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# **The Mobilisation of Muslim Women in Denmark**

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# **The Mobilisation of Muslim Women in Denmark**

## **Abstract:**

Under the headline of ‘the mobilisation of Muslim women in Denmark’, this paper contains a series of introductory considerations as well as a few preliminary findings on the relatively unexplored question of how and why Muslim women in Denmark form organisations, and via their organisations interact with the surrounding society. Previous studies of immigrant mobilisation in Denmark has not paid special attention to gender as a differentiating factor, but this paper argues that there are good reasons to actually do so. Based on a series of qualitative interviews with members of various immigrant women’s organisations, this paper aims to explore patterns of networking among these women, and the level and nature of their interaction with other organisations and societal institutions.

## **Introduction**

The full title of this research project is ‘Gender, Islam and Liberal Citizenship: the mobilisation of Muslim women in the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and the United Kingdom’. As such, it is clear that this preliminary paper on the mobilisation of Muslim women specifically in Denmark inscribes itself in a series of existing research traditions dealing respectively with gender, Islam, liberal democracy and liberal citizenship, as well as theories of political mobilisation, with several existing studies attempting to take account of two or more of these traditions simultaneously. This means that the research field in itself is quite complex and multifaceted, and also that some of the subfields within it are if not politicised, at least politically charged.

While hopefully not dispensing with the multifaceted nature of the subject, I will in the following unravel some of the complexities in dealing with the mobilisation of Muslim women in Denmark. To do so, I will start with a short overview of existing research on Muslim women and their mobilisation in Denmark. I will then briefly describe the Danish setting in terms of ‘gender regime’, based on the rather extensive commentaries already in circulation in this field. These preliminary framework descriptions will set the back-drop for a methodological discussion, outlining, among other things, selection criteria for organisations and respondents and describing research methods. This part of the paper deals with aspects of the research project that are very much under development, and hence comments and suggestions are more than welcome.

## **State of the art: existing research on the mobilisation of Muslims in Denmark**

Logically speaking, the headline ought to have been ‘existing research on the mobilisation of Muslim women in Denmark’. But in that case, the section would also have been very short: there

seems to be very little such research, two exceptions being (Siim 2003 and Togeby 2003). This of course lends urgency and relevance to my present work, but also poses a series of practical problems in terms of where to start. To solve this problem I have been consulting recent research (mainly anything published between 2000 and 2007) involving two of the three key words for this project: 'mobilisation', 'Muslim', and 'women', simultaneously keeping 'Denmark' a constant factor, while also consulting relevant comparative literature.

This has brought me far afield. Based on available research, I have extracted four main issues, which I have ordered into four headlines, comprising 'historical developments', 'structure and fragmentation', 'financing' and 'political participation'. These categories overlap in several ways, but nevertheless represent main themes covered by several authors within various fields of research. While none of these have been specifically applied to the question of how and why *women* would choose to mobilise, they are relevant in establishing focal points for the present research project.

In sum, the four main lessons to learn from reading existing research on the mobilisation of Muslims in Denmark as well as on Muslim women, are that

- 1) Most authors point to a tendency towards more cross-ethnic organisational forms, especially among the younger generation of ethnic minority population in Denmark (see Hussain in Mikkelsen 2002b; Hammer & Bruun 2000; Mørck 1998; Mikkelsen 2003; and Lassen & Østergaard in Hedetoft et al 2006).
- 2) State-imposed requirements for organisational structures influence the working conditions of these organisations, but at the same time they seem to be as much influenced by internal diversity and in some cases even disagreement about ends and means (see Hussain in Mikkelsen 2002b; Mikkelsen 2003). Hence existing case studies of specific organisations tend to be outdated as most of these replace each other in an apparent continuous cycle characterised by diversity and fragmentation.
- 3) There is a general lack of independent funds, leading to two possible strategies: obtaining funding from the Danish state, with all this entails in terms of following the norms, or attracting funds from abroad, which several studies also point to as a risky path to pursue (see Klausen 2005; Hammer & Bruun 2000; Mikkelsen 2002a; and Lassen & Østergaard in Hedetoft et al 2006).
- 4) While local electoral participation is relatively high (compared to minority groups in other Scandinavian countries) case studies of specific engagement processes between ethnic Danish decision-makers and minority representatives point to a host of practical problems

and apparent misunderstandings (see Togeby in Hedetoft et al 2006; Klausen 2005; Kehlet Christoffersen in Schwartz 2002).

Finally, it is clear that there has been little previous specific focus on the mobilisation of Muslim *women*, which means that the present project will be charging new ground. Furthermore, it has also become clear that large-scale minority women's organisation (especially any specifically identifying as Muslim) seem to be missing from the Danish scene. What we do have is a number of highly profiled individual women either identifying as Muslim or as of a Muslim background mobilising for various political causes. In addition, we have been able to track a number of smaller, mostly locally based, women's organisations less preoccupied with politics and more with getting on with their every day lives. How this affects the research design will be discussed below. First, however, it is necessary to set the national scene, so to speak.

### **Characterising the Danish setting.**

In terms of characterising the Danish setting, I have been looking at previous studies dealing respectively with characterisations of the current Danish citizenship and integration regime, the gender regime and state-church arrangements. For the sake of brevity, I here confine my comments to deal with the gender regime, as the major novelty of this research project is to look at the mobilisation of Muslim *women*.

Part of the impetus for focusing specifically on women is that they are often (and with good reason I would suggest) positioned in research as important agents of cultural change (see for example Yuval-Davis 1997) . And, indeed, focus in this project is on how Muslim *women* negotiate the possible tension between liberal citizenship and religious identity in their political mobilisation. In this context, it is important to characterise the role of women as it is perceived also among the majority society. To this purpose, Andreassen and Siim's 2007 characterisation serves as an up to date source.

The Nordic countries are perceived to belong to the same model of welfare, citizenship and gender. During the last 30 years, women have increasingly been included in the labour market and in the political elite. Gender equality has become part of the Danish citizenship model, and the present government defines gender equality as a key aspect of Danishness and Danish values. Gender equality and women's rights have become politicised in the struggle for control over migration, and the discourse of gender equality has increasingly become a means to legitimise discrimination and stigmatisation of ethnic/racial and religious minorities (Andreassen and Siim 2007: 16).

That this is indeed how the current Danish government is thinking about gender equality – as something that the Danes themselves have already obtained, and now we only need to bring the immigrants on board - is further supported by the excerpt from the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's speech on the re-opening of Parliament after the summer recession on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007, inserted as appendix A (in Danish).

In her previous work, Andreassen (2005) also documents how Danish media show a tendency to represent ethnic minority women as oppressed, as opposed to ethnic Danish women. Thus, equal gender roles are a large part of the construction of 'normal' Danishness in media presentations, while Andreassen states that this image does not reflect reality (2005: 162). Andreassen refers to statements by the spokesperson on gender equality issues Troels Lund Poulsen from the liberal party, currently in government, who has stated that it is old-fashioned to discuss gender equality in Denmark, and that it is more important to focus on for example female circumcision and forced marriages (Andreassen 2005: 165). Andreassen concludes her description of 'The Oppressed Immigrant Woman' as portrayed in Danish media with the words 'I have not been able to locate a significant shift in the coverage of female visible minorities during the 1980s, nor at any other time between the 1970s and 2004 [as opposed to analyses of other stereotypes]' (Andreassen 2005: 163). The stereotype of the 'oppressed Muslim woman' remained the same throughout the period, which helped maintain the myth about gender equality among ethnic Danes. 'The news media's focus on gender inequality among visible minorities has contributed to making the structural gender discrimination in Denmark invisible...' (Andreassen 2005: 167).

This corresponds with the image painted by Lundgren in her 2007 article for *The Diversity Factor*. In this article, Lundgren describes Denmark as a country 'in denial' of its ethnic diversity and gender and ethnic equality issues. Lundgren states that gender segregation in the labour market is an issue, and although 27% of politicians are women, only 4% are leaders in the private sector, education and public administration (Lundgren 2007: 4), while the majority of women are in care giving and social professions. Overall Lundgren concludes that

The Danish self-image as a "model society" may actually be an obstacle to Danes' own learning and development. I suspect that its star status as a model welfare state in the 50s and 60s contributes to a pervasive denial [...] Living in the shadow of the past all too often stops countries and organisations from doing the difficult work of building and maintaining internal cohesion (Lundgren 2007: 7).

## Designing a study of the mobilisation of Muslim women in Denmark

Based on the overview of previous research on the mobilisation of Muslims in Denmark, it is clear that it is not possible to simply go out and select a number of (long)existing *national* associations for Muslim women to use as case studies for this project. None seem to exist – at least none that are highly profiled in public debates. There are, however, other possible approaches to identify Muslim women organisations, rather than simply reviewing existing literature.

We have chosen to focus or search for Muslim women's organisations in three Danish municipalities, first of all Copenhagen and Aarhus, which are the two largest cities in Denmark<sup>1</sup> and house a larger proportion of immigrants and refugees than the country at large, see table 1 below. As our third location, we have chosen Aalborg, which is the fourth largest city in Denmark. The reasons for choosing Aalborg<sup>2</sup> is both geographic dispersal (in this way we cover a larger geographic area) and the fact that refugees by law have been assigned to various municipalities by quotas over the last 8 years, and have had to remain in their assigned municipality for at least three years after obtaining residence permit<sup>3</sup>. This means that some municipalities host a group of immigrants with a specific ethnic profile, because this municipality happened to have an unused quota at the time these refugees gained residence permits. Thus Aalborg houses a proportionally large group of Muslims from Somalia, whose potential political mobilisation we would like to investigate in comparison with the for example rather large group of Turks/Kurds living in Aarhus. It is thus interesting to note in table 2 below that Copenhagen and Aalborg seem to display an opposite pattern concerning the relative percentages of immigrants and descendants of respectively Somali and Turkish background by municipality in 2007. We would like to explore whether such factors might lead to variations in mobilisation patterns. Furthermore, all of these three cities in focus have neighbourhoods in which political intervention has been pronounced, and hence where we infer that the impetus for mobilisation is great. In addition, we are interested to see to what extent local municipal authorities might influence mobilisation patterns among the Muslim women.

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<sup>1</sup> Though not necessarily the largest municipalities, as the new municipal reform in effect from January 2007 has added considerable numbers of suburban and rural inhabitants to previous municipalities, as Denmark has gone from previously 272 municipalities to now 98.

<sup>2</sup> Rather than Odense, which comes in as the third largest city, though not the third largest municipality, because Aalborg has added a large number of old smaller municipalities to its size during the municipal reform. See table 1 below. A further reason for skipping Odense, is that it appears somewhat similar to Aarhus in terms of the demographic factors listed in table 1 below.

<sup>3</sup> A total ban on labour immigration was introduced in 1973 (Vikkelsø Slot 2004: 22) and since then it has only been possible to enter Denmark via family unification laws, if one possesses special qualification or as a refugee. The two former groups naturally settle with the family or near their workplaces, whereas the latter group since the introduction of the Danish Integration Act on January 1, 1999, have been governed by housing placement regulations (see Vikkelsø Slot 2004: 28-30).

**Table 1: Number of immigrants/refugees and descendants by municipality 2007.**

Based on own calculations of data drawn from Danmarks Statistik October 12<sup>th</sup> 2007, preliminary figures for 2007.

	Nationally	Copenhagen	Aarhus	Aalborg	(Odense)
<b>Persons of Danish origin</b>	<b>4,969,384</b>	<b>403,900</b>	<b>258,026</b>	<b>180,804</b>	<b>163,647</b>
<b>Immigrants/refugees</b>	<b>360,902</b>	<b>73,289</b>	<b>27,548</b>	<b>10,737</b>	<b>16,826</b>
<b>Descendants</b>	<b>116,798</b>	<b>26,510</b>	<b>10,596</b>	<b>2,608</b>	<b>6,272</b>
<b>Immigrants/refugees and descendants as total of population</b>	<b>8.8%</b>	<b>19.8%</b>	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>12.4%</b>

**Table 2: Numbers and relative numbers of immigrants and descendants of respectively Somali and Turkish background by municipality 2007.**

Based on own calculations of data drawn from Danmarks Statistik October 12<sup>th</sup> 2007, preliminary figures for 2007.

	Copenhagen	Aarhus	Aalborg
<b>No. of Somali immigrants/refugees and descendants</b>	<b>3774</b>	<b>3268</b>	<b>1185</b>
<b>Somali origin as percentage of immigrant population</b>	<b>3.4%</b>	<b>8.6%</b>	<b>8.9%</b>
<b>No. of Turkish immigrants/refugees and descendants</b>	<b>8076</b>	<b>4023</b>	<b>551</b>
<b>Turkish origin as percentage of immigrant population</b>	<b>8.1%</b>	<b>10.5%</b>	<b>4.1%</b>



Looking at previous case studies and available media information, lead us to suspect that a relatively large number of local organisations exist (often, apparently, organising at neighbourhood level rather than even city level), and we have tried to identify these based on existing research and municipal projects in different geographic locations, as well as searching the internet for women's organisations, among others using the network associations listed by Kvinno and Kvinderådet [*Denmark's Centre for Information on Women and Gender and Women's Council in Denmark*]. Both are majority women's organisations that have established cooperation with different minority women's organisations. Both organisations include a list of affiliated organisations on their homepages which we have searched for possible cases to use (see [www.kvinfo.dk](http://www.kvinfo.dk) and [www.kvinderaadet.dk](http://www.kvinderaadet.dk)). Search criteria here have included references to various minority ethnicities, or words like 'immigrant' or 'intercultural' in organisational names.

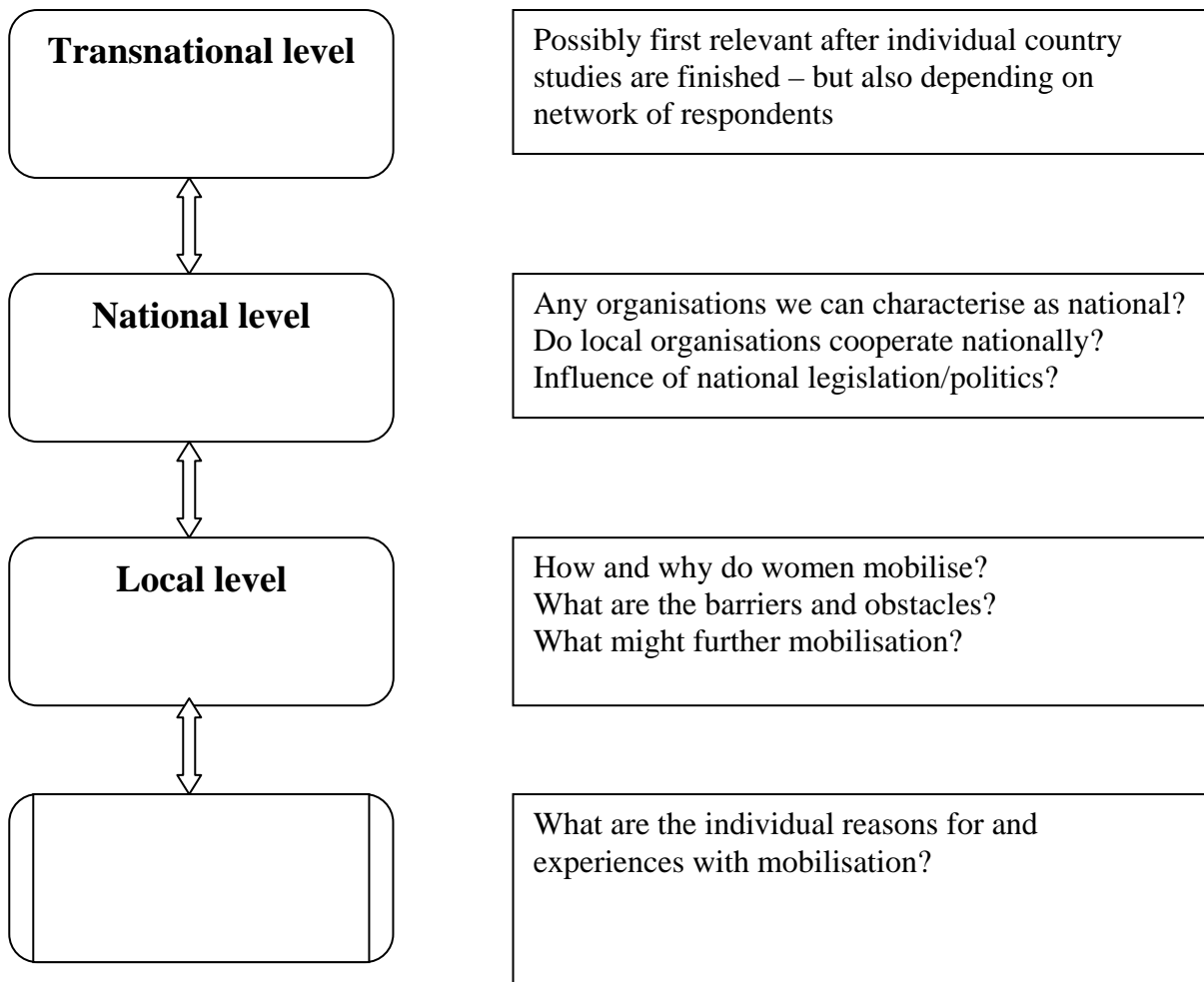
In addition to this, we have been consulting lists of who have applied for and who have been given '§18 or §115 support' by the different municipalities we are focusing on. The Danish Law popularly known as Serviceloven [Law on Social Services] from 2006 specifies in §18 that local municipalities have a duty to cooperate with and support the work of voluntary organisations (see Socialministeriet 2006a). In the previous law within this field (in effect from 1997-2006) this paragraph was named §115, and this still appears to be the most frequent reference in municipal reports about their activities in relation to supporting voluntary organisations. Organisations which have actually applied for this support and possibly even obtained it, we regard as the more resourceful end of the spectrum of organisations, as it is rather complicated to both apply for support and not least receive it, which can be evidenced by consulting Socialministeriet 2006b, *Vejledning om Kvalitet, tilsyn, tilskud til frivillige organisationer mv. [Guidelines for quality, supervision, support for voluntary organisations etc]* which is an 80 page long document of dense legal instruction about the intentions and applications of the law. This approach means that we are looking for organisations that are at least resourceful enough to apply for support – although what has happened a few times when I have called up contacts is that listed contact persons have told me that the organisation is no longer active. Nevertheless, I have also asked for interviews with these people, to hear their story and ask about the reasons for their current inactivity. Thus we are also aiming to include the less resourceful or even discontinued organisations in our project.

Apart from searching Kvinno and Kvinderådet for listed associates, and looking for §18/§115 registered organisations, we have searched city council homepages for references and projects

related to integration activities, primarily focusing on those targeted at or organised by Muslim women. Furthermore, we have searched for associations mentioned in connection with local neighbourhood events for those areas in the three selected cities where we know the number of inhabitants with an immigrant background is high. In this way we have come up with a list of primary respondents, whom we hope will lead us on to other potential respondents by way of a 'snowballing effect', where we hope the snowballing will enable us to also contact the outliers in the structure of mobilised Muslim women in Denmark. Overall, the parameters for which organisations we have deemed 'of interest' and therefore contacted or attempted to contact are defined as: organisations/activities primarily targeted at women of Muslim background, preferably those organised by the women themselves.

The above considerations mean that we methodologically have to take account of three (possibly four, if we can establish connections based on our comparative analyses with Norway and/or Holland and the UK) interdependent structural layers:

### Model 1: Interdependent structural layers in data collection – and analysis.



### Methodology

In terms of design, our entry point in this model is the local level, which we have used to structure our search for organisations. In terms of methodology, however, the focal point is on the individual level, where we propose to conduct approximately 10 qualitative interviews with key respondents in each of our three local settings, thus approximately 30 interviews in total

The original research proposal for this project spoke about three different topics that should be studied, using various methodological approaches. The three topics are: 1) country debates on Muslim women, 2) how Muslim women mobilise and 3) in-group demands on Muslim women. By sticking to a simple methodological design and relying on individual in-depth qualitative interviews with Muslim women based on an open-ended question guide (which has been partly coordinated

with the Norwegian study), we propose to establish these women's views on all three parameters. This may then be supplemented with frame analysis later on in the research phase concerning country debates and other questions arising at the national level. Here we will refer back to identified characteristics of the Danish setting. Hence our overview of the current Danish citizenship and integration regime, the gender regime and state-church arrangements, supplemented with some considerations of the general mobilisation pattern in Denmark, because we also deem this relevant for assessing the mobilisation of Muslim women in Denmark.

Our primary data will consist of interview material collected among the identified women of immigrant background who are (or used to be) active in various organisations in their local settings. Not all of these identify as Muslim, although several acknowledge having a Muslim background. Common for them, however, is that they all provide views on their personal reasons and experiences with mobilisation, as well as suggesting general barriers and incentives for immigrant women (and specifically for those with a Muslim background) to mobilise in a Danish setting.

This approach, of course, leaves us vulnerable to the accusation that our study does not provide an accurate picture of the mobilisation of Muslim women in Denmark, because we are only focusing on those who are actually active in civil society organisations. Nevertheless, we suggest that our study will provide valuable insight into the obstacles and incentives for mobilisation within the liberal democratic framework, even if we do not manage to find those mobilising counter to liberal democratic values or those women who are simply isolated from the liberal democratic society. Furthermore, we are aiming specifically to include little known – or only locally known – organisations in our study. Hence, several potential respondents have expressed great surprise to be contacted by me. And with one exception I have consciously tried to avoid re-interviewing women already interviewed for previous studies<sup>4</sup>.

### **Analytic framework**

At the time of writing, approximately 1/3 of the interviews have been completed, which means that it is very early days in terms of drawing conclusions from data. Nevertheless, one early hunch about this data (which is all, so far, from Aarhus) came to me while listening to a presentation by Lise Togeby on electoral behaviour patterns among immigrants in Aarhus. Here she documented how Turks in Aarhus are apparently very good at mobilising for 'their own' candidates at municipal

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<sup>4</sup> This exception was made because the organisation in question has existed for 11 years, which makes it an outlier in relation to most other organisations. One other has existed for 15 years, but has changed both chairperson, name and purpose/focus since then, although still catering to the same ethnic group as originally.

elections, while Iranians are much less successful in doing so (Togeby 2007). At this stage I had interviewed no less than four Iranians in Aarhus, all of them active in very cross-cultural organisations and projects. And I had spent a lot of time and energy trying to contact five different Turkish women and/or organisations in Aarhus, which only led to *one* actual interview, despite the fact that I had even gone so far as to call the janitor in the community house I knew one organisation had previously been using for meetings. This led me to conclude that either I was extremely unlucky, or the Turks in Aarhus were simply organising in self-enclosed circles. The last conclusion is further supported by the fact that at the time of starting the data collection process, a new large cross-ethnic immigrant women's organisation was forming in Aarhus under a lot of press and (local) authority attention<sup>5</sup>. This organisation is started on the initiative of 13 women of 7 different ethnic backgrounds: Swedish, Vietnamese, Egyptian, Palestinian, Somali, Iranian, Moroccan and Danish. - The Turks are conspicuously lacking.

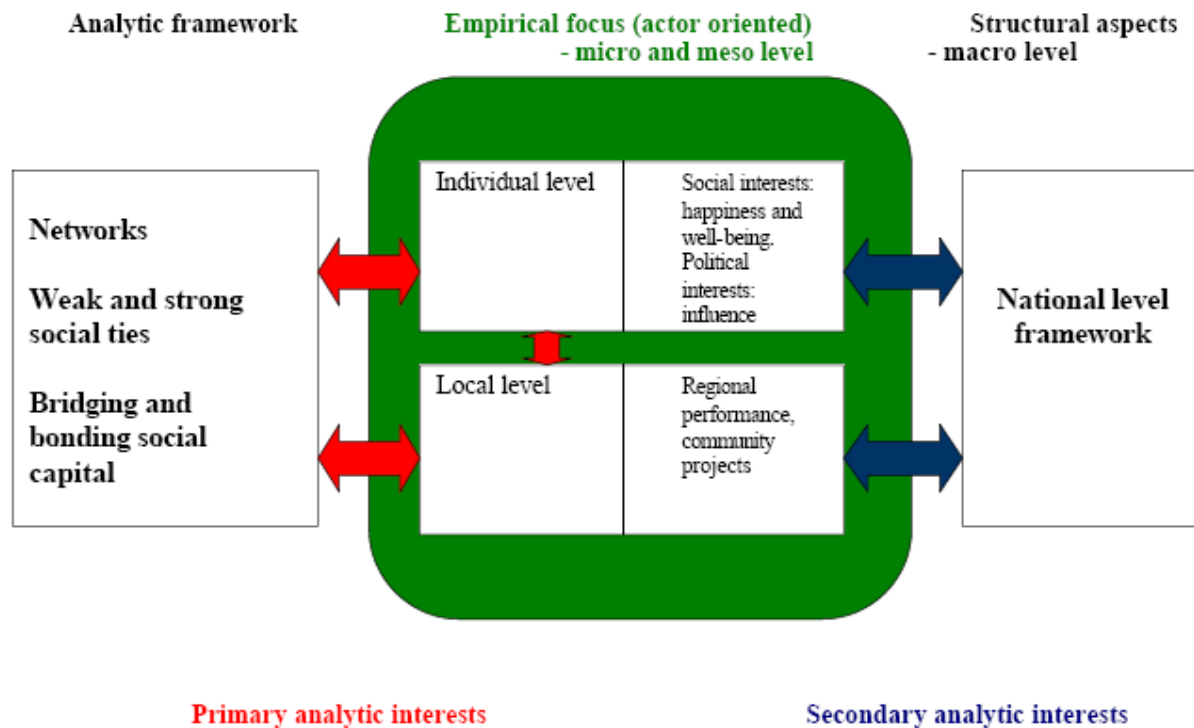
This caused me to voice a hypothesis that maybe the Turks are organising in closed intra-ethnic networks while the Iranians are actively working to engage themselves in inter-ethnic ones. Another attendee at the presentation said that a previous study of hers based on 168 telephone interviews with Turks and Iranians in Aarhus and Aalborg confirm this pattern (Petersen 2006). I have subsequently read her study and been given access to her data, and this has inspired me to think in terms of networks when approaching my own data analysis.

Retaining the orientation towards both micro- meso- and macro-levels of the mobilisation patterns under study (model 1 above), I have let myself be inspired by network theory and theories of social capital to develop the following model 2 for describing the analytical approach to my data. With regards to the social capital literature, I have taken a selective approach, using ideas about weak or strong social ties (Granovetter 1973) and bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam 2000). The model is partly inspired by Stolle 2002.

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<sup>5</sup> These women often figured in the local press at the time, were in regular contact with municipal representatives and reported several contacts with both the mayor, and various national ministers, including one of them receiving a personal phonecall from the Prime Minister to hear her view on a particular issue.

## Model 2: Empirical focus, analytic framework and analytic interests for study



This model is meant to be understood in the way that my primary analytic interest will be to look at network patterns, particularly focusing on the existence of strong and weak ties and bridging and bonding social capital at the interacting individual and local levels – the left-hand side of the model. Granovetter comments that ‘how interaction in small groups aggregates to form large-scale patterns eludes us in most cases’ and that ‘Analysis of social networks is suggested as a tool for linking micro and macro levels of sociological theory’ (Granovetter 1973: 1360). So if the aim of this research project is to provide a picture of mobilisation patterns among Muslim women in Denmark – ultimately being able to draw parallels to other national settings – this seems a reasonable approach to take. It seems a good way to link individual, local, national and perhaps even transnational levels into the same analytic framework.

The right-hand side of the model pertains to structural aspects at the macro-level. Here I propose to take a secondary analytic interest – secondary in the sense that this level will be analysed *after* having established network patterns at the local/municipal level. At this national

level it is still possible to remain inspired by the social capital literature, and here I propose to look specifically into two questions pointed out by Dietlind Stolle.

First, there is a debate about the extent to which the state and state institutions exercise an independent influence on social capital, as opposed to the claim that social capital is purely a product of civil society [...] Second, , there is disagreement about the extent to which governments' intervention is beneficial or even detrimental to social capital (Stolle 2002: 215-216)

I have drawn the arrows connecting the national level framework to the rest of the model as double arrows – this captures Stolle's first conundrum of whether the impact is going one way or the other in terms of how social capital is 'produced'. Secondly, as she suggests, the data should be analysed with a view to whether this is a positive or a negative relationship. I would suggest that the same two questions go for the double arrow drawn between the local and individual levels in the model.

Concerning the direction (top-down or bottom-up) and quality (beneficial or detrimental) of the impact of institutional patterns on individual mobilisation patterns, Stolle is rather critical of Putnam's approach (Putnam 2000), which according to her emphasises horizontal rather than vertical relationships (Stolle 2002: 198), and causes him to equate social capital with civicness (Stolle 2002: 200). In contrast to this, Stolle is more preoccupied with institutional links to social capital and the possibilities for institutional engineering (Stolle 2002: 218 and Stolle 2004). Stolle goes on to ponder specifically how the two questions above may be of relevance within a gender perspective, without, however, giving any finite suggestions. Neither do I think any conclusive answers will emanate from my study. But questions of direction and quality of impact of institutional structures will be attempted analysed specifically with view to their effect relative to gender and ethnic minority patterns.

Stolle further adds that '[...] the question remains as to precisely how these [good or bad experiences with government and fair political and social institutions] are generalized to the public at large, and how institutional experiences are transmitted and socialized' (Stolle 2002: 219). Here, I propose to substitute 'the public at large' with 'the group of interviewed active Muslim women' to see whether any patterns emerge in data. This approach will provide further arguments for focusing specifically on women, as mothers arguably play a major role in transmitting institutional experiences to the next generation. Furthermore, this will help me retain the link between micro- and macro-levels in the analysis.

The approach is also supported by a comment by Granovetter concerning the simultaneous inclusion of considerations of the roles of both structures and actors: '[...] the adoption of ideas cannot be explained purely by structural considerations. Content and motives for adopting one rather than another idea must enter as a crucial part of the analysis. The active role of individuals in a culture cannot be neglected lest the explanation become too mechanistic' (Granovetter 1983: 216). In line with this, I suggest that the explanatory power of a network approach is greatest if all intersecting levels are taken into account: the individual and her organisational membership, the local or municipal level, and the national level framework as expressed for example in debates over the role and position of Muslim women in society. Thus I explicitly refrain from focusing only on the importance of voluntary associations, thus distancing myself from Almond and Verba's classic study *Civic Culture*, in which they state that 'Voluntary associations are the prime means by which the function of mediating between the individual and the state is performed. Through them the individual is able to relate himself effectively and meaningfully to the political system' (Almond and Verba 1963: 300). Here I agree with Granovetter that the explanation easily risks becoming too mechanistic. Almond and Verba test the hypothesis that organisational membership 'fosters the development of a democratic citizenry' (Ibid: 307) and that members should be more committed to democratic values than non-members, their results indicating that membership does indeed affect political attitudes, leading to greater self-confidence in ability to influence political decision-making. But rather than relying on this as a foregone conclusion, I propose to include such questions in my interviews with respondents, and thus remain open towards the answer to Stolle's conundrum of whether we should think of social capital production as a top-down or bottom-up process.

Nevertheless, Almond and Verba's study is certainly useful in suggesting findings that might be probed specifically within the context of the mobilisation of Muslim women in Denmark. Among the conclusions they draw is that 'the existence of voluntary associations increases the democratic potential of a society', that 'the organizational member is likely to be a self-confident citizen as well as an active one', and finally that 'Membership in a *politically oriented* organization appears to lead to greater political competence than does membership in a nonpolitical organization, and *active* membership in an organization has a greater impact on political competence than does passive membership' (Almond and Verba 1963: 318). Apart from the fact that I am solely aiming for active respondents, these conclusions should all be testable within my qualitative data.



This observation points to *the* major limitation in my work: namely that it does not include the voices of the supposedly many Muslim women in Denmark who are *not* members of any voluntary organisations or are only passive members. Stolle raises the point that formal organisational membership might not be the right place to look when assessing levels of social capital among women. '[...] a gendered perspective urges us to broaden our view of what is relevant political and social participation [...] we might have missed recent developments in forms of participation that are not as easy to observe, to count and measure' (Stolle 2002:215). A further possibly disturbing aspect of my research design is the (almost) exclusive focus on *Muslim* women's organisations, as the study should clearly be intent on social cohesion rather than break-up, cf. the full title quoted at the beginning: 'Gender, Islam and *Liberal Citizenship*: the mobilisation of Muslim women in the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and the United Kingdom'. But 'If diversity matters for the socialization of co-operative values, then voluntary associations might not be the best place to look as such groups have been found to be relatively homogenous in character' (Mutz and Mondak, 1998; Popielarz, 1999 cited in Stolle 2002: 213).

Hence, I will consider it an important analytic question to see whether the organisations in the study function as vehicles of expression of political and social interests and places of learning of political and social mores, or whether they rather function as ends in themselves, furthering an ethnic community-building purpose. To this end, it will be extremely important to look at whether the organisations can be described as fostering bridging or bonding social capital (Putnam 2000) – in this context, this means looking at whether they encourage intra-ethnic bonding and social/political identity or rather cross-ethnic bridging to either majority society and/or other ethnic groups in society. Further, it will be interesting to probe whether possibly bridging ties can primarily be described as weak or strong – for example developing assessment criteria according to person-overlap in different organisations, or common membership in eg. Kvinderådet, or joint participation in community events etc. Further possibilities for common denominators remain to be seen.

Here it is interesting to note that Granovetter already in his 1973 article included some interesting considerations about the phenomenon of cliques within ethnic milieus and lack of abilities to establish strong organisations, even within areas one who think could spark mobilisation (Granovetter 1973: 1373-74). His 1983 includes a number of clarifications of his previous theory as well as comments on empirical studies inspired by the first article. Here he elaborates further on the problem of cliques: 'Membership in movements or goal-oriented organizations typically result from

being recruited by friends. While members of one or two cliques may be efficiently recruited, the problem is that, without weak ties, any momentum generated in this way does not spread *beyond* the clique. As a result, most of the population will be untouched' (Granovetter 1983: 202). He reports several empirical studies which have lead to the conclusion that poor lower class people often have difficulties in mobilising for a cause – even if it is one that greatly affects their daily lives. 'This pervasive use of strong ties by the poor and insecure is a response to economic pressures; they believe themselves to be without alternatives ... [this] has the impact of fragmenting communities of the poor into encapsulated networks with poor connections between these units' (Granovetter 1983: 213). Hence, it would be interesting to try to establish whether ethnic groups display the same pattern of relying on strong rather than weak ties – where possibilities for assessing tie strength may include asking about whether the tie is to a family member, friend or acquaintance, and whether the person in question is of same or different ethnic background, possibly with the further subdivision of 1) same background, 2) other minority background, 3) Danish background. This does not mean that I *eo ipso* suppose that ties to persons of same background will necessarily be strong, but it will be interesting to hear respondents' own assessment of such ties and also assessment of the resources of available ties.

Lin (2000) debates whether closure is a desirable network characteristic or not. He argues that when 'searching for and obtaining resources not presently possessed [such as a new job] accessing and extending bridges in the network should be more useful' (Lin 2000: 27), which does sound like a convincing argument. Nevertheless, this is an interesting question in relation to Petersen's (2007) results in her study of job acquisition among Turkish and Iranian immigrants in Aarhus and Aalborg, which partly indicate that closure *is* desirable - at least for obtaining a hierarchically equivalent job. Thus, her results indicate that the Turkish community in both municipalities is rather good at finding jobs for each other within those employment areas where several of them already work – whereas it is difficult for second or third generation Turks with a longer Danish education to find jobs matching their skill level. Lin (2000), however, follows Granovetter in arguing that bridges are far more important for resource obtainment than closure. Relating these ideas to some *very* preliminary points from data, I am intrigued to notice that one chairwoman of a Somali organisation in Aarhus put 'handing over the organisation to the next generation of young Somali girls' as the top priority and concern for the organisation at the moment. Which suggests a focus on network closure. In stark opposition to this, the only Turkish respondent I managed to interview in Aarhus had previously been a board member of an

intercultural women's organisation in Denmark which was no longer functioning – partly because they were no longer given municipal support under §18 for the reason that they had lost their meeting place. While this was the immediate occasion for the dissolution of the organisation, she also commented that the end goal of all ethnic organisations should be their eventual superfluous nature, in the sense that members would no longer primarily identify as belonging to an ethnic minority group, but rather as being interested in swimming, discussing literature or entering politics etc. Thus she was happy to report that old core members had gradually left the organisation to join various interest based organisations rather than ethnically oriented ones.

These are so far some preliminary concerns and ideas for analytic dimensions when approaching my data. As the idea to focus so much on network structure and social ties has developed simultaneously with the data collection process, part of what I am pondering at the moment is whether these ideas mean that I ought to revise my methodological approach and possibly supplement it with a survey asking about who these women know? Here I might find inspiration in Fennema (2007) who reports about a study in which they asked respondents to 'name five persons they would consult in (a) the case of an important career decision, (b) the choice of school for their children, and (c) when looking for a new house. In each case they were asked to indicate the ethnicity of the five advisors'. Whether this is something I will eventually incorporate into my design remains to be seen.

- comments are welcome!

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[www.nyidanmark.dk](http://www.nyidanmark.dk)

- Which contains a detailed list of organisation that have received financial support for integration related measures during 2006 at the following link:

[http://www.nyidanmark.dk/resources.ashx/Resources/Publikationer/Andet/2006/tilsagn\\_2006.pdf](http://www.nyidanmark.dk/resources.ashx/Resources/Publikationer/Andet/2006/tilsagn_2006.pdf)

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## **Appendix A: excerpt from the Danish Prime Minister's speech on the re-opening of Parliament after the summer recession, October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007**

Vi vil forbedre ligestillingen mellem kvinder og mænd. Det er med til at skabe stærk sammenhængskraft, at kvinder og mænd har lige muligheder.

Men det er ikke alle i Danmark, der nyder gavn af ligestillingen. Nogle indvandrerkvinder har ikke kontakt med det omgivende samfund. De kender ikke deres rettigheder, og de bestemmer ikke over deres egen tilværelse. Denne manglende ligestilling for mange indvandrerkvinder er en del af den nye ulighed. Regeringen vil iværksætte en samlet indsats for at fremme ligestillingen mellem kvinder og mænd med indvandrerbaggrund.

Vi vil for det første tilskynde til, at også kvinder med indvandrerbaggrund kan arbejde, få uddannelse, opnå økonomisk uafhængighed og deltage i idræts- og foreningslivet. Regeringen vil forstærke indsatsen for at hjælpe kvindelige iværksættere med indvandrerbaggrund.

Vi vil for det andet sikre, at alle kender deres rettigheder. Vi vil ud til alle nye danskere med oplysning og debatmateriale om kvinders rettigheder og ligestilling mellem kønnene.

Vi vil for det tredje gøre mere for at hjælpe de hundreder af kvinder og børn, der hvert år udsættes for vold og ender på krisecentrene. Næsten halvdelen af dem har indvandrerbaggrund. Derfor skal alle kvinder med børn på krisecentre fremover tilbydes en familierådgiver, som skal rådgive om bolig, økonomi, arbejdsmarked, skole, sundhed og ligestilling.

For det fjerde vil ligestillingsministeren holde en række dialogmøder med indvandrerkvinder i hele landet, så kvinderne selv kan komme til orde.

Vi ønsker et Danmark med lige rettigheder, lige muligheder og lige ansvar for det fælles. Lad os holde sammen på et Danmark uden de store skel og kløfter i befolkningen, et Danmark med en stærk sammenhængskraft.

From [http://www.ft.dk/doc.aspx?Samling/20071/salen/R1\\_BEH1\\_1\\_1\\_1.htm](http://www.ft.dk/doc.aspx?Samling/20071/salen/R1_BEH1_1_1_1.htm) Accessed on October 4th 2007.