

Female Leadership in Worship

Empowering Women in Religious Communities
Lebanon and Denmark



By Sherin Khankan

DANMISSION 

 **Danish-Arab
Partnership Programme**

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Summary

This report is based on a pilot project initiated by Danmission to explore the needs and means to empower the role of women within religious communities in Lebanon and Denmark. Danmission is seeking more information on gender and women empowerment and on the formal position for women within their religious communities.

The following report covers a selection of the existing and rising female voices fighting and arguing for equality, justice, and female leadership in religious communities in Lebanon and Denmark.

It is important for women to meet across sectarian and religious differences especially in a sectarian country like Lebanon. Many recommendations seem to be on the structural/organizational level, to increase collaboration and set up fora/platforms for cooperation. Danmission has a long tradition for interreligious networks but they are often dominated by male religious leaders. Creating interreligious groups for female leaders only is a recommendation that could build on Danmissions existing interreligious programme concerning interfaith dialogue.

The following sums up the recommendations from the one-on-one interviews and round table in Lebanon and Denmark under three overarching headings: 1) interreligious network for female leaders; 2) strengthening education in and exposure to modernist frameworks of theological interpretation; and 3) social initiatives.

The report shows that there is a need to formalize and capacity build female religious leadership in the MENA region as well as elsewhere. To focus on the role of religion and female religious actors seems more and more relevant.

Almost all women argued for the need to establish collaborative networks with new progressive religious actors and institutions in Denmark and Lebanon with a focus on female leaders. The existing interreligious communities funded by Danmission and others are often represented by more traditional groups and individuals with a majority of male religious leaders and representatives, especially when it comes to Muslims and Jews. This report identifies the need for other religious communities such as a forum for progressive female religious leaders. The aim is to mainstream progressive thought and female leadership within religious institutions. Female religious leadership could be a considerable game changer when it comes to the question of women empowerment.

Women empowerment cannot blossom within female movements only. Progressive thought about women empowerment has to enter conservative male dominated groups in order to effect real change.

The aim is not to deconstruct the Islamist, traditionalist or conservative position but rather to challenge these positions and to support and strengthen alternative female modernist positions in the religious field.

Sherin Khankan

Introduction

This report is based on a pilot project initiated by Danmission to explore the needs and means to empower¹ the role of women within religious communities in Lebanon and Denmark. The mandate of Danmission is to work with religion, the role of religion, and the role of religious actors in society. Danmission is seeking more information on gender and women empowerment and on the formal position for women within their religious communities. How and where may Danmission support and empower women in religious institutions? To answer these questions Danmission has hired Sherin Khankan, MA in Sociology of Religion, as an external consultant to offer recommendations on the role of women within religious communities in Lebanon and Denmark in the framework of the Danish-Arab partnership programme. The following report covers a selection of the existing and rising female voices fighting and arguing for equality, justice, and female leadership in religious communities in Lebanon and Denmark.

I, the consultant, am an author, lecturer, and the founder and leader of The Exit Circle – a network of self-help groups in Denmark combating mental violence. I did my MA thesis on Islamic activism in Syria with a focus on female Islamic activists in The Abu Nur Mosque. A Muslim activist, in August 2001 I founded the grassroots organization Critical Muslims² in Copenhagen. Critical Muslims promotes Islamic feminism and pluralism and has publicly advocated for female imams since 2002. In 2015 I founded FEMIMAM, an association that works to establish a women's mosque in Copenhagen with female imams and a modernist-spiritual approach³ to Islam.⁴

¹ In this report the word "empowerment" refers to the effort to strengthen women's formal and informal position within religious and social communities and institutions as well as challenging the inequality and patriarchal structure found in religious leadership.

² See A Muslim Manifesto by Sherin Khankan

³ The modernist reformist position within Islam is historically identified with the rise of the Islamic Salafiyya-Movement in Egypt in the 19th century, whose founding members were Muhammad Abduh (1849- 1905), an Egyptian Islamic scholar, jurist and liberal reformer, political activist Rashid Rida (1865-1935) and pan-Islamic activist, philosopher, and writer Djamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897). The Salafiyya-movement never became a mass movement, but it laid the foundation for Islamic progressive thinking and is identified with Islamic modernism and reform. Muhammad Abduh spoke out against polygamy and other women's rights issues at the Islamic University Al -Azhar and had a modernist/reformist approach to the interpretation of the Quran. Some of the members of the Salafiyya-movement found inspiration in the spiritual teachings of Sufism, but at the same time criticized orthodox Sufi interpretations. They sought to interpret the Quran according to contemporary society. The reform was practiced by going back to the roots of the Islamic texts. (Donohue, J, Esposito, J, Islam in Transition. Muslim Perspectives, Oxford University Press, (1982)).

When the consultant refers to the modernist/spiritual approach in this report, she refers to a progressive, philosophical/spiritual interpretation of Islam with a focus on women's rights, Islamic philosophy, and sufism. For modernist contemporary scholars, see the works of Amina Wadud, Margot Badran, Tariq Ramadan, Abdul Karim Sorousch, Shaheen Sardar Ali, Leyla Ahmad, Fatima Mernissi, Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd among many others. The modernist approach must not be identified with "modernity/modern" as opposed to "traditional", a questionable dichotomy in itself since many traditional and Islamist movements are based on modernity and are products of modernity.

⁴ As something new in Europe, FEMIMAM has performed interreligious *Nikah* ceremonies. (Islamic wedding)

Background and Context

Religion and religious leaders play an important role in modern societies and for many years women have been an object of study for academics trying to identify women's role in religious institutions and in the public debate on religion. Egypt is one among other countries that led the struggle for women's empowerment in the Middle East. In 1923 the first feminist movements and organizations started to blossom. Huda Sharawi founded the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923. Nabawiyah Musa was the first Egyptian woman, who got her college diploma in 1907 (without having received any college teaching). At that time women were not allowed to take college exams in Egypt and after Nabawiyah's triumph, the British rule in Egypt forbade other women to take the college exams. The Egyptian feminist movements inspired a new generation in North Africa and in the Middle East. The Moroccan sociologist and feminist writer Fatima Mernissi (1940-2015) founded a new Islamic feminist paradigm in the 1980s along with Amina Wadud and other prominent female scholars. The idea was that women's role are changing along with new family and social structures. The Quran is being re-read and re-interpreted in order to liberate women from patriarchal systems and traditions. The idea of complementarity is being challenged by modern feminists. Margot Badran, a leading scholar in Islamic Studies and history of Arab women, argues that the concept of "the family" is a modern construction with no base in the holy scripture of Islam. Women and men are equal and there is no such thing as fixed roles in the Quran according to Badran.

What is new to the field of religion and its impact on society and gender studies is the religious women's own steps into changing the religious structure demanding female religious leadership at an institutional level being it female rabbis, ordained pastors, or female imams. In 2006, 100 Muslim women leaders from all over the world met in New York City and established an international women empowerment movement called WISE: *Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity*. The Muslim women leaders represented academia, civil society, art, politics, and religion. The aim was to network, strategize, and share best practices around the joint mission of advancing the rights of Muslim women.

In Denmark the first female pastors were ordained in April 1948 within the Protestant church. Today the number of female and male pastors is about the same and women have a higher representation than men at The Faculties of Theology at Danish Universities. In Denmark minority groups of Jewish and Muslim scholars, both men and women, argue for the same development within the Jewish and Islamic religious communities calling for Scandinavian full-time female rabbis and imams. The changing religious discourse challenges the traditional roles of men and women in religious institutions.

In the Middle East similar developments are taking place. *“Only a few women have been ordained in the Middle East, and it seems in the example of Lebanon first and foremost to be the Presbyterian Church that gives room for women to act as religious leaders, though not ordained. The Orthodox and Catholic Churches do not have female pastors, but women play a significant social role. The Druze community in Lebanon does not allow female imams, but women are highly considered as part of society. The formal role of women within Sunni and Shia Islamic institutions in Lebanon seems to be more of a social and administrative role.”* (Danmission)

In the beginning of 2015 a Danish organization, FEMIMAM, was launched to advocate for the inclusion of women functioning as imams in Denmark. In autumn 2016, FEMIMAM is planning to launch one of Europe’s first women’s mosques with female imams leading the Friday *khutbah* (sermon) and Friday prayer for other women. FEMIMAM works to dissolve patriarchal structures in the leadership of religious worship and education, and to challenge men’s monopoly of the interpretation of the Quran. In Los Angeles a women’s mosque for women with female imams was launched in 2015. While FEMIMAM is faced with opposition by most male imams in Denmark, the mosque in Los Angeles is supported by the greater Islamic communities and imams in Los Angeles. In Bradford, England women are planning to open a women’s mosque with female imams too. According to these new female movements and other women working to integrate female imams into the mosque, the legitimacy of female imams is based on the Quranic scripture and on the Islamic traditions, as well as on the need for educated female spiritual advisors, who can focus on women’s rights.

Female imams are not a new phenomenon. Mosques with female imams have been active in China since the 1820s, in South Africa since 1995, in Canada since 2005, and in Los Angeles since 2015. Amina Wadud has led the prayer for mixed gender in different European countries and in Germany you can find a small group of progressive Muslims with a female imam leading the prayer for both women and men. In Morocco the state educates 50 female *murshidats*⁵ (religious teachers/advisors) a year, who work to combat religious extremism and radicalization with a special focus on religious enlightenment for young women and dialogue in rural areas with a high level of illiteracy. Women empowerment movements, institutions, and initiatives are spreading throughout the world, and women seem to gain more knowledge, power, and influence in religious fields. Still, women continue to be challenged in the religious sphere and the domination of men is intact within many Islamic, Jewish, and Christian traditions. According to the female informants in this report, this is due to the fact that many religious systems are patriarchal in belief and practice.

⁵ The Moroccan Ministry of Islamic Affairs has endorsed women’s presence and authority in the religious sphere through the training of female religious preachers (*murshidat*) and scholars (*‘alimat*). 50 *murshidat* are trained every year to contribute to strengthening the country’s “spiritual security”. The concept of spiritual security emerged in the context of the 2003 terrorist attacks which took place in Casablanca.

Danmission holds the belief that religious communities are important players when it comes to strengthen interfaith understanding and societies built on citizenship. As something new Danmission wants to focus on women as religious leaders. Women have something to offer and the struggle for equality is an essential part of the larger struggle for rights-based societies. Therefore it is of great importance to support the female leaders in The Middle East and elsewhere. Danmission wish to do so by challenging the current power structures in religious institutions, structures and communities together with progressive female and male voices within the systems in order to create ownership and local anchoring.

Objective and Method

The objective of the report is to uncover the needs and means to empower the formal and informal role of women within religious communities in Lebanon, the wider MENA region and Denmark.

This report is based on documentation, interviews, and round table discussions and serves to present the findings of the external evaluation. The views, conclusions and recommendations of the report are the sole responsibility of the consultant, and not necessarily shared by Danmission or any other stakeholders.

Documentation

The consultant has read relevant strategic documents including Danmission's DAPP Programme 2015 and MENA Strategy 2015-2017.

Interviews and Round Table Discussions

In order to highlight the issue of women empowerment in religious institutions in Lebanon, 11 female leaders within religious institutions, civil society, and academia were identified by the consultant and Danmission. The women come from Christian and Islamic communities.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with six women in the first week of June 2015. The interviews were held in Beirut and each interview lasted 1-2 hours. Some of the interviews took place at the informants' work place/organizations and some were held at The American University of Beirut and local cafes. Two of the informants, Ghida Anani and Zoya Rouhana, are founders and leaders of ABAAD and KAFA, Lebanese NGOs combating violence against women. Others represent academia, religious communities, and social NGOs.

One-on-One Interviews with Lebanese Women

- Khadijah-Hanine Lakkis, Lecturer, MA in Cultural Projects for Development
- Ghida Anani, MA in Clinical Counseling, Founder and Director of ABAAD, Resource Center For Gender Equality, Lebanese NGO combating violence against women.
- Radwa Salah, Practitioner of Interfaith Dialogue and FDCD regional coordinator
- Dr. Hosn Abboud, Researcher and Writer
- Zoya Rouhana, Founder and Director of KAFA, Violence & Exploitation, NGO combating violence against women.
- Dima Dabbous, Senior Consultant on Arab Media Laws and Regulations, UNESCO, and Editor-in-Chief of *Al-Raida*, (the peer-reviewed, feminist journal published by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University).

Round table Meeting in Beirut June 2, 2015

A round table discussion with five other women were held in Danmission's office in Beirut on the June 2, 2015:

- Najla Kassab, Executive Committee Member, World Communion of Reformed Churches
- Elsy Wakil, Regional Secretary, World Student Christian Federation ME
- Maliha Sadr, Director of ECIL Center, A Subsidiary of Imam Sadr Foundation
- Nayla Tabbara, Director Adyan Institute
- Diana Nassar Malaeb, founding member of the Dialogue Moltaqa in Lebanon and Lecturer at Saint Joseph University

The round table was facilitated by the consultant Sherin Khankan and attended by Maria Lindhardt, The Regional Representative from Danmission and her colleague Sofie Dahl.

Danmission facilitated and hosted the first female interreligious meeting with a focus on how to empower women within religious communities. The women were gathered to learn from each other's experiences and gain knowledge about how to empower women in Lebanon.

Round table discussion in Denmark

A similar interreligious roundtable discussion was conducted in Copenhagen on August 17, 2015 with eight Danish female religious and academic leadership representatives from different Muslim and Christian communities in Denmark:

Signe Malene Berg, Priest in Copenhagen Cathedral

Masnoon Rana, Head of Minhaj ul Quran Youth in Denmark

Aminah Tønnsen, Author of books on Islam

Line Mansour, Head Principal at a Danish/Arabic Private School, and representative of Imam Ali Mosque, Shia community

Katja Machon Madsen, MA in Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, Imam Ali Mosque (Shia)

Kirsten Jørgensen, Pastor, Author, MA in Middle Eastern Studies, member of Danmission

Mette Møbjerg Madsen, Master in Theology and Consultant

Lise Paulsen Galal, Associate Professor in Cultural Encounters, Roskilde University, Denmark

The round table was facilitated by the consultant, Sherin Khankan and attended by Line Stange Ramsdal and Rosa Marie Rasmussen from Danmission.

One-on-one Interviews with Danish Women

One-on-one interviews were held with four leading female representatives from the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities in Denmark:

1. Ellen Margrethe Gylling, Pastor
2. Adrienne Mannov, PhD and President of Forum for Progressive Jews, Shir Hatzafon
3. Line Mansour, Head Principal and female representative of Imam Ali Mosque
4. Mahvish Ahmad, PhD student at Cambridge University, journalist and activist

This report summarizes the thoughts, advice, and conclusions of the different female actors and contains quotes and stories from the women.

It includes findings and recommendations from a Lebanese as well as a Danish context.

The recommendations will be a critical reflection of suggestions by stakeholders in Lebanon and Denmark.

To sum up this report includes:

- Fieldwork in Lebanon.
- Challenges and possibilities based on interviews with key stakeholders in Lebanon and Denmark.
- An interreligious round table discussion in Lebanon and Denmark.
- Recommendations for further development of gender mainstreaming projects, advocacy means and institutional cooperation.
- Recommendations both process oriented and oriented on institutional changes with a focus on empowerment of women's formal role either as female imams and pastors or in relation to more social/administrative tasks.

Together with Danmission the consultant worked out the following overall questions to the one-on-one interviews and to the round table discussions. Finally, the consultant will use these different cases and quotations to frame a discussion on possible solutions and experience sharing. In the findings/discussion section I will look at different religious women's coping strategies regarding male supremacy within the religious sphere.

Questions:

- What is the role of women within your religious community?
- How would you describe your role? (Social, cultural, relational, spiritual, scriptural, etc.)
- What are the needs in relation to women empowerment in your religious community?
- Do you see a need to change the role of women? Advantages and disadvantages of the existing formal and informal system
- If yes, how can the change take place? What could Danmission do to support that change? And what could a cross-religious cooperation contribute with?
- Three challenges that you are facing or have faced in your professional life concerning empowerment of women and try to range these challenges.
- Joint recommendations on the subject.

Findings

There is an overall impression from the interviews and round table discussion in Beirut that a lot of important work and interventions are being performed by these women and their organizations/institutions to empower women within religious structures. There are a number of noteworthy initiatives undertaken in recent years building on the momentum brought by the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring spurred a growing sense that old political and religious structures or regimes could be questioned or dismantled.

What is being done in the field of advocating for leadership within religious institutions is small-scale. It faces a lot of opposition from men and some women. Women empowerment in religious institutions is often perceived as threatening according to some of the informants in Lebanon and Denmark. For the women who walk in front, who engage in the confrontation, in the quest to dismantle dominant paradigms and structures in the existing religious hierarchy, the need for collaboration, support, coordination, and sharing of experience is vital. At the round tables in Lebanon and Denmark the women found great support and hope for the future in exchanging stories.

It is important, necessary work undertaken by these women but also work that takes a high toll. Sharing stories in an interreligious forum is a concrete tool against loneliness and empowering in itself, the women declared. The mirroring process at the round table discussions was a unique experience underlining the common obstacles the women are sharing within their different fields and organizations. It became clear that the women often have to pay a personal and professional price when advocating for female leadership in religious institutions.

It is important for women to meet across sectarian and religious differences especially in a sectarian country like Lebanon. Many recommendations seem to be on the structural/organizational level, to increase collaboration and set up fora/platforms for cooperation. Danmission has a long tradition for interreligious networks but they are often dominated by male religious leaders. Creating interreligious groups for female leaders only is a recommendation that could build on Danmissions existing interreligious programme concerning interfaith dialogue.

The struggle or quest for female leadership and visibility in positions of power is part of a larger movement. There is a recognition among these Lebanese women that their work is part of a larger, rich and complex, national and pan-Arabic history of women's empowerment. There is a history in Islam of prominent female theological figures. Importantly, for these women the struggle is not perceived as superimposed or imported from the West. It is considered an indigenous struggle with an indigenous history.

Lebanon's history of war and current situation with the Syrian refugee crisis affect the struggle for women empowerment. Some of the Arab women would claim that "this is not the time for women empowerment, when the Syrian women are suffering". 1 in 4 is a Syrian

refugee in Lebanon. Lebanon is characterised by fractured politics, a divided parliament and garbage overflowing the streets. This is an urgent social and political reality. Still other women argue for women empowerment being even more necessary in times like these.

We are burdened with war. When humanity is dying we cannot focus on our (women) cause. We have a history of ruin. God give me wisdom to do change.

Women are sold in Syria. Human dignity is attacked. (Najla Kassab)

Some of the women also highlight Lebanon's confessionalist politics and pose the question of "How to rise in that kind of a system."

The following recurring themes can be identified in the conversations and round tables with the women in Lebanon and Denmark.⁶

1. Dilemmas concerning women's religious leadership and patriarchal structures
2. Coping mechanism in tackling the inequality and patriarchal structure
3. The traditional position versus the modernist approach
4. The dividing line between secularist and religious discourse/agendas.

1. Dilemmas concerning women's religious leadership and patriarchal structures

In order to empower women within religious communities one has to understand the obstacles or dilemmas these women are facing. At the round table in Lebanon four major obstacles were highlighted by the women: 1. The family law is discriminating women. 2. The interpretation of Holy Scriptures are often discriminating women. 3. The Lebanese culture and traditions are favoring boys and men. 4. The urgent social and political reality make women feel guilty of fighting for women's right. They are told: "this is not the right time and place", since women are sold in Syria. Still most women found the struggle for women's rights closely linked to the fight for human dignity. The following quotations highlight dilemmas and obstacles within the mosques, churches, and universities in Lebanon:

In the past women were not allowed to have a place in the public and because of this you will find hadith arguing: "The woman's mosque is her house". For women to have a mosque of their own is to have power. This is why some find a female mosque threatening because it gives the women public space. Women mosques will empower women and give them a chance to create alternatives to Salafi movements. (Dr. Hosn Abboud)

⁶ There are a variety of themes that one could highlight as important findings. The four themes are not representing all the themes that were discussed. The four selected themes were repeated and therefore considered significant.

When I finished my studies I wanted to study Masters of divinity, which allows you to be a pastor. The head at that time said: "No, No you cannot study here". So I said: "I'm leaving". I went to the US and had my degree from Princeton University.

I wanted to serve the church and I believed God had given me the ability, but I found my challenges since 1993. Now we have 4 women, who have a preaching license. Things are changing in our churches. If women are not in the decision making boards it will take forever to change things. (Najla Kassab)

There are conservatives who are not ready to introduce new topics related to Feminism in religious studies or in literature. They don't believe in women studies as a multidisciplinary academic field. (Dr. Hosn Abboud)

2. Coping mechanism in tackling the inequality and patriarchal structure

It is possible to identify different coping mechanisms in tackling the inequality and patriarchal structure. Some women find peace in the current situation of women not being able to reach the highest hierarchy of leadership. Instead they focus on spiritual care and educational activism. Others insist on confronting the gender discrimination at an institutional level as well as on a social/ educational level. Common for most women though is the ability to find new and creative ways of tackling gender discrimination. Another coping mechanism is empowerment through religious education and knowledge.

We are spiritual advisors already. I don't need the title imam. To me it's more important to be useful to others and I already function as a spiritual advisor for other women. Our role as women in the mosque is to teach the others. I don't need the title "imam" to teach. I'm not important. We are all important. The harmony of the larger community is important. Educating women is important. (Katja Machon Madsen- Shia Imam Ali Mosque in Copenhagen)

In our Mosque we are allowed to do anything we want. They don't differ between men and women and we are not ignored as women. On the contrary we are asked to represent the Imam Ali Mosque to the Danish public. (Line Mansour)

It is always the argument to say, that this is not the right time for women empowerment. Not the right time for female imams. If not now it will be never. We are in a transition phase and we have to fight for women empowerment. (Ghida Anani)

If you want to speak about feminism within the monotheistic religions we are facing the patriarchy. I know the great symbols within the religion and the history of how both Christian and Muslim traditions agreed to hide things from women and suppress women. In Islam, however, women were a part of the religious tradition and they passed Hadith to students both male and female. One of Ibn Arabi's (1165-1240) teachers was a woman. So I am confident that God spoke to both men and women and that women were a part of the rise and message of Islam. (Dr. Hosn Abboud)

One of the main obstacles in the Druze community is the patriarchy. Men are in power politically. The Druze council is male dominated. Some women have highly profiled religious positions in society, but only because they are related to powerful men. Women can change the pattern and through the Sufi path they can gain spiritual power. Some women are highly educated in religion but do not wish to be sheikha because, then they will lose their privileges. They don't wish to be symbols, who cannot communicate. Some women are committed, go to universities and make changes for women within the Druze community. (Diana Nassar Malaeb)

The Danish Church has become "feminized" with a focus on practical theology such as pastoral care, spiritual advising, children's education. All of this is good. But we need to separate this development from the gender. Both men and women should be involved in practical theology and not mostly women. Both men and women should be occupied with dogmatics and not mostly men. (Kirsten Jørgensen, pastor)

Because I'm a woman, I have experienced male dominance within the religious field. Therefore I decided to empower myself within this field. (Radwa Salah)

3. The traditional position versus the modernist approach

Some of the women consider the patriarchal interpretation of the religious scriptures and the patriarchal structures in society as main obstacles concerning female religious leadership. Some agree that it is not the scriptures in itself that discriminate women, but the interpretations of the scriptures. Therefore the women find it vital to promote leading female and male scholars who have a modernist approach to the scriptures. Within the Islamic debate on women and empowerment it is possible to identify three overall positions: The traditionalist position, the Islamist position, and the modernist position. Some of the women argue that women empowerment is closely linked to the modernist position be it Muslim, Christian, or Jewish communities. The women argue that the modernist position is about re-reading and re-interpreting the religious scriptures according to our times and societies. The inspiration from the Moroccan female scholar Fatima Mernissi is clear. The informants go back to the sources of their religions in order to claim women empowerment. Still some of the women claim the importance of respecting, understanding and cooperating with traditionalists, while advocating the modernist approach.

We are going back to the sources with a 21st century mind. (Nayla Tabbara)

Al-Azhar approves of female imams for other women. There were women that lead the prayer at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, this is stated clearly in the tradition. The Salafis go for the exception of the rules. We should go for the rules and female imams is the rule in Islam. When Amina Wadud held the prayer for men and women in New York in 2006, the response of many Mufti- leaders (from Al-Azhar to Qaradawi) were defensive. They could have opened up for a discussion as the

great master Ibn Rushd did, but they chose to reject the female imamate of Man without room for diversity or questions. As far as female imamate to women I don't think it's an issue at all. Shafi allowed female imams leading women. Maliki refused it. Tabari allowed full imamate. Full imamate means female imams leading prayer to women as well as men. (Dr. Hosn Abboud)

I became more empowered, when I studied Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd⁷, because somehow I felt, I was right. I believe the Quran is suitable for any time and any place but we need to purify or update our fiqh in order to empower women. Women at the time of the Prophet Muhammad were more empowered than women of today. (Radwa Salah)

Women are quite empowered in our congregation, but we are also part of a wider Jewish tradition in which, women are not always welcome as leaders, particularly in gender-mixed religious activities. In addition, there is sometimes a more social perception even in progressive/liberal circles, that more traditional and gender segregated practices are somehow more authentic. If we need empowerment, it would be on this more social level, rather than a structural one. One big problem that we have, and this is not just a gender issue, is that, it is very difficult to educate and recruit Scandinavian rabbis, who come from a liberal/progressive background. Supporting this process financially would contribute to a more diverse religious landscape in Denmark and within the Danish-Jewish community – including agendas and practices that support gender equality. As it is now, we do not have the funds to hire a full-time rabbi and this limits the amount of activities we can run and our visibility in the public space. (Adrienne Mannov, Forum For Progressive Jews)

4.The dividing line between secularist and religious discourse/agendas.

The question of the relationship between religion and secularism divides the informants' struggle for women's rights. Some of the informants argue that the struggle for women empowerment is not a battle between religious people and secularists underlining that the women empowerment movements are also lead by religious scholars, who use their religious authority to promote female leadership. They claim that the battle is between supporters of the "traditional woman" and supporters of the "new woman". Others argue that only a secular society with secular laws can ensure women's rights. Most women agree that the religious discourse can co-exist with the secular discourse as long as secularism is defined and practised as a dialogue between religion and politics/society and not as a strict separation between religion and politics. They also argue that female religious leaders have credibility locally and therefore can motivate positive changes for women. Ghida Anani, who is the founder of the Lebanese NGO Abaad – combating violence against women, argues for the need to combine the secular and the religious discourse in combating violence. The same goes for Dima Dabbous, who is a researcher.

⁷Nasr Hamed Abu Zayd (1943-2010), Professor of Islamic philosophy at Cairo University.

Violence in all its forms is condemned, but we seek to understand and address the root causes of the violence. We started to cooperate with religious leaders and all of a sudden all the radical feminists were against us and we were accused of giving religious leaders credibility and more power and validation. (Ghida Anani)

The religious NGOs are the ones who have a real base.

People listen to the sheikh. And if a religious woman says: The prophet said in his goodbye sermon: I entrust you with the women they are as fragile as glass. That will appeal to the women. This is empowering the women. They will consider leaving the violent husband. The secular discourse does not really touch on a personal level the way it should. The ideas can be western, universal, international but it has to be rooted in religion to connect with the people at a deeper level. Understanding Islam is an important issue when you live in the Middle East. Everything that has to do with your personal life, marriage, death, custody, divorce is regulated by religious laws. Most of the prominent NGOs are secular. This is their weakness because it makes them unable to really engage the policymakers and to have a popular base because people are religious and have a religious identity. (Dima Dabbous)

Zoya Rouhana, the director of KAFA another Lebanese NGO combating violence is arguing opposite Ghida Anani and Dima Dabbous. Zoya Rouhana sees the secular discourse as the most effective way to empower women:

We will not reach unity in Lebanon unless we build a state on citizenship. Unfortunately the political state today is build on confessional divisions. We believe this is a very big problem especially concerning women issues. One of the main obstacles preventing women from their rights is the personal laws in Lebanon that discriminate against women. These laws are patriarchal. It's the same for all religions – Christians and Muslims all of them expect the women to obey and follow her husband. If she disobeys his orders she will be considered disobedient and will be deprived of her rights. This is the main obstacle – the family laws. The secular law will establish equal rights and solve a lot of the existing problems. There is an article in the Institution giving the rights to all the religious groups to have their own regulations within family issues in order to regulate their own communities. The Parliament gives power to the religious communities on these matters. One of the main sources of violence against women are these family laws that exist. We try to provide help within the existing systems. But often we cannot provide help to these women because the laws are against us. For women, there are a lot of obstacles to obtain divorce. Within the Shia sect she cannot divorce without the acceptance from the husband. In the Maronite sect divorce is not allowed neither for women or for men. (They can apply either for separation or for the annulment of marriage) (Zoya Rouhana, Director of KAFA)

Joint Recommendations from Lebanon and Denmark

The following sums up the recommendations from the one-on-one interviews and round table in Lebanon and Denmark under three overarching headings: 1) interreligious network for female leaders; 2) strengthening education in and exposure to modernist frameworks of theological interpretation; and 3) social initiatives. The consultant has elaborated on the recommendations and added her own as well.

1. An Interreligious Female Network in Lebanon and Denmark

The women at the round tables in Beirut and Copenhagen all agree on a recommendation concerning the establishment of an interreligious network for female religious leaders and secular leaders in Lebanon and Denmark. The aim is to share stories, learn from each other, find common ground and means to empower women within religious institutions. It also aims to share experiences and challenges, and to foster a better awareness of possibilities. The network should work on concrete and operational suggestions for improving the access of women to leadership roles within their communities. All women agree on the importance of cooperating with secular groups in order to make change. They agree on meeting every second month and think it will be better to be small in numbers inside the women's forum in the beginning. The women discussed ways to inform media and others on the interreligious women's forum. The women are aware that the struggles and experiences of religious women vary considerably from locale to locale, based on a diversity of factors. The goals of the female network extend beyond simply furthering mutual awareness of ongoing advancements and building a shared experience and affinity. The underlying aim is to create a legitimate and coherent movement that empowers women within religious and social communities. Danmission already hosted the first two interreligious network meetings for female religious representatives in Beirut and Copenhagen. Therefore the basis for this concrete suggestion is already in action and can be implemented. Adrienne Mannov, who I did an one-on-one interview with in Denmark had the following comment on the women's idea of an interreligious network:

Progressive and liberal Jews have a lot of experience with implementing gender equality in practice in their communities and have struggled to do so earlier and in part still do, in ways, for example, that some Muslim women struggle with. I think that our experiences could be a great source of ideas and support for other women, who have not yet been able to implement such changes. Not that other communities should copy what we have done, but perhaps draw inspiration from our experiences on what is possible and to help make clear where precisely they might like to be, by way of comparison. (Adrienne Mannov, Forum for Progressive Jews)

According to Ghida Anani, the female interreligious network with female academic and religious leaders in Lebanon has to be united on what kind of changes it wishes to make and more importantly on defined common goals:

1. *Advocacy points and plans- we need a concrete plan of how to empower women. Curriculum development and cooperating with the Ministry of Education and Ministry Of Social Affairs*
2. *How to work with women in political parties and strengthen women in decision making processes*
3. *Three years plan- consensus.*

Ghida Anani raises the need for conceptual resources on religion in Arabic in the work of educating NGOs. She also mentions the need for training journalists in ethical journalism, study visits to learn from other countries, and online library resources in English.

i. Interreligious female website

In order to stay connected and to strengthen the bond between female leaders within different religions, the women suggest the creation of a website where the interreligious groups can share stories on female religious leadership, articles, books, facebook page etc. The website will connect all the religious female pastors, imams, rabbis and other religious leaders.

ii. Three international conferences

The consultant suggests three interreligious conferences to be held in Morocco, Lebanon, and Denmark for female religious leaders, leading academics, and social activists with a focus on women empowerment and sharing experiences. The conferences will include female pastors, imams and rabbis.

iii. Scholarships

The feminist organisation WISE in New York City has worked for the establishment of an endowment to provide scholarships for ten Muslim women to become Muftis (one licensed to render religious judgments or fatwas within an Islamic legal framework around the globe).

In order to educate more young female leaders, the women suggest enhancing opportunities for scholarships for women, who are ready to go further in theological training in Christianity, Judaism and Islam. According to the informants, women need experience with reading the holy texts and there is a lack of trained women within theological circles.

You call for women to be involved but you find a limited number of qualified women. We need to prepare and educate more women. The true obstacles are the lack of trained women and full time rabbis or imams.

iv. Female youth leaders

Some of the informants suggest special workshops, programming, and network opportunities to empower the youth and women so that they are not manipulated to join radical movements. As an extension of the focus on education and scholarships, the consultant proposes the identification of aspiring, young women leaders and the establishment of an interreligious female youth leaders network.

v. Women's forum at religious schools

Khadijah Lakkis recommends introducing a women's forum in religious schools. Her idea is to unite leaders from the different schools into one national women's forum. *"Academics, heads of religious schools. We have to learn about all religions through our school systems. Hatred flowers because we don't know each other. All the female heads of the religious schools should teach the others in their beliefs and ways of conducting their religion at the school. Then we should formulate a common official letter of recommendation. We need a combination of religious female leaders, academic non-religious female leaders and female Islamic scholars."* (Khadijah Lakkis)

2. Education and Exposure to Modernist Frameworks of Theological Interpretation

The women agree on the need for educating religious leaders in modernist interpretational approaches. A first step would involve identifying regional and international religious modernist male and female scholars, who can strengthen modernist and feminist approaches to the interpretation of the holy text. The modernist interpretation is vital as it gives room for a critical mind, feminism, pluralism and diversity in interpretation and at the same time it is concerned with women's urgent contemporary issues. Danmission can help set up a taskforce to identify modernist-inclined women and men from grassroots and academic backgrounds. Danmission can also support curriculum development activities among religious scholars and leaders, who can then introduce courses at religious institutions and universities in the modernist approach and invite guest speakers representing the modernist approach. The modernist approach serves as an alternative narrative to more radical, orthodox or intolerant views.

The question of empowerment has to include both women and men, some of the women argue. Women empowerment and progressive thought have to be rooted among the youth but also among traditional or conservative imams in order to spread in the larger community. Radwa Salah raises the question of the modernist religious approach and how to find creative ways to integrate conservative and modernist views:

We need to start working with the more open-minded imams and the more orthodox/conservative imams. We need to change their perspectives on women's role in society. The idea is to create a forum for male and female religious leaders representing orthodox/conservative as well as modernist communities. The idea is to educate the leaders in progressive thoughts. (Radwa Salah FDCD Regional Coordinator)

3. Social Initiatives

i. Family project

Listening to the women's life stories it becomes clear that some of the women were brought up in families with strong mothers symbolizing female leadership and with fathers, who told them that they could be anything they wanted to be. One of the obstacles facing many women in Lebanon as well as elsewhere is the patriarchal structure in the family, society in general, work place, political and religious institutions. Patriarchal thinking exists within many religions, cultures, and environments. Therefore the consultant suggests a project that empowers families in order to dissolve patriarchal structures. The family projects aim is to work with families and family structures looking at the roots of the problems. The idea is to identify five families of different religious background and teach them about equality, women's rights and give them the opportunity to share life stories. The families will be given cognitive tools to tackle problems within the family concerning patriarchal structures. After a five week course the teachers will pick out two families from the five educated families and let them teach five other new families together with specialists in the field. The problems with religious orthodoxy/rigidity or patriarchy is stated by informant Radwa Saleh:

I'm an Egyptian from a Muslim/Sunni conservative family. I was raised to be a good Muslim. I was always thinking, that I would die soon and that I had to prepare myself. It was a very harsh Muslim upbringing. I did not feel, that I had a real life, because I was always aware and preparing myself for Judgment day. I do not know if this is relevant, but I think our upbringing matters, when it comes to defining roles of men and women. I was always afraid of my parents' judgment, since I was very young. I had so many questions about my faith, but I was not allowed to show my doubt or ask questions. I could not find answers and even though I was not convinced, I had to accept it. You are not allowed to use your mind and this is not logical since God created us with minds and asked us to use it and to seek knowledge. (Radwa Salah)

ii. Mother/daughter project

Line Mansour representing the Shia community in Denmark and the new grand Shia mosque in Copenhagen speaks about the difficulties concerning generation gaps between mothers and daughters. Line Mansour suggests a project in both Lebanon and Denmark where mothers and daughters sit together in a joint forum. The goal is to share stories across generations and to know more about the other generation in order to empower both generations through the example of the other. The project could adapt a similar structure as suggested in the family project.

iii. Training *murshidats* (religious advisors) in Lebanon after the Moroccan model

Dima Dabbous among others refer to the *murshidats* in Morocco as a model for emulation within religious communities. The Moroccan state educates 50 *murshidats* a year both to combat radicalization and to educate the illiterate about Islam and women's empowerment

with a focus on how to avoid early marriages and educate girls and boys. It could be possible to educate Lebanese *murshidats* in order to educate women and families in rural areas. The success of the Moroccan *murshidats* is not without controversy, though. State-sponsored women preachers and spiritual advisors in Morocco are to a great extent a response to political Islam and can be viewed by the public as an attempt to endorse the authority of the state to control or silence the dynamics of religion in Morocco and to combat voices of individuals or groups that operate outside of the official religious discourse. Therefore the Moroccan model would be better off not being state-sponsored in Lebanon. Instead, a pilot project could educate Lebanese *murshidats* with respect for all religions and religious orientations and with a contemporary/spiritual approach to the Holy Scriptures.

The feminist movements in Morocco are very successful because of their discourse. If I'm a Sunni woman I want people who can understand me. That's why the women movements in Morocco are so successful because they use a religious discourse. They want to go back to the time of the prophet. But who cares. As long as it works. It does something. We cannot be disconnected from the hearts of the people. In south Lebanon we have the phenomenon of Muslim women preachers who go to homes. But I do not know about their ideas. They are very powerful. They have followers. I don't know what they teach. You have to be careful with empowerment because some of these women's religious leaders are powerful. It's not about them being empowered. I'm interested in their discourse. The issue is what do they exactly preach. If they are conservative what have you gained by empowering them. I know about Morocco and Murshidat's is ok in order to counter extremism. But other people here: what exactly are they saying. Some of them are super conservative. It's not only about empowering women. You have to know what they are teaching. You want a discourse that empowers women not discourses that keeps the women at home. We don't want women to be told to stay in their houses. Empowering women is about teaching women that they have the right to be who they are.

I like to take examples from other Arabic countries like the murshidats in Morocco. Murshidats have a training in theology. The religious women who go to houses here in Lebanon are powerful but it is informal. I'd rather work on the formal discourse like the example of the murshidats in Morocco. (Dima Dabbous)

iv. Empowerment through combating violence against women

Family violence is the most common form of violence experienced by women in Lebanon and globally, says Zoya Rouhana, who similarly to Ghida Anani from ABAAD works to break the silence and create awareness of the widespread mental and physical abuse of women. Violence against women, be it mental or physical, is closely linked to patriarchal structures and the lack of equality between men and women. Thus combating violence against women is an important battle and a part of the greater fight for women empowerment. Some women underline the importance of helping women in the rural areas, and religious activists operating in these remote areas as a part of a human rights strategy.

“Women often stay in their houses in villages or remote areas without any possibility of empowerment. How can we help these women? Especially divorced, widowed, singles in rural areas have difficulties finding a way in life”. (Khadijah Lakkis)

On a practical level there is a lot to be done, according to Zoya Rouhana, director of KAFA. The need for changing patriarchal practices and structures is big, especially the personal status law in Lebanon, that still discriminates against women. She mentions seven steps that Danmission can support:

- 1. Establish a shelter and a police station for women who face violence. The state should have this facility. In Sweden, in Malmø, they have a place run by the police but with social workers, doctors, and legal advisors.*
- 2. Raise awareness of the law of violence. All women should know the law and how to benefit from it.*
- 3. Training of all involved people: police, social workers etc.*
- 4. Support cooperation with other human rights organisations concerning the new law.*
- 5. Campaign to criminalize marital rape*
- 6. More safe-houses for women and children*
- 7. Specialized programs for girls under 18*

(Zoya Rouhana)

Academic Dima Dabbous introduces the concept of “the invisible foot soldiers”. The term refers to the unknown NGOs and individuals who work with absolutely minimum means and no support. Dima Dabbous suggests the building of a task force to identify and support these groups, NGOs and individuals.

Even though some of them are very conservative they work to protect the women from violence. We need to support NGO's who work with the undeveloped areas. They don't know how to apply for funding. They don't even have a webpage. And there's the language barrier. You need to write in English to apply for funding. We need to change the funding process. We need a task force to identify these groups and support them. I know a woman who is a Sunni Muslim and a lawyer and she is working with KAFA. Iqbal Duran. She is an amazing woman. She changed the custody age for Sunni kids from 7-12. She is behind it. She does not have the infra structure as KAFA. She works with a group of elder women, who had a carrier and a life but with very little means. Because she is a lawyer she has cases and people come to her. They need structure and funding. These are the women who changes- the invisible foot soldiers. (Dima Dabbous)

Ghida Anani recommends closed dialogue sessions between religious institutions and civil society on different concepts that are disempowering women such as obedience, custody, marital rape, punishment, violence, honour killing, and inheritance. These concepts limit women and can lead to violence, Ghida Anani says.

We need to redefine these concepts. Redefine- finding common concepts between the civil and religious communities. According to us, values and morals are the same across any religion and ethnicity. We need to focus on common values. What brings us together. We did a manual to work with religious leaders. What can religious leaders do to end violence. (Ghida Anani)

v. Women's right to divorce

In the light of the obstacles mentioned by the majority of the Lebanese informants concerning the discriminatory family laws in Lebanon, I, the consultant suggest a project focusing on women's right to divorce. It is my experience from the interviews in Lebanon as well as from my work in Denmark, that a lot of women suffer from the fact that they are denied a *talaq*/islamic divorce even in cases with severe violence. This is due to the fact that the majority of *nikah* contracts do not allow Muslim women the right to divorce even though this right is allowed in Islamic jurisprudence and widely accepted not only by modernist Islamic scholars but also by traditional and conservative scholars. The idea is to select ten of the leading imams and female religious leaders from Denmark, England and Lebanon to attend a meeting. At the meeting female and male experts in Islamic sharia will suggest ways to standardize an Islamic marital contract giving Muslim women the right to divorce. Professor in Islamic law and jurisprudence Shaheen Sardar Ali could be one of the teachers.

The imams will discuss freely and give their legal and differing opinion on the matter. After returning home three of the ten imams, who agree on women's right to divorce, will select ten other imams in their country and teach them afterwards under supervision of teachers. A few male and female imams in Denmark already implement women's right to divorce in the *nikah* contract. In England this is also practised and advice could be sought from the British experience. The aim is to mainstream a *nikah* contract that allows women the Islamic divorce (*talaq*) and rights over their children in case of divorce.

As founder of KAFA Zoya Rouhana stated: "*For women, there are a lot of obstacles to obtain divorce*". The denial of the Islamic divorce in some marriages is a problem in Muslim communities both in Europe and elsewhere.

How to implement recommendations into Danmission's existing programs

The recommendations from Lebanon and Denmark are many and some can be implemented and elaborated in some of Danmissions existing programmes such as Syrian Youth Encounter, International Work and Study Camp, Interfaith Education for International Citizenship (IIC), Leaders of Interreligious Understanding and Counter-extremism (LIU) and Contact Group for Muslims and Christians.

The interreligious women's network in Lebanon and Denmark will strengthen women's position. Danmission has identified women as a vulnerable and excluded group in most Middle Eastern societies. To address the issue and change the conditions of women, female

religious leaders should be supported. The consultant suggests that the interreligious network in Lebanon and Denmark meet at least four times a year in each country and that the Lebanese Religious Leaders Group meet up with the Danish Religious Leaders Group twice a year in each country in order to share experiences and network. This will broaden Danmission's Danish network and outreach in relation to its work in MENA and ensure cooperation with Muslim partners to increase local credibility. The interreligious female network can elaborate on Danmission's existing programmes such as Contact group for Muslims and Christians.

The suggested interreligious female youth network can be an extension of Danmission's programme of Leaders of Interreligious Understanding and Counter-extremism. The same model of choosing 32 female youth from Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Denmark could be implemented in order to train the female youth in women leadership. In some MENA settings, women are not encouraged to become leaders and do not feel confident to bring forward their ideas. Also the Syrian Youth Encounter could be inspired by a female youth network.

The International Work and Study Camp could be elaborated with a one week workshop in Lebanon for 30-35 female youth participants from MENA and Denmark of different religions. The project would aim not only at engaging female youth in relation building with women youth from other religious, cultural and ethnical backgrounds, but also train them in female youth leadership as a part of intercultural citizenship.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this report is to strengthen women's position in religious institutions and communities. The consultant was recruited to research the field and provide Danmission with recommendations of how to proceed.

The report shows that there is a need to formalize and capacity build female religious leadership in the MENA region as well as elsewhere. To focus on the role of religion and female religious actors seems more and more relevant.

Almost all women argued for the need to establish collaborative networks with new progressive religious actors and institutions in Denmark and Lebanon with a focus on female leaders. The existing interreligious communities funded by Danmission and others are often represented by more traditional groups and individuals with a majority of male religious leaders and representatives, especially when it comes to Muslims and Jews. This report identifies the need for other religious communities such as a forum for progressive female religious leaders. The aim is to mainstream progressive thought and female leadership within religious institutions. Female religious leadership could be a considerable game changer when

it comes to the question of women empowerment.

Helping women to reach a higher position in the religious hierarchy is important. But the goal is not to empower any woman, but women who have a progressive discourse for a start. The goal is to have progressive women as religious leaders. (Dima Dabbous)

This report concludes that it is vital to consider women empowerment in the religious communities on at least four levels: theological, political, social, and academic level.

1. Theological level: the question of the interpretation of the religious texts. Using the re-reading of the holy texts to change the religious and social role of women.
2. Political level: supporting the strong female voices within politics and in the political debate on religion.
3. Social level: NGOs working to combat violence against women and tackling the root of the problem, which is men violating women, and the need to establish groups for the victims as well as the abusers.
4. Academic level: promoting a modernist and spiritual interpretation of the religious texts as a concrete alternative to the traditionalist and more extremist positions. Identifying new progressive female groups and let them enter the already existing interreligious alliances. This will send a message of mainstreaming progressive thoughts.

Women empowerment cannot blossom within female movements only. Progressive thought about women empowerment has to enter conservative male dominated groups in order to effect real change.

The aim is not to deconstruct the Islamist, traditionalist or conservative position but rather to challenge these positions and to support and strengthen alternative female modernist/progressive positions in the religious field.

There is a fatigue around high-profile conferences and meetings gathering only small circles of people, and who do not have the commitment to create real changes, when they are back in their local settings. There is a need to go beyond the "usual suspects" and build on a new generation, when working with religious leaders. (MENA Strategy 2015-2017)

The Arab spring and the revolutionary changes in the Middle East was marked by women's significant presence in the struggle for democracy. Women of all religions and political orientations revolted alongside with men and demanded political change, gender equality, equal political representation for women and respect for women's rights. Women in the Middle East today are still struggling for female suffrage in the transition from patriarchal

structures to democratic societies.

One of the Danish activists and PhD student Mahvish Ahmad questions whether it is the responsibility of either Danmission or The Arab Initiative to help women in her communities to have stronger positions.

I do see a need for women to take more senior role within religious communities, and I do think inter-faith dialogues make sense. But I do not see Danmission or The Arab Initiative as the ones who should do this job. (Mahvish Ahmad)

Mahvish Ahmad's critique of foreign funding in the Middle East is not a rare position and Danmission has to find ways to integrate and act upon the critique in order to be successful in the Middle East. I would recommend Danmission to establish a group of critics including women like Mahvish and let them identify new ways of operating in the Middle East and elsewhere. Mahvish also argues for the need to see women empowerment and women's problems as a complex matter that cannot be reduced to religion only. For the very same reasons, this report on women empowerment in religious institutions also included academics, social workers, and female leaders of social NGOs combating violence against women. One of them (KAFA) is strictly secular.

To be sensitive to the entire gambit of women's problems in this part of the world there is an urgent need to stop reducing women's problems to merely religious or cultural problems, and seeing them as far broader. That is only possible if we stop trying to save them, and start standing in solidarity with them – which means listening to their assessment of their own lives. (Mahvish Ahmad)

I do think that an interreligious forum with female leaders could make a change. Sharing stories is a great tool for empowerment. And reporting the stories of these women's challenges and recommendations is a small but significant step towards increased female leadership in communities of religious worship.

Map of Ongoing Local and International Initiatives

New York: WISE: Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity

In November 2006, ASMA launched WISE at a historic conference in New York City. As these 150 leading Muslim women scholars, activists, artists and religious and civil society leaders – representing over 25 countries – joined together to develop a holistic and comprehensive vision for improving the position of Muslim women around the globe, WISE was born. Since this inaugural conference, WISE has energized a diverse and unified movement, soliciting participation from across religions and embracing a wide spectrum of ideologies, professions and nationalities. The women of WISE share the joint mission of advancing the rights of Muslim women.

The Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE) is a global program, social network and grassroots social justice movement led by Muslim women. WISE is empowering Muslim women to fully participate in their communities and nations and amplifying their collective voices. Muslim women have enjoyed a rich legacy of excellence in their roles as leaders, professionals, caregivers and activists, and Islamic history is an impressive record of their remarkable contributions as teachers and scholars of sacred text and law. WISE represents an authoritative Muslim women's movement to reclaim this legacy.

Morocco: Women Provide 'Spiritual Security'

Murshidat program launched in 2006 by Moroccan government is considered the first step in recruiting women who dare to curb violence and extremism by acquiring the knowledge of Islam. The program is highly selective and only high caliber applicants who hold university degrees and can recite Quran are considered. They, then, take several courses, including psychology, communication, marriage and dress to be able to rival the plethora of tribunals in the modern world. The graduates will be expected to attend mosques, prisons, and hospitals and train tolerance and respect as Islamic values. Murshidats will not be authorized leading men in prayer. The US government favored the program in 2009 in its Country Report on Terrorism where the program is described as "the pioneering experiment of training and using women as spiritual guides".

Denmark: Femimam Institute and Mariam Mosque with female imams since 2015.

In the beginning of 2015 a Danish organization, FEMIMAM, was launched to advocate for the inclusion of women functioning as imams in Denmark. In autumn 2016, FEMIMAM is planning to launch one of Europe's first women's mosques with female imams leading the Friday *khutbah* (sermon) and Friday prayer for other women. FEMIMAM works to dissolve patriarchal structures in the leadership of religious worship and education, and to challenge men's monopoly of the interpretation of the Quran. The legitimacy of female imams is based on the Quranic scripture and on the Islamic traditions, as well as on the need for educated female spiritual advisors, who can focus on women's rights. As something new in Europe, FEMIMAM has performed interreligious *Nikah* ceremonies (Islamic wedding ceremonies)
Address: Købmagergade 43, Copenhagen.

Denmark: The Exitcircles- Selfhelp groups against mental violence, Sherin Khankan

Denmark: Forum For Progressive Jews- Shir Hatzafon, Adrienne Mannov

Liberal Judaism in England, female rabbis

Germany, Köln: A group of progressive Muslims with a female imam

Lebanon:

- **Adyan Institute: interreligious network**
- **Abaad, Lebanese NGO combatting violence against women**
- **KAFA- Enough Violence & Exploitation**

China: Women's Mosques since 1820

Canada: Forum For Progressive Muslims: Mosques with both male and female imams. Mixed gender under friday prayers since 2005

Los Angeles: Women's Mosque with female imams since 2015

South Africa: Mosque with female imams

Bradford: Upcoming women's mosque with female imams

Istanbul: Kadem is an organization working with women's rights.

Providing a favorable background on which women of Turkey can utilize their knowledge and abilities in contribution to the development of the existing political, social and economic systems in this country,

Contributing to the development and strengthening of democracy, the rule of law, and respect to human rights and fundamental freedoms through protection of women's rights,

Establishing a collective consciousness in society on women's rights and equal opportunities for balancing the domestic and social roles of women,

Taking on as a category of interest every area that gives meaning to life in relation to women and family; from health, law, and environment to arts, sports, media and moral values,

Supporting women in becoming productive individuals in the domestic, economic, social, and cultural lives,

Fighting With Every Kind of Violence Against Everyone, without gender discrimination,

Supporting organized civil society movement in their efforts related to democratic reforms, civil rights and human rights of women,

Within this framework, KADEM aims to encourage, to conduct and to disseminate research, analysis and publication in women's issues by supporting women's active participation in socio-cultural, economic and political arenas, by developing projects

and activities targeting professional development of women and supporting development of awareness among women on their democratic rights.

Halima Krausen,

In 1985, Krausen became a founding member of the Inter-Religious Dialogue Center at the Department of Theology at Hamburg University. In 1993, she helped found the Initiative for Islamic Studies and became head of the German-speaking community.

In 1992, Krausen completed her studies in Islamic Law and Theology, Islamic Studies, Christian Theology and Comparative Religion. Also, Krausen was involved with the team that created German translations of the Qur'an with commentary. She also conducted a partial translation of the Hadith. She contributed to several books on interfaith studies and wrote a number of articles on various Islamic and inter-religious subjects. She teaches regularly in London and across Europe and is particularly interested in inter-faith dialogue. She joined a circle that involved Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim experts who were interested in taking dialogue past the intellectual and applying it to culture.

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