

SHERIN KHANKAN
Women are the Future of Islam: A Memoir of Hope.
 London: Rider 2018. 256 pages.
 Nainen on islamin tulevaisuus: Minun tarinani.
 Suom. Taina Helkamo.
 Helsinki: Kustantamo S&S. 300 s.

Women are the Future of Islam is the story of Sherin Khankan, a Muslim woman activist in Denmark, who is engaged in countering on the one hand Islamic patriarchy and on the other hand Islamophobia. Khankan tells the story of her childhood, education, travels, identity formation, marriage, and motherhood. This personal narrative is interwoven with the story of her multidimensional activism. The book is divided into 10 chapters, each of which intertwines the personal with the political.

Chapter 1 introduces the centerpiece of this activism, the Mariam Mosque which Khankan established on 26 August 2016. Several things are unique about this mosque, which was named after Mary the mother of Jesus, described by Khankan as “the mother of religions who unites” (p. 5). It is the first mosque in Scandinavia where prayers are led by female imams such as Khankan and where Friday prayers are exclusively held for women (men are welcome after 2pm). Since 2018, the mosque has also been providing a program in Islamic studies to train new female imams. It is a mosque where interfaith marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men are officiated, contravening with mainstream Sunni and Shi’i rul-

ings on marriage in Islamic legal tradition. Furthermore, the Muslim-Muslim marriage contracts that are officiated in the mosque do not allow polygamy, affirm women’s equal right to divorce, and stipulate that child custody is to be shared in the event of divorce. The goals of this mosque initiative, according to Khankan, are threefold: to promote a spiritual approach to Islam through new religious interpretations that take into account the changing realities of Muslims; to challenge Islamic patriarchal interpretations and institutions; and to advocate Islamic feminism in order to combat Islamophobia (p. 9).

Chapters 2 and 3 take us to the personal history that has shaped Khankan and her activism. Born in Denmark to a Syrian Muslim immigrant and a Finnish Christian nurse, Khankan was raised to embrace religious pluralism. Khankan describes growing up with a family that combines spirituality with the love of freedom and nature. Her Syrian grandfather was a *muezzin*, calling for the prayer in a Damascene mosque. Her Finnish grandfather fought for the independence of his country in the Winter War. Her Finnish grandmother taught Khankan and her sister the love of nature during summer walks to pick berries in the Finnish woods. Khankan’s father – an intellectual, a lover of Arabic literature, and a critic of Hafez al-Assad’s dictatorship – fled his home country Syria for Denmark in the 1970s to escape prosecution. Her mother, a hard-working Finnish nurse, moved to Denmark to join her sister and look for employment opportunities. Throughout the book, Khankan emphasizes how

this multicultural interfaith family life has not only sustained her through different trials in her life but also shaped her spiritual and inclusive approach to Islam.

It was, however, meeting a seeker on the Sufi path, her Kung Fu teacher, that sparked the beginning of her spiritual journey as an adult embracing Islam as her path towards God. This spiritual search led her to pursue university studies in sociology of religion and philosophy, with a focus on Islamic studies. Travel to Egypt and Syria to study Arabic and do research reinforced her commitment to seeking a spiritual path through Islam, and rekindled her ties to that part of the world where she says she found inspiration from its intellectuals and its history to fight for gender equality and justice for Muslim women in Denmark.

Chapters 4 through 9 shed light on Khankan’s multidimensional activism. One month before 9/11, she established with a group of other Danish Muslims the Forum for Critical Muslims, which she describes as a “reformist activist movement of Sufi inspiration and orientation that calls for a pluralist and democratic Islam” (p. 61). The organization held seminars, conferences, and debates on the Qur’an and Islam. The approach of the founders of the forum towards the Islamic tradition rested on four pillars: “reason, renewal, critique, and multiplicity” (p. 65). Khankan’s motivation behind establishing the forum was to provide an alternative voice for Islamist groups in Denmark and to counter the anti-Islam discourse promoted by far-right Danish political actors such as the Danish People’s Party.

In the aftermath of 9/11 and with the rise of Islamophobia, Khankan decided to pursue her activism in the political arena, joining the Danish Social Liberal Party and contemplating running for office in 2002. However, her political career was short-lived as she became engulfed in a controversy after she opposed an initiative by some of her party members to propose a resolution banning sharia law. The proposal was motivated by the plight of the married Nigerian woman Amina Lewal who was sentenced to stoning by a Nigerian sharia court after she was found guilty of committing adultery. Khankan's position was that the proposed resolution distorted what sharia meant in Islamic tradition, a "way towards learning the mercy and knowledge of God" (p. 83).

Another dimension of Khankan's activism focuses on providing support for victims of psychological abuse. In Chapter 7, Khankan recounts the story of Exit Circle, a secular nationwide organization that she established in 2014, which provides support and therapy for victims of psychological abuse. While the services provided by the organization are not exclusive to women, the majority of the victims are female. In establishing this organization, Khankan was motivated to focus on the abuse that arises from social control and/or religious control, which female victims in particular encounter. To illustrate the abuse arising from such forms of control, Khankan narrates her encounter with a Danish Muslim woman who was controlled by her husband and suffered from domestic violence in his hands, eventually losing to death her

sickly daughter who had repeatedly witnessed this abuse. Another encounter, she narrates, concerned a young woman who suffered from her mother's unhealthy control of her life. With the establishment of the Mariam Mosque, Khankan stepped down from the directorship of Exit Circle at the request of the other personnel in the organization who argued that her religious role as the leading imam of a mosque would make it sensitive for her to continue directing a secular non-religious organization. Though not convinced by this argument, Khankan stepped down. However, at the Mariam Mosque she continued providing weekly sessions of support and therapy to victims of abuse, while pursuing formal studies to become a certified cognitive psychologist.

The final chapter of the book sums up the religious discourse that Khankan is promoting: a Sufi approach to Islam, one that offers love, nuances, openness to others, and inclusivity. This approach, advocated by the Mariam Mosque, stands in stark contrast to the literalist conservative approach, which is adopted by Khankan's ex-husband, resulting in the breakdown of their marriage. Perhaps the gap and tension between the two approaches is best illustrated when the eldest of Khankan's four children notes how his father's mosque is very different from his mother's. In his father's mosque, the imams are "seventy-year-old men sitting on thrones from which they never get off", whereas in his mother's mosque the imam is a woman. Similarly, when asked by a friend about the job of an imam, Khankan's youngest daughter

replies, "a woman who does very important things".

In conclusion, Khankan's book narrates several interrelated stories. It is the story of the Mariam Mosque, which speaks to a pertinent global issue concerning the resistance of an increasing number of Muslim women to what they see as their marginalization and even exclusion from meaningful and empowering spaces and voices in mosques. In response, some of these women have sought to establish women-only mosques in a number of contexts such as North America, Germany, Denmark, and elsewhere. One could question the extent to which women-only mosques may substantively address the structural gender-based hierarchies and inequalities in the religious domain. However, one could also counter-argue that mosques such as the Mariam Mosque provide a space where women can find gender-sensitive religious knowledge, assume religious leadership, and experience egalitarian gender relations. But this story would have been even more insightful if Khankan had shed more light on the challenges entailed in creating such a space. For example, Khankan mentions that when officiating interfaith marriages, the mosque first reaches out to the families of the couple and tries to secure their blessing. How do the mosque's imams engage with such families? Also, what challenges do the Mariam Mosque imams encounter as they promote officiating Muslim-Muslim marriage contracts that oppose polygamy and affirm equal divorce and child custody rights? Highlighting specific challenges,

differences, and tensions encountered in this mosque initiative would have made the story of Khankan's activism even more informative.

Khankan's book is also about Islamic feminism. The author says one of the goals of establishing the Mariam Mosque is to institutionalize Islamic feminism in Denmark. But how does Khankan understand Islamic feminism? Is it activism? Is it new knowledge that informs gender activism? Who is an Islamic feminist? These questions are not adequately answered, and Khankan's analysis of Islamic feminism somewhat lacks texture and substance. Furthermore, her re-reading of some of the (six) problematic gender verses in the Qur'an is unconvincing. For example, the Quranic verse 2:282 stipulates that for the contracting of commercial transactions two male witnesses or a male and two female witnesses are required. Khankan explains away this gender-based difference by arguing that the idea of the two women is to have one of them protect the other from being placed in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis the man. This is a reading that is unsubstantiated by any linguistic or contextual reading of the verse. A historical contextual reading of the verse could have been persuasive: in the 7th-century Arabia where few women were knowledgeable about or took part in trade, it might have made sense to privilege men as witnesses for commercial transactions. Furthermore, in re-interpreting the verses that are used as a basis for the prohibition of a marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man, Khankan

fails to see the link to the juristic principle of a man's authority and guardianship over his wife, which would explain why exegetes and jurists were reluctant to have a marital union between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man who would then have authority and guardianship over her.

Notwithstanding, this is an engaging memoir of a Muslim woman activist in Denmark, written in accessible style.

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ANABEL INGE
**The Making of a Salafi
Muslim Woman: Paths to
Conversion. Oxford: Oxford
University Press 2016.**
320 s.

The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion on seikkaperäinen etnografinen tutkimus salafistinaisten elämästä Lontoossa. Musliminaisten elämä, ja ennen muuta heidän pukeutumisenensa, on ollut poliittisen keskustelun ja uuden lainsäädännön kohteena 2000-luvun Euroopassa, mutta naisten oma ääni on jäänyt huomattavan pieneksi niin julkisessa keskustelussa kuin tutkimuskirjallisuudessaakin. Päähuivia ja kasvohuntua käyttävistä naisista on alkanut ilmestyä enenevässä määrin tutkimusta, mutta salafistinaisista tiedetään vain vähän. Anabel Ingen tutkimus vastaa siis todelliseen tarpeeseen.

Teoksen johdanto ja ensimmäinen varsinainen luku keskittyvät salafismin esittelyyn. Kyseessä

on konservatiivinen suuntaus, jossa pyritään palaamaan islamin puhtaaseen muotoon tukeutumalla vain Koraaniin, sunnaan eli perimätietoon profeetta Muhamadin elämästä sekä ensimmäisten muslimisukupolvien aikaan. Tämän päivän kysymyksiin tarvittavia vastauksia voivat luotettavasti antaa vain hyvin koulutetut muslimioppineet. Salafismiin kuuluu tiukka sukupuolten välinen erottelu, miehillä parta sekä naisilla peittävä löysä pukeutuminen, pään peittäminen ja monesti myös kasvohuntu eli niqab. Vaate-tuksen väri on musta.

Konservatiivisuus, erottuminen länsimaisesta yhteiskunnasta sekä linkittyminen Saudi-Arabiaan ja siellä harjoitettavaan wahhabismiin lienevät keskeiset syyt, miksi salafismi nähdään monesti länsimaissa potentiaalisenä turvallisuusuhkana. Ingen mukaan salafistit pääsääntöisesti irtisanoutuvat niin poliittisesta osallistumisesta kuin väkivallastakin, ja tämä koskee myös hänen tutkimiaan naisia ja moskeijoita. Epäpoliittisuus ja väkivallattomuus eivät kuitenkaan vastaa länsimaissa vallitsevaa näkemystä salafismista.

Luvussa kaksi Inge kuvaa kiehtovasti kenttätöitä, johon kuului osallistuvaa havainnointia salafistinaisten opintopiireissä, erilaisissa juhlatilaisuuksissa, seminaareissa ja konferensseissa sekä naisten kotona. Aineisto on kerätty pääasiallisesti Lontoossa, missä keskeisenä paikkana toimi Brixtonin moskeija. Inge osallistui naisten elämään kahden vuoden ja neljän kuukauden ajan. Etnografisten muistiinpanojen ohella aineisto koostuu yhteensä 23 salafistinaisen haastatteluista sekä lukuisista epävirallisemmista