

Until Death Separates Us

On 3 March 2015, Sherin Khankan announced that Femimam, a committee she had founded, would open a mosque in which female imams would deliver the Friday sermon and lead the Friday prayer.¹ This led to the inauguration of the Mariam Mosque in downtown Copenhagen on 26 August 2016; however, the mosque issued its first Islamic divorce in March 2016 – five months prior to the inauguration. Neither Khankan nor others in Femimam had planned to issue Islamic divorces, but as the demand, described in previous chapters, was projected onto Khankan and the Mariam Mosque, an Islamic divorce council emerged. Today, Islamic divorce is the dominant activity in the Mariam Mosque: every other Friday in 2023, Khankan issued between one and four divorces, while Friday prayer – originally held once a month – has been more sporadic.² This underlines the magnitude of the demand; it bends trajectories and transforms institutions.

The analysis I present in this chapter repeats and underlines many of the conclusions from previous chapters, but it also adds something new. In this chapter, I present the process from the first request for an Islamic divorce projected onto Khankan and the Mariam Mosque in December 2015 up until the institutionalization of an Islamic divorce council, which in 2023 issued 60 Islamic divorces.

Because the panels of Islamic divorce councils are generally male dominated, Khankan's founding of the Mariam Mosque's council may seem remarkable. And it is, in the sense that Khankan is both its founder and daily leader, although it should be noted that major Islamic divorce councils such as the Islamic Sharia Council in Leyton (London), the Birmingham Sharia Council, and the Board of Imams in Victoria (Melbourne, Australia) have female panel

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- 1 For the sake of transparency, I must inform the reader that between April and June 2024 I conducted six semi-structured interviews for an evaluation of the Until Death Separates Us program, which I was paid to do. However, this chapter was submitted to Brill for peer review in February 2024. No changes have been made to the chapter since the submission in February 2024 apart from copy editing. However, two quotations from this evaluation has been inserted in Chapter 2 (Nour and Ayan).
 - 2 I am not suggesting that Friday prayer is less significant in the Mariam Mosque. I am merely pointing out the difference in frequency and time consumption. In 2023, the Mariam Mosque was recognized as a faith society in Denmark, which is a strong indication of its institutionalization. This also means that Khankan can now apply for a license to perform marriages.

members (F. Ahmed & Krayem, 2021, p. 25; Bowen, 2016, pp. 123–142). In other words, while it is rare to see women on panels, it is not unheard of, although I am not aware of another council that is led by a woman.

Three men are involved in the Mariam Mosque's divorce council – a PhD in Islamic studies, a PhD student of Islamic studies, and an activist – but they primarily assist with translation and sign divorces as witnesses. They do not sit on the panel or get involved in cases. This is not a deliberate choice; it is merely an outcome of time constraints for the two Islamic studies scholars, and, for the activist, a lack of religious educational credentials. One of three female secretaries is present at divorces, and a female imam-in-the-making sometimes signs as a witness and takes part in the divorce ritual (see below).

I began an ethnographic study of the Mariam Mosque in August 2016, shortly before it issued its second Islamic divorce. I dedicated all my time to fieldwork until June 2017, after which I became more strategic with it and decided to focus on Islamic divorce (for my previous publications on the Mariam Mosque, see Petersen, 2019a, 2019b; Petersen, 2022b, 2025). This meant that between July 2017 and December 2023, I collected 135 of the 137 Islamic divorce documents that the Mariam Mosque has issued, observed 14 Islamic divorces, interviewed or followed up on 11 divorcees,³ collected in and outgoing communications, attended relevant staff meetings, and regularly checked in with, or interviewed people involved in the facilitation of Islamic divorce in the Mariam Mosque.

This chapter begins with a short description of the origin and evolution of Islamic divorce in the Mariam Mosque, beginning with the first case in December 2015 and ending in December 2023. This is followed by an ethnographic description of the everyday operation of Mariam Mosque's divorce council. As a strategy to sensitize the presentation to the empirical material and provide a rich description, in this chapter I have let my fieldnotes dictate the content to a greater degree than in previous chapters. Consequently, the chapter has a less rigorous structure, although it is thematically organized to cover the Islamic divorce process, Khankan's method, women's agency, and responses from men and families. Khankan and Josephine Amanda Jørgensen, presented below, have read and approved my presentation with minor

3 Eight interviews were conducted by Khankan, and in three cases I followed up with a social worker. I chose this method as I presumed the women would be much more comfortable talking with Khankan, thereby producing better data. This methodology also seemed appropriate due to the risk of re-traumatizing the informants. After all, Khankan had a relationship with the women, knew their stories, and could, therefore, navigate this space better than I. It should be noted that Khankan followed my interview guide, and that she holds an MA in the sociology of religion and has extensive experience with semi-structured interviews.

corrections of factual information regarding *Until Death Separates Us* (see below) and the Exit Circle (see below).

1 The Formulation of an Islamic Divorce Template

When Khankan received her first request for an Islamic divorce in December 2015, she was focused on founding a mosque with female imams and did not consider Islamic divorce relevant to the project. However, as the female applicant had already contacted two male imams, both of whom had refused to issue an Islamic divorce document without her husband's consent, Khankan suggested that she might submit her case to a British Islamic divorce council. As this turned out to be too expensive, Khankan then contacted Hakeem (see Chapter 2) with the expectation that he or the Ihsan Mosque (see Chapter 8) would issue the divorce.

The husband had recently been convicted of violence against the woman, so Hakeem was hesitant to issue an Islamic divorce himself. Instead, he tried to recruit members for an ad hoc divorce council which could issue the divorce collectively, and thus, spread the security risk; however, as no one wanted to get involved, the process dragged out. Frustrated with the repeated delays and lack of progress, Khankan and Hicham Mouna (co-founder of the Mariam Mosque) issued an Islamic divorce in March 2016. This was an eight-page document drafted mainly by Mouna, containing the ID information of the involved parties and their children, a presentation of the case, a theological argument for women's Islamic right to Islamic divorce, and a granting of the divorce in the form of *khula* with signatures (for a detailed description of the drafting of the divorce document and its content, see Petersen, 2022b, pp. 167–172).⁴

When I interviewed Mouna in June 2017, he explained that he understood Islamic divorce as primarily an Islamic legal process which derives its validity from sound religious arguments. This further manifested in Mouna's insistence that all rules must be followed, including the return of their dower by battered women, as this was a requirement according to his understanding of *fiqh* rules. Mouna's insistence caused conflict between him and Khankan, who did not believe this to be fair and, therefore, refused to comply. Ultimately, Mouna had to adjust the divorce documents in accordance with Khankan's practice. Mouna was finishing an MA in pedagogics, and despite his interest in Islam and extensive reading on the subject, he had no formal religious training,

4 This book is open access and can be downloaded as a PDF from Brill's homepage.

let alone training in *fiqh*, and this troubled him. He did not feel qualified to engage with *fiqh*, and he did not want to write Islamic divorce documents, but he did so out of necessity. The alternative was to ignore women's pleas for help to get out of abusive relationships, and turning them away seemed even more objectionable.

I should briefly note that while the Mariam Mosque's Islamic divorce documents are unique, the practice of issuing *khula* without the husband's consent is not an unusual practice. Versions of such a practice are written into Egyptian family law and form the basis of the divorce practice of the largest Islamic divorce council in Britain (Bowen, 2016; Sonneveld, 2012). However, the Mariam Mosque's willingness to issue Islamic divorce documents to Muslims irrespective of whether one is Sunni, Shia, or adhere to some other Islamic creed is unusual; and, again irrespective of creed, all their divorces follow the same procedure. Furthermore, the Mariam Mosque will only attempt reconciliation if the woman requests it, and this sets it clearly apart from the majority of male Muslim leaders' practices, described in Chapter 5.

Soon after the first Islamic divorce, the Mariam Mosque received its second request, and Mouna removed the case-specific information from the first divorce document and filled in the details of the second. In other words, the Islamic divorce document Mouna drafted in March 2016 had become a template for Islamic divorce in the Mariam Mosque, and all four parts of this document were still in use at the time of writing (December 2023), although many minor, but significant, changes had been made. The formulation of a template for future action demonstrates the significance of the first case – and a single case is enough to create a cascade effect, which may lead to a temporary presence of an Islamic divorce institution that collapses at a later point. Or, as happened with the Mariam Mosque, a single case may be enough to generate a presence and put a person or an institution on a trajectory towards institutionalization. This dynamic is important in relation to the description in Chapter 2 of how representatives of the welfare state sometimes put male Muslim leaders under significant pressure to issue Islamic divorces, because it underlines the potential role of the welfare state in the emergence of Islamic divorce institutions: a single case is potentially enough.

When I interviewed Khankan in July 2018, she still conceptualized Islamic divorce in the Mariam Mosque as primarily an Islamic legal practice, which attained validity through an Islamic legal performance, and she believed in the myth of presence, although she was starting to realize that no such presence existed. Khankan explained that she still referred cases to male Muslim leaders as she believed that divorces from them would carry more weight, but she also found that women sometimes returned to her because the male imams

would not issue their Islamic divorces. In one case, a male imam even referred a woman to the Mariam Mosque, stating that it makes no difference in terms of validity whether an Islamic divorce document is issued by a male or a female Islamic authority, adding that “there are also female judges in Muslim countries who do the same thing” (Petersen, 2022b, p. 174).

The Mariam Mosque experienced the cascade effect, but the number of Islamic divorces remained low due to the lack of resources available. As Khankan explained in July 2018, “If the women do not get a booking right away, then they never return.” This situation is reflected in my conversations with Khankan in 2017 through to 2020: she always had a lot of cases coming in, but only the resources to handle some of them. She did not turn women away, but the lack of resources meant that to obtain a divorce in the Mariam Mosque women had to be patient and persistent. Although the mosque issued a mere 24 divorces between 2016 and 2020, it is noteworthy that these came from all parts of Denmark, and that it received many requests for Islamic divorce from representatives of the Danish welfare state. When I inquired about this in July 2018, Khankan provided me with three recent requests from women’s shelters and a request from a case officer at a municipality.

In conclusion, the founding of an Islamic divorce council in the Mariam Mosque was not planned. It emerged as Khankan and Mouna responded to Muslim women’s requests for Islamic divorce, or to use the metaphor from previous chapters: the Mariam Mosque was sucked into the vacuum. Mouna left the Mariam Mosque in June 2017 and died of cystic fibrosis in October 2018, aged 31. The fourth Islamic divorce was the last one he wrote, meaning that from the fifth divorce onwards, Khankan wrote the Islamic divorce documents using, and further developing, Mouna’s template.

2 Until Death Separates Us

In August 2014, Khankan founded the Exit Circle, which helps women out of abusive relationships – a nation-wide NGO that organizes therapy groups for victims of violence of all ages and genders. On 1 January 2021 the Exit Circle entered a collaboration program with the Mariam Mosque-titled, *Until Death Separates Us* (UDSU), with 134,000 EUR in funding from the Oak Foundation. The aim of this collaboration was twofold: 1) to disseminate a nikah contract that included women’s rights to Islamic divorce and in which it is stated that civil divorce also constitutes a termination of the nikah; 2) to make (no-fault) Islamic divorce available to Muslim women by informing them that UDSU could provide this in collaboration with the Mariam Mosque. The project

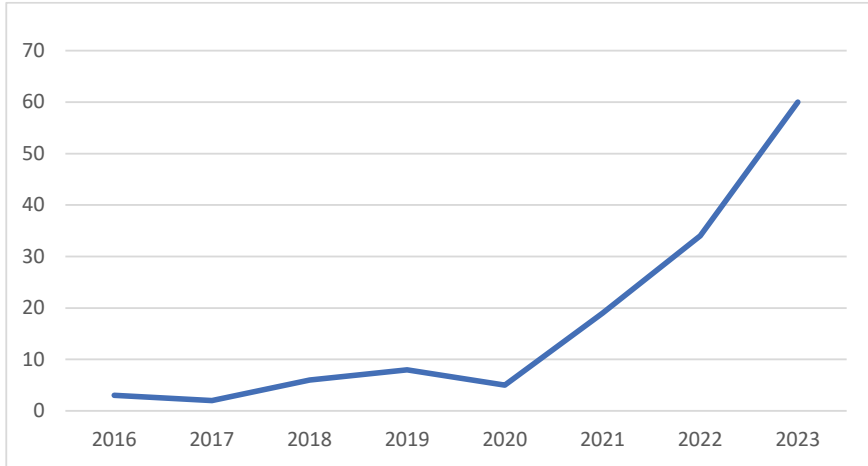


FIGURE 7 Number of Islamic divorces issued in the Mariam Mosque per year (n = 137)

disseminated this information through a campaign movie, Social Media posts and advertising, flyers, advertisement on public transport, and posters. Furthermore, the funding meant that the Exit Circle, which formally administered the funding, could hire a former volunteer, Josephine Amanda Jørgensen, on a part-time basis as project leader.

As demonstrated in Figure 7, the effect of UDSU was immediately visible in the number of Islamic divorces issued by the Mariam Mosque, which rose significantly from 2021. The rise is primarily due to UDSU's integration into services provided by the welfare state and the resources available to it, which meant that the cascade effect could now be handled. In February 2021, the Mariam Mosque began registering those who contacted the mosque for Islamic divorce, and out of 112 Islamic divorces, 44 cases (39 percent) came directly from mainly state-funded organizations. Of the remainder, 49 women (44 percent) contacted the UDSU hotline directly, 15 (13 percent) contacted the Mariam Mosque directly, and 4 cases are categorized as unknown. However, it should be noted that some women contact the UDSU hotline because its telephone number has been provided by representatives of the welfare state, and, therefore, the welfare state may be an even more significant variable than these numbers suggest.⁵ As Jørgensen explains,

5 Jørgensen explains that women call the UDSU hotline and state, "Well, I have been in contact with a security advisor in one of the regions, I have been in contact with my contact person at the police, or the women's shelter I live in has asked me to call you." Such calls are registered as women's contacting UDSU directly. It is only when calls come directly from

I also experience that generally ... they [social workers] say they do not have the resources to follow the woman and hold her hand the whole way. So, they provide our number to the woman and say, “Call the Exit Circle,⁶ then they can help you.” (Interview with Jørgensen, 17 August 2023)

The in- and outgoing communications in the UDSU mailbox demonstrate that its campaign material and services are in high demand among the Danish authorities, such as the police, security advisors, health services, municipalities (e.g. job centers and social services), and, likewise, among organizations such as women’s shelters and NGOs that help women out of abusive relationships. While it should not be overstated how widely available these flyers are distributed (1,750 between 2021 and 2023) the authorities and NGOs have shown a remarkable interest in UDSU, thereby playing a major role in the institutionalization of the Islamic divorce council in the Mariam Mosque. That is, as women project their demand for Islamic divorce onto representatives of the welfare state, a demand for this service emerges below the epistemic ceiling, which is why they spread the UDSU campaign material, despite the fact that many employees work in organizations that have no-collaboration policies.

This is exemplified by the security advisors who are employed in the Ministry of Immigration and Integration, which in 2012 published *The Government’s Strategy against Parallel Legal Orders – An End to Coercion and Suppression in Relation to Religious Marriage* (see Chapter 6). From 2021 to 2023, security advisors facilitated four divorces by directly contacting the Mariam Mosque, and as security advisors have also ordered UDSU flyers, they have undoubtedly also referred further women. In January 2024, a security advisor even wrote to Jørgensen regarding closer collaboration on Islamic divorce: “We would like to have a talk with her [Khankan] regarding a collaboration with her as an imam in relation to the women who cannot obtain a divorce from her husband.” Consequently, Jørgensen went to the security advisor’s office for a two-hour meeting in which they agreed on a referral collaboration whereby the security advisors would channel Islamic divorce requests to the Mariam Mosque. The day after, one of the security advisors wrote to Jørgensen to thank her for a productive meeting, stating,

I definitely believe that we will refer women to you, and therefore, I would like to accept the offer to receive flyers. ... Also, thank you for sending the

employees – not the woman herself – that cases are registered as a security advisor, the Danish police, a women’s shelter, etc.

6 Jørgensen is here referring to UDSU, which is administered by the Exit Circle.

divorce documents and the nikah contracts, including those sentences you equip the women with.⁷ In our function, it is super relevant for us to see.

Just four days later, the first Islamic divorce case arrived from the security advisors – an Islamic divorce which was coordinated between the security advisor, the women’s shelter, the contact person at the municipality, the police, and the Mariam Mosque. Shortly after, yet another one arrived, but I do not know what the future holds for this collaboration as I submitted the manuscript to Brill in February 2024.

The demand for Islamic divorce, projected onto the Danish welfare state, is typically channeled to initiatives such as security advisors, specialized teams in the police (*svæv*), or negative social control advisors, but as such employees have no instructions on how to address these problems, some project this demand onto Muslim leaders and Islamic institutions.

The problem of the demand for Islamic divorce projected onto the welfare state is sometimes also visible in the public sphere. Odense Municipality has, for example, invested significant resources in circumventing religious authorities in their social work – a topic that has been high on the political agenda in the city council. Nevertheless, their website dedicated to this has been linked to UDSU, which it described as “Until Death Separates Us: addressed to women who have been denied an Islamic divorce”.⁸ Furthermore, a local NGO, partially funded by the municipality, called Sisters against Violence and Control requested 14 Islamic divorces from the Mariam Mosque between 2021 and 2023.

All the incoming communication from representatives of the welfare state is as blunt as described above with the exception of one email, sent by an employee at a women’s shelter. This email follows the pattern described in Chapter 2 of circumventing no-collaboration policies by writing from a private email account and not disclosing a job title: “I am writing on behalf of a friend who, after having divorced under Danish law, would like to have an Islamic divorce.” The author of the email, who is an ethnic majority Dane, does not disclose that she is in fact an employee at a women’s shelter with a no-collaboration policy. However, this is indicated by how the “friend” was

⁷ These sentences constitute cognitive tools that I discuss later in the chapter.

⁸ Since 2022 the layout of the website (www.negativsocialkontrol.dk) has been changed so that it contains much less information on individual NGOs’ services. Therefore, this information is no longer available on the website. I have retrieved the older version of the website using the Way Back Machine (archive.org), accessed on 4 January 2024. In my data I have an email communication between civil servants in the municipality and the Mariam Mosque, which indicates that the presence of UDSU on the webpage was a conscious choice.

described in the email: “She speaks relatively good Danish and fluent Farsi.”⁹ The fact that I found just a single email in my sample in which the author circumvented a no-collaboration policy suggests that representatives of the welfare state find the Mariam Mosque a more legitimate collaboration partner – one that is not covered by no-collaboration policies.

It is important to underline that I do not suggest that representatives of the welfare state are doing anything wrong when they contact UDSU. These are dedicated employees doing everything they can to help their clients. However, it is important to note that the welfare state (below the epistemic ceiling) requests Islamic juridical services from Muslim leaders such as Khankan because this is an important dynamic in the emergence and institutionalization of parallel legal orders, which is the focus of this book. Furthermore, it demonstrates something important about how the welfare state works in practice: for example, how strategies against parallel legal orders formulated above the epistemic ceiling may contribute to the emergence and institutionalization of parallel legal orders. Some people may be fine with such parallel legal orders once they see the benefit to the women in *nikah* captivity, while others will insist on other solutions to the problem. Yet it is an empirical fact that Islamic legal institutions are at least partially – if not sometimes fully – integrated into the welfare state below the ceiling.

Collaborating with the Mariam Mosque enables representatives of the welfare state to assist women who would otherwise be difficult to help. For example, in a case from a municipality, a case officer had assisted a woman with obtaining a civil divorce, but (s)he now feared that the woman would return to her (ex)husband because her family was putting her under significant pressure to do so, with reference to her being in a *nikah* with him. The case officer, therefore, contacted a specialist within the municipality – a negative social control councilor employed at the job center – who then contacted UDSU. As Jørgensen explains,

So she was juridically divorced from her husband, but because she had not been able to obtain her Islamic divorce, the municipality was worried for her well-being and her children’s well-being, and that is why they contacted us – you know, to hear whether we could secure an Islamic divorce for her, so that there was a smaller risk that she would return due to the pressure from her family.

9 Just to be clear, I am not suggesting that a majority Dane cannot be friends with a minority Dane with limited Danish language skills. I am merely reading the email as an example of a pattern that I have previously documented. I have also double checked that the person in question is an employee at a women’s shelter.

The municipal employee wanted to relieve the pressure on the woman to keep her on the trajectory towards living a good life in accordance with her own wishes and to provide her with the conditions to be a good mother.¹⁰ This case demonstrates why it can be important for social workers to address the problem of *nikah* captivity if they want to further the municipality's policy of helping women out of abusive relationships to live emancipated lives. Similarly, *nikah* captivity is a situation that makes women vulnerable to Islamized post-separation violence, such as that posed by men who insist that their (ex)wife must be sexually available to them because they are still in the *nikah* (see Chapter 3). Jørgensen explains that representatives of the welfare state and social workers often contact UDSU to avoid or put an end to such violence:

Many of the women in question ... they experience that the absence of an Islamic divorce is used to build pressure on or extort them to get access to the children or have sexual intercourse – forced sexual intercourse, which really is rape, you know, sexualized psychological violence. It is also a way of extorting money.

Furthermore, social workers familiar with the concept of weaponized *talaq* may find it essential to assist women with obtaining Islamic divorce to avoid the women's agreeing to it. Jørgensen briefly elaborates on such a case:

She had already handed over the house, and she had paid money to him because he – now it has been a long time, it has been a year – but because he had promised that he would say *talaq* to her, but that was not what happened. Now he had the house, and he had gotten 100,000 [13,400 EUR] – I can't remember the exact amount; 130,000 kronor [17,400 EUR] or something like that – but she was still not divorced from him, and now he had just taken these things from her, but she had not gotten anything for it. So, that is where the police come in. [They] often [come in], when they can see that it [Islamic divorce] is being used as a means to blackmail the woman. ... And it is important for the woman that she gets her Islamic divorce to kind of stop it [the blackmail].

10 The woman in question did not want to divorce in the Mariam Mosque, so Jørgensen facilitated a divorce in another mosque. This also happened in another case, so two of the 137 Islamic divorce cases in the Mariam Mosque have been facilitated in collaboration with other mosques. Similarly, in a few cases, women have canceled their appointment in the Mariam Mosque because they have made an appointment in another mosque.

Although Danish police are involved in many cases in the Mariam Mosque, Jørgensen only received two direct requests for Islamic divorce from the Danish police between 2021 and 2023. Interestingly, in one of these cases, the woman had a delegated right to Islamic divorce written into the contract (talaq al-tafwid), so technically the Mariam Mosque merely witnessed her Islamic juridical performance.

The collaboration between UDSU and the Danish welfare state also benefits UDSU. In December 2021, Jørgensen contacted the National Security and Intelligence Service (PET) to complain that a woman's request for an assault alarm had been rejected. The employee at PET pulled some strings for Jørgensen, who could now re-start the case with another employee in the Danish police to whom Jørgensen wrote,

[Name] from PET told me that (s)he has spoken with you about the specific case and that you may be able to collaborate with us on how we best approach this going forward. The woman has reported it to the police, but they cannot do anything for her because the man lives in [country].

The husband had hired people in Denmark to vandalize his (ex)wife's property and in other ways intimidate her, so even if he was not in Denmark his actions posed a threat to her. Jørgensen's request meant that the police contacted the woman to re-evaluate their previous decision, and less than ten days after Jørgensen's inquiry, the woman had received an assault alarm. Likewise, UDSU has, in particularly urgent and serious cases, been able to find places at women's shelters even though the women have been told that all places were occupied.¹¹

The integration of the Mariam Mosque in the services provided by the welfare state is clear from the above, but it is also clear from the coordination with authorities and NGOs on individual cases. As a case officer writes to Jørgensen, "Now, I have informed the police about the divorce, so they will register this on the case and be more attentive at the women's shelter in the time ahead – so you may/can send the [Islamic divorce] papers to the husband."

In other words, Islamic divorce is coordinated between the Mariam Mosque, the Danish police, and women's shelters; the Mariam Mosque provides the divorce, and the latter two provide security. This is the everyday below the epistemic ceiling and a clear demonstration of how women's lives are improved by addressing their problems within sharia discourse.¹²

11 These women must still go through the normal visitation procedures.

12 I am not saying that such effects cannot be achieved in other ways but, so far, this has not been attempted; that is, no policy that positively lay out how to address nikah captivity

3 The Practical Details of Islamic Divorce in the Mariam Mosque

When people contact UDSU for an Islamic divorce, it is typically Jørgensen, sometimes Khankan, who holds a pre-divorce interview with either the woman or the person who calls on behalf of the woman.¹³ Next, the woman receives an email with the Islamic divorce template attached. The following is a complete email from August 2023 in which Jørgensen describes the Islamic divorce process to a woman with whom she has not spoken. This means that it is unusually detailed, thus providing an insight into the information communicated by the Mariam Mosque to women:

Dear [name of woman]

As per agreement with your case officer [name] I here send the template for Islamic divorce, including some information about the process.

Neither Islamic marriage nor Islamic divorce have legal validity in Denmark, but we recognize that they may have religious, spiritual, cultural, social, and psychological meaning for many.

In collaboration with the Mariam Mosque, the Exit Circle – Ways out of Psychological Violence – offers you an Islamic divorce without your husband's consent and without prior mediation. Unfortunately, the Mariam Mosque is fully booked with Islamic divorces and Islamic marriages over the next month. I will return as soon as I have a date. You are welcome to bring a family member or a friend on the day [of the divorce].

The process is as follows:

- 1) You will receive the khula document, which is a divorce document that you are welcome to fill in beforehand. If you find it difficult we can fill it out together on the day of the divorce.
- 2) On the day of the divorce, you will be invited to tell your story. We do this because it has an effect for a lot of women to be able to share their story. Imam Sherin Khankan will use both Islamic spiritual care and cognitive theory in the conversation.
- 3) We will go over the [Islamic divorce] document together.

has been formulated – only negative definitions of what not to do. An adequate policy must answer basic questions such as: what should the representative of the welfare state do, when a woman asks for assistance with Islamic divorce? And the answer must address the woman's problem, not ignore it. I have tried to formulate answers that circumvent Muslim leaders, but it is premature to say anything about the effect (Petersen, 2023). Obviously, answers that collaborate with Muslim leaders can also be formulated.

¹³ Prior to UDSU, Khankan did everything herself, but now that she has funding, she delegates much of the work, so that she can focus on other tasks.

- 4) We will pray al-Fatiha and seal your divorce with signatures. Two male representatives and two female representatives from the mosque will sign it.
- 5) Afterwards we can, on your behalf, send the document to your ex-husband, but you are also welcome to do this yourself. There is a telephone number in the document he can call if he wants to talk with us. However, we are under an obligation of unconditional confidentiality, so we do not disclose any information about your case. Your Islamic divorce will not be retracted no matter whether he opposes it or not.

In addition, we can in the Exit Circle offer a therapy group over 13 weeks with people in a similar situation. Here you can share your life story and you will get a range of cognitive tools to process the potential consequences of having been exposed to violence. Registration costs 1,000 kroner [134 EUR] but you can apply for a dispensation [from paying the registration fee] if you do not have a job or for other reasons cannot afford it. If you choose to accept the offer, we also offer free legal counseling and legal assistance in the Exit Circle.

You are welcome to write or call us if you have any questions.

Kind wishes

Josephine Amanda Jørgensen

The cascade effect is evident in that Jørgensen cannot set a date for when the woman may obtain her divorce; however, Jørgensen administers a prioritized waiting list, a way of handling the cascade effect, which is longest during the summer holidays. On 26 July 2023, for example, eleven women were waiting for an Islamic divorce. Most of the time the Mariam Mosque can provide a divorce within a month or two, but as the waiting list is prioritized, women who have an urgent need for a divorce will typically receive one within a week or two. Keeping and prioritizing the waiting list is possible because Jørgensen is a paid employee, which means that women do not have to be persistent to get their divorce through UDSU. Jørgensen makes sure that cases progress and everyone gets divorced once it is their turn.

The events on the day of divorce are structured as a ritual that typically takes around 60 minutes. Khankan is a sociologist of religion, certified in cognitive psychotherapy, and an imam with an interest in both ritual theory and ritual practice, and she often talks about the development of Islamic divorce practice in this language. A good example of ritual development is the notion of sealing the divorce with a recitation of al-Fatiha (the first seven verses of the Quran, which are recited in many Islamic rituals). This often has a significant effect on the women who begin to sob, cry, or express their emotions in other ways.

Prior to Khankan's introduction of sealing divorces with al-Fatiha, divorces ended with the signing of the Islamic divorce document, which Khankan then handed to the woman.

From a ritual theory perspective one may view the time between the breakdown of a nikah (e.g. moving apart) and the Islamic divorce as a liminal phase (Turner, 1969/2008). Nikah captivity then becomes a situation in which a woman is stuck in this liminal phase – an incomplete ritual that produce a need for closure (the woman's leaving the liminal phase). The explanation for why the ritual sometimes has little to no effect on men is that they have neither taken part in the ritual nor is their wife's participation in the ritual a result of their planning (Rappaport, 1999, p. 105). Any sequence of actions may be ritualized, and if successful, have a transformative effect on participants (Bell, 2009); thus, the woman who takes part in the ritual may be transformed, even if the world around her does not change much. However, as I demonstrate below, some Islamic divorces in the Mariam Mosque have an effect that goes beyond the individual and influences the world around the woman. Although all the Islamic divorce procedures follow the same pattern in the Mariam Mosque, each case is unique. In the following I present the case of an Islamic divorce process from August 2021, using the present tense to reflect my real-time field notes as much possible.

I arrive in the Mariam Mosque well in advance of the divorce. Jørgensen is already there, booting up her computer and getting things ready. When divorces are taking place, Jørgensen will also put tea, coffee, water, fruit, and sometimes candy on the table; however, today's divorce is online. When Khankan arrives, Jørgensen gives her a briefing on the case while Khankan dons her imam dress and a hijab. Jørgensen asks whether she too should don a hijab; she sometimes does this when it suits the situation, but Khankan answers, "Not necessarily", and Jørgensen leaves it at that.

Once online, two employees at the women's shelter, who had contacted UDSU, appear on the screen along with a woman named Hind. Khankan initiates some small talk with the woman in Arabic, but she does not respond because she does not understand Arabic. Khankan quickly realizes her mistake and changes course, initiating small talk in Danish about recent events in the woman's country of origin. Although unusual, the short misunderstanding and subsequent correction demonstrate something about how the Mariam Mosque's Islamic divorce council works. Requests for divorce are typically redirected to Jørgensen, who prepares the cases. This means that Khankan, although she always gets a briefing from Jørgensen, seldom has deep knowledge of the cases. The divorce situation is often the first time she meets the women.

The division of work between Khankan and Jørgensen is often clearly visible during the Islamic divorce processes, and this is also the case today. Once Khankan has finished her small talk, Jørgensen asks whether she should share the Islamic divorce document on Teams, so that they can get the technical details sorted, but Khankan stops her and says that she would like to talk with Hind first. Khankan embarks on this conversation with a carefully worded question: “Before we get to the paperwork – I know that you have filled out the papers – would you like to share your story? You should not share more than you want, and feel free to skip passages and take the breaks that you need.” The narration places the woman at the center of the ritual and infuses it with meaning relevant to her, but it also provides Khankan with important information and builds an intimate connection between them. That is, the narration is an important part of producing the ritual effect that comes later. Meanwhile, Khankan is cautious not to re-traumatize the woman by emphasizing that she should not share more information than they are comfortable with.

Hind explains that she entered into a *nikah* in her country of origin more than ten years earlier with a man of her own age whom her family had chosen for her. Khankan asks, “Did you want to marry him?” to which Hind answers, “Yes, but that is what one wants in [country] if the family wants one to” (cf. Bowen, 2016, pp. 20–21; Petersen, 2025). Hind goes on to explain that her husband was violent from day one. The day after their *nikah* ceremony he told her that she was to become his and his family’s servant – a status that he enforced by making her live with the animals in the stable. Hind adds that her husband soon began to cheat on her with other women, and when she confronted him with this, he threateningly told her not to tell anyone. Hind is afraid of her husband due to the severity of the physical violence in their *nikah*, and she remarks that she believes her children have also suffered, providing the example of her husband’s holding a knife at her throat while the children were watching.

Once Hind finishes her story, Khankan moves the process along with a clear statement of transition into the next sequence of the ritual: “Now to the divorce. We will issue an Islamic divorce without your husband’s consent and without mediation. It is Allah in the Quran who gives you this right. We merely facilitate it.” This is an example of another significant development in the Islamic divorce process in the Mariam Mosque. While the Mariam Mosque framed itself as primarily a judicial institution in its early divorces, it now emphasizes that it facilitates women’s exercising their right to divorce – an action taken by them rather than by the Mariam Mosque. This is also evident in an addition to the divorce template, which reads, “A woman’s right to Islamic divorce is from Allah. ... The Mosque is merely facilitating women’s right to Islamic divorce.”

Now, Khankan turns her attention to the divorce document, asking technical questions about its content, which are mainly answered by the two employees at the women's shelter as they are the ones who have filled it out on Hind's behalf as she has only been in Denmark for a few years and has limited communicative skills in Danish. Jørgensen continuously revises the document in accordance with the discussion; however, Khankan stops the conversation abruptly when she senses that Hind is becoming overwhelmed and is lost in the process. She turns to Hind and embarks on a conversation, restoring the intimacy of the situation, and provides Hind with two exercises, which they do together to handle the emotions Hind is experiencing. Once Hind is calm and re-grounded in the situation, Khankan says, "Let's continue", and they resume the conversation on the content of the divorce document, but at a much slower pace, with Khankan ensuring that Hind is at the center of the conversation all the way through.

Both the misunderstanding during small talk at the beginning of the ritual and the re-grounding and restoration of intimacy are examples of how Khankan continuously monitors the situation and keeps it on track. This is a characteristic of all 14 cases that I have observed, and although it is impossible to gauge internal emotional experiences, I have only observed a single ritual where I was in doubt about whether the ritual had an effect or fell flat. The latter was most likely due to a language barrier and the woman's expectation that the Islamic divorce from the Mariam Mosque carried legal validity in both the European country where she resided and her country of origin.

As part of the discussion of the technical details of the divorce document, Hind explains that her husband did not want to marry her, but his mother insisted on it. Despite the abuse, Hind tried to make the *nikah* work, saying, "I loved him. I waited ten years *halal* on my husband", and adds that she really wanted to make it a happy *nikah*. She continues by explaining that she bought nice dresses to attract his attention, but her husband did not want her and criticized her for spending the money. Hind believes that her husband may personally want to divorce, but that he is doing everything he can stop her divorcing him to protect his clan's honor. Consequently, she does not want a full description of the case in the divorce document, as this may escalate honor-motivated conflict. She says, "It is enough for me to become divorced. It should not say all that about the problems. This is not just about my life, it is also about my clan's life." Hind is afraid that her (ex)husband's clan may retaliate against her clan, still domiciled in her country of origin. While her clan supports her wish to divorce, it puts them in a vulnerable position as Hind's (ex)husband comes from a more powerful clan that is well connected politically, and in the police and army. Therefore, it is important for Hind that the divorce document describes her reasons for divorcing her husband in the

least detail possible. Ideally, she would like it merely to state that she is now divorced. This leads to the deletion of most of the information on her case from the Islamic divorce document, and an appendix with a police report is also removed.

Once the document has been edited, Khankan offers Hind a place for treatment in the Exit Circle but the security precautions surrounding Hind's case means that this is not practically possible. Khankan then embarks on the final sequence of the ritual, stating, "We will now seal your khula by praying al-Fatiha together." Khankan reaches into the closet next to her and pulls out a hijab that Jørgensen dons; however, the ritual is interrupted by one of Hind's small children who enters the room. Khankan sees the child, says "Welcome", and embarks on a conversation with her. They talk about school, playing, and the place they currently live. Hind takes part in the conversation, and after a while she says that her daughter would like to pray al-Fatiha with them, and she asks Khankan whether she thinks this is a good idea. Khankan welcomes this, and brings the ritual back on track by stating, "You are divorced, once we have prayed." She begins the recitation, and once done, she says, "Congratulations Hind." Hind is overwhelmed, the daughter also seems to have understood the significance of the moment, and even the two employees at the women's shelter seem touched by the situation. One exclaims, "Thank you for that. This is one of the best things I have experienced. You [plural] are really sweet." When divorces are sealed with physical presence, Khankan typically hugs the woman, if this seems appropriate, but when online, hugging takes place apart. That is, Khankan hugs Jørgensen as a gesture to Hind who hugs her child.

However, this sealing of the divorce was not the end of the case for Khankan and the other people who assisted her. In late February 2022, Hind's lawyer sent the Islamic divorce letter to her (ex)husband, and two days later the Mariam Mosque received a long email from him in which he questioned the legal foundation of the Mariam Mosque's granting of Islamic divorce. He wrote, "I really want to know what source of law or Sharia facts could have given you or anyone else the right to make a decision on my behalf and without any consultation with me or anybody else that represented on my behalf?"¹⁴ The (ex)husband went on to explain that Hind had stolen from him, that she had grossly misrepresented the case, and that he is unhappy with the Mariam Mosque's giving custody of his children to her. It should be noted that the Mariam Mosque cannot and does not make decisions on custody. Rather, the divorce document states that "the local authorities will decide how the children's well-being is best maintained as they deem fit". The (ex)husband added, "I am totally fine

14 This email was in English and is quoted ad verbatim.

with the Islamic divorce grant letter to Ms. [Hind] and I didn't wanted to stay in a toxic relationship and person."¹⁵ On the other hand, he wanted a settlement on his and Hind's finances and child custody.

Before the incoming communication from Hind's (ex)husband was answered, Khankan was contacted by Hind's lawyer in early March who warned her that the man was dangerous and had made threats. This is an example of how the security risk that Muslim leaders sometimes face is projected onto other people – including social workers – who assist women with divorcing (for similar examples of social workers being threatened, see Petersen, 2025). This information led Khankan to contact the police, who provided her with an assault alarm. As I discuss further below, this was not the first time Khankan was given an assault alarm in relation to an Islamic divorce case.

4 Khankan's Method

In September 2023, I set up two interviews with Khankan to discuss my observations in UDSU and the Mariam Mosque. To me, the Islamic divorce process simultaneously looked like a ritual and an Islamic legal performance. Further, the Islamic divorce process seemed more than anything else to be acutely focused on the women's needs, reflected in Khankan's application of fiqh terminology, which – as in Hassan and other male Muslim leaders' practice (see Chapter 5) – was user-oriented,

Petersen: Why do you call them khula and not tafriq, faskh, fasad or something like that. Is there a reason?¹⁶

Khankan: No, it is just the term we use, and I also think that is a term most women know and are comfortable with.

...

Petersen: And, if I were to ask in another way: why is this consideration more important than technical Islamic-judicial considerations?

Khankan: Maybe because we are grounded in our fundament, and it is more important to me that the women understand the language we speak.

15 This email was in English and is quoted ad verbatim.

16 My question here revolves around how the Mariam Mosque frames itself as a legal institution. Khula may be understood as an agreement between the two parties whereas tafriq, faskh, and fasad by definition are Islamic legal performances by a third party such as an Islamic court.

Khankan's answer must not be mistaken for indifference or insecurity regarding the validity of the Islamic divorce documents that the Mariam Mosque issues. Rather, her flexibility with regards to fiqh terminology is grounded in her confidence in the Islamic validity of the Mariam Mosque's Islamic divorce process. This is evident when (ex)husbands contact the mosque to oppose its divorce decisions. As Khankan explains,

The men who have called; I have told them that you are welcome to take the [divorce] document and go through it with other mosques, and if you can find a mosque which will support you, and which will oppose it [the divorce], then let us have a meeting.

In 2023, the Mariam Mosque began a practice of sending an email to the (ex)husbands, informing them that if they do not issue a talaq divorce before a certain date then the Mariam Mosque will issue a divorce without their consent. This approach is only adopted when expedient. In other cases, a finalized divorce document is sent either by the Mariam Mosque or the women themselves. This reflects Khankan's approach of being user-oriented and ready to adapt to individual cases. Or, as she puts it, "We must approach every case individually – you cannot make a universal model." As the emails are sent out by Jørgensen, who is formally employed in UDSU under the Exit Circle, they take the form of information that is passed on by her:

The Mariam Mosque has asked me to inform you that they will issue [woman's] Islamic divorce on [date] if you have not given her a talaq divorce in writing before this date. If you want to give [woman] a talaq divorce in writing before [date], you are welcome to send this to me by email. Then I will forward it to the right person.

I know of just two cases in which men responded by performing a talaq divorce. However, I should stress that the Mariam Mosque neither registers how many letters are sent nor the success rate. In the two cases I have observed, the men responded by going to other mosques where they performed a talaq divorce.

The variation in how *nikah* captivity manifests in individual cases cannot be overstated. Even when the cause, such as Islamized coercive control or honor-motivated conflict, are the same, manifestations vary considerably. Women held in *nikah* captivity by abusive husbands may have very different backgrounds, religious beliefs, expectations of what Islamic divorce may accomplish, and find themselves in very different situations: some have the support of their families, others do not, and one may be planning her escape

while another has been on the run for years. Despite this variation, Islamic divorce processes in the Mariam Mosque follow a common pattern, but at every stage Khankan may choose the most expedient course of action from a range of options, most of which she has tested through trial and error. That is, she has been in many situations in which she had to invent new methods – sometimes on the fly – and she has gradually built up a repertoire. This has led to significant developments in the Mariam Mosque’s divorce process over time, as Khankan explains: “Well, we have built this from scratch, from nothing. So, it is also a trial and error process. There is a framework that we work within, but we are also learning all the time.” It should be noted that although the developments in the Mariam Mosque may seem particularly significant given the short space of time, it is common for Islamic divorce councils to develop in accordance with user demand (Bowen, 2016, pp. 71, 114–117).

As I have previously stated, Khankan’s khula practice is not unusual in fiqh terms, but her flexibility illustrates something deeper about how the Mariam Mosque has come to understand Islamic divorce. In 2016, Khankan and Mouna conceptualized it as primarily an Islamic legal matter, and although it was still an Islamic legal matter to Khankan in 2023, it had become much more than just that. The Islamic juridical validity of the Mariam Mosque’s Islamic divorce practice was now perceived as an undisputed fact – or a strong fundament as Khankan would typically call it. Instead, producing an Islamic legal effect had come into focus, both on the individual and the social level and, as Khankan explains of the former,

The stronger a fundament one stands on the less space one takes up. That is how it is with most things when women come [to us]. It is important that she speaks most of the time. I will listen to her and let her control the conversation. This also reflects cognitive theory, which we also use in our divorces. I do not evaluate, I do not condemn, I do not give advice. I let go of giving advice. I am not going to tell her what she should do. I give her some tools with which she can help herself. I offer myself to her as a tool in the form of a female imam who can help her along, but in the end, it is an empowerment process in which she must experience that she is the one acting, that she has a power, that God has given her a free will and provided this as an option that she can decide to take advantage of. And, I think this is also relevant afterwards, when she has left the mosque. The feeling that she has been capable of acting and that this is her right. So, I think this thing with us taking up less space, that we are just this tool, this is something we have developed into because in the beginning

we were more insecure. Back then it was important for us to be an authority.

This notion of putting the women at the center of events and making the Islamic divorce relevant to her personally is a special characteristic of divorce in the Mariam Mosque. As stated previously, Khankan is fond of rituals, but this does not impart rigidity. Khankan observes that she sometimes adds sequences to rituals or changes rituals because she believes it will work better in specific cases, tailoring them by ritualizing a sequence of performances that are relevant to the woman (Bell, 2009). She is attentive to individual needs, and continuously develops her rituals in accordance with feedback. As she explains,

I like rituals. I think there is really a lot in [them]. When you ritualize actions they get a deeper effect, they get depth, they include nuance, nuances that I really like. So, this is also something that I continuously work on developing and improving. But I am also flexible in the sense that in some situations I can perform a ritualization which is not standard.

During Islamic divorces in the Mariam Mosque, two processes run in parallel: an Islamic legal process and a ritual. However, they do not end at the same time. The Islamic divorce process ends with signatures on the Islamic divorce document, and the ritual ends with a recitation of al-Fatiha. Khankan explains that she likes the structure in which she “first says that it is Allah who gives you this right, and then you end by leaving it to Allah”. She underlines that it is the signature that gives the divorce Islamic juridical validity, but emotionally this is insufficient for most women, adding,

I believe that there is a great effect in rituals. ... They are part of giving the woman a feeling that this has an effect and a value. There is a value in ending with al-Fatiha. You know, this thing with bringing Allah into the religious performance and the juridical performance.

Khankan compares the recitation of al-Fatiha with similar situations in which God’s name is invoked, such as when “we say bismillah every time we eat, or bismillah when you drive, or we pray al-Fatiha when we say goodbye to our loved ones before they go travelling”. Reciting al-Fatiha to seal the divorce constitutes “an involvement of Allah” and “there is a form of protection in it” similar to other situations in which al-Fatiha is recited to put one’s destiny in

God's hands. It is performed standing in a circle just after the signing of the Islamic divorce document. As Khankan points out, "It is also a conscious decision that we are standing up – that we are standing in a circle and not sitting down. This is because I know that the body reacts better when you stand. You are more receptive than when you are seated."

Like the ritual process, the Islamic juridical process is tailored to individual cases, both to accommodate the women's wishes and to optimize the individual and social effects. This is evident in the co-authoring of the Islamic divorce document when Khankan discusses the reasons for divorce, which are written into the documents. She explains that "it is a template, and then we work [with the women] with a point of departure in this template", adding that for the women, "this is a balancing act of how much should I include or how little". She then expands on the relevant considerations and how she guides the women:

I evaluate the security level – I mean, how threatened is she? How dangerous is the situation? So, I make an evaluation of security in the situation, and then I inform the woman that in some cases it can be expedient to have as much information as possible included in the khula document, but in other cases it may be more expedient to just include the most important information because it can raise the conflict level if one includes too much. On the other hand, if one includes too little, then the lack of good reasons ... may mean that her divorce will meet opposition, or that he does not take it seriously.

This quotation demonstrates that *fiqh* does matter. Khankan states that a divorce document that includes good reasons for the divorce provides support for the legitimacy of the decision; however, sometimes it is better to waive this to avoid an escalation of the conflict. In other words, the document is drafted with a future performance in mind: its future (deferred) function in the social dynamics outside the mosque. Khankan gives the example of the husband who "will receive the document and, thus, be confronted with his own behavior, the documentation of it, and [the fact that] a mosque has witnessed her [his wife's] story", although Islamic divorce documents often have a wider circulation that also includes at least the woman's family.

The co-authoring of the Islamic divorce document certainly took place in Hind's case. She and the two employees at the women's shelter initially wanted to include a detailed history to make as strong a case as possible, a plan that was largely based on Hind's assumption that this was how Khankan wanted the document. Yet when Khankan explained that this might not be expedient

in her case, Hind changed her mind, took charge, and decided to exclude everything but a few generic sentences and two examples.

In light of this process, which I have also observed in other mosques and among male Muslim leaders, it is important to underline that Islamic divorce documents do not constitute a true representation of the events, because they are typically written with other objectives in mind (cf. Bowen, 2016, p. 66). They are often designed to optimize their future (deferred) performative effect in a specific social situation. They are seldom written to provide a true account of events. Male Muslim leaders do not typically put women at the center, although they also tailor their divorce documents to future events. In that respect, Yasir is an exception, as he writes his Islamic divorce documents in as rich a detail as possible to legitimize his verdict (see Chapter 5).

The women's co-authoring of the divorce letter corresponds to Khankan's tactic of increasing the women's involvement in their own divorce process while Khankan also performs or facilitates it. From the very first divorces performed in the Mariam Mosque, it was also suggested to women that they could write down their story, which would then be inserted as an appendix to the Islamic divorce document. The first woman to write such an appendix divorced in the fall of 2016.

The Islamic juridical part of the process is characterized by empowerment, as Khankan explains: "We want to give them the experience and feeling of empowerment, that they are capable of acting, that it is God, it is Allah, who gives them the right to divorce, and we are just an instrument that helps them." This works in tandem with the ritual performance, which is aimed at producing a transformation, but, as Khankan observes, this is a symbiosis that emerged over time:

The woman enters. She is a victim, but she is much more than a victim. And by giving her the experience of acting on her own behalf, [she sees] that it is not us [the Mariam Mosque] that has the power and authority, but that she has authority herself. She is an individual and God has given her the authority to act. So, this is something that I have thought about – not from day one – but slowly this is something that I have begun to reflect on more and more.

Moreover, there are some elements that Khankan always introduces if expedient in relation to social effect, such as emphasizing the importance of family members' co-signing the divorce documents because this commits them to supporting the divorcee. All divorces are signed by panel members,

and in divorces where women find it important, a minimum of two men sign. Additionally, Khankan provides women with cognitive tools to maintain their personal conviction of being divorced. Colloquially in UDSU, these are called parrot sentences, as women are supposed to repeat them without entering discussions. If men, or the woman's own family, question the validity of her Islamic divorce, or in other ways oppose her decision, she is supposed to ignore their arguments and repeatedly respond with one of two to three sentences that they have practiced, such as, "Allah has given me the right to divorce, and I have used that right", or, "We are no longer married." These parrot sentences are designed to make women more resistant to social pressure. Furthermore, they demonstrate the deferred nature of Islamic divorce by highlighting that when women leave the Mariam Mosque they may have to fight for the validity of the verdict.

In 13 of the 14 divorces, I observed in the Mariam Mosque, there was a clear and discernible effect of Khankan's Islamic divorce ritual that manifested in a powerful emotional reaction when al-Fatiha had been recited, and there may also have been an effect in the remaining case, although I was not able to observe it. The effect on the personal level is also clear in my follow-up interviews with women who had divorced in the Mariam Mosque, even in divorces that husbands did not accept.

To take an example, Ziba migrated to Denmark for work in 2015 and, therefore, she had a temporary residence permit while her husband stayed in their country of origin and visited her regularly on a visa. She entered into a *nikah* under Islamic law in her country of origin in 2000, and in 2020, she obtained her Islamic divorce in the Mariam Mosque. When Ziba sent the Islamic divorce documents to her husband, he stated that they had no legal validity under Islamic law in the country where he lived (this is a correct assessment). Ziba's husband then travelled to Denmark for a short visit during which he unsuccessfully tried to get hold of Ziba. Soon after, however, Ziba's father was hospitalized, and she travelled to her country of origin to care for him and to say farewell before he passed away. That meant that she stayed for three weeks inside the hospital because as long as she did not leave the premises, she was safe from her husband. However, once her father had passed away, she lost this protection and her husband used his right to ban her from leaving the country. This meant that, while grieving over her father's death, she had to take up marital relations with her (ex)husband, which involved a significant amount of emotional display (Hochschild, 1983/2012) until he felt secure enough to let her travel back to Denmark to work. Once back in Denmark, Ziba hired a lawyer and filed for divorce under Islamic law in her country of origin, but her lawyer estimated that it would take two to three years to obtain her divorce as

her grounds were insufficient; thus, the lawyer had to find other ways of pressuring the husband to consent.

Ziba explained that her Islamic divorce in the Mariam Mosque enabled her to reject her husband when he came to Denmark to get hold of her. She said, "You can come [to see your child] but you cannot live with me because we are not married", adding that the Islamic divorce meant that she could talk openly about having left her husband. She was supported by most of her family, which demonstrates a social effect. Some female family members were very supportive, saying things like, "It is really cool that you have done this." In other words, while the Islamic divorce had no impact on Ziba's civil status in her country of origin, it has played an important role in putting her on a trajectory towards emancipation from her husband's control and, maybe, in the future, a legally valid Islamic divorce in her home country. In the meantime she lives her life as a divorced woman in Denmark with the support of her family.

In July 2018, I followed up on five of the nine divorces so far issued by the Mariam Mosque, assisted by Khankan who contacted the women one by one. Of the remaining four divorces, three were by mutual consent¹⁷ and one woman was unreachable. Of the five women whom Khankan and I contacted, four had moved on in various ways, secure in their belief that they were Islamically divorced. One was getting married to another man, and in one case the husband had accepted the divorce. In the fifth case, the woman stated that her husband had not accepted the divorce, and she did not want to elaborate on this. The conversation was short and indicated that the woman was still in *nikah* captivity.

In June 2021, by which time the Mariam Mosque had performed an additional 27 divorces, Khankan and I followed up on another three divorces, one of them Ziba's. None of the husbands had accepted the divorces, but Ziba and one other woman did not care, while a third was still in *nikah* captivity. I followed up on three divorces from the spring of 2021 through a social worker. In all three cases, the woman's own family had accepted the divorce while the (ex)husbands had not. Interestingly, two of the families had only accepted the Islamic divorce after mediation by the social worker, which again underlines the deferred nature of Islamic divorce performances.

From a legal point of view, it may be of significance whether husbands accept the legal performances in the Mariam Mosque, that is, whether this mirrors or is similar to the performance of a court. This is also important to some women, but as I demonstrate in the following section, my observations

17 Islamic divorce by mutual consent is rare in the Mariam Mosque, but it happened a few times in the early years.

suggest that most women who come to the Mariam Mosque are much more focused on what an Islamic divorce means to them personally, and whether their own families accept it.

5 Women's Experience of Agency

In September 2023, I was in the Mariam Mosque to observe two Islamic divorces. In the second case of the day, the applicant was supported by another woman, who had received her divorce in the same mosque 15 months earlier. During the small talk before embarking on the divorce ritual, Khankan inquired whether the earlier divorce had manifested socially: did the husband and his family accept it? The woman answered “No”, and added that her (ex)husband and his family had demanded 8,000 EUR in compensation to accept it. She remarked that she was just now getting her civil divorce and she lived apart from her (ex)husband, but he was stalking her. Thus, she was still in the process of wresting herself free of the bond with him, but she was in high spirits, and now she had brought a friend to the Mariam Mosque who also wanted to divorce her husband.

The above case demonstrates that while social effect is essential to some women, others are more focused on what an Islamic divorce means to them personally; that is, they do not obtain an Islamic divorce primarily to change the world around them, although such an effect would be nice. Rather, they obtain one because it changes their perspective on the world. This was also clearly expressed in the ensuing dialogue between Khankan and the woman who now wanted to divorce,

Khankan: What does it mean to you to get an Islamic divorce?

Woman: It means everything to me. As a Muslim it is important to me.

Khankan: What does it mean to you that your husband most likely will not accept the divorce?

Woman: It is not that important because if Allah allows me [to divorce] then that is all that matters to me. I do not seek his approval; I only seek Allah's approval.

Khankan then asked the woman who had previously divorced in the Mariam Mosque, “Is this the same for you?” She nodded and said, “Yes.” Later in the divorce process when Khankan asked whether the woman wanted the Mariam Mosque to send the Islamic divorce document to her husband, she replied that it was not necessary because he would not accept it anyway, and repeated that she was getting the divorce for her own sake.

A similar dynamic is present in cases with non-Muslims who request an Islamic divorce. I have touched on this in Chapter 1, but I briefly re-illustrate it here with a case in which a Christian woman, Siv, requested an Islamic divorce from the Mariam Mosque. While narrating her story to Khankan, Siv explained that it was rather urgent for her to get the Islamic divorce as she was getting married in a church the following week, adding, "It is not until now, when I will enter a church and marry again, that it dawns on me that I have also said yes, you know, in an Islamic tradition, and I simply need to end this in an orderly manner, in a respectful way, and that is not something I can do myself."

When Siv obtained a civil divorce six years earlier, her husband had refused to sign an Islamic divorce. They lost contact and at the time of her divorce in the Mariam Mosque she had not spoken with him for years. The ensuing dialogue indicates that her requesting an Islamic divorce was more about closure than wresting herself free from her (ex)husband. Towards the end of Siv's narration, Khankan summed up her motivation for requesting the Islamic divorce: "So, it is a need you have to feel that you are completely, like, that you have completely put it behind you and that you are no longer bound Islamically?" Siv answered,

Yes, well. I also think it is the blessing that is contained in it. That is, after all, what we do with these ceremonies, right? That we stop in relation to what we do, and you know, like, it is you who in some way facilitate that blessing. That thing with turning the gaze towards the sky and then praying that what happens now is right. That is the meaning it has for me.

Siv has an expectation that Khankan's ritual performance will achieve something that she cannot do on her own. Interestingly, in narrating her story, Siv explained that formally – Islamic juridically – she is divorced, but her requesting Islamic divorce from the Mariam Mosque indicates that this does not feel right or sufficient. As she explains,

He has definitely done that [performed the Islamic divorce]. He always scolds me, so he has said it at least three times [I divorce you], but there is also something that is important to me. You know; that I as a woman also actively [divorce my husband].

The quotation demonstrates that the authorized way of performing a talaq divorce sometimes fails, and that women therefore need something in addition to this – a substitute or addition that feels right. This is a fairly common phenomenon. Another (Muslim) woman who requested a divorce in the Mariam Mosque even stated that her husband had performed a divorce (but

later retracted it), so “I do not need an Islamic divorce because I am already divorced. I just want some documentation.”¹⁸ She added that her (ex)husband would surely not accept whatever documentation she obtained; however, she did not care what he thought.

The narratives of needing a divorce even though a husband has already divorced in an authorized way (although he may have subsequently changed his mind)¹⁹ is not just a phenomenon in the Mariam Mosque, and this is one of the explanatory strengths of ritual theory: while a performance may be in accordance with *fiqh* this does not mean that it has the effect that *fiqh* prescribes. As demonstrated in previous chapters, even men who want to perform a *talaq* divorce typically seek out a Muslim leader. I emphasize this as it illustrates something important about how Islamic divorce performances work: the parties involved are active co-producers of the divorce, not passive recipients of a legal decision (cf. Bowen, 2016, p. 88). To properly analyze this, I briefly de-center Khankan and the Mariam Mosque and instead focus on the women's agency.

First and foremost, it should be noted that Khankan's ritual performance is encoded in women's requesting an Islamic divorce. That is, women come to the Mariam Mosque with different needs and expectations and, based on these, they attribute Khankan with a function in their life. Furthermore, the success of Khankan's performance is encoded in the women's planning of a celebration afterwards, thereby setting themselves and Khankan up for success. I return to my field notes using the present tense to provide an empirically grounded description.

Khankan connects to an online meeting with Jane, who is a convert. Jane fell in love with a man in secondary school and entered into a *nikah* with him a year later (no civil marriage). She explained that her husband became abusive within a few months – a description that fits the pattern of Islamized coercive control (see Chapter 3) – and that she reported him to the police six months into their *nikah* as he had woken her up at 3 AM and pulled her out of bed by her hair because he could not get into her telephone to check up on her. The police arrived, took pictures, and drove her to her father's home. Jane was unhappy with how the police had responded as she did not understand why she was the one who had to leave when her husband was the assailant. Further,

18 This woman, who wanted to divorce because her (ex)husband had taken a second wife, had the locks changed on her apartment while he was with the other woman. Her (ex)husband demanded 20,000 EUR to consent to divorce, but the woman ignored this and obtained the divorce in the Mariam Mosque instead.

19 There is no authorized way of taking back an Islamic legal enunciation within any of the schools of thought. Nonetheless, socially this is a common phenomenon and, thus, Islamic legal practice – the lived *sharia* – allows for it.

Jane was not on good terms with her father and, therefore, she could not stay with him, not even for a short while.

Jane's divorce had already partially happened. She had called the police on her husband, which is a clear act of resistance against his control and a way of ending their relationship. Furthermore, she is already living a life beyond the immediate coercive control of her husband. This is evident in her clothing, as she remarks, "If he saw me walk around in the kind of clothes I am wearing now, he would beat me." Her husband had even agreed to Islamic divorce and performed a talaq divorce, but as it so often happens, he later retracted it and claimed that it did not count because he was angry when performing it. Instead, he is now keeping her in nikah captivity, as this exchange of words demonstrates:

Khankan: What does he think about your wanting to divorce?

Jane: [He says], "It will not happen. It is a pity for our children." And then he explains that he can always take a second wife and hold me captive.

Jane has planned her escape. She has given up her apartment and will go underground by moving to a friend's place in a different region of Denmark. She wants to send the Islamic divorce document to her husband herself to make sure that this is done at the right moment of her escape. If we fast forward to the end of the divorce ritual, Jane has an emotional reaction at the end of the recitation of al-Fatiha, albeit seemingly a bit less intensely than other women whose divorces I have observed. The ritual was successful, but it is not over yet as Jane must complete the ritual herself. She will leave the liminal phase and free herself when she escapes and sends the Islamic divorce document to her husband. Thus, the divorce happened even before Jane got online with Khankan, it happened during the Islamic divorce ritual, and it happened once more when Jane "used" her Islamic divorce document as a gesture during her escape. In other words, the success of Khankan's performance was encoded in Jane's request and in the planned escape – actions prior and subsequent to Khankan's performance. This brings another perspective to the common scenes that play out in the Mariam Mosque. To take an example:

Khankan: It is Allah who gives you divorce. Islamic divorce is your right.

Jane: I have been told that I do not have the right to Islamic divorce.

Khankan: You have, it says so in the Quran.

Khankan is an enabler for Jane. Although Jane may need to hear Khankan say that she has a right to Islamic divorce, this was already encoded in Jane's request and in her showing up. This underlines Jane's agency, but also Khankan's role as

someone who enables and empowers the women who contact her – a role that begins a long time before the women contact UDSU or the Mariam Mosque.

The encoding of Khankan's performance in events prior and subsequent to the Islamic divorce performance in the Mariam Mosque also explains why these divorces often work via Zoom. Khankan was initially worried that it would not be possible to generate a ritual effect using this medium, and doing so has required experimentation, such as the distance hugging described in Hind's case, but she has been surprised to find that the ritual actually works in this format. As she points out, "I do not like Zoom – I think it is terrible. I have a really hard time with Zoom. I have also run the Exit Circle's conversation groups over Zoom,²⁰ so it is something I do out of necessity, but I am a little surprised that there is an effect over Zoom. ... I have had some very strong and impactful reactions ..."

The effect is, of course, generated by the symbiosis of Khankan's Islamic legal and ritual performance but, as demonstrated above, this is encoded in a longer sequence of events, which means that even in conditions that are far from optimal, Khankan's performance is often still successful. It should be noted that this is partially due to Khankan and Jørgensen's counseling, which prepares the women for the Islamic divorce performance via the Islamic divorce template and the pre-interview. During the latter they tell women that it is important not to be alone after the divorce. In many cases this leads women to plan some sort of celebration to mark the significance of what has just happened.

6 Men's and Families' Responses

In June 2021, Khankan told me about the first time a man contacted her due to a divorce she had issued. Two men had showed up without an appointment while Khankan was leading a therapy group session in the Exit Circle. She told them to wait, and they sat down in the lounge and waited for half an hour. The apartment that housed the Mariam Mosque at the time was a busy place with people from other NGOs working late, so Khankan felt secure.

When they told her why they were there, she asked the recently divorced man to come to her office while the other waited in the lounge. Khankan explains, "I started by validating how he feels which I always do", by which she means,

²⁰ The conversations only took place via Zoom during the Covid-19 pandemic.

I start by saying that I am really sorry that you [plural] have undergone divorce ... and I am sorry that I have had to facilitate it, and I understand that this is difficult, I understand that it is hard, and that it can be upsetting not to have been part of the conversation – that there has been no attempt at mediation from our side.

The most common critique by men and families of divorces in the Mariam Mosque is that there has been no mediation. However, as most divorces in the Mariam Mosque are between women and abusive husbands Khankan seldom instigates it. Women who come to the Mariam Mosque typically do not want mediation – they want to divorce – and Khankan understands this to be a Muslim woman's right, a right that the Mariam Mosque is obligated to enforce because they have launched an Islamic divorce council. Khankan continues her narration about the man, who had turned up unannounced:

I remember that we spoke for about an hour and that he actually became calm, and that I offered him free sessions with me ... because it turns out that he has himself experienced some difficult things in his childhood. He shared this with me.

Khankan adds that the man never took Khankan up on the offer, but he accepted the divorce, at least at the time. Although men typically do not come around to accepting the divorces, this is a frequent pattern. Men contact the Mariam Mosque to complain and Khankan stands her ground while she validates their feelings. I listened in on such a conversation in August 2023 with a man whose wife had suffered severe and well-documented violence. At the time of the conversation, the woman was still living in a women's shelter, but just two weeks after the conversation, the woman moved back to the man and declared to Jørgensen that they were very happy together. This type of oscillation is common in coercive control relationships (Smith, 2021).

As described above, the Mariam Mosque is often able to produce a lasting effect on the individual level, and the frequency with which family members sign the Islamic divorce document is high,²¹ thus demonstrating an effect on the social level. In an attempt to extend this social effect to include an (ex)husband's acceptance as well, Khankan introduced a new initiative in June 2021,

21 I cannot measure the exact frequency based on the Islamic divorce documents because I do not know the identity of co-signers and their relation to the women. My estimate is drawn from ongoing ethnographic observation, including – but not limited to – the observation of divorces.

putting the UDSU's telephone number on the divorce documents so that men could get in contact with the Mariam Mosque. She hoped that by doing so she might be able to talk some of the men into accepting the divorce, but she also found it important that these men were "not just demonized", and that "we reach out and say, that there is transparency; that if you have questions you can call. And this may also hinder cases from escalating." Two days later, Khankan received her first death threat due to a divorce (see below), but the initiative persisted.

The number of responses the Mariam Mosque receives from (ex)husbands clearly demonstrates that their divorces have some form of social effect.²² Men are seldom indifferent about divorces issued by the Mariam Mosque, an effect that Khankan feels is mainly due to the way these divorces change (ex)wives' behavior, as she explains:

When the woman stands up, is sturdier, and is able to say to the man, "I am divorced from you now." And she does this directly or indirectly by sending the document or giving it in person. ... That in itself is an action that is very significant. She goes from being submissive to being assertive to acting, and this affects the man when he can see that the woman does this. So that is why he reacts to it, I think.

This should be viewed in the light that many of these men exert coercive control, and they will typically respond aggressively to any interference with their controlling behavior (Smith, 2021). Sometimes they are even successful in coercing their (ex)wife to return, as illustrated above – one of the reasons why Khankan believes that it is so important to talk with them:

So, you give a woman a divorce, but so what? This man is violent, and he will marry again and then the pattern repeats itself. So, if we want to get to the root of the problem, then some much deeper work is necessary – something I would like to do in the future.

She finds it important to focus on controlling men's problems, because she believes this is the root (or cause) of the women's problems, and in November 2021 she managed to persuade a controlling man, to whose (ex)wife she had issued a divorce without his consent, to take part in three therapy

²² These responses are not registered, so this evaluation is based on my ongoing ethnographic observation in the Mariam Mosque.

sessions with her. Since then, she has engaged in fundraising to start up therapy groups for controlling men.

In January 2024, Khankan extended her initiative of 2021; in an effort to get into contact with more men (in cases where it was expedient), she would now call them to let them know that their wife had requested an Islamic divorce, that under Islamic rules she had the right to do so, and she would then ask them either to come to the Mariam Mosque to sign the divorce documents or do so digitally. With this course of action Khankan would, as she explained, transition “from an apologetic approach to assertive power”. This reflects the letters the mosque began sending out in 2023, and it mirrors a tactic that is often used by male Muslim leaders. In other words, the experiments continue and Khankan continues to develop her repertoire of methods.

7 Security Issues

In previous chapters I have pointed to two variables when explaining why presences collapse: the cascade effect and security issues. As described above, the Mariam Mosque had the resources to deal with the cascade effect, although it still generated a waiting list. In October 2022, for example, Jørgensen called me to complain about Abdel (see Chapter 5), explaining that he had once again facilitated a nikah with an underaged woman and, in addition to this, a polygamous nikah. Jørgensen wanted to know whether this was illegal, to which the answer is no: the latter is not illegal, and the former was not illegal at the time of the nikah. During the conversation, Jørgensen added that UDSU had seven women ready for divorce – their divorce papers filled out and everything – but Khankan’s calendar presented a bottleneck; there were not enough available timeslots to issue the number of divorces coming in, and as no one else could do Khankan’s job, the women had to wait.

Jørgensen joked that it would be much easier if she converted to Islam herself and became an imam, so that there would be two imams in the mosque. In August 2021, Khankan said something similar to me: “If we could just hire a full time imam, whom we could train in these procedures, then we would be much better off resource-wise. ... Economics means a lot in relation to these matters.” Joking aside, Jørgensen went on to discuss another case in which the Mariam Mosque had decided to postpone the issuing of the Islamic divorce till the husband had been expelled from Denmark. A few weeks earlier Khankan had described the case to me in an email: “the husband has been extremely physically violent, held boiling water over her and tried to kill her. ... He has nothing to lose, and he is dangerous.” She added that the family is well connected, owns

a lot of property, and has taken part in the abuse. Jørgensen was worried about the woman's mental health as his departure from Denmark could take a long time, because once expelled he could remain indefinitely in a departure facility (*udrejsecenter*) before leaving the country. Ultimately the Mariam Mosque offered to issue the divorce but needed some time to handle the security issues. In the meantime another imam seized the moment and persuaded the man to issue an Islamic divorce while he was influenced by drugs.

The conversation demonstrates two points: first, the funding of UDSU made the Mariam Mosque able to handle the cascade effect despite temporary bottlenecks; second, that security was still an issue. I have described how Khankan obtained an assault alarm in March 2022 from Danish police because of Hind's (ex)husband. Not long before this case, Khankan had returned her previous assault alarm, which she obtained due to a divorce in June 2021. This was the first significant security threat against the Mariam Mosque, only six months into the UDSU project. Because this is the point at which presences normally collapse, I examine this case in more detail.

On 7 June 2021, I was at the police station in Copenhagen central station with Khankan. A few days earlier, on 4 June, I had observed her issue Islamic divorces to two women in the Mariam Mosque. When she was done, a woman came by to pick up a divorce letter. I had not seen her before, but the conversation quickly indicated that this was a problematic case. Not only had the man been abusive, but he was also a gang member; thus, this case constituted a test of how far Khankan and other members of the Mariam Mosque's divorce council were willing to go in terms of jeopardizing their own security.

Khankan and the other members had discussed security in relation to previous cases, but this was the first time that there was a worrying probability that they would be met with a violent reaction. Therefore, they discussed whether to revise the divorce contract so that it could not be traced to the Mariam Mosque, postpone the divorce until the security situation had been clarified and a strategy developed, or insist that the woman had an inviolable Islamic right to divorce that should not be affected by security concerns. After some discussion back and forth, Khankan decided in favor of the latter perspective and stated that this woman indeed had such an inviolable right and, therefore, the contract must be signed here and now, whatever the consequences. Furthermore, as a religious institution, the Mariam Mosque had to back the divorce, so only the address of the mosque was removed, not its name. This decision to insist on a woman's inviolable right to divorce no matter the consequences set a precedence for future cases, even if, as the case above demonstrates, the mosque had to take precautions. A few days later, the Danish police equipped Khankan with an assault alarm due to death threats by the woman's (ex)husband.

8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that a single case is enough to generate a presence that becomes institutionalized if the cascade effect and security issues are overcome. Further, I have demonstrated that the demand, described in previous chapters, is significant enough to bend planned trajectories and transform institutions. The Mariam Mosque was quickly incorporated into the services provided by the welfare state, which demonstrates that the demand projected onto social workers from women wanting Islamic divorce also creates a vacuum within the welfare state, which Islamic institutions can be sucked into. This is less the case with male Muslim leaders and other mosques as the episteme above the ceiling dictates that such collaborations are problematic (see Chapters 2, 5, and 8); that is, collaboration is taboo, but social workers seem to be more willing to collaborate openly with the Mariam Mosque.

The vacuum within the welfare state leads to a situation in which Islamic institutions perform Islamic divorces in collaboration with and/or as a service to the welfare state. This is evident below the epistemic ceiling where these collaborations are actively sought by representatives of the welfare state, while policies aimed at abolishing such practices are formulated above the epistemic ceiling. In other words, while Islamic divorce practices may be conceptualized as a parallel system above the epistemic ceiling, they are to some degree integrated into the welfare state below it.

In relation to the epistemic ceiling, it is notable that Khankan has been accused of being a radical Islamist by several members of parliament, three of whom she took to court for libel in 2020 and 2021 but lost. A significant number of debaters and opinion makers have also portrayed Khankan as a radical Islamist. On 15 December 2017, the question was even debated on one of Denmark's agenda-setting TV programs, *Deadline*, in which two professors were asked for their evaluation; both stated that Khankan was not an Islamist. In other words, or to repeat my conclusion from previous chapters, there is a significant discrepancy between the episteme above and below the ceiling. I should point out that since 2021, the debate on Khankan's status has died out, with only a small segment of debaters and politicians insisting that she is a radical Islamist; it should also be noted that Khankan has had some strong and influential supporters throughout the discussion (for a more detailed account, see Petersen, 2022a; Petersen, 2022b).

In combination with Chapter 4, this chapter both underlines the role women may play as Islamic authorities and the agency of women in getting divorced, something that is often neglected or excluded from studies (for two notable exceptions, see Mir-Hosseini, 1993/2000; Walker, 2016). My

investigation demonstrates that women play an active role in producing the Islamic divorce, and Khankan takes the role of a woman who empowers other women and enables them to act. In other words, the women who come to the Mariam Mosque are not just subjects in an Islamic legal process. Mir-Hosseini and Walker demonstrate how women either resist their framing as subject to Islamic law as understood by the Islamic authorities, or navigate these spaces but ultimately end up with a patriarchal bargain (Scott, 1990). Interestingly, in contrast with Walker's and Mir-Hosseini's informants – and Bowen's observations of Islamic divorce councils – the women who came to the Mariam Mosque seldom performed a strong religious identity, possibly due to the inclusive atmosphere created by Khankan, which does not demand such performances.

There is a stark contrast between how Walker's (2016) informants relate to religion in British sharia councils and how women in the Mariam Mosque relate to religion. This also influences how they conceptualize their Islamic divorces on a personal level. While Walker's informants are primarily oriented toward the function of the sharia councils without finding the religious foundations of these councils legitimate, the women's own religious beliefs are the point of departure in the Mariam Mosque. This means that the Islamic divorce becomes a religious event for the women to a much greater extent.

In relation to Chapter 4, I must add that I have been surprised to see how many husbands practiced Islamic polygamy, and here I only count the ones who have entered into a *nikah* or civil marriage with women other than those getting divorced in the Mariam Mosque, not men who have multiple relationships apart from their marriage. Unfortunately, my data do not contain a sufficiently systematic registration of polygamy to provide an estimate of its frequency. Furthermore, I should repeat that Islamic polygamy is not illegal in Denmark. However, I do believe this is an area in which much more research is needed.

As a contribution to the kaleidoscopic description of sharia practices, I have in this chapter applied ritual theory, which highlights how Islamic legal processes produce effects. The explanatory power of ritual theory is demonstrated by the fact that Islamic legal actions performed in accordance with *fiqh* – such as saying, “I divorce you” – do not produce the effect described as the outcome in *fiqh*; rather, it is produced once the performance is either ritualized (Bell, 2009) or has been performed as a ritual (Rappaport, 1999). Furthermore, I have highlighted how events before and after an Islamic divorce are important to the Islamic juridical performance, and may even be understood as sequences of a much longer ritual or a prolonged liminal phase (Turner, 1969/2008). Again, this highlights the women's agency and decenters the Islamic juridical

performance. This is not to say that the Islamic juridical performance is not important. Often it constitutes a climax in the series of events. My point is that it is insufficient to investigate the Islamic juridical performance as an isolated event.

Finally, the chapter has highlighted the deferred nature of Islamic divorce performances with reference to elements such as parrot sentences, and a description of how women tactically plan their presentation of the verdict to their significant others. This analysis has demonstrated that Islamic divorce documents are written to have an optimal effect in such struggles rather than aimed at providing a true account of events, which does not mean that the documents contain false information. They are not, however, appropriate as source material for research on actual events and, as this is a common way of writing them up – with the notable exception of Yasir and a few others – I have almost exclusively used my collection of 552 Islamic divorce documents to get a deeper understanding of the deferred nature of Islamic divorce.