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**Mourchidates: Promoting a New Role in Islam for Women in
Morocco and the Global Muslim Community**

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Literature Review	8
Methodology	15
Section One: Background	16
Women's Historical Role in Islam	16
Contemporary Women in the Global Muslim Community	19
Moroccan Background	24
Section Two: Status of Morocco's Mourchidate Program	34
Program Description	34
Evaluation of the Mourchidate Program	39
Section Three: Implementation	47
Current Factors	47
Similar Programs	51
Conclusion	53
Works Cited	55

Abstract

Mourchidates: Promoting a New Role in Islam for Women in Morocco and the Global

Muslim community

Morocco has been hailed as a leader in the global Muslim community because of its recent official efforts to increase gender equality and female empowerment. In 2006, the first class of mourchidates, the first female state-trained religious leaders in any Arab country, graduated. This research employs select academic works, media and government reports, and interviews with a former Grand Mufti, Dalia Ziada, Egyptian blogger and humans rights activist and director of the North Africa officer of the American Islamic conferece, Mufti Ibrahim Negm, assistant to the grand mufti of Egypt, and Rajaa Naji, one of the trainers and program developers, and Sarah Islam, an Islamic family law scholar. Both negative and positive results thus far are explored, which helps predict the future success of the program. However time is necessary to determine the program's full capacity and effects.

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April 30, 2010

Professor Kunkle

Contemporary Islam Research Course

Mourchidates: Promoting a New Role in Islam for Women in Morocco and the Global Muslim Community

Morocco has been hailed as a leader in the global Muslim community because of its recent official effort to increase gender equality and female empowerment. While its reforms in the areas of family law have received the most attention by the foreign press, the creation of a state-run program to train women to become spiritual leaders throughout the country, called the mourchidate program, may be more important and groundbreaking. Although it has only been a few years since the creation of this program, both negative and positive results can already be seen, which must be watched carefully in order to predict the program's likelihood of achieving its goal of promoting moderate Islam. This paper looks at a variety of areas in order to determine the successes and failures of the mourchidate program as well as discover some of the factors and conditions leading to its creation, and whether it is likely to be implemented in other parts of the global Muslim community. First, it explores the historical role of Muslim women in roles similar to the mourchidates as scholarly leaders and includes a brief overview of women's role in early Islam. It also attempts to uncover the context and conditions that may have led to the creation of the program, both within Morocco and from the international community, to examine the program itself, and to look at results recorded in other academic works and media sources showing possible affects and reactions within Morocco. This paper ultimately discovers just how

much of an impact the program has had thus far and whether it is likely to cause significant lasting change for Muslim women in Morocco or other parts of the global Muslim community in terms of their daily or political life. This paper determines the impact on Morocco and extrapolates to the global Muslim community based on written evidence and interviews.

It is first necessary to understand some of the terms that will be used throughout the context of this paper. The first is 'imam'. Although 'imam' frequently has a Shi'a connotation of being one of the original twelve imams, known as the "Great Imams", in the context of this paper it will be defined as "a Muslim leader of the community or mosque and a leader of daily and Friday prayer".¹ The second term this paper will employ is 'mourchidate', which is very similar to the aforementioned imam, except female and without the ability to lead Friday prayer in the mosque; the term will be defined using the description provided by the United States Department of States' "International Religious Freedom Report 2009", as a "government-trained spiritual guide."² Mourchidates work mainly, but not solely, with women and provide religious guidance and counseling in an official, state-sponsored capacity. They also help manage the mosques and hold trainings within the communities surrounding the mosques on a variety of topics.³ Their role is further examined in section two. The term 'mourchidate' can present confusion because of the variety of spellings used in the media and other sources; it is sometimes spelt 'mourchidat',

¹ "imam." Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2010.
Merriam-Webster Online. 3 April 2010
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/imam>

² United States. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*. US Department of State, 26 Oct. 2009. Web. 4 Feb. 2010.
<<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127354.htm>>.

³ Moroccan American Cultural Center. *Muslim Women Religious Leaders from Morocco Visit US to Highlight Pioneering Initiative To Promote Equality, Tolerance, & Faith. Mourchidate Visit to US (May 16-24)*. Moroccan American Cultural Center, 15 May 2009. Web. 9 Feb. 2010.
<http://moroccoonthemove.com/morocco_on_the_move_website.html>.

‘murshidat’, or ‘murchidate’. However, this paper will use the most common spelling found in media and scholarly sources, ‘mourchidate’.

This paper largely focuses on the ‘global Muslim community’, defined as “the people who practice Islam or places where Islam is commonly practiced.” Two other terms that should be explained are the two main sources of Islamic law and practice. The first is the ‘Qur’an’, the central text of Islam, believed by Muslims to be the final revelation of God, and transmitted through the Prophet Muhammad. The second is ‘hadith’, the acts and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad that were evaluated and published in collections based on their accuracy. Another term used throughout the paper is ‘madhab’, defined as schools of Islamic legal thought. Lastly, ‘ijtihad’ is defined as the independent interpretation of the Qur’an, hadith, and existing Islamic law using reason and context.

As is discussed further in section one, males have experienced a near-monopoly of Islamic legal interpretation over the past several hundred centuries, resulting in the rolling back of rights for many Muslim women.⁴ The “International Religious Freedom Report” explains that prior to the reforms of Morocco’s family law in 2003, Morocco lagged behind many countries in the rights it provided for women. The discrepancy in illiteracy rates between males and females in Morocco were, and continue to be exceptionally high, especially in rural areas. Also, the minimum age for women to marry was only 15 years old and women were often refused rights in the divorce and custody process, along with other discrepancies based on gender.⁵

According to *The Washington Times*, the mourchidate training program was first introduced by King Mohammed VI in 2005, two years after making major reforms to Morocco’s

⁴ “Sarah Islam.” Personal interview. 16 Mar. 2010.

⁵ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

family law, the moudawana, including the near-outlawing of polygamy, setting age minimums for marriage, and increasing rights for women in divorce.⁶ The first group of women in the mouchidate program, 50 in all, graduated in 2006 and the program has continued every year since.

The mouchidate program admissions panel selects from top-ranking women under the age of 46, who hold bachelor's degrees and have memorized at least half of the Qur'an. These women in turn enter the training program where they complete, alongside a group of men training to become imams, a year-long course of study including Islamic Studies and Islamic Law. The program also includes coursework focusing on psychology, communications, foreign languages, and information technology. Thus it is a program combining tradition with modernity, presumably so that the women are able to not only provide religious knowledge and clarification, but also be relevant and current. Because of their interdisciplinary training, they are also able to help with other needs in the mosques and are better able to communicate with and counsel the women that seek personal or religious advice. After the training, the women must take a comprehensive exam. During the first year 10 women failed, meaning that although the class started with 60, only 50 successfully completed the program, a pattern that has continued each year since.⁷

The program is truly a first in the global Muslim community. As reported by the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Richard Hamilton, the mouchidates "are the first women

⁶ Soulas, Delphine. "Morocco Pushes Women's Rights." *Washington Times*. News World Communications, INC., 26 Nov. 2003. Web. 5 Feb. 2010.
<http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/archives/03_1126_morocco_wrights.htm>.

⁷ "Muslim Women Religious "murchidates" from Morocco Visit U.S. to Highlight Pioneering Initiative." PR Newswire. *Moroccoboard.com*. Morocco Board News Service, May 2009. Web. 3 Feb. 2010.
<http://moroccoboard.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=497>.

ever in any Muslim country that can perform the functions of a male Imam in a mosque, except lead the prayers.”⁸ They are also the first female state-trained religious leaders in an Arab country.⁹ According to the “International Religious Freedom Report 2009”, the main hope of supporters in the US government is that it will help spread a tolerant message of Islam.¹⁰ The Minister of Islamic Affairs, Ahmed Toufiq, who *The Telegraph*’s Sally Williams claims is generally seen as a modernizer, further claims, “the Mourchidat programme was necessary to maintain a healthy society as a preventative measure against terrorism.”¹¹ Others are less confident about the success of the program, such as Nadia Yassine, the founder and head of the feminist wing of the banned Islamist political party Justice and Charity. Many opponents think that it is designed simply to be used as a tool enabling the government to increase its control over local mosques and opposition groups because of the high level of monitoring and control inherent in the program.¹²

If the end result is deemed beneficial to Moroccan society in terms of its main goal of promoting moderate, non-extremist Islam, Islamic legal scholars, program participants, and program leaders think that it is a program that can be replicated in other countries throughout the global Muslim community. It seems that the spread of similar programs would mark a major step

⁸ Hamilton, Richard. "Islam's Pioneering Women Preachers." *BBC News*. British Broadcasting Corporation, 25 Feb. 2007. Web. 17 Mar. 2010.

⁹ Jones, Dorian. "Challenging Traditional Gender Roles." News Report. *Qantara.de* "Dialogue with the Islamic World. Radical Middle Way, 15 Sept. 2009. Web. 18 Feb. 2010. <http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-307/_nr-35/i.html>.

¹⁰ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

¹¹ Hamilton.

¹² *Class of 2006*. Prod. Charlotte Mangin. Dir. Gini Reticker. PBS: Wide Angle, 2007. DVD.

forward for women in terms of their level of involvement in the formal structure of Islam throughout the global Muslim community.

Very little literature has been published focusing on the mourchidate program itself. In fact, the only academic source focusing specifically on the program that is accessible in English is a paper, "Women Spiritual Guides (Mourchidate) in Morocco: Agents of Change" by Professor Margaret J. Rausch.¹³ A documentary film produced for PBS that focuses specifically on the mourchidate program is also frequently used as a framework, entitled *Class of 2006*.¹⁴ This paper relies heavily on primary sources, such as interviews and government documents. Secondary sources, such as media reports and articles, are also used. Additionally, this paper employs other academic works in section one, when looking at possible factors that may have led to the establishment of the program and in section three, when evaluating its success and replicability. Explicit extrapolation to the greater global Muslim community is one of the key areas lacking in the literature, as is a tie in with the history of Islamic female scholars and similar recent global movements. This paper attempts to fill in both of these holes.

The paper is divided into three main sections. First, it examines the background and factors or conditions that may have led to the establishment of the program. Second, it explores the mourchidate program itself and third, it concludes with an evaluation and impact. The first section provides a brief history of the role of women in early Islam and some of the major female figures with roles similar to the mourchidates, especially women focusing on religious scholarship and training. This section also looks at several possible global movements and trends

¹³ Rausch, Margaret. "Women Spiritual Guides (Mourchidate) in Morocco: Agents of Change." Thesis. University of Kansas. *Yale.edu*. Yale University, Jan. 2009. Web. 9 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/africadissent/rausch.pdf>>.

¹⁴ *Class of 2006*. Prod. Charlotte Mangin. Dir. Gini Reticker. PBS: Wide Angle, 2007. DVD.

in the past century that might have helped lay the foundation for the program. Next it examines the major political and influential figures in Morocco, such as the current king, King Mohammed VI and his father and predecessor, King Hassan II; the role of religion in Moroccan life and its connection with the political system; and the types of influence felt in Morocco from the outside world, both from within and outside of the global Muslim community. It further examines the possible impact of terrorist attacks and growing extremism in the years preceding the creation of the program.

The second section of the paper looks at the details of the actual program. It includes a detailed overview of the components of the program, including quotes from some of the participants and those involved with the program. It explores the immediate reactions and effects that have been felt thus far, using a variety of means, such as interviews, quotes from participants, quotes from opposition and supporting parties, and an evaluation of its effectiveness in terms of battling terrorism and promoting tolerant Islam.

The third section mainly looks at the possibility of implementation to other areas in the global Muslim community. It looks at similar programs in Egypt and Algeria that were created after Morocco's mouchidate program, the global visibility of the program, and Morocco's relations with other countries in the global Muslim community. The paper concludes with an analysis of the program's likely effectiveness and impact, both long-term and mid-term and from both within and outside of Morocco.

The paper finds that at this point, the program will be more valuable as a signal and symbolic action than as having statistically provable, on-the-ground results. However this does not mean it will not be a significant event in the long-term. The mouchidate program has the important prospect of increasing women's participation and increasing the official role of women

in the Muslim religion. This is vital because according to Amina Wadud, a prominent Islamic feminist, scholar, and one of the first women to lead mixed-gender Friday prayer, the lack of female influence has led to a near absence of female interpretation and input, often leading to some of the more patriarchal characteristics connected with Islam, which were not necessarily part of the religion in its original form.¹⁵ According to Khadija al-Aktami, a mouchidate in Rabat, women also bring different strengths to the table and will be able to give other women in the communities they serve advice and council that only a woman can provide.¹⁶ Hopefully they may also provide an example, especially to young girls, that they too can have a role of active involvement and leadership in Moroccan Islam. The increased role of educated women in the implementation of the religion will hopefully increase women's influence in a positive way, decreasing extremism and providing a pathway for further reforms both in Morocco and the global Muslim community as a whole.

Literature Review

Morocco's mouchidate training program is of major significance to the global Muslim community because it is the first state-run program that trains female religious leaders in the Arab World. The program represents an opportunity for women to become officially involved in the Muslim religion and in the mosque, a domain typically reserved for men. The involvement of women in Islam gives them the opportunity to communicate and work with women in a way that men often cannot, as according to mouchidate Khadija al-Aktami, women have a better

¹⁵ Wadud, Amina. "Ai'shah's Legacy." *New Internationalist*. NI, May 2002. Web. 1 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.newint.org/features/2002/05/01/aishahs-legacy/>>.

¹⁶ Hamilton.

understanding of the issues facing other women.¹⁷ They might be able to promote and interpret the Muslim faith in a way that counters some of the more patriarchal traditions that have seeped into Islam since its creation. It also represents an important step forward in Morocco's general initiative to increase the status of women in Morocco, alongside changes in the family law and the invitation of female scholars to lecture at the annual Ramadan festivals hosted by King Mohammad.

The program might also test an alternative way of fighting terrorism, since according to Morocco's Minister of Islamic Affairs, Ahmed Toufiq, the program was created to prevent terrorism and maintain a society free from extremism. It is supposed to help promote "moderate Islam".¹⁸ This is important because counter-terrorism is typically thought of in a hard-power way. Exploring alternative ways of fighting terrorism in non-violent and yet untested ways is an important step in the battle against terrorism and extremism. Finally, it is important to look at the program and the possibility of its implementation in other parts of the global Muslim community because if similar programs can be initiated, they will presumably expand the benefits resulting from Morocco's program on a wider scale and may also help set the stage for positive reform or at least more involvement of women in the future.

The mourchidate program is an important issue to examine at this time. Very little literature has been published in English and even media coverage since the early years of the program has been limited. It is important to look at this issue now because after four years, some results, such as the creation of similar programs in other parts of the global Muslim community, can be seen. However, it is difficult to measure concrete results because of lack of statistics or polling and because the mourchidate program in Morocco was implemented simultaneously with

¹⁷ Hamilton.

¹⁸ *Class*.

other programs to fight extremism and expand the rights of women. It is also timely because the mouchidates are starting to gain a global voice, speaking at forums and conferences in the United States. Looking in-depth at the program and other progressive movements is especially important for the United States because of President Obama's focus on the global Muslim community, combating extremism, and drawing on soft power resources.

Morocco's mouchidate program has received limited coverage in academic and scholarly literature. Very few mainstream works focus on it specifically, only a paper by Margaret J. Rausch and a documentary film, *Class of 2006*. Both of these works focus mainly on the specifics of the program itself and do not delve deeply into the significance of the program or possible causal factors outside of the reasoning provided by the Moroccan government. They also do not tie it into the greater global Muslim community or talk about the future of the program, likely because they may feel it is too early to tell. However it is important to draw from what is available; four years into the program, it is not too early to bring the initial results together. This paper will attempt to fill in some of these knowledge gaps.

The first issue that this paper looks at is the history of the status of women in Islam. Information was drawn from a variety of academic sources, relying heavily upon the works of Natana J. Delong-Bas and Jamal Badawi. Delong-Bas is the senior research-assistant for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University and has written extensively on women and Islam. She is the author of *Notable Muslims: A Biographical Dictionary* and *Wahhabi Islam from Revival and Reform to global Jihad*, as well as co-author of *Women and Muslim Family Law*, written with John Esposito.¹⁹ She argues that Muslim women have

¹⁹ "About the Author(s)." *Oxford University Press*. Oxford University. Web. 25 Mar. 2010. <http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/ReligionTheology/Islam/~/dmlldz11c2EmY2k9OTc4MDE5NTE2OTkxMQ==?view=usa&ci=9780195169911#Author_Information>.

traditionally been left out of interpretation and generally marginalized, but this has been changing over the past century. A variety of factors such as increasing literacy mean that some women are now playing an important role especially with interpretation, recitation, and teaching, all areas which the mourchidates focus on. She admits that many challenges remain for Muslim women. She also explains the history of recent events that led to the current expanded role of women in Islam, including a brief description of the mourchidate program in her article.²⁰

Jamal Badawi, an Egyptian-born Canadian professor at St. Mary's University, researched and presented a long-running television show focusing on Islam and wrote several books, mostly focusing on the role of women and gender in Islam, such as *Gender Equity in Islam* and *The Status of Women in Islam*. He is considered an expert on Christian-Muslim dialogues, is a member of the Islamic Society of America Fiqh Council, and director of the Islamic Research Foundation.²¹ In the article used for this paper, Badawi gives an overview of the status of women in the early-days of Islam, and then explains the status of women using interpretation of the hadith and Qur'an. He breaks his analysis down by looking at the spiritual, economic, social, and political aspects and concludes that women have been powerful in the past and there is no justification in Islamic law for the mistreatment or lack of legal rights for women.²²

Information about the Mourchidate program itself, as well as for the analysis of its success, was mainly gained using a paper by Margaret J Rausch. A documentary, the *Class of*

²⁰ DeLong-Bas, Natana J. "Women, Islam, and the Twenty-first Century." *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*. Print.

²¹ "Dr. Jamal Badawi." *Islamic Research Foundation*. Islamic Research Foundation, 2009. Web. 24 Mar. 2010. <http://www.irf.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=168%3Abiodata-dr-jamal-badawi&catid=57%3Aorators-international&Itemid=174>.

²² Badawi, Jamal. "The Status of Women in Islam." *Al-Ittihad* 8.2 (1971). *Islam for Today*. Islam for Today. Web. 1 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.islamfortoday.com/womensrightsbadawi.htm>>.

2006, was also used as a helpful frame and overview of the program since the academic field focusing on the program was very limited. It was supplemented by an interview with Rajaa Naji and news, government, and primary sources.

Class of 2006 is a documentary that shows footage from some of the major events leading up to the mourchidate program such as the lecture by Rajaa Naji and speeches by King Mohammad VI, as well as footage of the women actually completing coursework. It is heavily interview-based and did an excellent job interviewing most of the major players in the program, including numerous mourchidates from the first graduating class, the mourchidates' families, people within the government, such as the especially important Minister of Islamic Affairs, and opposition groups, such as Nadia Yassine from the Justice and Charity political party. It thus reveals a balanced array of views about the program. It also included basic information on the program itself and a brief background of events leading up to it.²³ The film is produced for the series "Wide Angle", which airs on the United States' Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and is the only program dedicated exclusively to international current affairs documentaries. The program is anchored by Aaron Brown, a former CNN and ABC journalist and is directed by Gini Retinker, an independent filmmaker who won an Emmy and a Sigma Delta Chi Award for a previous "Wide Angle" film, *Ladies First*, about women rebuilding Rwanda, along with many other awards and distinctions. It is produced by Charlotte Mangin, a former producer for National Geographic Television and Film.²⁴

Rausch's paper is titled, "Women Spiritual Guides (Mourchidate) in Morocco: Agents of Change". Rausch gives a description of the program itself, along with the role the mourchidates

²³ *Class*.

²⁴ "Class of 2006." *Wide Angle*. Public Broadcasting Service. Web. 10 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/shows/morocco/index.html>>.

are expected to play. She also includes opinions from the opposition group, Justice and Charity. She then explains the different ways the program is looked at, from those that view it as authoritarian because of the state's control of the program, to others who view it as having "a tendency towards liberalization and a significant change in particular with regard to gender". She also goes into detail about the King's other reforms and how the mouchidate program fits among the other social reforms, calling the king "an occasional feminist". Further, she explains the difficulties and experiences of the mouchidate. Her overall evaluation of the program is that it is a positive step forward but is often misunderstood and its successes over-exaggerated; it is not a truly gender equal move, as many often hail it because the women are unable to lead Friday prayers and work mainly with women.²⁵ Rausch is a religious studies assistant professor at the University of Kansas and she focuses on women's autonomous religious organizations in Morocco. She is fluent in Moroccan-dialect Arabic and French.²⁶

The paper employs information from personal interviews, from both Sarah Islam and Rajaa Naji, interspersed in a variety of sections. Sarah Islam is scholar in residence at KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, a charitable, educational organization that focuses on the domestic and global issues of human rights facing Muslim women. Sarah Islam focuses on Islamic jurisprudence, especially as related to women and is currently a doctoral student focusing on sociology and the Near East at Princeton University.²⁷ Rajaa Naji is a professor of law at the Mohammad V University in Rabat and made history when she was the first woman to lecture during Ramadan for King Mohammad VI in 2003. She was also one of the

²⁵ Rausch. 6.

²⁶ "Kansas African Studies Center." *Faculty-QR-Africanist Studies*. University of Kansas. Web. 15 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.kasc.ku.edu/about/faculty/qr.shtml>>.

²⁷ "Sarah Islam." Personal interview. 16 Mar. 2010.

head teachers of both the imams and the mourchidates and helped design the program. She was chosen by both *Newsweek* and *Al Jazeera* as one of the most influential women in the Arab and Muslim world.²⁸

The paper also utilizes first-hand meetings that the author had during travel to Jordan, Syria, and Egypt. An important source is the former grand mufti of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan who, when asked about the mourchidate program in Morocco, supported the idea of female teachers as it stood but was clear that strict boundaries between male and female roles must remain. Another source is Mufti Ibrahim Negm, the assistant to the Grand Mufti of Egypt. He works for the Egyptian Ministry of Fatwas and attended Al Azhar University where he was valedictorian and went on to conduct research at Harvard Law School. He was also a visiting scholar and researcher at Oxford University. He shed light on the opinion of the Egyptian Grand Mufti's views on females in official positions, such as judges. The final source gained in Egypt is Dalia Ziada, a human rights activist, blogger, and director of the North Africa office of the American Islamic Congress.²⁹

When evaluating the success of the program, this paper looks at an evaluation of Morocco's anti-terrorism program by Dr. J. Peter Pham, who includes the mourchidate program as an integral part of Morocco's overall anti-terrorism agenda. He asserts that Morocco's counter-terrorism efforts are comprehensive, although an ongoing battle. Pham is director of the Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs, a Senior Fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, and Vice President of the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa (ASMEA) He has also written over 200 essays and reviews and written or edited over

²⁸ Naji, Rajaa. "Interview with Rajaa Naji." Personal interview. 10 Mar. 2010.

²⁹ Wright, Robin. "A Quiet Revolution Grows in the Muslim World." *Time*. Time Inc., 19 Mar. 2009. Web. 27 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1886539,00.html>>.

a dozen books. He has testified before the US Congress and consulted congressional and executive agencies on issues related to democracy and security.³⁰

Methodology

In order to explore the mourchidate program, the author gathered material using several methods. First, she read basic, foundational material in order to learn the basics about women in Islam, contemporary Muslim women's movements, and the structure and key people in Morocco. She then viewed the documentary, *Class of 2006*, and recorded the transcript of the program so she could refer back to it when writing the paper. She then read the paper by Rausch because it was the most extensive, well-rounded academic source available specifically relating to the mourchidate program. After this preliminary research the author created a detailed outline, based on the separate topics she planned to cover.

After, she read many secondary sources, such as newspaper articles, reports, and articles released from Islamic organizations. These works focused on the mourchidate program itself, background information, Morocco's foreign relations, women in Islam, and a variety of other topics explored in the content of the paper. She kept detailed notes during the process, with all relevant information and quotes typed up in a word document, broken down by each source. She would also check each source to make sure the author or contributor was legitimate. As she prepared to write the paper itself, she separated information and quotes into the relevant sections such as: literature review, background, section one, section two, and section three, basically filling in the sections of the outline and adding or taking away if something seemed like it was not relevant or later became important to include.

³⁰ Pham, Peter. "Morocco's Comprehensive Counterterrorism Approach." *World Defense Review*. World Defense Review, 4 June 2009. Web. 23 Mar. 2010. <<http://worlddefensereview.com/pham060409.shtml>>.

The paper was written in the order of the final paper and if the author found information later that should be included, she would include it in the relevant sections. Final additions to the paper were included from the primary sources she gathered during her travels to Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. She finished by doing extensive checks on her sources, editing the paper several times, and receiving feedback from the capstone advisor.

Section One: Background

Women's Historical Role in Islam

The role of Muslim women has gone through major shifts since the beginning of the Muslim Calendar in 622 CE. Both of the primary sources of Islamic law and practice, the hadith and the Qur'an, were considered exceedingly progressive for the time they were recorded. This is an important factor to consider when analyzing the vision and status of the role of women in Islam. During the time of the Prophet, many new reforms benefiting women were enacted, such as forbidding female infanticide, revising inheritance laws to include women, limiting the number of wives a man could marry, and giving women more rights in the divorce process. Many scholars argue that both the Qur'an and the hadith, placed women in a progressive and egalitarian context. For instance, the hadith of Al-Bayhaqi records that the Prophet proclaimed: "Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim", with the term "Muslim" referring to both males and females.³¹ Many other similar examples of this can be found in the Qur'an and hadith. According to an article written by Akmar Ahmed, Ibn Khaldun chair of Islamic Studies at American University, the Prophet's personal regard for women may be partially a result of his relationship with his first wife, Khadijah, who was the first Muslim convert and a very powerful

³¹ Badawi.

woman in her own right, even proposing to the Prophet and supporting him financially.³² In fact Wadud writes that, “It is clear to me that the Qur’an aimed to erase all notions of women as subhuman. There are more passages that address issues relating to women — as individuals, in the family, as members of the community — than all other social issues combined.”³³

During the time of the Prophet and the period immediately following his death, women were extremely influential in the Muslim community. According to Jannah.org, a non-profit informational website about Islam with no professed affiliation to any particular sect, some strong historical figures stand out. They include scholars and muhaddithat, warriors, benefactors, poetesses, political experts, recorders and scholars of hadith, worshippers and mystics, and significantly to the mourchidate program, orators and preachers.³⁴ Some examples of these early, powerful Muslim women include the Prophet’s wife, Aisha bint Abu Bakr, whom the American Muslim Women Association claims recorded 2,210 hadith of the Prophet and taught at least 88 prominent male Islamic scholars.³⁵ Others also stand out such as Rabi’ah Bint Mu’awwad, a great scholar of Islamic law whom taught both male and female scholars in Medina, and A'isha bint Sa'd bint ibn Abi Waqqas, a woman so well-informed that some of the most famous jurists and scholars of hadith journeyed to be taught and receive consultation from her.³⁶

³² Ahmed, Akbar. "Veiled Truth." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 22 Oct. 2001. Web. 28 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2001/oct/22/socialsciences.highereducation>>.

³³ Wadud.

³⁴ Jannah.org, *Famous Women in Islamic History*. Jannah.org. Web. 26 Feb. 2010. <www.jannah.org/sisters/famousmuslimwomen.ppt>.

³⁵ "Women in Islam." *American Muslim Women's Association*. Web. 26 Feb. 2010. <<http://amwa.us/AMWAWomenInIslam.htm>>.

³⁶ Jannah.org

According to Wadud, later in history, especially under the Abbasids, who ruled from 1258 to 1519, many of the rights of women were rolled back. Such a decline in the rights of women was especially powerful because of the far-reaching influence of the actions that occurred during the time. During the era of the Abbasids, Islam's foundations were said to have been largely developed, concurrent with a near monopoly by males on issues relating to Islamic thought and scholarship. By this time, scholars had no contact with the Prophet or any of the people who knew him and revelation was not strongly adhered to. Within law discussions, women were typically treated as material goods. This had lasting affects on Islamic jurisprudence, as this was the time period that the four major madhabs, or schools of Islamic legal thought, developed.³⁷ According to Sarah Islam, there was a shift from oral to written transmission and women were often left out of literacy training. Although they historically had been on par with men as oral transmitters of knowledge, their involvement declined as the medium of teaching changed. The disengagement of women was not necessarily on purpose, but rather a result of cultural factors, evolving circumstances, and events.³⁸

As Islamic law became increasingly under the sole domination of men, who tended to interpret law in patriarchal ways,³⁹ there was still a small minority of women who played active roles in political and religious life, especially in the development of Sufism over the centuries. For instance, according to an article in *Gnosis*, a journal of the Western inner traditions, female Rabi'a al-Adawiyya, was the first person to call God "Beloved" in the mid to late 700's. Female Sufis were often less visible and quieter than their male counterparts, but equally active,

³⁷ Wadud.

³⁸ Sarah.

³⁹ Wadud.

sometimes carrying out activities with men and other times only with other women. Sufism further encouraged the participation of women because it relied more on oral than written tradition, which was helpful since women were less likely to be literate than men.⁴⁰ However women's involvement in Islamic law generally decreased markedly from its high level in the beginning of Islam's history to the extent that prior to the mourchidate program, women were rarely involved in official or leadership religious positions.⁴¹

Contemporary Women in the Global Muslim community

There are many different statuses and roles of women across the global Muslim community. This paper gives a brief overview of some of the changes and trends that have occurred over the past century or so that may have led to the emergence of the Moroccan mourchidate program, as well as any similar programs or events preceding it.

According to an article published in *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, "The combined spread of literacy; the availability and promotion of public education for both girls and boys; expansion of job opportunities for women; and the rising number of conversions to Islam from other religious traditions, particularly in the West," have all led to an increased desire in Muslim women for increased empowerment in their faith.⁴² The article continues that currently, many women are involved in activities within mosques, Qur'anic study groups, as professors and instructors of Islam, and as Islamic lawyers worldwide. However none have reached the highest positions in the faith⁴³, such as Grand Mufti or Grand Ayatollah.

⁴⁰ Helminski, Camille A. "Women and Sufism." *Gnosis* 30 (1994): 48. Print.

⁴¹ Wadud.

⁴² DeLong-Bas.

⁴³ DeLong-Bas.

One of the growing, but often under-acknowledged trends in the global Muslim community is “Islamic Feminism”, which Margot Badran, a senior fellow at the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University defines as,

“A feminist discourse and practice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an, seeking rights and justice within the framework of gender equality for women and men in the totality of their existence. Islamic feminism explicates the idea of gender equality as part and parcel of the Qur'anic notion of equality of all insan (human beings) and calls for the implementation of gender equality in the state, civil institutions, and everyday life.”⁴⁴

Feminism is a controversial topic in the global Muslim community for several reasons. One of the strongest reasons is the pervasive belief that almost all feminism comes from the West. According to Islamic Studies professor Dr. Alan Godlas, “Third world women, like women of color in the West, are realizing that while they have certain things in common with the struggle of Euro-American feminists, what is best for Euro-American women is not necessarily going to be best for them. Consequently Muslim women have been developing a distinctly “Islamic” feminism.”⁴⁵

According to Dr. Lois Lamya' al Faruqi, it is important when approaching feminism in the global Muslim community to remember the following factors: the importance of the family, including the extended family; focus on the community, not focus on the individual as is common in the Western World; the realization that Islam is seen as the greatest supporter of the women’s movement; and a differentiation in sex roles, thus striving to actualize the early Islamic

⁴⁴ Badran, Margot. “Islamic Feminism Revisited.” *Countercurrents.org* (10 Feb. 2006). *Countercurrents.org*. 10 Feb. 2006. Web. 26 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.countercurrents.org/gen-badran100206.htm>>.

⁴⁵ Godlas, Alan. “Women in Islam: Muslim Women.” *Women in Islam: Muslim Women*. Web. 1 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.uga.edu/islam/Islamwomen.html>>.

vision of the sexes being equal but not necessarily identical.⁴⁶ Islamic feminism may be seen as an undercurrent explaining some of the more recent pushes for reforms that benefit women in a way that continues to put a strong emphasis on Islam and the push for *ijtihad*, which advocates argue may decrease misogynist interpretations. It may also explain the growing trend throughout the global Muslim community of a desire for a stronger, more visible role of Islam in daily life. In fact according to John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed's book, *Who Speaks for Islam?*, in the 2005-2007 Gallup Polls of countries with majority Muslim populations, majorities in many countries say, "Religion plays an important role in their daily lives...Asked what they admire most about the Islamic World, the number one response from significant populations in countries as diverse as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia is "people's sincere adherence to Islam.""⁴⁷

According to the article published in the journal *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, most feminist activism is focused on, "Life, reciting, teaching, and interpreting the Qur'an; participating in and leading public worship; and interpreting Islamic law."⁴⁸ The *mourchidate* program follows these stated goals of Islamic feminism almost to a tee, since it is seen as benefiting the community more than the *mourchidates* themselves, allows most of the women to stay close to their families, puts women in a position that is strong, but still slightly different from men, and uses Islam as the tool and foundation for the empowerment of women. The desire for Islamic feminism could be part of the reason that the *mourchidate* program was created and supported by many female Moroccans.

⁴⁶ Al' Faruqi, Lois Lamya. "Islamic Traditions and the Feminist Movement." *ISLAMIC TRADITIONS AND THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT: CONFRONTATION OR COOPERATION?* Jannah.org. Web. 28 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.jannah.org/sisters/feminism.html>>.

⁴⁷ Esposito, John L. "Who Are Muslims." *Who Speaks for Islam?* New York: Gallup, 2007. 5-6. Print.

⁴⁸ DeLong-Bas.

Over the past century there have been several important events that may have laid a foundation for the creation of the mourchidate program. According to Sally Williams, one of the first major figures in the Islamic feminist movement was Malak-Hifni-al-Nasif, a male Egyptian feminist in the first half of the 20th century who rallied for space in mosques for women and later established the Muslim Ladies' Association, which provided training programs for women to educate other women about the Qur'an and hadith in Egypt. These women also provided social welfare in their communities, but, like the mourchidates, the members did not try to lead Friday prayers.⁴⁹

Another similar movement was carried out by Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama, an Indonesian organization established in 1946 that laid a foundation for the mourchidate program by pushing for reinterpretation of misogynist practices in the many religious boarding schools in Indonesia and offering courses for women in such fields as Islamic Law, as well as training female imams.⁵⁰ In Malaysia, The Sisters of Islam, founded in 1988, believed that the Qur'an is actually a protector of women's and human rights, but the interpretation has manipulated the meaning. Such groups are important because they establish a framework for the possibility of reexamining the Qur'an and hadith to establish programs similar to the mourchidate program but with expanded capabilities.⁵¹

Perhaps the strongest precursor to the establishment of the Moroccan mourchidate program was the extreme liberalization that took place as a result of the lifting of apartheid in South Africa. As part of the overall call for equality and rights for all, it was determined by much

⁴⁹ Williams, Sally. "Mourchidat - Morocco's Female Muslim Clerics." *Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group Limited, 26 Apr. 2008. Web. 2 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3672924/Mourchidat-Moroccos-female-Muslim-clerics.html>>.

⁵⁰ Williams.

⁵¹ Williams.

of the South African Muslim community that women should be allowed to fill major leadership roles in public worship, pray in the same area of the mosque, and as early as the 1990's, be allowed to lead mixed-gender prayer and even Friday prayer, a step that even the mourchidate program in Morocco has not explicitly considered. This was the first example of a woman leading Friday prayers, a practice that has continued in a very limited fashion in the US and Canada.⁵²

Muslim women have become increasingly influential in the past several decades. They have served as heads of state in several countries including Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. According to *The 500 Most Influential Muslims 2009*, a comprehensive book with lists of influential Muslims broken down into distinct categories and published by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, many contemporary women are extremely influential, especially in reform movements and programs similar to the mourchidate program in Morocco. Examples include: prominent preacher Professor Dr. Tuti Alawiyaah, the former Indonesian Minister of Women's Empowerment; Egyptian Al-Halafawi, the first female political candidate in the Muslim Brotherhood; Jordan's Queen Rania, who has pushed for educational reform; and Lily Zakiyah Munir, an Indonesian woman who founded and directs the Centre for Pesantren and Democracy Studies.⁵³

One of the major forerunners to Morocco's Mourchidate program is the state-run training of "Viaze" in Turkey. In this program, females are appointed by the Religious Affairs Directorate. This program began in 2004 and by 2005 there were approximately 400 Viaze in

⁵² Williams.

⁵³ Esposito, John, and Ibrahim Kalin, eds. *500 Most Influential Muslims*. First ed. Washington: Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, 2009. Print.

Turkey. The women teach classes on the Qur'an and contemporary issues, especially relating to women, but they do not lead prayer or give sermons. It is likely that the Moroccan mourchidate program was inspired by Turkey's program. However Morocco is the first state-run program of its kind in the Arab world and the mourchidates can lead sermons and preach, although they, like the Viaze, cannot lead mixed-gender or Friday prayer.⁵⁴

According to a fatwa by Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl, a prominent Islamic scholar and jurist, professor of Islamic law at the University of California Los Angeles, and globally recognized sheikh, the vast majority of jurists do not allow women to lead men in prayer. However there is nothing specifically against women leading prayer in the Qur'an and the hadith is unclear, with evidence that the Prophet Muhammad allowed women to lead men in his household if they were the most learned. Up until four centuries after the Muslim calendar began, two major schools existed that allowed women to lead Friday prayers, but since that time all of the major schools of thought have not allowed women to lead prayers to men or mixed-gender groups. Since that time it has been customary in Islamic practice to exclude women from leading mixed-gender Friday prayers.⁵⁵

Moroccan Background

Islam first spread to Morocco as a result of Uqba ibn Nafi's march through the country in 681 C.E. Islam, along with Arab culture, first became a strong force in society around 710 C.E. Over the next several hundred years the country had many rulers and was part of several empires, both Berber and Arab. Europe began to exercise major control in the late 19th century

⁵⁴ Jones.

⁵⁵ Fadl, Abou El. "On Women Leading Prayer." *Scholar of the House*. Web. 27 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.scholarofthehouse.org/onwolepr.html>>.

and by 1904, Morocco was officially under the control of the French. Spain also had control of several regions. Independence was finally gained in March 1956 when Mohammad V became Sultan. Mohammad V made several significant reforms and improvements. When he died in 1961, his son, King Hassan II became King.⁵⁶

Morocco has a constitutional monarchy, with the King acting as chief of state and a prime minister, chosen by the King, acting as head of the government. The current prime minister was chosen in 2007, after the mouchidate program was created and thus not considered an important factor in the origins of the program. The current constitution was created in 1972, revised in 1992, and amended in 1996. Morocco provides universal suffrage at age 18, but most major positions and decisions are made by the monarch, not through the democratic process. Citizens can only vote in legislative elections. This puts most of the power in the King's hands, meaning that he likely was most influential in the creation of the mouchidate program or could at least make unilateral decisions in the process of its creation.

Morocco is 98.7 percent Muslim (mainly Sunni), 1.1 percent Christian, and 0.2 percent Jewish. It is divided into 15 regions and covers an area slightly larger than the state of California, with the mouchidates working in all regions. The population is 56 percent urban, with mouchidate working in both high-density urban and remote, rural areas. The legal system is based on a combination of Islamic law and both French and Spanish civil systems.

Morocco has always had a strong relationship with the West and was actually the first state to officially recognize the United States' independence. This has put it in an interesting position in the global Muslim community. Its efforts to appease the United States, such as its generally open ties with Israel, are often viewed as beneficial in its battle for the Western Sahara,

⁵⁶ Kjeilen, Tore. "History." *LookLex Encyclopedia*. LookLex. Web. 8 Mar. 2010. <<http://i-cias.com/e.o/morocco.history.htm>>.

which is a contested region between Spain and Morocco and is often seen as Morocco's most important foreign policy concern. The European Union is Morocco's largest trading partner, accounting for two-thirds of its total trade. Morocco's top export partners are: Spain, France, Brazil, United States, Belgium, and Italy. Its top import partners are: France, Spain, Italy, China Germany, Saudi Arabia, and Moldova. France has an especially strong influence on Morocco and is said to represent Morocco's most important bilateral relationship because of its colonial history, the prevalence of the French language in Morocco, the high trade volume, and the large number of Moroccans living and working in France. There are many Moroccans throughout other European Union countries as well, representing approximately 5% of the total Moroccan population. The resulting high level of remittances, account for more than half of the remittances sent to Morocco.⁵⁷

Although Europe is in close geographic proximity and Moroccans try to "look at themselves in the mirror of Europe" and try to imitate Europe, they also struggle to maintain an Arab identity.⁵⁸ The country is a member of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Arab League. Morocco also has especially strong relations with the Maghreb, or the five North African states, made up of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Libya. The country's people tend to identify much more strongly with the Arab World than Europe.⁵⁹

A Moroccan government official says, "We were in many ways very open in the last three to four decades. It could be that certain elements foreign to our traditions are already

⁵⁷ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.

⁵⁸ *Class.*

⁵⁹ *Class.*

here.”⁶⁰ Morocco is striving to maintain equilibrium with the West, Africa, and the Arab World. This seems to be strongly reflected in the mourchidate program. According to the US State Department background notes on Morocco, Europe is home to more than two million Moroccan immigrants and has close ties with Morocco. Because of this, Europeans fear the spread of radical Islam. As a result, they have put pressure for a reduction in the number of North Africans living or working in Europe. The maintenance and allowance of these Moroccan workers is essential for Morocco since they account for the vast majority of Moroccan remittances, which constitute an integral component of many impoverished Moroccan’s incomes.⁶¹ The fact that Morocco pushed for a program that has the explicit goal of putting forward a goal of moderate Islam, may be in part a strategy to show Europe that Morocco is doing all it can to decrease extremism.

At the same time, the importance Morocco places on its Arab and Muslim identity may explain why a program based on the Islamic faith was chosen as a way to reduce extremism. Such a move might further their Muslim image and increase respect in the global Muslim community. The relationship with the global Muslim community will be further examined in part three, when looking at the likely ability to implement similar programs throughout the global Muslim community.⁶² In the words of Mayrem Yafont, “I think [the mourchidat] is a political force that everybody is sort of playing,” Marvine Howe observes, pointing out the double purpose the mourchidat serve for a king wanting to keep both the West and a rapidly growing Islamic

⁶⁰ *Class.*

⁶¹ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. *Morocco (01/10)*. US Department of State, Jan. 2010. Web. 4 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5431.htm#political>>.

⁶² United States. Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.

movement happy. 'The king wanted to say, well, I can advance women and put them in the church itself.'"⁶³

The Monarch is very influential in almost everything that happens in Morocco. According to the US Department of State, he appoints nearly all councils and members of the government. The constitution gives him the right to dissolve the legislature or remove anyone from office.⁶⁴ According to a biography in the *Wallstreet Journal*, King Hassan II ruled Morocco for 38 years from 1961 to 1999, when he died at the age of 70. He was the creator of the country's first constitution, but was more of an autocrat than a true democrat, often reeling in rights when it suited his interests or personal security. On the other hand, he generally tolerated opposition parties and a free press in criticism of policies, although never in criticism of the monarchy. He brought critics down with such force that it attracted negative attention from human rights groups. He was considered pro-western and as someone who "outmaneuvered Islamic militants". During the Cold War, he continued his close relationship with the West, while at the same time relying on the Soviets. In 1961, he told the Associated Press, "As an Islamic people, we have the right to practice bigamy. We can wed East and West and be faithful to both." Hassan's more moderate views could be seen in his actions towards Israel, where he focused on protecting Morocco's Jewish population, kept channels open with Israel, and was the second Arab nation to allow an official visit from an Israeli official.⁶⁵

⁶³ Williams.

⁶⁴ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.

⁶⁵ Gregory, Joseph R. "Hassan II of Morocco Dies at 70; A Monarch Oriented to the West." *The New York Times on the Web*. The New York Times Company, 24 July 1999. Web. 6 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0709.html>>.

King Hassan was a major promoter of the faith. He especially impressed the rural conservatives with his focus on Islam, quadrupling the number of mosques and building the world's largest mosque. During the 1990's and especially towards the end of his life, there were reports of torture and many political prisoners, along with continued poverty.⁶⁶

When Hassan II died in 1999, his son and successor, King Mohammad VI had a stage set for reform and change, especially in the ways of expanding rights and reducing poverty. Mohammad was born in 1963 and as a child studied at the Royal Palace Qur'anic School. He completed his undergraduate degree in law and a graduate degree in political science, both at Morocco's Rabat Mohammad V University. In 1993, he completed a doctoral degree in law from France's Nice-Sophia Antipolis University with "very honorable distinction". Before taking the throne, he was highly involved and visible in national politics.⁶⁷

According to the US Department of State's country background of Morocco, upon taking the throne, King Mohammad VI proclaimed the need to focus on economic development, expand education, and increase economic and housing opportunities, which he began to actively pursue mainly through projects involved with infrastructure and modernization. He has also worked to expand trade and tourism, decrease rural poverty and social exclusion in urban areas, reform the healthcare system, and upgrade the national education system. The economy has generally improved since King Mohammad VI took power, with new employment and moderately high growth. He was even given the title "Guardian of the Poor".⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Gregory.

⁶⁷ "Biography of Morocco's King Mohammed Ben Al-Hassan." *Arabicnews.com*. Arabicnews.com, 24 July 1999. Web. 6 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/990724/1999072428.html>>.

⁶⁸ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.

An early symbol of the changes taking place under King Mohammad VI in terms of women's rights was the fact that his new wife, whom he wed in 2002, appeared with him in public unveiled. Another symbolic statement was his invitation of a woman, Professor Rajaa Naji, a professor of law at Mohammad V University, to lecture at the Royal Palace Mosque. This lecture was broadcasted throughout Morocco and represented the first time a woman was ever allowed in the room, let alone allowed to lecture in front of the male-only audience.⁶⁹ Naji explains that the lecture opened a window, "[Setting up the mourchidat] became less difficult, because people had this image of a woman in a religious context." It was also helpful because Naji is seen as a moderate.⁷⁰ After this lecture, Professor Naji said to King Muhammad, "May this day, my lord, be recorded in the history of your graces upon women"⁷¹ and it seems that it was indeed the first of several events implemented by the King to increase the status and public participation of women in their faith.

On May 16, 2003 Morocco experienced the largest terrorist attack in its history, which hit Casablanca, Morocco's largest and most populous city. According to the BBC, the bomb blasts were carried out by twelve suicide bombers, with a total of five explosions within half an hour. They attacked a Jewish center, a Spanish restaurant and club, a five-star hotel, and the Belgian consulate. The attacks resulted in approximately 41 deaths and injured over 100 more, with tourists and non-Moroccans as clear targets of the attack, although the vast majority of those killed were Moroccans. It is believed that the attackers had links with al Qaeda, but were from

⁶⁹ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.

⁷⁰ Williams.

⁷¹ *Class*.

Morocco.⁷² This began to prompt major fear in the people, who rallied behind the king in his efforts to protect Morocco from terrorism and its roots in Islamic extremism.

According to the *Class of 2006*, the mouchidate program was also a response to the growing influence of Wahhabism, creeping in with wealth from petrodollars which were also used to build new mosques, threatening the king's authority over the religious realm. The film reports that, "Home grown political Islamists were starting to flex their muscles, capitalizing on the poverty, discontent, and deeply religious population."⁷³ According to Steve Erlanger and Souad Mekhennet of the *New York Times*, Shi'ism seeping in from Iran was also seen as a major threat.⁷⁴ Thus the Moroccan people largely supported the king's imprisonment of approximately 1,400 Moroccans, mostly men, convicted of terrorism-related charges. They also stood behind the majority of his other proposals directly after the terrorist attack, especially those linked with countering extremism. One such proposal was the reform of family law, the moudawana. This was important because it helped lay the groundwork for the mouchidate program by increasing women's rights and role in society.

Reforming the moudawana made Morocco the second Arab country, after Tunisia, to implement such progressive measures for women. Upon announcing the reforms to family law, King Muhammad proclaimed, "We must open the way for women so they can participate in all aspects of national life with their competence, integrity, and dedication."⁷⁵ The US Moroccan embassy reports that the king asked, "How can society achieve progress, while women who

⁷² "Terror Blasts Rock Casablanca." *BBC News*. British Broadcasting Corporation, 17 May 2003. Web. 11 Mar. 2010. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3035803.stm>>.

⁷³ *Class*.

⁷⁴ Erlanger.

⁷⁵ *Class*.

represent half the nation, see their rights violated and suffer as a result of injustice, violence and marginalization, notwithstanding the dignity and justice granted them by our glorious religion?"⁷⁶ The moudawana is especially important to the mouchidate program because the mouchidates are taught the new family law as a major component of their training. One of their duties is educating the people in the communities around the mosques they serve about family law. The moudawana increased women's rights dramatically in many areas of life.

Before the new family law was implemented, new civil judges were hired and family courts were established to adjudicate custody cases and divorce. By 2005, 300 new judges and 60 family court judges had been trained, along with providing continued education on the reforms for the 600 retained judges. By the end of 2004, 20 of the 70 new family law courts originally planned had been formed. Some of the key changes in the reformed moudawana included: giving mothers full custody of minor children, increasing the minimum marriage age to 18, giving men and women the same rights in the divorce process, putting limitations on polygamy that make it nearly impossible, and abolishing the favoring of male heirs in inheritance. The moudawana only applies to Muslims. Separate legal systems and public schools exist for Christians and Jews, based on each respective faith.⁷⁷

All of the aforementioned background and history, both from throughout the global Muslim community and in Morocco, led to conditions that allowed for the mouchidate program's inception. It is essential to understand the undercurrents and conditions to determine possible motivation for the program outside of the official justification. Many critics, such as

⁷⁶ Kingdom of Morocco. Embassy Portal. Washington DC. *Promotion of Women's Rights*. Kingdom of Morocco Embassy, 2008. Web. 4 Feb. 2010.
<http://dcusa.themoroccanembassy.com/moroccan_embassy_human_rights_promotion.aspx>.

⁷⁷ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

those in the influential and popular Islamist party Justice and Charity, believe that there are other, more negative reasons, for the program's existence, which are discussed further in section three of this paper.⁷⁸

The official justification for the creation of the mourchidate program was to promote a more tolerant or liberal version of Islam in reaction against the growing extremism within Morocco. According to the Minister of Islamic Affairs, Ahmed Toufiq, the mourchidate program is a necessary program to maintain a healthy society as a preventative measure against terrorism. Toufiq claims,

“Society is like a human body and the body needs to be looked after: it needs to be fed and its health has to be preserved... Terrorism is the extreme example of a serious illness in society. You cannot leave a body until it gets into a crisis. You have to feed the body to avoid it falling into a state of crisis and disease. There are all sorts of measures you can take to prevent a crisis and this is one of them. There is an obligation to do this as a means of prevention”.⁷⁹

Minister Toufiq further claimed, “We need a systematic effort from state institutions to teach and educate, to lead everyone...to tell everyone, here are the fundamental principles of religion”.⁸⁰ According to Professor Rajaa Naji, “It needs to be the imams or mourchidates who inform the public, not blasphemists or untrained people. This is one way to defend ourselves against extremist tendencies.”⁸¹

According to the website of the US Moroccan embassy, the Moroccan government is,

⁷⁸ Hamilton.

⁷⁹ Hamilton.

⁸⁰ *Class*.

⁸¹ *Class*.

“Aware that any effort toward social and economic development could never hope to attain its desired objective without the active and equal participation of women. Morocco has introduced profound reforms over the last several years aimed at integrating the principle of equal rights and obligations for men and women and promoting the full and active contribution of women at the highest levels [of government] in all domains, be they political, economic, social, or cultural.”⁸²

Dalia Ziada echoes many of these sentiments when she says, “Women are mostly going back to focusing almost exclusively on the family, even educated women, because of extremist sheikhs. We [Muslims] have always been religious and it is best to address women through religion and change their mentality. When you target women, it increases human rights in everything, civil rights, *everything*. This is across the Middle East from Yemen to Morocco.” However she also claims that many laws are not actually making an impact when she says, “Rankings in terms of women’s rights don’t reflect the situation on the ground. Governments pass laws to increase women’s rights but society is still getting increasingly patriarchal.”⁸³

Section Two: Status of Morocco’s Mouchidate Program

Program Description

According to Rausch, the mouchidate program was enacted in 2005 by order of Morocco’s Islamic Affairs Ministry, with the first class graduating in 2006. The first applicant pool consisted of 745 male imam applicants and 515 female mouchidate applications. Of these, 230 potential imams were interviewed, resulting in the acceptance of 160 trainees. An additional, 100 potential mouchidates were chosen, resulting in a class of 60 mouchidates. In order to

⁸² Kingdom.

⁸³ Ziada, Dalia. Interview. 21 Apr. 2010.

participate, all candidates regardless of gender must be under 46 years old and hold a bachelor's degree from a Moroccan or equivalent university. They must also have graduated with the highest marks in their class. During the interviews, both academic and Qur'anic knowledge are assessed. To qualify, women must be able to recite at least half of the Qur'an, whereas men must know the entire text.⁸⁴ One of the mouchidates, Houria Ben Kada, from the first graduating class explains, "I always wanted to join the religious training and preach and counsel the nation. This coincided with the royal initiative, so I applied."⁸⁵

The students do not actually enroll in a university, but rather are trained by Morocco's official high council of Ulama in Rabat at the seminary Dar al-Hadith al-Hassania.⁸⁶ The women and men are taught in the same classroom and focus on the same topics and concepts. Coursework extends from the more predictable, such as Qur'anic interpretation, Qur'anic chanting, Muslim history, religious dogma, preaching, Arabic, and sociology of religions, to non-religious fields, including information technology classes, law, economics, mediation, and business management.⁸⁷ This secular training is important because the women have a broad range of duties that go beyond religious knowledge. Such training also keeps them relevant in contemporary issues and makes them a better resource in the communities they work.

According to the documentary, *Class of 2006*, all of the material is approved by the king, especially that relating to Islam, as part of the "King's approved version of Islam".⁸⁸ This

⁸⁴ Rausch.

⁸⁵ *Class*.

⁸⁶ Mouchidate: Morocco's female Muslim Clerics

⁸⁷ Rausch.

⁸⁸ *Class of 2006*. Prod. Charlotte Mangin. Dir. Gini Reticker. PBS: Wide Angle, 2007. DVD.

version of Islam is specifically based on the Maliki School, which *The Oxford Islamic Dictionary* describes as “the dominant madhab in most of North Africa and several other regions of the global Muslim community. The Maliki Madhab relies heavily on hadith and the early practices in Medina as a source of law”.⁸⁹ King Muhammad claims the Maliki School is “an integral part of the Moroccan identity” and he tries to focus on its moderate and tolerant characteristics.⁹⁰ Rausch continues that the mourchidates are also taught about and encouraged to spread the new family law, the moudawana. In total, 32 subjects are taught, over the course of 12 months, beginning in the spring, with graduation commencing the following spring. The *Class of 2006* states that the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, “Decided to train imams in the same way that teachers, professors, and army officers are trained.”⁹¹

At the end of the first year of the program, ten women were unable to pass the final examination, meaning that only 50 women successfully became mourchidates in the first year. The *Class of 2006* filmmakers interviewed several of the mourchidates soon after the graduation ceremony of the first graduating class of mourchidates. One of the mourchidates exclaimed, “All the joy I felt in the 29 years of my life came together on this day!” Another said, “We’re celebrating. It’s the graduation ceremony of the first class of religious leaders. It’s a new event in Morocco.”⁹² All of these graduates received certificates from the council in Rabat and were told

⁸⁹ "Maliki School of Law." *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*. The Oxford Dictionary of Islam. Web. 17 Mar. 2010. <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1413?_hi=0&_pos=2>.

⁹⁰ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

⁹¹ *Class*.

⁹² *Class*.

during their graduation ceremony, “You were ambitious and serious in your studies since childhood. You deserve to do this job.”⁹³

In order to highlight some of the tasks and backgrounds of the mourchidates, it is helpful to look at several individual mourchidates. The three mourchidates who visited the United States for an inter-faith dialogue, which will be further discussed in section three, are a good example. Fatima Zahra Salhi finished the program in 2006 and now helps coordinate community health programs such as blood donation drives and works to raise awareness for teens about sexually transmitted diseases. Another, Ilham Chafik, has a Ph.D. in Arabic linguistics. She conducts trainings on Qur’anic study and Islam at the Mohammed VI Institute for the Education and Training for the Blind. Lastly, Nezha Nassi works at women's detention centers, where she coordinates social events and religious ceremonies for prisoners and provides support for women before they are released into society.⁹⁴

The second year resulted in fewer male applicants, with a total of 537, of whom 280 were interviewed and 160 were enrolled. In contrast, there was an increase in the number of female applicants, with almost double the amount from the first year: 1,027 women applied, with 130 interviewed and 60 enrolled. Each year since has resulted in the successful training and certification of 50 candidates. Islamic Affairs Minister Ahmed Toufiq hopes that in upcoming years, the number of mourchidates trained each year will be 150,⁹⁵ equal to the number of imams annually trained. Considering the enthusiasm displayed by the mourchidates since the program’s inception, this seems like a valid and achievable goal in terms of sheer interest of women who

⁹³ *Class.*

⁹⁴ Moroccan American Cultural Center.

⁹⁵ Rausch.

hope to become involved. As there have been 50 mouchidates trained every year since the program's creation, approximately 200 mouchidates are currently in service throughout Morocco.

The goal of increasing the number of female participants is especially valid because women have been very successful in the program. According to Professor Rajaa Naji, the women are often more capable and successful than their male counterparts. She said that "Many of the men were a little conservative sometimes. They did not accept the role of women as it is today. The women became much better; more courageous and more present. They answered back when the imams criticized or lectured them."⁹⁶ Later in the film, she even claimed, "The mouchidates were better [than the imams]. They were at the top of the class. They weren't only equal to the men, but sometimes they did a better job."⁹⁷

According to the narrator of *Class of 2006*, after finishing the program, the mouchidates are assigned to work at a specified mosque. At these mosques, Toufiq claims they and the imams are to act as "guardians of the temple", meaning they are supposed to be on their guard for and not accept traditions that seem foreign to Moroccan traditions and Islam. They are also expected to help in all of the 40,000 other mosques throughout Morocco. Their purpose is to provide counsel and mediation, alongside other services. They are also to spread a moderate message of Islam and information about the new family law. Their practices are closely overseen by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs which, "controls virtually all aspects of the mosques, including the content of sermons."⁹⁸ In *Class of 2006*, the women are shown being told by the people that are

⁹⁶ *Class*.

⁹⁷ *Class*.

⁹⁸ *Class*.

giving them their mosque assignments, “You are considered to be our representatives...you are not administrative officials and not supervisors, you are state employees.”⁹⁹ This control and monitoring could be a result of the growth of Wahhabist mosques and the growing Wahhabist influence, seen as a major threat to the King. In a similar vein, the “International Religious Freedom Report 2009” also reports that the government requires mosques to close very soon after the end of the appointed daily prayer times because they fear groups will gather and dangerous or damaging political activities will take place.¹⁰⁰

According to the “International Religious Freedom Report 2009”, the imams and the mouchidates are equal. However this is not completely accurate because the women are not allowed to perform sermons on Fridays, do not lead mixed-gender prayers, and expend more of their time and effort focusing on issues relating to women than typical imams do,¹⁰¹ likely reflecting the egalitarian principles present throughout Islamic revelation. According to Rausch, they are usually assigned to a mosque near their home and during the first year they were paid 5,000 dirhams, the equivalent of \$560 per month. This comes to approximately \$6,720 per year, which was more than four times the national average yearly income.¹⁰² The high salary likely acts as a major incentive for the large pool of applicants, as the country has a high unemployment and poverty rate.

Evaluation of the Mouchidate Program

Many reporters rushed to cover the story of the mouchidate program in Morocco because they were so accustomed to the overwhelming majority of stories coming from the

⁹⁹ *Class.*

¹⁰⁰ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

¹⁰¹ United States. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

¹⁰² Rausch.

global Muslim community focusing on repressed women. A story focusing on Muslim women's empowerment was refreshing and different news. Many characteristics of the program, such as the growing number of applicants also raise hope that the program will be successful. However, along with the optimism, there are major doubts. Thus it is necessary to examine whether the program has been a success since its creation in 2006. In many ways it is still too early to measure just how successful the program will be within Morocco, but it is helpful to look at some of the immediate reactions and affects in order to view its early success or lack thereof. This is especially useful for predicting how the program will perform in the long-term and its implementability in other countries in the global Muslim community.

The reactions and feelings of the mouchidates themselves are essential to examine because their cooperation and effectiveness is essential to the program's success. *Class of 2006* claims, "Religion is not just about what they [Muslim women] wear. They want an official role in the mosques, which are centers of community life....Now they're getting it."¹⁰³ Almost all of the statements recorded in the press from the mouchidates are overwhelmingly positive, although some voice apprehension or nervousness over the task because of its newness and the difficulties the mouchidates predict they will face. Describing her feelings about her new task, one of the new mouchidates, Samira Marzuk, said, "Of course it was a dream. It was bigger than big. It was something I was obsessed with since I was in high school...I was afraid, well not exactly afraid, but I was feeling the weight of a big responsibility. Maybe my husband will be a little afraid too. My fear was greater than my joy and I was hoping that God would make me worthy of the task."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ *Class.*

¹⁰⁴ *Class.*

Although many felt pressure that “all eyes were fixed on them”,¹⁰⁵ most were determined to do well and felt that their role would be useful and make a positive impact. One mourchidate explained, “As a religious leader, I hope I’ll succeed in protecting the spiritual life of this country.” Marzuk further explained why she felt they were so important when she said, “People need to know that Islam isn’t extremism. Islam is a religion of balance in everything.”¹⁰⁶ When Richard Hamilton, asked mourchidate Khadija al-Aktami why she thought women were best for their role, she clarified, “Women make good preachers because God has made them more sensitive, merciful and more patient than men! A woman is a mother, a wife, a daughter and a friend, so she will perform well in this role. Besides, no one can understand a woman as well as another woman.”¹⁰⁷

When asked about the mourchidate program and the training of female mourchidates, the former grand mufti of Syria, Shaykh Sa’id Hijjawi, was much in agreement that women are more experienced and comfortable with working with other women. He said, “The Muslim scholars used to feel embarrassed when women came to ask questions about womanly matters and so some insisted on female teachers to answer women’s questions and because women wouldn’t feel shy and could help give the *dawa* to others. There is a difference between a mufti and a person who gives advice. How to apply it is the responsibility of the mufti; teachers and muftis have different roles.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *Class.*

¹⁰⁶ *Class.*

¹⁰⁷ Hamilton.

¹⁰⁸ Hijjawi, H.E. Shaykh Sa’id. Interview. 8 Apr. 2010.

However, the mouchidates clearly knew that their job was going to be a challenge, with Marzuk saying, “Many elements such as illiteracy, poverty, economic level, and unemployment make our successes fragile.” The narrator of the film further claimed, “Though they seem full of joy, they also know how volatile Morocco has been since the king came to power and began implementing his agenda.” The length of the training is a further concern, especially with so many different subjects to learn and the high pressure put on the mouchidates’ shoulders. Professor Naji revealed, “My concern is that one year of training might not be enough to change a mentality that has been entrenched for years and years. Customs have endured for centuries; men are used to having authority over women. Modern life is layered on top of the ancient. Tradition shapes the future.”¹⁰⁹

Challenges certainly arose in reaction to the program. One of the earliest indicators of the difficulties and intricacies of the program, occurred when Richard Hamilton reported that a number of the women from the first group of mouchidates have been discovered to be supporters of the Moroccan monarchy’s main opposition, the Justice and Charity party, an Islamist group against the reform of the family law.¹¹⁰ This is especially interesting because in the *Class of 2006* documentary, Nadia Yassine, the founder of the party, was interviewed before this news was revealed. She explained that her movement does want real change and the liberation of women, but dismissed the program as “window dressings for the king’s agenda.” She further claimed, “No matter what, they’ll be working in an official structure in order to sap the popularity of our movement. However we think that we can co-opt them into our movement, which is very good because we don’t have to spend as much on them since they have already

¹⁰⁹ *Class*.

¹¹⁰ Hamilton.

been trained in theology”¹¹¹ In this way, the program ended up actually working against the government’s plans.

The linkage to the government and control by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs mentioned by Yassine, is the most frequently mentioned criticism of the program. Abdelwahed Motawakil, the secretary-general of the Justice and Charity party further explains the group’s position saying,

“If you take the idea in the abstract, I must say that it's an excellent idea, because it gives an opportunity for women to participate in an area that has been monopolized by men. But if you look a little deeper and analyze the motives, you will find out that it is part of a strategy adopted by the regime to control the religious field and not to leave that field open for their opponents - the Islamists. So they want to control that area and convey their official view of Islam.”¹¹²

Fazia Asuli, spokeswoman for an opposing Moroccan group, the Democratic League for Women’s Rights, which supported the family law reforms, was hopeful about the mourchidate program. She said that the Justice and Charity party

“Used the reform of the family law to convince people that the Islamic identity is endanger; the Muslim family is in danger; Islam is in danger. And all of this is a conspiracy of the West. We were confronted with opposition from conservatives and the rise of extremists too. Society was beginning to change. I could feel it under my skin. With the terrorist attack, we found ourselves invaded by Wahhabism.”¹¹³

¹¹¹ Yassine.

¹¹² Hamilton.

¹¹³ *Class.*

Sarah Islam, scholar in residence at KARAMAH, a charitable, educational organization that focuses on the domestic and global issues of human rights facing Muslim women, shares some of the skepticism of those in the Justice and Charity party and said in an interview, “They [the mourchidates] are overall an important effort to have more women in these programs; at the same time we have to realize that government-funded programs limit the discussions you can have. There is a limitation involved because of the political influence.” When I asked about how influential she thought the program will be for Morocco she responded, “I am not sure; clearly it is going to be helpful for the female population, but it is hard to tell how much impact there will be on the ground.”¹¹⁴

The mourchidate program was not seen as a positive step by everyone in the general population. The producers of *Class of 2006* remarked that, “Women were accused of heresy by Islamic activists. It met with strong resistance, a strong opposition.”¹¹⁵ According to Sally Williams, opposition was especially strong among Morocco’s imams. One of the mourchidates, Halima Kachkach, explains that it was clear during the training alongside the Imams that “There is distance, manners in our relationship.” As for criticisms from their male counterparts, “If there is, they don't say it to our face...so perhaps.”¹¹⁶ Not all males were against the mourchidates. The husband of newly trained mourchidate Marzuk said, “I’m very happy for her success. The most important thing is that she feels fulfilled and I hope God will help her out with that.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Sarah.

¹¹⁵ *Class*.

¹¹⁶ Williams.

¹¹⁷ *Class*.

As for the condemnations of “heresy”, Islamic law scholar Sarah Islam defends the soundness of the practice according to Islam, claiming, “There is nothing against the Moroccan mouchidate program according to Islamic jurisprudence. From an Islamic historical perspective, it is encouraged and from a doctrinal perspective there is nothing against it.”¹¹⁸

The opposition against the mouchidate program extended to the media. The *Class of 2006* documentary showed that just after graduation, one of the mouchidates, Marzuk, was invited to be interviewed on a nationally broadcast news program. She was given the script of the questions she would be asked in advance so she could form responses and was told not to be nervous about it. However when she was interviewed live, the interviewer went off script and put her on the spot saying, “There are some people who say that this step is part of a political strategy not a religious or educational one since Morocco seeks to improve its human rights record, especially related to women’s issues.” Marzuk disagreed, saying, “You can’t think of it as politics, on the contrary, it’s very normal for a country to reform its religious culture.”¹¹⁹

In looking at the success of the mouchidate program, it is also vital to look at how well it helped with the aim voiced by the government of promoting a tolerant version of Islam and countering extremism.¹²⁰ This is especially important because, according to Dr. J. Peter Pham, director of the Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs and a Senior Fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, the US State Department hailed the mouchidate program as “pioneering” as a counter-terrorism strategy in an address to Congress. This paper will not attempt to conduct a direct comparison between terrorist attacks before and after the

¹¹⁸ Islam.

¹¹⁹ *Class*.

¹²⁰ Hamilton.

implementation of the program, especially because the mourchidate program is part of a broader counter-terrorism program that is considered extremely effective and thus it would be difficult to pinpoint success or lack of specifically to the mourchidate program. As described by Pham, the mourchidate program is part of a “serious and comprehensive approach which Morocco has adopted to fighting the threat which extremist ideology and terrorist violence poses not only the North African country, but to its regional and international partners, including the United States. Not only does the overall success of these counterterrorism efforts need to be celebrated, but other governments, including that of the United States, ought to be encouraged to examine what lessons they might learn from the Moroccan experience.” The mourchidate program was described at length in the report,¹²¹ proving that the author considered it an integral part of the anti-terrorism measures.

However it is important to note that terror threats are still visible in Morocco, with the World Travel Watch, a column focusing on travel advisories, which is nationally syndicated to newspapers such as the *Boston Globe* and the *Chicago Tribune*, reporting six different instances of raised threats or thwarted attacks.¹²² It is unclear whether there would have been a higher number of terrorist threats or attacks without the program. There are also indications that extremists may be gaining ground and consequentially slowing the pace of reforms. *A New York Times* report claims, “Under pressure from Islamic radicalism, King Mohammed VI has slowed the pace of change.”¹²³

¹²¹ Pham.

¹²² Morocco.

¹²³ Erlanger.

Dalia Ziada, Egyptian blogger, human rights activist, and director of the North Africa office of the American Islamic Conference, took an interesting angle when looking at the likelihood of success of the mourchidate program when she said, “I don’t think it [the mourchidate program in Morocco] will be successful because Morocco is controlled by Salafis, not moderates, and because of this, society wouldn’t truly accept it. It is not a problem from an Islamic legal perspective but from the likelihood of acceptance.” However she agrees with many of the overall tactics of the program, such as the focus on training strong women to extend key messages, claiming, “General society is controlled by men but women control the family and house, if you change the women, you will change society. The woman is the decision-maker, she is the key player. Train powerful women in each community and she will subtly go to neighbors to extend the teachings.”¹²⁴

Section Three: Implementation

Current Factors

Although the mourchidate program is important when viewed solely in a Moroccan context, its impact will be considerably stronger if the concept is implemented in other nations or communities throughout the global Muslim community. It is vital to examine the likelihood, or if already begun, the current progress, of spreading the program.

Most experts agree that the program should be executed throughout the global Muslim community, but that many challenges lie in the way of a direct implementation of the program. When Rajaa Naji was asked whether she believes that it is possible to implement the mourchidate program in other parts of the global Muslim community she explained, “In the

¹²⁴ Ziada.

future it will be implementable to many countries, but not now.”¹²⁵ Sarah Islam explained, “This program absolutely should be implemented throughout the Muslim World. But again there are limitations to state-sponsored programs. It is also difficult because different countries have different cultural norms and it is difficult to gage how well it would be received.” She went on to point out, “Institutions themselves are male-dominated in Morocco and the rest of the Muslim World; if it is to be implemented, Morocco and other countries need to create an environment where women feel welcome.”¹²⁶

As mentioned by Sarah Islam, there are many possible factors that could influence the likelihood and extent of implementation of a program similar to Morocco’s mouchidate program in different parts of the global Muslim community. The type of government would be influential because purely secular governments might be more or less likely to implement a religious program sponsored by the government, although Turkey does have a similar program which trains female religious leaders, viazes, even though its government claims to be secular. Also, governments with more involvement by diverse groups may have problems agreeing on and implementing such a program. Others, that follow more Salafi, or conservative sects, might not be willing to implement such a program and consider it ‘bidah’, or innovation according to the more conservative Hanbali Madhab. Funding might also be an issue in implementation of the program because many governments within the global Muslim community are not wealthy. Yet another issue is whether governments feel that it is likely they will face opposition if they start a similar program and consequentially will not take the risk of inciting violence or decreasing the popularity of the regime in power.

¹²⁵ Naji.

¹²⁶ Sarah.

Morocco's relationship with other states in the global Muslim community might also have an impact on implementation. The US Department of State's country report on Morocco describes Morocco as a "moderate Arab state"¹²⁷. It is active in the Arab Maghreb Union, meaning that its policies will likely be quite influential with the other member states, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Libya.¹²⁸ The close relations and influence between these states can also be reflected in the fact that Tunisia reformed its family law in 1998, and was the only other Arab state to have expanded rights to such an extent, only three years before Morocco successfully changed its own law. Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco have an especially strong shared history and culture.¹²⁹ Morocco is also likely to have an influence on members of the OIC and the Community of Sahel-Saharan States, because of its shared membership. Morocco is very active in African issues, although it is not a member of the African Union. Morocco cut relations with Iran in March 2009 as a result of remarks made by the Iranian government about Bahrain and because it accused Iran of trying to spread Shi'ism through proselytizing.¹³⁰ Morocco is not currently in active conflict with any other state with a Muslim majority.¹³¹

The visibility of Morocco's mouchidate program and Morocco in general is also important when looking at the likelihood that the program will be implemented. According to Sarah Islam, "Morocco gets a lot of attention because it has taken more steps to incorporate women in their family law than most other states in the Muslim Community." She also explained

¹²⁷ Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs

¹²⁸ Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs

¹²⁹ Soulas.

¹³⁰ "Morocco Severs Relations with Iran." *Al Jazeera English*. Al Jazeera, 8 Mar. 2009. Web. 22 Mar. 2010. <<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2009/03/2009370303221419.html>>.

¹³¹ Department of State. Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs

that the program has been discussed in Islamic academic circles and with informed American Muslims.¹³² However the lack of scholarly literature on the program will not help increase its global influence.

One event that has certainly increased attention to the mourchidate program was the involvement of Moroccan mourchidates in inter-faith forums in the United States and their tour in the US during May 2009. Many of the results that come up in a simple Google search of the mourchidate program are from media reports focusing on this event. There were two main events on the tour. According to Islamtoday.com, one was a forum held in Washington, DC, titled "Our Families, Our Faiths, & Our Futures". It was organized by the Moroccan American Cultural Center. At the event, the mourchidates shared their experiences with Jewish and Muslim American women leaders.¹³³ The second event, in New York City, was titled "Women's Spiritual Voices: Crossing Continents, Finding Common Ground." It was sponsored by the Moroccan American Cultural Center and the American Jewish Committee. Other panelists were from the Jewish and Christian communities and together they explored the role of female religious leaders in each religion.¹³⁴

Similar Programs

Although there is doubt as to the ease and likelihood of implementing programs similar to the mourchidate program, two similar programs have been created, in Algeria and Egypt, since the inception of the mourchidate program. Although neither of the programs explicitly mention the influence of the mourchidate program as inspiration, it is likely that the Moroccan mourchidate program was looked at for ideas, or if they were in reality developed independently

¹³² Sarah.

¹³³ Moroccan.

¹³⁴ Moroccan.

of the mourchidate program, that some of the same global trends discussed in section one may have been responsible for their existence.

The first is in Algeria. This program is especially important to examine because of Algeria's close connection with Morocco in light of its geographic proximity and its joint membership in the Arab Maghreb Union. Information on this program is extremely limited. However according to UNICEF, the program began in 2009 and 300 women have been trained by the Algerian government and the women even carry the title "mourchidate" as in Morocco. In July 2009, UNICEF partnered with the program and helped train 30 of the mourchidates in promotion of the health of women and children.¹³⁵ According to the Minister for Family and Women, Saadia Nouara Ja'far, "Algeria is a leader at training mourchidate... Our experience is above that of Morocco. These women will contribute to the fight against illiteracy and to direct women to make the right decisions. And this in the spirit of our Islam."¹³⁶

Egypt is another country in the global Muslim community that developed a similar program after the creation of the mourchidate program. According to Common Ground News Service, a news service that publishes articles by local and international experts on current Middle East issues, the Egyptian Religious Affairs Ministry began a four-year training program at Al-Azhar, the world's second-oldest degree-granting university and Egypt's top Islamic university. The article claims that the program has been "welcomed by men and women alike."

¹³⁵ United Nations. UNICEF, Press Centre. *Women Religious Leaders in Algeria Spread the Word about Maternal and Child Health. Unite for Children*. United Nations, 13 July 2009. Web. 24 Mar. 2010. <http://www.unicef.org/media/media_50229.html>.

¹³⁶ Algeria Forum. News, Debate, Science. *The Mourchidate and Women in Algeria*. Jelsoft Enterprises Ltd, 14 July 2008. Web. 24 Mar. 2010. <<http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=fr&u=http://www.algerie-dz.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-87766.html&ei=4E-sS9zLLYOB8gba->

At the time of the article's printing, on January 12, 2010, 50 women were already working in Cairo at 90 mosques.¹³⁷ However the Becket Fund for International Religious Freedom reported in 2007 that the ministry had temporarily suspended the nomination of mouchidates because of fear that they would encourage the women they worked with to wear the niqab, a veil that covers the face.¹³⁸ This demonstrates the fact that training women does not always increase moderation. According to Mufti Ibrihim Negm, the assistant to the Grand Mufti of Egypt, the Grand Mufti is currently trying to push through fatwas that increase the official role of women in Islam. For instance he said, "We rejected the ruling against female judges. We are pro-female judges and are trying to make moves in the constitution reflecting our fatwa about female judges. This is currently in progress."¹³⁹

Conclusion

The mouchidate program deserves more attention and to be monitored carefully over the next decade or so. It is important for several reasons. First, it demonstrates an alternative way of counterterrorism and fighting extremism. It also gives Muslim women a more visible, qualified position in the Muslim religion and in the mosque, an area typically reserved for men. This is important because it could be a step forward towards allowing women into higher positions in the formal Islamic structure and also increasing the voice of women so that they can begin the process of increasing women's voices in interpretation and Islamic law.

¹³⁷ Ennaji, Moha. "Muslim Religious Guides Only Men? Think Again." *Common Ground News Service*. Common Ground News Service, 12 Jan. 2010. Web. 24 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=27059&lan=en&sid=1&sp=0>>.

¹³⁸ Becket Fund for Religious Freedom. International Religious Freedom News. Egypt: Government Suspends Nominations of Female Spiritual Leaders. International Religious Freedom News. 15 Mar. 2007. Web. 25 Mar. 2010. <<http://becketinternational.wordpress.com/2007/03/15/egypt-government-suspends-nominations-of-female-spiritual-leaders/>>.

¹³⁹ Negm, Ibrahim. Interview. 19 Apr. 2010.

However the program seems to have several areas of concern that should be improved, especially before similar programs are implemented in other parts of the global Muslim community. For instance, the strong control by the government is something that decreases legitimacy a great deal. Some government influence may be necessary in order to fund the program and make it more widespread and influential, but it should be limited. It is probably best to have loose ties with a governing body, but with much more freedom in the content of trainings and classes.

At this point, only four years since the beginning of the program in Morocco, it is really too early to tell how successful the program will be in the long-run and whether it will achieve its goals. As more mouchidates graduate and they thus begin to have a more visible role in Morocco, the mouchidates' influence is likely to increase and results will probably be stronger felt. It might take years for the women's work to have full effect, but eventually it seems likely that some positive effects will be felt. Not only will women likely feel more integrated in their faith, women that attend classes, whom are often poor, will be more knowledgeable as a result of the mouchidate-led classes they attend and they will feel like they have a close mentor whom they can talk to about matters of religion. It will also serve as an example to female youth that they can have a visible, official role in their faith and motivate them to study hard in order to possibly become a mouchidate at some point in their future.

In order to extend the research available on this program, scholars should go to Morocco and carry out follow-ups with some of the mouchidates who graduated in the first year or two to see what their lives have been like since they began working in their communities. They should ask the mouchidates if they feel that the training they received sufficiently prepared them for their positions, the type of work they do, their favorite part of their work, areas they think should

be improved, challenges, and the reactions they have encountered from other people. It would also be very interesting to talk to the mourchidates who graduated in 2006 that abandoned the program and instead went to work for the Justice and Charity movement and find out why they did it and if they were planning it all along. Another helpful step would be to carry out polling or surveys among the general population about their feelings about the program and the affects they have felt.

At this point, it seems that the mourchidate program is mostly symbolic and an optimistic step for what could happen in the future if the program continues, especially if it is implemented in other parts of the global Muslim community. It will be an interesting program to watch and has the capacity for major positive change in the future, especially if it is built upon and modified.

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