

**“THE NEW MUSLIM FEMINIST IMAGE IN FINLAND:
CHANCES AND CHALLENGES”**

“MUSLIM WOMEN ACTIVISM IN FINLAND”

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Abstract

This thesis aims to study Muslim women activism in Europe generally and in Finland, in particular. The scope of this study discusses the fact that Islamic religious teachings and their interpretation can still help Muslim women have a role in society, and seek for equality between men and women as active members in their communities.

The aspects considered include: a comprehensive literature survey carried out and analyzed which qualitatively assesses the sharing of role activity which Muslim women perform as part of the role of minorities in Finnish society. The activities were analyzed using questionnaires, interviews, observations and internet data collection.

The analysis results indicated that there have been positive trials from different active groups (***Islamic Feminists***) in Finland, but many obstacles continue to stand in their way. Therefore, Muslim women groups in the minority still need to use different supportive governmental programs or non-governmental programs, so that their contribution can integrate more into Finnish culture and society. Whereas the results show that Finland has traditionally been characterized as a relatively homogeneous country, currently Finnish society is becoming increasingly international and both ethnically and culturally diverse.

Keywords: Muslim women, Activism, Minority group, Integration in the West, Islamic Feminism, Finnish Society.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ "
O mankind! Lo! We have created you from male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! The noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware.

Ref.: (13) - Al-Hujraat – Al Quraan Kareem

Over the last few decades, Islam has become an increasingly important religion and a critical international political factor. A concurrent phenomenon is the global rise of Islamic feminism, a discourse grounded in the Quran, that articulates full gender equality and social justice across the public, private spheres, and activism based upon these premises. The spread of conversions to Islam, especially in western countries, is a phenomenon of the late twentieth century continuing its rapid growth into the present century with women constituting the largest numbers of new Muslims.

Conversion to Islam and Islamic feminism address intersecting religious, societal, and cultural needs, and both raise hard questions. The acceleration of Muslim conversions and the rise of Islamic feminism both occurred in the wake of the surfacing of political Islam and subsequent broader Islamic cultural revival (Badran, 2006).

The sub-title of this paper “Finnish Muslim Women Activism” has two components that have been focused on in the past decades: first, Finnish Muslims which leads to European Islam, and, second, Muslim women's status in European societies. Both components are related to politics, religion, society and globalization. These concepts, at the same time, are also contradicting nationalism, and national classical theories.

Regarding European Islam, there has been a debate concerning whether a particular European Islam or Euro – Islam should develop, in the sense of an Islam that is clearly recognizable as European. Many speculations are insufficiently specific about what elements such a European Islam would contain (Steinbach, 2005). Many Muslims in Europe have isolated themselves within their own, seemingly secure, parallel

communities, because they have sometimes an obsessive fear of losing their religious identity. These enclaves are supported in their reluctant accommodation to their immediate surroundings by existing Islamic doctrines on how to live as a minority in non-Muslim countries.

Different scholars, including Tariq Ramdan a Swiss philosopher, call upon Muslims to abandon this self-definition as a minority and to give up their relative isolation from European society (Abu Zayed 2006).

Another example is Bassem Tibi, a professor of international relations in Cornell University, who emphasizes the need for Muslims to completely accept dominant European culture. In Tibi's view, this means that the Muslim minority in Europe must embrace democracy, human rights, and pluralism, but also must accept that religion is a private matter. Only in this way can Muslims prevent the creation of parallel societies that turn away from the principles of the democratic constitutional state.

Both authors attach great importance to overcoming the “**We and They**” situation and to stimulating full citizenship for Muslims. As Tibi stresses, Islam's common frame of reference can and should flourish in the European public space; if Muslims embrace democracy and constitutional principles, Tariq Ramadan, cherishes hope for a future European Islam that embraces the democratic constitutional state.

The motivation of the present study on Muslim women is to assess the role of Finnish Muslim women in the Finnish society, with an overview on the activities of Muslim women in Europe. All groups of the Muslim community of women, as immigrants, dual citizens, and converted Muslim women, can practically contribute to enriching society as citizens.

The objective of the present study is to explore the areas of possible contribution, and the related challenges. The study is divided into different chapters, summarized as follows:

Chapter One: The introduction covers the main conflict issues between East and West.

Chapter Two: The chapter is a comprehensive literature survey leading to the identification of Muslim women activities presently in Europe in general, and Finland in particular. The chapter shall discuss both terms “Islamic Feminism” and “Activism”.

Chapter Three: This chapter will offer the research hypothesis and the questions addressed by this study.

Chapter Four: This chapter contains analysis of the data collection and discussion of the case study results. In addition, this section identifies both the government and non-government roles, while the analysis covers different items including statistical data, the activity of Muslim women (Immigrant, converted Muslims activities in Finland), and then the role, future perspectives, and social events.

Chapter Five: The main concluding remarks and recommendations are summarized, as well as the areas that need additional future investigation.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE SURVEY

2.1 Introduction

The European Union's population is highly diverse and is becoming increasingly so. Alongside established minorities, such as the Roma and national minorities, immigration from outside the EU has played a significant role in recent years in shaping the ethnic and cultural diversity of Europe (EU-MIDIS, 2009).

There has been various research investigating minorities' integration into European societies, as well as the role of their increasing population in different countries in Europe.

There are an estimated 15 million Muslims living in Western Europe today, or about 4% of the population, and they are larger than combined populations of Finland, Denmark, and Ireland (Modood, 2007)

According to the European Union minorities and Discrimination survey published in 2009, compared to 20% of non-Muslim ethnic minorities 51% of Muslims surveyed believe discrimination on grounds of religion or belief to be "very" or "fairly" widespread. When investigating the reasons for the discrimination, 79% of Muslims have experienced discrimination and did not report their experiences anywhere. And when investigating the reasons for not reporting discrimination to the state bodies or non governmental agencies, 59% of the victims believed that nothing would happen or change by reporting, in comparison to 33% who didn't know how or where to report.

Looking at the statistics for these cases emphasizes the need to study and empower minorities in Europe. A detailed literature survey on Muslim women in Europe and Finland will be conducted in this thesis. The literature survey shall examine minorities' success and challenges in Finnish society.

2.1.1 Minorities - Definition

According to Kettani, minorities are those groups of people who for one reason or another become the first victims of the despotism of the state or of the community that constitutes the majority. According to Kettani (1986), most of these minorities are inclined to degenerate and lose their identity as few care to support their struggle for survival.

Suojanen (1993) defines a minority as a group of people who freely associate for an established purpose where their shared desire differs from that expressed by the majority.

Even the term minority itself points to the fact that the group described is minor – in other words, smaller. Therefore, minority issues are often regarded as issues of minor or imbued with less influence, power or rank. On the other hand, minority parties are defined here as parties which openly aim at representing chosen minorities on issues such as the local autonomy of the group, language rights and cultural matters (Suojanen 2007).

2.1.2 Muslim Minorities in Europe & Finland

As mentioned previously, there are over fifteen million Muslims in the European population, as immigrants, dual citizens (second generation raised in Europe), or Muslim converters (Modood, 2007). There has been significant research conducted post 9/11 about Muslims' daily lives and religious practices in Europe.

In their daily lives, minorities encounter a lack of identity, oppression, injustice and experiences with negative psychological dimensions. Muslim minorities have to realize that minority status is limited in many aspects and should work on freeing themselves from the stereotypes by building bridges between minorities and majorities (Kettani, 1986)

Kenneth Ritzen (Roald 2001), a Swedish historian of religions, in his numerous lectures on the relationship between Muslims and majority societies uses the following model to illustrate the relationship between Muslims as a minority and “the others” as the majority. As minorities, Muslims judge the majority as one group who is different from their own behavior and characteristics, not in their own view but their Islamic ideal. The same judgment occurs apparently in reverse from the majority group, not of their own perspectives, but in relation to the European ideal conception towards the Muslim characteristics (See figure 1).

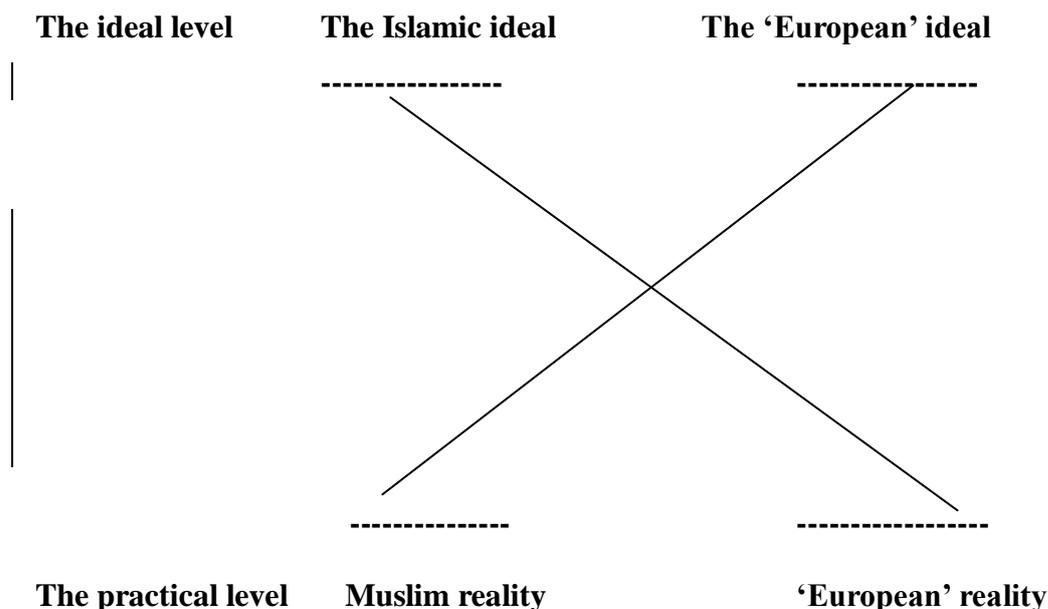


Figure 1 – The relation between Muslim minority & European majority

The Finnish Muslim minority started before 1990, as Marja Tiilikainen and Isra Lehtinen studied (2004), the number of Finnish converts to Islam was very small, not more than 50. The most well known convert at that time was Mikko Telaranta, who had been a Muslim since the beginning of 1980s. Mikko Telaranta had studied in Al Azhar (a well-known Islamic university in Cairo, Egypt), and he was active in lecturing, commenting and writing articles on Islam.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, a growing number of Finns began to embrace Islam. This growth has been steady and the converts numbered between 600 - 700 in 2003. By embracing Islam, a Finnish woman becomes part of a minority, which is a strange experience in one's own country. A convert still regards herself as a Finn among other Finns, although she does not necessarily share the values of the majority anymore. The majority, however, often easily notes the change, especially if a Finnish woman starts using *Hijab* (Islamic women dress code).

A convert is a Muslim by choice, not by birth and inheritance; thus, convert may find the situation problematic. A Finnish convert in this case belongs not only to a minority, but also to a *minority within a minority* (Roald, 2006).

2.2 Overview on Feminist Movements in the world

According to Lorraine Code (2000), feminist theory is the system of concepts, propositions and analysis that describe and explain women's situations and experiences and support recommendations about how to improve them.

Feminism has started as a movement focused on exposing and breaking down power structures which privilege men, in general, and white, heterosexual, middle class, able-bodied men, in particular. Feminism, as a new consciousness of gender and women's subordination, first emerged among the upper and middle classes in the spaces of unevenly gendered modernity at different moments in various countries (Badran1999).

Unlike most academic theories, born out of the institution, feminist theory emerged out of political a movement, and then became institutionalized (Women Resources Center in University of Calgary, 2008).

Feminism has passed through three different and distinct waves which can be summarised as follows;

First Wave Feminism (1850 – 1945) can be characterized as:

- Focusing on North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.
- Industrialization undermined household production and established a hierarchy between the male-dominated public sphere and the female-dominated private sphere.
- Liberal-democratic ideologies, socialism, evangelical Protestant Christianity, and social reform movements (abolitionism and temperance) propel a wide spectrum of women to challenge their exclusion from the public realm.
- 1850s to 1870s women advocate a single sexual standard for women and men, primarily within marriage, dress reform, equal property and other legal rights, including higher education, especially in medicine and law.
- Early 1900s suffrage movements
- Second World War: women move into the public sphere and then are forced back into the home when soldiers return home.

Second Wave Feminism (1960 - 1980s) can be summarized as follows:

- Civil rights movement and other movements influence women's social consciousness. Women come out of isolation and begin to take part in consciousness raising groups where the phrase 'the personal is political' becomes popularized.
- Key elements of women's campaigns to control their bodies: sexual freedom; legalized birth control and abortion; legal reform for victims of domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence and rape; liberalized divorce laws; and rights for lesbian mothers.
- Elements of economic and work related campaigns: equal pay for equal work, equal pay for work of equal value that is traditionally female, access to non-traditional areas of employment, and childcare support.
- Women's Studies emerges as a new academic area of study.
- 1980s organizations of non-western, visible minority, immigrant, refugee, and aboriginal women complicated and diversified feminist notions of a female condition.
- Differences rather than commonalities were emphasized.

Van Nieuwkerk (2006) argues that second wave feminism in the west in the 1970s and 1980s must go hand in hand with secularism Religion is viewed as irredeemably patriarchal and has contributed to the shrill responses to Western women's conversions to Islam.

Third Wave Feminism - Post Feminism (1990s: to Present) is characterized as:

- Post feminism (feminism is no longer needed as women have achieved their rights); backlash (fundamentalist religious and patriarchal movements involving both women and men in pushing neo-conservative values of tradition and moving women back into the home and traditional roles); and the emergence of the third wave feminism.
- Postcolonial Feminism and Third World Feminism: women of limited resource nations challenge white western feminisms as hegemonic.

- Contemporary and Young Feminisms emerge as young feminists use new language, technology and forms of communication. (Women Resources Center in University of Calgary, 2008).

2.2.1 Secular Feminism versus Islamic Feminism

There has been a long-term focus on feminism among Muslims in the East. With the coming of female Muslim leaders such as *Huda Sha'rawi* (an early twentieth century Egyptian nationalist and feminist, 1879-1947), and *Benazir Bhutto* (a Pakistani politician who chaired the [Pakistan Peoples Party](#), and [Pakistan's](#) first and to date only female prime minister, 1953 – 2007).

In addition to the increased demand for extended female political participation in the Muslim world in general, and in the Arab world in particular, the matter of female involvement in politics on various levels has become a hotly debated issue, known as “secular feminism”.

Secular feminism emerged in late nineteenth century in Egypt (a pioneering country) in the context of modernization, Islamic reform, and the nationalist struggle against British colonialism. This feminism drew upon secular nationalist and Islamic modernist discourse. Secular feminists in Muslim societies demanded full equality in the public sphere, calling for access to education, work, and political participation as part of women's self-development and an important aspect of empowering the entire society in the decolonizing process. When Muslim women (for example, the Egyptian women) have a precise feminist identity, they did not see it as threatening to their religious identity. On the contrary, they felt their feminism enhanced their lives as Muslims (Badran 1995).

As Badran (1995) discusses, besides the feminism movement in the late nineteenth century, and for the first two – thirds of the twentieth century, the reforming of Islamic modernism accorded space for feminism within the framework of the religious culture and provided a congenial climate for its evolution.

While the official purview of the Islamic establishment was contracting, Shaykh Muhammed Abduh articulates the discourse of Islamic modernism. He advocated a return to the practice of *Ijtihad* (independent inquiry), calling upon Muslims to look to scriptural sources of their religion for fresh inspiration. This gave Muslims, men and women alike, a tool to interpret religion and to apply Islam in their lives (Badran, 1995).

Islamic feminism arose and continues to spread simultaneously in both established Muslim societies and the West. In 1990, some Muslim journalists, writers, and activists began to refer to a newly emergent form of feminism as “Islamic feminism”. There has been a paradigm shift in Muslim feminism from a secular feminism to Islamic feminism, which takes a somewhat wider view by focusing on gender equality and social justice as basic and intersecting principles enshrined in the Quran, and by disputing men’s exclusive authority to define Islam (Badran, 1995).

As Moghissi (1999) discusses, feminism today has grown large and includes many brands, both conservative and radical, religious and atheist, as well as white and non-white. Islamic feminism is a global phenomenon; it is part of global Islam and part of the global feminism with all its political affiliations.

Attempts at all-encompassing theories, concepts and the earlier ideological commitment to universalizing the perspectives of women have turned out to be significant only in relation to specific culture, class and race. Iran, for example, is an important pioneering country of the production of Islamic feminist discourse. There are reports of an increase in the visibility and professional activities of Muslim women. Women in Black “chador” (dress code in Iran) are now representing Islamic Iran at international conferences, addressing issues of interest to feminism globally, such as economic development, birth control, gender violence and women’s human rights (Moghissi, 1999).

There have been different positions taken up within Islamic feminism, from either secular feminists or fundamentalist's groups. The secular group’s point of view rejects the possibility of co-existence between Islam and feminism. For the secular group, hostility towards feminism and feminist demands is inherent in divine laws, while women’s liberation in Islamic societies must start with de-Islamization of every aspect of life.

Also, we find feminists who speculate that feminism within an Islamic framework is the only culturally sound and effective strategy for the region’s women’s movement. They see Islamic feminism as a ‘feminism true to its society’s traditions’, and a resistance to

cultural conversion attempts to release western women's claim on feminism. (Moghissi, 1999, 134). Fundamentalist movements in different regions have a different point of view, more than any other group, women in their view create the most urgent challenges, in words, actions, and to re-Islamification policies. Their main claims indicate that Islamic feminism is a rebirth of the existing westernized secular feminism term, transformed simply to fit Muslim women.

Badran discusses that Islamic feminism is used increasingly as a term to identify the beliefs and activities of Muslim women who are trying to improve the lot of their sex within the confines of their faith. As there are women who demand equal rights and who have adopted Islam as their personal faith and cultural identity. This future feminism will increase for the following:-

- Islam is becoming a dominant cultural and political paradigm
- Muslim women are highly educated in greater numbers than ever before
- Islamic feminism can reach different social classes, and both Islam and Feminism can reach different people and ideologies
- The increasing globalization and growth in Muslim communities, both Muslim women and new Muslim women who practice Islam want to embrace feminism and Islam
- Globalized media and technology (for example, Facebook), are connecting Muslim women inside and outside Muslim communities.

Islamic feminism is the new feminism of the future in Muslim societies include Muslim communities in the west (for example, in Europe and North America) . In formulating an explicit, independent feminist discourse of gender equality inside the Middle East, the new Islamic feminists are at the vanguard (Badran1999). Muslim women who have pursued an intellectual critical reflection on their faith have begun to propose a **'feminine' rather than 'feminist'** view of Islam. This consists in a re-appropriation and re-affirmation of their own identity and autonomy that passes through their personal experience, and internalization, of faith (Silvestri 2008). However, Islamic feminism requires playing role awithin the global activism feminism.

2.3. Muslim Women Activism & Presence in Europe in comparison to Early Finnish women activism

2.3.1 Muslim Women Activism

Along with other concepts such as Islamism, fundamentalism, extremism, and political Islam, in the current context the term Islamic activism often evokes associations with extremist actions performed in the name of Islam; this is something that should not be ignored. Abu Zayed agrees with Badran's description of "Islamic feminism" as part of Islamic activism.

Abu Zayed (2006) explains *Islamic activism* as the revival of 'Islam' as a political factor in the Muslim world. This refers to the endeavors of people for whom Islam is an important source of inspiration in the organizing of contemporary politics and society. The word *Islamic* emphasizes that Islam functions as a common vehicle and idiom for raising the political and social consciousness of large groups of Muslims. Activism indicates that many different kinds of efforts may be included and these may be highly subject to change. Abu Zayed (2006) explains that recent Islamic activism arose in precisely the same period as human rights activism.

Bullock's research about Muslim women activism in North America is an initiative study evaluating Muslim women activities. As Ikram Beshir, an interviewee said:

Islam is all for activism". I believe it's everyone's job to promote Islam in whatever from they are capable of. Islam is not an individualistic religion; as a matter of fact it's at the opposite end of the spectrum. There's a lot more to Islam than locking yourself up in the local mosque and praying 24/7. (Bullock 2005:23)

As this paper links the relation between activism of women before and after conversion to Islam. Bullock (2005) mentions that it is interesting to study the activism of the people before and after conversion. Bullock (2005) writes concerning herself:

"I wasn't Muslim yet, but when I did become a Muslim, it was natural to turn my energies to the Muslim community" (Bullock, 2005, 135).

Bullock (2005) continues that she had never really considered her “extracurricular” efforts to change and improve the world, unusual, or anything out of the ordinary. To her, the term “activist” describes someone who goes beyond the call of duty to work for changes in society.

This paper discusses Bullock’s point of view concerning the role of woman in Islam as of grave importance which Muslims seem to be unaware of it at times.

On the other hand, we should take into consideration other trials from Western Muslims which indicate a hopeful sign that the new generations of women may break the cycle of unemployment and poverty prevalent among Europe's migrant populations. By encouraging young Muslim women wearing Islamic headscarves to integrate in different fields in society to help bridge the cultural divide between the Western mainstream and Islam, tolerance and understanding is promoted. For example, Muslim women entering the military, police or other professions in which they are underrepresented in Europe. Bullock (2005).

There are new styles of *Hijab* (Islamic dress code) worn by modern, young Muslims within Western societies which has less to do with following traditions. These fashions are close to modern styles and have famous western brand names, which decreases the gap of integration.

2.3.2 Muslim Women's Activities in Europe

As Abugideiri (2004, 223) pointed out Muslim women in Europe have increasingly exposed how such European laws have afforded Muslim women a more visible role in public, yet paradoxically, women have also been accorded more restrictive rights within the home.

It has been argued that Muslim women are likely to take on the role of wife and mother (for example, accepting formal marriages as normative and having higher and longer sustained periods of reproduction, influenced by acculturation and educational achievement). And despite the calls for “Emancipation of Women” around the world, we find that it has been proven that these calls have not accomplished their mission yet. This call has come to signify much wider political and social attitudes towards social change and modernization as women come to occupy an important role in this change. Meanwhile, Silvestri (2008) in her research conducted in Europe discusses Muslim advocacy networks, in their campaigns in particular against ethnic, racial and religious-based discrimination.

The main Muslim advocacy networks include:

- 1- The Brussels-based European Forum of Muslim Women (EFOMW)
- 2- The London-based *Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism* (FAIR), a service open to all genders and ages but which up to 2004 was run by two very dynamic young women
- 3- The Flemish *Vereniging voor Ontwikkeling en Emancipatie van Moslims* (VOEM, organization for the development and emancipation of Muslims – *Al Hedaya*) in Belgium.

There are also nondenominational advocacy groups where women of Muslim background are involved. These include for instance

- 1- The *National Assembly Against Racism* (NAAR, UK) and *SOS Racism* (France).
- 2- The German *Zentrum für Islamische Frauenforschung* (Islamic Women’s Center for Research and Encouragement).

As Silvestri (2008) continues to show in her research, there are also various local services run by NGOs or public authorities in many European cities where Muslim women are actively involved as members (serving Muslim women clients who face violence). These NGOs are a combination of information campaigns, education, and dedicated community-based social services, including:

- 1- The South all Black Sisters, SPIOR in the Netherlands
- 2- The Muslim Women Helpline in London – seeking the best avenues to find solutions to these complex problems. This community network has proved that legal measures alone can lead to a breach of trust between public authorities and ethnic and faith communities.

Also, there are a number of feminist groups that involve people of Muslim background but that are mobilized primarily in secular terms. Silvestri (2008) lists:

- 1- The French network, *Ni Putes Ni Soumises*.
- 2- The Association of Moroccan women in Italy (ACMID)

As a Muslim advocacy network, the Forum of European Muslim Women is one of the numerous organizations run by European Muslim women who want to fight stigma and promote their participation in European society and politics Silvestri (2008).

Their first European Forum of Muslim Women (*EFOMW*) summit was held in Brussels in 2006 As an NGO dedicated to defending the rights of Muslim women in Europe, the aim to:

- Analyze how to bridge dialogue between different religions
- Promote cooperation between Muslim women organizations
- Battle discrimination against Muslim women in Europe

In Finland, an interesting study by Marja Tiilikainen and Isra Lehtinen (2004) researched the minority Muslim women and their attempts of activism, as a heterogeneous new group in Finland.

Within the Finnish organizational system, there is a tendency that associations or organizations with few members receive relatively little financial support. Religious activities often fall outside public support systems. Hence, due to the lack of economic resources, the activities in the mosques or Islamic associations often lie in the hands of volunteers (Tiilikainen & Lehtinen, 2004).

Finnish Muslim women have been active inside the mosques; convert women have been particularly active in organizing Islamic teaching and other communal activities. Besides these mainly Finnish women, converts and Tatars who are used to gender equality and are familiar with the Finnish organizational system have been in charge of these Mosques. This topic shall be discussed in the next chapters.

2.3.3 Early Women Activism in Finland

Finland was known as one of the most agricultural countries in Europe. Women worked alongside men on farms and were familiar with all the jobs that had to be done in the early twentieth century. In the harsh Finnish climate, everyone had to take part in the work when the time came to do it. The year 1906 represents an important milestone for women's social and political participation as early Finnish feminists made Finland the first country in Europe where women could fully exercise their voting rights and eligibility for parliamentary elections. Altogether nineteen female members out of two hundred were elected to Parliament. Finland was an autonomous grand duchy of the Russian empire at the time.

The post Second World War economic expansion shifted the economic base from fishers and agriculture to industrial- and service- based sectors. By the 1970s, women had emerged in politics. Although women entered rapidly into political life throughout Scandinavia, their position in the family and in the workplace did not progress as rapidly.

The proportion of women members of Parliament has increased in the last few decades. A record level of representation was achieved in the 1991 elections: 77 women out of a total of 200 seats (38.5%). In Parliament, women have been particularly involved with legislation concerning social issues, culture and education. In the last elections, in 2003, 74 women were elected, or 37% of the members of the house.

Table 1: Percentage of Women in National Parliaments – Regional Averages

Regional Districts	Single House or Lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses Combined
Nordic Countries	41.4%	-----	----
Americas	21.6%	19.8%	21.3%
Europe - OSCE member countries - including Nordic countries	20.9%	17.9%	20.3%
Europe - OSCE member countries excluding Nordic countries	19.0%	17.9%	18.8%
Sub-Saharan Africa	17.3%	21.2%	17.8%
Asia	17.0%	14.8%	16.7%
Pacific	12.9%	31.8%	15.0%
Arab States	9.6%	7.0%	9.1%

Regions are classified by descending order of the percentage of women in the lower or single House.

Source: Inter- Parliamentary Union, 29 February 2008

According to Inter – Parliamentary Union on 29 February 2008 (See Table 1), the lower or single House of Finland ranks 4th. Due to the Election in 3/2007, of the 200 seats, women have taken 83 seats making the percentage 41.50%. As impressive as these percentages are, the majority of decision-making bodies in Nordic countries are still dominated by men (Women in Power).

According to the Human Development Report 2007/2008, includes a report of the building of the capabilities of Women in Finland as follows:

The HDI: measures average achievements in a country, but does not incorporate the degree of gender imbalance in these achievements.

The gender-related development index, or **GDI**, which was introduced in the Human Development Report 1995, measures achievements in the same dimensions using the same indicators as the HDI, but captures inequalities in achievement between women and men. GDI is simply the HDI adjusted downward for gender inequality. The greater the gender disparity in basic human development, the lower is a country's GDI relative to its HDI.

Finland's GDI value of 0.947 should be compared to its HDI value of 0.952. Its GDI value is 99.5% of its HDI value. Out of the 156 countries with both HDI and GDI values, 50 countries have a better ratio than Finland.

The following table (Table 2) shows how Finland's ratio of GDI to HDI compares to other countries, and also shows its values for selected underlying values in the calculation of the GDI (measure of gender disparity).

Table 2: Building the Capabilities of Women - Finland

GDI as % of HDI	Life expectancy at birth(years) 2004	Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio2004
	<i>Female as % Male</i>	<i>Female as % Male</i>
1. Maldives (100.4%)	1. Russian Federation (123.1%)	1. United Arab Emirates (126.0%)
49. Bolivia (99.5%)	54. Albania (108.7%)	36. United Kingdom (107.3%)
50. Moldova (99.5%)	55. Spain (108.6%)	37. Niue (107.3%)
51. Finland (99.5%)	56. Finland (108.6%)	38. Finland (107.0%)
52. Jamaica (99.5%)	57. Portugal (108.5%)	39. Dominica (106.8%)
53. Kyrgyzstan (99.4%)	58. Venezuela (108.4%)	40. Spain (106.6%)
156. Yemen (92.7%)	194. Niger (96.9%)	194. Afghanistan (55.3%)

Source: Human Development Report 2007/ 2008 – Building the Capabilities of Women - Finland

The gender empowerment measure (GEM) reveals whether women take an active part in economic and political life. It tracks the share of seats in parliament held by women;

of female legislators, senior officials and managers; and of female professional and technical workers; as well as the gender disparity in earned income, reflecting economic independence. Differing from the GDI, the GEM exposes inequality in opportunities in selected areas. Finland ranks 3rd out of 93 countries in the GEM, with a value of 0.887, according to the Human development report 2007/2008.

2.4. Overview of Women's conversion to Islam in Europe & Finland

The conversion toward Islam has apparently accelerated significantly after September 11, 2001. These religious shifts generally are given political weight. Conversion to Islam, in particular, has a political dimension and indicates that Islam has become one of the players on the religious market in the West, and further that its message makes sense to individual converts. Van Nieuwekerk (2006).

One of the main reasons for conversion to Islam in Europe, and the Nordic countries is the simplicity of Islamic theology. Van Nieuwekerk (2006) maintains that Islam is considered rational, scientific, and logical; therefore it is deemed the most convincing religion.

According to Van Nieuwekerk (2006), Islamic guidelines are providing reasoned answers to the quest for a structured life as a “*Guide for life*” or “*Way of life*”. As a religious system Islam has been seen attractive because it is grounded in nature, and is a social and moral religion.

Van Nieuwekerk (2006), argues that the concept of conversion is difficult to define. The common definition of conversion as an act of freely willed choice, as an authentic experience, or, as an inward transformation after a thorough search and/or divine inspiration, has been criticized before. Conversion takes on a wide variety of forms and meanings, which can only be understood in the specific contexts and power relations of the individuals and groups involved. Conversion is analyzed as a complex social phenomenon rather than simply as an individual spiritual transition.

It is important to mention that early Muslims and companions of the prophet Muhammed were converts. The first Muslim convert was a woman, *Khadija*, prophet Muhammed’s wife, who supported her husband morally and financially. In Christianity, the first Christian, that is the first person who was asked to believe in Jesus' resurrection was also a woman, *Mary Magdalene*.

One of the main questions regarding gender and religion in the West is: “Why are women interested in conversion attracted to Islam?” Does Islam liberate Western

women? The discourse on gender mainly centers on gender roles, sexuality, and motherhood. Does Islam provide converts with constructions of gender that allow them to live according to their feminine nature (*Fitrah*), without being treated as sex objects? Do they feel more respected as women?

According to different surveys studied, “Conversion to Islam” occurs in different cases: by marrying a Muslim, meeting Muslims, dealing with immigrants or travelling, and there is also rational conversion which occurs not through personal contact, but rather an intellectual search.

The decisions surrounding conversion to Islam might lead to several changes in life. These changes occur in daily life practices, including praying, fasting, and allowed (*Halal*) food. Personal markers like name or personal appearance (*Hijab*) could also be changed. Conversion could also lead to changing social and cultural practices, such as Muslim celebrations (*Eid*), opposite sex relations, and the family of origin.

With a close view of Finland, an estimated 200 Finns have converted to Islam in the 1990s. A new Finnish translation of the Quran was published in 1995, which was prepared by a Finnish scholar of Arabic language and culture. The translator later also published an introduction to the Quran in Finnish (Lehtinen, 2004) and has been a key envoy for explaining Islam in Finland.

The vast majority of converts in Finland are women who have married Muslim men. Most of these converts live in cities, typically in metropolitan areas like Helsinki or Tampere.

With respect to educational background, female converts in Finland are a heterogeneous group. Some women have higher university degrees, while others have not studied beyond the comprehensive school level (*Peruskoulu*) and only quite few female converts have an average university level of education. The age structure of the group seems to have changed during these ten years. In the beginning of the 1990s, most female converts in Finland were between 25 and 35 years of age. Within the past few years, however, the majority of new converts have been younger, around twenty years old. One explanation for the decreasing age of converts might be that the importance of

marriage as a catalyst to conversion has decreased for young women who are not yet married, but they individually search for religious and spiritual alternatives Lehtinen (2004).

2.4.1 An Overview of Islamic Reformation in Association with the Current Islamic Ideologies in Europe.

Throughout Islamic history, there have been dynamic responses to the idea of renewal or revivalism in Muslim societies. The concept of renewal itself, embodied in the terms *tajdid*, meaning “regeneration” or “renewal”, and the related term *mujaddid*, meaning the person who leads renewal (Voll, 1991).

As Hadad (1991) discusses, the contemporary Islamic revival is one of the phases that reflect the history of Islamic world's encounter with the West. This ongoing relationship began in the sixteenth century when European conquests of Muslim land began. As Muslims believe that Islam is a religion for every time and place, they had to search for a motivational purpose for these trials of Islamic revivals. Muslim scholars found their support on change in Surah (13:12) of the Quran “*God will not alter what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves*”.

Hadad (1991) continues that Muslims saw how Islam affirmed both religion and the world. The export of Muslim activists to Europe gave them the opportunity to learn more about European ideas and techniques and helped encourage a literature in dialogue with the West, one that stresses the ideals of Islam and proposes Islamic solutions in opposition to western societies.

The Islamic revival movements in the West had significant effects on the rejection of any nationalist ideologies and replaced them with an Islamic revival ideology.

An important focus of revivalist writing is the proper role for women in Islamic society. As this paper discusses in Chapter Two, secular feminism persuaded that the women's liberation movement in the Muslim world has been one of the unwelcome influences of western hegemony. And, in fact, part of the increasingly obvious western agenda to undermine the religion of Islam, contemporary Muslims have made the issue of the role

of women one of the major arenas in which the debate between western and Islamic values is taking place (Hadad, 1991).

There are differences among writers in the Muslim world in the degree to which women are allowed to participate in the public realm. In general, women are restricted to the home or allowed to work as teachers, social workers and medical or personnel taking care of the female population. The task of the woman, however, has been greatly enhanced in that this literature now validates her shared responsibility of inculcating the elements of the Islamic faith in the members of her family (Hadad, 1991).

Roald (2001) has explained the main dominant Islamic schools or groups which exist in Europe. She has distinguished these main groups according to nine categories, and this paper will highlight the active groups that function and play a main role among the Muslim community in Finland. Some of these groups are working on increasing the role of Muslim women in society as part of Islamic revivalism.

1. The Salafi Trend “Wahhabi movement”

The term Salafi refers to *al-aslaf* (the first three generations of Muslims), the practice of Wahhabism is to adhere firmly to the traditional Islam in Arab lands. As the group's main concept is “the return to Quran and Prophet's Sunna”, without referring to modern scholars' opinions, they consider the problems of Muslims to be a result of diverse understandings of Islam. The Salafi school has been spread by the graduates of the Islamic teaching universities, which were established in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. They have a strict view of women's role in society, as they encourage women to stay in their homes as they represent temptation (*fitna*), women also should wear face veils (*Niqab*) as the Salafists, generally take the strictest legal position in Islam. As this thesis discusses the dominance of the Salafi school in Finland, in particular, Roald's research discussing the strong footholds of Salafists in Europe, particularly among Arab and Somali groups, is very helpful. Salafists is an initiative group in Islamic book translations, but is strongly supported by materials from Arab oil states. With the urgency of integration in Europe, some immigrants have been modifying their Salafists ideas and become more moderate, on the other hand, many have become more strict and more isolated from society because of unemployment and poverty. Al Huda Mosque is known to be associated with the Salafi domination in Helsinki, Finland.

Roald (2001) explains that the Salafi movement is quite different compared to other groups, since it was developed in a closed, non-colonized atmosphere.

2. The Muslim Brotherhood (*Al-ikhwan al muslimun*)

Early movement started in Egypt back in 1928 and it has spread throughout the Middle East and other Muslim countries. This organization is concerned with high level of political activities, and are a predominantly political group. The Muslim Brotherhood are known for their well organized structures and clear focus on education. The Post Ikhwan is the current trend developing a more independent view and free-thinking atmosphere. They support an increase of Muslim women's role in the society. Members of these groups are actively successful in administration, for example of the “Islamic Rabita” in Helsinki, Finland.

As Roald (2001) explained western colonization has played a role in developing some group's traditional ideas through encountering modern or western ideas as the Muslim Brotherhood.

3. Sufi group

The Sufi's main concept is the reparation of the heart and turning away from all but God (Allah). This group's activities occur mainly as *dhikr* or spiritual lectures in local mosques. The Habashi movement is quite active movement in Sufism, and they do have active groups in Europe and in Nordic countries. Normally, Sufi groups are not concerned with political decisions, but the Habashi group is quite socio-politically involved in Europe. Their main conflict with others is that they exclude some Islamic thinkers and accuse them of being non-Muslims. At the same time, they do have some lenient interpretations of Islamic rulings or laws in comparison with other groups (e.g Salafi group).

4. Other Islamic movements; *Shii* groups, *Tabligh* movement

Shiia groups are mainly from Iraqi, Lebanese, Iranian or Afghani origins. These are people belonging (*hizb allah*) to the Amal party, and they are quite active groups, and considered religio-political groups. The main obstacle for this group is that they are not accepted by the Sunni religious schools, and are usually excluded. There is centre is located in Turku, Finland.

The Tabligh movement is an active group in *Dawa* (Call to Islam), using their main concepts of *Dawa* and *Tabligh* (Preaching) to provide a basic level of Islamic message in the Muslim community.

Converts play an important role in society and often function as cultural and political mediators between the state and Muslim communities. Some of them are engaged in the interpretation of Islamic sources and developing new discourses, as the following chapter explains.

2.5 European Culture Versus Islamic Culture on Converts

When two cultures meet, a necessary outcome is the blending mixing and interaction of customs and traditions. Since Islam is universal, as Muslims believe, its manifestations cannot be confined to a particular nationality, social sphere, culture, or language. Therefore, it must reflect the name, attire and cultures of communities where it begins to take root. There is no religious requirement for converts or others to change their names or appearance, and they should pass up the “Arabization” of Islam, since it can flourish in any culture and among any individuals as long as it is modest and not offensive to anyone (Hassan 2006).

Professor Tariq Modood at the University of Bristol explains there are three different social integration terminologies, assimilation, integration and multiculturalism.

As Modood (2008) explains “assimilation” is where the processes affecting the relationship between newly settled social groups are seen one way and the desired outcome for society as a whole is seen as involving change in how things are done for the majority of the country and its institutional policies. For example, when newcomers do little to disturb the society, they are settling in and become as much like their new compatriots as possible.

“Integration”, on the other hand, is the processes of social interaction seen as two-way interaction and members of the majority community as well as immigrants and ethnic minorities are required to do something. In this way, the latter cannot alone be blamed for failing (or not trying) to integrate. The established society is the site of institutions - including employers, civil systems and government – in which integration has to take place, and accordingly must take the lead in establishing connections.

“Multiculturalism” assumes a two way process of integration but, additionally, it works differently for different groups.

Multicultural accommodation of minorities is different from integration because it recognizes the social reality of groups (not just of individuals and organizations). For

example, a sense of solidarity with people with similar origins, faith or mother tongue, including those in a country of origin or a diaspora.

Multiculturalism is not opposed to integration, as without multiculturalism there would not be a form of integration as apparent in hyphenated identities such as Jewish-American or British-Muslim. These hyphenated identities, on this understanding, are a legitimate basis for political mobilization and lobbying, and not attacked as divisive or disloyal because these minority identities do not necessarily compete with a sense of nationality (e.g. Britishness) (Modood, 2008).

To summarize, multiculturalism or the accommodation of minorities is different from integration because it recognizes groups, not just individuals, at the levels of: identities, associations, and belonging, including diasporic connections, behaviour, culture, religious practices, and political mobilization. Multiculturalism appreciates that groups vary in all kinds of ways and will become part of the social landscape in different ways. This means that minorities cannot necessarily be accommodated according to a single plan and will in different ways change the society into which they are integrated (Modood, 2008).

A closer point of view on “Multiculturalism” is articulated by Tariq Ramadan at the University of Genève, raised in Switzerland from an Egyptian background. He is the only one to propose the concept of European Islam or European Muslim citizenship. He believes that there is a “European Islam” as there is a separate "Asian Islam" and an "African Islam", which take into account cultural differences. Ramadan identifies himself as a European who does not deny his Muslim roots, but wants to develop an identity that combines Islam with European-based identities. With some 15 million Muslims in Europe, he feels it is time to abandon the dichotomy in Muslim thought that defines Islam in opposition to the West. This is possible if one separates Islamic principles from their culture of origin and anchors them in the cultural reality of Western Europe. Ramadan says: “I am a European who has grown up here. I don’t deny my Muslim roots, but I don’t vilify Europe either” (Abu Zayed, 2006). Ramadan (2002) discusses that the future of a Muslim presence in Europe must entail a truly “European Islamic Culture” disengaged from other cultures. The formation of this new

Islamic culture is a pioneering endeavour, making use of European energy while respecting Islamic values and guidelines.

According to Roald (2006), the case is quite hard on converts when they when they begin living Islam as a religion and they are faced with a culture – or better cultures of Islam. Islam offers the possibility of distancing oneself from an ethnic background, either through a discourse on the universality of Islam and the irrelevance of the ethnic dimension, or by critical reflection on such Western values as materialism, individualism, or views on sex and gender.

Both Roald and Tezcan (2006) agree that most converts identify themselves as their birth-origin and as a Muslim. Converts put their identity together in a single label as Dutch Muslim, German Muslim or Finnish Muslim. They stress that they have become Muslims, but did not adopt another nation's identity, and live within a prediction and hope for a version of Islam called "national Islam". By reclaiming their culture, they can claim an ethnicity distinct from the "Arabic", "Turkish" or "Kurdish" label, which often connotes different ideologies. Even though their views have changed concerning their own society and they have become critical of several aspects, they are not often very estranged. They may have moved away from central Western values, but they don't feel they are outsiders.

Roald (2006) stresses that converts have a vested interest in remaining "Scandinavian", with all that its implications. By reclaiming their Scandinavian heritage, they can effectively distance themselves from the social, economic, and political problems that are weighing down the Muslim community and keep some of the superior status inherent in belonging to their majority community.

Van Nieuwkerek's (2006) research on women embracing Islam indicates that for some families the appearance of *Hijab* is a shock, more than the decision to convert itself. For the West, the Muslim woman is, by definition, downtrodden, and the symbol of her oppression is the *Hijab*, or veil which she is forced to wear. The *Hijab* is no longer seen as an innocent mark of a woman intent on maintaining her cultural or religious identity, but as a threatening symbol of a pathologically anti-Western ideology. The veil (*Hijab*, or occasionally *Niqab face cover*) has various connotations in a WEestern context. A

Christian nun wearing a veil might be seen as an image of sincere religiosity, purity and peace, whereas a Muslim woman wearing a veil is likely to be seen as a symbol of the oppression of women and as a person making a political and religious statement (Roald, 2006).

This inner conflict with society, the culture's identities' clash could lead some converts to step out of Islam and not remain Muslims. Some converts turn away from Islam, either because of the pressure they have been through, as a result of cultural changes or disappointment with some born-Muslims behaviour and ideas (e.g., unsuccessful marriage to Muslim men and cultural difference in notions).

Frank Flinn , a researcher on conversion, discusses that a convert community might work in a revolutionary way by defying accepted rules and establishing new movements (Roald, 2008). New Scandinavian Muslims are active in shaping a "Scandinavian Islam" (Roald 2006). Being a "European" Muslim is becoming a safer and less stressful option which looks increasingly attractive to many.

2.6. Roles of New European Muslims in their own Society

Defining a European, Norwegian, Swiss, or Finnish Islam has been attempted many times. Although successful trails have been made into defining the direction of an Islam from a Western perspective (Tripp 2006), there is no definitive meaning. As Tripp (2006) articulates these tryouts were efficiently executed by both converts and second generation Muslims who were both raised in the western society.

European Muslim converts are the mediators in society and one of the only links between both nations and their different ideologies. The insistence on their role is one of the main challenges toward a positive beneficial direction to the whole society. New Muslims and second generation Muslims play the role of “local actors” in society, and sometimes outsiders do not realize and feel the need to consult with local actors about their facts or strategies. Outsider involvement can cause damage, especially in cases of insufficient collaboration with those on the ground who are the most knowledgeable about their own circumstances. There are many cultural cases in Europe where local actors were excluded and disempowered by the interventions, and further some were endangered rather than helped (Tripp 2006).

2.6.1 Finnish Muslims Serving Muslim Community in Finland

Finnish Muslim converts have attempted to form organizations over time. The first organization founded by Finnish converts to Islam – Information (association), was established in 1994. Due to inner conflicts, a decision was made not to form an association, but a committee (Lehtinen, 2004).

As Lehtinen (2004) explains, a female convert and a Tatar man ran the committee. It functioned well for the first year, but due to lack of economic and human resources, the activities gradually ceased. The second year started with only two volunteer women who were able to donate their time to the committee. Although associations have not been a successful way to carry out activities, a lot has been done by the activity of individual converts (Lehtinen, 2004).

A Finnish journal on Islam called, *An – Nur Journal*, which means the Light, , was established in 1994. Published first as a private journal, it has become a monthly periodical ever since, mainly as a result of the activity of women. Contributors write articles and translate texts from English. In 1996, *An Nur* joined the Islamic Society of Finland as they shared the same policy of moderate Islam in Finnish circumstances. Today *An - Nur* reaches about 470 private subscribers and 50 libraries. The Islamic Society of Finland and others cover printing costs through subscription fees and donations. *An - Nur* has been an important channel providing information and knowledge about religious issues as well as practical information on current events (Lehtinen, 2004).

According to Lehtinen (2004), the religion of Islam has started to be taught in many Finnish schools. Most books on Islam in the Finnish language are translations. Some books, however, had converts as translators. In 2003, the National Board of Education published the first school book on Islam written by Muslims, two converts and a Somali immigrant (Lehtinen , 2004).

Lehtinen (2004) continues her discussions about the convert's activities in Finland, as converts have also been active in trying to bring converts from different mosques together. These attempts have often been successful and there have been seminars for Finnish Muslims on an annual basis since 1997. Converts from different European countries have been invited as lecturers, and local converts have held some other lectures as well. Furthermore, mother-children Islamic groups and children's groups have also been arranged.

It is essential to mention that seminars, lectures and study circles (*Halaqs*) have been important ways to train converted women on Islam, since many women cannot read books in English. Furthermore, they have provided converts with valuable opportunities to meet and share experiences.

Another important activity has been dialogue between Muslims and Christians. By the end of 1990s, in a suburb called Vuosaari in Eastern Helsinki where many immigrants live, a discussion group attended by Christian and Muslim women had been active for

five years. Finnish converts and immigrant Muslim women, especially Somalis, participated in this group (Lehtinen, 2004).

2.6.2 Other Social Events

For Emile Durkheim, religion was a source of knowledge and knowing. It was the original source of all man's knowledge. Durkheim also thought religion was integral to society, so knowledge was also social. In a "*Mechanical Society*", one finds religion is preponderant, dominating social life at every level on a daily basis (Dingley 2008).

Finland

This model of mechanical society is the case in the Muslim community because it is hard to make a distinction between social and religious events. Many religious events are, at the same time, social events, and vice versa. Many Muslim women's gatherings also have religious elements (e.g., preparing food can be a religious activity if it is prepared for fasting people during *Ramadan*). Typically, women prepare special traditional foods for religious ceremonies and rituals. Many social events and activities of Muslim women in Finland follow ethnic lines (Lehtinen 2004).

Friends, who often belong to the same ethnic group, visit and support each other, and are invited to different celebrations. For some years, Finnish converts have had social evenings together, sharing food, discussing Islam, praying and getting to know each other. But for many women it was difficult to attend without children, especially in the evenings (Lehtinen 2004).

Despite the fact that the activities of Muslim women belonging to different ethnic groups are somehow segregated, women have also co-operated and joined their efforts, to some extent. Ramadan and pilgrimage time are important sacred periods, which unite the whole Muslim community. Since the end of 1990s, converts and their children have had their own *Eid* celebrations.

As Lehtinen (2004) stresses, one crucial social event that has to be mentioned is that immigrant and convert women have also been active in creating opportunities to *swim*,

as well as guidance for themselves and their daughters. After long discussions with public swimming pool staff regarding proper swimsuit and showering arrangement, they managed to arrange a separate hour of swimming just for Muslim women and girls in a public swimming pool in Helsinki. In addition, other swimming opportunities for Muslim women have been arranged in smaller pools. For instance, one Somali women's association has organized swimming for Somali women only.

In a study by Tiilikainen and Lehtinen (2004), they explain how the media has handled Islam in Finland and how it was mainly connected to Somalis, refugees, criminals and problems in general.

The negative image of Islam, such as connections to threat, war and terrorism, created by news, television programs and articles, create stereotypes about Muslims, including those living in Finland. Although the official policy of Finland has changed in order to encourage the development of a multi-religious and multicultural society, the attitudes of ordinary citizens change slowly. Muslim women who wear a headscarf or a veil are exposed to discrimination, and often rude remarks. This happens to not only immigrant Muslim women, but also Finnish convert women.

With this overview on Muslim women activities in Finland, we find that Islam has united women belonging to different ethnic and cultural groups, despite differences in their religious interpretations. In addition, Muslim women in Finland share a sense of belonging to a minority. Muslim women have become part of the ongoing multicultural discourse in Finland and possible future debates on Islam and minority rights will affect them and their families. Future developments following the growth of second generation converts and immigrants will be of special interest.

Norway

Roald (2006) discusses a gradual convergence of "Islamic" and "Norwegian" activities into a new kind of "Islamic" activity. Norwegian converts have, for instance, started up Islamic kindergartens and have initiated a specific form of *Eid-celebration*.

In the Muslim community in Norway, there was no real *Eid-celebration* for children until female converts decided to arrange children's celebrations in the Al-Rabita mosque. The new Muslims *Eid*-traditions in Scandinavia resemble those of the traditional Christmas observance, as most converts tend to skip Christmas celebration (Roald, 2006).

One example of this is the Norwegian converts who have introduced the Norwegian tradition of the "Advent calendar", or "Julkalender", which contains little pictures and small pieces of candy for each day of Advent, adapted it for Ramadan (Roald, 2006). The calendars are homemade, with shaped pieces of mosques, crescents, and other "Islamic" motifs. As Roald (2006) writes, these calendars are unusual in that the children are not to open the gift of the day until after sunset, when Muslims break their fast.

As Roald (2006) continues in discussion of the role of Muslim Norwegians, the publication of a book of Norwegian – Islamic children's songs becomes another example of how "Islam" has evolved in the Norwegian context. The texts are mainly Islamic songs translated from English, but the new Muslims have composed some songs themselves. It is interesting to observe that the melodies are often taken from well-known children's songs, even Christian songs from the Norwegian context (Larsen 1995, 167).

As Roald (2006) explains, there have been other activities during Ramadan like telling stories in one of the mosques in Oslo. Children queued up to participate in the activities, even those children who often refused to participate in mosque activities were enthusiastic about going to the mosque the year activities were initiated.

Sweden

In the Swedish town of Gothenburg, a group consisting mainly of Swedish female converts has started up Islamic kindergartens. It is interesting to note that the main methodology used in these kindergartens is the Montessori system, in which many of the new Muslims have taken classes. They regard this model to be in accordance with the "Islamic" pedagogical ideal (Roald, 2006).

Yet another interesting phenomenon in the development toward a "Scandinavian Islam" is the new Muslim undertaking of "walking with poles". Over the last few years, this sport where one walks with ski poles in order to increase the exercising effect, has become popular in Sweden and Norway and particularly in Finland, where it started. Some converts walk regularly several miles with poles (Roald 2006).

These examples of convert activities typify how new Scandinavian Muslims form their own "Islamic" traditions by transferring Scandinavian traditions into an Islamic context. The new Islamic model draws on elements both from the Muslims' own cultural context and from a Scandinavian cultural sphere

The role of converts as mediators in the society has added to both Muslim societies and Western societies in general. For example, in North America different magazines like "Azizah" and "Muslim Girl" were published for the Muslim American woman in her voice, and from her perspective. www.azizahmagazine.com. (Bullock 2005:195). Other roles occupied by American converts is the preacher "Hamza Yusuf", who has played an urgent role as an advisor to the former American President, George W. Bush, in the "War against Terror" Campaign in the fall of 2001. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamza_Yusuf)

In Britain, the famous convert Yusuf Islam (former singer Cat Stevens) has played a significant role as an British honorable ambassador to Bosnia & Herzegovina, while the civil war in Bosnia back in the 90`s. (<http://www.yusufislam.com/articles/2000s/cat-stevens-returns-with-smal/>).

To summarize, we find that converts are crucial mainly in three fields. Converted intellectuals, in particular, offer legitimatization in the eyes of society. Besides, converts can provide confirmation for immigrants of the rightness of their faith. Moreover, converts form an element of guarantee, since they are citizens who cannot, even if they act as militant Islamic leaders, be expelled from the country (Allievi & Roald, 2006). Female converts also play a role in the development of new discourse on gender and Islam. They are important in the Islamic feminist production of knowledge. Recent research indicates that Islamic feminism is also gaining ground among female converts in the Netherlands, England, and South Africa (Roald 2006).

The role of New Muslims as mediators in society should be considered as they have the most intimate knowledge of issues, other players, conditions, laws, and cultural sensitivities. They have greater legitimacy than outsiders. Taking action that affects a community and a whole society requires consulting local organizations, taking in consideration many factors (e.g. timing, frame out) and other local dynamics (Tripp 2006).

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Hypotheses

3.1 Emergence of this study

Many studies have portrayed Muslim women as incapable to deal with modern issues (Aune, 2008). And despite these calls for “Emancipation of Women” around the world, we find that it has been proven that these calls are not done with their mission yet. It has come to signify much wider political and social attitudes towards social change and modernization as women occupy an important role in this change (Davis 1997).

Aune (2008) conducted different surveys and has found that 18% of Muslims in general look after home, in comparison to 7% of the population nationally, and Muslim women have the highest rates, 34%, of being housewives and higher proportion of children (three children or more from the age 0 to 15 years).

Aune (2008) continues to say that in comparison with other eastern minorities, Muslim women are more likely than any other group to be economically inactive. Hindu, Sikhs and other women are 1.6 times more likely to be economically inactive than their males. If this were an indication that Muslims are slightly less inclined towards “traditional family types”, economic inactivity may be an indication of Gender Specific roles within these communities. According to national surveys in England and Wales, we find English language proficiency, as an indication of participation in the public sphere 73% for Muslim women, 76% for Buddhists, 81% for Sikhs. We find that 75% of Muslim women are not on paid employment or self-employment, but yet remain dependent in comparison to 49% of Buddhists.

As women tend to occupy the role of nurturer or homekeeper, rather than being breadwinners or contributors to bread winning (a family member whose wages supply its livelihood), 18% of Muslim women look after their homes in comparison to 7% of the national population in England and Wales. National census (2001).

The reasons many are household caretakers or economically inactive depend on several factors:

- The current climate of tensions
- Prejudice
- External forces on social activities
- Less exposure to secular influenced institutions
- Religion as obstacle
- Preferring additional time for worship

A number of the chapters have also confirmed the idea that home-centered women find reinforcement for their position in traditional religion (Davis, 1997). And one of the paradoxes associated with fundamentalism is the fact that women collude, see comfort in, and even gain a sense of empowerment within the spaces allocated to them by fundamentalist movements. Women attend religious gatherings generally more than men in all categories, as they have their inner calling for spirituality (Aune 2008). Many have this believe inside them, even if they do not belong to or follow a constant theology. We find spirituality exists with all these changes in women lives and it is related to active participants or volunteers. For women of racial and ethnic minorities, it can also provide the means by which to defend themselves, as well as to defy the racist hegemonic culture. However, the overall effect of fundamentalist movements has been very detrimental to women, limiting and defining their roles and activities and actively oppressing them when they step outside their preordained limits (Aune, 2008).

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Data and Methodology

The research methodology in the area of women activism has depended mainly on methods involving qualitative and quantitative research. Both research methods were required in order to reach a numerical result supported by feminist feelings. As minority activities trend had to be measured, it was essential to use questionnaires as a qualitative method. In addition, to transfer a feminist point of view in this research, it was less essential to use structured interviews.

This empirical research was conducted in Helsinki which contains large concentrations of Muslim populations. The study involved questionnaires, structured and semi-structured interviews with a total of 26 Muslim women, mainly Finnish citizens, some with diverse ethnic backgrounds. The data analysis is prefaced by an overview of the status of women in Islam and of socioeconomic and legal issues surrounding the history of the Muslim presence in Europe over the past years.

There was a very enthusiastic and large participation of Finnish Muslim women in this research. The research participants welcomed a study that would finally set out Muslim women's experiences and aspirations rather than talk "about" their conversion to Islam and their headscarves, or "Hijab".

4.1. Data Analysis

This research consisted of interviews of a group of Finnish Muslim women. The questionnaire (See Appendix) was distributed by email, and has been sent to over 35 women from different cities in Finland. Twenty questionnaires were returned. Interviews have been done with six women in Helsinki. Interviews were interactive, specifically about the role of new Muslim women in Finland and their activism inside the Muslim community. Field observations were made mainly during the Jomaa (Friday) prayer and were completed in Helsinki.

4.1.1. Participants' Criteria

The participating group has been categorized by personal information to determine some of their activities, as follows:

General criteria for the selection of the key informants and interviewees:

- Present Activities: Their current activities and whether they were highly active, or moderately active in the Muslim community
- Islamic knowledge of literature: as a new Muslim, it was important to know how they learn Islam, and methods to improve their learning
- Ethnic background or origin: since this research is investigating the Finnish Muslim community, it is important to understand the ethnic backgrounds of the participants.
- Educational standard: it is vital to this research to know the level of the participant's educational achievement.
- City's population: since most of the Muslim community were located in the main cities in Finland, like, Helsinki and Tampere.
- Employment status/professional organizations: In order to search the community's percentage of working women, it was important to discuss the participants' employment status or membership in professional organizations.

4.1.2. Interviews

Interviews were conducted in different places in Helsinki. One of the interviews was hosted in a key informant's house. The remaining five interviews took places in public places or the Mosque. All of the six participants were from different groups. The interviews were semi-structured, and the questionnaire was discussed fully with the participants. The interviews were important opportunities to discern many of the participant's visions and feelings. As feminist research, the study had to be supported by feminist feelings and the interviews shared in gathering this information.

4.1.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part contained six closed text questions, with a possibility to add more information through the option of specifying other answers if needed. This questionnaire structure helped in gaining more information as open ended text questions. The six questions were general questions, measuring the main outlines of the participant's activism before and after converting to Islam, main resources for learning about Islam and how Islam gives back to each participant.

The second part of the questionnaire contained eight Likert-scale questions; these questions were considered the core of the thesis topic as they sought to understand how the Muslim women participate in the Muslim community as vital members. These questions also measure the motivation of Muslim women to take on a wider space and more responsibilities, not only inside the Muslim community, but also to work and serve the majority society in their own country. The Likert-scale method accurately measured the participant's thoughts and feedback on the current role of Muslim women both minor and major communities, as well as measuring possibilities for growth.

Part One

Description of the Participants

1. Key Informants

Three participants out of the six are considered the research's key informants. As two of these women hold positions in the community. The first key informant is a head of "International Muslim Women Union of Finland". The Union was established in 2001 and their activities include: providing counseling, offering access to a small library, conducting seminars, and running summer camps. She was elected to presidency in year 2004/2005. Their office opens everyday in the al-Huda cultural centre and mosque in Pasila. The Association's website is www.mnunioni.org.

The second key informant was active earlier in the 1980s. She started translation and editing the first Islamic Journal in Finland "*An - Nur*". She is also an active member of the "Finnish Islamic Council", that recently organized and participated in the event which was hosted by the [Finnish Islamic Council](#) (SINE), an association, "whose single mission is to increase dialogue with the different religions living together in Finland." Its purpose is also to promote respect for and awareness of Islam in Finland and Finnish culture within the Muslim community. The Council seeks to prevent both Islamism and the emergence development of anti-Islam as extreme phenomena in Finland.

The third key informant is an executive secretary in one of the main mosques in Helsinki "Masjid Al-Iman Islamic Multicultural Da'wah Centre". The informant is a young active woman, who is aware of many sociological problems in the Muslim community. She spends most of her free time volunteering in the Mosque besides her daily job.

2. Identity

- 23 of 26 participant were Finnish, only 3 were from different origins like Swedish or French.

3. Targeted Group

- Participant's ages were divided from 18-35, 36 and above. 18 of the participant's age categories were between 18 to 35 and 8 of the participants were over the age 36.
- This questionnaire reached participants from different cities. The majority of the participants were living in cities with populations over 100 000 (around 50% participants). About 7 participants ranked themselves in cities with population estimates of 50 000 – 100 000. A small percentage participated from cities with populations less than 50 000. Electronic questionnaires reached distant cities such as Oulu and Tampere.
- The electronic questionnaire proved that all participants have general computer literacy. More than 15 out of the 26 participant volunteer by updating online Islamic forums in Finland, while two interviews mentioned that updating forums requires a good knowledge of computer and new software. Online Islamic forums have different point of views and ideologies, many of the forums in Finland represent their local group's ideology in the city, such as Tampere's webpage (www.sunnanpolku.com), as the Shiaa' group. Other new blogs carry moderate ideas and try to attract younger generations by presenting advanced and highly discussed topics among young generations (<http://muxlim.com>). A key informant brought up the issue of young Muslim generations in Finland, as confronting "Cultural Identity" problems, and receiving less attention in most of the activities.
- By searching the daily activities and daily presence for the participants, as mentioned over 23 of the participants wore the "Hijab" (Muslim women dress code). With the Hijab dress code, 10 of the participants attend gym classes and other sports (gym has been the most popular sport activity among the participants).
- On the other side, four participants volunteer in different fields (e.g. Mosque administration assistant), not only serving the Islamic community, but also volunteering within the majority society.
- 15 participants hold driving licenses. Their daily driving is required either on their way to work or children to schools.

PART TWO

Group's Membership and Participation in Society

1. Moderate Active Involvement vs. Highly Active Involvement

- The objective was to measure the whole picture of involvement within the Muslim community generally in Finland. A high percentage have described their participation in the Muslim community in Finland by “*moderately involved*”, 9 out of 20 chose the average amount of participating or performing roles inside the Muslim community in Finland. The “*highly involved*” were mainly answered by the key informants who are currently in charge of positions inside the community.
- The activity average after conversion to Islam in comparison to before : 6 out of the 20 participant described their participation before converting to Islam with “*Highly involved*” in comparison to 5 out of the 20 participant were “*Not Involved*” at all before conversion to Islam.
- 9 out of 20 participants were considered to be “*moderately involved*” in the Muslim community (after conversion to Islam). In comparison to 8 out of 20 who were already “*moderately involved*” before conversion to Islam.
- 3 out of 6 key informants were “*highly involved*” in different activities, before and after converting to the Islam; they are in charge of some positions inside the community. It was important to measure and connect each participant's measuring activities, how she can define herself and compare participant's activism both before and after conversion to Islam.

According to both answers, there has been a connection between participants' majority answers with the “*moderately involved*” before and after Islam. This response is related somehow to one's personal attitude, and personal perspective in being active, as it has been mentioned earlier in this paper by Bullock (2005) who wrote about herself □ *I wasn't Muslim yet, but when I did become a Muslim, it was natural to turn my energies to the Muslim community* □ .

But having this high percentage of highly involved individuals before Islam raises the question, “Has converting to Islam anything to do with it? Or does the difference in the

activity involvement come from differences in life stages (marriage and responsibilities)?”

The answer to these questions could be answered through an analysis of the personal data. 55% of the participants are married and 50% have children, and besides it has been raised that the lack of children care, while having ongoing events requires participants, volunteers and organizers is problematic for participation. This complaint was raised by some of the interviewees, and has been one of the main obstacles for many Muslim women to participate actively in the community.

2. Relation with the Muslim community

- The Finnish Muslim women group is considered to be a heterogeneous minority “minority within minority” as they belong to different Islamic ideology schools in Finland. It was important to have participants from different Islamic perspectives and measure their vision equally. 5 out of 20 considered themselves generally as Muslims and not belonging to any specific group, 9 of the group identified themselves as Sunni Muslims, 2 belonged to the Sufi group, and 2 belonged to the Shia Group. 3 interviewees and Key informants belonged to the Salafi (radical Islamic group), while the other 3 participants were following moderate Islamic schools and did not belong to a specific group. These above mentioned groups are playing an important role inside the heterogeneous Muslim group in Finland, and some ideologies have prevented Muslim women from being active and raised conflicts in the community.
- Participants serve the Islamic community by arranging weekly Islamic gatherings (Halaqa), or volunteering to assist in Mosque administration.
- Around 10 of the participants have participated in online Islamic forums, as two interviewees have mentioned that they are widely popular in Finland and require updating). These interviewees mainly volunteer by updating Islamic forums. Online Islamic forums have different point of views and ideologies. Many of the forums in Finland represent a local group in a city, such as Tampere’s webpage (www.sunnanpolku.com), but some of the new blogs are carry moderate ideas, and are more fashionable to reach a high percentage of the younger generations (<http://muxlim.com>). A key informant brought up the issue of young Muslim

generations in Finland, as those who confront “cultural identity” problems, and face less attention in most activities.

3. Integration in the Muslim community

- Half of the participants (13 out of 26 participant) preferred to be called by the name Sister (*Sisar*), as the term base of sisterhood is highly appreciated in Islam.

By exploring name changes after conversion to Islam, it was observed that many new Muslims prefer to change their origin name (name by birth) to a Muslim name (normally Arabic name). In statement no. 4 (See Appendix 1) the case of integration was explored and how would one choose to change from a majority society name to a minority group name? A high percentage of the participants explained the change of name case as a personal choice, in order to help in integration with the new group. They have also mentioned in the interviews that it has been easier to know with these new Muslim/Arabic names inside the Muslim community, another group mentioned that keeping both names (birth name and a new name after conversion), has helped in integrating in both the major society and minor society. Two interviewees of the six mentioned that their own family (including husbands), prefer calling them by the origin name, not the new Muslim one. A key informant has choose to have a unique name which half of it is Arabic and the second half is Finnish, which is understood by both sides.

According to the questionnaire 13 out of 26 of the whole group preferred to be called by neither their birth name nor their new Muslim name, but by *Sister (Sisar)*.

This highly percentage choice has leaded to search the choice of this term “Sisterhood”. What is the basis of sisterhood in the feminist movement and Islam?

Searching in the feminist theory and movement, the term *Sisterhood*, has been articulated in second wave feminism (1960 - 1980s), as mentioned in these papers (for details, consult Chapter 2).

Feminists, themselves, faced the initial challenge of convincing women that they needed feminism. These early active feminists addressed a need for women’s “sisterhood”, and this consciousness – raising group stressed the need for both psychological and politically pragmatic activity to express their new understand, as it offered women who were isolated through bourgeois domestic conventions a framework for understanding

potential loyalties to one another. Like the ideology of *fraternité* in the French Revolution, “sisterhood” provided a metaphor for women’s solidarity even while constructing radical terminologies within the explicitly bourgeois codes of family (Dever, 2004).

The concept of “Sisterhood” is also an important aspect in Islam. Sisterhood entails many rights, responsibilities, mutual duties and obligations, and has been dealt with as a religious matter in Islam. This has been brought up from different Islamic references in the Quran, the Prophet’s sayings (Sunnah) and related fields like, Islam for women, Muslim women, Women in shariah.

From the Quran *“The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise..” (At-Tauba 009:71)”*

And from prophet’s sayings as narrated by Ibn Muslim *“Do not be envious of other Muslims; do not overbid at auctions against another Muslim; do not have malice against a Muslim; do not go against a Muslim and forsake him; do not make an offering during a pending transaction. O’ servants of Allah, be like brothers (or sisters) with each other. A Muslim is the brother (or sister) of another Muslim; do not hurt him (or her), or look down upon him (or her) or bring shame on him (or her). Piety is a matter of heart (The Prophet (SAW) repeated this thrice). It is enough evil for a person to look down upon his Muslim brother (or sister). The blood, property and honor of a Muslim is inviolable to a Muslim.”*

Participants declared by a high percentage the importance of Sisterhood and the practice of this term inside the community. Both feminist movements and Islamic notions have also emphasized the deep meaning of sisterhood and its healthy benefits as an outcome.

4. Personal Meanings of Religion

- To identify the participants' opinion on Islamic belonging, if the case is to feel attached and secure to a specific religion? Or is it the fact of belonging to a group of “sisterhood” as discussed? Only three participants have

chosen the Islamic faith to belong to a group. 19 out of the 26 participants believed in the faith, and 4 participants mentioned that Islam made them secure.

- In this term, it was hard also to get one clear answer or choice. Most of the participants, either choose all three above choices, or at least wanted to add more, such as that Islam has giving them meaning as women in terms of dignity, a meaningful life, peace of mind, righteousness in every aspect of life, and peace in their hearts.
- The internet has recently been a main source of developing their faith, instead of reading and attending Muslim gatherings (Halaqas).
- By searching the source of developing faith in Islam, Internet and reading options are considered to be more independent and self learning methods, in comparison with Muslim gatherings (Halaqas - Circles) which normally depend on frequent attendance, listening to the speaker, and writing notes.
- As the participants were computer users with good literacy, 11 participants depended on the Internet as a main source in comparison to 13 participants who preferred both sources as their own educational sources.
- Also, it raised in the interviews by 4 out of 6 interviewees that a shortage of time and babysitting issues are main reasons for depending on both sources, instead of attending any Islamic classes.
- Generally, reading either from online resources or books has helped many of the participants learn about their new religion. Many mentioned that almost all books are translated and written by specific scholars who belong to the Salafi school (most books were published and printed in Saudi Arabia). Despite the existence of other Islamic ideologies in Finland, most of the available books don't present different ideologies, but focus mainly mainly Salafi or Sufi ideologies in Islam.
- One interviewee stated that she is volunteering by arranging the Muslim gatherings (Halaqas), which are moderated in Finnish and take place in Oulu. The other participants who are volunteering in the community by working on the online Islamic forums and Islamic activities, in both languages Finnish and English (and sometimes Swedish).

5. Relations to Former Friends

- Relationship with former friends and relatives are considered the first link with surrounding people from the majority society. In what terms, do these relations still remain?
- 13 out of 20 participants strongly agreed that their relation haven't been affected by their conversion or even dress code, while one of interviewee out of 6 agreed that her family was even supportive of her as she is a single women. Her family take into consideration her status now as a Muslim and respect her. Five other participants somewhat agree that their relations remain but with some changes, as some wrote that only half of the family is still in contact, or that only a few friends are accepting of the idea. Many participants haven't decided, regarding this issue.
- Also, the time of conversion was raised by one of the participants as she converted 10 years back, and the action wasn't understood in that time. She had lost many contacts by the time, but she added that it is not the same case for others in this time, as many factors have changed. One key informant also supported the fact that the time factor is a good reason for them to be accepted.

6. Relation with the Majority society in Finland

- 5 out of the 26 Participants mentioned another type of volunteering, which was considered untypical "As a president of a dog association", or "Translations for Immigrants." These types of volunteering are considered to be not quite common among Muslims, but yet benefit both the minority community and the major society.
- Being a member in both the Finnish Society and the Muslim community was strongly agreed upon by 11 participants out of 20 as important. 5 out of 6 key informants also agreed on the importance of having their Finnish identity. One key informant insisted on her Finnish roots and loyalty to serve the Finish Muslim community.

It is important to differentiate and discuss the role of Muslim women in both the Muslim community and the Finnish society. Whether acting as a mediator between both

the Muslim community and the Finnish society was not decided upon by 11 participants, in comparison with 10 participants who were also not decided in relation to being a member in the Muslim community. Being Muslim women with a role in the both the Finnish society and the Muslim community was strongly agreed upon as important by 15 of the participants, as a choice of being both members in the major society and the minor society.

As a member in the Muslim community by itself, one Interviewee has stated that although she chose being both mediator and member in the Finnish Society and Muslim community, her personal belonging is as a member in the Muslim community rather than in the Finnish society. On the other hand, one key informant (interviewee) has insisted on her Finnish roots and loyalty to serving the Finnish Muslim community, expressing her Finnish identity clearly. Four interviewees strongly believed in being both mediator and member in the Finnish society and Muslim community.

Part Three

Future Expectations of Muslim Women in Finland

1. Muslim Women & Feminism

Researching the possibility of Muslim Women occupying high or sensitive positions in the Finnish society from the participant's personal opinions and point of views is important. There has been a debate generally among Muslims in different societies discussing the capability of Muslim women to fulfill sensitive positions, for example, a judge.

- 6 of the participants strongly agreed that Muslim women could obtain such positions in the future and should not face any obstacles, 2 participants were divided equally between somewhat disagree and strongly disagree. 3 have not decided if Muslim women can occupy sensitive positions, and 3 were agreed somewhat. Two interviewees out of 6 strongly disagreed for this possibility chance for the Muslim women, their disagreement came from a religious point of view that these proposed positions are more masculine positions than feminine ones. In other words, these positions could fit the nature of the man more than women's nature as one interviewee has mentioned.
- In relation to the general Muslim women's perspective on their roles in the Muslim community, 10 strongly agreed that women are part of the dominant force and vital part in the Islamic revival and awareness. 5 participants somewhat agreed and also another 5 participants did not decide. It is important to mention that these new terms "Islamic revivals", "Islamic reform" and "Islamic awareness" are new initiative terms raised by new educated Muslims scholars and generations in both Islamic countries and Western countries. These initiatives hardworking and sometimes work together to defeat violence, ignorance, and create an understanding for moderate Islam and Muslims.
- Much research explores the role and position of current women inside the Muslim community. Discussions of the factors that could be responsible for giving women fewer roles in the community, and whether the influence of the media, Eastern cultures, or ignorance of women's rights could be main factors, are all important.

- In relation to the factors that could be the responsible for giving women fewer roles in the community, and if the influence of the media could be the main factors, participants had the smallest reaction toward this factor, in comparison to the other two factors (Eastern cultures and ignorance of women's rights). 9 of the participants strongly agreed equally that both influences of Eastern cultures and ignorance of women's rights are the main factors. In comparison to 2 participants who strongly agreed that the influence of the media is the main factor. This could lead to the mainstream negative image of Muslim women by the media, it is not one of the main practical reasons, as 10 participants could not decide if the influence of the Media is the main reason

The influence of Eastern cultures is somehow observed inside the Muslim communities, as the majority of Muslims belong to Eastern cultures which make them consequently the general impression of the Muslims community.

One key informant, the "President of Islamic women organization", has stated openly that women's voices are not listened to since it is a male dominated community; few participants shared the same opinion that women are left out from the decision-making and their effort or potential in sustaining and developing conditions is mostly ignored. They added that sometimes women do not even get to vote on important issues concerning a mosque or Islamic organization which theoretically touches upon the Islamic message of both gender rights to equality. This explains why 9 participants have strongly agreed on the dominance of Eastern cultures in comparison to 6 participants who could not decide if the influence of the Eastern cultures is one of the main factors, while 5 participants disagreed somewhat.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, consciousness-raising is a mode of activism that aimed to shape any distinction between the abstract and the material, the personal and the political, the individual and the collective. This consciousness-raising has turned to face women's *self*-consciousness as their inner feeling. As Vivian Gornick explained, "the battle for women's liberation is not necessarily a battle for economic and legal reforms; it is a battle for minds and feelings and psychologies" (Dever, 2004).

In other words, ignorance of women's rights, her required activism and awareness to take place with her remain rights is a one of the main reasons for taking fewer roles inside the community. 9 participants strongly agreed that the factor of ignorance of women's rights was another main factor, in comparison to 2 participants who somewhat

disagreed with this factor. A very small number of the participants could not decide whether the ignorance of women's rights is a vital factor.

Both the factors of influence of Eastern cultures and the ignorance of women's rights were supported by four interviewees out of six, as they found it both factors are vital and effective.

2. Election's Participation

- Participation in elections, either as union elections or member elections is an important factor. Only 16 participants out of the 26 were not members in any organization or trade union in comparison to 8 participants who belonged to their own trade unions.

On the other hand, 13 participants have agreed that they participate in National voting in Finland, in comparison to 6 participants who don't vote or participate in any votes, and a small number chose to be neutral. Two interviewees have mentioned the discussions of the "Muslim Teachers Union" in Finland, and its emergence as a way to discuss the required curriculum and type of education for the Muslim community.

3. Future Expectations

Researching Muslim Women future expectations and activism in Finland requires examining women's views of future participation. There were statements in the questionnaire trying to determine women's mainstream in the Muslim community. Many participants raised generally that female Muslim activism faces many obstacles and challenges.

- 9 Participants strongly agreed facing these challenges, in comparison to 5 participants who strongly agreed that there were many active tryouts from the new Muslim's demographic, while 3 participants strongly agreed that there are not as many active tryouts. In discussion about obstacles facing Muslim women's activism, there were different factors discussed. Few participants mentioned that having some "Hard Liners" or strict religious trends inside the community is an obstacle they are facing in order to be active and not criticized. They also added that more balanced trends appeared recently helping to decrease the tension they face. Two out of six interviewees supported this idea and discussed it openly, that having such difficulties or clashes of different mentalities has stopped many events and activities from being organized.

- Focusing on the personal data, 14 of the participants are parenting from one to three kids, are working or a housewife, are having a problem of babysitting their kids, which has been an obstacle to participating in many ongoing activities.
- Around 4 participants strongly agreed that there were not as many active tryouts, as there should be. But on the other hand, 30% have not decided if there were enough active tryouts or not from their point of view.

This paper has discussed many active tryouts in Finland. As a key informant has organized and participated in the most recent event in Helsinki, which was the **Islam Expo Helsinki 2008**. The event was hosted by the [Finnish Islamic Council](#) (SINE), an association,

whose single mission is to increase dialogue with the different religions living together in Finland. Its purpose is also to promote respect for and awareness of Islam in Finland and Finnish culture within the Muslim community. The Council will seek to prevent both Islamism and the emergence development of anti-Islam as extreme phenomena in Finland. The First Islam-Expo is a part of the Year of Dialogue, the year 2008 has been designated the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. The Year aims to bring European nations closer to each other, to bring together the cultural backgrounds of the people and get them to understand each other's idea of the world.

Other topics were the same as those challenges faced in the community, and should be taken in consideration, such as Finnish legislation, and political interest's roles (i.e., finding a cemetery for Muslims, building new Mosques) and the effects of institutionalized Islamophobia on and within Finnish culture.

- Despite the challenges and obstacles Muslim women are facing, there were still a high percentage of participants who strongly agreed that there are chances opening in the Future. An optimistic vision of Muslim women's future expectations has led 12 participants to strongly agree with the possibility of opportunities coming in the future. One key informant (a head of a women's organization) assured that opportunities are based only upon qualifications and the high standard of education. Around 6 participants have not decided whether they have the same vision of these opportunities in the Future. On the other hand, three interviewees agreed

- Three out of the six interviewees raised the "*Hijab*" (Muslim dress code) as an obstacle and issue confronting these opportunities and the future path of the Muslim women in Finland. Hijab was the dress code for 23 of the questionnaire's participants, and all the six interviewees. Many of them said that they still face some obstacles by wearing Hijab. Despite that this paper does not discuss deeply the concept of "*Hijab*", organizations are involved in campaigns for the rights of women and in particular for respect for the "*hijab*" in terms of freedom of religion and freedom of expression.
- 8 participants were working either entry levels or highly advanced levels. Their type of jobs were not mainly confronting their dress code "*Hijab*", as many of them were teachers, administrators and working with immigrants or Muslim communities. On the other hand, when for example some of them tried to change careers or contact other marketing or sales representatives areas, their "*Hijab*" was an obstacle to being accepted. One interviewee added that they were mainly accepting the Hijab when you were already working in the position for some time, but the problem arises when you are interviewed and getting recruited for a new position.
- There was not a high percentage of participants who thought that nothing much will be changed, only 3 participants strongly agreed and supported that nothing will change in the future, in comparison to 11 participants who were undecided. On the other hand, 7 participants strongly agreed that the situation is not clear so far, and 10 participants were undecided and were not sure if the situation is clear to them at all.
- Discussing different solutions to mobilize Muslim women activism inside the community, participants had a range of responses. Participants made comments that they aren't being asked to participate in many vital issues in the community. When we analyse educational standards, a good percentage of the participants and interviewees of this study were educated people as 12 participants are university graduates (some working on post graduate studies). 13 participants are high/vocational schools graduates; therefore, this is considered a small, but educated community.
- Researching possibilities to develop Muslim women activism in the community, a high percentage could not decide which option is better than the other, whether

substituting current leaders in Muslim communities or a more advanced governmental awareness programs. A small percentage of the participants (3 participants) strongly agreed on the option of “substituting current leaders in Muslim communities”. (A key informant had critical remarks about the scarce level of education of the Imams (*Preachers*) are interesting especially in the light of the high position of women's education mentality, in general, given that most of the respondents seemed to concur on the fact that education is the recipe for upward social mobility). **Education, access to European languages, and religious knowledge** are the way forward for the elaboration of new conceptualizations of Islamic identity – and potentially, also activism that is compatible with democratic values.

- The option of having more governmental/non governmental programs or awareness programs were supported ideas. Around 5 participants strongly agreed with governmental programs or even the non profit organizations/programs addressed to women. Also around 3 participants agreed somewhat with the requirement of awareness programs for the community.

One key informant also mentioned that most of the governmental programs target immigrants and refugees groups in Finland. The key informant said, “Minorities are subsidized from Finnish government to study culture and language”. This paper is trying to highlight the different types of programs that could be addressed specifically to women of minorities, such as leadership & advanced skills programs that can activate these women’s motivations and shall benefit both the community and the majority society.

To conclude, the Muslim community in Finland requires more in the future. As key informants and participants, Muslim women have raised and currently work on these topics within their agendas;

- Building an Islamic school for children and younger generations.
- The younger generation’s membership and identity problem that needs to be worked on in both Muslim community and the Finnish society.
- Building a mosque architecturally as a mosque. Since most of the existing places were mainly either rented or non prepared places used as mosques
- The calls for a Muslim cemetery has been an issue in Finnish media and debates in 2008.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

This research paper "The New Muslim Women Activism in Finland: Challenges and Chances" explores the new Feminist image in Finland and has attempted to discuss the minority within a minority of new Muslim women and their activities in Finland. Many interesting studies have discussed similar topics, focusing on immigrant integration in Europe.

This paper has been welcomed and supported by the Muslim women community in Finland. Researching new Muslim women without any label names or excluded titles such as: converts or non-born Muslims has helped to generate interest and involvement from women who wanted to participate and to share more ideas and experiences of their own. In general, most participants and interviewees have been enthusiastic about this paper; they felt the need to work on independence and to counter stereotypes about the submissive image of women in Islam.

Researching their sociological status and not discussing their religion or faith status has evoked many other related issues in the community and withdrawn attention from some serious social matters. This minority within a minority has a legally estimated number around 700 back in 2003. But as key informants insisted, that number is now close to 2000 new Muslim women in Finland. She said,

There are so many Finnish sisters who have not registered themselves in any Islamic organizations, but every month we hear about a new convert, so the number is rising all the time! At this moment it seems that very young girls have got interested in Islam, many girls 14-18 years old, some of them have already taken Shahada (Conversion) and some are still studying more about Islam, they just have this problem, that they are not allowed to leave the Christian church without their parent's permission, so officially in all documents they are still Christians, even in their heart they are Muslims. Then when they turn 18, they can officially join any Islamic organization (Finnish, 39 years, Oulu).

Since this research is one of the ongoing subjects in the West, the paper discusses new feminist trends in minorities. As early in 1970's, governments and different political

parties have adopted symbolic and material policies to enable women to achieve positions in elected and appointed office, semi-public and public advisory boards, political parties, trade unions, and more recently political representation policies (Mazur 2002). And despite ongoing problems, there is a strong overall trend in Europe toward the improvement of minority rights. EU expansion has been explicitly linked to minority rights protections: in order to join, aspirant countries must reach certain benchmarks on their treatment of minorities

Finland has implemented a number of commendable measures in the area of minority protection. These include the adoption of language laws covering the Swedish and Sami languages, the development of anti-discrimination legislation and the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman for Minorities. New government programs have been established to support minority participation in public life, including a permanent regional advisory board for Roma affairs. However, despite these measures, problems involving discrimination and intolerance remain. Acting faster toward what minorities needs should help, most of the studies researching the integration of the immigrants, but what about others belonging to the same minority (Tatars; New Muslims, etc).

This paper has discussed “consciousness – raising” of various feminist terms; Islamic feminism, global feminism, secular feminism (Dever 2004). In order to measure these current situations in the Muslim community, as discussed by Mazur (2002), the following list has been used;

1. The improvement of women’s status or situation to be in line with men’s, rights, status, and situation culturally.
2. The reduction or elimination of gender-based hierarchies or patriarchy.
3. A focus on both the public and the private spheres or an approach that avoids distinctions between the public and the private;
4. A focus on women initiatives or feminist groups inside the community

As discussed by Mazur (2002) there are many positive actions that can promote women in decision-making positions such as, public information awareness campaigns, the extension of basic political rights to women – voting and the right to stand for public office, women’s commissions inside political parties, development of leadership training programs for women, and public awareness campaigns for women on the

advantages of electing women to public office. A positive action is to take in consideration various minorities and motivate women inside these minorities.

A vital notion relating to this paper, as Mazur continues, is *positive discrimination* which occurs when official policies state the specific balance between men and women, sex or gender balance, in decision-making hierarchies of organizations, and public commissions. Achieving the particular balance between men and women is sometimes set at 50:50, meaning that positions must be reserved for women rather than men. A *positive discrimination* policy trend started in the 1980s, and this concept discusses a valuable matter inside the Muslim community in Finland. A high percentage of educated Muslim Finnish women inside the community with a presentable profile could be selected to represent the Muslim Committee, their basis as both Finnish and Muslim is the positive criteria that demands such positive actions and discrimination. These mentioned political representation policies might be the only solution which guarantees positive future for the Muslim community in Finland.

Many young Muslims and new Muslims are absolutely thirsty to find their own way, to experience and understand Islam, intellectually, spiritually and bodily. So they should be facilitated in this process, but not left alone. They should be exposed to a range of views that exist within Islamic knowledge and religious traditions, to avoid the risk that they are captured by narrow-minded and exclusive discourses. Sometimes, for fear of trampling on someone else's religious beliefs and for fear of being accused of discrimination, no-one dares to explore the needs and religious traditions of these people and guide them, leaving them exposed to simplistic messages that are damaging even if they are not about terrorism. Being women in a European country that had an early feminism movement and a current successful woman president □ Tarja Halonen □ , is more than reason to empower all women in Finland.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This paper has answered the main research question and investigation regarding Muslim women in Finland's mobility and ability to play an active role in the community. It also has raised their ongoing topics of debate and items on their agendas.

The relation between the dominant Muslim ideologies should not affect their activism in general. Finnish Muslim women have a positive vision on their future expectations with hope to successfully benefit both the minor Muslim community and the society in general in Finland.

- “The New Muslim Feminist Image: Challenges and Chances” has attempted to discuss this minority within minority in Finland, as a mediator between both Muslim minority and the major Finnish society.
- Because of a successful feminist history in Finland, the current president Mrs. Tarja Halonen could associate with the rising term of Islamic feminism and more chances and activities should take a place and a role in the society.
- This research has been welcomed and supported by many of the Muslim women community in Finland as an opportunity and a channel to deliver their voices.

Muslim Women Activism in Finland Questionnaire

This questionnaire is for a study about Muslim Women Activism in Finland. The questionnaire is available both in English and in Finnish. Muslim Women Activism is quite a new phenomenon in the Finnish society; thus you are in very special position to mediate information about it and your contribution in this research is extremely valuable.

Hopefully the questions will be clear and easy to answer. Please submit and return the questionnaire by April 15, 2009. If you have any questions concerning the questionnaire, please contact me on: 044 9662325 or mfath@cc.joensuu.fi. Your anonymity is guaranteed when the research report is to be published.

Thank you for your participation!

Mariam Fath, Cultural Diversity Student, University of Joensuu.

Tämän kyselyn tavoitteena on koota tietoa musliminaisten aktivismista ja osallistumisesta erilaisiin yhteisiin toimintoihin. Lomake on saatavilla sekä suomeksi että englanniksi. Aihepiiri on Suomessa lähes tutkimaton, ja siksi osallistumisenne tähän tutkimukseen on erittäin tärkeää ja tervetullutta. Mikäli lomakkeessa on epäselvyyksiä, ota rohkeasti yhteyttä tutkimuksen tekijään puh. 04 4966 2325 tai mfath@cc.joensuu.fi. Pyydän palauttamaan täytetyn lomakkeen minulle huhtikuun 15.04. 2009 mennessä osoitteeseen mfath@cc.joensuu.fi.

Kiitos osallistumisestasi!

Mariam Fath, Cultural Diversity Student, University of Joensuu.

Please Double-click to mark your choice (Default Value – Checked)

1 - How do you describe your participation in the Muslim community in Finland?

1 - Kuinka aktiivisesti osallistut muslimiyhteisön toimintaan Suomessa?

Highly Involved	Moderately Involved	Not Involved
Aktiivisesti	Joskus, jos asia on	Vain satunnaisesti tai en
ollenkaan		
päivittäin/viikottain	minulle tärkeä	

Please specify your way of contribution:

Millä tavoin osallistut toimintaan:

2 - Have you been an active person generally in your life (even before converting to Islam)?

2 - Kuinka aktiivisesti olet osallistunut erilaiseen kansalaistoimintaan ennen islaminuskoon kääntymistäsi?

Highly Involved	Moderately Involved	Not Involved
Aktiivisesti	Joskus, jos asia on	Vain satunnaisesti tai en
ollenkaan		
päivittäin/viikottain	minulle tärkeä	

3- Do you belong to any particular Muslim Group, in Finland?

3- Kuulutko johonkin tiettyyn muslimiryhmään Suomessa?

Salafist **Ikwan Muslmeen (Muslim Brothers)** **Sufi** **Shiaa**

Other/Muu (mikä?):

4 - How would you like to be called in the Muslim Community (e.g. inside the mosque)?

4 - Millä nimellä haluat itseäsi kutsuttavan muslimiyhteisössä (esim. moskeijassa)?

New Muslim Name **Convert** **Sister** **Your origin name**

Musliminimelläsi **Käännynäinen** **Sisar**

Syntymänimelläsi

Other/Muu (mikä?)

5 - What is your main source of developing your faith in Islam?

5 - Mistä lähteistä haet tietoa islaminuskosta?

Internet **Reading** **Muslim gatherings (Halaqas)**

Internetistä **Kirjallisuudesta** **Muslimien**

opintopiirikokoumisista

Other/Muu (mikä?)

6 - What is Islam giving you as a woman?

6 - Mitä islaminusko antaa sinulle naisena?

Secure **Faith** **Belonging to a group**

Turvallisuudentunnetta Uskonnon **Kuulumista ryhmään**

Other/Muu (mikä?)

Vastaa seuraaviin väitteisiin valitsemalla yksi annetuista vaihtoehdoista jokaisen väittämän kohdalla.

Please mark your choice in the following statements.

	Strongly	Somewhat	Somewhat	Strongly	Not
Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Decided	
Täysin	Jokseenkin	Jokseenkin	Täysin	En osaa	
samaa	samaa	eri mieltä	eri mieltä sanoa	mieltä	

7 - Do you think a Muslim woman can occupy high or Sensitive positions in the Finnish society (e.g. Governor, Judge)?

7 - Musliminainen voi saavuttaa merkittävän aseman suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa (esim. johtaja, tuomari)

8 - Your role as a Muslim woman in the Finnish society is...

8 - Roolisi musliminaisena suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa on...

Mediator in the Finnish Society

Välittäjä

suomalaisen yhteiskunnan ja muslimiyhteisön välillä

Member in the Muslim community

Muslimiyhteisön jäsen

Both mediator and member in the

Finnish Society and Muslim community

Sekä välittäjä että muslimiyhteisön jäsen suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa

9 - Women are part of the dominate force of the Islamic revivals and Islamic awareness.

9 - Naisilla on valtaa vaikuttaa islaminuskon leviämiseen tai ihmisten tietoisuuteen islaminuskosta.

10 - Muslim women seem to have fewer roles than men inside the community, because of...

10 - Naisilla vaikuttaisi olevan miehiä pienempi rooli muslimiyhteisössä, koska...

Influence of Media

Media

ylläpitää tätä vaikutelmaa

Influences of Eastern Cultures

Itämaisissa kulttuureissa tämä on tavallista

Ignorance of women's Rights

Naisilla on vähemmän oikeuksia kuin miehillä

Other/Muu (mikä?), / Comments/Kommenttisi:

11- Muslim Women Activism in Finland consist of

11 - Musliminaisten kansalaistoimintaan Suomessa sisältyy...

Many obstacles and challenges (Please specify-)

Useita esteitä ja haasteita

Many active tryouts from the New Muslims side

Useita aloitteita muslimiyhteisössä

Not many active tryouts

Vain vähän aloitteita muslimiyhteisössä

Others/Muuta (mitä?) / Comments/Kommenttisi:

12 - The Future path of the

Muslim women in Finland means...

12 - Musliminaisilla on tulevaisuudessa Suomessa...

There are opening chances coming in the Future

Uusia

mahdollisuuksia

That nothing much will be changed

Samat mahdollisuudet kuin nytkin

That it is not clear so far

Mahdollisuuksia joista ei vielä tiedetä

Others/Muuta (mitä?) /Comments/Kommenttisi:

13 - The future path of Muslim women can be developed...

13 - Musliminaisten mahdollisuuksia tulevaisuudessa

voi parantaa...

With more governmental/non-governmental programs

Lanseeraamalla useampia valtakunnallisia tai hallituksesta

riippumattomia ohjelmia

With educational and awareness programs to communities

Tuomalla koulutusohjelmia muslimiyhteisön sisälle

By substituting current leaders in Muslim communities

Vaihtamalla muslimiyhteisöjen johtajia

Others/Muulla tavalla (miten?) Comments/Kommenttisi:

14 – My relationship with former friends

and relatives are still good (after conversion)?

14 - Suhteeni sukulaisiin ja ystäviin ovat säilyneet

muslimiksi kääntymisen jälkeen.

Please specify if there are any changes/Jos suhteissa on tapahtunut muutoksia, niin millaisia muutokset ovat olleet?

15 - Personal Information (Taustatiedot)

These personal questions are asked so we can look for connections between people's backgrounds and their views (Taustatietoja kysytään tutkimusteknisistä syistä. Tietoja käsitellään niin, ettei yksittäistä vastaajaa voi tunnistaa annettujen vastausten perusteella).

Name /Nimi (Optional/vapaahtoinen):

.....

Age/Ikä:

Origin/Syntyperä: Finnish/Suomalainen Other/Muu

Location/Kotipaikkakunnan asukasluvu: <50 000 50 000 – 100 000 >100 000

Level of Education/Koulutustaso: Comprehensive School/Peruskoulu

High/Vocational School – Lukio/ammattikoulu

University/Polytechnic – Yliopisto/Ammattikorkeakoulu

Other (specify -----)/ Muu (mikä?)

Marital Status/Siviilisääty: Single/Naimaton Married/Naimisissa Muu (mikä?)

Number of Children/Lasten lukumäärä:

Employment Status/Työmarkkina-asema: Working/Työssäkäyvä Unemployed/Työtön

Household/Kotiäiti

Other (specify-----)/Muu (mikä?)

If Working/Jos olet töissä, olet...: Entry Level / Alempi toimihenkilö tai työntekijä

Intermediate Level / Ylempi toimihenkilö tai asiantuntija

Advanced Level / Johtavassa asemassa oleva

Present Activities/Harrastukset: Sports/Liikunta

Volunteering (specify) / Vapaaehtoistoiminta (mikä?)

Study/Opiskelu (millä alalla?) Other/Muu (mikä?)

Dress Code/Pukukoodi: Hijab Niqab None/Ei ole

Driving Licence/Ajokortti: Yes/Kyllä No/Ei

Computer Literacy/Atk-aidot: User/Käytän tietokonetta

Not User/En käytä tietokonetta

Member in a Trade Union/Kuulutko ammattiyhdistykseen

Yes/Kyllä No/En Other/Muu

Do you vote or participate in any other professional organizations or political activities?

Äänestätkö vaaleissa tai osallistutko muuhun poliittiseen ja ammatilliseen toimintaan?

Yes, I participate in - Kyllä, osallistun (mihin toimintaan?)

.....

No, I do not participate at all.

.....

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