mushollas speak to the possibilities of creating an exclusive space that privileges those within it, fulfilling the women's desire of religious

knowledge, leadership, community, and piety in ways that traditional religious spaces have at times fallen short.

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I am thankful for my family, who have always loved and supported me from one adventure to the next. I owe my deepest appreciation to Zackery Jenner, whose love and understanding over the years have made it possible for me to achieve this goal.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

For the most part, I have based transliteration on the style recommended by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES)* for Arabic words and phrases. Diacritical marks have been omitted and the symbol (‘) is used for the letter *‘ayn* and (’) for medial-position *hamza*. I have not altered the transliteration used by other scholars when citing their work. While I did not utilize italics unless already present in quotations, I have included a glossary of Arabic and Indonesian terms in Appendix A. Qur’an references in English are derived from the Yusuf Ali translation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER Page

Chapter 1: Introduction

"You have to believe that what you have to say is important and that, however fragile and insecure you might be, you have a little inner light worth heeding."

-Fatima Mernissi

Prologue

In the summer of 2013, I was a few weeks into a summer fellowship in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, taking classes at Universitas Gadjah Mada and exploring Javanese culture. One evening I was sitting in the lounge with another member of the program, a male, American student, preparing to return to our university guesthouse. The director of one of the graduate programs, Dr. Siti Syamsiyatun, invited us to go to some type of leadership meeting. Never wanting to miss an opportunity, I was in the habit of agreeing to activities and spontaneous outings in my travels. We drove to the 'Aisyiyah headquarters in Yogyakarta and observed a meeting of successful, important women: active 'Aisyiyah leaders who were extremely involved in their community. My limited Indonesian at the time was not enough to completely follow along, but it was immediately impressed upon me by the attendees the extent to which 'Aisyiyah was self-governed and not to be dismissed as just another part of Muhammadiyah, its counterpart and second largest Islamic organization in Indonesia. After the meeting concluded, Dr. Syamsiyatun asked if we wanted to visit a masjid— it was Ramadan, after all, and nearly sundown. As we drove to Kauman, I lamented not having brought a scarf to cover my hair; I even asked Dr. Syamsiyatun if I could run across the street and quickly buy one, but she assured me that since I was a visiting American scholar it was not necessary. Just as we arrived, she mentioned that this was a mosque only for women, but my male peer

would be welcome to enter after prayer was finished. Although I began my academic interest in Islam as a freshman in college and continued to focus on this field of study throughout my undergraduate degree, master's degree and then the first phase of my doctorate, I had never heard of a mosque only for women— mosques that did not allow women, yes, but never the opposite: a mosque that did not allow men.

Up until this moment in my life the only places I had ever entered that were reserved for the use of women only were locker rooms, restroom facilities and the like. My friend and I removed our shoes and waited on the steps outside of a small building on a narrow street while we heard the women pray inside. We were unsure if he would be allowed in at all, but again the exception seemed to have been made where his foreigner scholar status trumped his gender and he was welcomed in with me. The doors opened and we were invited to sit in a circle and visit. As it was time to break the fast, snack boxes were passed around and the women asked us questions about our studies while we asked about their community and the musholla. Over thirty women were there, comprised of a range of ages and backgrounds. I shared my surprise that a women's only mosque existed and was reminded "In the Prophet's time, women were encouraged to pray in mosques as much as men." Another woman said "It is very nice to have a place just for us."

My wonder at this experience did not fade upon my return to the United States, where I shared my story of the women's musholla in Kauman to professors and colleagues. Still, I prepared to set it aside to focus on courses and an unrelated, vaguely conceptualized thesis, not knowing that this experience would in fact become the cornerstone of my doctorate. Ultimately, I came to the realization that the women's

mushollas in Java merited further study long after my advisors, whose enthusiasm when I announced a change in my thesis topic solidified my determination to fulfill my course, language, and exam requirements so I could return to Indonesia better prepared for research and analysis. Then, in 2015, the Women's Mosque of America opened its doors in a multi-faith center in Los Angeles, and after just one visit I knew that the stories of these women, from California to Indonesia, needed to be told.

Study Purpose

The question of the role of women in Islam is often a controversial issue among Islamic feminists, governments of majority Islamic countries, scholars and the media. In recent years a series of short articles were published by different media outlets proclaiming that for the first time ever mosques that only allowed women were opening in various locations such as Amsterdam and Hong Kong. Women-only mosques are not a new phenomenon in many parts of the world; research has been done on the women's mosques and Qur'an schools in western China which have flourished for centuries. Yet, there is woefully little study on the almost one-hundred years old 'Aisyiyah mushollahs in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and while the Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles is in its fifth year in operation there has been almost no scholarly attention paid to it. At first glance, women's mosques and mushollahs may appear to be an extreme method of gender segregation, with mixed-gender mosques with little to no barrier on one end of the continuum and mosques that forbid women on the other. However, where do women's mosques fall when the motivation for the mosque and those who attend it is not so much privileging men over women but creating an exclusive space for women? This study aims

to explore how the voluntarily segregated space of a women-only mosque can be beneficial to the inhabitants and allow greater access to religious knowledge and the sacred.

Initially, I pondered why a place just for women to pray would be constructed, what need it fulfilled and how the space impacted not just the women who attended it but the community as a whole. As I studied the sociology of space through the writings of Michel de Certeau, Jose Casanova, Erving Goffman, and Michel Foucault I realized that although the motivation behind the construction of a place matters, a place's inhabitants and their activities within the place perhaps carry more weight as far as the way the space is understood. When four walls are erected and a door is attached with the understanding that only certain people may enter, what happens to the people who are allowed inside? Considering Mircea Eliade, Peter Berger, and Rudolph Otto, I wondered if gatherings for the purpose of religion, such as the enactment of rituals, fostering community and coming into contact with the sacred, does exclusivity benefit the inhabitants? When I first heard of the Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles just a few months after its creation, I saw this effort as the creation of an exclusive space for a group that perhaps felt excluded from typical religious activities. In Islam, women leading prayer and giving sermons is common in many areas, but not in the particular space of a mosque. My questions about the construction of place and space, the motivations behind its construction, the inhabitants that enjoy the finished product and the activities they perform within it were not enough. Rather, I also needed to consider the concept of power— who has it, who does not, and how it is exercised in a space and over a group—as well as the idea that with power there is always resistance. bell hooks wrote that in the margins of social life,

where the Other is often relegated, the space could be transformed into one of empowerment and resistance. Could I categorize these mosques as spaces of resistance—and resistance from what or who? If the women who act in these spaces feel liberated, knowledgeable, and powerful, what force was responsible for depriving them of those feelings and experiences outside of the space? These are spaces where women are able to shut the door on men, where women take on roles that are often denied to them in a mixed-gender setting, where women can hear and see the imam and preachers without a barrier. Did the mere existence of the space transform these women once they inhabited it, or have the women themselves imbued the space with such sacred power?

Based on preliminary research, I approached my field sites with a series of general questions that I hoped to answer with the guidance of the women who attend the two ‘Aisyiyah women’s mushollas in Indonesia and the Women’s Mosque of America in Los Angeles. First, I was curious about whether female congregants believe that their proximity to the imam and khateeb during prayer and sermons impacts their experience, both spiritually and in terms of their ability to acquire knowledge. With the understanding that a women’s mosque, women’s musholla, or the space allocated to women in mix-gendered prayer spaces in Islam are all gendered spaces, a term that will be discussed further below, I was eager to see if the traditional negative interpretations of gendered space could be countered when women create or maintain an exclusive space that privileges themselves and their religious engagement. Are the women’s mushollas and the Women’s Mosque of America and the activities that occur within them transformative and/or empowering to the women? Or, are these spaces just a more extreme and isolating form of gender segregation that puts women at a disadvantage from removing them

entirely from predominately male spaces? The fact that the mushollas and the Women's Mosque of America are a form of voluntary segregation also raised some interesting questions about how power can be claimed in the margins. In sum, I seek to gain further understanding of how religion and gender play a role in the assigned meaning and performed activities in a gendered space and how those within the space experience it and are subsequently affected.

Chapter Outlines

Following this introduction, the second chapter contains a literature review. Very little scholarship exists on mosques exclusive to women; in fact, to my knowledge only one text is dedicated to the topic, specifically about Chinese women's mosques by Maria Jaschok and Shui Jingun. However, my research was greatly informed by work on the concept of gender in Islam, seclusion and segregation in Muslim cultures, and the history of mosques. Additionally, literature on the development of Islam in Indonesia and gender issues amongst Indonesian Muslims was also helpful. The third chapter consists of a brief historical background discussing early Muslim women, including the wives of the Prophet, and gender relations and leadership roles during the lifetime of the Prophet. This chapter also examines changes in authority and the rise of veiling and seclusion in the Islamic Empire following the death of the Prophet Muhammed. Current gender issues in contemporary Islam are addressed along with a look at Muslim women's movements around the world that challenge traditional ideas of leadership, knowledge attainment, and spirituality. In the fourth chapter, I describe the theoretical framework that was the grounded theory of this research, including theories on space and place, sacred space,

gendered space, power, and resistance. The methodology portion of this chapter outlines the ethnographic and feminist research I conducted gathering qualitative data in the forms of interviews and observations in both Yogyakarta and Los Angeles.

Following those introductory chapters that formed the foundation of this research project, chapters five through eight delve into the ethnographic work at the field sites. Chapter five focuses on the creation of the Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles, its short history, programs, and the media response it garnered. Chapter six features the words of the women who attend the mosque themselves as they discuss what drew them to the Women's Mosque of America, experiences at mixed-gender mosques, their thoughts on gender segregation in mosques and women's leadership and authority in Islam, and what the future may hold for the Women's Mosque of America and its congregants. The next two chapters take us from Los Angeles almost 9,000 miles west to the city of Yogyakarta on the island of Java in Indonesia. Chapter seven discusses the history of Islam in Indonesia and the development of its second largest religious organization, Muhammadiyah, and its sister organization 'Aisyiyah, which runs mushollas exclusive to women including the two in Yogyakarta where I conducted ethnographic research. Chapter eight discusses the experiences of the women who have attended these special mushollas for a great deal of their lives, including their thoughts on women's leadership, gender roles, and the ways in which having access to these spaces have impacted them. Finally, chapter nine is a conclusion that articulates notable findings and theoretical implications, a review of the initial research questions and areas of further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Although my awareness of women's mosques only came about upon my first visit to the 'Aisyiyah musholla in Kauman in 2013, years of prior exposure to scholarship on women and gender in Islam came to the forefront of my mind when I began to seriously consider furthering my research in this area. Arguments for gender equality and equal participation in the Muslim community abound, but little has been written on the topic of women voluntarily claiming their own space both figuratively and literally in Islam. A limited number of scholars have asked similar questions to mine about the production and use of mosque space for women in Islam beyond the variety and meaning of physical boundaries that separate sexes. This is perhaps because women-only mosques are seen as exceptionally rare, although there is evidence of women praying and learning together, purposefully without men, throughout the Islamic world.

Women and Islam as a field of study is rich with important scholarship exploring the Sunnah and the complexities of the Islamic experience. While there is very little work on the topic of women-only mosques, and almost none on the two areas I examine in this dissertation, I owe a great deal to those scholars before me who have asked the hard questions about the role of women in Islam. This literature review focuses on several themes that are integral to my academic career and research pursuits. The first theme discusses the topic of gender in Islam, specifically in regard to the Qur'an, hadith and fiqh. The seclusion of women in Islamic cultures follows as the second theme and literature on women in the mosque is the third theme. The fourth theme is comprised of literature which relates to the unique expression of Islam in Indonesian culture. This

compilation of literature has formed the basis of my understanding of this field and prepared me for my ethnographic work, while the gaps present in the literature leave unresolved questions that have prodded me toward further analysis.

Gender and Islam

While men and women are seen as spiritually equal in Islam, in other facets of life patriarchy has become the norm in the practice of Islam and has ultimately led to various forms of segregation or even oppression of women. In Qasim Amin's works, *The Liberation of Women* and *The New Woman,* he discusses the way a gender hierarchy and gendered thinking have resulted in practices that deprive Muslim women of agency.[1] Amin, an Egyptian judge and Islamic modernist writing in the early 1900s, is critical in his work of the position allocated to women in society as evidence of outdated social standards erroneously attributed to Islamic tenets. For example, Amin takes on the issue of veiling, asserting that the veil or similar garments are not inherently Muslim but were derived from other cultures, appropriated and given a religious meaning. Practices such as veiling and seclusion often, in Egyptian Muslim culture, go beyond the sufficient moral principles of Islam and the tenets of Shari'a, causing harm to both men and women. However, Amin is criticized by Leila Ahmed who suggests his point of view is too heavily influenced by European perspectives on Egyptian culture and, furthermore, that his call to bring women into the public sphere as full participants is ultimately for the cause of nation-building rather than gender justice.[2] Amin offers evidence that the

[1] Qasim Amin, *The Liberation of Women and the New Women* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2000).

seclusion of the Prophet's wives was meant to set them apart from other women of the time, meaning that other women were not to be secluded. He contends that some of the benefits ascribed to female seclusion (protection of purity, increased respect from others) are actually benefits already enjoyed by women who are not in seclusion when men follow Islamic teachings. Amin considers the seclusion of women to be outdated and not useful to society as a whole, reinforcing the idea that gendered segregation only benefits the patriarchy by withholding power from women.

Etin Anwar, in her text *Gender and Self in Islam*, argues that while existing in a patriarchal system and following patriarchal beliefs, women contribute to and perpetuate the patriarchy themselves. According to Anwar, while "…women regularly contribute to the status quo of this public perception of truth, they have not actively been involved in the production of the knowledge that has shaped the epistemological status of women in Muslim societies."[3] By granting men authority over women, the obedience of women is used to "…maintain the status quo of the patriarchal and dominant norms in family and society. It reinforces the existing hierarchical gender relations between men and women."[4] Anwar also examines how the gendered thinking ("…the process of producing and reproducing public perception of the truth of how men and women's roles are appropriated in the Muslim world,"[5]) came to exist in early Islam through the Qur'an and hadith.

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[2] Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, From the Middle East to America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

[3] Etin Anwar, *Gender and Self in Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 19.

[4] *Ibid*., 127.

[5] *Ibid*., 16.

There are several more excellent texts that trace the role of women in Islam from the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad to contemporary times. In Syafiq Hasyim's *Understanding Women in Islam: An Indonesian Perspective*, he analyzes how women contributed to (or did not) fiqh and how fiqh regarding women came to be.[6] Hasyim sees a serious problem in how fiqh that addressed biological issues of women were ruled on by male 'ulama with no female input. There are numerous hadith narratives discussing the involvement of women in the public sphere and the political realm that have been used as the basis for arguments to seclude women from these areas. Despite this, throughout history female Islamic legal experts emerged all over the world and opportunities for women to be active in political and religious life have been varied. For example, fiqh experts from certain schools have ruled that women should be allowed to conduct the call to prayer while other jurists disagree; both opinions rely on Qur'an and hadith for support.[7] Hasyim reminds readers that although the Qur'an and Sunnah are unchangeable, "fiqh is the result of serious human endeavor (ijtihad) and is open to human excesses and failings."[8] He calls for a new approach to fiqh that includes women— "fiqh min al-nisa' (fiqh from women), formulated by women."[9] Hasyim goes further to offer a new method of understanding fiqh that pays attention to past and present circumstances to develop new fiqh that is relevant to today.

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[6] Syafiq Hasyim, *Understanding Women in Islam: An Indonesian Perspective* (Jakarta: Solstice Publishing, 2006).

[7] *Ibid*., 149.

[8] *Ibid*., 172.

[9] *Ibid*., 175.

In her breakthrough work *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective,* Amina Wadud examines the text of the Qur'an for indications of how the Prophet Muhammad intended women to be viewed in Islam.[10] According to Wadud, existing perceptions of women become reflected in the way the Qur'an is interpreted, rather than the Qur'an itself influencing how women are perceived. She argues, "there is no indication that the Qur'an intends for us to understand that there is a primordial distinction between males and females with regard to spiritual potential."[11] If this is the case, why have certain activities and roles aimed to promote spiritual growth become available to only one gender? Both Hasyim and Wadud seem to argue that egalitarian interpretations of Islamic texts and fiqh would benefit Islamic society as a whole, especially if both men and women were equally tasked with producing such scholarship. Wadud, in her second book *Inside the Gender Jihad,* uses this framework to challenge accepted gender roles in Islam, arguing that Muslims and the manner that their religion is expressed must be transformed to better reflect the spirit of the Qur'an.[12] To Wadud, this would look like an Ummah, or Muslim community, of brothers and sisters following Allah with equal rights to leadership, interpretation, dignity and agency. Controversially, she put her words to action by leading a group of men and women in prayer in 2005. Again, these scholars focus on creating a level playing field for men and women, acknowledging that for so long, powerful roles and opportunities were the

[10] Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[11] *Ibid*., 35.

[12] Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

privilege of men and that to remedy the consequences of this patriarchal structure women must be afforded the same access alongside men. Finally, it would be remiss of me to not acknowledge other female scholars of Islam who have grappled with patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an and hadith that have influenced Islamic law, most notably Kecia Ali, Asma Barlas, Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Asma Sayeed.[13]

Seclusion and Islam

Although the Western world tends to focus on (and often exotify and demonize) veiling in Islam, this practice is part of a larger discourse about modesty, seclusion and segregation of women in Islamic history as well as Asian and European history. Leila Ahmed, in *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, traces the role of women in the public sphere from Mesopotamia to the resurgence in veiling occurring in Islamic communities today.[14] Like Amin, she suggests that seclusion for women was only required of the Prophet's wives and that the wives' segregation became more stringent after his death by the subsequent caliphs. By the Abbasid dynasty, the seclusion of the Prophet's wives was considered a model for all women, resulting in the absence of women in public life and a lack of women's contribution to religious texts.

Fatima Mernissi's extensive body of work, including *Beyond the Veil: Male-female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society,*[15] *Women and Islam: An Historical and*

[13] See Ali, *Sexual Ethics in Islam*; Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam;* Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender*; Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam.*

[14] Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

[15] Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* (New York: J. Wiley and Sons, 1975).

Theological Enquiry,[16] and *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory*,[17] explores the division of public and private space in Islamic societies and how these spheres have become separated and gendered. One justification for this division is the threat of sexual temptation; that is, the idea that women carry the burden of being so sexually tempting that for the good of men, and therefore society as a whole, to prevent the dangerous consequences of a woman's sexuality women must be relegated to a separate space. With this separation, however, comes a distinct power differential, which Mernissi describes as thus:

> Strict space boundaries divide Muslim society into two sub-universes: the universe of men (the umma, the world religion and power) and the universe of women, the domestic world of sexuality and the family. The spatial division according to sex reflects the division between those who hold authority and those who do not, those who hold spiritual powers and those who do not.[18]

Veiling then serves as a method to allow women access to spaces otherwise prohibited to them while still, according to Mernissi, making their presence invisible.

Mohammad Ali Syed also looks at the tradition of purdah, the seclusion of women from the public sphere that is present throughout both Hindu and Islamic history.[19] Purdah refers to a large spectrum of garments, architectural organization and behavior aimed at separating women from men, including veiling and its variants, the configuration of gender-specific spaces in a home or public space, and accepted methods

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[16] Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

[17] Fatima Mernissi, *Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory* (London: Zed Books, 1996).

[18] Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, 138.

[19] Mohammad Ali Syed, *The Position of Women in Islam: A Progressive View* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

of interaction (or avoidance) between sexes. Syed claims that adherence to the Islamic tradition of purdah and the ideals it represents do not find their origin in the time of the Prophet but to "…reactionary Muslim rulers in various countries and by the regulators of Muslim society who were undoubtedly influenced by the societies and cultures with whom they came into contact after the conquest of Iran, parts of the Byzantine empire, and India."[20] Syed cites numerous credible hadith that indicate the presence of women with men in the Prophet's mosque as well as Quranic verses mentioning women in public. Hajj rituals serve as prime examples to Syed of the intent in Islam of peaceful and free interaction between men and women without any barriers, a topic that became a part of many important conversations in my ethnographic work. Furthermore, separation between the sexes is deemed not only un-Islamic but no longer necessary to Syed, who partially owes the implementation of purdah to the violence of a male-dominated society that no longer exists.

Lila Abu-Lughod studies how certain clothing and other barriers fulfill the principle of seclusion while also allowing a woman access to the public sphere.[21] Abu-Lughod employs the almost oxymoronic "portable seclusion" to describe this use of clothing. This term originated from Hanna Papanek and her work on purdah in Pakistan to describe the function of the burqa: "As a result [of wearing the burqa], and despite its forbidding appearance, the burqa can be considered a liberating invention and is seen in this way by many women themselves."[22] The burqa, originally cultural or regional wear

[20] *Ibid*., 103.

[21] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

associated with the Pashtun, has allowed some women to feel they may move outside of segregated spaces because by being so thoroughly covered they are still secluding themselves while having increased mobility. Abu-Lughod asks important questions about the intent of such clothing: "Can dress symbolize freedom or constraint? How can we distinguish dress that is freely chosen from that which is worn out of habit, social pressure, or fashion?"[23]

For many Muslim women, the different forms of veiling may represent their liberation and act as grantors of access to otherwise taboo roles and situations in society. Abu-Lughod refuses to believe that liberation can only have one context, asking, "…can we accept that there might be different ideas about justice and that different women might want, or even choose, different futures from ones that we envision as best? We must consider that they might be called to personhood, so to speak, in different languages."[24] The nuances of veiling and seclusion are only components of a larger conversation about power dynamics— discerning who has power over women's access the public, how women exert their own power, and so on. By examining this argument as Abu-Lughod asks, it is possible that demonizing religious and cultural practices is just another way of exerting power and therefore oppressing the Other. Many arguments about veiling and seclusion largely rest on the negative view of gendered space, as will be discussed later, and the idea that gendered space only functions to serve men and hold back women.

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[22] Hanna Papanek, "Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 15, no. 3 (1973): 295.

[23] Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* 18.

[24] *Ibid*., 43.

While historically speaking this is a valid sentiment, there has been little attention to how voluntarily creating a space for women, *sans* men, can be used as a method to empower women.

Women and the Mosque

The presence of women in mosques has been debated at least since the caliphate of Umar (634-644 CE) and different cultures have chosen to interpret and enforce ideas of gender and space, sometimes in conflicting manners. Marion Holmes Katz uses the concept of gendered space to follow a timeline of women's inclusion or exclusion in the mosque throughout Islamic history in her book *Women in the Mosque*.[25] Katz takes on common justifications for preventing women from attending mosques— that they are too busy with domestic duties, that the Prophet did not command women to attend, that they are too sexually tempting to attend, and more. Through much of her scholarship, Nimat Hafez Barazangi argues that women are unfairly disallowed opportunities for piety due to such restrictions[26]:

> By preventing women from Friday assembly, congregational prayer, and the mosque, they[27] have limited women's participation in community affairs and the exchange of knowledge that is an important part of the congregational prayer…they have also institutionalized an unwarranted differentiation between the religious duties of males and females.[28]

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[25] Marion Holmes Katz, *Women in the Mosque: A History of Legal Thought and Social Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

[26] See also Barazangi, *Woman's Identity and the Qur'an*.

[27] Here Barazangi specifically references the Muqallidun, whom she deems the imitators of precedence. This term is derived from taqlid, unquestioning conformity to laws, traditions, and doctrine.

[28] Nimat Hafez Barazangi, "Viceregency and Gender Justice in Islam," in *Islamic Identity and the Struggle for Justice*, eds. Nimat Hafez Barazangi, M. Raquibuz Zaman and Omar Azfal (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 80.

Saba Mahmood's seminal ethnography, *Politics of Piety,* illustrates the first time in Egyptian history that a large number of women gathered publicly in mosques for religious lessons, which she sees as a part of the larger Islamic Revival that began in Egypt in the 1970s.[29] The increasing demand for Qur'an lessons for women resulted in women in Egypt officially being licensed as preachers. Mahmood notes that this aspect of the movement is not seen as a rebellion against Islam by the practitioners but instead is viewed "…in terms of a recuperation of a set of traditional practices they saw as grounded in an exemplary past and in classical notions of Islamic piety."[30] Mahmood calls the growth in participation of Muslim women in study and preaching a women's mosque movement, referring to the growing presence of women in mosques for religious activities and leadership roles.

Mahmood explores the motivations of the women of the piety movement and challenges assumptions that they are motivated solely by a desire to resist secularization and subvert dominant patriarchal norms. She notes, "…it would be a mistake to analyze the complexity of this movement through the lens of resistance insomuch as such a reading flattens out an entire dimension of force this movement commands and the transformations it has spawned within the social and political fields."[31] In their pursuit of piety, many of the women Mahmood discusses challenge secular-liberal norms, moving deeper into a lifestyle inspired by classical Islam. On the other hand, by becoming

[29] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[30] *Ibid*., 116.

[31] *Ibid*., 175.

schooled in Islamic doctrine, leading prayer and becoming licensed preachers many women are seen as resisting male domination by taking on roles typically reserved for men in Islam. We will see these sentiments echoed by the attendees of the 'Aisyiyah mushollas in Indonesia as well as the founder's vision for the Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles. Naming resistance as the key motivation for piety movements is far too restrictive, especially considering the often-contradictory demands that women must navigate in order to pursue various forms of Islamic piety.

Possibly the only English language text dedicated to the topic of women's mosques is Maria Jaschok and Shui Jingjun's *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam*.[32] In China, where Muslims are the minority, Hui Muslims have several small, mosque-centered communities. In the eighteenth-century female-only religious schools became popular and the roles of female religious leaders, ahongs, expanded. Eventually, mosques were built to accompany the schools. According to Jaschok and Jingjun, the goal of these women's spaces is to be a social space for female Muslims to acquire religious learning and ritual mastery and to pray collectively under the guidance of their own female ahong. Chinese Muslims from both traditionalist and reformist schools of thought have advocates and detractors for women's mosques. Many attribute the existence of women's mosques and Qur'an schools to the support of Chinese society for gender equality.

Women's mosques in China, called nusi, have taken on a multifunctional role in the community. Women gather there for prayer and religious instruction but also to

[32] Maria Jaschok and Shui Jingjun, *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000).

"ponder issues of communal and personal interest; trusted nu [female] ahong will be invited to mediate quarrels or disputes…"[33] That is, the nusi are serving the women in many facets of their life similar to the nansi, or men's mosques. "Nu ahong describe their work as responding to Muslim women's real needs as they listen, give advice on Muslim life-style, provide individual instruction, or impart religious knowledge to the group of women."[34] However, there are marked differences between the roles of nu ahong and male imams. Nu ahong or any woman who leads women in prayer in the nusi stands within the front line of worshippers rather than standing alone in front of the prayer lines, as a male imam would do when leading prayer. Given the common interpretation that women are prohibited from performing the adhan, nusi do not have the call to prayer, called banke. Larger celebrations and commemorations are done in the nansi rather than nusi and the nusi architecture does not include minarets, an archway or marker for the qibla, or a platform or pulpit for sermons. These variations from the tradition and construction of nansi mark the nusi as a separate space meant for particular activities rather than an innovation or replacement for the traditional mosque.

The majority of women's mosques in China are not considered independent but are subsumed under nearby men's mosques, raising questions about the level of autonomy of these women's spaces. Many nusi are located in the courtyards of pre-existing nansi. Because only completely independent women's mosques can be registered with the government, it is difficult to get an accurate account of how many mosques just for women, whether independent or under the supervision of men's

[33] *Ibid*., 105.

[34] *Ibid*., 165.

mosques, actually exist in China.[35] Some nusi are independently created by women and others eventually separate from the nansi administration to become independent. Jaschok and Jingjuin see the success of the women's mosques in China to be inextricably linked to Chinese culture and government. In their book they conclude,

> The role of the state and the Communist Party in China as guardians of sexual egalitarianism has granted women opportunities to use a non-Islamic institution to start reforming Islam, to use Islamic institutions to gain positions of authority, however limited, in a secular state and in the process help re-define the symbolic map which grounds them in passivity.[36]

This differs from other scholarship discussed thus far that has taken an "inside" approach to call for a change in gender roles in Islam— examining texts and historical precedent to provide evidence supporting equality. The "outside" approach, or consideration of culture, government and other influences on Muslims' ideas of gender roles, is one also often employed in discussions of gender, Islam and Indonesia.

In Indonesia, there are two women's mushollas[37] sponsored by 'Aisyiyah, the female branch of the important non-governmental organization Muhammadiyah. In Indonesian mixed-gender mosques, women typically stay in the back of the prayer hall

[35] *Ibid*., 15.

[36] *Ibid*., 306.

[37] The term musholla in Indonesian indicates a prayer house. Mushollas are often small areas dedicated to prayer found in public spaces like restaurants, malls, universities, airports, and gas stations. Typically, these types of mushollas are meant to serve as a convenience to Muslims as they go about their daily lives; mushollas are clean, private areas where one might go to pray if a masjid is not close by. Other events besides prayer do not occur in these types of mushollas. Whereas the mushollas tucked away in public spaces do not usually have an imam or regular attendees, the mushollas discussed in this dissertation are part of the social structure of the surrounding community. Mushollas like the ones overseen by 'Aisyiyah as discussed in this work refer to stand-alone buildings where people go to pray and also perform numerous other activities such as fast-breaking, sermons, Quranic study and recitation. However, Jumma'a prayers are not done in mushollas; this activity is reserved for the masjid. Other than this distinction, the 'Aisyiyah mushollas in Yogya are referred to interchangeably as mosques or mushollas by both Indonesian and Western scholars, and, at times, the attendees themselves.

with some method of physical separation between them and the male Muslims. In Tutin Aryanti's "Women's Prayer Space: Body and Boundary" she makes the argument that pawestren, women's prayer spaces in Indonesia's mixed-gender mosques, "reflects gender discrimination, which is practiced subtly in the mosque through architectural quality and functions as well as regulations."[38] Additionally, she suggests that the male/female separation within mixed-gender mosques creates a sexual border that prevents women from being full mosque members— although they are physically present, their status makes them invisible. While some scholarship on the development of the Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah organizations make mention of the 'Aisyiyah mushollas,[39] much of the work referring to women's prayer spaces in Indonesia has been done by Aryanti, who applies architectural theory in her analyses of gender segregation in Indonesian mosques. She has particularly focused on the architecture of women's sections and entrances. Aryanti's research reveals how "architectural spaces can be tools of practicing gender ideology in religious communities to limit women's access to certain rituals and spaces through spatial segregation."[40] From this perspective, the construction of separate entrances and physical barriers that segregate men and women in mixed-gender mosques act as means of excluding women from Islam and the Muslim community.

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[38] Tutin Aryanti, "Women's Prayer Space: Body and Boundary" *The International Journal of the Constructed Environment* 2 (2012): 12.

[39] See, for example, Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan Dan Perkembangan 'Aisyiyah* and Arifin, *Muhammadiyah: Potret Yang Berubah.*

[40] Tutin Aryanti, "A Claim to Space: Debating Female Religious Leadership in a Muhammadiyah Mosque in Indonesia" *The Muslim World* 103, no. 3 (2013): 383.

What of the experiences of the women in the Indonesian women's mushollas? In much scholarship, brief mentions of the two mushollas I spent time at were limited in their exploration of the attendees, merely describing these buildings as out of the way spaces men sent women. One dissertation, written almost twenty years ago, refers to the Kauman Musholla and an elderly woman attendee who explains it is a woman's mosque, the only one like it in the world.[41] The scholar contemplates correcting the woman, since her own understanding of a musholla's function was that it differed from that of a masjid. Now, after spending months with the women of the very same musholla, I wish the writer had continued the conversation and asked the woman to tell her more. To outsiders, the 'Aisyiyah mushollas have been dismissed time and time again as no more than prayer houses, spaces created simply to fulfill a need for gender segregation with little attention to how the mushollas have impacted the women attendees. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to ask the women more, and in doing so, their stories and rich experiences have made this work possible.

Islam, Gender and Indonesia

The development of Islam in Indonesia has led to a unique and celebrated expression of the religion, called Islam Nusantara. Nusantara is an old Javanese word meaning archipelago and the concept of Islam Nusantara refers to the expression of Islamic teachings with local Indonesian traditions, setting Indonesian Islamic practice apart from Arab culture and customs that are sometimes categorized as being

[41] Leslie Katherine Dwyer, "Making Modern Muslims: Embodied Politics and Piety in Urban Java, Indonesia," Dissertation, (Princeton University, June 2001

representative of a globalized Islam. This concept is promoted by the organization Nahdlatul Ulama as a moderate Islam compatible with Indonesian values but others criticize it as un-Islamic and syncretic. Many notable scholars have taken the time to study and analyze the ways in which Islam has been interpreted in Indonesia and how the influence of Islam has in turn shaped Indonesian society.

Clifford Geertz, in his study of Java, separated Javanese Muslims into a trichotomy: abangan, santri and priyayi.[42] Abangan, to Geertz, referred to the Javanese who practiced a syncretic form of Islam and indigenous traditions with little understanding of Islam. Santri was composed of orthodox Muslims formally educated in religious schools while priyayi was a class made up of Javanese aristocrats and bureaucrats influenced by Hindu-Buddhist traditions. Geertz separated the Javanese into these categories based on socio-economic status, understanding of Islamic tenets, and what he perceived as purity of Islamic practice. This categorization has often been contested by other scholars of Indonesian Islam. Robert W. Hefner, for example, points out that socio-economic status does not necessarily correlate with Islamic practice and that many regions on Java do not fit into Geertz's trichotomy.[43] According to Mark Woodward's *Islam in Java*, when he began fieldwork in Java he was surprised that the Hindu-Buddhist influence he was expecting based on Geertz's account of the priyayi was few and far between.[44] Additionally, Woodward stressed that those Muslims whose

[42] Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

[43] Robert W. Hefner, "Islamizing Java? Religion and Politics in Rural East Java," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 3 (1987): 533-554.

[44] Mark Woodward, *Islam in Java; Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989).

expressions of Islam entangled with Javanese culture were arbitrarily designated as less devoted or insincere Muslims by Geertz. Geertz's contributions, however, to cultural theory have an important place in scholarship about Indonesia and have served as inspiration for many scholars' projects there.

While Geertz's categorization of Islamic purity might not accurately reflect the expressions of Islam in Java, the question of how Islam should be interpreted and accurately expressed is continually grappled with in Indonesia, especially by the members of the social-religious organizations Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. Muhammadiyah advocates a modernist approach to Islam that strives to purify the religion from other influences, such as indigenous traditions, while Nahdlatul Ulama represents a traditionalist perspective that embraces pre-Islamic influences on Indonesia. These organizations figure largely into the modern experience of Indonesian Muslims and further discussion of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama will occur later in this work. Mark Woodward's extensive research on Islam and Javanese culture takes a deeper look at how the sultanates of Java embraced the religion and came to be centers of Indonesian Islamic thought.[45] Indeed, the area of Kauman in the royal city of Yogyakarta is the birthplace of the Muhammadiyah movement and its founder, Ahmad Dahlan, as well as the location of the first women's musholla overseen by 'Aisyiyah, built in 1923.

Many anthropologists and sociologists have delved deeper into the nuances of how gender roles are influenced by Islam, indigenous culture, history and more in Indonesia. Suzanne Brenner's work on Javanese women notes the conflicting nature and

[45] Mark Woodward, *Java, Indonesia and Islam* (New York: Springer, 2011).

ambiguities of expressions and understandings of gender in Java— variously, that women are entrusted with the financial concerns of the family, women exhibit more self-control, men are guided by lust, and so on. These Javanese ideas about gender are challenged, however, by the growth of Islamic movements that promote different guidelines for women's behavior and dismiss traditional Javanese norms as backward or unIslamic.[46] In John R. Bowen's book *Islam, Law and Equality in Indonesia*, he explores how Muslims in Indonesia negotiate between three types of law: adat, or local cultural practice, Islamic law, and laws of the state.[47] In circumstances where these laws seem to be in contradiction, especially in the case of Shari'a and Indonesian cultural norms, Bowen outlines how the issue in question is contextualized by Indonesian Islamic scholars and jurists to satisfy both an Indonesian worldview and understanding of Qur'an and hadith. Pieternella Van Doorn-Harder examines how Indonesian Islamic organizations approach women's leadership and empowerment within a religious context and how their efforts differ from both Western feminism and Islamist feminism.[48] Rachel Rinaldo describes the Indonesian women mobilizing as women activists who aim to create "a feminism that is critical of neoliberal globalization but can also incorporate Islamic piety," noting that feminist agency and pious agency are not mutually exclusive.[49]

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[46] See Brenner, *Domestication of Desire,* "Why Women Rule the Roost," "Reconstructing Self and Society," "Democracy, Polygamy, and Women," and "Private Moralities in the Public Sphere."

[47] John R. Bowen, *Islam, Law and Equality in Indonesia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[48] Pierternella van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Reading the Qur'an in Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

[49] Rachel Rinaldo, *Mobilizing Piety: Islam and Feminism in Indonesia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 10.

While none of these important works on Islam and gender in Indonesia have made more than a passing mention of the women-only prayer spaces discussed in this dissertation, these scholars have created an important framework for understanding the concurrent development of Indonesia as a nation and as a part of the Islamic world and the important role of gender politics[50] in both processes.

Since Indonesia is the largest Muslim majority country in the world, democratic, and lies outside of the Middle East, an area typically associated with the religion, Islam in Indonesia is often given extraordinary consideration. Scholars have asked what it is about Indonesia that allows for an Islam so influenced by different cultures, histories, and customs; indeed, as we see with Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, the Indonesian people have grappled with this question and whether or not these influences are in fact for the better. I have been asked by students, both Western and Indonesian, if I think that women's mushollas exist in Indonesia because there is something about Indonesian Islam that welcomes what could possibly be negatively considered bid'a, or innovation, by other Islamic cultures.[51] The women who inhabit these spaces, however, situate themselves firmly within a global Islamic community and a collective Islamic history, insisting that their right to women's leadership and opportunities for communal prayer are derived from the example set by the Prophet and early Muslims.

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[50] From Rinaldo, *Mobilizing Piety* "Gender politics is the field of political negotiations about gender and can include actors who challenge gender inequality, attempt to help women in a variety of ways, and who may or may not seek to maintain conventional gender norms" (32).

[51] Bid'a refers to innovation in the religion of Islam that crosses the line into heresy. Something introduced as Islamic could be considered bid'a if there is no evidence of it being based in the Qur'an or Sunnah. Some schools of thought break down bid'a into different categories ranging from acceptable bid'a to completely forbidden bid'a. Women's mosque attendees argue that women's presence in mosques during the Prophet's lifetime and early Muslim women leading their households in prayer situate their practice in the Sunnah, as will be discussed later.

This dissertation aims to examine the production of gendered space as it relates to Islamic piety, religious education, and community. This work could not be done without an understanding of the Qur'an and hadith interpretations and the history of gender segregation in Islam, particularly through the lenses of Islamic feminism and Indonesian Islamic culture. However, none of the prior scholarship in this field has examined the creation of space and the experiences of those who have spent much of their lives attending women-only mushollas in Indonesia or, for that matter, the more recent phenomenon of the Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles. I aim to fill a major gap that has been left in the field of study of women and gender in Islam by sharing the experiences of the women who have spoken a great deal with me about how their lives have been impacted by these mosques and mushollas and through my consideration of these spaces and the activities done within them using theories on gendered space, power, and resistance.

Chapter 3: A Brief History of Female Segregation and Leadership in Islam

When a man or a woman enters a mosque they silently engage in a series of questions and answers that reaffirm their identity and decorum— this process occurs if they are a first-time attendee, hoping to behave correctly, or a seasoned practitioner who has already grappled with these questions enough that they need not dwell on the answers. From the parking lot of the average mosque, a Muslim has to discern where their appropriate entrance is located: is there a communal entrance or do women enter from the side or back while men enter through the main doors? Upon entering the property, are there separate spaces for performing ablutions and leaving shoes? After these spaces are successfully navigated, a woman new to the mosque must ask a more complicated question: where does she belong? Is there a curtain or wall in the back or stairs that lead to a separate room? Will she be alone or do other women attend this mosque? Will she be able to hear and see the imam firsthand or will she need to rely on a video monitor or speaker? For some Muslim women they must ask one question above all others before entering a mosque— are women allowed here at all? Men, on the other hand, know they are welcome through the main entrance and that their place in the prayer hall is closest to the imam, in the front. This process of discernment is done all over the world in mosques that provide a variety of answers due to their architecture, philosophy, mission, and above all else cultural and religious interpretations.

The vast majority of mosques separate men and women in various ways during prayer, sermons and religious instruction. The practice and purpose of gender segregation within some mosques as well as outside of mosques is a result of cultural influences,

interpretations of religious texts, and historical events. The primary sources of authenticity within Islam, the Qur'an, hadith and Sunnah along with the numerous hermeneutical, sociological, anthropological, and historical works done by men and women such as Amina Wadud, Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, Saba Mahmood, Lila Abu-Lughod, John R. Bowen, and more serve as guides in my pursuit to unpack the nuances of mosques' gender segregation within Islam. With the understanding that Islam is not a monolith, not static and unchanging since its first believers, I seek here to explore the origins of gender segregation among Muslim people in religious practice and further understand the place of gender segregation in the diverse expressions of Islam throughout the world today.

Women and the Mosque in Early Islam

To begin with, it is important to note that there is no information in the Qur'an about how, when and where specifically women should pray. Rather, the Qur'an contains numerous commands directed toward the Muslim community about prayer without differentiating any rules based on gender. The majority of the references to prayer utilize plural pronouns which in Quranic Arabic functions as generic, neutral pronouns to address both men and women. For example, Qur'an 24:56 states "So establish regular Prayer and give regular Charity; and obey the Messenger; that ye may receive mercy." The commands "establish," "give," and "obey" use the direct Arabic imperative plural. Since these commands address both men and women, this verse then applies to all Muslim believers regardless of gender. Other verses in the Qur'an discuss the appropriate times to pray, typically using the direct Arabic imperative plural as well to refer to those

performing salat like in the case of Qur'an 30:17— "So give glory to Allah, when *you* reach eventide and when *you* rise in the morning" (emphasis added). Additionally, when mosques are mentioned in the Qur'an, often those inhabiting it are also described with gender-neutral nouns and pronouns. For example, Qur'an 7:31 states, "O Children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer."[52] Throughout the Qur'an, both men and women are commanded not only pray but to pray at certain times with the added detail that during some of these prayers, they will be in a mosque.[53]

However, while the Qur'an is the central religious text of Islam and considered to be revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims also place great, although secondary, authority on hadith narratives. Hadith is the record of sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad as related by a chain of narrators. After the death of the Prophet, numerous collections of hadith were compiled and their validity and chain of transmission were traced back to their original sources. While some collections and narrators are considered to be authentic due to specific criteria, others may be considered weak in terms of the chain of transmission, trustworthiness of the sources, and lack of agreement with other more credible sources, especially and primarily the Qur'an. Virtually all of the restrictions on women's prayer in regards to position, time and place are based on hadith narratives. For example, it is widely accepted in Islam that the Jumma'a prayer is obligatory for men but not for women. Jumma'a is a congregational

[52] In the Arabic form of this verse, masjid is the original word that is translated into English as "place of prayer."

[53] For more examples, see 2:3, 2:277, 7:29, 7:170, 9:71, 13:22, 30:31, 40:14, 40:60.

prayer that includes a two-part khutbah or sermon followed by two rakats of prayer in place of the Dhuhr[54] prayer on Fridays. In the Qur'an, 62:9-10 commands:

> O ye who believe! When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday (the Day of Assembly), hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of Allah, and leave off business (and traffic): That is best for you if ye but knew! And when the Prayer is finished, then may ye disperse through the land, and seek of the Bounty of Allah: and celebrate the Praises of Allah often (and without stint): that ye may prosper.

Again, in the Quranic Arabic these verses use the direct Arabic imperative plural, referring to not just Muslim men but to both Muslim men and women.

As John R. Bowen points out, "the Qur'an does not provide a precise plan for daily worship; Muslims rely on the example of Muhammad…rather, we have reports of what his Companions saw him do, or the response he gave to questions about proper worship."[55] With this in mind, the presence of women during communal prayer is mentioned several times in hadith narratives. The following hadith is often referenced regarding whether women should pray Jumma'a, although its credibility is debated: "The Prophet (ﷺ) said: The Friday prayer in congregation is a necessary duty for every Muslim, with four exceptions; a slave, a woman, a boy, and a sick person."[56] Various interpretations of this hadith have led to women attending Jumma'a prayer regularly, women rarely or never feeling it necessary to attend, or women being restricted from

[54] Dhuhr (or Zuhr) prayer is done at midday with four rakats (units) prayer. On Fridays, Jumma'a prayer replaces Dhuhr with a khutbah and two rakats prayer.

[55] John R. Bowen, *A New Anthropology of Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 19.

[56] Sunan Abu Dawud Book 3, Hadith 1062.

attending Jumma'a.[57] The four Sunni schools of thought unanimously agree that attending Jumma'a prayer is not obligatory for women and instead women who are not in attendance should perform the regular Dhuhr prayer. On the other hand, credible hadith narratives also report the Prophet Muhammad telling men to not prevent women from attending mosques if they wish,[58] although some hadith have the Prophet adding that it is better for them to pray in their homes.[59] Other hadith refer to women being present during prayer— the Prophet discusses shortening his prayer when he hears a baby crying because he does not want to trouble the mother, which suggests that women were at least in earshot of the Prophet as he led prayer.[60] Hadith narratives describe the Prophet collecting alms from women on Eid after his khutbah[61] and how women would leave prayer when it had concluded while the men remained until after the Prophet left.[62] In Omid Safi's *Memories of Muhammad* he recounts a story of how the Prophet's granddaughter, Umamah, used to sit upon his shoulders as he led prayer.[63] It is important to keep in mind, however, that the Qur'an remains the primary source when considering what is permissible and pleasing to God in Islam, with hadith narratives being helpful but secondary since their chain of transmission and credibility can be questioned. If the

[57] As of 2019, for example, India's Supreme Court was considering a ruling to declare the long-standing tradition of forbidding women from entering mosques as unconstitutional.

[58] Sahih Muslim Book 4, Hadith 884 and Book 4 Hadith 887; Book 4 Hadith 888.

[59] Sunan Abu Dawud Book 2, Hadith 567.

[60] Sahih al-Bukhari Vol. 1, Book 11, Hadith 678.

[61] Sahih al-Bukhari Vol. 7, Book 72, Hadith 768.

[62] Sahih al-Bukhari Vol. 1, Book 12, Hadith 825.

[63] Omid Safi, *Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 143.

Qur'an and hadith contain so many references to women praying in mosques, under what circumstances have we come to find the question of women's access to mosques such a controversial issue today?

The Wives of the Prophet

Prophet Muhammad was born in an era and culture where women had freedoms in some ways but in others were severely restricted. Typically, when teaching about early Islamic history, the circumstances of women during the Jahiliya[64] are discussed, particularly the practice of female infanticide as well as the lack of inheritance, property or divorce rights for women. The Prophet Muhammad forbade female infanticide and through Islamic law women were granted rights to property, divorce, and inheritance—although not equal to the status of men. However, Muhammad married his first wife prior to receiving revelations; Khadija, a wealthy, business-owning widow was a product of the Jahiliya culture. Khadija is considered the first Muslim convert, Muhammad's most ardent supporter and an exemplary Muslim woman, but, as Leila Ahmed points out, "she was already in her fifties, however, when Muhammad received his first revelation and began to preach, and thus it was Jahilia society and customs, rather than Islamic, that shaped her conduct and defined the possibilities of her life."[65] Moving a few years later we find another exemplary Muslim woman in the figure of 'Aisha, another wife of the Prophet who is described as being a favorite of Muhammad and, unlike Khadija, was

[64] Jahiliya refers to the time before the revelations that became the Qur'an, translated as Age of Ignorance.

[65] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 42.

born four or five years after the advent of Islam. ‘Aisha is known as a credible transmitter of over 2,000 hadith and was involved in political affairs after the Prophet’s death. Additionally, during ‘Aisha’s marriage to the Prophet female seclusion and veiling began to have Islamic connotations. Ahmed suggests that “the difference between Khadija’s and ‘Aisha’s lives— especially in regard to autonomy— foreshadows the changes that Islam would affect for Arabian women. ‘Aisha, however, lived at a moment of transition, and in some respects her life reflects Jahilia as well as Islamic practice.”[66] Women during the Jahiliya had some rights that were limited by the advent of Islam, other rights were afforded to women that had been denied to them prior to Islam, and still more rights and ideas about women were conceptualized during this transition and later. It is imperative to keep in mind these various influences and how they have been interpreted over the centuries by Muslims.

Incidents of the Prophet’s wives requiring seclusion as well as the reasoning behind it are described as a benefit to the women and Muslim society as a whole. Verse 33:53 of the Qur’an describes how Muslims should not enter the Prophet’s home uninvited, should not overstay their welcome, should address his wives from behind a curtain and should not marry any of his wives upon his death. The term used for partition here, hijab, is derived from the root “hajaba” meaning to conceal or cover. Hijab is also commonly used to refer to a head covering. Etin Anwar in *Gender and Self in Islam* relates the revelation of this verse with the wedding night of the Prophet and Zeynab, when a particular guest did not end his visit to the wedding chamber in a timely manner:

[66] *Ibid*., 43.

> …verse 33:53 was revealed ordering the installation of a 'cloth curtain' (hijab) separating the private chamber from the meeting room. Assuming that the curtain was drawn to mark out the chamber of the Prophet's wives', Muslims were forced to communicate with the Prophet's wives from 'behind the curtain.' This interpretation makes sense because no one would want to have a visitor go directly into their private room.[67]

This verse is interpreted variously as only applying to the wives of the Prophet, applying to all who wish to emanate the wives of the Prophet, all Muslim women of all times or applicable only to Muslim women during the Prophet's lifetime.

The surah goes on to describe that women need not seclude themselves from their immediate male family members (any relative whom they would not be eligible to marry) or their slaves. Later in the same surah, the wives of the Prophet are told to "abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of former times of ignorance" and also commands prayer, zakat and obedience to Allah.[68] Qasim Amin contends that the seclusion of the Prophet's wives was meant to set them apart from other women, meaning that Muslim women who were not married to the Prophet were not secluded. In addition to this, he argues that some of the benefits attributed to female seclusion are already enjoyed by non-secluded women in communities where men are following Islamic teachings. He concludes that "we should encourage whatever facilitates the daily needs of people and discourage whatever hinders, obstructs, or limits people in achieving the necessities of life."[69] In this interpretation, seclusion from society, and especially

[67] Anwar, *Gender and Self in Islam*, 106.

[68] Qur'an 33:33.

[69] Amin, *The Liberation of Women*, 44.

from men appears to be particular to the circumstances of the Prophet's wives and the perilous time in which they lived.

Female Leadership and Authority

Fatima Mernissi introduces her *Forgotten Queens of Islam* with the comment "…no woman has ever borne the title of caliph or imam in the current meaning of the word, that is, someone who leads prayers in the mosque for *everyone, men and women*" (emphasis added).[70] While this statement may be contested, especially in the past decade with the rise of inclusive mosques which I will soon discuss, first it is pertinent to address the idea of women leading men or women leading other women in prayer and religious instruction during the lifetime of the Prophet. The current tradition in most Muslim communities is that a woman may lead prayer only for other women and not in mixed company and, in many cases, only if a knowledgeable male is not available. The foundation of this claim lies with the following hadith, "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."[71] This suggests that since women must pray behind men and the person leading prayer must be in the front row of congregants, women are precluded from leading men and women together in prayer. However, if only

[70] Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 9.

[71] Sahih Muslim Book 4, Hadith 881. See also Sunan an-Nasa'i Vol. 1, Book 10, Hadith 821 and Sunan Ibn Majah Vol. 1, Book 5, Hadith 1001.

a group of women are praying, women would form the front row and a woman within the front row would be able to lead prayer.

Besides the issue of rows, what was it about women in early Islam that rendered them fit to lead prayer only with other women but not to lead men? First, we must return to the idea of seclusion in early Islam and how the wives of the Prophet and eventually all female Muslims were encouraged to not interact with men who were not relatives or their slaves. Also of importance are traditional gender roles of women caring for the home and family, which some believe would exclude them from having a position of leadership in the mosque. Men are not only considered to be natural leaders over women as seen in Qur'an 4:34 but female leadership later began to be seen as harmful to the salvation of men, as will be discussed further below.[72]

Despite differences in the role of men and women in prayer and leadership that emerged during and after the life of the Prophet, the spiritual equality between men and women as described in the Qur'an has remained unchanged, as discussed by Amina Wadud in *Qur'an and Woman*. Asma Lamrabet suggests that spiritual equality is the only way women are seen as equal to men in the Qur'an:

> It is true that, overall, classical exegesis does acknowledge a spiritual equality between men and women as a foundation of Islam. The spiritual equality is based essentially on the practice of worship and on rewards and punishments in the hereafter. But this is the only equality that is recognized, since most commentators try to find a religious compromise between gender equality in

[72] Qur'an 4:34: Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).

> worship practices and traditional gender hierarchy and complementarity as the norm in most other cases.[73]

Syafiq Hasyim qualifies the term equality as referring solely to equality in the eyes of God: "Inequality between men and women occurred because of social constructions, instead of the religious teachings…they were differentiated [in the eyes of God] on the basis of their obedience. Obedience has no gender bias…"[74] Despite any divine benefits of spiritual equality, I argue that other attitudes of gender inequality were made manifest in the daily lives of women especially during the era of the first four caliphs and later dynasties.

Veiling and Seclusion in the Islamic Empire

According to Muhammed Ali Syed the existence of Quranic verses and hadith that discuss women going out in public is proof that women were not required to remain in their houses during the Prophet's life and that an increase in seclusion practices came later.

> Going out of the house obviously requires a woman to come into contact with men and intermingling of the two sexes cannot be avoided. This is precisely the reason why the Quran has laid down rules to be observed on such occasions. Therefore, the views of many Muslim conservatives that a woman's real place is at home has no support either in the Quran or the Hadith. In fact, Muslim women are in the same position as Muslim men who also come out of their houses only for their needs.[75]

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[73] Asma Lamrabet, "An Egalitarian Reading of the Concepts of Khilafah, Wilayah and Qiwamah" in *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition* ed. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, et.al. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), 72.

[74] Hasyim, *Understanding Women in Islam*, 189.

[75] Syed, *The Position of Women in Islam*, 113.

In addition to physical mobility, Leila Ahmed contends that the transmission of hadith from women indicates that women were capable of being considered authoritative in matters of religion by both sexes. Following the death of Muhammad, what changed in early Islamic society that resulted in a more stringent tradition of gender segregation and understanding of gender roles that exists today?

Female veiling and female seclusion existed in numerous societies during the life of the Prophet and became even more widely practiced in Muslim society after his death, especially as the Islamic Empire spread to encompass regions that already practiced veiling for a variety of reasons. Leila Ahmed points out that women who covered in Assyrian and Greek societies did so as a sign of their status, respectability, and sexual availability: the wife was veiled and did not leave the house often because she did not have to, while the peasant, for example, had to work outside of the home and the prostitute dressed without modesty.[76] An uncovered woman was a sign of her sexual status and in some societies unmarried women who covered faced punishment. Syed owes the increase in purdah, or the practice of seclusion, to the cultures that early Muslims encountered during their conquests to Iran, the Byzantine Empire, and India.[77] This influence was manifested in the way women were allowed access to the mosque and positioned within the mosque.

The second of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, Umar, instructed the wives of the Prophet to not go to the mosque during a time of tension between the Muslims and Quraysh enemies. Hasyim argues that this practice became institutionalized by later

[76] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam,* 14.

[77] Syed, *The Position of Women,* 103.

fiqh[78] experts despite being applicable only to a particular cultural situation during the time of Caliph Umar and this tradition should therefore not be in place today.[79] Leila Ahmed expands on the changes Umar brought to the religious practice of Muslim women:

> …he [Umar] sought to confine women to their homes and to prevent their attending prayers at the mosques. Unsuccessful in this last attempt, he instituted segregated prayers, appointing a separate imam for each sex. He chose a male imam for the women, another departure from precedent…[80]

The next caliph, Uthman, returned some liberties to women by allowing women to attend the mosque with men and go on pilgrimage but required that women gather separately in the mosque.[81] The murder of Uthman resulted in ‘Aisha demanding vengeance for his death, which culminated in the Battle of the Camel.

While ‘Aisha is credited as being a model wife, Muslim, and credible source of hadith, her involvement with the Battle of the Camel is controversial. ‘Aisha gathered thousands of Muslim men to fight against ‘Ali, the fourth caliph, and rode into battle with them. This marked the first civil war amongst Muslims and began the division between Shia and Sunni. ‘Aisha was unsuccessful and her role in this battle is used to both laud and denigrate her. While her competency as an authority on fiqh was not questioned, her choice as a woman to wage war was blamed for the loss of the battle. Mernissi summarizes the issue: “‘A’isha was the first woman to transgress the hudud (limits), to

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[78] Fiqh is Islamic jurisprudence or human understanding and interpretation of Shari‘a, Islamic law.

[79] Hasyim, *Understanding Women,* 153.

[80] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam,* 60.

[81] *Ibid*., 61.

violate the boundary between the territory of women and that of men, to incite to kill, even though the act of war is the privilege of men and belongs to territory outside of the harem."[82] The loss of this battle served as an example to those Muslims in power of a woman overstepping her boundaries.

By the time of the Abbasid caliphate, a little over a century after the death of the Prophet, women were living more in seclusion and contributing less to Islamic discourse. Syed contributes the introduction of harem life and more stringent seclusion, or purdah, to Walid the Second, the last Umayyad caliph before the Abbasid dynasty took over. Thus, by the time of the Abbasid dynasty, seclusion was customary.[83] Three centuries after the death of the Prophet, Imam Nasa'i specified in his writings how men and women must be situated during prayer in a mosque— in rows, not too close to each other.[84] A century later, Hanbali Imam Al-Jawzi stated that the prayers of men seated behind women were nullified and therefore worthless.[85] He is also credited with saying that there are more women occupying Hell than men, adding to misogynistic views of women. Slowly, the space women were able to inhabit in the mosque and public life as a whole was narrowing.

The Abbasid age, however, was a time of great strides in the development of fiqh. Since women were essentially removed from the public sphere, there is a lack of female contributions to the fiqh produced at this time as well as a dearth of discourse on the

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[82] Mernissi, *Forgotten Queens*, 66.

[83] Syed, *Position of Women*, 105.

[84] Mernissi, *Forgotten Queens,* 80.

[85] *Ibid*, 81.

equality and justice for women that was previously present earlier in the Islamic era.[86] Syafiq Hasyim expands on the effects of this:

> The lack of women's involvement in the development of fiqh meant the serious underestimation of issues that should have involved women. Even issues such as menstruation, childbirth, and the blood of afterbirth— issues that should have involved women in their discussion— were ruled on by male ulama.[87]

Despite this, some female Islamic legal experts continued to contribute to jurisprudence although vastly outnumbered by the male 'ulama.

Gender Segregation in Contemporary Islam

Today, gender segregation in Islam is interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the tradition, school of thought, culture and history of each Islamic community. The pilgrimage to Mecca is an excellent example of how gender segregation is variously interpreted and selectively enforced. This pilgrimage, the Hajj, is one of the five pillars of Islam and it is considered obligatory for all Muslims to complete the Hajj during their lifetime as long as their health and wealth permits. Although the pilgrimage process is largely controlled by the Saudi government, the men and women who make the Hajj come from every corner of the world. Rites of the Hajj have remained mostly preserved since the lifetime of the Prophet, meaning that women have completed the Hajj alongside men for hundreds of years. However, some aspects of gender segregation and control of women's travel have been introduced by the government. Although not a religious command, Saudi Arabian law mandates that women can only attend with a male guardian

[86] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam,* 88.

[87] Hasyim, *Understanding Women,* 88.

who is either a husband or unmarriageable due to kinship, called a mahram, or with written permission from their male guardian if they are over the age of forty-five and wish to travel with a women's group. Men and women stay in separate lodgings but all of the Hajj rituals are coed— there is no spatial distinction between men and women as they perform Tawaf and Sa'yee in Mecca[88] or Rami al-Jamarat in Mina[89]. Men are required specific dress— two white, simple sheets— whereas women have to observe veiling with their face uncovered, but have more freedom in terms of fabric, color and style. For the Muslims making the Hajj, these customs may be more stringent than they are used to or more lenient. Muslims owe the gender mixing on the Hajj to a multitude of reasons. Some believe that Mecca's status as the holiest site on earth creates conditions conducive to interactions between genders while others say the mindset of the pilgrims and their focus on spiritual pursuits allow for it. I have been told by numerous Muslims in both the United States and Indonesia that the only reason there is less gender segregation on the Hajj is because to do so would be logistically impossible due to the immense number of pilgrims. Interestingly, a significant number of people I asked either could offer no reason for the increased gender interaction on the Hajj or admitted to me that they had never before considered the difference. Still, even on Hajj, while women freely circumambulate the Ka'ba, walk between Safa and Marwa, and throw stones at pillars, when the call to prayer is heard the female pilgrims resituate themselves behind men or leave the public space to pray in their lodgings.

[88] Tawaf is the ritual circumambulation of the Ka'ba and Sa'yee is the ritual of walking back and forth between Safa and Marwa mountain seven times.

[89] Rami al-Jamarat is the ritual of throwing stones at three stone pillars in the city of Mina in remembrance of Ibrahim's devotion to God and resistance to the devil.

As I mentioned previously, gender segregation in mosques is also expressed in numerous ways depending on a particular Muslim community's interpretation. The spectrum of gender segregation has a wide range: women not being allowed in mosques, separate rooms for women where the salat and khutbah are transmitted through video screens and speakers, rooms behind the main prayer hall with a one way mirror so the women can see the imam but the imam and male congregants cannot see the women, full curtains separating a prayer hall for men and women with the women in the back, low walls where women can still see the imam, or a line on the ground or some other decorative scheme that marks where women should remain. According to numerous women I have spoken with throughout this project, the more extreme means of separation has served as a deterrent for women to enter mosques entirely.

The reasoning for these stricter methods of segregation has, as we have seen above, historical connotations and also are influenced by notions of femininity. These include ideas about the sphere of women, namely the home and private sphere, the sexual needs of men and the view of women as unwitting temptresses and distractors from piety. Etin Anwar is especially critical of this way that men have been allowed to define for women what she calls the materiality of self:

> …the embodiment of religious, cultural, and social practices subject female bodies to the performance of a gendered construct…Certain practices such as veiling, circumcision, and virginity are used as means to constitute the material self…This constructed material self is what I call a 'cultural body' in the sense that this body internalizes both the popular masculine concept of femininity and what she imports from the religious culture in her life. In this way, she learns and observes what is appropriate for a woman.[90]

[90] Anwar, *Gender and Self,* 102.

With Muslim men being the dominant force in deciding religious norms in Islam after the death of the Prophet, gender segregation was touted as a means to protect women from harassment and preserve their propriety as well as protecting men from the temptation of the feminine body, which was seen as threatening to both decorum and piety. In the *Veil and the Male Elite*, Fatima Mernissi poses powerful questions regarding the male Islamic 'ulama: "How did the tradition succeed in transforming the Muslim woman into that submissive, marginal creature who buries herself and only goes out in the world timidly and huddled in her veils? Why does the Muslim man need such a mutilated companion?"[91] Like Mernissi, those who contend that oppressive practices against women are not rooted in Islam argue that in fact the rights afforded to women in the Islamic tradition have been distorted by the male elite in order to serve their own interests.

To this end, many Muslim women have donned the veil as an outward expression of their faith and to mark a clear boundary. In these cases, the veil becomes an opportunity for women to assert themselves and present how they wish to be treated both as Muslims and women. The burqa, originally cultural or regional wear associated with the Pashtun, has allowed some women to feel they may move outside of segregated spaces because by being so thoroughly covered they are still secluding themselves while having increased mobility. In communities where veiling was not the norm, women began to wear the garment in an effort to push against harassment and demand the respect that was afforded to the wives of the Prophet when they donned the veil. Lila Abu-

[91] Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 1991), 194.

Lughod notes that many women view the donning of the burqa as a form of liberation because it allows, as she calls it using the earlier discussed term, "portable seclusion."[92] In Elizabeth W. Fernea's short documentary *The Veiled Revolution* and corresponding book chapter, she considers why veiling is rising in popularity among highly educated women in Muslim-majority countries. "Manipulated in one way, it can become a symbol for conservatism or for reaction against modernization;" she writes. "Utilized in another way, it can become a symbol for an Islamic approach to the solutions of both old and new problems."[93]

Muslim Women's Movements

Many Islamic communities have experienced what is often labeled as piety movements, or an increase in adherence to ritual and tradition and a surge in those seeking religious education. The women involved in these movements are more likely to begin wearing the veil when perhaps prior generations remained uncovered. In addition to the increased practice of veiling (and the variety of methods and interpretations of veiling) Muslim women are gathering more for religious education, often under the leadership of other women.

There are several outstanding instances of female leadership of both segregated and mixed-gender congregations. In China's Hui Muslim community, women have run Quranic schools for women which eventually led to the creation of women-only mosques

[92] Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, 36.

[93] Elizabeth W. Fernea, "The Veiled Revolution," in *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*, 2nd edition., eds. Donna Lee Bowen and Evelyn A. Early (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 154.

that serve local women and are led by qualified, trained, and licensed women called ahongs.[94] The community may fund these mosques and schools to function by themselves or they may be under the jurisdiction of predominantly male mosques in the area. In Indonesia, the second-largest Islamic non-governmental organization, Muhammadiyah, sponsors women-only mushollas which are run under the direction of the sister organization to Muhammadiyah, 'Aisyiyah (created in 1923 and named after the Prophet's wife 'Aisha). These mosques are led by female imams and offer religious instruction as well as salat and sermons. According to Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, 'Aisyiyah women "insisted that women were under the obligation to go out and preach if they had the competence to do so"— in fact, in 1932 Muhammadiyah decided that women were allowed to instruct men as well as women.[95] In 2003 Asra Nomani questioned her right to pray on the men's side of her local mosque and began the "Women-Led Prayer Initiative" in the United States.[96] In 2005 Amina Wadud controversially led a mixed-gender congregation in prayer, sparking protests and international debate.

Throughout the last decade we have seen a rise in the creation of women-led and women-friendly mosques; that is, mosques that are organized and led by women while allowing both men and women to congregate or mosques that are designed to be more egalitarian in terms of space, activities and leadership. Notable gender-inclusive mosques

[94] Jaschok and Jingjun, *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam*.

[95] van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam*, 79.

[96] Zareena Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 316-317.

include the Inclusive Mosque Initiative in London (founded in 2012), Masjid al-Rabia in Chicago (founded in 2016), Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque in Berlin (founded in 2017), Unity Mosque in Toronto (founded in 2009) and Qal'bu Maryam Mosque in Berkeley (founded in 2017). In addition to the women's mushollas that have operated in Indonesia for almost a century, the past few years have also seen a rise in mosques exclusive to women in the West, including Copenhagen's Mariam Mosque (founded in 2016), The Women's Mosque of Canada in Toronto (founded in 2019), and The Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles (founded in 2015). These are only a few examples of women questioning the segregation of gender in the mosque as well as the male-dominated leadership in Islamic ritual—while there has been an increase in gender-inclusive mosques and women-exclusive mosques in the last ten years, the issues that these mosques aim to address have been part of Islamic discourse for far longer.

Women are also becoming more active in the area of fiqh as some countries and Islamic communities are allowing women muftis.[97] In Zareena Grewal's *Islam is a Foreign Country*, she asserts:

> In theory, Muslim women can reach the highest intellectual positions in Islam, but in practice, there are multiple gender barriers that prevent female students of knowledge from navigating the peaks of the Islamic intellectual world and reaching high levels of scholarly mastery and religious authority…The restrictions on female students…are couched in terms of the norms of modesty that treat women's pursuit of knowledge as an optional luxury rather than a pressing need.[98]

In Turkey, for example, women and men are trained alongside each other in jurisprudence but women may only become assistant muftis. In 2008 the Grand Mufti of

[97] A mufti is a Muslim legal expert who gives legal rulings.

[98] *Ibid*, 245-246.

Syria announced that females could begin training as muftis but their fatwas would only apply to women. Also in 2008, the Grand Mufti of the United Arab Emirates announced the appointment of the "world's first state-sanctioned female mufti" with the caveat that she could never attain the status of Grand Mufti.[99] Interestingly, the Grand Mufti of the UAE cited the importance of the female contemporaries of the Prophet to our understanding of Islam in his announcement.

Should this rise in female leadership and breaking down of the physical barriers of segregation be seen as a return to the true intention of Islam and the example of the Prophet? Grewal refers to those scholars who credit the Prophet as being the world's first feminist, but notes that others would vehemently disagree and call this notion anachronistic. On the one hand, as Fatima Mernissi passionately expresses,

> …a Muslim expert has been able to say that the Prophet Muhammad excluded women from public life and relegated them to the household. But to do this, he had to do outrageous violence to Muhammad as a historical person about whom we have copious documentation.[100]

Meaning that it would be false to say that the Prophet is the source of the practice of seclusion of Muslim women and in fact hadith disputes this claim. Additionally, Ayesha S. Chaudhry argues that the Prophet and his works must be considered contextually—

> …Prophet Muhammad cannot be liberated from his contexts; his words and actions are always directly connected to historical events that sometimes reflect and sometimes subvert his context. The resulting image is of a Prophet who is fully a product of his environment, and yet transcended its strictures…Given his context, Prophet Muhammad did the most he could to create conditions for gender egalitarianism, without actually fulfilling this vision in his lifetime.[101]

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[99] *Ibid*, 249-251.

[100] Mernissi, *Veil and the Male Elite,* 8.

She goes on to outline ways that Muslim feminists may go about looking at the Prophet Muhammad and the concept of women's equality in early Islam. As stated earlier, to call the Prophet a feminist or refer to Quranic verses or hadith narratives as feminist may be problematic since, historically, the feminist movement did not exist and clearly the Prophet was living in a patriarchal society. In fact, in selectively using Islamic texts to support a gender-egalitarian view of Islam, "Muslim feminists would be doing exactly what Muslim scholars did when using prophetic practice to support patriarchal perspectives of Islam."[102] Therefore it is integral to qualify the use of the term feminism according to the constraints and differing interpretations by time, region, and culture.

The term feminism on its own for many of these women's movements is often see as problematic. The secular, Western understanding of feminism is often critiqued as being rather individualistic and involving the imposition of particular cultural values on non-Western societies in a colonizing manner. This feminism also tends to relegate religion to the private sphere. Proponents of Islamic feminism, on the other hand, claim that it is founded on the very tradition of Islam. Seyyed Hossein Nasr describes Islamic feminism as the effort of women to "…gain the rights they believe the Quran and Hadith accord them, but that local social customs and regulations have prevented them from gaining."[103] When Elizabeth Fernea traveled the world interviewing Muslim women, she found that those who were involved in causes she would describe as feminist rooted their

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[101] Ayesha S. Chaudhry, "Producing Gender-Egalitarian Islamic Law: A Case Study of Guardianship (Wilayah) in Prophetic Practice" in *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition*, ed. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, et. al. (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), 90-91.

[102] *Ibid*., 93.

[103] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam* (New York: HarperOne, 2002) 196.

efforts in Islam.[104] In the movement, the goals of Islamic feminism are thought to not only be compatible with Islam but substantiated by the Sunnah in allowing women to lead a pious, public Muslim life with equality and opportunity.

Conclusion

To what extent, then, are the practice of gender segregation, lack of women's leadership, and seclusion of women in Islam due to the religion itself? Furthermore, can the efforts of Muslim women toward leadership and greater visibility be owed to or traced back to Islamic history? At the forefront it must be considered that there is no monolithic Islam that is practiced uniformly, as we have seen throughout this chapter in regards to methods of segregation and varieties of piety movements and women's leadership. John R. Bowen maintains that there is no such thing as Islam rid of historical and cultural concepts in any region in which there exists a Muslim community:

> Islam emerged not as what was left when you subtracted culture, but as a set of processes through which Muslims, rural and urban, North African and Southeast Asian, drew on elements of their shared tradition in ways that made sense to them, in that place and at that historical moment.[105]

Related to how I briefly looked at the chain of events in early Muslim history that resulted in the encouragement of gender segregation and female seclusion, Muslim communities throughout the world face the same task. There is no single interpretation privileging men above women that is followed universally in Islam. Muhammad Arkoun articulates this succinctly:

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[104] Elizabeth Warnock Fernea*, In Search of Islamic Feminism: One Woman's Global Journey* (New York: First Anchor Books, 1998).

[105] Bowen, *A New Anthropology*, 7.

> …Islamic societies must be examined in and for themselves, as French, German, Belgian, U.S., or Polish societies are. It is certainly legitimate for research to identify common factors that generate a single Islamic discourse in very different societies, but then it must also come back to the history of each of these societies and to its own culture.[106]

These instances of segregation and seclusion need to be assessed for their hermeneutical influences, cultural and historical elements as well as understandings of gender and sexuality that vary across time and region.

Thus, it seems that a woman approaching a mosque in 2020 must ask herself much the same questions as women have asked since after the death of the Prophet. The decisions women must make upon entering a mosque to pray are colored by a variety of cultural and historical influences, power relations and concepts of gender that cannot be entirely owed to the first Muslims, that is, the Prophet and his male and female companions and family members. However, in the same way that the lives of early Muslims are used as examples to deny women access to religious experiences or leadership roles, more women are looking to early Islam to support their drive for a fuller, more egalitarian Muslim experience in which their spiritual equality affords them the same access and opportunities that Muslim men have enjoyed.

[106] Mohammed Arkoun*, Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers,* trans. Robert D. Lee (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 8-9.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In considering appropriate theoretical approaches with which to analyze my research, I started in the same way that I began my ethnographic work, that is, from a physical position on the outside of the mosque and mushollas. Prior scholarship on the 'Aisyiyah women's mushollas in Yogyakarta focused on the architecture of the buildings while news pieces on the Women's Mosque of America prioritized descriptions of the appearance of its two meeting locations, first a multi-use site called the Pico Union Project and later a Unitarian Universalist church. Equally important to the physical characteristics of these locations is the creation of the spaces themselves. Beyond descriptions of the material aspects of the places lie greater questions regarding the social production of the spaces within; the circumstances, activities, and meanings assigned that somehow make the sites welcoming and, for the women attendees, a sacred place of spiritual opportunities. Although the mushollas and mosque in many ways represent the gendered spaces where women are either relegated to or seclude themselves, the experiences of the women I spoke with in both countries raised the possibility that these spaces and the activities done in them broke with previous understandings of gendered spaces carrying only a negative impact for those within. Rather, the women expressed attitudes of empowerment and many saw their participation as acts of resistance against patriarchal norms that they deemed to be contradictory to the spirit of Islam. As such, theories on the meaning and creation of spaces, such as the gendering of space and how space can be imbued with sacredness and how actors and activities within a space can be demonstrations of power and resistance have proved to be especially important to a deeper understanding of women's mosques.

Space and Place

When people occupy any location and perform activities, the concept of space is essential to understanding the meaning of the activities and the motivations of the actors. As a term, space is used often in the colloquial to refer to any type of location, but in the fields of geography, sociology, and anthropology the idea of space is one that continues to be explored and complicated. A space that is created must have a creator or creators, that is, those architects and constructors who carry their own motivations and assign their own meanings to the process and final product which may affect future use of a space and the actors who perform within it. These people who are involved with a space, for example, the architects, creators, performers, and others who fulfill necessary roles must grapple with assigning meaning to the space. Inhabitants of a space can affect the space and, indeed, the space can have an impact on the inhabitants.

Delving into the topic of religion and space necessitates exploring concepts of the sacred and ritual performance. Furthermore, the relationship between spaces and those people and materials which inhabit them brings to light questions about the divide between the so-called public and private spheres and whether or not the world can be defined in such a binary fashion. How is space socially produced? Can it also be said that space somehow works on society, and what does this entail? What makes a space sacred and how does meaning assigned to a space influence how people experience a space?

I turn to Michel de Certeau's explanation of the difference between space and place, two terms that are inextricably linked but carry different meanings:

> A place…is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (place). The law of the "proper" rules in the

> place: the element taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability.[107]

In other words, a place is a location created within an environment and perhaps built with materials. De Certeau defines space as something that exists in a place under particular circumstances.

> A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. On this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a "proper." In short, space is a practiced place.[108]

A place may be produced with brick and mortar, but space is socially produced. In Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy*, he describes how society is the product of man and yet man is the product of society. A noted sociologist, he outlines a process of society through externalization, objectivation, and internalization. That is, humans create the world around them through the construction of space, symbol, ritual, culture, and more. These constructions become separate from the humans who created them and thus objectivated. Lastly, humans then need to take this new reality and re-appropriate it by internalizing this constructed world.[109] It is through this dialectic process that space and performance

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[107] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 117.

[108] *Ibid*., 117.

[109] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 1

can be produced by humans and yet still humans are affected, changed, or recreated by these, their own productions.

To help unpack how space is produced, and by whom, space may be located similarly to how place is, by finding it in either the public or private sphere. What is done in a space, who performs in it and what a space contains is continually influenced by what social sphere it inhabits. Of course, despite efforts to the contrary throughout history, delineating the private and public sphere is no easy task and actually relegating some aspect of society and culture to just one sphere may be impossible. Just as a place can be deemed private or public— the home (private), university (public or private, depending), a town square (public)— a space may be considered in the same way due to the place it inhabits, the creators of the space, and the performances and performers of the space.

To further understand this, I begin with a look at how the motivations behind creating a space and place can affect the meaning within and the effect on those who inhabit the space. The intent of the architect of any place does of course influence its design and function. A mosque, for example, may be erected with much thought given to the surrounding Muslim community and how many congregants may be expected on any given day. The need for a kitchen for the preparation of communal meals or classrooms and conference rooms for instruction and meetings must be considered. The community's interpretation of gender segregation during prayer must be kept in mind and based on this there are a variety of options to separate males from females— physical barriers such as separate rooms, one-way mirrors, low walls or curtains or simply a line or different decorative scheme to mark where women should stay and men should avoid. Once the

architect of a place has finished their job and seen the project through, however, it is what spaces occur within the place and what is done in these spaces that may transform the space to hold meaning that might not align with the original motivations of the architect. The construction of a place does contribute to its meaning, but the intent of the architect or creator is not the sole source of the meaning of a space.

Design of a place influences its performance. Shirley Ardener in her chapter in *Gender, Space, Architecture* posits that "the environment imposes certain restraints on our mobility, and, in turn, our perceptions of space are shaped by our own capacity to move about…So: behavior and space are mutually dependent."[110] She articulates this further: "…space defines the people in it…Thus: people define space."[111] As important as the environment, design or architecture is to a space, in the sense that these elements shape the place and perhaps make possible the presence of actors and their performances in the space, the actors in turn, by their performances, define the space themselves.

A helpful illustration of this is Erving Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor in *The Presentation of Everyday Life.* For Goffman, the setting of a dramatic performance is synonymous to de Certeau's concept of place.

> A setting tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it.[112]

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[110] Shirley Ardener, "The Partition of Space" in *Gender, Space, Architecture*, ed. Jane Rendell et al. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 113.

[111] *Ibid.,* 113.

[112] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 22.

While I have used the term performance to refer to any action or ritual done by people inhabiting a space, since Goffman is relying on the theater as the basis for his metaphor, he describes the performance as actions done by people in a setting for an audience. In what Goffman calls the "front region" or perhaps the stage, actors give performances based on their audience and certain rules and requirements decided by public decorum. Continuing the metaphor, however, there is a "backstage," a space "…where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course…Here the performer can relax, he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character."[113] Casanova describes Goffman's backstage as a space belonging to the private sphere "where the individual can relax unobserved before donning the theatrical personae which the public self will play in the strategic performance of 'interaction rituals' in public spaces."[114] The public sphere, then, includes interactions which require following of the rules of social hierarchy, propriety, parameters of ritual, and other limits, whereas the private sphere is a space allowing more freedom, less artificiality and less concern for decorum.

Sacred Space

If, as Jose Casanova asserts, religion cannot be relegated to either just the private or public sphere, where do the spaces of religious ritual and the dissemination of religious knowledge reside when keeping in mind Goffman's idea of the backstage and front

[113] *Ibid*., 112.

[114] Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 42.

stage?[115] Firstly, returning to Berger's *Sacred Canopy*, he situates religious acts and rituals as connectors between history, culture, society and the present.

> Both religious acts and religious legitimations, ritual and mythology…together serve to recall the traditional meanings embodied in the culture and its major institutions. They restore ever again the continuity between the present moment and the societal traditions, placing the experiences of the individual and the various groups of the society in the context of history that transcends them all.[116]

Since space is socially produced, it is logical to make the association that components of religiosity, for example, ritual and sacredness, are functions of society and therefore help to transform space and the actors and meanings within it.

Mircea Eliade explores the meaning of the sacred and how a space may become sacred in his book *The Sacred and the Profane.* Something that is sacred is related to the divine, such as God or gods, and is easily distinguished from the profane or what has no relation to the divine. An obvious example would be a religious institution such as a church, mosque, or temple whose creation was motivated by the belief in the existence of the divine. Eliade notes, "Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different."[117] But for Eliade a space cannot become sacred merely by the efforts of humans:

> We must not suppose that human work is in question here, that it is through his own efforts that man can consecrate a space. In reality the ritual by which he constructs a sacred space is efficacious in the measure in which it reproduces the work of the gods.[118]

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[115] *Ibid*, 215.

[116] Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 40-41.

[117]Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1959), 26.

What is done in a space, that is, what performance is given, can result in a connection and experience with the divine which then sets the space apart from the ordinary, profane world. Berger takes this further in *The Heretical Imperative:*

> Religious ritual, for example, assigns the encounters with sacred reality to certain times and places, and puts them under the control of typically prudent functionaries. By the same token, religious ritual liberates the rest of life from the burden of having to undergo these encounters.[119]

Ritual performance transforms a space and gives meaning to it as well as affecting the experience of the actors within the space.

When humans are faced with a sacred experience, they become aware of their own profaneness, according to Rudolf Otto. Coming into contact with the numinous, or something that is a totally other, irrational, awe-inspiring element of divine power, brings forth the realization that the actor is unfit to interact with the holy. Something must occur, then, as Otto notes,

> …a procedure that renders the approacher himself "numinous," frees him from his "profane" being, and fits him for intercourse with the numen. The means of "consecration," however— means of grace in the proper sense— are derived from, or conferred and appointed by, the numen itself, which bestows something of its own quality to make man capable of communion with it.[120]

Thus, a space cannot become sacred with the mere actions of the human actor. Rather, it requires an interaction between the religious human and the divine that is trying to be reached or experienced through religious ritual.

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[118] *Ibid*., 29.

[119] Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (New York: Anchor Books, 1980), 46.

[120] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 54.

Gendered Space

In many mosques, women are positioned behind men or completely away from male practitioners during prayer and sermons (khutab[121]). When a woman must listen to the muezzin or imam from the back of the room or behind a curtain or wall, or even through a speaker or video monitor, while a man may inhabit the space nearest to the muezzin or imam, women are at a disadvantage. Daphne Spain refers to gendered segregation of space as a method that limits "women's access to knowledge and thereby reinforce women's lower status relative to men. 'Gendered spaces' separate women from knowledge used by men to produce and reproduce power and privilege."[122] This holds especially true for those mosques that do not allow women at all.

What occurs in a space (performance) and who acts in a space (performers) is heavily influenced by who is the dominant force. In the case of a mosque that practices gender segregation in a way that women are spatially separated from men as well as the leaders of ritual and the activity of knowledge dissemination, this reflects also how gender itself is constructed and understood. Notes feminist geographer Doreen Massey:

> The limitation of women's mobility, in terms both of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts crucial means of subordination. Moreover the two things— the limitation on mobility in space, the attempted consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand, and the limitation on identity on the other— have been crucially related.[123]

[121] Khutab is the plural of khutbah in Arabic, referring to the sermon given during Jumma'a.

[122] Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 3.

[123] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 179.

In this example, the space that women are relegated to in the mosque defines the women themselves, through religious interpretations and social hierarchies, as subordinate, sexually tempting, inappropriate, impure, or other degrees of being lesser than men. By being placed behind a curtain or in a separate room from the dissemination of religious knowledge or experience of the sacred, women are labeled as less knowledgeable or requiring less knowledge. However, by residing in this space their access to knowledge is limited, so the label perpetuates itself. Just because the dominant figures in a religious space, in this case men, are guiding the mobility or acts of the subordinate (women) does not mean that the women are powerless to assign meaning to their space.

Daphne Spain's concept of gendered space sees spatial segregation as inherently negative because it reinforces status differences and knowledge access between men and women. If spaces may be created to privilege men, what are the possibilities of spaces created to privilege women? Can women benefit from spaces created specifically to afford them access to knowledge? For Spain, the resolution to gendered spaces that leave women at a disadvantage is the process of degendering space. She asserts, "degendering spaces in the home, school, and workplace will improve women's status only to the extent that it also improves their acquisition of knowledge valued by society."[124] This understanding of gendered space suggests that these spaces exist only to serve the best interest of men. Is it possible that gendered space could, alternatively, serve the best interest of women, with no concern to the interest of men?

[124] Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, 233.

Nancy Duncan, in her discussion of quasi-private space, touches on some of the shortcomings of a space that benefits a typically marginalized group. While such space may be empowering, there may be consequences to isolation; there may be "an undesirable depoliticizing effect on a group, fortifying it against challenges from, and allowing it to inadvertently assume independence from, a wider public sphere."[125] This drawback is especially important in my later considerations of the mission of the Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles and where the attendees position the mosque on the spectrum of varieties of gender segregation in mosques. Duncan's acknowledgement of the empowering aspects and drawbacks of a quasi-private space should be considered along with Spain's concept of gendered space being only beneficial to men. The possibilities for a women-only space for knowledge attainment, community, and piety, as we will see in my analysis of the 'Aisyiyah mushollas and Women's Mosque of America, come with an array of benefits and costs.

Power and Knowledge

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, Foucault gives a thorough explanation of power:

> It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose

[125] Nancy Duncan, "Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces," in *BodySpace: Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality*, ed. Nancy Duncan (New York: Routledge, 1996) 129.

> general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.[126]

In his early texts Foucault focuses on how institutions are places of power differentials where people are placed in power over others and therefore social hierarchies are reinforced— examples include the prison, hospital, factory, and school. Power exists when one has control over another's actions and experiences, particularly the experience of knowledge attainment. This means that spaces may reinforce power relations through geographical components, performances and actors.

I use the term knowledge attainment in relation to religion to refer to the experience of the sacred, referring back to Eliade and Otto, and religious instruction or learning about the sacred. Who has the power in religious spaces is incredibly important when considering the knowledge disseminated there and who is allowed access to this knowledge. In his interview with editors of the journal *Herodote*, Foucault reflects on the relationship between power and knowledge.

> Once knowledge can be analyzed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of a domination designated by notions such as field, region, and territory.[127]

In other words, to borrow a famous quote from Francis Bacon, "Knowledge is power." Whoever has the knowledge has power, whoever disseminates knowledge or grants

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[126] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 92-93.

[127] Michel Foucault, "Questions on Geography" in *Space, Knowledge, and Power: Foucault and Geography* ed. By Crampton and Elden (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 177.

access or even has access to knowledge has power. And if one does not have these things, they are without power.

Going back to the concept of the attainment of religious knowledge—experience of the sacred or instruction in the sacred— a religious space must be examined to determine who carries the power. One of the most important divides between who has knowledge/power in a religious space is exhibited in the division of gender. Examples of this include the Roman Catholic Church bestowing the priesthood only on males, some synagogues and mosques separating men and women during communal worship, and the Evangelical complementarianism movement, to only name a few. Thus far I have discussed how meaning may be assigned by the architect, the actor, and through the acts performed, but it should now be clear that those with hegemony exert considerable influence. How then, can women assign meaning in such a way that affects their experiences within a space despite being disadvantaged in terms of power and knowledge access? How may a space of segregation and marginalization become a space that elevates women?

Returning to Michel Foucault, he acknowledges that where there is power there is also resistance.[128] bell hooks proposes that the margins of a space are spaces of resistance, imbued with radical possibility.[129] To put it another way, one can choose to remain in the margins and transform it into a space of resistance and creativity—"choosing the margin, rather than being assigned it, makes a difference," as Jane Rendell

[128] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, *Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 94-96.

[129] bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" in *Gender, Space, Architecture* ed. Jane Rendell et al. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 207.

describes hooks' thinking.[130] The site of a mosque is a religious space, a space of ritual, the sacred, and performances of power and knowledge. As a way of embracing the margins and transforming segregated, gendered space into a space of access, some Muslim women have created women's mosques which fulfill the traditional requirements of gender segregation during prayer and sermons but involves the construction of a separate place so that the space within is transformed. This occurs through the roles of female a'immah[131] and khateebat[132] as well as free mobility and access for all women within the space, all voluntarily. In these spaces, women control their own access to knowledge and their geographical positioning during experiences of the sacred while still participating in their religious community. Power relations will still exist in such a space since it is a social production, but men are not the dominant power-wielders or disseminators of knowledge in the actual space.

A space can be so dynamic as to produce and be produced, assign meaning and be assigned meaning, perform and be performed in and so on that we are provided with an incredibly rich setting for experience and study. Within a multitude of spaces at any given time humans are performing in ways that reinforce or resist existing social structures. For women's mosques, the meaning of these places relies on those who inhabit and perform there, such as the women who gather there one Friday a month to create the Women's Mosque of America and the women who attend the Ranting

[130] Jane Rendell, "Introduction: 'Gender, Space,'" in *Gender, Space, Architecture* ed. Jane Rendell et al. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 107.

[131] The plural of imam in Arabic.

[132] The plural of khateebah in Arabic.

Karangkajen and Kauman ‘Aisyiyah Mushollas for their daily prayers, Qur’an reading, sermons, and communal meals. As Foucault notes, liberty is a practice. Liberation, or transformation, may occur in a space, but it takes more than the motivations of the creator or architect; rather, the performance of those inhabiting the space must be liberating and transformative. These women have taken what traditionally could represent a space of marginalization and instead use their performance and construction to rearticulate the space into a gendered space that may serve the best interest of women.

Methodology

By observing prayer at the ‘Aisyiyah Musholla in Kauman and chatting with the participants after on that Ramadan night in 2013, I unknowingly embarked on an ethnographic research project. It was not until I returned to the United States months later that I revisited the notes I had quickly scribbled about the experience. My words from that night conveyed the awkwardness I felt to be in a mosque without a headscarf rather than an account of being in a woman’s musholla for the first time. When I looked back on my time there, I was regretful that I had not returned to the musholla during the remaining weeks of my stay in Indonesia. I continued with my graduate courses and by the end of my last semester, the musholla in Kauman and the women attendees were still on my mind, pushing me to study the history of the mushollas and their sponsoring organization, ‘Aisyiyah, as much as I could from the United States.

I did not come lightly to the decision to base my dissertation project on women-only mosques. After courses in qualitative research methods, ethnography and the ethics of ethnographic work, it became clear that this mode of research would be best suited for

this project. As Sherry Ortner notes, "minimally (ethnography) has always meant the attempt to understand another life world using the self—as much of it as possible—as the instrument of knowing."[133] The space of the women's mushollas, the activities within it and the experiences of the women attendees made up the "life world" that I wanted to examine more closely. As time went on and the Women's Mosque of America opened in 2015, I recognized that this new space was an opportunity to explore another facet of my research on exclusive women's prayer spaces. This work explores how the voluntarily segregated space of a women-only mosque can be beneficial to the inhabitants by allowing greater access to religious knowledge and opportunities for piety.

Although I was as conscious as possible to not impose predetermined theories on my fieldwork that could influence my analysis, I did come to the table with some key questions that I hoped I would be able to satisfactorily discuss by the end of this process. As I have outlined earlier, I sought to know if the physical structure of a woman-only mosque or musholla provided an advantage or disadvantage to the women attendees, how the women felt about their attendance, details about the activities and community of the mushollas and mosque, and if these spaces and the activities held there were beneficial to the women's spiritual aims. I was also interested in how the women dealt with the arguments for and against the existence of women-only mosques; the first being that this tradition has carried on throughout Islamic history starting with the time of the Prophet Muhammad; the other arguing that these spaces are bid'a and any activities done here are

[133] Sherry Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37, no.1 (1995): 73.

not only invalid but possibly harmful. These questions could only be answered by the women themselves who entrusted me with their stories and experiences.

I knew that quantitative research, such as attendance numbers, donations or other measurements of participation, would not sufficiently add to the knowledge of this topic. Taylor and Bogdan explain, "Qualitative researchers are concerned with the meanings people attach to things in their lives."[134] Numbers could not tell me this information; rather, these communities deserved the opportunity to articulate the meanings they attached to these spaces. Furthermore, qualitative research is inductive and the process rests on grounded theory, meaning the concepts derived from the research are based on the data itself rather than using the data to support preconceived hypotheses. Generally speaking, I had the sense that the women who attended these mushollas and the mosque felt positively about their experiences there, as supported by their continued attendance, but beyond this I relied on the resultant data from interviews and observation to suggest any theories. Over time, through analysis of interviews and observations, relevant theories became apparent and the discussion of these are present at the beginning of this chapter.

Within the realm of qualitative study, I embarked on my work with a focus on ethnographic methods and feminist research. Ethnographic processes like interview and participant observation aim to analyze a culture and produce, as Clifford Geertz called it, thick description.[135] Feminist research is "any research that has as its goal increasing our

[134] Steven J. Taylor and Robert Bogdan, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 1998), 7.

[135] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

empirical understanding of the processes through which inequality are reproduced with an eye toward eradication of that inequality."[136] Feminist ethnography is focused on women's lives and experiences and "pays particular attention to interplays between gender and other forms of power and difference."[137] Ethnographic methods, however, are not without their risks and drawbacks. Intensive research into a culture can be intrusive and disruptive, ending with the researcher abandoning her collaborators once the data is collected. Furthermore, the end product of ethnographic work is the story of a culture as told by the researcher, often an outsider, with a lack of self-reflexivity and acknowledgement of the power dynamics at play. Given these potential pitfalls, Judith Stacey questions whether a feminist ethnography can truly bear the weight of the goals of feminist research:

> My current response to the question…is that while there cannot be a fully feminist ethnography, there can be (indeed there are) ethnographers that are partially feminist, accounts of culture enhanced by the application of feminist perspectives. There also can and should be feminist research that is rigorously self-aware and therefore humble about the partiality of its ethnographic vision and its capacity to represent self and other…I believe the potential benefits of 'partially' feminist ethnography seem worth the serious moral costs involved. [138]

With these considerations in mind, my project is situated in the realm of feminist research using ethnographic methods. It is my intent, through the use of these methodologies, to

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[136] Shannon N. Davis and Angela Hattery, "Teaching Feminist Research Methods: A Comment and Evaluation," *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, 15, no. 15 (Fall 2018): 51.

[137] Elana D. Buch and Karen M. Staller, "The Feminist Practice of Ethnography" in *Feminist Research Practice,* ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Lina Leavey (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 4.

[138] Judith Stacey, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" *Women's Studies International Forum*, 11, no. 1 (1988): 26.

humbly serve the women who shared their experiences with me by articulating how access to exclusive women's prayer spaces has impacted their lives.

This research focused on three communities, two in the city of Yogyakarta in Indonesia and the third in Los Angeles, California. My first role in these fields was that of observer; as time progressed some opportunities arose for me to be a participant-observer through small acts of service or community at the mushollas and mosque. In addition to my observation notes, much of the information I gathered came from semi-structured interviews. The general themes of my interviews in Indonesia and the United States remained similar, focusing on demographic information, religious practice and belief, participation and experiences within the communities, and views on gender in Islam. Often, the responses to questions I asked would lead to new questions from me or insights and stories from the interviewee and the conversation would evolve.

In Indonesia, I observed the daily prayers, activities, and gatherings at the musholla Ranting Karangkajen and the musholla in Kauman. I spent four weeks at each location and was often welcomed into the attendees' nearby homes. Initially I introduced myself to the 'Aisyiyah Yogyakarta headquarters leaders and obtained permission to conduct this research; I later obtained permission from the leaders of each musholla. The women of both mushollas welcomed me warmly and after prayer would conclude there was always someone willing to speak with me at the musholla or in their home. I was invited to sermons, the fast-breaking evening meals on Mondays and Thursdays, evening halaqas (meetings for religious study) and Qur'an recitations. My goal was to interview any regular attendees who were willing to participate and I was able to conduct lengthy interviews with fifteen women at each musholla.

The structure of my study at the Women's Mosque of America varied greatly from my experience in Indonesia for numerous reasons. The two biggest obstacles were that the mosque only operates one Friday per month and the attendees and khateebat come from the greater Los Angeles area while many guest khateebat traveled from other states to give their khutab. The founder of the Women's Mosque of America was open to me attending Jumma'a prayers and approaching attendees for interviews; she only asked that I did not do any interviews in the mosque itself. Instead, my in-person interviews took place in nearby cafes or in the interviewee's home when I was invited. For those women who lived farther away and were not able to attend the mosque regularly I conducted interviews over Skype. I first began attending the Women's Mosque of America in 2015 and would travel to Los Angeles several times a year to observe Jumma'a until I left for Indonesia to do fieldwork. Upon returning from Indonesia in the spring of 2018, I spent the next year traveling to Los Angeles for each month's Jumma'a and I would conduct lengthy interviews in the days or hours surrounding the Jumma'a. For participants who felt it was more convenient to be interviewed through Skype, I scheduled interviews during the weekdays around their schedules. In total I was able to interview thirteen women; this group was comprised of women who were regular attendees, those who served as khateebat, and those who operated the mosque, including its founder. I sought out participants by emailing past khateebat and approaching attendees at the Jumma'a prayers; many of the women I interviewed suggested that I reach out to others or had their friends contact me. When the Women's Mosque of America first began it saw huge numbers of attendees. However, once the novelty began

to wear off, there remained a small group of consistent attendees and khateebat on whom I chose to focus much of my time.

For each of my interviews I explained my academic background and the purpose of my research; after obtaining verbal permission from the participants I was allowed to conduct the interviews and record the audio.[139] To protect the identities of the participants, I have changed their names in this work, with the exception of the founder of the Women's Mosque of America since she is considered a public figure and she gave me permission to use her name. In Indonesia, the women of the mushollas urged me to take photos to use in my work and also asked me to be a part of their own photos, some of which are included in this dissertation. Although I have studied Indonesian extensively, I thought it was important to use an interpreter to ensure accuracy in my interviews. Based off of the recommendation of the religious studies department at Universitas Gadjah Mada, my sponsoring institution in Indonesia, I worked with a former student who had recently obtained her master's and whose research interests held similar themes to my own. While Linda's interpretation assistance and help with transcribing my Indonesian interviews were indispensable, her own experience of our time at the 'Aisyiyah mushollas provided invaluable insights of the impact of these sites, of which I will expand upon later in this work. As for data, my observation notes from both Indonesia and Los Angeles and the interview recordings and transcriptions pertaining to the Women's Mosque of America remained only accessible to me while the interview recordings and transcriptions from Indonesia were only seen by myself and my

[139] In accordance with Arizona State University's Internal Review Board, this project obtained exempt status. These interviews posed limited risk for participants and as such only verbal agreement was required from participants after my research and intent were fully explained.

interpreter. All of my data was saved with anonymized names and organized and coded using the NVIVO qualitative analysis program. This program helped me to categorize news articles, interview transcriptions, and notes thematically so that I could best apply my data to the research questions.

The following four chapters represent my analysis and findings of the women's mushollas in Karangkajen and in Kauman in Yogyakarta and the Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles. These sites were chosen for many reasons, but particularly for their unique histories and the differences between how long women have had access to the mushollas and the mosque. The attendees in Indonesia have attended the women's mushollas for many years and have a wealth of experiences there; access to these spaces is a normal part of their everyday life. On the other hand, the attendees of the Women's Mosque of America sought out this space, the first of its kind in the United States, as a novel opportunity after spending most of their lives without access to a prayer space exclusively for women or without the opportunity to be led by women. Furthermore, there are two opposing arguments raised in response to the presence of women's only mosques. The women represented in this work span two countries and several decades; it is from the depth of their experiences that we have the opportunity to explore the power and potential of women's mosques.

Chapter 5: Creating the Women's Mosque of America

Introduction

When Edina Lekovic, co-founder of NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change, member of Los Angeles' Interfaith Leaders Collaborative and board member of the Pico-Union Project, began the first Friday prayer sermon for the Women's Mosque of America, her voice shook. "Today, we open this historic Jumma'a with the opening chapter of the Qur'an, al-Fatihah. The words of God, which we recite the most often, and which bring us here together, to continue the legacy of Muslim women throughout our history. And, to begin a new chapter in the story of Muslim women." While she spoke, women embraced each other, some adjusted their headscarves, and mothers quieted the babies in their arms. Every woman's attention was on the podium, called a minbar in Arabic, in a building that was once a synagogue and then a church and, on that day, became a mosque. The women, seated only a few feet away from her, listened intently to the khateebah as she, at times pausing with emotion, talked about the Islam she wanted her infant daughter to come to know. "My daughter—our daughters, our community, can say, 'a woman's mosque? We got that!'…And today, because of you, that is truth that can never be unwritten."

In 2015, when the Women's Mosque of America first opened, for many it seemed like this was a project hundreds of years in the making. In fact, upon hearing about and attending the monthly Jumma'a, several women admitted having asked themselves, "Why didn't I do this?" and, later, as women emerged as leaders of the mosque, telling themselves "I can do this!" The mosque itself is a culmination of one woman's lifelong dream, years of grappling with faith and interpretations of gender roles, and above all

inspiration from the Qur'an and Islamic history. The Women's Mosque of America is an institution that opens the doors of a rented space once a month for all Muslim women, inviting anyone who enters to take part in prayer, learn from gifted khateebat, and become involved in a community that celebrates inclusivity, diversity, and faith. Through their involvement with the mosque, numerous women have taken the opportunity to serve as leaders in ways that were prohibited to them throughout their life: at the WMA[140] women give the call to prayer, lead prayer, and deliver sermons. From the first announcement about the creation of the WMA to now, five years after the first monthly Jumma'a, the WMA has achieved notoriety and garnered a great deal of nationwide media attention. Notably, there has been both criticism and support from influential Muslims throughout the United States. However, it is in the experiences of the attendees that we can truly begin to understand the impact that the Women's Mosque of America has had on the lives of so many women. Having had the privilege to observe the mosque and speak with its attendees over the past several years, in this chapter and the next I shall share the journey of the Women's Mosque of America from its creation to today.

Building a Women's Mosque

The first time I interviewed Hasna Maznavi, the founder of the Woman's Mosque of America, she only had a few minutes to spare while she drove from Friday prayers to meet with that month's khateebah. That was 2015, and it was still the early days of the WMA when Maznavi was fulfilling many roles and constantly on the go running the

[140] Henceforth the Women's Mosque of America will often be abbreviated to WMA in my words. The words of my interviewees and any other sources will stand in their original form.

mosque and working her full-time job as a comedy writer. The second time I interviewed Hasna Maznavi, it was 2018 and we were sitting down in a busy café just a few blocks away from the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles, where the WMA rents space each month for Jumma'a. Maznavi spends a lot of time there working on her film projects and planning future Jumma'at for the mosque. "This is the first interview I've done in a long time!" she told me after I started with questions about how she decided to name the mosque. "I used to have all of these answers right off the top of my head," Maznavi laughed. During the first two years of the Women's Mosque of America, Maznavi seemed to be always giving comments, interviews, or written statements to the media about her pet project. Now, as the mosque enters its fifth year in operation, the novelty has died down, in part due to a decision by the mosque board to take a step back from the numerous media inquiries. Fortunately, Maznavi has remained in contact with me since the first time I attended the WMA in November of 2015. Through phone calls, emails, brief conversations after Jumma'at, and two interviews, Maznavi has given me insight on how the Women's Mosque was created and sustained for the last five years, as well as offering her own reflections on the impact of the mosque.

In interviews with the media, Maznavi is quick to point out that the concept of a women's mosque—and even more so, female Islamic leadership and inclusive prayer—is not novel to Islam. In addition to the historical precedence of women's mosques and women's study groups in China, Egypt, Indonesia, and numerous other places, the original inspiration comes from the Prophet's era, where women were free to go to the mosque and pray without a barrier to the Prophet. The organization's mission statement asserts:

> The Women's Mosque of America seeks to uplift the Muslim community by empowering women and girls through more direct access to Islamic scholarship and leadership opportunities. The Women's Mosque of America provides a safe space for women to feel welcome, respected, and actively engaged within the Muslim Ummah. It complements existing mosques, offering opportunities for women to grow, learn, and gain inspiration to spread throughout their respective communities.[141]

Maznavi sums this up in an interview with Muslim Girl magazine: "We want to see the way that Muslim women were treated during the Prophet's time."[142] With this, the WMA firmly places its call for female leadership and collaboration within the social and legal traditions of Islam, or the Sunnah.

When Hasna Maznavi was a little girl, her dream was to build a mosque. She grew up going to different mosques in Southern California with her family, typically drawn to a mosque because of the quality of khutab, the space allocated for women, and convenient proximity. As a teenager, Maznavi found that after 9/11 her religion had become a controversial topic discussed in the public sphere more than it ever had before. Everyone seemed to have an opinion or an argument about Muslim beliefs, the Qur'an, and what Muslims do or should do. Eager to understand the truth about her religion, Maznavi decided to read the Qur'an all the way through—in English, her primary language. In a 2018 speech she gave at the WMA's Co-Ed Annual Iftar and Qiyam, she recalled the fear she felt in undertaking this task; she was afraid the Qur'an might reveal to her that all of the harsh, violent things that she heard constantly associated with Islam were true. Instead, she had a rewarding experience: "I found inspiration, I found my

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[141] "About," *Women's Mosque of America*, http://womensmosque.com/about-2

[142] Salma Elkhaoudi, "Women's Mosque of America: In the Founder's Own Words," *Muslim Girl Magazine*, February 10, 2015. http://muslimgirl.com/10157/womens-mosque-america-interview-m-hasna-maznavi/

purpose, I found my responsibility here on this earth, and I found my life in the Qur'an, and that is purely where this mosque comes from."[143] Maznavi, armed with a new understanding of the Qur'an and her faith, went on to pursue higher education and a career in the film industry but always kept her dream of creating a mosque in the back of her mind.

In 2010, Maznavi started to save all of her ideas pertaining to creating a mosque in a Word document, like she did for her film projects. She would add ideas, notes, and questions to the document, often stemming from experiences she had in other mosques in California. From Los Angeles to Oakland, Maznavi prayed in mosques that represented the variety of the Muslim-American experience; she appreciated the different architecture, evaluated the spaces set aside for women in terms of their closeness to the rest of the congregation and the imam, considered the representation of women on mosque boards and activities, and pondered the relevancy of sermon topics. At some point, however, one of the mosques she frequented underwent a renovation and the previous gender segregation style of women and men inhabiting the same main area with a small barrier between them drastically changed. Instead, women were given an upstairs area, away from the imam and the rest of the congregation. Women attendees looked out through a glass window but were hidden from view to everyone else. Maznavi realized that with this change in architecture came a change in the mosque culture itself after she was asked to go upstairs rather than pray in the back of the mostly-empty main hall one day. She continued to visit other mosques throughout California, wondering about the

[143] Hasna Maznavi, "Welcome Remarks" (presentation, 4th Annual Women's Mosque of America Co-Ed Iftar and Qiyam, Los Angeles, May 18 2018).

significance of the disappointment she felt in some of these less inclusive. Ultimately, Maznavi realized that her experiences were shared by many other Muslim women. Although she continued to find truth in the Qur'an and Islam, problems with the interpretation of Islamic law and influence of cultural traditions that relegated women to an unseen and unheard status in many mosques became clear to her.

Maznavi returned again and again to her childhood dream of creating an ideal mosque. Originally, she envisioned an egalitarian mosque where men and women would both have the opportunity to worship and lead. During the planning process, however, she found the name Masjid Al-Nisa coming to mind while she prayed, especially during the du'a, or invocation to God, for guidance. At first Maznavi could not understand why the name, meaning Women's Mosque, would even be a consideration—after all, she wanted to promote inclusivity and to avoid promulgating stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed and concealed because of their faith. Yet as time went on, the name stayed with her and even those close to her started to encourage the idea of a mosque for women. Maznavi shifted from her plan of an inclusive mosque for men and women to an exclusive mosque where all Muslim women would feel welcome.

Her first concern was that the exclusivity would prevent Muslim women, especially those with either more conservative or liberal interpretations of Islam from coming to the mosque at all. With this in mind, Maznavi concentrated her planning efforts toward making a woman's mosque founded on pluralism, where any Muslim woman could feel comfortable taking part in prayer and learning while feeling that their needs were being met. "I made it, in my view, more conservative by making it women only. So, to me, it is definitely middle of the road," she noted. "And I really wanted to

create a place that was truly inclusive of everybody so it doesn't matter where you fall on the spectrum. You come in and you don't feel like you're being pushed in a way that is making you uncomfortable."

In 2014, Maznavi posted on Facebook her intent to start the WMA after Ramadan concluded. She invited anyone interested to attend a public organizer's meeting to learn more or help plan. By the end of the year, Maznavi had a list of khateebat, a mission statement, and a plan for the future. She was surprised by how often she was approached by other women who expressed that they had always wanted to create or at least attend an exclusive women's mosque, often conveying negative experiences they had with traditional mixed-gender mosques and the spaces and activities allocated to women there that were very different from her own experiences. Through the process of launching the mosque and its first years of activity, Maznavi remained committed to rooting the project in positivity and compassion. "I think also when you create a space from a place of pain it's very different from when you create it from a place of inspiration and feeling whole," she said, recalling the origin of her lifetime dream to start a mosque. "Because had I had a negative experience growing up it would be a very different space." Since the first Jumma'a at the Pico Union Project in January of 2015, Maznavi's journey of creating and sustaining the WMA has not ceased and she continues to focus on how this space may best serve the diverse needs of the attendees.

Monthly Jummaʿa

One of the obstacles in creating a welcoming atmosphere for women to pray and learn was undoubtedly deciding on a location. While several a'immah[144] in Southern California approached Maznavi to offer the use of all or part of their mosques, she declined. Maznavi was concerned that being affiliated with an existing mosque would be perceived by potential attendees as an affiliation with a mosque's interpretation of Islam, including a partiality to a school of thought, cultural influence, political leaning or other such characteristic. Rather, Maznavi felt that it would be best for the WMA to hold their Jummaʿa on as neutral ground as possible, making the Pico Union Project an ideal candidate for the first few years of the mosque's operation. The brick building has stain glass windows adorned with the Star of David and is filled with wooden pews that were pushed to the back of the main hall during Jummaʿa. It began as a Jewish synagogue in 1909 and later served as a Welsh Presbyterian church. In 2012 it became the project of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern California where it was then turned into a multi-use building dedicated to interfaith activities and the arts.[145] While the WMA was held there, the Pico Union Project served as the home of four other worship communities, including three Christian denominations and a Jewish group, as well as a venue for community events. An added bonus of holding the WMA at the Pico Union Project is that women from other faiths were encouraged to attend Jummaʿa to show their support, a tradition that still exists today even with a change in location.

[144] A'immah is the plural form of imam.

[145] "Our Vision," Pico Union Project, 2020, https://www.picounionproject.org/vision/.

The mosque eventually relocated to a Unitarian Church still in the Los Angeles area. As with the Pico Union Project, no sign on the outside of the building alerts you to the Women's Mosque being held there; rather, women RSVP online and are directed to the location and parking options there. One Friday a month the place is transformed into a space for communal prayer, sermons, and question and answer sessions. At the entryway of the main hall, women place their shoes against the wall and use the restroom to perform wudu, or ritual cleansing. Two banners are always hung on the stage; the first reading "Allah…And when my servants ask you about Me, then truly, I am near," from Qur'an 2:186. The second reads, "Muhammad…I have only been sent to perfect your good manners," from hadith. The floor is covered in neat rows of cloth for women to form prayer lines, with chairs in rows toward the back for those who wish to just observe or cannot perform some of the physical demands of prayer. Toward the back of the room, tables are set up with a variety of materials about the local Muslim community including information sheets about Islamic prayer, resources for counseling, and flyers for upcoming events. There is also a container with scarves women may borrow if they choose to cover their head, although it is not required for those not leading prayer, and another container with clay turbahs for Shi'a attendees.[146] As volunteers perform sound checks or finish setting up, women greet each other and socialize before Jumma'a begins, often gathering in a circle to take turns reading from either a copy of the Qur'an or someone's Qur'an phone application.

[146] Turbahs are clay disks made usually from the earth of Karbala, Iraq and used by many Shi'a Muslims. Turbahs are used in Islamic prayer to touch the forehead to the earth during prostration. This is done based on the belief that the Prophet Muhammad prayed with his forehead touching the earth or a natural substance rather than having any barrier in between like a carpet. This practice is not widely done by Sunni Muslims.

Jumma‘a officially starts when a woman makes the call to prayer, or adhan, using the microphone at the foot of the stage. The role of muezzin is delegated on a volunteer basis to those women who feel comfortable issuing the call to prayer. Then, either Maznavi, a member of staff or volunteer will approach the pulpit to share any announcements and give an introduction for that month’s khateebah, offering background information on the speaker and their sermon topic. After the khateebah takes the stage, the second adhan occurs. The khateebah then delivers the first half of her khutbah, ending it with a du‘a, and then takes a seat briefly while she silently offers a du‘a for forgiveness. The khateebah then rises and completes the second half of her khutbah, finishing with another du‘a. While the khateebah is giving both parts of her khutbah a donation box is passed around, with proceeds going toward location and equipment rental, security, and most recently the employment of the mosque’s part-time operations staff member. After the khateebah’s sermon concludes, the iqama is given and the khateebah leads the congregation in a two rakat Jumma‘a prayer either from within the front line of women or in front of the women, based on her preference. Following this there is a second iqama and another woman leads all those who wish in Dhuhr prayer, the noon prayer that is obligatory if Jumma‘a is not performed.

After prayers are complete, the women form a circle on the floor or with their chairs. Maznavi typically reminds the congregants that the sermons are recorded and live-streamed while question and answer sessions are audio recorded before she opens the floor for discussion and feedback. Each session, several women choose to thank the khateebah for her sermon, explaining how her words impacted them and expressing gratefulness for her teaching and also for the opportunity to inhabit a space like the

WMA. Some pose questions or ask for clarifications directed toward the khateebah or even offer personal experiences related to the day's sermon. It is not unusual for a variety of emotions to be expressed within this circle; women may be moved to tears or speak passionately, there's always times of laughter, and the attendees comfort each other or lend support with the touch of a hand or a hug even if they do not know each other well.

Finally, the Jumma'a concludes and those who can stay behind help clean up the space as it transforms back into a church hall. Maznavi and other members of the mosque team, along with any attendees who are able, often join the khateebah for lunch and more discussion somewhere nearby. Most of the women say their farewells, making plans to reconnect at least by the following month's Jumma'a. Perhaps some will attend mixed-gender mosques local to them in the meantime, although many will prefer to pray privately until they can return to the WMA. Although the WMA's monthly activity may be complete, Maznavi and her team are already hard at work preparing future Jumma'at and collaborating with upcoming khateebat.

Maznavi believes one of the most important questions to ask a Muslim woman is "What do you need?" Whether the answer to that question involves architectural changes, more leadership opportunities, additional class offerings or different khutbah topics— the point is that listening to Muslim women's voices improves the quality and equality of Muslim communities. It is for this reason that Dhuhr prayer began to be offered after Jumma'a prayer in order to alleviate the concerns of any attendees who are unsure about the validity of a female-led Jumma'a. Similarly, when a khateebah asked the mosque team if it was permissible for her to not cover her hair during her khutbah, the issue was posed to the congregation. The majority of the attendees preferred the khutbah be given

by a woman wearing some type of head covering as she would while she led prayer, and the khateebah gladly complied in order to make everyone more comfortable. One obstacle women often face when they attend any mosque is the question of childcare. In many mosques, children stay in the women's section and women may have to stop praying or listening to the sermon to soothe their child or even step out with the child, leaving the space entirely. The WMA provides professional childcare at every Jumma'a for both boys and girls under twelve years old, although if an attendee feels more comfortable having her child with her in the congregation then that is welcomed as well. The team prioritizes the concerns of the congregation and relies on prior experiences in mosques, the Qur'an, and a focus on inclusivity to guide them.

In an interview from the mosque's opening, Maznavi told NPR "When we build this mosque, we are reflecting our own culture— and that's American culture."[147] Indeed, the women who attend the WMA represent much of the diversity of the American Muslim population. There are converts and life-long Muslims, Sunni and Shi'a, women from Arab, Asian, and African cultures, career women and stay at home mothers, and women from every generation—a variety of Los Angeles women gathering in the name of Allah. Some choose to cover their hair while others do not; everyone is encouraged to dress in whatever way they feel comfortable. Jumma'a prayer is held during midday on Fridays, often an inconvenient time for men and women in non-Muslim majority countries to leave work, school, or other obligations to attend. Consequently, when the

[147] Rebecca Hersher and Nathan Rott, "In LA, Women Build A Mosque Where They Can Call To Prayer," Weekend Edition Saturday, *NPR*, January 31, 2015, http://www.npr.org/2015/01/31/382851591/in-la-women-build-a-mosque-where-they-can-call-to-prayer

WMA was first formed it was only an option to those who could make the time commitment and have transportation to Los Angeles. During the first year of its operation, the WMA's Jumma'at would often have over one hundred congregants as well as non-Muslim supporters and a large press presence. As time has passed, each Jumma'a continues to draw a few first-time attendees in addition to a core group of regular attendees that have remained, about twenty-five to thirty women. Women from other faiths who want to show their support are often in attendance and it is common to see female students attending for a class or project with their notebooks in hand. In an effort to be more accessible and also transparent, the WMA records every khutbah and question and answer session and posts them on YouTube and various podcast websites. According to their YouTube Channel and Facebook page, the khutbah videos receive anywhere from three hundred to ten thousand views. Women from all over the world are able to experience the WMA at a distance and, with the recent addition of Facebook Livestreaming, they can attend in real time. Posting Jumma'a also figuratively opens the mosque's doors to men who wish to hear the adhan and learn from the khutab.

Coverage and Criticism of the Mosque

From the time the first Jumma'a was planned for January 30 2015, the WMA was inundated with media inquiries. Several media outlets attended the first Jumma'a and dozens of news pieces were published in the weeks following. The media portrayals of the WMA ranged from inspiring and uplifting to critical and often factually incorrect, prompting Maznavi to reevaluate the mosque's future relationship with the press. Although media coverage of the Women's Mosque has significantly decreased after its

first year in operation, the mosque team has taken charge of how the mosque is represented by taking a more active role in public discussion of their efforts. In addition to the impact of media coverage, the mosque has also been affected both positively and negatively by social media discourse. Although the mosque's media notoriety has decreased as the organization became more established, their social media interaction remains the key way people connect with the mosque outside of attending Jumma'a.

Both national and international media outlets raced to cover the emerging story of the first women-only mosque in the United States. In the days following the mosque's debut, *NPR, Huffington Post, Wall Street Journal, The Los Angeles Times, NBC, ABC, BBC News* and *Al-Jazeera English* were just a few of those who published print or online articles or recorded audio or video coverage. Most of the attention focused on the mission of the mosque and its unique place in American Islamic history while providing brief explanations of the issues women often face in traditional mosques in terms of space, access, and leadership. Journalists discussed the Pico Union Project choice of location, the large crowd in attendance, descriptions of the women-led prayer and khutbah and the sense of excitement and joy that permeated the first Jumma'a. In addition to comments from Hasna Maznavi and the first khateebah Edina Lekovic, some reports included reaction statements of either support or criticism from leaders of Islamic communities and religious scholars. In the rush to recount the news, however, several missteps and misrepresentations were made in the coverage of the mosque as far as its team and vision. Most notably, after one article described there being two co-founders and presidents of the WMA, dozens of more reports continued to reflect this erroneous information. Hasna Maznavi has always been the only founder and president of the mosque. While numerous

volunteers, including board members, were part of organizing the launch of the WMA, the mosque itself is a reflection of Maznavi's childhood ambition to create a mosque which developed into this first exclusively female mosque in the United States. Other problematic reports situated the efforts of the mosque as wholly innovative and often oppositional to the Islamic religion, whereas the organizational team and attendees often frame the mosque as inspired by the women of early Islam, the Prophet, the Qur'an and with precedent within Islamic tradition and Islamic communities around the world throughout history.

When Maznavi, the rest of the mosque team and even many attendees were dissatisfied with the quick and unthorough coverage of the WMA, they pondered how to move forward. Maznavi accepted more interviews where she could more clearly articulate the impetus behind the mosque and she was featured in a lengthy article for Muslim Girl magazine. Additionally, Maznavi penned her own articles about the WMA and was published in Huffington Post[148] and the Tennessee Tribune.[149] After the initial vast media response to the mosque and the ensuing requests for interviews, the mosque team ultimately decided to take a step back from engaging with the media to be able to more fully focus their attention on growing the mosque in terms of attendance and activities and how to best serve the attendees. Maznavi continues to speak at conferences and events and was even featured as one of CNN's "25 Influential American

[148] Hasna Maznavi, "9 Things You Should Know About the Women's Mosque of America—and Muslim Women in General," *Huffington Post*, May 20 2015, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/9-things-you-should-know-about-the-womens_b_7339582

[149] Hasna Maznavi, "The Women's Mosque of America Helping Women," *Tennessee Tribune*, July 7 2016.

Muslims."[150] Although the mosque continues to be mentioned in the media whenever other women's mosques throughout the world are discussed, the mosque engages very little with the news media since the initial clamor about the mosque has faded.

Probably more impactful to the Muslim community has been the social media presence of the WMA and the discussion surrounding it. Most of the women attendees and khateebat I have spoken with over the years mention first hearing about the WMA through social media, whether from Maznavi's first post announcing her plan for the mosque or later posts sharing event information or past khutab. Now, the mosque has thousands following its Facebook page, additional private Facebook groups for supporters as well as khateebat and a'immah, over two thousand followers on Twitter and almost a thousand on Instagram, and an email newsletter. Social media remains the chief method of spreading news of the Women's Mosque, attracting new followers and sharing news and sermons with men and women outside of Los Angeles.

At the start, critics of the mosque were also vocal through blogs, opinion pieces and on sites like Facebook, including male and female Islamic scholars. There are two main criticisms leveled at the WMA from within the Muslim community: questioning the validity of female-led Jumma'a and khutbah and the charge that the mosque's existence promotes the exclusion of women from other mosques and the wider Islamic community. From the time the WMA was first announced up until just shortly after the first Jumma'a, its practices were up for debate by Muslim leaders, scholars, and believers.

[150] Daniel Burke and Madeleine Stix, "25 Influential American Muslims." *CNN*. May 2018, https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2018/05/us/influential-muslims/.

Furhan Zubairi, khateeb, imam, and author in Southern California, published an article on *Medium* released the day of the first Jumma'a.[151] In the article he considers the mission of the WMA as well as legal arguments regarding the validity of the mosque's activities. Zubairi briefly outlines the four Sunni schools of thoughts' stances on women leading women in congregational prayer, noting in particular that such prayers would only be valid if the woman leading the congregation stood within the first line rather than in front of it, and their unanimous disapproval of women leading men in prayer. He also opines that although the mission of the organization is noble, the exclusivity of the mosque is contrary to the spirit of Friday prayer and the effort to bring together all Muslims of a community. Ultimately Zubairi lauds the mosque's efforts to empower women but asserts that there is a lack of legal precedence to make the Jumma'a valid.

Several attendees of the mosque lamented to me how they felt some Islamic scholars' perspectives on the WMA prevented Muslim women in the community from experiencing the mosque for themselves. Muslema Purmul, the Muslim chaplain for the University of Southern California, provided a lengthy post on Facebook on the day of the first Jumma'a discussing the lack of specific precedence for a woman-led Jumma'a and voicing her concerns that attendees would be missing an obligatory prayer.[152] She wrote:

> I say this not to destroy the energy or creativity of the organizers, because I support the idea of all women's programming and spaces. My main concern is that 200 women will be praying tomorrow and may miss the observation of Dhuhr because they think an all women's Jumuah will take its place. Since prayer is the second pillar of our faith, what separates us from disbelief, it is worthy of our attention to make sure its conditions are met and understood at an individual and community level. If you are attending the Jumuah tomorrow and Dhuhr is not

[151] Furhan Zubairi, "Thoughts on the Women's Mosque of America," *Medium*, January 30 2015, https://medium.com/@furhanzubairi/thought-on-the-womens-mosque-of-america-c2c4e8ffc71f

[152] It is of note that a year later, in 2016, Muslema Parmul was a guest speaker at a WMA event.

> prayed in congregation, I encourage you to get up afterwards and pray it by yourself individually. I have immense respect for the organisers and for Sis. Edina Lekovic who will be leading this effort, though it is legally invalid insofar as it counting as fard[153] prayer.[154]

This post was liked almost six hundred times and shared by almost one hundred and fifty people. The one hundred and four comments provided an interesting snapshot of the concerns many Muslims have about women-led mosques, with many commenters arguing that the WMA is potentially dangerous due to its alleged invalidity and bid‘a, or unsanctioned innovation. Others questioned the need for such a space at all, lauding the preponderance of mosques and Islamic centers in Southern California that welcome both sexes. A vocal minority, however, contended that the current state of gender relations in mosques has created a need for the WMA. While some Facebook users asserted that a woman’s mosque was not Sunnah and therefore invalid, others suggested that the lack of precedence was an indication that the opportunities afforded to women in Islam have deviated in contemporary times from the intentions of the Prophet and indeed the spirit of Islam to the point where women must seek out these alternative spaces in order find spiritual fulfillment.

The majority of the articles and posts critical to the WMA were written and published prior or just after the first Jumma‘a. The issues raised were not overlooked by the mosque team; rather, these points of contention continue to be grappled with especially in the context of providing an atmosphere that would make Muslim women

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[153] Fard refers to obligatory.

[154] Muslema Purmul, 2015. “All women’s Jumuah.” Facebook, January 30 2015. https://www.facebook.com/mpurmul/posts/a-lot-of-people-have-been-asking-me-about-the-all-womens-jumuah-that-is-supposed/398252807004722/

critical or doubtful of the WMA's validity feel welcome and heard. The policy of the mosque has always been to allow the imama the choice whether to lead prayers from within the first line or in front of the first line, citing the difference of opinion between the major schools of thought on the issue. In order to accommodate those who are unsure of the validity of a woman-led Jumma'a, the WMA always offers time for Dhuhr prayer, the noon prayer that is typically done in absence of Jumma'a. While the WMA has been accused many times of distancing women further from the Islamic community by drawing them to an exclusive space, Maznavi disagrees. In her interview for Muslim Girl Magazine, Maznavi stated, "We want women to come here, gain inspiration, and go back to their mosques with that inspiration."[155] Indeed the impetus for only holding Jumma'a once a month, in addition to making best use of limited resources, is so Muslim women will be encouraged to participate in their local mixed-gender mosques and even consider taking up leadership positions on mosque boards and in programs. Of course, some of the early critics have changed their opinion after attending the mosque and experiencing it for themselves. One khateebah recounted how she first heard about the WMA in her own masjid. "I do remember there was a woman who was like that's bid'a! That's bid'a," she recalled. A few years later, on the day she delivered the khutbah, however, she was shocked to see the same woman from her masjid in the congregation. "I looked at her and she sat there in the circle and said 'I'm just so proud of you young women' and on and on…She had completely changed her tune."

[155] Elkhaoudi, "Women's Mosque of America: In the Founder's Own Words."

Conclusion

When the Women's Mosque of America opened its doors in 2015, it not only made history but it propelled a great deal of conversation surrounding gender relations in Islam and the status of women in mosques. Hasna Maznavi created the space based on a lifelong dream and, unbeknownst to her at first, she was also fulfilling the dreams of so many American Muslim women who felt disenfranchised by their local mosques. Five years later, the debates amongst scholars and other Muslim leaders have somewhat subsided and the notoriety that drew so much media has faded. What remains, however, are the women who gather every month to pray and learn together under the leadership of one of their own. Thus far, the majority of the published work on the Women's Mosque of America has focused on its novelty and controversy, but very little voice has been given to the women who attend and lead within the WMA. With the history of the Women's Mosque of America, its mission and national and global impact in mind, let us look within the mosque to understand what this space means for the women themselves.

Chapter 6: The Women of the Mosque

Introduction

I first visited the Women's Mosque of America on November 20, 2015, just a few months after its first Jumma'a. After hearing about it from my advisor, I contacted the mosque via email to introduce myself and request permission to attend during a monthly Jumma'a and observe. The founder, Hasna Maznavi, welcomed my visit and I drove up from where I was living at the time in San Diego to downtown Los Angeles, where the Jumma'a was being held at the Pico Union Project. There were so many women in attendance that day that observers and supporters were filling the first few rows of pews that had been pushed back to allow for long strips of cloth to form prayer lines. One group introduced themselves to me as local Jewish women who wanted to express their encouragement for women's religious spaces and offer interfaith support. Several college age students were observing as well, occasionally writing down notes. Many of the attendees greeted each other warmly with hugs and introduced themselves to those around them before the service began. Following the conclusion of the question and answer portion, I introduced myself to Maznavi and made plans to meet with her for further discussion in the future. During this first visit to the WMA it became clear to me that simply observing and documenting the activities of the mosque was not enough to truly understand its significance; rather, any thorough analysis of the organization must include the perspectives of the women attendees. After all, space, even one imbued with meaning like the ones in which the WMA has inhabited, cannot speak for itself but rather those who act within the space can best articulate its meaning.

In this chapter and the next, in addition to information from news interviews, I include conversations I had with regular attendees, first time attendees, khateebat, volunteers and supporters of the WMA. While I attended numerous Jumma'at since 2015, over a period of two years I also interviewed attendees on a volunteer basis either over video calls or in person. These were semi-structured interviews; I began each interview with a standard list of open-ended questions, including background information and general inquiries about my interlocuter's opinions, interpretations, and experiences with the WMA as well as other mosques and Islam in a broader sense. Often, however, my interviewees steered the conversations in unexpected directions and I remained open to new questions and paths of discourse as they arose. All of the names of people I interviewed personally have been changed to protect the anonymity of those who gave me their time, with the exception of the founder, Hasna Maznavi, since she is a public figure. I chose to anonymize the names of my interlocuters per my personal preference and at the request of several of the women, who at times offered personal stories about themselves, information about themselves that they did not want publicized, and opinions about Islam, local mosques, and the Women's Mosque that they wished to share freely without being concerned about garnering judgement from their community and loved ones. Through dozens of hours of interviews, the women shared stories of their commitment to Islam, involvement with mosques and other prayer spaces, their understanding of the relationship between gender and Islam, and finally the ways they felt the WMA had impacted them.

Drawn to the Women's Mosque

The majority of the women I spoke with over the years first heard about the WMA on social media or from a friend or family member. Both the novelty and the controversy surrounding the announcement of the mosque drew people to learn more. Maha, a university employee, saw that the mosque was a hot topic of discussion in Muslim, progressive-leaning Facebook groups in which she was active. She noted that before she began attending the WMA, the internet was her main form of interaction with a Muslim community, "because that was just one of the only spaces at that time that talked about various Islamic viewpoints and things like that." Learning about the mosque and the debate about whether or not it was in accordance with Islamic law made many of the women more eager to attend. "[The hype] didn't deter me at all from wanting to come and check it out and do what I could to support. If anything, it just made me want to be here more so I could stand in solidarity," noted Amira, who has given several khutab over the years. Numerous women found out about the mosque through their own routine internet research into women's issues and Muslim issues about which they were passionate. Even women who did not live in the Los Angeles area were inspired to travel to the mosque after they heard about it; one recent convert spent months planning a trip from across the country to attend a monthly Jumma'a because she deeply believes in the mission of the WMA. Strikingly, all of the women I interviewed were intrigued by the idea of a women's mosque because they were actively seeking new perspectives and experiences of their Islamic spirituality and community, thus making them ideal candidates to attend and become active in the WMA.

When asking women why they were drawn to the WMA, it became apparent that their interactions with other mosques throughout their lives played a major role in their decision to begin attending a women's mosque. Prior to becoming a part of the WMA, the women can be categorized as either active with other mosques, or, in many of their words, "unmosqued." This term, which describes people who do not regularly attend a mosque in their community, became well known with the 2013 release of a documentary by the same name directed by Ahmed Eid.[156] The film follows Muslim-Americans who no longer attend their local mosques and delves into the reasons behind their disillusionment, ultimately calling for mosque reform in the United States. In the documentary, one of the key issues is the role of women in the mosque or lack thereof, including the spatial resources allocated to female Muslims and the dearth of women in leadership; these concerns were echoed in the experiences of most of the Women's Mosque attendees I interviewed.

For many Muslim women in America, the spaces designed for their use in the mosque are subpar to that afforded to men. As mentioned previously, the women's areas are often smaller and methods of segregation may make it more difficult to see or hear imams. In some countries it is the norm for women to either not attend mosques at all or be prohibited from entering. For some of the women attendees of the WMA who have immigrated to the United States, attending the mosque is their first time attending any mosque. The lack of female mosque attendance in the United States has not gone unnoticed. In 2013, the Islamic Society of North America published a National Needs

[156] *Unmosqued*, directed by Ahmed Eid (2013).

Assessment where they found that on average 66% of mosques utilize a curtain or physical divider to separate sexes. Additionally, they noted that Jumma'a attendance was only 18% female.[157] ISNA formed the "Task Force for Women-Friendly Masjids" and, in 2015, issued a statement saying that women should be able to pray in the main prayer spaces of mosques without barriers:

> We call upon masjids to ensure that women have access to the main *musalla* to perform salah, listen to the Jum'ah khutbah or attend and participate in lectures or discussions. This should be in addition to any separate area that currently exists for women. Recognizing that the architecture of some masjids may make it difficult to find a barrier-free space for women in the main *musalla*, especially for Jum'ah, masjids still have the duty to find a solution to realize the sunnah of including women in the main *musalla*.[158]

Although many saw this statement as the start of positive reform in US mosques, several of the women I interviewed remain impacted by uncomfortable or even upsetting experiences at mosques that practice physical segregation by gender.

In each of my interviews, I asked about past experiences in mixed-gender mosques and what my interviewees' opinions were on gender segregation in mosques in general. For several women, methods of gender segregation in mosques and their consequences were deterrents to attending. "Just having space for women is an issue in so many mosques," Amira, a young professional, noted. "There either is no designated space for women and then either they're not allowed to come or they get pushed into some weird corner and are made to feel they are somewhere they are not welcome…Or the space that is designated for women is just so horrible, it's not comfortable, it's off

[157] Ihsan Bagby, "National Needs Assessment of Mosques Associated with ISNA and NAIT," *Islamic Society of North America*, 2013.

[158] Islamic Society of North America, "ISNA Statement on the Inclusion of Women in Masjids," *Islamic Society of North America*, 4 September 2015. http://www.isna.net/isna-statement/

somewhere on the side where you just don't feel connected to the rest of the community." Laila, a writer with young children, echoed this sentiment: "It's always that women are like an afterthought—it's not an equal space…Sometimes they're like, 'Oh we don't have enough money so we wanted to first make the men's section and in the meantime you women can pray,' you know, in some sort of, I don't want to say closet but maybe a backroom type or a lobby of some school that is attached to the masjid." One woman related that she particularly dislikes a certain mosque because the woman's space is so out of the way that the only thing the women are close to while praying is a bathroom. A khateebah for the WMA, Thema, felt called to action when she entered her local mosque one day and found a partition had been placed between the men and women's spaces, making the women's space considerably cramped:

> So, I want to hear, I want to see, right? And I walked in and this partition was there. I was the only one in the masjid. I made my two rakats and then another woman came in and she starting making her two rakats. And I realized, if any more sisters come in here, there'll be no way to move this partition because you know the space will be compromised. I simply got up and moved the partition...So, all of a sudden there was a big discussion about this— they had to have a community meeting about moving the partition.

For these women, several aspects of the space allotted to them in different mosques created an unwelcome atmosphere.

Women's areas were cramped, sometimes poorly maintained, and often very much removed from the rest of the congregation. The distance from the imam also prevented women from hearing the prayers and sermons and excluded them from sermon discussions. It is also typical for the women's spaces to serve double-duty as children's areas when dedicated babysitting areas and childcare are not available, meaning that while men and boys are able to focus on prayer and sermons, women may be frequently

interrupted in these efforts. This physical separation adds to a sense of not truly belonging in a Muslim community as a whole. “A lot of times it feels like the women are peripheral; they are just accessories to this male religion or this religion that was just made for men,” Laila explained, adding that although she prays, her family chooses to not regularly attend traditional mosques.

The mosques described above are examples of gendered space; the space itself is organized in such a way that privileges men and places limitations on women. Men may enjoy access via the main entrance in many mosques, nicer accommodations for wudu, or ritual ablutions, and more spacious areas to pray with direct access to the imam. Meanwhile, the quality of space and opportunities to hear and see sermons and prayers, much less participate in discussion, are lacking enough that for these women the conditions serve as a deterrent to attend at all. As seen in Laila’s and Amira’s descriptions, the space allocated to women sends a negative message to them about their value as defined by the mosque, Muslim men, and perhaps the Islamic tradition as a whole despite the women’s own evaluation of their self-worth and understanding of their spiritual equality to men. By inhabiting the gendered space of a mosque that is more advantageous to men, the women report feeling “not welcome,” and “not comfortable,” like “afterthoughts.”

By having to reside in these marginal spaces within a mosque, the women’s engagement with the rituals and the community are compromised. Several women echoed the sentiment that not being able to see or hear the imam or khateeb properly was frustrating and made sermons difficult to follow. In mosque designs where the women are able to see and hear but are not seen or heard themselves, my interviewees still said they

felt that the sermons were directed to men as if they were the only audience. After sermons, it is common for men to gather around the khateeb and ask questions and discuss the topic. Although in some cases women may be able to write a question down and have, for example, a child run the note to the khateeb, women are often unable to interact with the khateeb after the sermons because it would mean transgressing boundaries, first physically by going into the men's space and then metaphorically by making inquiries regarding the khutbah, which, since Jumma'a is seen as obligatory for men but not women, may be interpreted as a predominately male activity. It is not difficult to see that the balance of power is detrimental for women in these cases. If one way to exercise power is to control who may or may not attain knowledge, preventing women from seeing and hearing the sermons, designing sermons that essentially ignore issue relevant to women, and inhibiting women's ability to learn more when men are present are all tools that serve to deprive women of knowledge to varying degrees.

For some of the recent converts to Islam, gender segregation in mosques was something they knew from the beginning would be an issue with which they would have to contend. Amanda, who grew up in a Protestant Christian tradition where families sat together in church, still attends her local mosque but is vocal about how it makes her feel. "I don't like being separate from my husband…It totally sucks. The women's section in the back is just terrible…you can't hear the imam, and you don't feel engaged," she shared. When Anna returned to the United States after converting to Islam abroad, she realized the closest mosque to her was much more conservative in terms of their understanding of gender, but she kept attending because she was eager for a Muslim community. "I went, even though I didn't feel right. I thought I had to accept it," she

recalls, referencing the large partition allowing only men in the main area and sermons she felt were misogynistic. Years later, she wonders how she tolerated that environment, noting that she would never attend a similar mosque now. Rachel, a convert from evangelical Christianity, is still looking for a regular local mosque but studiously avoids any mosques she knows has partition separating genders. The women I spoke with also saw a connection with a mosque's method of gender separation and the likelihood that it would offer gender-inclusive programs, resources and activities especially for women, and range of sermon topics. For example, when Rachel researches a local mosque and sees that women are put behind a one-way glass upstairs, she interprets this to mean that the mosque's leadership is more conservative and that women's issues and engagement are not a primary concern. Thus, she crosses that mosque off of her list of potential prayer spaces and goes elsewhere.

For many of the attendees, the WMA is not the first non-traditional mosque they have sought out after feeling disillusioned with the space for women in other mosques. When asked what would be the spatial organization of their ideal mosque, some of the women referred to non-traditional mixed-gender spaces that they had heard about or visited. There has been an increase in mosques situating men and women's sections next to each other, offering equal access to the imam in the main prayer hall while perhaps still using a small partition; Thema, for example, is currently pushing for this style in her local mosque as it undergoes renovation. Third spaces like the Ta'leef Collective in northern California, while not designated as a mosque, was mentioned often in my interviews. At the Ta'leef Collective, men and women pray in the same area with men on one side and women on the other; additionally, children are welcome on both sides and

are cared for by their mothers and fathers. Being able to inhabit the same general space as one's spouse during prayer came up as a desirable trait for a mosque since it would help with child care and, notably, women felt it would best reflect a sense of equality with their male counterparts.

When asked if they would attend fully integrated mosques where there is no separate space for men and women, I received a range of responses. The act of prayer in Islam involves a great deal of physical movement and requires lines of people standing shoulder to shoulder and prostrating themselves in front of each other. The thought of performing these actions in close proximity to potential strangers of the opposite sex made some of the women uncomfortable. Rather, they would prefer a mixed-gender mosque where men and women pray on either side of a main area with little to no physical partition, meaning that both genders would have equal access to hear and see the imam while not touching each other. A few women were enthusiastic about a completely desegregated mosque like Amanda and Maha; yet, both admitted that this setup would likely not be popular and that they would be happy with the side-by-side model. One argument used to support the desegregation of mosque space is the example of the Hajj.

As discussed previously in this work, much of Hajj rituals are done without separating men and women. Malikah, an academic, often wonders how the spatial access for women has evolved from the practice of the Hajj and early Islam to now. Amina's interpretation of the Hajj is that it serves as an ideal: "In many ways it is an exceptional context that is being created and so people are behaving in ways and doing things that you may or may not be doing in the rest of your life. And then people don't expect to hold themselves to the same standards as when they are on Hajj." However, she warns

that ascribing the acts of the Hajj as exceptional can be used in a negative way, like as an excuse as to why the lack of segregation at the Ka‘ba may not be replicated in other mosques. Anna shared a viewpoint I have often heard, that the Hajj is mainly desegregated because of logistics; in fact, she believes that if those in power found a way to segregate the millions of pilgrims at the Ka‘ba that it would absolutely be done. Still, she fondly remembers her experience of praying Jumma‘a on the Hajj, “I was in front of [men] and I was so proud of myself; I prayed in front of those men and it was an awesome experience. And they didn't seem to mind either, which was pretty surprising!” For Anna, praying in front of men, something that would not be possible in a traditional mosque, was an act of resistance and a way to emphasize her self-worth and her understanding of spiritual equality in Islam. While she would not be able to do this in almost any mosque in the United States, Anna was free to do so at the holiest site on Earth.

Throughout my research I have had the opportunity to ask many women about their first experiences attending the WMA; each time, their responses were immediate and enthusiastic, whether it had been months or years since their initial visit. Amanda, who heard about the WMA while living out of state, traveled to Los Angeles just to attend a Friday Jumma‘a after spending months following the mosque online. When asked what she thought of her time spent at the mosque, she told me it was the best day of her life. Like many of the women, Maha felt excitement and a sense that this type of gathering was long overdue: “Finally, we have a space for us. Finally, there’s [a women’s mosque] in the States and it’s accessible to me. It took so long to do this and to get this but it was so exciting. I’m so grateful for the space.” Laila’s first experience attending the

mosque was also the same Jumma'a in which she gave her first khutbah on a topic that was very personal. "There was this sense of sisterhood, which I know sounds really corny," she laughed. "Everyone was just helping each other, talking to each other, very welcoming and warm. As I was giving my speech everybody was listening and there was a genuine empathy in the room." After her sermon and the conclusion of prayers, the women gathered in a circle for the question and answer session. "It was a very, very personal conversation, very genuine. And because my topic was sensitive, they had two counselors available…It was just a very amazing experience." For the majority of women attending the mosque for the first time, this is their first encounter with any women's mosque; still for others, the WMA serves as their first encounter with any mosque ever or their first mosque after many years of being "unmosqued." One thing is clear: for all of the women I spoke to, attending the WMA was an experience like none other.

Indeed, it is not uncommon to see tears on the faces of some women when they hear the first notes of the adhan; for most, this is the first time they are hearing the call to prayer from a female voice. Malikah, an early khateebah for the mosque, was a part of the organization from its first planning meeting in 2014. An educator, she has spent many years running Islamic primary and secondary schools where communal prayer and Friday Jumma'a were part of the school schedule. One important component of the curriculum was teaching correct rituals, such as the Arabic prayers and Qur'an recitation. Each year, Malikah would teach her young male students how to call the prayer and lead prayers. "I just remember feeling as though when I taught them how to do the call for prayer, wishing I could do that myself," she told me. Every Friday, she would also coordinate for a male Muslim from the community to come to the school and deliver the khutbah. "The

first time I was at the Woman's Mosque, at the opening, the emotions I felt were so overwhelming because all of that came back. All of that, the feeling of teaching others to basically lead me and other people, and I could have been doing that, but I wasn't seeing myself as the leader. The impact of that was very significant to me." During one khutbah, a khateebah told the audience that she knew several of the women in the congregation had been writing sermons for male imams to use at mosques for years, knowing they would never be able to say their own words at their local mosques. At the WMA, women can finally take on the roles that they had been longing for and even helping others perform in the past.

The diversity of those attending the mosque also stood out as very impactful to the women. The mosque welcomes a variety of ages, professions, cultures, ethnicities, identities and interpretations of Islam. For Amira, the diverse backgrounds of the women and the way every point of view is given the opportunity to be heard drove her to increase her participation in the WMA. After being raised in South Asia where it is not the norm for women to attend mosques, she became very active in the Muslim student community and interfaith efforts when she began college in the United States. Amira considers herself a "mosque-hopper," a term I heard several times from women to denote their preference to attend different mosques throughout the year rather than just one local mosque. Amira enjoys attending numerous mosques in the Los Angeles area because she feels each one fulfills a different need; for example, perhaps she likes the khutab at one mosque but favors the programs or community service efforts of another mosque. The WMA, however, has provided her with a space to engage with more women of different

backgrounds than she would normally find at a mosque now that she is graduated from her university.

> You can meet really traditional Muslim women, conservative Muslim women. We have had a khateebah who chooses to cover her face. And we've had other khateebahs who gave khutbahs that were very traditional—like I could have heard that coming out of the mouth of a man in a standard traditional mosque. And then I've heard khutbahs that were very liberal and progressive. And somehow, we all manage to come together and be in the Women's Mosque at the same time and there's good energy and there's togetherness and there's community. Basically, being at the Women's Mosque helped me in a very concrete way to experience that it is possible to bring together Muslims from the whole spectrum; we can come together in peace and we can learn from each other and be happy together. That gives me a lot of hope and a lot of joy. And that's why I love to keep coming back.

Amira introduced me to her friend and fellow attendee of the Woman's Mosque of America, Rachel. Rachel is a young transgender woman who, when she heard about the mosque, emailed Maznavi to make sure she was allowed to attend and was pleased and excited when she was welcomed without hesitation. Rachel, a recent convert to Islam, found that many mosques, like the churches she was involved with before her conversion, feature the same person delivering sermons each week, which she found to be rather monotonous. She appreciates that when she attends the WMA there are a variety of opinions shared in khutab and in the question and answer circle and that women's issues and social justice are often at the forefront. "[The mosque] has a pretty 'come as you are' policy and they encourage everyone to be open minded," she told me. "I think it allows for ideas to be shared and a community to form that maybe in most circumstances wouldn't happen. It feels inclusive and safe." One of the regular mua'zzin,[159] Nicole, described the Jumma'a as a healing experience. The first three

[159] Plural form of muezzin, person who performs the call to prayer, a role usually reserved for men.

Jumma'at she attended were focused on Black Lives Matter and she said she enjoyed "the opportunity to listen to women of color and their points of view in a spiritual, sacred place." After the first question and answer session, Nicole was determined to continue to support the mosque and remain an active congregant. By drawing on current social issues and featuring a variety of khateebat from different backgrounds, the WMA functions very differently than many mosques who often rely on one or a small group of men to deliver khutab; this distinction also serves to better reflect the diversity of the mosque's congregation.

However, women who enjoy being a part of the WMA only have the opportunity to do so, at most, one Friday per month. This is due largely to the WMA's commitment to serve as a complementary space in the Muslim community; that is, the mosque does not strive to monopolize all of a Muslim woman's communal prayer time and activity in the wider Muslim community. The risk of this occurring has been a concern voiced by several critics of the mosque. An article featured in *GOOD* online news site calls the WMA an alternative space: "It is a complementary Muslim space…you can call it a 'third space,' but it's really part of something more—an intentional community."[160] Typically, mosques and other religious centers are considered third spaces, or spaces outside of the home or workplace where people gather. Third spaces, a concept expanded upon by sociologist Ray Oldenberg, are considered foundational for a society's vitality and a group's identity formation.[161] Supporters of the WMA suggest that traditional mosques

[160] Tasbeeh Herwees, "Don't Call It A Mosque," *GOOD*, April 16 2015. https://www.good.is/features/milennial-muslims-dont-call-it-a-mosque

[161] Ray Oldenberg, *The Great Good Place* (New York: Marlow & Company, 1999).

do not always benefit women as a third space should due to the lack of access and activities and the emphasis on patriarchal norms. The idea of the WMA as a complementary space allows women to seek spiritual fulfillment and community while also giving them the opportunity to take what they learn from the mosque and apply it to their local, traditional mosques and in fact help transform them into third spaces that are more able to optimally serve both men and women.

Situating the Mosque Within the Muslim Community

Although the concept of the WMA is for it to be complementary to other mosques rather than detracting from their communities, for some women it serves as their only means of physical interaction with a Muslim community larger than their circle of family and friends. Amira, for example, always attends the monthly Jumma'at at the WMA but admitted that she now takes attending Jumma'at at other mosques during the month very casually. One regular attendee shared that although she is on a local mosque's board of directors, she has found it difficult to attend that mosque's Jumma'at or other activities besides prayers ever since she started going to the WMA. For Rachel, attending the WMA is her main source of engagement with the Islamic community. "I've been searching for a local mosque that I really like and that has enough of a progressive drive that me being there is a really comfortable thing. So far I've yet to find one where I've really felt like it is my home aside from the Women's Mosque." Others agree with Rachel that they wish the WMA had its own building and was open throughout the week for all of the obligatory prayers and other activities.

Situating the WMA as a complementary space to other mosques is very strategic. Nicole pointed out that although she does think it would be great for the mosque to be open all the time in its own building, by holding Jumma'a only once a month the mosque and its attendees remain a part of the greater dialogue of women and the Islamic community rather than removed from it. For Malikah, the monthly Jumma'at are a sort of refuge from the issues that arise related to gender roles in many traditional mosques. "It's a safe space for you to think about something, to see something that you never saw before that is going to broaden and strengthen what's already there without the distraction of males…and then you can go out and intermingle," she notes. Malika does not mean that just the sight of males is distracting in a mosque; rather the mosque as a male-dominated space brings with it a set of rules guiding women's behavior and sets limits on the space they may inhabit. Like Erving Goffman's discussion of the theater with the public stage and private backstage, traditional mosques in the United States have served as a highly controlled space that restricts the performance of women—women are told where they can and cannot go, if they may lead and how, or perhaps that they should not be seen and absolutely will not be heard.[162] The WMA, on the other hand, acts as a space without these limitations, allowing women's voices, ideas, and leadership to flourish. Yet, it does not seek to remove the stage completely since women are urged to remain active in traditional mosques in hopes that their experiences will be a catalyst that changes the narrative there.

[162] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.*

When I asked her opinion of the criticism that the WMA is further isolating women from the Islamic community by drawing them away from traditional mosques, Maha interjected to ask, "Do they really care though?" She wonders if the uproar over women attending the mosque really has to do with fears of luring women away from a community or if in fact the controversy is more about the creation of a space where men are not permitted. Indeed, in casual conversations about this project, several men have voiced their concern that any space, whether religious or any other social capacity, would not permit men, failing to acknowledge the ways in which traditional mosques, and many spaces in society at large, may serve to exclude women. On February 2, 2015, Maryam Amir, a writer and public speaker focusing on social justice and women's issues in Islam wrote a passionate Facebook post directed at the critics of the WMA, although she was clear that she was not endorsing nor condemning the mosque. The first part of her post is as follows:

> If you're upset at the concept of women creating their own space, then you truly have no idea how marginalized, isolated and emotionally, psychologically and spiritually abused many women are in our community- BECAUSE of our community. If you're angry, I hope you're even more angered when you hear of women no longer attending the masjid because she cannot reconcile how a religion can be so empowering to women, yet some of its worshippers use the same texts she loves to justify pushing her out of the visible community fabric and space.[163]

The fact is, in many traditional mosques throughout the United States women have been spatially restricted and their interaction with men, especially in opportunities to lead and instruct, has been curtailed. Why, then, would male Muslims who support the absence of women in the main part of the mosque as well as the limitations placed on women's

[163] Maryam Amir. 2015. "If you're upset at the concept of women creating their own space," Facebook, February 2 2015. https://www.facebook.com/maryam.amirebrahimi/posts/846462402081285

participation in mosque activities be concerned that women are removing themselves from the mosque entirely? Could it be, perhaps, that what is really seen as dangerous is the removal of their opportunity to police women's bodies and constrain women's access to knowledge? The argument against the WMA that women are being removed from the Islamic community ignores the sentiment expressed to me numerous times that women already felt like outsiders because of their gender.

In Furhan Zubairi's aforementioned *Medium* article on the opening of the mosque, although he disagreed with the creation of the WMA itself, he did acknowledge that the mosque is yet another indication that traditional mosques desperately need to address the gender disparity in access, activities, and leadership.[164] Patricia, a longtime attendee of the WMA and a successful professional, acknowledged that criticism that the WMA was not complementary but rather isolating misses the point that traditional mosques have been so lacking in how they serve the community's women that women have felt no choice but to create these new spaces for themselves. "Women's mosques will exist," she told me, "as long as there is a need. If mosques were already fulfilling that need, serving women well, we wouldn't be going to or needing a women's mosque."

I asked several of the women attendees of the WMA if they thought it was preferable to focus on making traditional mosques more egalitarian rather than to carve out this new space for themselves. More than once I was reminded that the current state of gender relations in mosques are not reflective of early Islamic practices; indeed, during the Prophet's time women did form prayer lines behind men but there was no physical

[164] Furhan Zubairi, "Thoughts on the Women's Mosque of America."

barrier separating them and there was certainly nothing preventing women from seeing and hearing the Prophet's sermons. When I inquired about the role the WMA's regular attendees had or have had at their local mosques, I was met with a range of responses: women serve on mosque board of directors, contribute financially, write sermons for imams, and participate in or even lead programs for children, new converts, or the sick and elderly. These women are in fact working hard to build and maintain influence in local mosques to facilitate change, even remaining active, like in Malikah's case, despite not feeling spiritually fulfilled or intellectually stimulated in those spaces.

There are countless people, both men and women, who are attempting to address the consequences of mosques being gendered spaces that privilege men. Yet, when facing the reality that any advances toward more egalitarian mosques are often unhurried and hard-won, should women be expected to accept the conditions they have been relegated to for the sake of the larger community? Daphne Spain calls the method of degendering gendered space a two-part process, "first, to make gendered spaces and their links with knowledge visible, and second, to oppose their persistence."[165] Her book, *Gendered Spaces*, focuses on how gendered space may put women at a disadvantage in the home, school, and workplace. While she does little more than mention the presence of gendered space in third spaces like religious institutions, her reference to the movements to integrate elite, all-male social clubs and her analysis of the school and workplace as spaces where the transmission and production of knowledge are essential are useful in considering the degendering of traditional mosques. As I have mentioned previously,

[165] Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, 239.

Spain's stance is that all gendered space is inherently negative. In the WMA, however, the women attendees find a space that is created for the purpose of privileging their gender; this exclusive mosque is a gendered space, but not in the traditional meaning of a space that gives advantage to men.

Instead, the WMA strives to create a safe, dedicated space for women to learn, lead, worship, and collaborate with women from a variety of backgrounds. "I think there's something to be said for a female-only space. I mean, there's studies that show women do better in female-only schools and classes versus co-ed." Laila told me. "[The WMA] feels like the only place for me. Where I can talk to God and not have to worry about the male gaze, I wouldn't have to worry about being judged, all these things." If women attending a mixed-gender mosque face the obstacles described by my interviewees as resulting in an experience lesser than that of their male counterparts, is it wrong to wish to remove themselves from the gendered space completely in order to construct a space that caters to their needs instead? While the struggle to degender traditional mosques continues, are women misguided to attempt to fulfill their needs for spirituality, community, leadership, and learning through alternative means? With truly degendered mosques— meaning fully spatially integrated and supportive of women's growth in knowledge and leadership in the same way as men—being exceedingly rare, Muslim women are left to either continue the work of degendering, seek out a space that is gendered to their advantage in the spirit of self-care, or, in the case of many of the WMA attendees, do both.

Led by Women, for Women

One of the major issues that the WMA strives to address is the importance of female leadership and perspectives. On attending a monthly Jumma'a, you will typically not see a male in the building at all. Although there have been male members of the board and early on some of the technical support was done by men, the on-the-ground organizing team is all female, the prayers are called by a woman and the khutab are always offered by a woman. I spent several hours in conversation with Maznavi and many khateebat for the mosque regarding the process of becoming a khateebah, writing a khutbah and delivering it during a monthly Jumma'a. When the mosque was first established, women were asked to volunteer to give future khutab; now it is more common to be invited to deliver a khutbah and several khateebat have delivered more than one khutbah at the WMA. When a woman agrees to write a khutbah, she is supported throughout the entire process by Maznavi, the mosque board, and a guidebook written especially for the khateebat.

There are several requirements asked of a potential khateebah and the khutbah itself must follow particular guidelines. Khateebat must self-identify as Muslim women It is also important to the WMA that khateebat be acquainted with the Qur'an in their native language, an act of piety that Maznavi herself has shared changed her life and understanding of Islam. Khateebat must be of good moral character and agree to interact with the congregants respectfully, especially if they are of differing opinions. If these requirements are met, potential khateebat must decide on a topic and begin the process of writing their khutbah.

The WMA offers a list of past khutab for khateebat to use as inspiration for future sermons as well as a list of topics that congregants have requested. For most of the khateebat, the topics of choice are deeply personal to them and they are able to speak passionately. The Qur'an must be emphasized in the sermon over hadith and any hadith references must be strong and credible. In order to accommodate the diverse language backgrounds of the women attendees, all non-English terms must be translated to English. Although khutbah topics are timely and often engage with political issues, direct political endorsements are discouraged to keep the organization in compliance with its 501(c)(3) status. Khateebat are urged to use supportive and encouraging language rather than condemning or shaming people or behaviors and self-promotion is prohibited. Sermons have a typical length of twenty-five to thirty minutes and a written version is turned in to the mosque in the weeks prior to the Jumma'a. The mosque board reviews the sermon, perhaps identifying areas that need clarification or references and ensuring the length and scope are appropriate. Throughout the writing process, Maznavi and the board are in close communication with the khateebat to offer advice and guidance. Some of the women have already written several khutab for male imams to use at traditional mosques and often khateebat have spoken publicly at social justice or interfaith events, universities and schools or on behalf of organizations and businesses. All of the khateebat I interviewed, prior to giving their first khutbah at the WMA, have never been given the opportunity to deliver a khutbah at a mosque until now. In many traditional mosques, the sermon topics and content are not vetted; Maznavi expressed that the WMA's rigorous process is done as a way to remain accountable to the congregation and provide a platform for as many perspectives as possible while maintaining a safe space.

Khateebat are also given options that reflect their understanding of Jumma‘a prayer and women’s leadership. They may choose to lead prayer in front of the first line of women or within the first line of women; many women feel comfortable leading within the first line as it is believed that women imams did so when leading other women in prayer during the lifetime of the Prophet. Because the WMA strives to respect all Muslim women and value their diversity, the team is aware that not all women who attend the mosque may agree that Jumma‘a prayer led by a woman is valid. Women are given two options, to either lead Jumma’a and deliver a khutbah or lead Dhuhr and deliver a pre-khutbah bayan, a short talk or lecture sometimes offered in mosques before a khutbah. Intention is an integral part of ritual in Islam; the person performing rituals must have the intention that what they are doing is valid and good in order for it to in fact be so. Any woman unsure is still respectfully given the opportunity to participate and lead in ways where she can be without doubt. Out of respect for all attendees of the Women’s Mosque of America, it is important that the intention of the prayer leaders and speakers match the intention of the congregation.

The decision to be inclusive in terms of accepting those who are unsure about the validity of the Jumma‘a itself has not gone without disapproval by some women. According to Maznavi, many of the women who prefer to perform the Dhuhr prayer are still hesitant that a female-led Jumma‘a prayer is valid and feel that doing Dhuhr prayer is just a welcome additional step that acts as a provisional measure. Often women will join in on the Dhuhr prayer to show their support and because added prayers are only beneficial. Thema, however, chooses not to participate in Dhuhr at the Jumma‘a as a sign of solidarity with the WMA. “I specifically do not do it because there would be no point

in me coming to a women's mosque if something about it is not going to cut it with Allah," she says. "Then it's kind of a contradiction in terms—it's for women, but women can't do everything?" One of Amira's more progressive-leaning friends attended the mosque and left very displeased with the inclusion of the Dhuhr prayer. Amira recounted that her friend found it "…really upsetting that women are giving in to and sort of holding on to these oppressive, from her perspective, traditions." For Amira's friend, and a few other attendees, the inclusion of the Dhuhr prayer is a concession to patriarchal interpretations that women are not fit to lead. Yet many of the women I spoke with agree that additional rakats were harmless and that if their inclusion allows women of more conservative backgrounds to feel welcome at the mosque then the goals of the WMA are fulfilled.

Since its inception in 2015, the WMA has featured a variety of women's voices and the khutbah topics continually address women's issues, social justice, and spiritual growth. When women are invited to deliver a khutbah, they do not take this task lightly and the process involves a great deal of study, prayer, and self-reflection. Women have spoken about violence, racism, mental health, suicide, substance abuse, and grief. Several khutab have been given addressing Ramadan and other Islamic observances like obligatory prayer, wudu, and reading the Qur'an. Important women mentioned in the Qur'an or figures from early Islam are often featured as role models, like the Prophet's wives, daughter, granddaughter, and Maryam, the mother of the Jesus. The WMA also strives to offer khutab on timely topics like the #MeToo Movement, Black Lives Matter, and Islamophobia. Common themes throughout the years include a focus on self-care, overcoming trauma, supporting others and positivity. For Malikah, this is why it is so

difficult for her to remain satisfied with local mosques: “The most intelligent khutbahs I have ever heard— and I’ve gone to a lot of mosques in my life in a lot of different communities— but the most intelligent khutbahs on the most wide variety of topics I’ve only heard at the Women’s Mosque.” These sermons, and the fact that they are given by women and for women, are what draw thousands of people to access the recordings and videos around the world and keep regular attendees returning each month.

The mosque gives a unique opportunity for women to exercise leadership skills that they may have not felt comfortable developing elsewhere. Before each question and answer session, Maznavi urges all women to participate. “We especially like to encourage people who usually don’t speak up, who usually wait for others to speak up first,” she tells the attendees each month. “We want you to practice using your voice in this circle.” Women’s leadership in Islam is as multi-variant as expressions of the religion itself. Some schools of thought, for example, agree that women should lead other women in prayer and instruction only when a qualified male is not present. In many countries, however, Muslim women are welcome to offer sermons outside of Jumma‘a and their teachings are attended by both males and females. Throughout Islamic history, women have served as religious scholars and teachers, fiqh experts, preachers, and translators and commentators of the Qur’an. Maznavi shared in her interview with *GOOD* that the mosque strives to celebrate and reestablish female leadership in Islam. “My vision is for a worldwide Islamic renaissance that is shaped by Muslim women’s voices, perspective, participation, scholarship, and leadership,” she stated, a sentiment she has shared in

numerous speeches and articles.[166] In the past few years, Maznavi and those active with the WMA have seen an increase in women's leadership roles in local mosques, a positive turn that they do believe is related to the opening of the WMA. Maznavi has noticed, at least in Southern California, that women are being asked to give ad'iyah[167] or talks at traditional, mixed-gender mosques and panels of Muslim scholars are now featuring more women where before the speakers were only men.

While the WMA gives women the opportunity to lead other women, the permissibility of women leading men still remains a debated issue. Referring to her local mosque, one attendee shared,

> I know that the imam will call me for advice on all kinds of things but if I were giving that kind of advice and I were a male, well, first he probably wouldn't call me because he'd know that I'd probably have his job. If I were a male, I would be the imam. So…why aren't I doing this work? Why can't I be in that position?

Thema sees the increase of women leaders in the other Abrahamic faiths as a sign that female imams of mixed-gender congregations are inevitable. However, she wonders about the physical positioning of a woman imam in front of a group of men and if people would be more comfortable with the idea if there was some sort of divide blocking a female imam's body from being seen going through the movements of prayer. While both Anna and Laila support women leading women in prayers, they are hesitant when presented with the notion of women leading men. Laila, who became convinced that a women's mosque was permissible to Allah based on her own extensive research, admits she needs to investigate the issue of women leading men further before she solidifies her

[166] Tasbeeh Herwees, "Don't Call It A Mosque."

[167] Plural form of du'a, an invocation to God or prayer of supplication.

stance. One the one hand, Amanda says she supports women leading men in prayer wholeheartedly; however, she knows if she were to do so her more conservative husband would be extremely upset and it could cause marital discord. Amira relies on past evidence of women leading and speaking in front of men during the Prophet's lifetime and sees no problem with women leading men. Maha and Rachel strongly believe that any leadership role enjoyed by men should be open for women in Islam. The prospect of women leading both men and women in prayer is seen by some as a necessary step toward restoring gender justice in the religion. "I think it would be better for women to lead prayer for men and women," Nicole told me. "I think women and men praying together is extremely constructive." Women's leadership also speaks to the issue of spiritual equality within Islam, a topic on which Amina Wadud, who herself publicly led a group of men and women in prayer in 2005, wrote about in her book *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective.*[168] As Malikah emphasized:

> We are not seen as having the same intrinsic value as any other person. And if we can know that ourselves, in particular as Muslim women, we need to keep saying we are allowed. The word 'allowed' just drives me crazy—whenever I hear women use it, it drives me crazy, that women are allowed this and allowed that. Then what we are given is what God has given us and there is no person that can take that away from us. And I think that the biggest issue is to get women to see that and to know that and to live in that truth.

Thus, the question of whether men may be led by women in prayer is more than just an issue of anatomy; it goes to the heart of the debate of gender equality and specifically considerations of worth and value. In an interview with *Christian Century*, khateebah

[168] Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman.*

Zariah Horton contrasted the lack of women's leadership in Islam to the increased female presence in politics. "It's hard to say you're not qualified or capable when you're doing something else that shows strength of character, shows faith, shows leadership," she said. "It's hard to tell somebody you can't do something- you can't give a khutbah (sermon)—but you can be in Congress."[169]

Looking to the Future

For many of those active with the WMA, the mosque is an important step toward an ultimate goal of egalitarian leadership in mixed-gender mosques. Still, during all of the WMA's Annual Co-ed Iftars, while men and women are separated on either side of the prayer space and equidistant to the front, a male always leads prayer, so there seems to be no plans to fully integrate. However, the focus the WMA has of providing women with a safe and separate space for women to collaborate, learn, pray and grow spiritually shows no sign of waning. While currently all donations are used to reserve the Unitarian Church space, pay for security, insurance, audio/visual engineers and the mosque's part-time director of operations, the organization has many plans for the future. The WMA hopes to offer a women's speaker series, women's empowerment workshops, a co-ed Qur'an literacy program, a mentoring program for new Muslims, and a youth mentoring program. When asked if a singular imam could be a part of that future, however, Maznavi emphasized the benefit of showcasing different Muslim women's voices at the Jumma'at. In fact, it is written into the by-laws that if a regular imam joins the mosque, preaching

[169] Caitlin Yoshiko Kandil, "A woman's place—at the mosque," *Christian Century,* July 9 2019. https://www.christiancentury.org/article/features/woman-s-place-mosque.

time must be split equally so plurality can remain at the forefront. Maznavi says that eventually having a dedicated building for the Women's Mosque would be part of a natural progression and the board is continually exploring a range of opportunities to serve women. For many of the women, their dream is to see the mosque have its own permanent space that can be open every day to offer support and activities. Anna pointed out that the mosque's current focus on Friday Jumma'a means that working women are likely unable to benefit from the WMA and that adding more events and open hours would increase the impact the mosque can have in the community, cementing itself as an integral spiritual and social resource to Muslim women in Los Angeles.

From the start of the WMA, the organizational team has fielded countless requests from around the country to offer guidance to mixed-gender mosques, Muslim women's groups, and women interested in starting their own women's mosques. Maznavi and the board of directors have written an extensive guide outlining the mosque's development and operations that may serve as inspiration to others. Since January 2015, the United States has seen the opening of more non-traditional mosques that highlight women's leadership. In December of 2016, Masjid al-Rabia opened its doors in Chicago to serve women and the LGBTQ community with a permanent, independent location opened in 2018. The team describes their Islamic center as women-centered where women may lead both men and women in prayer.[170] The San Francisco Bay area welcomed a woman-led mixed-gender mosque in 2017 named Qal'bu Maryam Women's Mosque, meaning "heart of Maryam," the mother of Jesus. This is not an exclusive women's mosque but is

[170] "Our History," *Masjid al-Rabia*, 2019. https://masjidalrabia.org/history.

under female leadership; it currently uses space at the First Congregational Church of Oakland, men and women pray without any separation and both genders may call the adhan, lead prayer, and deliver khutab.[171] Unfortunately no formal studies have been conducted analyzing if traditional mosques in the United States have seen an increase in women's leadership in terms of giving sermons or if more mosques are adjusting the minimal space previously allocated to women, as the ISNA statement encouraged.

Conclusion

In May of 2015, *Huffington Post* ran an article written by Hasna Maznavi entitled "9 Things You Should Know About the Women's Mosque of America—and Muslim Women in General."[172] This was part of Maznavi and the organizational team's effort to reclaim the narrative of the WMA after numerous instances of shoddy reporting. She begins by dismissing the idea that the WMA was created out of hatred and opposition toward Muslim men rather than out of love and support for Muslim women. That is, the mosque is not meant to be just a response or reaction to issues that arise from gender relations in traditional mosques but, according to Maznavi, as "a very positive celebration of the history of Muslim women's involvement in Islam from a very early era."[173]

The existence of the WMA is an act of resistance, not against Islam, and not against all males, but against patriarchal interpretations of women's roles in Islam that

[171] "Leadership," Qal'bu Maryam Women's Mosque, 2020. https://qalbumaryam.weebly.com/leadership.html

[172] Hasna Maznavi, "9 Things You Should Know About the Women's Mosque of America—and Muslim Women in General," *Huffington Post,* May 20 2015. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/9-things-you-should-know-about-the-womens_b_7339582

[173]Tasbeeh Herwees, "Don't Call It A Mosque."

have served to make traditional mosques unwelcoming for women. bell hooks wrote "to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body."[174] Women are asked to remain committed to their local Muslim community by attending traditional mosques that physically and metaphorically situate them in the margins. The attendees of the WMA are not demanding for the physical margins in which they have been relegated to be destroyed; rather, by joyfully inhabiting a mosque exclusive to them they are redefining what the margins can do for them. In the chapter "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," hooks reimagines the potential of the spaces outside of the center in which those relegated to the margins may even wish to remain.[175] Similarly, the WMA is a physical reimagining of the cramped, out of the way spaces designated for women in the hidden corners of mosques. It fulfills the conservative mandate that women must be separated from men during prayer and sermons and even serves to make the women unseen by men entirely.

Yet, within this mosque something blooms that has yet to thrive in those back rooms. Women have claimed this space, even as temporary as it is now, as their own instead of resigning themselves to what is left over from men. The monthly transformation of a church to a place suitable for Jumma'a is an act of creation and ownership of all that occurs within. With the opening of its doors, leaders have emerged, to call the adhan, initiate prayer, deliver khutab, and support their fellow women, resulting in a community defined by its diversity and devoted to an exchange of knowledge and experience and the opportunity for spiritual growth. Here, in the margins,

[174] bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," 206.

[175] *Ibid.*

women are laying claim to power that they feel is their right despite being told for so long that they were not worthy, and using this power to privilege themselves as Muslim women.

Chapter 7: Musholla Khusus Wanita

Introduction

The musholla, or prayer house, that I attended during Ramadan in 2013 was created in Yogyakarta in the village of Kauman in 1923 by the major Indonesian socio-religious organization Muhammadiyah and its sister organization ‘Aisyiyah. The women who I met there had been attending since childhood, first brought by their mothers. When I returned to my guesthouse that night, I wrote a journal entry that mostly lamented my lack of foresight for not having a scarf on hand with some additional comments about how amazing the mosque[176] was and the ladies within it. This experience remained memorialized as a simple journal entry for months after I returned to the United States and began to discuss it further with my peers and professors. As time went on, I realized the vast array of questions I wish I had thought to ask the women at the ‘Aisyiyah Musholla. This project slowly took form and I had to satisfy my curiosity in other ways before I could venture back to Indonesia. I completed my coursework and comprehensive exams, began serious research into Indonesia’s history and Islam in Southeast Asia, and went to the University of Wisconsin Madison to learn two years’ worth of Bahasa Indonesia in one summer. Perhaps the most arduous task was the navigating the bureaucracy to obtain a research visa, which took several months and a few near-misses with the consulate almost losing my passport. Finally, in 2018, just shy of five years after my initial visit to that musholla in Kauman, I returned to Indonesia to seek answers to the questions that had accumulated during the intervening time.

[176] At that time, the musholla was described to me using the term masjid despite the sign on the building proclaiming it was a musholla.

The first time I gave a conference paper about the women's mushollas[177] in Indonesia, most of the audience was genuinely surprised that such spaces existed anywhere and certainly had never heard of the ones in Indonesia. I found this sentiment echoed over the years by professors, graduate students, and American Muslims. In Indonesia, people from my GoJek[178] driver to the students at the Muhammadiyah university at which I was a guest speaker had never heard of the women's mushollas that were in their city. Although the 'Aisyiyah organization is proud of their women's mushollahs, there is little to be found beyond mere mentions in official literature. Similarly, references to women's mushollas in scholarship about Muslim women in Indonesia are often relegated to footnotes, if present at all. To my knowledge, no research has been published focusing on the women's mushollahs in Indonesia, despite the first 'Aisyiyah musholla in Kauman being almost 100 years old.

Chapters 7 and 8 are an endeavor to fill this gap in the public's knowledge, with the present chapter containing vital background information. Before delving into the accounts about experiences with the musholla that I gathered from long-time attendees, it is necessary to briefly outline the history of Islam in Indonesia and the rise of the organization Muhammadiyah and its sister organization 'Aisyiyah. The physical spaces of the women's mushollas, particularly the two where I was welcomed as an observer and interviewer, serve as important examples of the creation of gendered spaces meant to fulfill spiritual and communal needs.

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[177] In this chapter and the next, all Islamic terms will utilize the Indonesian spelling.

[178] Motorbike taxi service similar to Uber or Lyft.

Islam in Indonesia

In Edward Said's *Orientalism*, he masterfully explains how western scholarship and politics had fallen into the practice of treating the Orient, or that which is not the West, as a static, monolithic being.[179] This problem continues today as news outlets discuss Islam almost as a country with borders, military, citizens, and a unified set of laws and values. But there is no such thing as this "Islamland," as Lila Abu-Lughod refers to it— there are only people who identify as being part of the religion, cultures, and regions that are related to the practice and history of Islam.[180] Despite over 1.6 billion world citizens claiming some relation to the religion of Islam, "Islamland" is consistently placed by Westerners over the Near East on a map. The Republic of Indonesia, however, lies over 8,000 kilometers from Mecca, the holiest site in Islam, and Indonesia holds the title of the country with the largest population of Muslims in the world (approximately 205 million people as of 2010[181]). Where does Indonesia fit in this so-called "Islamland?"

The five pillars of Islam were not observed in Indonesia until long after the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632AD, and at that from the mouths of traders that hailed from India rather than Mecca or Medina. Moreover, Islamic teachings did not reach

[179] Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1994).

[180] Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*

[181] Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Muslim Population of Indonesia," *Pew Research Center*, 4 November 2010. https://www.pewforum.org/2010/11/04/muslim-population-of-indonesia/

Indonesians who were unaware of religion, had no concept of value systems or perhaps were looking to the West hoping to fill a religious void that their ancestors could not. Islam arrived to an archipelago rich with Hindu, Buddhist, and local polytheistic traditions. Mark Woodward wrote that Java became Islamicized in a way that descended from the royal courts to the peasant class. He noted that "Islam has penetrated so quickly and so deeply in the fabric of Javanese culture because it was embraced by the royal courts as the basis for a theocratic state," and further, that mystical aspects of Javanese religion seemed to be influenced by the mysticism of Sufism.[182] The Islam that Woodward observed varied by region, royalty, and even had variations based on the individual. Instead of seeing that the Islam of the priyayi (nobles) and abangan (peasants) had incorporated pre-existing Hindu and Buddhist beliefs as Clifford Geertz had asserted decades before,[183] Woodward concluded that "Java is exceptional in the Islamic world not because it has retained pre-Islamic ideas but because of the ingenuous and artful ways in which such a large body of Hindu and Buddhist tradition has been so thoroughly Islamicized."[184] There is no easy, straightforward timeline of Indonesia that can be demarcated where Hindu-Buddhist traditions were the norm and then suddenly the people shifted to Islam, abandoning their local customs and beliefs. The question of how much of these other traditions should be incorporated within Indonesian religious culture is still debated today, especially within the major socio-religious organizations.

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[182] Mark Woodward, *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta,* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 3.

[183] Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

[184] Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 17.

Additionally, South Asian Islam cannot claim to be the sole introduction of Islam to Indonesia, since competing European colonial powers made South Asia and Southeast Asia part of their imperial conquests, separating the two regions from trade and further religious influence.[185] With this, communication of Islamic thought flowed more freely between the Middle East and the colony that would become Indonesia, then known as the Dutch East Indies. Advances in technology allowed more Indonesians to make the Hajj to Mecca in less time and for less money. Many male pilgrims would stay on in Mecca to learn under religious scholars, ultimately returning to share their knowledge by setting up Islamic boarding schools, or pesantren. Through this trifecta of traders, travel and education, the santri class, which was mainly occupied by traders, became associated with conceptualizations of Islam from the Middle East.

In Suzanne Brenner's discussion of Javanese ideas of gender and behavior, she uses the term "spiritual potency" to describe a concept present in many ethnographies of Java, referring to "inner spiritual strength through the sustained practice of emotional and behavioral self-control."[186] Mark Woodward connects the idea of spirituality in Javanese Islam with the concept of inner and outer meaning, a principle of Sufism. He explains, "According to Sufi texts, the outer meaning of the Qur'an concerns the regulation of behavior, while its inner meaning concerns the mystical path and the quest for knowledge of Allah."[187] He goes on to differentiate between the interpretation of inner and outer

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[185] *Ibid*., 244.

[186] Suzanne Brenner, "Why Women Rule the Roost: Rethinking Javanese Ideologies of Gender and Self-Control" in *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia,* eds. Aihwa Ong and Michael G Peletz (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 20.

[187] Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 71.

meaning between Middle Eastern Sufism and Javanese Islam; the latter uses this distinction in the sense of the microcosm as well as the macrocosm.

This interpretation of the order of the universe fit well with the theocracy of the Javanese royal courts. "Sufism forms the core of the state cult and the theory of kingship, which, as is true of the Indianized states of Bali and mainland Southeast Asia, is the primary model for popular religion."[188] When a sultan of a kingdom converted to Islam, the citizens typically followed suit. The sultans of the royal court are revered as saints whose inner and outer spirituality hold them in a place of authority that is above the religious law, which is needed by the general public. (Woodward relates this to the "tendency for Sufis to deny the importance of the law for advanced students of mysticism."[189]) The 'ulama were considered subordinate to the royal court and even today in the sultanates of Indonesia, including the special region of Yogyakarta, prayers are done in the name of the reigning sultan. Robert W. Hefner calls the expression of Islam in the Indonesian courts prior to the arrival of the Dutch "raja-centric" in his book *Civil Islam*.[190] Geertz owed the mystical aspects of the religion and role of the sultanate of the priyayi and abangan classes to the syncretism of Hindu-Buddhist-Islamic traditions.[191] Woodward attributes this to Geertz's oversight of Sufi literature from the Middle East and South Asia as well as a lack of engagement with Javanese texts.[192]

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[188] *Ibid*., 3.

[189] *Ibid*., 6.

[190] Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 29.

[191] Geertz, *The Religion of Java.*

[192] Woodward*, Islam in Java*, 245.

With the arrival of the Portuguese and Dutch, however, the power of the royal courts was stunted and the colonizers saw Islam as a threat to their authority. In the beginning of each of their conquests, the Europeans destroyed much of the Indonesian trading class, sinking ships and enslaving populations. Dutch colonialism then continued rather unevenly across the archipelago over three centuries, with coastal areas being the first to fall to Dutch rule. The Dutch, whose religious ideas were a product of the Protestant Reformation and Calvinism, viewed Islam with suspicion and hostility. Muslim leaders, teachers and scholars were restricted from making the Hajj or traveling freely around the archipelago and the role of Islam was questioned:

> The crown jewel in the Dutch policy was set in place in 1889, with the implementation of recommendations from the renowned orientalist Snouck Hurgronje, relaxing controls on 'religious' Islam while stiffening those on 'political Islam.' This approach, and the secular–modernist perception of religion it implied, was to have a lasting effect on state-Muslim relations.[193]

The colonial powers deemed Islam not only a threat to their authority but also an encroachment on what they considered "true" Javanese religion. Consequently, the Dutch began a widespread attempt to purge Islamic influences from politics, history, education and art. Pre-Islamic Java was romanticized, with colonizers claiming that the advent of Islam had ruined the great art and literature and, overall, limited the potential of the Javanese. Alternatively, the true influence of Islam was questioned as it was posited that perhaps the practice of Islam in the archipelago was just a façade, covering true local religious beliefs. The power of the sultans and other Islamic leaders were made subject to

[193] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 32.

the authority of the Dutch, schools were secularized, and religious pilgrimage was limited, all along with the exploitation of the native people and their resources.

During the colonial period, pesantren carried the added weight of preserving Islamic teachings and culture as well as maintaining the tradition of education in Java. Adrian Vickers describes these schools in *A History of Modern Indonesia*:

> Pesantren have played a major role as social institutions in Indonesia over the centuries, emphasizing core values of sincerity, simplicity, individual autonomy, solidarity and self-control…These schools aimed to deepen knowledge of the Koran, particularly through learning Arabic grammar, traditions of exegesis, the Sayings of the Prophet, law and logic. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many still included the study of the Hindu-Buddhist stories found in wayang shadow theater, apocryphal stories about heroes from the Middle East associated with the early history of Islam, and a wide range of Javanese mystical text.[194]

Pesantren leaders were given roles in the different ministries set up by the Japanese during their World War II occupation and students were even trained as militia to support the Japanese forces. The Japanese saw the potential for the archipelago to become an important ally and allowed Muslims more freedom along with setting up a path for their eventual nationhood. At the close of the war, the Japanese left the archipelago and the Dutch returned, although Indonesia became a nation shortly after.

It was the pesantren-educated that became the leaders of the newly formed nation of Indonesia after the archipelago achieved its independence in 1945. The beginning of the nation is marked with the rise of Muslim intellectuals to political power, according to Taufik Abdullah, who argues that that this trend ended with the subsequent leadership of Suharto.[195] However, the Indonesia that emerged was not an Islamic state but instead a

[194] Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 55.

nationalistic one of secular liberalism lead by Sukarno, the first president. Sukarno argued for a secular nation, arguing that separating Islam from the state "would liberate Islam from the tutelage of corrupt rulers and unleash its progressive potentialities…In his view religious disestablishment would facilitate more effective realization in society."[196] Those who opposed this idea rallied for an Islamic state, accusing Sukarno's vision for Indonesia as too Westernized and claiming that Islam as an ideology could not be separated from politics in the way that Christianity was in the West. The resulting compromise was embodied in the philosophy of Pancasila, a five-part statement that was to become the foundation not only for the nation but every organization within Indonesia. Robert W. Hefner describes Pancasila as "a unique synthesis of nationalist, Muslim, Marxist, liberal democratic, and populist-Indonesian ideas," meant to appeal to both secular and pro-Shari'a Muslims while not being expressly in either camp.[197] Originally, Sukarno formulated the following: "Structuring a Free Indonesia in Faithfulness to God Almighty, Consensus or Democracy, Internationalism or Humanitarianism, Social Prosperity, and Nationalism or National Unity."[198] The first tenet was a way of asserting religion as a basis for the nation without it being an Islamic state, which was feared would have resulted in the exclusion of minority citizens.

For many Muslims, however, this pronouncement was not enough. The first statement about a belief in God was considered too vague, so a committee revised the

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[195] Taufik Abdullah, "The Formation of a New Paradigm: A Sketch on Contemporary Islamic Discourse." in *Toward a New Paradigm: Recent Developments in Indonesian Islamic Thought* ed. Mark R. Woodward (Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, 1996), 48.

[196] Hefner, *Civil Islam,* 39.

[197] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 41-42.

[198] Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia,* 117.

statement to what became known as the Jakarta Charter: "belief in God with the obligation for adherents of Islam to carry out Islamic law [shariah]."[199] Secular and non-Muslim Indonesians strongly opposed this, not wanting Shari'a to become the law of the land and therefore imposed on non-Muslims or Muslims who did not adhere to it. Ultimately Sukarno took the advice of the major Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama and revised the first tenet of Pancasila to specify belief in a singular God, which is more closely related to the Islamic concept of tawhid or oneness of God. The Constitution was thus passed and Pancasila became the foundation of the new Indonesia, although this revised statement would have lasting effects on the religious landscape in the future.

With the formation of the new government of Indonesia came the creation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This ministry would be in charge of all marriage licenses, the Islamic high court, Hajj arrangements, mosques, and religious education. The ministry was largely put under the control of the Nahdlatul Ulama, which is still the nation's largest Islamic organization today. Consequently, the ministry focused more on Islamic issues. Under Sukarno's leadership in the 1960s the government then officially recognized six religious traditions: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism and Confucianism. Indonesian citizens were required to choose one of these six to be noted on their identification cards; if someone did not fit in any of these categories, they still had to choose one. This was mainly an attempt to recover from the attempted Communist coup and retaliatory crackdown against suspected Communists and reaffirm the importance of religion to the country. This identification practice continues

[199] Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 42.

today with two developments of note. As of 2015, citizens can write in any religion on their ID card including indigenous, while the persecuted Muslim minority group Ahmadiyya is forbidden from designating Islam on their cards.

Sukarno was eventually replaced with Suharto and Sukarno's nationalist-socialist concept of Guided Democracy was substituted by Suharto's New Order, which lasted until 1998. In the New Order, most religious organizations faced restrictions or were put under the control of the Suharto regime; additionally, leaders in the regime could not simultaneously hold positions in religious organizations. This resulted in widespread loss of leadership in Islamic organizations, including Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 spurred an Islamic revival in Indonesia and a sense of pan-Islamic unity rather than the concept of a heterogeneous Islam became popular. The 1980s saw the rise of the Free Aceh movement, one of several rebellions of the Acehnese after Indonesian independence, where the Islamic people of Aceh attempted to separate from Indonesia to form their own Islamic state. Although still a part of Indonesia, Aceh is considered an area of restricted access where Shari'a is enforced by local government. After the fall of the New Order in 1998, Indonesia began the long road to reestablish itself as a democracy and somehow unite the archipelago.

Today, Indonesia has the fourth highest population in the world with 251 million people; 85.2 percent of whom identify as Muslim.[200] In 2009, then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on a visit there, "If you want to know whether Islam, democracy, modernity and women's rights can co-exist, go to Indonesia."[201] Due to the increase of

[200] "About Indonesia," Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, accessed March 10, 2020, http://www.indonesia.cz/the-government-of-the-republic-of-indonesia/

Islamism around the world, the Indonesian government and major Islamic organizations have turned to promoting the distinct relationship between the Indonesian culture and Islam, urging citizens to avoid influence from outside groups and cultures. Although the nation prides itself in the concept of Pancasila, acceptance of non-Muslims can be hard-won and discrimination against minorities has been slow to change. For example, in 2017 the Christian governor of Jakarta, Ahok, was imprisoned for allegations of blasphemy against the Qur'an. Universities are seeing an increase in more conservative and even extremist groups amongst their students, which is concerning to older generations. Meanwhile, a rapidly growing population, changing economy, and increasingly threatened environment are left to be addressed. As technology makes the world a smaller place and different ideas more accessible, Indonesians are tasked with reconfiguring and reaffirming who they are as a nation and society.

Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah

Indonesia is home to two large ormas, major Islamic organizations, called Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, as well as a host of smaller non-governmental organizations. Ormas focus on a variety of causes and methods of outreach while being volunteer-based.[202] Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest with over forty million members, is popular outside of Java, is traditionalist and known for its pesantren or Indonesian

[201] Arshad Mohammed and Ed Davies, "Indonesia shows Islam, modernity coexist: Clinton," *Reuters*, February 17 2009. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-indonesia-clinton-idUSTRE51H15A20090218

[202] Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

boarding school system.[203] NU, as it is called, has an autonomous organization for women, Muslimat, founded in 1946, and for young women, Fatayat, founded in 1950.[204] Other smaller women's organizations associated with conservative strains of Islam imported from outside of Indonesia are showing an increase in popularity amongst those who wish to create an Islamic state or enforce Shari'a. Secular women's groups also function in Indonesia, but with smaller numbers and less power than they did in the 1990s when such groups opposed the New Order and championed democracy in Indonesia.[205] Still, on Java it is not unusual to hear someone ask a new acquaintance if they are either "with NU or Muhammadiyah."

The aspirations of the Indonesia's second largest socio-religious organization, Muhammadiyah, includes basing life around the values present in the Qur'an and hadith rather than man-made traditions and specifically "…upholding worship guided by Prophet Muhammad, without additional changes from human beings."[206] Muhammadiyah, founded in 1912 by Ahmad Dahlan, is considered a modernist reformist organization aimed at re-creating an Islamic society more like the early Muslims during the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Dahlan was inspired by other modernism movements and leaders in the Muslim world, including Muhammad Abduh in Egypt. In size, Muhammadiyah is second only to Nahdlatul Ulama, with members and programs found

[203] "Basis Pendukung," Nahdlatul Ulama, accessed March 13 2020.

[204] For more on the development of Fatayat and Muslimat, see Arnez, "Empowering Women Through Islam" and van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam.*

[205] Rinaldo, Rachel. *Mobilizing Piety: Islam and Feminism in Indonesia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[206] "Faith Pledge and Aspirations of Muhammadiyah Life" *Muhammadiyah*, http://www.muhammadiyah.or.id/en/content-175-det-matan-keyakinan-dan-citacita-hidup.html

throughout the country but with a major concentration of membership in Java. As of 2013, twelve percent of Indonesians reported some affiliation with Muhammadiyah, or approximately thirty million people.[207] Through educational institutions and charitable foundations, the organization is a bastion of moderate Islam, focusing on spreading Islamic knowledge throughout Indonesia.

Male-dominated Muhammadiyah was originally committed to providing private prayer space for each gender while discouraging mixed-gender activity. In fact, it was not until 1944 that women were able to be visible during meetings.[208] Historically, women have played a key role in the economy and society of Central Java, especially prominent in the batik and silver trades. When Muhammadiyah was created, most women were illiterate but were active in public life. However, Javanese culture taught that the woman was not responsible for her salvation— her husband or father had that responsibility.[209] In 1917, Ahmad Dahlan's wife, Siti Walidah, also known as Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, formed the women's group 'Aisyiyah, named after the Prophet's wife. Five years later the group officially came under the guidance of the parent organization, Muhammadiyah. Two years after the organization began, 'Aiysiyah pioneered a play group which later became a kindergarten program that spread throughout the archipelago. In the 1950s 'Aisyiyah gained autonomy as an organization although there is still some oversight from Muhammadiyah. 'Aisyiyah has opened and staffed a variety of schools from preschools

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[207] Martin van Bruinessen, "Overview of Muslim Organizations, Associations and Movements in Indonesia," in *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam* ed. Martin van Bruinessen (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2013), 21

[208] Van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam,* 208.

[209] *Ibid*., 90.

to universities, it provides clinics focused on child and maternal health, grants micro-loans, helps women develop businesses, and teaches religious education.

Today, ‘Aisyiyah is one of the largest organizations for Muslim women in the country. In 2006, there was thought to be more than two million sympathizers,[210] while a 2016 article estimated fifteen million members.[211] In the 1990s, Muhammadiyah began allowing women to be members of their Majlis Tarjih, the group that gives religious opinions and interpretations of holy texts. High-ranking members of ‘Aisyiyah also began to serve in Muhammadiyah leadership. Signifying their thoughts on female leadership, when Megawati ran for president of Indonesia in 1999, the apolitical ‘Aisyiyah released a document supporting a woman’s right to lead as long as it does not conflict with her duties as a wife and mother.[212] Most women in ‘Aisyiyah wear the jilbab,[213] although the cadar[214] is officially forbidden by the group, and members are mostly part of the urban upper middle or middle class. At times, ‘Aisyiyah has been criticized for representing an older generation of Indonesian Muslim women, but women are given the opportunity to be involved in Muhammadiyah and its related organizations from childhood. To recruit future ‘Aisyiyah members, there is another autonomous organization called Nasyiatul

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[210] *Ibid*., 73.

[211] Laura Jean McKay, “Aisyiyah: 99 Years of Women’s Empowerment,” Aid Profiles (Development Policy Centre, September 13, 2016), http://devpolicy.org/aidprofiles/2016/09/13/aisyiyah-99-years-of-womens-empowerment/

[212] *Ibid*., 14.

[213] Called a hijab in Arab countries, Indonesia’s jilbab is typically a large square of fabric drawn tightly around the face and neck, covering the shoulders and hair.

[214] The cadar (pronounced cha-dar) is the term in Indonesian used to refer to the face veil or niqab. not to be confused with the chador popular in Persian culture.

'Aisyiyah for young women to gain experience and contribute to society before marrying or reaching maturity and then joining 'Aisyiyah.[215] Indeed, many of the women I interviewed in Indonesia were first members of NA, as it is called, before joining 'Aisyiyah when they got married.

'Aisyiyah provides religious education in many forms: Arabic classes, Qur'an recitation classes, lectures, and more. Within both Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah, religious education is intrinsically tied to faith and piety. Van Doorn-Harder writes, "According to 'Aisyiyah…increased religious knowledge automatically resulted in intensified worship, which encouraged virtuous behavior, which in turn would lead to increased participation in 'Aisyiyah activities."[216] In addition to religious education, 'Aisyiyah operates preschools, kindergartens, and schools for nursing and midwifery. Like the national education system, 'Aisyiyah schools are coeducational and do not gender segregate. In 2016, the Yogyakarta Health Science College (STIKES) 'Aisyiyah, which includes a School of Health Sciences, School of Science and Technology, and School of Social, Economic and Human Sciences, was upgraded in status from a college to a university and renamed Unisa.[217] Unisa is the first university managed by the organization, while Muhammadiyah operates dozens of universities. With this development, 'Aisyiyah also issued a statement indicating that more of its colleges will transition to universities in the future.

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[215] Siti Syamsiyatun, "A Daughter in the Indonesian Muhammadiyah: Nasyiatul Aisyiyah Negotiates a New Status and Image," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 18, no. 1 (January 2007): 69-94.

[216] Van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam*, 95.

[217] "Islands in focus: STIKES Aisyiyah gains university status," *Jakarta Post*, March 19 2016. https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/03/19/islands-focus-stikes-aisyiyah-gains-university-status.html

Islamic education also leads to leadership roles for the women of ‘Aisyiyah. Women who preach and teach in Qur’an gatherings are called mubalighat, meaning transmitters of knowledge, and they are considered well-versed in religious knowledge and respected in the community. In her book *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood explores the conservative women’s movement in Egypt where women gathered in mosques to teach Islamic doctrine. However, she notes that in order to participate in this da‘wa, the women must adhere to certain conditions:

> …while encouraged to carry out da‘wa among other women, [they] are not allowed to do so among men…Women preachers are markedly called *dā‘iyāt* or *wā‘iẓāt* (nominative for *wa‘ẓ,* meaning “to preach, admonish or give good advice”). The reasoning behind these restrictions is twofold. First is the general belief that since the Quran makes men the guardians of women, the latter should not serve in significant positions of leadership over men. Second is the prevailing notion that a woman’s voice can nullify an act of worship…Women *dā‘iyāt* in Egypt today do not challenge these conditions of participation.[218]

The motivation behind these conditions is shared by Muhammadiyah and ‘Aisyiyah insofar as men are considered the leaders in religion. Yet, ‘Aisyiyah members “insisted that women were under the obligation to go out and preach if they had the competence to do so,” and in 1932 the Majlis Tarjih decided that women should be able to teach men as well as women.[219] A mubalighat may be a female imam and lead women in prayers while some have gained notoriety and give sermons to wider audiences. Interestingly, Van-Doorn Harder notes that most of the more popular female preachers do not have official training but “have reached their position by a lifelong habit of studying, participating in

[218] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 65-66.

[219] Van-Doorn Harder, *Women Shaping Islam,* 79

Muhammadiyah events, and following directives from workshops"[220] It is permissible for a woman performing dakwah to preach and teach both men and women as long as it is not considered a khutbah. In both Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah, preaching, teaching, and charity are all forms of dakwah, or pious acts, that are integral to one's spiritual journey and the goal of spreading Islam.

Although women in Java were active in the public sphere, the interpretation of masjids as male spaces meant that most Muslim women prayed in their homes. In 1922, a prayer house, or musholla, was opened in the village of Kauman where Muhammadiyah originated, so women could have a dedicated space for prayer in the community. According to Muhammadiyah, this first women's musholla was intended to be "…a place where 'Aisyiyah women can gather to discuss plans for activities and where new ideas may emerge to further the organization's charitable efforts," (translation mine).[221] The space also served two goals: to encourage gender segregation during prayer and to give women the opportunity to publicly express their religion rather than be relegated to their homes. Funding was raised for women's mushollas throughout Indonesia by 'Aisyiyah in the 1920s, including for 'Aiysiyah Garut in West Java and Masjidah in Sumatra. These women's mushollas encouraged women to express their religion outside of their home while still ensuring that they maintained their propriety by providing women-only spaces. In this sense, the mushollas are similar to what Nancy Duncan referred to as quasi-private space; women attending the mushollas are perhaps purposely isolating themselves from

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[220] *Ibid*., 97.

[221] Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan Dan Perkembangan* '*Aisyiyah* (Jakarta: Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, 1992), 30.

men, but, as we will see, the women see the alternative to be not integration with the men, since culturally and traditionally praying at the masjid with men is undesirable. Instead, the women choose to go to the women's mushollas because the only other viable alternative to them is to pray at home and lose that sense of community and the spiritual rewards associated with it.

When I arrived in Yogyakarta in 2018, the first thing I did was make my way to the 'Aisyiyah Musholla in Kotagede, the famous silver district. Prior research had indicated that this was another women's musholla with a kindergarten attached. Before afternoon prayer, I quietly entered the empty musholla and sat in the back. Imagine my surprise when two men walked in and began praying! Later, after speaking to several of the teachers and 'Aisyiyah leaders there at the musholla, it was explained that while this particular musholla may have originally been exclusively for women, the surrounding busy (and often tourist-filled) silver district had placed a high demand for available prayer space for both genders. While local 'Aisyiyah meetings and activities were still held there for women, the musholla itself welcomed men and women. Although several women-only mushollas run by 'Aisyiyah remain in Indonesia, this was seemingly not an isolated occurrence as 'Aisyiyah members told me throughout my trip of other women's mushollas that had to be repurposed to serve the local population. Long-time women's musholla attendees usually could recall knowing about only two or three other 'Aisyiyah women's mushollas in addition to their own.

In authorized texts about the history of Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah, other women's mushollas are often referred to using the term masjid interchangeably with musholla. While in interviews it became clear that certain activities are reserved for the

mixed-gender masjids like co-ed events, funerals and Jumat, one can find numerous examples of the women's mushollas described as masjids in official organization texts, Indonesian articles and in casual conversation. A musholla, which is often translated to prayer house, suggests a space where only prayer occurs, such as the areas found in Indonesia's restaurants, malls, schools, and airports. When I initially began discussing this research upon returning from my first trip to Indonesia, several people I knew were skeptical of the significance of the women's mushollas I spoke of because to them, the term implied a place simply meant for convenient prayer. However, as I will expand upon below, the women's mushollas overseen by 'Aisyiyah host a variety of activities beyond prayer, making it more like a masjid, although with some distinctions.

In his book *The Crescent Rises over the Banyan Tree,* Mitsuo Nakamura defines 'Aisyiyah mushollas as mosques for women several times, although he corrects this terminology in footnotes. "At that time, I made a mistake of regarding the musholla of 'Aisyiyah in Basen as 'a mosque for women' since it was used by 'Aisyiyah women very frequently. Obviously, however, it was not a mosque but a prayer house since it was not used for Friday congregational prayers," he explains.[222] Also, as mentioned previously, Dwyer's 2001 dissertation described an elderly woman in Kauman showing the building to her and describing it as a women's mosque.[223] So how, exactly, are masjids/mosques and mushollas distinguished from each other in Indonesia? According to Islamic law,

[222] Mitsuo Nakamura, *The Crescent Rises Over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in a Central Javanese Town, C. 1910s-2010*, 2nd ed. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012), 255.

[223] Leslie Katherine Dwyer. "Making Modern Muslims: Embodied Politics and Piety in Urban Java, Indonesia," Dissertation, (Princeton University, June 2001).

masjids and mushollahs must be waqf, or wakaf in Indonesian, which refers to buildings and land that have been donated for a religious purpose. Once a space is designated as waqf, it is no longer personal property and it cannot be reclaimed by the original owners. The prayer rooms found in airports, universities, and malls throughout Indonesia are not waqf and instead are meant to be just clean, convenient areas to perform prayer. These areas are considered temporary, although throughout the world they are often called some variation of the word musholla.

Differentiating between mushollas, like the ‘Aisyiyah ones of Kauman and Ranting Karangkajen, and masjids seems to depend on the activities performed within each. Cursory online searches reveal that many Muslims have inquired about the difference between masjids and mushollas on message boards and online fatwa sites. Since the term musholla is often used to refer to non-waqf spaces in the public spheres throughout the world, they are considered different from masjids because people do not regularly pray there. However, the women who attend the ‘Aisyiyah mushollas, which are waqf, often go there every day and, in the case of many of the retired women, all five daily prayers are performed at the mushollas, which is essentially the main purpose of masjids. For Nakamura, only a masjid can hold Friday prayers. In Indonesia, women do not go to Jumat at the masjid because it is believed to be obligatory for men and, in the words of the ‘Aisyiyah members I spoke with, “for men only, not women.” The ‘Aisyiyah mushollas appear to be a space of its own category: waqf, so not just a convenient prayer room in a public space, a place where all five prayers are performed by regular attendees, but without the Jumat prayer which is relegated to masjids. Instead of performing Jumat, women at the ‘Aisyiyah mushollas carry out the obligatory prayers

like any other day. The only men who are invited to enter the women's mushollas are visiting scholars giving a sermon or perhaps repairmen or caretakers, while the masjids frequently hold activities with both men and women present, like meetings, sermons, talks, and pengajian, or Qur'an study, although women are not present for Jumat.

Additionally, the term langgar also refers to a prayer house and is sometimes used interchangeably with musholla. However, whether a langgar may be waqf or privately owned is up for debate—Clifford Geertz wrote "a langgar is the same as a mosque except that it is smaller, it is often privately owned (although some langgars are public foundations, as are nearly all mosques), and Friday service is not conducted in it."[224] Thus, most mushollas and masjids in Indonesia are waqf, while langgars may or may not be waqf. Just a few hundred feet from the 'Aisyiyah Musholla, there is the Langgar Ar-Rosyad, a building on private property that serves as a prayer space where the women sometimes gather for pengajian.

This brief discussion about the meanings of the terms used to describe prayer spaces in Indonesia is meant to illustrate a few key points. First, the designation of a space by giving it a name of course influences what occurs in the space itself; however, the performances within a space may not always align with the moniker. The women's spaces described in these chapters are often overlooked or understudied precisely because the term officially applied to them, musholla, is commonly used to denote spaces of little use or less importance compared to masjids, when in actuality the 'Aisyiyah women's mushollas function in a manner very similar to Indonesian masjids, with the most notable

[224] Geertz, *Religion of Java*, 181.

exception being Jumat. Furthermore, the impact that these spaces have on the daily lives of these women as well as their spirituality and sense of community denote them as places of importance that should not be dismissed.

The ‘Aisyiyah Mushollas

I conducted this research by first visiting the Pimpinan Pusat ‘Aisyiyah in Kauman, the Yogyakarta headquarters for the organization, and describing my research plans to the leadership. I was greeted warmly and instructed to continue on to the mushollas I wished to research to gain direct permission from their leaders. I began my research by spending a month at the Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Ranting Karangkajen,[225] in the southern part of the Special District of Yogyakarta. I went to the musholla in the afternoon just before Asr prayer and met with one of the leaders who shared some of the musholla’s history and agreed to allow me and my interpreter to observe musholla activities and interview willing participants. I went to the musholla every day for at least two prayers and observed. I also spent Monday and Thursday evenings at the mushollas, where the women broke their fast together. Additionally, I was able to be present for a sermon held by a male imam at the musholla on Jumat Kliwon as well as a charitable distribution to the elderly that occurs once a month. Throughout this time, I interviewed ten of the regular attendees of the musholla, including two of the young women who served as imams.

[225] Ranting translates to “branch.” This musholla is on the street Jalan Karangkajen.

The Ranting Karangkajen musholla is surrounded by a fence and located within a residential area. In the early morning of May 27, 2006, Yogyakarta was hit with a 6.4 earthquake, resulting in a great deal of destruction and thousands of deaths. The musholla, thankfully empty, was decimated by this earthquake and it took two years of fundraising and building before the current structure was usable. The layout is spacious and decorated with white tile and green accents. A wall separates the musholla and the ‘Aisyiyah kindergarten next door. On the grounds of the musholla there is a roofless tile structure with one three walls containing faucets for wudu, a two-story building that houses female students, and the musholla itself, a small square building with numerous windows, entrances on three sides, and surrounded by a large veranda. Every day the gate is unlocked for activities or prior to prayer by any of the ‘Aisyiyah leadership who live nearby.

Inside the musholla, the qibla, which indicates the direction of the Ka‘ba in Mecca toward which Muslims all around the world pray, is indicated by an arch cut into the center of one wall. Small fans are mounted on the walls to combat the extremely humid climate and in the back corner stands a bookcase overflowing with Qur’ans and religious texts. On a typical day, two strips of carpet are laid parallel to form prayer lines and a few plastic chairs are set up on the back line for the older women. Most of the activities besides prayer and sermons are conducted on the veranda, such as Qur’an recitation, meetings, charitable events, and communal meals. Behind the musholla is a two-story building that contains small living spaces rented out to the young women who study at universities and religious schools and often serve as the musholla’s imams. The call to prayer is broadcasted from the nearby masjid and indicates to the women when to

begin. The Ranting Karangkajen musholla was the smaller of the two I visited in terms of attendance and size, with only around fifteen to twenty-five women attending afternoon and evening prayers on days that they broke the fast together. The Qur'an reading groups were small and usually included three to five women. On the Jumat Kliwon sermon day, there were probably fifty women from several mushollas since the event venue rotates throughout the area and for the charity event around forty women congregated, many of whom were elderly community members who did not regularly attend prayers at the musholla.[226] The attendees of this musholla were kind and eager to assist me in my research and I was able to interview ten attendees.

After my time at the Ranting Karangkajen musholla concluded I moved on to the Musholla 'Aisyiyah in Kauman. This musholla has almost twice the attendance as the Karangkajen musholla and it is the first 'Aisyiyah musholla created by Ahmad Dahlan in 1922. I spoke with the leaders and gained permission to attend daily prayers, activities, and conduct interviews. I attended Magrib and Asr prayer every day, observing and conducting interviews with willing musholla attendees after prayer concluded. I also attended Subuh prayers on Sundays which are followed by a sermon from a female Islamic scholar. I joined some of the ladies as they broke their fasts on Thursdays and was often welcomed to their homes and nearby warungs, small food stalls or restaurants, to join them in meals and conduct interviews. In total I interviewed ten women at the Kauman musholla.

[226] The Javanese calendar traditionally observes a five-day week, with the fifth day called Kliwon. When Kliwon overlaps with Friday, or Jumat, the day is called Jumat Kliwon and sermon activities are done within rotating 'Aisyiyah mushollas, drawing members from throughout the area.

The Kauman musholla looks much the same as it did in 1922 when it was opened as a center of activity for ‘Aisyiyah women. It survived the 2006 earthquake unscathed, for which several women owe to the power of God. The sign outside of the building reads “Musholla ‘Aisyiyah, Kauman Yogyakarta, Khusus Wanita, Didirikan Oleh K.H. Dahlan TH 1922.” This identifies the musholla as being operated under the oversight of ‘Aisyiyah, its location in the village of Kauman and that it was founded by Kyai Hajji Dahlan in 1922. “Khusus Wanita” proclaims that this space is especially for women, or, depending on who you ask, for special women.

The village itself is a unique area considering its proximity to the tourist-heavy Malioboro shopping area. As the birthplace of Ahmad Dahlan and the Muhammadiyah movement, it holds great historical importance and the original home of Dahlan has been preserved and generates religious tourism. It is almost impossible to own property in Kauman unless one is both Muslim and a member of Muhammadiyah. Although the village is surrounded by streets busy with traffic, nestled in between storefronts are gated arches that caution visitors that they are now entering Kauman, where no cars are allowed and motorbikes must be turned off and walked. Flush to the narrow, cobblestone streets are one- and two-story homes, often historic, perhaps with their doors and windows open and the soft sound of television or music filtering into the air. Here or there are small stands with food or convenience items, with shop owners asking passersby “Mau ke mana?” (Where are you going?) A few streets away is the masjid where much of the local co-ed Muhammadiyah activity takes place along with a strictly male-attended Jumat. When the sound of the adhan is emitted from the masjid, men wearing songkoks and

women adjusting their mukenas start to emerge from their homes and walk to their respective places of prayer.

Like the Karangkajen musholla, the Kauman musholla is surrounded by a gate and the building itself has a large tiled veranda. The place for wudu is in an enclosed area on the side of the building and much larger in size than the Karangkajen musholla's wudu area. A few rooms serve as offices farther back on the side of the building as well as kitchen, a custodial closet, and a room for the musholla's caretaker. No kindergarten or dormitories surround this musholla, instead its neighbors are historic homes, some over a hundred years old. Shrubs and flower boxes decorate the outside of the wrought iron fence with pale green pillars that match the musholla. Three sides of the building have several sets of black lacquered double-doors topped with windows that can be propped open. These windows and those that are spaced out around closer to the top of the building are divided into brightly colored, stained-glassed panes.

Inside the musholla, sunlight shines through the colorful windows, reflecting hues of pink, green, and blue onto the pale green walls. Through the main doors, visitors are met with a large wooden donation box that most attendees contribute to upon entering to raise funds for 'Aisyiyah charitable activities and the upkeep of the musholla. A grandfather clock stands opposite of the qibla along with a framed Muhammadiyah calendar. On one side of the room there is a large carved wooden wardrobe with folded mukenas for anyone to use, although almost everyone arrives from their homes in their own. A bookshelf is filled with Qur'ans for study and recitation. Like the Karangkajen musholla, this qibla is marked by a cut-out arch in the one wall without doors. Long green carpets with white flowers are placed parallel to each other and angled to the qibla,

with a row of white plastic chairs in the back. This musholla is much larger than Karangkajen and it is clear why when the adhan begins and a number of women arrive.

The musholla is open for the five daily prayers and can become so busy during Ramadan than women end up using overflow space across the street. Unlike Karangkajen, it is not typical for the women to eat meals at the musholla outside of Ramadan; instead they prefer to eat together in their nearby homes. Every Sunday after the sunrise prayer, a female Islamic scholar delivers a sermon and hosts a question and answer session. Most gatherings outside of prayer involve hot tea and boxes of snacks. On the outside of the building are framed schedules of sermons and who is responsible for leading which prayer. The women in the community take turns leading prayer according to when they volunteer. For prayer, anywhere from twenty-five to thirty-five women come to the Kauman musholla and for the Sunday sermons over forty-five women were present. The musholla is easily twice as large as the one in Karangkajen and has become a site of religious tourism for Muhammadiyah members and school children who visit with their classes. ‘Aisyiyah leaders give visitors flyers with information on the history of Muhammadiyah and the founding of the musholla, although it is rare to see foreign tourists in the quiet village.

Conclusion

I first arrived in Yogyakarta in 2013, a new doctoral student with little to no knowledge about Indonesia and the complexities of its history and people. After years of research and preparation, my return to Indonesia to observe and interview the women of the mushollas found me a little better equipped. Delving into the experiences of the

women attendees of the Ranting Karangkajen and Kauman women's mushollas cannot be done without first attempting to grasp the journey of Islam to and through Indonesia, the development of the nation itself, and the ways in which religion and society are inextricably intertwined there today. It is because of the Indonesian expression of Islam and Muhammadiyah's interpretation of the religion that these unique women-only mushollas were created and thrive today in Yogyakarta. While Ahmad Dahlan himself created the mushollas, what the mushollas have become over the past several decades are largely because of the atmosphere and opportunities the women who attend them have cultivated.

Chapter 8: The Women of the Mushollas

Introduction

During the weeks in which I became a fixture at the Ranting Karangkajen and Kauman mushollas, I was welcomed with both warmth and curiosity. As the women would trickle in for prayer, many would clasp my hand and inquire after my research. I was asked numerous times if I was married (my affirmative answer was usually followed by another question: "But you left him in America?"), whether or not I had children, and if I liked Indonesia. During interviews and conversations over meals on the mushollas' verandas or in their homes, some would tell me they were glad I was writing about their mushollas but that they were nervous about giving me the wrong answer. Each time, I would tell them that there was no wrong answer to my questions and that I just wanted to learn more about what they thought and felt about their time at the musholla. When it was time for me to return to the United States, I was invited to a farewell dinner at one of the women's homes in Kauman and some of the women from the Ranting Karangkajen musholla met me at the airport to bid me goodbye. I left Yogyakarta with a deeper understanding of that pitfall so many ethnographers fall into: the realization that the end of fieldwork is a type of abandonment of the people whose lives you become a part of during fieldwork. "It's important you write about this place," the women assured me in

Indonesian, “When it’s done send us a copy to read!” I promised that I would deliver a copy to them, in person.

In the following sections I will discuss what I learned about the women of the Kauman and Ranting Karangkajen mushollas and their experiences with praying in an exclusive female space. Here I present the data gleaned from my observations and interviews at the mushollas, organized thematically to answer key research questions regarding the experiences of the women in these spaces. As with my discussion of the Women’s Mosque of America, the stories shared with me by the longtime attendees of these mushollas are essential in understanding how these unique spaces have impacted their interpretation of Islam and gender and influenced many aspects of their lives. The women’s mushollas, and indeed the ‘Aisyiyah organization as a whole, offers women numerous leadership roles that in other countries or other communities with different interpretations of the Sunnah would not be possible. Like the WMA, ‘Aisyiyah members and women’s musholla attendees base their involvement on examples from the Qur’an and early Islamic history. While within the musholla the women serve as leaders, outside of the musholla they conduct themselves according to more traditional and therefore patriarchal norms. Finally, as the women look toward the future, they expressed concerns that these mushollahs will lessen in popularity and possibly cease to exist, putting future generations of women at a disadvantage.

Over a period of three months I spent a significant part of each day observing musholla activities and interviewing attendees on a volunteer basis. These semi-structured interviews began with standard questions gathering general background information and continued on to open-ended questions dealing with the women’s

opinions of and experiences with the musholla, ‘Aisyiyah organization, masjids, prayer, and ideas of gender roles in Islam and Indonesia. Like with the Women’s Mosque of America interviews, all names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the women, with the exception of my interpreter Linda who agreed to be included with her given name. A key difference between the interviews in the US and Indonesia that cannot be understated is the language; all interviews done in Yogyakarta were completely in Bahasa Indonesia, using my own knowledge of the language and Linda’s immense help in interpreting more complex questions and answers. For ease of reading, however, all aspects of the interviews will be discussed in this chapter in their English translation, with some additional notes about Indonesian vocabulary when necessary. It became clear to me early on in my fieldwork in Indonesia that speaking to these women about the mushollas was really asking them to reflect back on their experiences in a place that had, for many, always been such a constant aspect of their lives that it was felt to be positively ordinary.

Attending the Mushollas

For most of the regular attendees of each of these women’s mushollas, the mushollas have been a fixture in their lives since childhood. Many of the women were born and raised in the area immediate to their respective musholla and could recall accompanying their mothers there as children. Some, like Ibu[227] Budiwati, an eighty-year-old ‘Aisyiyah member and attendee of the Karangkajen musholla, used to attend

[227] Literally meaning “mother,” this is used as a term of respect to address women in their thirties and older. The women often called me ‘Bu Beth.’

more as a young girl. She remembered that seventy years ago many children would come with their mothers, although now it is less common to see children there. Ibu Budiwati also mentioned that this newer musholla, rebuilt after the 2006 earthquake, has a much better wudu area. Before, the only area provided was a small pool whereas now there are spouts and more room which she prefers. She wishes she could come to the musholla as often as she did when she was growing up, but now she finds it difficult to walk to the musholla for more than two prayers each day, at sunrise and in the evening.

With the women's mushollas in walking distance of many of the regular attendees' homes, most of the women rarely, if ever, pray at other masjids and mushollas. I asked Ibu Amelia, a sixty-six year old retiree who leads prayer several times a week at the Ranting Karangkajen musholla, if she ever goes to the large masjid just a few blocks away. "Every month. For my leadership position in 'Aisyiyah, we have a meeting there with other branches," she answered. "But, do you ever go to the masjid to pray?" I prodded further. "No, just for meetings. We try to pray here, in our place, not any other," she answered, motioning to the musholla surrounding us. Several other women from both mushollas shared that they go to the masjid for 'Aisyiyah and Muhammadiyah activities, like preaching, but prefer their own women's musholla. For those who are still working, they do go to the nearest masjid or musholla to their place of employment, like Ibu Citra, who goes to the masjid by her office for the noon prayer but goes to the Kauman women's musholla for all others. The retired women, who had various careers including teaching, banking, tailoring, and in civil service and administration, spent many years praying at home, at mushollas at their jobs, or at whatever masjid or musholla was

nearby. Now that they are in a different stage of life, the women choose to attend the women's mushollas for all or most of their prayers, like their mothers did before them.

Like Ibu Budiwati, a majority of the women at both mushollas have been attending since childhood. Although some went away for school, careers, or to raise their family, they returned to their village to live out the rest of their years. Retirement has given them the freedom to be more active in the musholla and with the 'Aisyiyah organization. Several of the women walk to the musholla for all five obligatory prayers each day while others perform some prayers at home. When I asked each woman I interviewed why they come to the musholla so often, I received a very specific response. Ibu Amelia explained:

> Every day we pray together and try to get women to come together to pray. If we pray from home, we get just one reward from Allah, but if we come here and pray together, we get twenty-five more rewards from Allah.[228] We try to ask more women to come to the musholla so we can receive more reward from Allah each day.

Several women from both mushollas echoed this sentiment. According to several hadith narratives, praying congregationally in a mosque is worth anywhere from twenty-five to twenty-seven times the spiritual reward of praying alone or at home.[229] However, many scholars and Islamic leaders argue that these hadith narratives are directed only to men,

[228] Sahih al-Bukhari 646, Book 10, Hadith 43: Narrated Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "The prayer in congregation is twenty five times superior to the prayer offered by person alone" (M. M. Khan 1971 translation).

[229] See, for more examples, Sunan an-Nasa'i, Vol. 1, Book 10, Hadith 838 and Vol. 1, Book 10, Hadith 840; Sahih al-Bukhari Vol. 1, Book 11, Hadith 621; Sahih Muslim, Book 4, Hadith 1360 and Book 4, Hadith 1361.

referring to the previously discussed hadith where it is reported that the Prophet Muhammad said it was better for women to pray at home.[230]

The women attendees of the two mushollas strongly disagree with the idea that it is better to pray at home. "It is far better for women to go to a masjid," Ibu Intan, a retired teacher from Kauman asserted, "the reward is much more!" I wondered how the idea of rewarding congregational prayer, which in many parts of the world is interpreted to only apply to males, came to serve as the reason for women to attend their musholla so frequently. At Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah Yogyakarta, the headquarters for the 'Aisyiyah branch in Yogyakarta, I was told that Ahmad Dahlan created the organization and the women's mushollas with the intent of liberating women from the errancy of local customs and flawed understandings of Islam. Tutin Aryanti writes, "The vision of the organization was to educate women and to fight against backwardness by encouraging their social roles in society…their attempts to educate women and to encourage their participation in the public space were considered a major challenge to local tradition."[231] However, Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah still adhere to traditional values and ideas of gender roles. In order to give women the opportunity to be more active in public religious life while still maintaining a separation from the opposite sex, women's mushollas were created. With a special space for women to pray together and lead each other, they were now eligible for the rewards that are believed to accompany congregational prayer that had long been denied to them when they only prayed in their homes.

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[230] See Chapter 3 for a brief discussion on this.

[231] Tutin Aryanti, "A Claim to Space: Debating Female Religious Leadership in a Muhammadiyah Mosque in Indonesia," *The Muslim World,* 103: 375-388.

For many of the women, praying communally has become almost obligatory, especially for those who are retired and have the flexibility with their schedules to attend the musholla each time they hear the adhan. Ibu Nur, who is involved in local ‘Aisyiyah leadership while her husband serves in local Muhammadiyah leadership, explained that for most women while they pursued careers or raised their families, they would often have to delay prayers, pray at home, or pray alone while working. Now, in retirement, the women are more able to focus on attaining as much spiritual rewards as possible in hopes of reaping these rewards in the afterlife. “If I am just at home, maybe I will postpone the prayer. But I am looking for rewards now and we are rewarded more for praying here together than at home,” Ibu Dian, a widowed housewife, related. With a musholla exclusive to women nearby, the women feel they are held to the same standard as men when it comes to communal prayer and therefore the spiritual rewards that accompany it.

Convenience, atmosphere, community, and affiliation with ‘Aisyiyah are all reasons the women provided for why they continue to attend their respective women’s musholla rather than seeking other venues to gain spiritual reward. All of the regular attendees are active ‘Aisyiyah members, many of whom had parents who were active in the organization and now their own children are part of Muhammadiyah, ‘Aisyiyah, or Nasyiatul ‘Aisyiyah. As members, it is important to patronize the women’s mushollas to help them succeed. In Kauman, it is common for women to donate a small amount of money each day to the musholla, contributing toward the local organization’s charity work, musholla activities and general maintenance. A regular Ranting Karangkajen musholla attendee and retired teacher, Ibu Irene, said that attending the musholla helps it prosper, allowing the community the funds for charitable activities, like the monthly

distribution of money and kilograms of rice to the elderly women in the area. Ibu Citra, who at the age of fifty-nine has been attending the Kauman musholla since she started praying as a child, says that as a member of 'Aisyiyah it is her responsibility to keep the musholla alive by attending.

The sign over the door of the Kauman musholla proclaims that it is "khusus wanita," meaning especially for women or only for women. Having access to a large, clean space where men are nowhere to be found is a draw for many of the mushollas' regular attendees. "I think it is better here, I like it better, because we can be with other women and not have to feel awkward or careful like when men around. We have more freedom to express ourselves," noted Ibu Melati, one of several regular imams at the Kauman musholla. Ibu Nona, who has attended the Ranting Karangkajen musholla since she was born, prefers the women-only setting because she can perform wudu without risking men seeing her aurat, or the parts of her body she believes must be covered according to Islam. This includes the women's hair; every person interviewed at both mushollas wore jilbabs but, upon stepping outside of the musholla or going to the wudu area they were comfortable adjusting the fabric or even removing it for a few minutes because they were surrounded by other women. This sense of freedom that the women prefer relates to Goffman's analysis of private space as a type of "backstage."[232] While during prayer, decorum and orthopraxy regarding the ritual of prayer are observed by the women in the mushollas, outside of prayer the grounds of the mushollas serve as a backstage where the women are not as constrained since they do not have to worry about

[232] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.*

interaction with men, as they would at a masjid or mixed-gender musholla. Other women mentioned that they preferred the women's mushollas because they tended to be cleaner than the masjids frequented mainly by men. In addition to a women-only space being more convenient and comfortable, the mushollas were also praised for their atmosphere and community.

I asked each woman I spoke with if they thought it was important to both hear and see the imam while praying in congregation. I found that they were split into two camps. Some believed it is important to both hear and see the imam, which is a reason they prefer the women's musholla; others stated that seeing the imam was not at all important and that as long as they could hear the imam and their intention was on prayer, then the atmosphere was agreeable to them. In the larger masjids in Indonesia where women form lines at the back behind the more numerous male attendees or pray behind a partition, seeing the imam or preacher is very difficult. Most preachers, including at the mushollas, use a microphone so they can be heard easily. What other reasons, then, spur the women to go to these mushollas multiple times a day?

The mushollas were frequently described as peaceful and comforting when I asked the women why they preferred to attend. Much of the time before and after prayer the mushollas are quiet, giving women the opportunity to say additional rakats of prayer in hopes of attaining more reward. However, there are plenty of times throughout the day that the mushollas and their verandas are filled with laughter, conversation, and 'Aisyiyah activities. "The best thing about the musholla is that we can connect with each other. We can talk and have discussions," Ibu Irene, who leads pengajian at the Ranting Karangkajen musholla, told me. At the Kauman musholla, it is common for each woman

to warmly greet every other woman there before prayer begins. When a scheduled imam is sick or unable to lead prayer, another woman volunteers to take her place. At both mushollas, when the women hear that another woman in the community is ill, they will go as a group to her home with food and gifts, checking in on her until she is well again. On Mondays and Thursdays, the women at the Ranting Karangkajen musholla take turns bringing dinner to break their day-long fast together in between evening prayers. Everyone eats on the veranda, visiting with each other, talking about their families, and discussing future 'Aisyiyah events. It is thought, according to hadith, that the Prophet fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, so most of the women at this musholla follow his example.[233] A few women in Kauman do the same, rotating whose home hosts the meal and what dish each person brings. With so many of the lifetime attendees of the mushollas retired, widowed, or with grown children living far, the constant community that the mushollas provide is the cornerstone to their social lives.

The women give thanks to their religion and the vision of Ahmad Dahlan for providing the mushollas. Ibu Melati recounted the story of Ahmad Dahlan creating the Kauman musholla to give women a space to interact:

> Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan felt sorry for the women because they didn't have a space to have activities like discussion or anything. They could only do that when they met at his house, which at that time was so small and not big enough for the women of the community. This place is for the resurgence of Islam, so this place can be a place where women spread the teachings of Islam.

Ibu Nur also gave credit to Ahmad Dahlan's wife, Ibu Siti Walidah. "Ibu Walidah knew that women needed to advance, so this musholla is for women to become leaders and

[233] See, for example, Jami' at-Tirmidhi, Vol. 2, Book 3, Hadith 745

imams and run pengajian. Ibu Walidah realized how important women were and that, even though Indonesia wasn't yet independent, its women needed to not be backwards." The communities formed at each musholla are not isolated; each month women from different mushollas and 'Aisyiyah branches come together for meetings, sermons from Islamic scholars, and charitable activities. No one I spoke to seemed quite sure how many mushollas in Yogyakarta were exclusive to women, but the women did describe the few they knew of as being very active and strong like their own.

Solat

While these spaces are used for Qur'an reading, sermons, communal meals, charity work and community-building, the main purpose of any musholla is to provide a place for prayer, or solat in Indonesian. Ten to fifteen minutes before each designated prayer time, the gates surrounding the Ranting Karangkajen and Kauman mushollas are unlocked by one of the women who live nearby or a caretaker. The adhan broadcasted from masjids a few blocks away propels women from their homes, walking along the narrow streets toward the women's musholla while they adjust their mukenas. Mukenas are long, flowing two-piece garments worn during prayer by Southeast Asian Muslim women. Although they are usually white or pastel-colored, mukenas often contain intricate embroidery, some done by hand by the wearer, or bolder, more colorful prints. In Indonesia, wearing the jilbab has only become popular since the 1990s; before this, most Indonesian Muslim women either did not cover their hair in public or wore a kerudung, a loose, gauzy headscarf that may show some hair. The kerudung is still worn by the oldest women in the community, usually those in their eighties, and the women

who wear jilbabs recalled that their mothers mostly wore kerudungs rather than jilbabs during their lives. During prayer, however, Indonesian women would don mukenas to make sure they were covered in accordance to Islamic ideas of modesty during prayer. Now, despite all of the women of both mushollas wearing jilbabs when outside of their house, it is still customary to wear mukenas during prayer even over the women's already modest attire.

After the adhan has concluded, the women form prayer lines in the musholla, filling rows from the first line back and standing shoulder to shoulder. At the Kauman musholla, a woman gives the iqama just before the start of prayer. The iqama is not the same as the adhan, which is the call to prayer that alerts people to prepare for prayer or journey to the masjid or musholla; instead, it serves as the second call to prayer, meant to alert the people in the musholla or masjid that prayer is about to begin. It is recited more quickly and with a less melodious tone than the male-performed adhans that can be heard throughout Yogyakarta, although it was no less moving to hear it given by a woman. At the Ranting Karangkajen musholla there is no iqama; the women explained to me that it was only obligatory for men to perform iqama before prayer so they did not need to do so. In Kauman, after the iqama the woman who is scheduled to lead this particular prayer begins, while standing in the center of the first line and not in front of it. As the women pray, others may make their way in and join the lines. Once the prayer is completed, some perform extra rakats, others walk back to their homes and, if it is evening, some may stay to visit with each other until the next prayer.

Women's Leadership

Every masjid on Java has a space for women, whether behind a partition or some other visual cue that separates men from women during prayer. What makes the 'Aisyiyah mushollas unique, however, is that this exclusively female space is ran by a women's organization and the daily activities are led by women. At the Ranting Karangkajen musholla, four young women regularly lead prayers. They are students in their early twenties, working on their bachelor's degrees at a nearby university at the same time as they pursue an Arabic studies certificate from an Islamic school. The two I spoke with, Mbak[234] Niki and Mbak Rina, are hafizah, meaning they have memorized and can recite the Qur'an. During Ramadan they give sermons at the musholla; however, Mbak Niki and Mbak Rina explained that the sermons are pre-written by Islamic scholars and they read them from a book. After graduating their programs, both women hope to get married and start a family and do not plan on continuing as imams. At the Kauman musholla, a schedule is made each month and the regular attendees volunteer to lead each prayer. Whoever is the imama stands within the first line of congregants while leading prayer at each musholla, whereas a male imam would typically stand in front of the first line.

In addition to prayers, both mushollas host religious scholars and preachers for sermons regularly. At the Kauman musholla, every Sunday at dawn after the Subuh prayer, which is the first of the obligatory prayers, a female scholar is invited to give a sermon. Ibu Citra explained that she enjoys hearing the female preachers because, "Their topics are about women. They talk about daily life, our health, reproduction, and about

[234] Mbak literally means "older sister" in Javanese and is used to address young women with respect in Java.

how to worship, which I like a lot." Ibu Intan said, "We like to hear from women and about women, because they are like us." Male preachers, however, do give sermons depending on the event and topic, like the Jumat Kliwon I attended at Karangkajen. That preacher was chosen to give a sermon about preparing for Ramadan and making sure one's prayer is valid. Later, I was introduced to him since he was the husband of one of the Kauman musholla's most active leaders. "We especially try to invite women who have knowledge about Islam to teach us," Ibu Amelia clarified, "but depending on the situation, sometimes there is a man who knows the issue more deeply so we will invite him."

At the Ranting Karangkajen musholla, 'Aisyiyah leaders often give a short sermon before community events. The first time I observed there, a female preacher opened with a short recitation of the Qur'an and gave a sermon offering some tips toward happiness: read the Qur'an, give to charity, avoid anxiousness, and do not spend too much time day-dreaming. After the sermon, she asked the women to recite back to her the tips and gave 'Aisyiyah calendars as prizes to those who answered correctly. During one of the sermons at Kauman after Subuh, the preacher noted that while she is not a regular attendee of the musholla, she is an 'Aisyiyah member and gives a sermon at the musholla about once a month. Her sermon focused on a much more somber theme: the Prophet and Iblis, the devil. She offered a variety of ways in which women could prevent evil djinn from damaging their lives, from making sure the Qur'an is read aloud in one's home to keeping one's fingernails short and unpolished so that the devil may not reside in unnecessary vanity. After the sermon, the preacher explained that she chooses different themes for each sermon. "Islam is meant to regulate all of life," she told me. "We must

convey the knowledge of the Qur'an and Sunnah; we must spread this knowledge to all of the people who do not know." This enthusiasm for spreading knowledge of Islam is called dakwah in Indonesia, meaning proselytization.

Although you will never find a woman leading men in prayer in Indonesia, it is accepted in many parts of the world and within several organizations, including Muhammadiyah, that women may proselytize to both men and women. Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah are dedicated to training members in religious teachings and how to properly spread those teachings through proselytization. No mixed-gender events are held at the Karangkajen or Kauman mushollas; rather, anything aimed at the men and women of the community occur at the masjid, where women sometimes give talks or run activities. When I asked about this in interviews, it often went something like this:

> Bethany: Can women give sermons or lectures in front of men and women together?
> Ibu: Sure, why not? Of course they can!
> Bethany: But, can women lead prayer, be the imam, when men are present?
> Ibu: No, if a man is there, he has to lead prayer.
> Bethany: I see. Can a woman give the khutbah?
> Ibu: No, they cannot. It's a rule; only men can do it.

Women who have been trained in dakwah, the Qur'an, and Islamic teachings are thought to be as capable of delivering ceramah, or lectures given by preachers, as men. However, the khutbah is considered an exception that only men can perform, largely because it is believed that only men are obligated to attend Jumat and thus women generally do not go to the masjid for Jumat. At the root of this is the idea that knowledge of Islam is something that must be spread urgently and that anyone with this knowledge has a responsibility to promulgate the information to others, making both men and women obligated to do so to audiences of both genders.

As members of ‘Aisyiyah, the attendees of the women’s mushollas are exposed to leadership training and opportunities and they learn from female leaders on a constant basis. However, the women I spoke with carefully categorized where and when their leadership is warranted. “In every family in Islam, the man is the leader; so, for example I am very active as a leader in ‘Aisyiyah, but at home I am not the leader, my husband is my leader,” Ibu Ajeng, a lifetime attendee at the Ranting Karangkajen musholla clarified. “It’s in the Qur’an; the man must be the leader,” Ibu Dian told me. “It’s the rule,” said Ibu Melati. Mbak Rina explained, “Inherently, men are the leader over women.” The women perform all of the leadership duties within the musholla and ‘Aisyiyah and even have enjoyed careers with leadership roles; yet, when in the company of their husband, they maintain the traditional role of deferential wife.

Gender Segregation and Gender Relations

If women may teach about Islam to men, lead other women in prayer and hold leadership roles in a major socio-religious organization, why is it taboo for women to lead prayer in front of men? “It’s the rule,” was the unanimous response I received from all twenty women over the few months I was with them. A few, like Ibu Eka, who taught Islamic studies at a Muhammadiyah school for decades, explained that this rule is stipulated in the Qur’an and hadith. Ibu Nona suggested that this was the standard in order to prevent desire; on other words, having a woman standing in front of men and leading prayer could tempt the men away from the intention of prayer. Furthermore, although during earlier research I read that women regularly perform the adhan in Indonesia, at least in Yogyakarta that is not the case. “Adhan is only for men. If men and

women are together, the adhan and leading prayer are done by men. We don't do the adhan here because we are women. We listen for the adhan from the masjid," Ibu Amelia corrected. Amongst the women, they are free to lead each other in prayer and say the iqama, but expressed no aspirations to lead in this way when men are present.

I was also told frequently that the masjid was really a place for men when it came to prayer, although some of the women do go to their closest masjid sometimes when it is more convenient. "Masjid is supposed to be for men. It's OK for women to go, but a barrier is needed," Ibu Budiwati, who goes to the nearby masjid sometimes, told me. Ibu Dewi and Ibu Dian, who both grew up in Yogyakarta and are now retired, explained that they go to the masjid for pengajian, funerals, and preaching, but never to pray. In Indonesia, women typically do not go to the masjid for Jumat. "It is not an obligation for us," Ibu Citra said. "It is an obligation for the men. So, they go to the masjid for Jumat, and we just come here and pray four rakats." While it is not forbidden for women to go for Jumat, the belief that it is not obligatory for women has made it an entirely male affair. "If men don't pray Jumat they will be punished," Ibu Irene warned, referring to a spiritual consequence. "So, all the masjids are filled with men on Fridays." Mbak Niki, the young imama at the Karangkajen musholla, said that women are not obligated to go to a masjid or musholla at all, but that they are able to do so freely according to the Prophet Muhammad's stipulation that women should not be prevented from it. I asked some of the women if they ever wanted to hear a khutbah and was told that since there are so many sermons, lectures and other activities throughout the week that they are learning all the time as it is. Yet, with the masjid interpreted as a place just for men when it comes to prayer, a place where Jumat and the khutbah are given without women present, the

masjid itself becomes a gendered space that privileges men and grants knowledge to only men. Are the women who avoid the masjid for prayer, especially Jumat, at a disadvantage because they are blocked from accessing knowledge? On the other hand, the women gather for sermons, pengajian, and other activities in their mushollas that men are not privy to, while at the masjid both men and women come together for Muhammadiyah/ 'Aisyiyah meetings, lectures, and sermons. The women seem content that while the men have access to certain knowledge, the women have access to their own without the presence of men as well as the opportunity to learn together at the masjid for co-ed events.

If women do go to a masjid for solat, I was told again and again that some barrier or partition must be in place. When lectures, preaching, or other activities occur, there is no need for a partition. For prayer, however, which is a very physical act, women and men are separated from touching or seeing each other. "We have to be separated to make the men concentrate more since it is so easy for men to be distracted," Ibu Artini, a seventy-year-old retired banker who has attended the musholla for over twenty years explained. I asked if her women are ever distracted by men and she replied, "Yes, that's why Kyai Ahmad Dahlan built a women's mosque, so we could have our own special place." The masjids in Yogyakarta often use a curtain or rattan divider, although sometimes there is just some sort of visual cue where women should pray behind men. Some women said that the dividers also prevent women from being distracted by men coming in during prayer. Ibu Dewi, a former banker who now creates batik, a traditional Indonesian textile, opined that dividers are not always necessary, however, if men and women know where they are supposed to pray, with women in rows behind men.

Fifteen of the regular attendees I interviewed from the Ranting Karangkajen musholla and Kauman musholla have made the Hajj or Umrah[235] and some have traveled to Mecca up to three or four times. Since, as I have discussed earlier, much of the Hajj includes rituals that do not require gender segregation, like circumambulating the Ka'ba, I was interested in what the women thought of their pilgrimage experience and why they think gender separation does not occur as much there. Like my conversations with women in the United States, several women cited the sheer number of pilgrims as the reason why, logistically, there was no gender separation during Tawaf, the circumambulation of the Ka'ba. However, during prayer and the time in Medina there are barriers separating genders. Ibu Amelia said that although there is no separation at the Ka'ba, "We always try to stay separate by staying with our family or our group to avoid sin." Many of the women travelled with other 'Aisyiyah members as a group; the Saudi Arabian government allows groups of women over the age of forty-five to make the pilgrimage without a husband or a mahram as long as they have written permission from them. Ibu Intan and Ibu Yuni, the latter of whom lives outside of Kauman and whose husband leads a masjid, agreed that since it is a special circumstance, it is permissible for men and women to perhaps nudge each other as they move. They also noted that the area for wudu was so far away that if men and women had to perform wudu each time they accidentally touched each other during Tawaf they would never be able to complete the rite. Another reason given for the lack of physical separation at the Ka'ba is the holiness of the site. Ibu Dewi said that at the Ka'ba there is no desire, so the separation is

[235] Umrah is lesser pilgrimage done outside of the month of Hajj.

unnecessary. “Men and women come together from all over the world and are united. In Mecca, we are all the guests of Allah, so there is no need for separation when we are all united,” said Ibu Sakti, a fifty-seven-year-old housewife who has gone to Mecca on the Hajj once and made Umrah twice. A few women I spoke with were surprised at my question, admitting that they had never thought about the lack of gender segregation during the Hajj. “I just realized this!” exclaimed Mbak Niki, who has not yet been to Mecca. “I don’t know why this is. Men and women at the Ka‘ba are so close they must touch each other, but I don’t know why they aren’t separated!” The designation of Mecca as being the holiest site in the world seems to carry with it a special status that allows it, whether for logistical purposes or more spiritual reasons, to be an exception to some of the gender segregation restrictions that are often employed by masjids and mushollas during prayer.

Although in Muhammadiyah and ‘Aisyiyah it is customary for men to be the leader of their families, there is also the belief that men and women are spiritually equal as taught in the Qur’an. “In religion, we are all the same, it is a solid rule,” Ibu Citra told me. “In front of Allah, everyone is the same. The only thing that makes us all different are our actions,” Ibu Nona said. “But that does not mean that women should lead men!” she added. Ibu Irene noted that while men and women are the same in Islam, their function is different, since women are responsible for the home and can only work if their husband allows it. It is of note that the majority of the women I interviewed at both mushollas had long careers outside of the home while being married and raising children and that many leaders in ‘Aisyiyah are business owners. Ibu Yuni proudly said that Muhammadiyah and ‘Aisyiyah mirror the spiritual equality between genders by each

organization having autonomy and different leadership, although the organizations are related and work together. Although the women believe that some of the functions and obligations may differ between men and women, both genders are measured in the same way by their intentions and actions in the eyes of Allah.

I also asked the women if they thought men and women were generally considered equal in Indonesia. Since the nation is overwhelmingly Muslim, much of society is influenced by concepts derived from religion. Many women were quick to present the 2001 to 2004 presidency of Megawati Sukarnoputri as evidence of gender equality in Indonesia, reminding me that even the United States has not yet elected a woman president. When Megawati ran for president of Indonesia in 1999, the politically neutral 'Aisyiyah released a document supporting a woman's right to lead as long as she remains attentive to her duty as a housewife.[236] "The way things are now in Indonesia," Ibu Artini explained, "men and women have the same rights and a woman can be president, but even in that household the man is still the leader." Ibu Dewi agreed, saying, "In society men and women are the same, but in religion it is different; men are always the leader in the eyes of Allah." At the Ranting Karangkajen musholla, Ibu Nona and Ibu Eka thought that there was still room for improvement in gender equality in Indonesia and mentioned that women are still often left out. Most of the women thought that social equality and equal opportunities for career and education were positive while at the same time believing that in religious matters the preferable, God-ordained situation was for men to be the leaders over women.

[236] Van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam*, 14.

Yet, in a community where men are considered the rightful leaders in the masjid and the home, the women-led autonomous organization ‘Aisyiyah flourishes and its exclusively female mushollas continue to be extraordinary spaces. Since it is the norm for men and women to go to the nearest musholla upon hearing the adhan, I wondered whether men ever approached the women’s mushollas to pray, perhaps not knowing about their “khusus wanita” status. As I mentioned earlier, the Kotagede musholla may have once been exclusive to women but is located in such a busy part of town that both men and women frequent it now. Ibu Melati, one of the leaders at the Kauman musholla, related that many times during Ramadan or Sekaten, the week-long Javanese celebration of Maulid, the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, everyone is looking for the nearest musholla and men will come to the ‘Aisyiyah musholla unaware that it is just for women. “So many men come here then, and I feel sorry for them so I will provide a place for those men to pray in the back!” Once during my time at the Karangkajen musholla, two men drove up on their motorbikes. Three of the women rushed over to them and shooed them away, explaining that this was a women’s musholla and directed them to the closest masjid. The protectiveness the women feel for these spaces is evident. These two mushollas are gendered spaces, the grounds indicating that they are places meant for women, which suggests that other spaces meant to privilege men are metaphorically out of reach. However, the regular attendees have laid claim to the mushollas, taking pride in their exclusivity and striving to maintain the spaces for themselves, even going so far as to cast out men or, as Ibu Melati shared, relegating the men to a part of the musholla that is not traditionally a men’s space out of compassion.

Looking Forward

Yet, the future of the women's mushollas is unclear. As I noted, the majority of regular attendees at both the Ranting Karangajen musholla and Kauman musholla are retirement age with grown children who often live away from the city. During Ramadan, both mushollas are always full, with the Kauman musholla even needing to use overflow space at times. Outside of Ramadan, however, the Karangkajen women's musholla typically sees about fifteen to twenty-five women for morning and evening prayers and less at midday while the Kauman musholla has anywhere from twenty-five to thirty-five women attending in the mornings and evenings. Several women voiced the concern that, besides during Ramadan, the number of attendees seems to be falling compared to what they could recall from childhood.

At the Ranting Karangkajen musholla, one or two young girls, daughters of regular attendees, would accompany their mothers to prayer sometimes and at the Kauman musholla there was only one instance where girls came. During my first few weeks observing in Kauman, every day I would pass a group of young girls dressed in brightly colored mukenas with cartoon patterns. Each time, they would ask me in unison, "Mau ke mana?" Or, "Where are you going?" I told them I was going to the 'Aisyiyah musholla and they would laugh and ask me more questions. After two weeks, I realized after I passed them that I had gained two little shadows following me to the musholla. The girls joined in prayer, standing in the last line, and the women of the musholla greeted them, smiling and telling me how curious the girls were about the foreigner going to the musholla every day. After prayer concluded, the girls shyly rushed away from the musholla. "They go to the masjid or langgar with other kids and teens," Ibu Nur informed

me. “They want to be with their friends so that is where all of the kids go.” When some of the Kauman women were children, they used to come to the women’s musholla and take part in special activities geared toward their age group. “On Tuesdays, we used to have meetings at night to help us be more confident when we were girls,” Ibu Amelia recalled. “Every girl had to share a story, or sing, or do anything that would build their confidence.” Now, the girls who benefitted from those programs are grown and are attending the musholla in their golden years, while the young girls in the community prefer the masjid or other spaces. At the Karangkajen musholla, since it is adjacent to a kindergarten, the small children are brought to the musholla to learn how to pray each year, but, like in Kauman, most females that have not reached adulthood regularly pray in the home or elsewhere. The attendees of the women’s mushollas wonder if the young girls will come to the musholla when they are older, or even, like them, when they retire and return to the village after pursuing careers and raising their families.

It is important to the women that the legacy of Kyai Ahmad Dahlan and Ibu Siti Walidah, who created the mushollas, is carried on and that these spaces are used. Ibu Dian said that there are more people coming to the musholla now than when she was a teenager, but it is more elderly women. I asked Ibu Nur if she thought future generations would keep using the Kauman musholla. “I think they will, but I am growing concerned about it,” she said. “During Ramadan the place is so full; we have a preacher come every day and there are so many women and girls here. When it’s not Ramadan, well, women have careers and work so they can’t come during the day.” “We need the younger generation to continue this,” added Ibu Melati. “God-willing, the kids will start coming and carry on the tradition,” Ibu Putri said. Between Muhammadiyah and ‘Aisyiyah-run

schools and the robust programs ‘Aisyiyah offers to females from childhood through adulthood, there does not seem to be a lack of activity; however, the almost one-hundred-year-old tradition of ‘Aisyiyah women’s mushollas is not seeing the same growth in younger generations. This could also be related to some disharmony between Nasyiatul ‘Aisyiyah and ‘Aisyiyah.[237] The younger women’s organization is sometimes critical of ‘Aisyiyah’s work; perhaps the women’s mushollas are more reflective of an older generation’s ideals, ambitions, and concepts regarding gender rather than those of the incoming members.

Indeed, when I was a guest speaker at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, I was surprised that seemingly none of the students had heard of or given much thought to ‘Aisyiyah’s women’s mushollas, despite their long standing in the city and place in the history of Muhammadiyah. Ibu Melati shared that religious tourism has become an obligation for students in Muhammadiyah schools, so classes now visit Kauman to learn more about Muhammadiyah and the life of Ahmad Dahlan. During these visits, she said students are taken to the women’s musholla and, hopefully, this will spread more knowledge about the ‘Aisyiyah women’s mushollas.

In conversations at the mushollas, I explained that I also did research at a women’s mosque in the United States, the first one of its kind that had only opened a few years ago; the women were surprised that there was only one. In each interview, I asked the musholla attendees why they thought there were not many women’s mushollas everywhere, whether in Indonesia or other countries, and if they thought there should be

[237] *Ibid*., 14-15.

more. The sentiment overall was that their mushollas were comforting and peaceful, helped them to pray regularly and learn from the Qur'an and that they wished other women had access to the same kind of space. "There are so many benefits," Ibu Nur said. "The first being to learn how to lead prayer." The existence of the women's mushollas in Yogyakarta is deeply tied to the identity of Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah, and many of the women owe their access to a women's only prayer space to the organization, saying that perhaps there are so few women's mushollas and masjids outside of Indonesia because there are not similar organizations available to give such opportunities to women.

Conclusion

In the months of observation and interviews at the Ranting Karangkajen and Kauman 'Aisyiyah mushollas, my interpreter Linda, who became a dear friend, accompanied me each day. A recent master's graduate in religious studies, Linda grew up Muslim but did not consider herself very observant in adulthood. She was unusual in Indonesia in that she was a Muslim woman who did not cover her hair; in fact, her thesis was on the treatment and experiences of Muslim women who chose to not wear the jilbab or stopped wearing the jilbab, and she was used to people inquiring about her religion. "I just tell them I'm Buddhist or something else, usually," she told me when we first met, explaining that she did this to avoid uncomfortable or judgmental conversations about why she did not behave or dress a certain way.

In my search to understand how the mushollas impacted the women who attended them, I was surprised to find that there was much to learn about this from Linda herself.

At the Kauman musholla, the first of the ‘Aisyiyah women’s mushollas, a wardrobe holds extra mukenas for visitors to use while praying. On our third day observing there, Linda decided to don one of the mukenas and join the women in prayer. “There is something about this place,” she said. “It is so peaceful here and seeing all of these women come together makes me want to take part.” Linda joined the lines of women and was greeted with smiles and affection. She later said it was the first time in a long time that she had prayed in a musholla or masjid, but something just felt right, and she continued to pray with them every day for the rest of our time in Kauman.

The attendees of the Karangkajen and Kauman women’s mushollas have had easy access to a place specifically built for them to pray, learn, and form relationships for the majority, if not all, of their lives. This is evident in how protective they are of the spaces—the mushollas are always immaculate, the women make an effort to use the mushollas multiple times a day and for several activities, and they are proud of the history behind the mushollas and feel a responsibility to continue the legacy. Because of the mushollas, the women are more likely to pray communally, which according to their belief results in greater rewards. The mushollas also have their own traditions and inner structure unique to each. The women are close to each other and see each other for prayer every day, creating a very important support system—they break fasts together, organize events together, and when someone is sick or in need the women who attend the musholla come together to help. Although these women often act as leaders within ‘Aisyiyah and the mushollas, they have a strong belief in patriarchy and understand men to be the leaders in the home and in most religious affairs. The women recognize that the activities that occur in the mushollas have helped deepen their understanding of Islam and their

commitment to the guidelines of their religion. It is important to note, however, that there is a concern about future generations not taking advantage of the women's mushollas. The devoted attendees of these mushollas are mostly well into retirement and fear that young women and girls will prefer the mixed-gender masjid. The women are committed to maintaining the women's mushollas and using them maximally; they believe it is imperative to continue the legacy that Ahmad Dahlan created when he constructed these special places for women.

Although these mushollas were created by a man for the sake of gender segregation, the other purpose of providing women with their own space to grow in their spirituality has proven beneficial to the women of the two communities. The opportunities that the women attendees have been given by having access to such spaces have been, according to them, invaluable. Within the mushollas and their sponsoring organization, the women are able to perform leadership roles and take charge of much of their own religious engagement, while still adhering to their traditional cultural and religious values of being deferential to their husbands. Within the walls of their musholla, the women have forged and embraced an Indonesian Islam that privileges their voices and efforts, allowing them to be responsible for their faith and the rewards that are hard-earned in this life for the next. Currently, exclusive spaces for Muslim women are being created in the United States and Europe to answer a growing need in their communities for women-centered spaces. There is so much to be learned from the 'Aisyiyah women in Yogyakarta, these "special women" who have enjoyed and maintained a space especially for them, yet so little has been published or shared even within Indonesia about the mushollas, much less throughout the world.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

By focusing on the Women's Mosque of America and the two 'Aisyiyah women's mushollas in Yogyakarta and the experiences of their attendees, I do not mean to simply draw comparisons and weigh them against each other. These communities, although sharing the concept of an exclusive women's space for prayer and leadership, differ in age, culture, activities, history, and more, making a project of stark comparison both unfair and unhelpful. However, with new women's mosques around the world featured in the news and the ongoing debates about the place of women in Islam, more scholarship featuring these spaces and the women who inhabit them is long overdue. Thus far I have provided descriptions of the women's mosque and mushollas and information and opinions provided by the attendees of these spaces. I will revisit the original research questions that began my inquiry followed by a discussion of the findings and their theoretical implications. I will also reflect on this project and examine its limitations while considering possibilities for future research. Finally, I will close with a brief discussion of how this research contributes to the field.

Aims of Research

I embarked on this effort to explore exclusive spaces where women voluntarily segregate themselves for prayer and religious activities. After my first conversations with the women of the Kauman musholla in 2013 and my first visit to the Women's Mosque of America in 2015, I understood that these spaces were offering something to the women that led them to speak joyfully about their experiences there and kept them returning. The questions I had focused on the relationship between the women and the space: what were the motivations behind the creation of these spaces, does access to these spaces benefit the women when access to other spaces are denied or limited, and does voluntary segregation isolate or empower the women spiritually and socially? Through researching the organizations behind the Women's Mosque of America and the 'Aisyiyah mushollas as well as months of observation and in-depth interviews, theories arose that provided a helpful lens through which I should examine my data. This analysis began with theories of space and place and then evolved into the concept of gendered space and whether or not such spaces are always detrimental, the relationship between space and power and space and the sacred in religious ritual, and marginal space as a site of transformation, access, and community. In doing this work on the Women's Mosque of America and the 'Aisyiyah mushollas in Ranting Karangkajen and Kauman, I explored how such gendered spaces may affect the women who have chosen to inhabit them in their pursuit of piety, religious knowledge, and community.

Notable Findings

As I suspected when I prepared for this qualitative research, all of the women I spoke with felt that having access to an exclusive women's prayer space was beneficial

for them, whether they had been attending a musholla for most of their lives or had only had the opportunity to become a part of the mosque since its opening five years ago. What was surprising, however, was the different ways these benefits were articulated. While at the Indonesian mushollas the common reason for attendance was the perceived reward, that is, twenty-five to twenty-seven times the reward of praying alone, the regular attendees of the Women's Mosque of America described the benefits in less concrete terms. Additionally, proximity to the imam and khateebah seemed more of a concern for the women in Los Angeles. Opportunities to learn from and be led by other women was appreciated in both the mushollas and the mosque and the absence of men was also mentioned as granting the women a sense of ease. Finally, even though the Yogyakarta mushollas can boast a nearly a century of history and the Women's Mosque of America has been running for just half a decade, there is a pride amongst all the women in the history of their prayer space and a desire to continue their legacies. Despite these field sites being separated by an ocean and several thousand miles, the women who enliven these spaces have much in common in terms of the reasons why they enjoy their time at the women's mushollas and mosque.

When I began interviewing the women at the 'Aisyiyah women's mushollas in Yogyakarta, I was not expecting such an exact answer when I asked why they prayed there, some of them five times a day. The women feel that communal prayer reaps twenty-five to twenty-seven times the reward of praying at home, in accordance with some hadith narratives. Since the masjid is perceived as mainly a male space when it comes to prayer, the women see their mushollas as an opportunity to accumulate the same reward offered to men. Furthermore, many of the longtime musholla attendees are

retired, whether from careers or raising families, during which congregational prayer was not convenient. By attending the mushollas every day, multiple times a day, the women expressed their determination to make up for previous years where they could not focus on generating spiritual rewards in the way they may now.

While none of the women I spoke to from the Women's Mosque of America strived to pray communally based on a numerical reward, several agreed that praying communally was often advantageous. The experience of congregational prayer was described as emotional, an act that made the women feel closer to each other and that they were reaching toward the same goal. One attendee called it an "exponential feeling…like the boundaries of self and others change." This calls to mind Émile Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence, where people come together in an act that unifies them and brings them out of the mundane and into an extraordinary experience.[238] The attendees of the Women's Mosque of America indicated that previous experiences of praying in a group at other mosques were at times hindered by the quality of space provided and feelings of not belonging. For them, the monthly Jumma'a at the Women's Mosque of America is a welcome alternative that removes these obstacles. Additionally, the Los Angeles attendees felt that they were better able to experience Jumma'a, concentrate, and learn because of their closer proximity to the imama and khateebah, whereas they lamented that in traditional mosques it is often difficult to see or hear prayers and sermons and maintain focus. Many of the women had the opportunity to pray in several mosques in the United States with the influence of different cultural

[238] Émile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

backgrounds, schools of thought, religious interpretations and communities, all of which impacted the methods of gender segregation and spatial allocation for women in terms of proximity to the imam. When I asked about this in Yogyakarta, however, I was often told that while hearing the sermon and prayer is important, seeing the speaker is not necessary. As regular musholla attendees, most of these women have experienced a visual or auditory separation from imams far less frequently than the Los Angeles women, so it is possible that this divergence is due to the length of time these groups have had access to the spaces.

In both Yogyakarta and Los Angeles, it was mentioned that the absence of men created a more liberating atmosphere. Women were less worried about aurat and therefore less time and energy were focused on ensuring their bodies were covered, whether during wudu, prayer, sermons, or discussion. Some of the Women's Mosque of America attendees mentioned that at other, more traditional mosques, it felt like the sermons were always directed toward men and that topics relevant to women were avoided. The khutab given at the Women's Mosque of America are intended for women to learn more about themselves and the female experience and to learn other women's perspectives on religious and social issues. Likewise, the women of the Ranting Karangkajen and Kauman mushollas expressed preference for the female-led and female-focused sermons given each week as well as at 'Aisyiyah events at the mushollas, although organization members also go to the masjid for sermons directed at a mixed-gender audience. As spaces exclusive to women, the mushollas and mosque provide opportunities for women-centered discussion and sermons while not subjecting them to the male gaze and the anxieties that accompany it.

Perhaps most stimulating to the women, whether they had attended the mushollas for decades or only had the chance to go to the WMA for the last few years, is the female leadership and the opportunity for attendees to fulfill leadership roles. The women at the Kauman musholla, who take turns leading prayer based on a volunteer schedule, are proud that having their own musholla means they learn to lead prayer. Many of the khateebat at the Women's Mosque of America talk about how for most of their adult lives they had been attending mosque events that were led by males, helping plan mosque activities that were male-led, and even writing khutab for men to give. To at last have a place where the women lead prayer and write and deliver the khutab was described as deeply fulfilling and emotional. Interestingly, it seems that most of the khateebat at the WMA have assumed leadership roles in their careers, hobbies, and social justice work; that is, these women have been able leaders in arenas only outside of their religion, with the exception of those who served on mosque boards. One khateebah noted that she had given speeches at universities, churches, and synagogues about religion, but never was allowed to give a sermon in her own mosque until she found the WMA. Alternatively, the 'Aisyiyah members who attend the women's mushollas in Yogyakarta were trained to be community leaders, and in some cases preachers through their involvement with the organization, and learned how to lead women in prayer through their attendance of the mushollas. Yet, the 'Aisyiyah women stressed to me that although they valued their roles as leaders in the organization, community, and musholla, at home and generally in Islam men were the true leaders. They also unanimously agreed that while they enjoyed leading women and being led by women, they had no desire to go against tradition and lead men in prayer, although in 'Aisyiyah and Muhammadiyah women may preach and give

lectures to both men and women as a form of dakwah. At the WMA, many of the regular attendees took no issue with women leading men in prayer and delivering the khutbah to men, but there were a few women who were unsure or uncomfortable with the idea and were thus far satisfied with the opportunity to lead other women at the WMA. Thus, although female leadership for female groups was preferred by all and thought to be extremely beneficial, the prospect of women leading men in the same way was contentious.

The spaces themselves, in terms of the way the women described them and how the spaces made them feel, also differed. In Yogyakarta, the women found the mushollas to be peaceful and comforting. The term comforting denotes the long-standing relationship with the mushollas that the women have enjoyed; similarly, one often finds normal, ordinary, and constant things in their life to be comforting. Conversely, the WMA was described as exciting and invigorating, which conveys the organization's uniqueness and sense that it is extraordinary in these women's lives, all of whom have never before been involved in a similar space. Indeed, when I told women at the Women's Mosque of America about my time in the 'Aisyiyah mushollas, they often responded with a certain wistfulness and hope, as if imagining how their religious journey may have differed if they always had access to this type of space, and realizing that for the rest of their lives and perhaps for their daughters' lives, they would.

Whether in a five-year old mosque in a rented space or nearly one-hundred-year-old mushollas rooted in the history of its parent organization, those committed to these spaces expressed awe at their historical significance. The 'Aisyiyah members are proud of the origins of the mushollas, which, to them, serve as evidence of the Muhammadiyah

and ‘Aiysiyah’s founders’ commitment to the advancement of women. The women feel it is their responsibility to care for the mushollas and utilize them as much as possible. There is also some concern when considering the future of the mushollas; the women want these spaces to endure and prosper, but the average age of attendees has increased and younger women are not as drawn to the mushollas. At the WMA, women of all ages are excited to be a part of the first women’s mosque in the United States and are hopeful that the organization continues to progress well into the future and even influence the creation of other women’s mosques. The concerns of the WMA attendees are related to the accessibility of the WMA in its current state of only being open one Friday afternoon per month in a temporary space, which is inconvenient for many women due to work schedules and transportation. These women, several of whom have been attending the WMA since its opening and have contributed numerous times as khateebat, hope to see the WMA become a more permanent fixture in the Muslim community. The founder, Hasna Maznavi, has bold plans for the mosque’s future endeavors and strives for every advancement to be true to the mosque’s mission. The women of the WMA have already changed history; now they are trying to build a legacy. The protectiveness the women exhibit of the mosque and mushollas conveys their commitment to what the spaces stand for and how they have become a positive point in the women’s lives.

Critics of the Women’s Mosque of America voiced concerns that a mosque exclusive to women would be isolating women from the community; however, the women of the ‘Aisyiyah mushollas credit their exclusive spaces with preventing isolation. This criticism leveled at the WMA makes the assumption that a women’s mosque would draw women away from their traditional mixed-gender mosque, yet many of the women I

interviewed from the WMA only attended traditional mosques infrequently, "mosque-hopped," or considered themselves "unmosqued." Recall that, the 2013 assessment issued by the Islamic Society of North America reported that in US mosques only 18% of Jumma'a congregants are women.[239] The WMA also only holds Jumma'a once a month, partly so women may have the opportunity to engage with other, perhaps more traditional mosques most Fridays while still benefitting from the experience of women-led prayer and women-centered khutab at the Women's Mosque of America each month. In Yogyakarta, the 'Aisyiyah organization credits Muhammadiyah founder Ahmad Dahlan and his wife Siti Walidah with creating the women's mushollas in an effort to draw the women out of their homes where they would otherwise pray alone. The women felt the mushollas helped create communities of women who shared their lives together through prayer, learning, charity work, and other activities organized by 'Aisyiyah, preventing isolation or, worse, a decline in faith.

Another issue that is important to attendees of both the WMA and the Yogyakarta mushollas is validity. No matter where I was, all of the women I spoke with agreed that a group of women led in prayer by another woman makes the prayer valid. However, there were some members of the WMA who also believed that women should be able to lead groups with men in prayer also, which is not generally accepted in Islam. The Women's Mosque of America monthly Jumma'a prayers exclusively feature female khateebat, which is so controversial that mosque organizers include the Dhuhr prayer for those who are unsure if the Jumma'a prayers performed and khutbah given are valid since they are

[239] Ihsan Bagby. "National Needs Assessment of Mosques Associated with ISNA and NAIT." *Islamic Society of North America*, 2

led by women. In other words, there are women who enjoy attending the WMA but still perform the obligatory afternoon prayer that Jumma'a is meant to replace because they are unsure if a woman-led Jumma'a is acceptable, even if they find it enjoyable. That even women who are unsure about the validity of the WMA's efforts are drawn to it emphasizes the diversity within the WMA congregation, which encapsulates women from different cultures, ethnicities, and religious interpretations from all over the Los Angeles area.

In Yogyakarta, the women-only mushollas themselves are rooted in Muhammadiyah history and therefore the validity of the mushollas and the activities done within them are authorized and embraced by the organization and its sister organization, 'Aisyiyah. When asked about attending Friday prayers at the masjid, or the possibility of a woman delivering a khutbah, the musholla attendees were unanimous in their response. Jumat at the masjid is for men and only men may give the khutbah, they said, even if that meant that the women themselves would never attend Jumat prayers or hear a khutbah. This stance reflects the teachings of Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah and Indonesian interpretations of Islam. The women I interviewed, all active 'Aiysiyah members, were united in their certainty that these rules were based on the Qur'an. When I told them about the Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles, however, the Indonesian women were supportive and a few explained that the existence of different interpretations of Islam is positive; although the 'Aisyiyah members would not wish to participate in a female-led Jumma'a, or any Jumma'a since they consider it obligatory only for men, they were pleased to hear about a space made exclusively for Muslim women to pray and learn in the United States.

There is no question that mosques and mushollas exclusive to women are exceptionally rare in the world, but are these radical spaces of resistance? What or whom is being resisted? The vision behind the WMA and the ‘Aisyiyah mushollas includes leaning in to Islamic teachings, specifically the Qur’an and early Islamic tradition, that women should pray and learn and have the capacity to lead and influence others in the name of God. At the Women’s Mosque of America, what is being resisted are cultural influences and patriarchal interpretations of Islamic spaces that put women at a disadvantage in terms of ritual, knowledge attainment and the benefit of communal religion. Bringing women together at the mosque is not a rebellion against men but rather a strategy to resist the man-made configurations that have developed in some Muslim communities that resulted in many Muslim women feeling unwelcome or uncomfortable in spaces they are encouraged in the Qur’an to inhabit. In Indonesia, the Islamic culture that developed over the centuries was influenced by a variety of cultures and religious interpretations, occasioning for the creation of a norm where women prayed in their homes and had little opportunity to gain religious knowledge. The orma Muhammadiyah and its sister organization ‘Aisyiyah saw this trend as adverse to the development of a more Islamic, forward-thinking Java and created women’s mushollas in an effort to bring women out of their homes to worship and learn together. In both of these cases, Islam itself is being embraced, not resisted; the mosque and mushollas instead are resisting strictures that privilege some Muslims over others to the detriment of the entire Ummah. bell hooks discusses spaces in the margins that are protected by those who inhabit them, “…because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical

perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds."[240] This resonates with how the women I interviewed at the mushollas and the Women's Mosque of America expressed their hopes that the movements supporting the spaces would continue well into the future and multiply to serve more women.

In my interviews with the attendees of the Women's Mosque of America I asked where they would situate the WMA on a spectrum of different mosque set-ups, with one end being mosques that do not allow women any access and, on the opposite end, mosques that fully integrate women with no form of physical separation between genders. Several women positioned the WMA in the middle of this spectrum, since it does succeed in enforcing gender segregation by removing male access while offering opportunities for women's leadership and empowerment in ways that are not always found in contemporary Islamic practice, thus appeasing some aspects of both conservative and liberal religious agendas. In considering the 'Aisyiyah mushollas, they enjoy the support of a large socio-religious organization that strives to adhere to the Islam that existed during the life of the Prophet while utilizing modern rational thought to apply Islam to contemporary circumstances. Consequently, the women's mushollas are perhaps situated similarly to the WMA in that they are part of a tradition that adheres to gender segregation and patriarchal structures, but they are also part of an autonomous, women-centered organization that creates opportunities for strong female leadership and the advancement of women in terms of health, education, business, and more. In some of my interviews of Women's Mosque of America attendees, my interlocuters suggested that

[240] bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," 207.

such exclusive women's spaces should be removed entirely from the spectrum that I proposed—a spectrum, one woman explained, that was defined by male-created spaces meant for men and measured by how much access women were allowed by men. Instead, like in the story I recounted earlier of men driving up on their motorbikes to the Ranting Karangkajen musholla during Ramadan, perhaps the WMA and the 'Aisyiyah mushollas are on a spectrum of their own; women-centered spaces that are measured by how they serve women and, in some part, the access the women allow men.

This leads to the main theoretical issue I have grappled with: can gendered space ever benefit those whom inhabit it? Traditional understandings of gendered space define it as spaces created by those in power in order to consign those with less power to them, therefore creating restrictions on how much power and knowledge the lesser group may achieve and preserving such benefits for those in authority. Indeed, where men interpret their religion as demanding that women only inhabit small, poorly kept spaces hidden away in mosques for fear of a woman's voice or the sight of a woman's body nullifying their own rituals, the space allocated to women is gendered space that is not meant to serve them but is actually meant to serve and prioritize men. What of a mosque dreamed up and created by a woman, a mosque that serves as a beacon drawing in women who had in some cases given up on the idea of an inviting, comfortable sacred space where the community encourages each other to lead and learn? What of mushollas almost a century old that have become so ingrained in women's daily lives that they choose to go every day to experience peace and ease while striving for spiritual rewards together? Every gendered space is gendered by someone and for someone; the women's mushollas and Women's Mosque of America are exceptional in that they were created for women and

sustained by women for the purpose of empowerment, community, and spiritual welfare. In my time with these attendees of the mushollas and mosque, it was impossible to find anyone who felt their involvement with these spaces had not benefitted them in some substantial way, suggesting that in some circumstances gendered spaces may be desirable to those who occupy them, especially in cases where a complete degendering, or integration, is not easily found or even wanted.

Recommendations for Future Research

As I have stated before, very little has been published on mosques and mushollas exclusive to women, with the main source being Maria Jaschok and Shui Jingun's book about China published in 2000.[241] Although some women's mosques, both those exclusive to women and those who are female-led but with mixed-gender congregations, have been briefly featured in the news, typically reports refer to women's mosques in China as the only historical basis for these women-centered spaces. On the one hand, women's mosques and mushollas are often viewed as anomalies and not accurate representations of trends and traditions within Islam, sometimes even referred to as bid'a or innovation not guided by the Sunnah, according to critics. Alternatively, there are exclusive women's mosques and mushollas around the world that have existed as part of the community and the daily life of local women for so long that they are understood to be relatively ordinary, as seen with the women's mushollas in Yogyakarta. In particular, I see two barriers that have perhaps hampered research of women's mosques and

[241] Jaschok and Jingjun, *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam*.

mushollas outside of the United States, especially in Indonesia. First, women-only spaces may not accept male researchers, and of course, male researchers have dominated the field for quite some time. I remember my surprise when my classmate in 2013 was allowed to enter in the Kauman musholla after prayers; had he returned in 2018, instead of me, asking to spend every day at the mushollas observing prayers and interviewing women, I suspect the women would have kindly refused. Secondly, the consequences of the colonizer/colonized relationship continue to reverberate throughout both academia and the collective memories of those who were victimized by colonization. To that end there exists a wide range of complexities concerning what researchers have considered worthy of closer examination and whose voices were permitted to be in the conversation. It is hopeful, however, that more female scholars are contributing to research in the field of religious studies, particularly in the areas of gender and sexuality. Additionally, there has been an increasing emphasis on research conducted by non-Western scholars who are part of communities about whom, for quite a long time, only research from outsiders was the norm. I did my utmost to cultivate my own awareness of these complexities, which is why I determined qualitative research relying on grounded theory and a methodology of ethnography and feminist research to be the most appropriate way to ensure the information in this work was reflective of the women's thoughts and experiences they shared with me.

There were several instances in which my ethnographic study of the Women's Mosque of America and the 'Aisyiyah Mushollas Ranting Karangkajen and Kauman raised additional questions that are worth further study. Concerning the Women's Mosque of America, which was only opened five years ago, one of the most helpful

resources for future study is time itself. Will the WMA continue in the years to come, and if so, how will its congregation and programs change? Several groups in the United States have expressed interest in starting their own women-led mosque programs or even creating mosques similar to the WMA, so it is possible that more opportunities to study exclusive women's mosques in the United States are in the future. Founder Hasna Maznavi opined that since the WMA's opening, she has seen an uptick in female Muslim representation in public events in the Los Angeles area and it has always been the mission of the mosque that women will take inspiration from their experiences there and become more active in changing their Muslim communities for the better. If the WMA has had the effect of increasing female presence on mosque boards and mosque activities, that is a very intriguing relationship that could even be evaluated quantitatively, especially in light of the criticism the WMA has received accusing the organization of attempting to decrease women's involvement in Muslim communities.

Although time is on the side of the 'Aisyiyah mushollas in Yogyakarta with their long history of activity, I lament that I could not dedicate more time there, perhaps allowing me to explore more of the questions that arose during my work. One of the more surprising parts of my research in Indonesia was learning about the emphasis placed on enumerated spiritual rewards that the women believed they were accumulating by praying in congregation. I think this is worth further discussion regarding any possible cultural influences that make a Muslim community likely to adhere to the idea of numerical spiritual rewards, since, for example, although the women I interviewed in Los Angeles were diverse in age, ethnicity, and cultural influence, few of them literally interpreted the hadith narratives indicating that communal prayer is worth twenty-five or

twenty-seven times the reward. Another consideration is the ways in which gender segregation or limited access to communal prayer spaces may conflict with a Muslim's ability to accumulate reward. Furthermore, the Mushollas 'Aisyiyah Kauman and Ranting Karangkajen have an almost one-hundred-year legacy, but the regular attendees are largely in the retirement stage of their life, prompting some concern amongst members that younger generations will not continue the tradition of attending women's mushollas. Future inquiry into why the women's mushollas are not more widely known outside of their respective communities and why younger generations of women are showing preference for co-ed mushollas or other prayer spaces could shed light into whether or not the women's mushollas will prosper for generations to come.

Another area that merits more exploration is the concept of Jumma'a validity and obligation. There seems to be a variety of views on what makes a Jumma'a count and what could invalidate it, from the gender of the khateeb, the content of the khutbah, and the location and makeup of the congregation. Critics of the Women's Mosque of America claim that since there is no evidence of a woman delivering a khutbah in the Qur'an or hadith that the practice must be invalid. The attendees at the 'Aisyiyah mushollas agreed that a woman could never give a khutbah. Furthermore, I was told again and again in Yogyakarta that women are not obligated to attend Jumma'a, which has become somewhat of a mandate that women not ever attend Friday prayers at a masjid. It would be helpful to study the sources of these beliefs, including exploring the credibility of related hadith narratives, historical rulings and explanations, and an investigation into Muslim communities with differing interpretations regarding what makes a Jumma'a valid and who is obligated or allowed to attend.

The past decade has seen an increase in progressive Muslim movements around the world. Mosques, Islamic Centers, and other Muslim spaces have been created that prioritize the inclusion of marginalized groups. There is much to learn about mosques that are integrating space in different ways and how the attendees are impacted. Mosques that are women-centered or LGBTQ-focused are also contributing a great deal to the discussion of the future of Islam and how Muslims are turning to religion to combat discrimination and oppression. Other religions like Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism are also addressing gendered space, gender roles and leadership, sometimes doubling down on tradition or, alternatively, reexamining the factors that influence religious traditions and interpretations.

Contributions to Knowledge

Although I came to greatly admire the women of the mushollas and mosque, it is important to emphasize that this work is not meant to be prescriptive; it is not my place and I am in no way suggesting that Muslim women should emulate my interlocuters and create their own exclusive places for religious ritual. The focus of this dissertation is an examination of how religious spaces made exclusively for women may be transformative and empowering when their inhabitants can come together in community, united in a desire for leadership, knowledge attainment, and spiritual fulfillment that have often been restricted in other places. The creation and sustainment of spaces like the Women's Mosque of America and the Mushollas 'Aisyiyah Ranting Karangkajen and Kauman reveal the possibilities of gendered space when the motivation behind its existence supports and privileges those who act within it. For the women who attend the mosque

and mushollas and are devoted to their continuance, having access to a place that provides community, female leadership, ritual, and religious knowledge that is relevant to their life experiences has been invaluable. Despite rooting such spaces and their activities in the Qur'an and early Islamic history, decades of scholarship and media have labeled these exclusive women's spaces as novel, retaliatory, or even unimportant. Yet, the long-term benefits afforded to the musholla attendees offers a bright outlook for the women who, disillusioned with the spaces and opportunities for leadership allotted to them in their existing Muslim communities, were drawn to the Women's Mosque of America to fulfill a great spiritual need which has, at times, been ignored or downplayed. This effort has revealed a great deal about the dynamic nature of space and the potential for those who, by inhabiting and acting within it, imbue the space with the power of radical possibility and liberation in a sacred context.

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APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF ARABIC AND INDONESIAN TERMS

adhan: (Arabic: أُذْن) Islamic call to prayer.

Asr: (Arabic: عصر) Afternoon Islamic prayer.

aurat: (Arabic: عَوْرة) The parts of the body that must be covered by clothing according to Islam.

bid‘a: (Arabic: بِدْعة) Novelty, innovation, religious heresy.

cadar: (Indonesian) Veil worn by some Muslim women that covers the face except the eyes.

Caliph: (Arabic: خَلِيف) Successor, title given to those who led the Islamic Empire after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

cerama: (Indonesian) Lecture or talk.

da‘wa: (Arabic: دَعْوى Indonesian: dakwah) Islamic proselytism.

Dhuhr: (Arabic: ظُهْر) Midday obligatory prayer.

du‘a: (Arabic: دُعَاء pl. ad‘iyah) Invocation or prayer request.

fard: (Arabic: فَرْض) Religious obligation or duty.

fiqh: (Arabic: فِقْه) Islamic jurisprudence.

hadith: (Arabic: حَديث) Narration of the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad.

hafiz: (Arabic: حافِظ fem: hafizah) One who has memorized the Qur’an.

Hajj: (Arabic: حَجّ) Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca performed between the eighth and thirteenth days of the last month of the Islamic calendar.

halaqa: (Arabic: حَلْقة) A gathering to study the Qur'an and Islam.

Ibu: (Indonesian) Title for a married woman or a woman of marriageable age, sometimes shortened to 'Bu'.

imam: (Arabic: إمام fem: imama, pl: a'immah) The person who leads Islamic prayer.

iqama: (Arabic: إِقَامَة) The second call to prayer, shorter and faster than the first, made immediately before Muslims pray.

Jahiliya: (Arabic: جَاهِلِيَّة) The Age of Ignorance, or the era in Arabia before the advent of Islam and the revelation of the Qur'an.

jilbab: (Indonesian) Popular Muslim woman's garment that covers the head, hair and shoulders but exposes the face.

Jumma'a: (Arabic: جُمْعةِ pl: Jumma'at Indonesian: Jumat) Friday congregational prayer, performed midday in place of Dhuhr prayer, consisting of a two-part sermon (khutbah) followed by a two rakat prayer.

Ka'ba: (Arabic: الكعبة) The most sacred site of Islam, a cube-shaped building in the center of the Great Mosque of Mecca. Muslims make pilgrimage to Mecca and circumambulate the Ka'ba and all Muslims around the world orient themselves toward the Ka'ba during prayer.

kerudung: (Indonesian) A loose, gauzy scarf draped over the head and shoulders of a Muslim woman.

khateeb: (Arabic: خطيب fem: khateebah, fem. pl: khateebat) The person who delivers the two-part sermon (khutbah) during Jumma'a.

khutbah: (Arabic: خُطْبة pl: khutab) The two-part sermon given during Jumma'a.

kyai: (Indonesian) Javanese title of a Muslim cleric.

langgar: (Indonesian) A building for Muslim prayer, not always waqf.

Maghrib: (Arabic: المغرب) Islamic prayer at sunset.

mahram: (Arabic: مَحْرَم) Unmarriageable kin; legal escort for a traveling woman (includes husband).

mosque: (Arabic: مَسْجِد Indonesian: masjid) The Anglicized word for the Arabic masjid, literally meaning a place for prostration, a Muslim place for worship.

Mbak: (Indonesian) From Javanese, term used to address a young woman.

minbar: (Arabic: مِنْبَر) A pulpit where sermons are delivered.

mubalighat: (Indonesian) A female preacher.

muezzin: (Arabic: مُؤَذِّن pl. mua'zzin) The person who gives the call to prayer (adhan) in Islam.

mufti: (Arabic: مفتي) A Muslim legal expert who can make religious rulings.

mukena: (Indonesian) One- or two-piece prayer garment, usually white, covering the body except the face and hands and worn by Muslim women during prayer in Southeast Asia.

musholla: (Indonesian) (Arabic: مصلى) A Muslim prayer house not used for Friday congregational prayer.

orma: (Indonesian) A mass organization.

Pancasila: (Indonesian) The Five Principles of Indonesia, foundational to the nation and all Indonesian organizations, including belief in one God, humanitarianism, Indonesian unity, democracy, and social justice.

pengajian: (Indonesian) A gathering of Muslims to study and recite the Qur'an.

pesantren: (Indonesian) Islamic boarding school.

qibla: (Arabic: قِبْلة) The direction faced during prayer, toward Mecca.

Qur'an: (Arabic: قُرْآن) Literally "the recitation," the holy book of Islam, believed by Muslims to be revelations from God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the archangel Jibril (Gabriel).

rakat: (Arabic: رَكْعة) One unit of Islamic prayer.

ranting: (Indonesian) Branch of an office or organization.

Sa'yee: (Arabic: سَعْي) Ritual walking between Safa and Marwa during pilgrimage to Mecca.

salat (Arabic: صَلاة Indonesian: solat) prayer.

Shari'a: (Arabic شَريعة) Islamic law.

songkok: (Indonesian) Also called a kopiah, a felt or velvet had worn by Muslim men and as a sign of nationalism.

Subuh: (Arabic: صُبْح) The dawn obligatory prayer, called Subuh in the Malay region and Fajr in others.

Sunnah: (Arabic سُنّة) Tradition according to the words and acts of the Prophet Muhammad.

surah: (Arabic: سورة) Chapter of the Qur'an.

Tawaf: (Arabic: طَواف) Circumambulation of the Ka'ba.

tawhid: (Arabic تَوحيد) The oneness of God.

'ulama: (Arabic: عُلَماءُ) Islamic scholars with expertise in theology and jurisprudence.

Ummah: (Arabic: أمّة) The Muslim community of believers.

Umrah: (Arabic: عُمْرة) Less or minor pilgrimage to Mecca which is voluntary, may be shorter and may occur at any time of year.

waqf: (Arabic: وَقْف) An Islamic endowment of property or money to be used for charity or religious purposes, such as land donated for a mosque to be built upon it.

wudu: (Arabic: وُضوء) Ritual ablution before prayer in Islam.

APPENDIX B

FIGURES OF THE WOMEN'S MOSQUE OF AMERICA IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Figure 1. At the Pico Union Project, Edina Lekovic delivers the first khutbah at the opening day of The Women's Mosque of America in Los Angeles, California on January 30, 2015. Image from Lori Shepler, Reuters.

Figure 2. Attendees of the first Jumma'a at the Women's Mosque of America at the Pico Union Project form a circle for a question and answer session with the khateebah, Edina Lekovic. Image downloaded from the Women's Mosque of America website: http://womensmosque.com/faq/

Figure 3. A female muezzin gives the adhan at the Pico Union Project, signaling that Jumma'a prayer will begin at the Women's Mosque of America. Image downloaded from the Women's Mosque of America official Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/WomensMosque/

Figure 4. Women pray at the Women's Mosque of America, held at the Pico Union Project. Image downloaded from the Women's Mosque of America official Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/WomensMosque/

Figure 5. The Women's Mosque of America leadership team poses with that month's khateebah at the First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles. Image downloaded from the

Women's Mosque of America official Facebook page:
https://www.facebook.com/WomensMosque/

APPENDIX C

FIGURES OF 'AISYIYAH MUSHOLLA IN THE VILLAGE OF KAUMAN, YOGYAKARTA INDONESIA

Figure 6. Exterior of the Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Kauman.

Figure 7. Main entryway of Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Kauman. Sign above door reads: Musholla ‘Aisyiyah (in Arabic), Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Kauman Yogyakarta (in Indonesian).

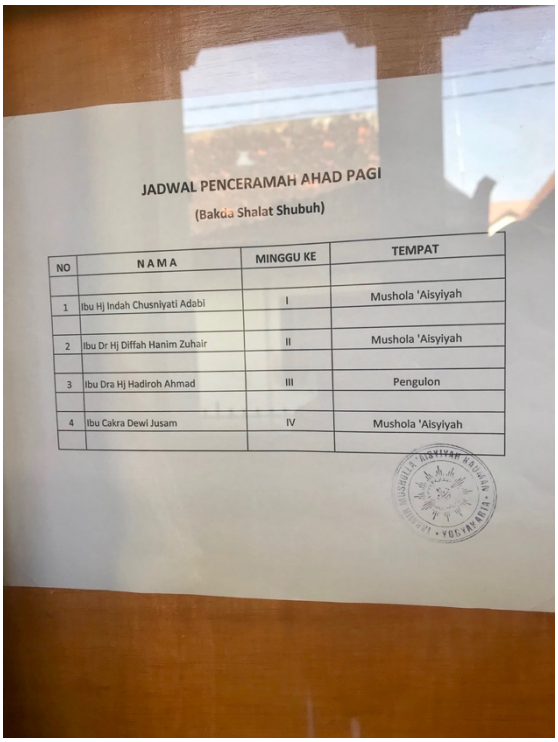
Figure 8. Sign next to main entry at Musholla 'Aisyiyah Kauman. Sign reads (in Indonesian): Musholla Aisyiyah
Kauman Yogyakarta
Especially for women
Founded by Kyai Hajji Ahmad Dahlan
Year 1922

Figure 9. Wudu area, for ritual ablutions, at the Musholla 'Aisyiyah Kauman.

Figure 10. Interior of Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Kauman during prayer. Women form the front line, wearing mukenas, a traditional Indonesian prayer garment.

Figure 11. Women listen to a preacher and eat snacks on Sunday morning, after Subuh prayers at dawn at the Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Kauman.

Figure 12. Women pray Maghrib prayer, after sunset, at the Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Kauman.



JADWAL PENCERAMAH AHAD PAGI

(Bakda Shalat Shubuh)

NO	NAMA	MINGGU KE	TEMPAT
1	Ibu Hj Indah Chusniyati Adabi	I	Mushola 'Aisyiyah
2	Ibu Dr Hj Diffah Hanim Zuhair	II	Mushola 'Aisyiyah
3	Ibu Dra Hj Hadiroh Ahmad	III	Pengulon
4	Ibu Cakra Dewi Jusam	IV	Mushola 'Aisyiyah

Figure 13. Schedule for weekly sermons posted outside of Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Kauman.

Figure 14. Regular attendees and leaders of Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Kauman break their Thursday fast, pray, and socialize together in one of their homes.

Figure 15. Sign outside of the Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Ranting Karangkajen (Karangkajen branch).

Figure 16. A gate surrounds the Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Ranting Karangkajen. The gate is opened by members who live nearby before each prayer and activities.

Figure 17. Wudu area for ritual ablutions behind the Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Karangkajen. The stairs lead up to residence areas for female students and the musholla’s a’immah.

Figure 18. Women pray maghrib prayer, after sunset, at Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Ranting Karangkajen.

Figure 19. Thursday evening communal meal to break the fast at the Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Ranting Karangkajen.

Figure 20. Women pray Isha prayer at around seven in the evening at Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Ranting Karangkajen.

Figure 21. Monthly event at Musholla ‘Aisyiyah Ranting Karangkajen where cash and kilos of rice are distributed to elderly women in the community by ‘Aisyiyah. Event includes prayer, snacks, and a sermon.

Figure 22. Regular attendees and a'immah of Musholla 'Aisyiyah Ranting Karangkajen pose for a photograph.