



The Making of  
a Mosque with  
Female Imams  
*Serendipities in the Production  
of Danish Islams*

Jesper Petersen

BRILL

## The Making of a Mosque with Female Imams

# Muslim Minorities

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By

Jesper Petersen



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Cover illustration: The Mariam Mosque from the outside, 11 May 2018. Photo by Jesper Petersen

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Petersen, Jesper, author.

Title: The making of a mosque with female imams : serendipities in the production of Danish Islams / by Jesper Petersen.

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2022. | Series: Muslim minorities, 1570-7571 ; vol.40 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022035325 (print) | LCCN 2022035326 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004523012 (hardback) | ISBN 9789004523029 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Women imams (Mosque officers)—Denmark. | Imams (Mosque officers)—Denmark. | Muslim women—Denmark. | Women in Islam—Denmark. | Feminism—Religious aspects—Islam. | Islam—Denmark. | Muslims—Denmark.

Classification: LCC BP185.4 .P48 2022 (print) | LCC BP185.4 (ebook) | DDC 297.5/7082—dc23/eng/20220825

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022035325>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022035326>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: [brill.com/brill-typeface](http://brill.com/brill-typeface).

ISSN 1570-7571

ISBN 978-90-04-52301-2 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-52302-9 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

*To Poul Petersen*





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## Acknowledgements

Producing ethnographic research is not a lonely matter as many people are involved, even in a project that, on paper, is carried out by a single person. I have relied on the goodwill and assistance of my informants, who let me into their lives to do research. Ethnography is collaborative, and thus, my informants—some of whom have chosen to remain anonymous—have taken part in producing the knowledge contained in this book. I hope the analysis and perspective I offer will be enriching. Likewise, I am indebted to Marie Skovgaard who broke with convention and gave me access to her video library while shooting her documentary *The Reformist*.

Some of my best ideas have emerged and grown in conversations with my PhD supervisor Jonas Otterbeck. I have seldom left your office without being inspired—or maybe even with an urge—to read a book or two that you have recommended. Thank you for your commitment and care, for always giving so generously of your time, and for continuously challenging my ideas in a way that sparks curiosity. You made this a fun, interesting, and exciting experience.

I would also like to thank my co-supervisors, Johan Cato and Brian Arly Jacobsen, for bringing in perspectives that at first seemed foreign to me, but I learned a lot in the process. Your feedback made this a better and theoretically more balanced study.

Working at Lund University has been inspiring, and even if one formally only has a single supervisor, everyone seems to make their time and knowledge available. I have received a great deal of inspiration from Anne-Christine Hornborg who has continually sparked my curiosity on ritual studies by recommending books and articles, while also discussing my observations in the Mariam Mosque. Similarly, I would like to thank Hege Irene Markussen for her support when fieldwork became difficult and I needed to discuss ethical issues related to the project.

In addition to the few named individuals, I have received feedback from colleagues at seminars and conferences in Sweden, Denmark, and abroad. You are too numerous to mention individually, but I greatly appreciate your input and ideas.

And finally, thank you to Anders Ackfeldt who told me about the funding opportunities at Lund University while killing time in the back seat of a police car in the Yemen. Without our adventure—and the unfortunate misunderstanding that got us in trouble—I would not have known about the opportunities that Lund has to offer.

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## Entering the Field

“The time is now 6:14 AM. Islam and homosexuality may sound incompatible, but even though homosexuality has always been frowned upon in Islam there have been times in history when it did not cause much concern ...”<sup>1</sup> It was early in the morning 10 March 2015. I had just turned on the car radio while driving the 450 kilometers from my home in Copenhagen to the northern part of Jutland where I was to give a series of lectures on first-wave Arab feminism in commemoration of the upcoming 100-year jubilee for universal suffrage in Denmark on 5 June. Saliha Marie Fetteh, a female part-time lecturer in Arabic studies—and a Muslim, the announcer added—was on the radio explaining that Muslim poets and singers in the Abbasid era composed poems about their love for young boys, giving the example of Abu Nuwas (d. 813–815) and al-Kisa’i (d. 805). The latter, she expounded, is famous for his skills in Quran recitation but according to some sources he openly had sexual relations with men. This, however, did not cause much concern among his contemporaries.

It had been International Women’s Day two days earlier, so it was no surprise that the first radio broadcast of the day focused on gender and sexuality. The preceding week, I had taken students to Brussels, so I had not listened in on this year’s debate but I suspected that most discussions had centered around the upcoming jubilee, looking back at a century of Danish women’s struggle. Of course, the debate that interested me the most as a part-time lecturer on Islam and gender was that involving Muslim voices. The woman on the radio continued,

I actually think that the imams’ handling of it is inadequate. There are examples of young people who have come to them because they have been sad ... in despair, and feeling uncomfortable with their own sexuality. They turn up to get help and moral support and instead they are almost asked to suppress their sexuality—or they are told that it is a disease—and I think that is inappropriate ...

FETTEH

---

1 P1 Morgen, 6:14 AM (10 March 2015). Accessed from Mediestream. My translation.

As in many European countries, Islam is a hot topic in public debate in Denmark but most debates are mere reruns of earlier ones where everyone takes predictable positions and repeats the same statements (Jacobsen 2017; Jacobsen et al. 2013; Petersen and Vinding 2020). However, this morning's debate contained a surprise. Four minutes into the interview, the journalist set a new frame with a final question:

Together with the chairman for Critical Muslims, Sherin Khankan, Saliha Marie Fetteh is working towards getting female imams in Denmark, and they have already found a place where, within a short time, they will issue an invitation to Friday prayer, which will be led by a woman. But will homosexual Muslims be welcome to take part in the Friday prayer? Saliha Marie Fetteh says: "I can't answer on behalf of Sherin Khankan, but for me, I have no hesitation praying a Friday prayer side by side with a homosexual." [pause] In the program, Religion Report, later today you can meet a homosexual with Muslim background ... the time is now 6:19AM.

This was the first time I heard about Sherin Khankan's initiative, and I was quite surprised that it was not the main story of the broadcast. A mosque with female imams in Denmark seemed like quite a story and its being a secondary issue in the interview suggested that the initiative had been around for a long time and that I had somehow missed it. A month later, on 13 April, I therefore wrote an email to Khankan and invited her to deliver a guest lecture:

Dear Sherin Khankan,

I teach the course "Muslims in the West" at the Danish Institute for Studies Abroad and I would like to invite you to give a guest lecture in the fall of 2015 in our module about women in Islam. The module focuses on women's struggle in Islam and the students read texts by Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Alifa Rifaat, Mona Eltahawy, and many others. However, it would be interesting to get a Danish perspective on women's struggle in Islam, and it would no doubt be enriching for both me and my students if you could spare us 1½–2 hours in the fall to tell us about your exciting project.

Best regards, Jesper Petersen<sup>2</sup>

---

2 I have edited out the salary information and definition of audience.

Meanwhile in Beirut, a Danish documentarist, Marie Skovgaard, was leading a workshop and wrapping up her work on a documentary on the life of a female radio journalist. She also heard the news and on 19 March she sent an email to Khankan:

Dear Sherin,

My name is Marie and I have enthusiastically followed the debate on female imams and your [singular]/your [plural] initiative to start a mosque for women and with time hopefully a mosque for all ... I am myself a documentarist and ... I would really like to make a movie about you [singular] and your [plural] Femimam mission. It could be interesting to follow your work towards the opening of the mosque and the whole start-up phase—maybe even longer ... I am very much looking forward to hearing from you, Marie<sup>3</sup>

On the receiving end of this communication, Khankan was reading through an endless stream of emails and text messages, and answering phone calls. She had made the front page of one of Denmark's nine national dailies, *Information*, on 3 March with the headline, "Denmark's next imam?" (see Figure 1 in Chapter 6). Two days later, she laid out her plans to open a mosque with female imams in an opinion piece in the biggest newspaper in Denmark, *Politiken*, explaining that it would be inaugurated in August 2015 and that Friday prayer would be mixed gender and led by a woman. The announcement immediately became part of several other debates such as those on Islamic terrorism, integration, Islamophobia, women's suppression, and—as the radio interview with Fetteh demonstrates—LGBTQ-Muslims' struggle for acceptance by Islamic authorities.<sup>4</sup>

While Skovgaard started the recording of her documentary on 26 April 2015, I did not meet Khankan and the co-founder of the Mariam Mosque, Hicham Mouna, until 30 October 2015 when Khankan gave the abovementioned guest lecture in my class. At that time, the inauguration of the mosque had been postponed to an unspecified date in the future, but after the lecture we agreed that I would join the group as a researcher. During the spring, Khankan invited me

3 I have received this email from Marie Skovgaard and have her permission to publish the content.

4 I later found out that *Politiken* had run a series of articles on being an LGBTQ-Muslim in Denmark and that the announcement of Femimam therefore was tied into an already existing debate.



to several activities such as the fourth and fifth *nikah* (Islamic marriage) ceremonies she performed and to a viewing of a room in an apartment that a famous Danish photographer, Jacob Holdt, had put at her disposal for Friday prayers. The apartment is depicted on the cover of the book, on the first floor in the yellow building where the windows are open. This is where the Mariam Mosque was eventually inaugurated on 26 August 2016. However, my teaching obligations and some travel arrangements got in the way of my attending the *nikah* ceremonies, but I got a tour of the apartment on 2 June 2016. I talked to Khankan on the phone a few times in relation to my application for funding as a PhD student at Lund University, but it was not until 1 April 2016 when Khankan gave a second guest lecture in another class of mine that we met again. In May 2016, I was accepted as PhD student at Lund University with a start in September.

I joined Femimam as a researcher on fieldwork and was admitted to the group's internal Facebook forum on 5 August 2016, three weeks before the inauguration. My fieldwork started on 21 August 2016, which is the day Femimam, as the group called itself back then, started converting a room in a downtown apartment in Copenhagen into a mosque.

## 1 Finding an Aim

I originally went into the field with a preconceived notion that Khankan's idea of opening a mosque with female imams was activism inspired by Islamic feminist discourses as represented by authors such as those mentioned in my email to her. This seemed like a fair assumption at the time because Khankan made references to world-wide Islamic feminist activism when talking about her initiative. I imagined that Femimam was institutionalizing a theoretical discourse as a mosque and thereby converted discourse into bricks and mortar, so to speak. This is also reflected in the funding application and the original title of my project: "The Institutionalization of Islamic Feminism". However, I soon realized that this was not the case, largely because only a few individuals in Femimam were familiar with the literature, and then only to a limited degree.

In the subsequent months I adopted multiple theoretical frameworks in my attempt to understand the phenomenon I was observing. However, it persistently fell between models. My initial explanation was that the Mariam Mosque somehow constituted a new social movement and an institution at the same time (Eyerman and Jamison 2007; Jepperson 1991; Melucci 1996a; Vinding 2013). It recruited as a movement and worked through activism, but it also per-

formed nikah ceremonies, *aqiqah* (name giving), and issued Islamic divorces as an institution.

Compared to other mosques, the Mariam Mosque displayed some odd features. It is located in an apartment, but it has no temporal permanence; it only exists for a few hours at a time. The room where the monthly Friday prayer takes place is fitted out in the hours just prior to the prayer, and when the prayer is over, the calligraphy and other objects are taken down and stored until the next prayer a month later. Between Friday prayers, the room is employed for a range of other purposes by the apartment's tenants and other users.

These were just a few of the oddities that I had observed, and I did not find an overall theoretical framework that was suitable to my initial impulse. Instead, I attempted to describe the phenomenon, using multiple theoretical frameworks as inspiration. I devised a new concept, *the pop-up mosque* (Petersen 2019b), as an analytical term for recurring temporary conversions of an other-purposed space into a mosque.

As soon as I had defined the pop-up mosque concept I started to see the pattern everywhere and I therefore arranged seven semi-structured interviews with leaders of pop-up mosques in the summer of 2018 to saturate the concept (Petersen 2019b). I also observed, through a small literature study, that some of the first mosques-as-buildings founded by Muslim guest workers in Germany and Sweden in the 1950s and 1960s existed as pop-up mosques before they became permanent (Petersen 2019b: 179). In other words, what I was observing in the Mariam Mosque was not odd; it was just a pattern of social action that had not previously been theorized. Furthermore, it is a pattern that often leaves no trace as it may be erased by a narrative about how and why a mosque-as-building came into being or, as frequently happens, the pop-up mosque activity dies out before it is recorded. Thus, this study sheds light on a phenomenon (pop-up mosques), many of which have not yet been identified because of erasure. The pop-up mosque will be introduced more thoroughly in Chapter 9.

## 2 The Revised Aim

All pop-up mosques I have observed have emerged in contexts with a religious demand but insufficient economic resources to cater for it (Petersen 2019b). While the demand that produced the Mariam Mosque is unique, the form of social action taken by Khankan and others who tried to cater for the demand is not. As explained above, the first Muslim guest workers in Europe also made pop-up mosques, but that was mainly because there were no mosques at all, and they needed a place to perform the Friday prayer. The Mariam Mosque

emerged in a context where this general demand was already satisfied, and therefore it is rather produced by new, emerging demands.

Islamic female authority is not a new phenomenon. It has existed in various forms since the time of Mohammad (Ahmed 1993; Katz 2014; Nadwi 2013) and its emergence in ever new forms is a continuous field of research (e.g. Bano 2017; Hill 2018; Mahmood 2012). However, in Europe, phenomena like the emergence of female imams, female-led Friday prayer, and interfaith nikah between Muslim women and non-Muslim men are new. For example, female imams do not feature in Jeanette Jouili's and Schirin Amir-Moazami's article on female authority in Europe from 2006; nor are they mentioned in Anne Sofie Roald's study of Muslim converts in Scandinavia (2004) or Garbi Schmidt's study of Danish Muslim youth movements (2007). However, these studies have demonstrated the importance of gender in contemporary productions of Islam in Europe.

It may be viewed as remarkable that Femimam has managed to standardize what may appear to some as heterodox practice by posing as an institution. However, to categorize Femimam with the emic category, heterodox, is a theological undertaking, which is incommensurable with research epistemology. From an etic perspective, emic labeling is an exertion of power within a social field; it means that the power to define Islam is vested elsewhere and Femimam is challenging this position. This study focusses on the etic perspective.

The Mariam Mosque is not outside tradition; it is one among numerous producers of tradition (an extreme case), and while many Danish Islamic authorities object to some of the practices in the Mariam Mosque, they understand it to be a mosque with Khankan as the imam. In other words, the Mariam Mosque is at least part of the Copenhagen Islamic tradition, and maybe even part of an urban West-European—and possibly also a Euro-American—Islamic tradition (Levitt and Schiller 2004). Jan Hjärpe (1997: 268) explains, "That which does not function disappears, just as many phenomena in the history of religions have disappeared." Whether this Islamic tradition will be reproduced by subsequent generations of Muslims is yet to be seen; however, innovation is to be expected in the production of any religious tradition.

For this study I have chosen an extreme case as these "often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied" (Flyvbjerg 2006: 229). That is, extreme cases often produce a rich empirical material, which is important in a single case study as their advantage is depth rather than breadth. Based on the shared patterns of pop-up mosques and catering to religious demands (Bulliet 1994; Woodhead 2016), I also consider this a paradigmatic case that can highlight general characteristics

of how Islam is produced (Flyvbjerg 2006: 232; Gerring 2007: 20). This means that I use the rich empirical material to describe the production of Islam in minute detail highlighting serendipities and non-Islamic sources of Islam, thus challenging common theories of what Islam is and how it is produced. Even if the Mariam Mosque (or the like of it) is not reproduced by subsequent generations of Muslims, the processes of its production highlights how religious innovations are institutionalized and why some practices are vetted out by history while others are reproduced.

Bent Flyvbjerg (2006: 238) explains that “case stories ... can neither be briefly recounted nor summarized in a few main results. The case story is itself the result.” Thus, writing an introduction to a study in which the conclusions are only intelligible after the case description has been made is paradoxical (Derrida 1983). This is evident by considering a more accurate title for the book, *The making of a pop-up mosque*. As the pop-up mosque is a neologism of mine it will not be recognized as a known phenomenon by potential readers; neither will many of the other patterns that I am going to describe. To resolve this paradox, I will present most of the study’s conclusions and relate them to ongoing academic discussions in the individual chapters where they belong rather than explicate them in the introduction. Thus, I only present two summarized conclusions below. First, I present the main argument of the book, which concerns serendipities in the production of Islam. Second, I argue the case for including *non-Muslim Islam* as a research object within Islamic studies. It should be noted that the book does not include a study of non-Muslim Islam in itself, but this phenomenon is too significant to exclude, even if it has not previously been theorized.

### 3 The Serendipitous Production of Islams

The difficulty of predicting future events is well known within economic theory, which occupies a great number of researchers creating models that supposedly can forecast economic development. However, the demonstrable inaccuracy of many economic forecasts has over the past decades led researchers to take a greater interest in unpredictability. Based on the observation that stockbrokers do not perform better than what would be expected if stocks were picked at random Daniel Kahneman (2011) has explained the cognitive biases involved in producing a coherent world and maintaining its stability when faced with empirical observations that contradict individuals’ core beliefs (cf. Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter 2009/1956). Faced with Kahneman’s conclusions stockbrokers continue to claim expertise in stock picking, even after his winning

the Nobel Prize in 2002 for his psychological insights in economic theory, thus demonstrating the strength of cognitive biases.

The economist Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2010) argues that social scientific theory face a problem similar to Kahneman's economists. He claims that history is primarily formed by highly improbable events such as World War II,<sup>5</sup> the Lebanese civil war,<sup>6</sup> al-Qaida's coordinated attacks on the American East coast, the outbreak of COVID-19,<sup>7</sup> etc. but social scientific theory does not seem to account for these events even though they determine the course of history. Rather, he argues, researchers are occupied with models within their respective fields, equivalent to the bell-shaped curves (normal distribution) so familiar to economists. That is, they occupy themselves with normality, but this is according to Taleb not what history is formed by. With a reference to highly improbable events as outliers (on the bell-shaped curve), he remarks that "*The inability to predict outliers implies the inability to predict the course of history*, given the share of these events in the dynamics of events. But we act as though we are able to predict historical events ..."<sup>8</sup> (Taleb 2010: xxiv). Samuli Schielke problematize the latter as a consequence of what social scientific theory sets out to accomplish:

The problem has to do with our expectations on social scientific theory. We want theories that predict, that tell what is going to happen, that give us a sense that we grasp what is going on. I, in contrast, am concerned with finding a theory that accounts for the sense of not grasping what is going on, one that describes how people face the unpredictable.

SCHIELKE 2015: 219–220

- 
- 5 With reference to a study done by Niall Ferguson, which demonstrates the coming of war was not reflected in the imperial bond market (a good predictor of investors' expectations of conflict), Taleb (2010: 14) argues that the mounting tensions and the escalating crises that are constructed after-the-fact in some historical narratives about World War II constitutes anachronistic retrospection. This unpredictability is more famously exemplified in Neville Chamberlain's Peace of our Time speech on 30 September 1938, after his negotiations with Adolf Hitler, in which he stated, "My good friends, for the second time in our history, a British Prime Minister has returned from Germany bringing peace with honor." Less than a year later, Nazi Germany invaded Poland.
- 6 Taleb demonstrates how wrong predictions about the expected brevity of the Lebanese Civil War were erased and forgotten as soon as they were proven wrong and replaced with new predictions of the imminent end of the war. That is, Taleb describes history in prospect (without erasure), not in retrospect (with erasure).
- 7 Taleb does not mention COVID-19 as his book predates this pandemic, but this is the kind of events that he points to.
- 8 Taleb's emphasis.

Schielke (2015:180) for example argues that during the Arab Spring, “not only was Egypt’s political leadership surprised and overwhelmed by the events, so were the revolutionaries” (cf. Kurzman 2012). However, they had no reason to be surprised because even if the timing of events could not be predicted the Arab Spring constitutes the normal condition:

Historically speaking, this is the normal condition ... it is the condition of a society with deep unsolved conflicts and mutually irreconcilable powers. January 25, 2011, was not the opening of a new era in Egypt. It was the return to the historical normality of a nation in revolt, the continuation of a state of uprising that began in 1919, or perhaps already in the Orabi Rebellion of 1881, and that is bound to continue.

SCHIELKE 2015: 190

Schielke’s description is reminiscent of the process I will describe in this book. Khankan did not want to become an imam, but she did; neither did the co-founder of the Mariam Mosque, Hicham Mouna, want to open a mosque, but he did. Both were surprised and overwhelmed by the events in 2015–2017, but they continuously adapted to an evolving situation, which ultimately led to the founding of the Mariam Mosque with Khankan as its female imam.

I argue that while we do not know what is going to happen, some events are more likely than others, and the potential of any moment may be assessed if one has sufficient data. That is, we may theorize the unpredictable.<sup>9</sup> A starting point is to focus on contemporary Islams as discourses and “uncover the rules of their formation, the conditions of existence for discursive events, albeit in present, living narrative” (Renders 2021: 13). Next, one may identify and assess the demand for discursive products (Islams) and analyze the structures within which Muslims produce Islams. Such a theory does not predict what is going to happen, but it will produce a more accurate assessment of normality and what to expect.

In Chapter 3–5 I analyze the formation of the discursivity that conditioned the emergence of the Mariam Mosque and the well-known variables of agency and structure (Giddens 2013). In short, these chapters demonstrate that in addition to being formed by their parents’ culture, Muslim children of migrants, born in Denmark, are socialized into Danish culture and values, disciplined

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9 Such theorization is already taking place within economics where Nobel laureate, Robert J. Shiller (2015) has demonstrated how irrational exuberance can to some extent predict bubble-formation and volatility in economic markets. Similarly, bubble phenomena in other parts of society have been demonstrated by Vincent F. Hendricks and Pelle G. Hansen (2016).

by dominant discourses, educated in the Danish schools and universities, and they internalize contemporary emotional regimes that influence their sense of justice, what they strive for in life (the definition of success), and what emotions they are able and likely to produce in specific contexts (Barrett 2017; Lazarus 1994; Riis and Woodhead 2010). This is also true of the Mariam Mosque's founders, Sherin Khankan (b. 1974) and Hicham Mouna (b. 1987), who were both born and raised in Denmark. Chapter 3 gives a short introduction to Muslims in Denmark, Chapter 4 analyzes the genealogy of Khankan's discourse on female imams, and Chapter 5 investigates the emergence of a demand for female imams, thus establishing that the conditions for a mosque with female imams were present, but also that all attempts to establish such an institution had failed.

The remaining chapters of the book are concerned with serendipities as a third variable in addition to agency and structure. Serendipities constitute the catalyst that produces events and changes the course of history on a microscale, sometimes leading to much larger quivers on a macroscale. To highlight the significance of serendipities is to emphasize the events that changes the course of history, or to merge Taleb's and Schielke's perspectives: highlighting serendipities gives a richer description of the normal condition, which expects the emergence of serendipities that changes the course of history.

Before I introduce my argument on non-Muslim Islam as a research object, it is necessary to present a definition of Islams (in the plural). I take the definition of Islam to its most basic definition as discourse emerging in human communication and interaction. Muslims may claim that Islam has an ontological existence beyond this, but as a researcher I cannot make observations of such a phenomenon, and thus, I must rely on manifestations of discourse.

Given the significant influence of Talal Asad's (1986) famous working paper *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* and its concept of discursive traditions it may seem strange that I do not discuss it in my defining Islams section below. I have often been surprised at how seriously Asad's papers is taken by some of his readers, especially as Asad does not himself seem to have understood this paper as central to his authorship in the years following its publication. Jonas Otterbeck has pointed out that Asad has not tried to defend or further develop the concept of discursive tradition, neither does he use it much in his later writing. For example, it "only features twice in *Genealogies of Religion* (1993), the first major book after the 1986-working paper" (Otterbeck 2022: 109). To me this suggests that other scholars have developed the concept for Asad in much the same way as Olivier Roy's readers developed churchification in his name (Vinding 2018: 53) and Kimberlé W. Crenshaw's (1989) readers

have developed the concept intersectionality far beyond what she originally defined in her famous article (K. Davis 2016: 44). Murray S. Davis suggests that ambiguous and incomplete theories are more malleable and therefore tend to become classics because “an ambiguous theory can appeal to different—even hostile—divisions of its audience, allowing each subgroup to interpret the theory in congenial, if mutually incompatible ways” (M.S. Davis 1986: 296). This seems to be what happened to Asad’s working paper; like other successful theories, it is ambiguous and extraordinarily open to interpretation as the paper’s main function was to introduce discourse theory to the anthropology of Islam, and Asad deserves great credit for that. In the years following its publication, Asad and some of his PhD students used the word discursive in combination with a broad range of words to highlight the discursiveness of phenomena. Charles Hirschkind (2009: 131, 218, 36) for example discuss discursive forms, discursive conditions, discursive coherence, discursive conventions, and discursively defined emotional content, while Asad in his abovementioned *Genealogies of Religion* discuss discursive definitions, discursive processes, discursive practices, discursive interventions, discursive events, discursive games, discursive dominance, discursive models, discursive power, and discursive formations (Asad 1993: 8, 29, 144, 153, 180, 193, 210, 219, 229, 247, 264). However, today—after the wide dissemination of discourse theory—I see no reason to highlight that traditions are discursive.

#### 4 Defining Islams

As briefly mentioned in the above, Islam is always produced within a discursivity that limits what Islams can be produced. I define discursivity as the discursive constraints within which humans can produce discourse (cf. Butler 2010; Certeau 2011; Derrida 1977; Foucault 1994b). Discursivity is dependent on the context within which a given person can produce meaningful discourse, which lives and dies with people and the world in which they live. Discourse and discursivity have close links because the most common way of expanding one’s discursivity is by learning new discourse, making one capable of decoding and producing discourses within the new discursivity thus provided. Although discursivity is partially inherited through language and culture, the process is always imperfect; some discursivity is lost while new discursivity is produced through serendipities, creativity, experience, and people learning other discourses.

It is important not to reduce discursivity to merely what can be expressed through language, as discursivity also determines the sexualities one is able to



embody (Butler 2010) and the emotions individuals are able to produce (Barrett 2017; Lazarus 1994; Riis and Woodhead 2010). To take an example, the idea of being in love in contemporary Copenhagen may seem like something natural, but it is a feeling produced within a discursivity oriented towards contemporary practices of dating, making couples, marriage, the nuclear family, and contemporary ideas about happiness, with all that it entails (Foucault 1988; Giddens 1992). In short, discursivity enables people to produce utterances, actions, and emotions in relation to discourses. A lack of discursivity highlights the absence of the knowledge and socialization needed to be able to express oneself in relation to a given discourse. Thus, discursivity simultaneously signals competences and restrictions, and what constitutes a meaningful articulation in the 7th century Arabia may be unintelligible in 21st century Copenhagen (and vice versa).

The formation of contemporary individuals' discursivities is significantly influenced by recent structural transformations on the macrolevel. Realizing this has far-reaching consequences for the conceptualization of Islam because it decenters texts, religious authority, and institutions in the production of Islam. The discursivity, which conditions not just the Mariam Mosque's formation but European Islam as such, is caused by the labor migration of the 20th century from Muslim majority countries to Europe. That is, the primary variable accounting for Islamic theological developments currently occurring in Europe is not texts, religious authorities, or institutions—it is a series of highly improbable events, which led to mass migration and thus the emergence of the European Muslim discursivities that produces Islam in contemporary Europe. In other words, mass migration—once again—led to the emergence of new Islams at the edge (Bulliet 1994).

There is an abundance of macrostructures that significantly influence the production of Islam, which means that they must be considered sources of Islam from an etic perspective. To take two additional examples: the fundamental changes to families' internal structure and their relation to the outside world caused by the introduction of capitalist economies, and the existence of a public sphere within which celebrity imams can emerge (Habermas 1989; MacIntyre 1981/2014: 264–265). But, also more recent structural changes significantly influence the formation of the discursivities within which people<sup>10</sup> produce Islam such as individuation (Berger 1969/1990; Otterbeck 2010), singularization (Reckwitz 2020), the concept of freedom (Rose 2010), secularities

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10 I am going to argue below that both Muslims and non-Muslims produce Islam and I therefore use the term human rather than Muslim here.

(Asad 2003), securitization of Islam and Muslims (Racius 2020), and states bureaucracies (Kühle and Larsen 2019; Kühle 2020; Racius 2020). Even contemporary taste, aesthetics, and information infrastructure play an important role. With reference to six recent studies of Islamic authority, Thijl Sunier and Léon Buskens (2022: 11) conclude that “when old and established categories of authority erode, the capacity to disseminate specific understandings of religious practices and beliefs becomes increasingly based upon rhetoric, performance and visual events”. This indicates that “the performative and persuasive qualities of religious figures, religious knowledge and religious objects as particular modes of mediation, are as important as the very messages that are being conveyed”, and “leaders and spokespersons increasingly need to respond to the forms of auratic and charismatic power found in the mass media”. That is, even religious authority seems to be less about religious educational credentials, and more about aesthetics, rhetoric, and appeal.

In history, people have continuously produced Islams and Islamic traditions using semiotic resources categorized as Islamic (Hodge and Kress 1988; Leeuwen 2005; Vannini 2007). I use the term semiotic resource to underline that signifiers such as *nikah* (Islamic marriage), *wali* (guardian), *mahr* (dower), and *fitnah* (seduction) have meaning potential rather than specific meanings (Leeuwen 2005: 4–55). Although these words have been in continuous use since the 7th century (and earlier),<sup>11</sup> contemporary Muslims in Copenhagen produce meanings with them that are markedly different from those applied by Mohammad, his contemporaries, and almost all generations of Muslims up until the present. Even the most persistent effort of Salafi Muslims to practice something akin to Islams in the 7th century is confined by contemporary discursivities (Inge 2017) as is Islamists’ efforts to found an “authentic” Islamic state (Roy 1994). In Richard W. Bulliet’s (1994: 186) words, “the variegated forms of Islam that dotted the Middle East and North Africa prior to the twelfth century have passed away, leaving little trace except in old manuscripts” That is, the semantics of past discursivities are partially recoverable through scholarly work, but embodied discursivities are unretrievable as 7th century Arab tribal society is no more.

Islam is often assumed to be grounded in scripture, but discursivity confines the production of Islam, which means that scripture cannot be read in the same way across time and space. It may be claimed that the Quran is a primary text—using Foucault’s (1981) terminology—that has a privileged status as a text towards which all Muslims are oriented, meaning that, although it may

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11 Mohammad did not coin these words; they were part of his mother tongue.

not otherwise be relevant, Muslims will read it and develop a discursivity with which they can produce Islamic discourse. However, the idea of a primary text is problematic as any text will always exist within discourse. Thus, a text's status as primary must be understood within the discourse where it is constructed as such (Otterbeck 2000a: 46–47).

Every generation “*reinvent eternity itself* in new historical conditions”<sup>12</sup> (Žižek 2012: 66) by appropriating and thus producing the Islamic tradition (in emic singular) as if such a tradition existed independent of its unique production in the here and now. People construct Islamic traditions by treating Muslim scholars such as Abu Hanifa, Ibn Arabi, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi as contributing to a single debate within a single discursivity making them “contemporaries of both ourselves and each other. This leads to an abstraction of these writers from the cultural and social milieus in which they lived and thought and so the history of their thought acquires a false independence from the rest ....” (MacIntyre 1981/2014: 12–13). In other words, the Islamic tradition is an emic construction, produced by people's enforcing present discursivities on to the past and assuming continuity where there is rupture; an illusion that is partially created by the continuous use of the same semiotic resources to produce meaning in ever new presents (Eco 2012: 22; Vannini 2007), partially by humans striving for coherence and consistency (Kahneman 2011; Renders 2021: 16), and partially by the tendency to (maybe without being consciously aware of it) erase the signs documenting Islams' emergence in the here and now (Otterbeck 2010: 200; Schielke 2007: 352).

I acknowledge that “an adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present” (MacIntyre 1981/2014: 258; cf. Asad 1986: 14–15), but I also stress the fluidity of the social semiotic resources that are inherited, focus attention on human creativity in working with the inherited past, and demonstrate the ruptured nature of the product, Islam. Theo van Leeuwen (2005: 26) explains that, “As society changes, new semiotic resources and new ways of using existing semiotic resources may be needed”. That is, the catalogues of semiotic resources available to people constructing Islamic tradition is continuously accumulating new resources, some of which will be forgotten within a generation and others being continuously reinterpreted within new discursivities for centuries. Thus, because Islams are produced by the context within which they emerge “there are as many Islams as there are situations that sustain [them]” (al-Azmeh 1993: 1). In short, Islam emerges in human interaction and communication, which is

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12 Žižek's emphasis.

influenced by the structuration of space by strategic religion (Woodhead 2016), and as I will demonstrate in this book, this may be a highly serendipitous process. Structures may create a degree of stability in terms of what is socially recognized as authentically Islamic in the here and now, but as pointed out by Shahab Ahmed (2016) what passes as Islamic (or not) can differ significantly across time and space.

As can be seen from the above, I use Islam in the plural. This is due to the absence of a single master signifier that structures all Islamic discourse, which leads me to conclude that there must exist a plurality of Islams and Islamic traditions in the present, and historically (cf. al-Azmeh 1993: 1; Varisco 2005: 160; el-Zein 1977: 242). Thus, my etic definition of Islams is ontologically different from emic definitions, which are premised on the existence of a single master signifier (Renders 2021). The importance of the pluralization is highlighted in relation to what I call *non-Muslim Islams*, which have markedly different master signifiers than Muslim Islams. Non-Muslim Islam constitutes Islam without worship of Allah, so to speak, and therefore they have a different master signifier than Muslim Islam.

## 5 Non-Muslim Islam as a Research Object

Islamic discourse produced by non-Muslims may seem a bit uncanny at first, but its everyday manifestation should be familiar to all. In his Cairo speech, Barack Obama for example declared religious extremism a form of heresy with direct reference to the Quran 5:32, explaining that “[extremists’] actions are irreconcilable ... with Islam” because “the Holy Koran teaches that ‘whoever kills an innocent, it is as if he has killed all mankind’”, and adding that “partnership between America and Islam must be based on what Islam is, not what it isn’t” (Obama 2009). In contrast, Professor of Quranic studies, Thomas Hoffmann (2015b), has stated that a Danish Muslim intellectual’s reference to this verse as a commandment of peace constitutes a “very careless reference to the Quran” that “tends towards misinformation”, even if this is what some Muslims believe in. Hoffmann argues that the verse is in fact a commandment to Jews, not Muslims, and that the subsequent verse (Quran 5:33) on killing, crucifying, or punishing through amputation of limbs those who wage war against Islam or spread mischief in society is addressed to Muslims. Thus, despite Obama’s and Hoffmann’s being non-Muslims they—in their responding to Muslim theological standpoints—present themselves to the public as *de facto* authorities on Islam who, based on their understanding of what Islam is or ought to be, reprimand and lecture to Muslims about Islam, declaring their theology het-

erodox or misinformed. This phenomenon of non-Muslims' producing Islams for dissemination in the public sphere is echoed in non-Muslim artistic expression (Ackfeldt 2019; Otterbeck, Mattsson, and Pastene 2018), journalism (Cesari 2013; Jacobsen et al. 2013), and many other places in societies where Muslims constitute religious minorities.

Aaron Hughes (2012, 2015) has among others pointed out that epistemologies of theology, politics, and research have become entangled in contemporary Islamic studies, giving the examples of Omid Safi, Tariq Ramadan, and John Esposito whom he claims produce apologetic Islamic theology, which they—like Obama—utilize to declare jihadi Muslim Islam heterodox. However, Hughes fails to realize that non-apologetic standpoints like Hoffmann's (and others') also carry theological implications. My endeavor here is not to set the record straight or academic housekeeping. Banal as it may seem, I am merely widening the empirical scope of Islamic studies to include non-Muslim productions of Islam. Non-Muslim artists, politicians, conspiracist theorists, journalists, and scholars<sup>13</sup> preaching and missionizing their own productions of Islam and venturing into theological debates with Muslims as *non-Muslim Islamic authorities* demonstrate that public knowledge about Islam matters to non-Muslims. The phenomenon cannot be reduced to cynical power politics, bigotry, political opportunism, prejudice, or apologetics (even if this may sometimes be the case).

Unstructured empirical observations suggest that non-Muslim Islams may be the most well-disseminated and influential interpretation of Islam in societies where Muslims constitute a minority (Cesari 2013; Jacobsen et al. 2013). Nevertheless, they play an insignificant role in contemporary discussions aimed at fine tuning the epistemological framework of Islamic studies (Ahmed 2016; Bowen 2012; Curtis 2014; Emon 2019; Fadil 2019; Marranci 2008; Sheedy

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13 As I will explain in the note on language below, scholars produce discourse on Islam, and thus, they produce Islam. I see no problem in this, and my point is not to discourage it. In fact, this is inevitable. However, it is important that the premise of the production is clear: if it poses as humanities research it must be based on a humanities research epistemology. As I explain in the ethics section (see appendix A) emic and etic understandings of Islam do not contradict each other because of their different epistemologies and the different ontological claims being made. What I am problematizing in the above is the entanglement of epistemologies that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether Islam produced by these scholars constitute humanities research or Islamic theology. I would also like to underline that I do not see a problem in scholars' producing theology as long as this is clearly labelled as such, but I am puzzled by non-Muslim scholars who make Islamic theological claims and reprimand Muslims for their supposedly erroneous readings.

2018; Varisco 2005; Willerslev and Suhr 2018). However, studies of Muslims in Denmark have repeatedly demonstrated the influence of majority-minority dynamics in Muslim identity formation and religious beliefs (Kublitz 2016; Otterbeck 2000b, 2010; Schmidt 2007), thus indicating that we will not fully understand Muslim Islams without a clear understanding of non-Muslim Islams.

I have, together with my colleague Anders Ackfeldt, argued for the importance of studying non-Muslim Islams (Petersen and Ackfeldt forthcoming), but this is beyond the scope of this book. However, non-Muslim Islams represented by non-Muslim Islamic authorities in the form of politicians, debaters, scholars, and self-proclaimed experts play such an influential role in the making of the Mariam Mosque that I had to conceptualize the phenomenon here, if just briefly. Interestingly, the main theological resistance against Femimam in Danish media came from non-Muslim Islamic authorities, not from Muslim Islamic authorities. And even more interestingly, it seems to be the norm in Denmark that Islamic theological debate in public is between Muslims and non-Muslims.

## 6 A Note on Language

Linguistic precision is important, but researchers' languages are derived from everyday speech, which tends to describe the world as it appears to us while occasionally ignoring the knowledge we have about the world: the sun does not rise, it is earth that turns, and species do not evolve, it is just an effect caused by the survival of the fittest (Eco 1998: 23). Scholars within the humanities primarily study discursively constructed objects such as Islam, and the result of an analysis is communicated through language which re-constructs the object within the theoretical framework of a discipline. That is, the analysis of a discursively constructed object constitutes a discursive construction, created by the researcher and different from the original. Therefore, scholars within the humanities must carefully consider the language they use so as not to create objects that are not grounded empirically.

Commonly used expressions such as “interpretation *of* Islam” or “branches *of* Islam” which emphasize variation in Muslims' beliefs, create Islam as an undefined but stable point of reference. That is, these expressions create Islam as a linguistic byproduct; an Islam that exists independent of human interaction and communication. Using these expressions, scholars linguistically construct—even if this is unintended—an Islam that can be interpreted or an Islam existing metaphorically as a tree that supports its branches. This could

be called *speaking theologically* because of the similarity between Islam-as-a-byproduct and an emic idea among Muslims that Islam exist independently of human communication and interaction (cf. al-Azmeh 1993: 1–13; Varisco 2005: 3; el-Zein 1977).

Sometimes Islam-as-a-byproduct is constructed as a *dangerous supplement* (Derrida 1967/1997: 141–164). Olivier Roy for example writes that, “The Islamists engage in a political and social rereading of the Quran made possible precisely by the distortion of Muslim tradition” (Roy 1994: 40; cf. Köhler 1997). By categorizing Islamists’ reading of the Quran as a distortion, Roy constructs an Islam that is undistorted as a linguistic byproduct. This constitutes a dangerous supplement as Roy constructs an asymmetry between the authentic and the inauthentic (or distorted) Islam. This is also evident in Roy’s use of the verb rereading rather than reading, the latter leading to something more original than the former. Thus, Roy ends up passing judgement on an inherently theological question of orthodoxy instead of analyzing the power dynamics that in some spaces render Islamism orthodox to a segment of Muslims.

While it may be argued that scholars make up interpretive communities (Fish 1976), and the reductions of complexity are well understood among research, I argue that most of these reductions are unnecessary and disguise the actual research object under layers of abstraction, and sometimes scholars even end up studying the abstractions, conflating them with empirical data. In an attempt to demonstrate that European Muslims are active in the production of Islam, Mohammad Hashas (2018) titles a book chapter, “Does European Islam think?” without commenting on the absurdity of asking whether Islam has agency or not. Instead Hashas explains that there are two camps among scholars: the first, represented by Olivier Roy, postulates that European Islam does not think, while the other, represented by Jørgen S. Nielsen, postulates that it does. While Roy and Nielsen discuss what Muslims do—not what Islam does—Hashas moves the agency from Muslims to Islam. He argues Nielsen’s case and wants to make European Muslims’ contribution to ongoing theological discussions visible, but linguistically he attributes the agency to the abstract construct, European Islam, by making it the subject of verbs throughout most of the book chapter in sentences such as, “it [Islam] speaks and can be heard as a voice of alterity” (Hashas 2018: 43). Not only does Islam speak, it can also be heard. In other words, Hashas to some degree constructs the object that he analyzes and brings it to life in metaphoric language.

To say that Muslims interpret Islam is to adopt the emic idea of Islam existing independently of human interaction and communication as etic, but to say

that Muslims produce Islam is to frame this emic idea within an etic language that focuses attention on Muslims and what they do.<sup>14</sup>

To be clear, I am not arguing that only individual Muslims produce Islam; that is obviously not the case. It is well established within sociology that individuals cannot just emancipate themselves from structures and self-define as free agents (Berger and Luckmann 1991; Bourdieu 1991; Giddens 2013). However, whatever agency exists in a given context, this agency must be grounded in an entity that actually has the capacity to be an agent, either directly in the form of an individual or as a more abstract—but empirically grounded—entity.

For the reasons given above, I refrain from using a number of common expressions such as *of*-Islam sentences or saying that Muslims interpret Islam, as if such a thing existed independently of human communication and interaction. Instead, I either say that Muslims produce Islam or appropriate the Islamic tradition. This is a way of insisting on scientific humanities language with a clear distinction between emic and etic.

## 7 Overview of the Book

As briefly mentioned in the above, Chapter 3–5 provides an introduction and analysis of the agents and structures involved in the production of the Mariam Mosque. This is followed by chapter 6–10, which investigates the influence of serendipities in the production of the Mariam Mosque. These chapters are chronological organized so that Chapter 6 makes a genealogical analysis of the media serendipity which produced Femimam, and Chapter 7 investigates Femimam's planning to open a knowledge center. However, this planning did not produce results, and as I demonstrate in Chapter 8, which chronologically runs parallel to Chapter 7, the institution that later became the Mariam Mosque emerged in Khankan's and Mouna's responding to requests for Islamic rituals and Islamic juridical services. Femimam was not planning such activities, and the first women to request an Islamic divorce from Femimam was in fact referred to another mosque. However, these rituals and juridical services soon became defining characteristics of the mosque that emerged. In short, Chapter 7 and 8 together demonstrate that the Mariam Mosque was not planned but produced by Khankan's and Mouna's responding to events they had not anticipated.

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14 It should be noted that an etic perspective is not necessarily a non-Muslim perspective. Muslims may distinguish between emic and etic just as well as non-Muslims.



Chapter 9 focusses on the concept of pop-up mosque starting with the first time the Mariam Mosque was built and its first year of popping up once a month. It also contains an analysis of serendipities on the micro-level. Chapter 10 contains an ethnographic study focused on Mariam Mosque members' continuously facing the unpredictable, starting with the inauguration of the Mariam Mosque on 26 August 2016 and ending with its collapse on 4 July 2017. The last Chapter of the book analyzes how Khankan's political opponents successfully produced her identity as that of a radical Islamist in some knowledge spaces. The chapter, furthermore, contains an analysis of commodification of Khankan's narrative and reception of the Mariam Mosque among Muslim Islamic authorities in Denmark.

## 8 Comments on Translation and Transcription

A significant number of the sources for this project are in Danish and are therefore consistently translated into English, with original titles to be found in the bibliography. Likewise, all quotes are translated from Danish to English without providing the Danish original. In cases where the Danish wording may give Scandinavian- (and possibly German-)speaking readers a deeper understanding of the original Danish expression, I have provided this in square brackets. In the few instances where the original is in English, I make this explicit in the text or in a footnote.

Some terms used by Muslims are so integrated into English that they have a vernacular spelling, even if they are still considered loan words. Whenever this is the case, I use the English simplified version of the word such as the Quran rather than al-Qur'an and sharia rather than shari'a. These words will not be explained or italicized.

In some descriptions I use words that are not yet integrated into English such as *alima*, *nikah*, *wudu*, *dua*, and *salat al-zuhr*. These words are italicized the first time they appear in each chapter with a translation in brackets, and they are transcribed with the aim of making the terms readable rather than being zealous. Technically, this means I do not use diacritical marks nor special letters for hamza or 'ayn. This seems reasonable as no scholar within Islamic studies will be in doubt about what the terms are in Arabic and scholars outside the discipline will appreciate the simplified transcription.

I use Arabic as a reference point as this was most common in the Mariam Mosque. When a word takes a sound plural in Arabic, I use the English plural (-s), but when a word takes a broken plural in Arabic, I provide a transcription of this. That is, the plural of *khatiba* becomes *khatibas* rather than *khatibat*, but

the plural of *alim* becomes *ulama* rather than *alims*. However, in a few cases where the broken plural sounds very similar to the singular such as *madhahib*, I use the English plural (in this case, *madhhabs*). When broken plurals appear, they are explained in brackets.

# Ethnographic Methodology

I wanted to document and analyze the emergence the Mariam Mosque while it was taking place—however chaotic such an endeavor may be—rather than wait for it to pass and write about its emergence in retrospect. This posed some methodological challenges that I address in this chapter, the first being the ethnographic documentation of a chain of events. That is, collection of data that are diachronic rather than synchronic. My ethical considerations in relation to the study can be found in the appendix.

## 1 Events Happening Once

Ethnographers often presume a degree of stability in the objects they study. For example, Clifford Geertz famously collected data on fifty-seven cockfights before writing his thick description of the Balinese cockfight (Geertz 1973: 426). This is not to say that individual Balinese cockfights are always the same—that is obviously not the case—but after Geertz identified certain patterns of social interaction, he tested his ideas by continuing to observe cockfights until his description reached a state of saturation where his attendance at additional cockfights no longer added anything new to his understanding of the phenomenon. The present study, however, focus on a series of chained events happening only once, with subsequent events being affected by former ones. Time corrupts data in the study of such a chain of events because of retrospection (the reevaluation of past events in compliance with the present), and data that is not collected when produced may be lost forever.

When describing a chain of events, there is a temptation and a danger to produce a teleological progression, or a plot as it is called within literary studies (Bennett and Royle 2016: 56). If a plot arises it may create the illusion of a trajectory where every moment causes the next and all are given meaning by an overall structure:

We are able to read present moments—in literature and, by extension, in life—as endowed with narrative meaning only because we read them in anticipation of the structuring power of those endings that will retrospectively give them the order and significance of plot.

BROOKS 1984: 94

I have, therefore, collected data on dead ends, unrealized moments, and the everyday chaos of fieldwork, even if much of this data could be seen as superfluous to a plotted description of the chain of events. That is, rather than discard or give less priority to data collected that was rendered irrelevant by narratives erected at a later point in time, I have aimed at preserving the relevance and importance that this data was attributed with at the point in time when it was produced.

## 2 A Trail of Digital Data

The temporal progression of a chain of events renders all data collected pertinent to the time at which they were collected; indeed, this study has only been possible due to recent technological developments that have left a trail of digital data for me to follow, and because Skovgaard—with the expectation that the mosque would open in just four months—recorded almost all the events relevant to Sherin Khankan's project from the first time the founding members met on 24 April 2015. Her first recording begins with the members introducing themselves to each other, a necessary preliminary because, the founders of Femimam had not met before Skovgaard got on board.<sup>1</sup> The insights presented here would likely have been lost without her recordings. Working with Skovgaard, on the other hand, also meant that on a few occasions I had to abstain from being present; for example, she explicitly asked me to book alternative trains when I followed Khankan to Aarhus (Denmark) and Münster (Germany). These two scenes actually made it to the final cut of her documentary.

With a few restrictions,<sup>2</sup> and with the permission of the involved members of the Mariam Mosque, Skovgaard gave me access to her whole video library, spanning more than four years of recordings. I have not studied all the material systematically; there is simply too much data. However, I have used the record-

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1 Everyone had met Khankan, but they had not met each other.

2 Skovgaard, based on the principle of the right to a private life, restricted my access to scenes from Khankan's private life, such as family dinners and the abovementioned train ride to Aarhus, which was a family trip. That is, to gain access to these recordings I would have to ask Khankan's and her family's permission, which I did not do, as I am studying the pop-up mosque phenomenon, and Khankan herself only by extension. Likewise, there are a few recordings of spiritual care sessions in the Mariam Mosque that would require explicit permission from the people involved and I have not asked for this for ethical reasons, as these were vulnerable people who may have been anxious about the material's leaving Skovgaard's video library. That is, they had made a deal with Skovgaard that I would not try to renegotiate.

ings both as an archive to avoid retrospection and in some cases coded and used videos as sources for analysis.

To reconstruct events prior to Skovgaard's recordings, I have followed various types of digital trails to triangulate information gathered through interviews. Alan Bryman (2016: 643) remarks, "when a triangulation exercise is undertaken, the possibility of a failure to corroborate findings always exists. This raises the issue of what approach should be taken to inconsistent results." While I did get inconsistent results from my first series of interviews, the digital trail left behind by informants made it possible to reconstruct events.

Some information was available in the internal communication on Facebook, where the Mariam Mosque has both open and private groups, but several informants have also been helpful in putting internal communication via email and messaging at my disposal to produce accurate genealogies of developments from November 2014 to March 2015, which is important for the explanation of how Femimam emerged. I have also used databases that can provide information that informants could not provide, such as a web-crawler to date updates on websites, recovering details on the activities in Forum for Critical Muslims, and finding withdrawn articles and other information. The edit history on Wikipedia, which is publicly available, has also given me insights on the history of the convergence culture that produced some of the information that Khankan put to use in her activism.

In short, except for some overall strategic decisions (see next section), I have continually adapted my methodology to the situation or, as Pierre Bourdieu (1992/2007: 227) advises, mobilized "all the techniques that are relevant and practically usable, given the definition of the object and the practical conditions of data collection". This also means that the data for this project are not of a singular nature that can be easily described in an overview, and are therefore introduced and described more specifically in individual chapters.

Finally, and unrelated to the triangulation, I have gathered data in four media archives: Infomedia, Mediestream, TV2 Play, and Radio24Syv's online archives. The first is a searchable media archive that includes Danish print media and some references to radio and TV. The second is a media database that includes all state media productions of radio and TV. Material in this database is not tagged and is therefore only searchable in terms of program name, not content. The third and fourth are media archives restricted to TV2 and Radio24Syv which are partially state funded but have their own archives, which are searchable but not systematically tagged. Therefore, I have performed searches in Infomedia and used the three other archives to access specific broadcasts.

### 3 Interviews and Observation of Participants

During the fall of 2016, I interviewed four members of Femimam (Ellen Chakir, Saliha Marie Fetteh, Hicham Mouna, and Khankan) who were already on board before the first meeting on 24 April 2015 where Skovgaard shot her first scene. The interview guides were individually designed with a focus on the individuals' history with Femimam and their personal history before that. With the exception of Khankan and Mouna, who jointly founded Femimam by responding to a series of serendipities, I did not want the interviewees to reflect too much on Femimam as I did not want to influence the Mariam Mosque as a research object (Harvey 2014: 234). Instead I conducted factual interviews asking the interviewees to help me reconstruct the series of events that led to the emergence of Femimam (Brinkman and Kvale 2015: 176).

This turned out to be quite difficult as the interviewees could only remember bits and pieces and, when I compared the interviews, events appeared in different orders. Most of this was resolved through digital trails and, as the reconstruction progressed, I would make inquiries with the four interviewees and other people involved until I reached a state where I could not make any further progress. At this point only one event was unclear; there may have been a meeting in March 2015 where Khankan, Mouna, Jacob Holdt, and a few other members, who decided not to join Femimam, were present. That being said, the group that became Femimam did not meet before 24 April, which is when Skovgaard began her recordings.

Going forward I have tried to collect as much data as possible from observations in the mosque rather than situations such as interviews that were alien to the prevailing atmosphere, because I feared that the reflection that comes from asking questions in an interview could influence the chain of events. Instead I tried to be present as much as possible, going along with whatever happened and accepting all invitations whether I saw them as relevant or not (Harvey 2014).

Due to this methodological choice and out of curiosity I took some short, overnight journeys to follow Khankan around to events, and a four-day journey to Berlin with Mouna for the inauguration of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque in June 2017. I have, furthermore, travelled to South Africa for a week with a member of the mosque to meet Sheikh Fadhlalla Haeri, who is also an important inspiration for Khankan, and I also accepted an invitation to visit another member's sheikh in Somalia, but this trip never materialized. Finally, I got to know Fetteh—the woman who gave the first khutbah in the Mariam Mosque—on a personal level while I studied classical Arabic in Jordan for five months. Jordan was Fetteh's second home until she settled there permanently in the summer

of 2017 to open a bed and breakfast and teach Arabic; she also taught my wife basic Arabic during our stay.

Most interviews for this project are not recorded and constitute what H. Russell Bernard calls unstructured interviewing, although they are “based on a clear plan that you keep constantly in mind” (Bernard 2011: 157). During day-to-day fieldwork I kept a list of relevant questions on my cell phone that, at opportune moments, could be used to test hypotheses erected on previous observations, along with short interview guides for specific informants that I could likewise bring into play when an opportunity presented itself.

I would, for example, test hypotheses that emerged from the data by using probing techniques that seemed natural in the situations, such as, “I thought Halima was Shia, but I’m not sure?” to test whether members knew each other’s background (Bernard 2011: 156–171). It turned out that most did not. This kind of data collection plays an important role in Chapter 9, which is partially based on five semi-structured interviews framed as non-recorded casual conversations about the visuality of the Mariam Mosque in the spring of 2017. I call them casual as they were not the result of making appointments but rather of taking advantage of opportune moments, or doing informal interviewing as Bernard (2011: 156–157) calls it.<sup>3</sup> The interview guide was inspired by my observations in the preceding five months and thus they do not stand alone but are attempts to reach a state of saturation on a specific topic by intensifying data collection. Unfortunately, the reflections emerging from even these casual conversations motivated Khankan to want to change the appearance of the mosque; however, this never materialized and was soon forgotten.

When I ended my field work in June 2017, I set up recorded interviews with three young and very active members of Femimam structured around both their religious lives before the Mariam Mosque and their thoughts on subjects such as female-led Friday prayer and interfaith nikah between Muslim women and non-Muslim men. These interviews were a combination of conceptual and narrative interviews (Brinkman and Kvale 2015: 176–181), a type of interview that entails a significant amount of reflection on the part of the interviewee, which would have constituted an intervention if they had taken place prior to the final month of my involvement. Furthermore, conducting the interviews at that stage meant that I could write interview guides informed by previous observations, which sparked conversations about what we had experienced together (Harvey 2014).

Using the same approach—but a different interview guide—I also set up a recorded interview with Khankan because the formal setting made it easier

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3 I made interviewees aware that I was asking questions related to my research (see Chapter 9).

to focus on specific topics at length and produced a situation in which it was, to a much greater degree, socially acceptable for me to set the agenda. Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale encourage researchers to reflect on the power asymmetry between researcher and informant as it can lead interviewees to “more or less deliberately express what they believe the interviewer authority wants to hear” (Brinkman and Kvale 2015: 38). While too great a power asymmetry may be problematic and produce poor quality data, I took advantage of it in my interview with Khankan, as the power asymmetry made her take on her formal role of imam. I had more casual conversations with the other leading members, while taking notes to lessen the power asymmetry as much as possible.<sup>4</sup>

In short, my ethnographic study of the mosque has been conducted through observation of participants, semi-structured interviews, and keeping two diaries: one to record events and the other to record reflections, hypothesize, and identify patterns (Bernard 2011: 256–305). All the methodologies have focused on using techniques of data collection that minimize intervention while postponing data collection that may cause reflection until the end of the study.

The primary difficulty with the postponement was that the Mariam Mosque started to disintegrate in late May 2017, but at the time no one knew that this crisis would lead to its collapse and, thus, it did not have a great effect on the three semi-structured interviews with young members of the Mariam Mosque, which were conducted early in June. Had I waited another month the events that led to the collapse would have corrupted the data as it partially resulted from the re-evaluation of past events.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4 On Influencing the Data

As Harvey (2014: 234) points out, “The asking of questions and the act of participant observation can, like all acts of observation, cause changes in that which researchers observe ... in some respects it is true that the scholarly task (to understand religion) is quite distinct from the religious task (to do religion).” In other words, it is impossible to completely avoid influencing a research object

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4 During my fieldwork I made observations while some of these leading members represented the Mariam Mosque during visits by gymnasium and college classes and, on occasion, when they represented the Mariam Mosque in intra-Muslim contexts.

5 The collapse of the Mariam Mosque is not described in detail as it does not contribute much to the analysis. It was a single event that led to an escalation of existing conflicts and tensions, and I therefore focus on the latter in Chapter 10.



when doing participant observation, and there is no getting around this, even if reduced to an absolute minimum by positioning oneself as an observant participant.

Undoubtedly, Skovgaard and I have in some ways influenced the Mariam Mosque and changed Khankan's trajectory. Most of this is insignificant; for example, I gave Khankan and Mouna a copy of my book *From Harem to Islamic Feminism—Women's Gender Struggle in Egypt* as a present at Khankan's first lecture in my class, and at the next lecture I noticed that Khankan had added Nabawiyya Musa, an Egyptian feminist mentioned in the book, to her list of heroines (Petersen 2014). I also published a book called *The Women of Medina—Imams, Scholars, and Warriors* on 9 September 2016, a date falling between the two first Friday prayers (Petersen 2016). This is based on Ibn Saad's *Tabaqaat al-Kabir* and focusses on women who played an active role in Medina at the time of Mohammad, Umm Waraqa among others. The book, in which I explicitly declare myself a non-believer, is written as a piece of world history; however, readers may approach it as Islamic feminist literature. Khankan already knew the relevant hadiths on woman-led prayer contained in the book, although from a different source text, but when Femimam was collecting books for a library in the Mariam Mosque I donated a surplus of both books that could be given away for free to mosque visitors.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Khankan did not read the book in full until after the inauguration of the Mariam Mosque.

While on a research tour in the spring of 2017 to Johannesburg (South Africa), Los Angeles and San Francisco (USA), Toronto (Canada), and Bradford (United Kingdom) to visit well known Islamic feminists, I interviewed Amina Wadud, among others, in San Francisco. At my request, she signed and wrote a congratulatory note to Khankan in a copy of her book, *Quran and Woman: Re-Reading the Sacred Scripture from a Woman's Perspective*, which I had brought with me. I then visited Rabia Keeble who was about to open the Qal'bu Mariam Mosque with female imams and mixed gender Friday prayer in Berkley. When I presented Wadud's book to Khankan and told her about my tour she started thinking about visiting San Francisco herself. Soon after, when Skovgaard received an extra grant for her film, it was settled that they would shoot some scenes there, with Khankan giving a Friday sermon in the Qal'bu Mariam Mosque, leading the subsequent prayer, and engaging in a panel debate with Wadud and Keeple at Berkley University. The interaction and arrangement of these events were out of my hands as soon as I had established

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<sup>6</sup> The first donation took place before the inauguration and I have subsequently resupplied the Mariam Mosque with this book.

the contact between Wadud and Keeble on the one hand and Khankan and Skovgaard on the other.

## 5 What This Study Does Not Include

There has been a constant influx and exodus of members in Femimam, and the project they worked on repeatedly morphed and changed direction. This meant that I had to make difficult decisions on what data to collect and what to pay less attention to. I could, for example, have done follow-up interviews with couples who had married or divorced in the mosque and, as a way to pursue dead ends, I could have contacted the many members who left. However, the ethnographic study and merely keeping up with the Mariam Mosque networks was already proving difficult and, when Khankan recruited a further network of young volunteers in the spring of 2017, I suddenly had two social circles to track and engage with. With a calendar dedicated to being present as much as possible, I was the only person who had time to follow almost all the youth meetings, meetings between the leaders, events in the mosque, private social events, and so on. Other members would typically prioritize their presence as they had to balance attendance with full time work and/or studies, and possibly NGO participation and other volunteer work.

Despite dedicating my time to field work, I still had to prioritize, and my choice was to focus on the mosque as an object of study. In the hours after Friday prayer I would spend time in the lounge or prayer hall making observations, while Khankan gave spiritual care in the back office. This means that I have not collected data on Khankan administering spiritual care, even though she sees this as a core function of being an imam. However, as I did not know what I was going to find in my field work and what data would at a later stage become important, I adapted my prioritizations throughout field work by continuously hypothesizing and reflecting on the data collected in my second diary.

This book is in no way a comprehensive account of femimam and the Mariam Mosque. The data for the project is too voluminous to present in full, and I have therefore selected data for analysis based on what looked most promising. For example, I do not at any point mention the content of Friday prayers, although I watched all of them on video, and I only follow very few of the dead ends that I have observed.

## Muslims in Denmark

The earliest official statistics we have on Muslims in Denmark is from a census in 1880 where just eight were counted: six women and two men (Jacobsen 2011),<sup>1</sup> a number that rose significantly when Denmark joined the European-wide search for migrant labor in the late 1960s. Approximately 2,000 Muslims had arrived by 1968, many of whom belonged to the Ahmadi community which built Denmark's first mosque in 1967 (Nielsen and Otterbeck 2016: 84). This community included a significant number of converts, one of whom, Abdul Salam Madsen, made the first translation of the Quran into Danish in 1967, which was the only one available until three new translations were published in response to rising demand in 2006, 2014, and 2015 (Westh 2017). Immigration was almost unrestricted until 1973 when a new law put a full stop to labor migration while continuing to allow family reunification (Nielsen and Otterbeck 2016: 84). By 1980 there were around 29,400 Muslims in Denmark, but this number rose to approximately 256,000 Muslims by 2020, making up 4.4% of the population (Jacobsen and Vinding 2020).<sup>2</sup>

Whereas early migrants arrived in search of labor, later migration was dominated by refugees and family reunifications. The demographic composition of the Muslim population in Denmark represents around 60 nationalities and no minority makes up more than 9% of the population with the exception of Turks and Syrians who make up 18.8% and 11.8%, respectively (Jacobsen 2007; Jacobsen and Vinding 2019: 206–207). In other words, the Muslim population in Denmark is very diverse, maybe even hyper diverse as Garbi Schmidt (2009: 42) argues with reference to Steven Vertovec (1996) and his analysis of the difficulty of formulating policies that take this diversity into account.

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- 1 Of course, Islam had already arrived in Denmark long before. The production of ideas about Islam can be found as early as the era of the Vikings (Kleingärtner and Williams 2013; Simonson 1990). Some Vikings even seem to have converted to Islam (Sorgenfrei 2018). Although very small, the presence of Muslims, or discourses relating to Islam, in Scandinavia seems to be continuous until the present day (Jacobsen 2011; Schmidt 2021; Sorgenfrei 2019, 2021). The production of Islam after the Viking era and prior to the 1960s can be summed up in two major trends: a discourse drawing from Christian polemics and an Orientalist discourse exploring an imagined original Islam.
  - 2 These two numbers are calculated in different ways as Brian Arly Jacobsen, due to the availability of a better data set in 2019, changed the calculation method (Jacobsen and Vinding 2020).

The vast majority of people engaged in the Mariam Mosque are children of Muslim immigrants who arrived in Denmark at some point after the late 1960's. Thus, they constitute the first generation of Muslims born and raised in Denmark as a religious minority. A few members are converts, such as Saliha Marie Fetteh, but their life stories are often intertwined with migration history as their becoming Muslim is the outcome of interaction with Muslims living in Denmark.

## 1 Strategy and Tactics

Inspired by Michel de Certeau's (2011) distinction between strategies and tactics, Linda Woodhead (2016) develops the idea of tactical as opposed to strategic religion. In short, religious institutions employ strategies whereas individual believers employ tactics in their everyday lived religion (Woodhead 2016: 15–20). Strategic religion controls time, administers ritual performances, defines religious knowledge in some knowledge spaces, and attempts to discipline the individual into correct practice. Strategic religion is characterized by its holding believers accountable for their private beliefs if they choose to utter these in public.

While strategy may also be seen as a technological power that disciplines the individual (Foucault 1991), de Certeau understands it as a structure within which the individual navigates, noting that, “the space of the tactic is the space of the other. Thus, it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power ... [a tactic] is a maneuver ‘within the enemy’s field of vision,’ as von Bülow puts it” (Certeau 2011: 37). Strategy and tactics metaphorically describe the form power takes depending on strength: the strong employ strategy while a “tactic is an art of the weak” (Certeau 2011: 37).

However, de Certeau cautions scholars not to assume that all relations between the stronger and the weaker are conflictual or competitive as this analytical framework may significantly distort how informants understand power dynamics (Certeau 2011: 24–25; cf. Abu-Lughod 1990). Studies have demonstrated that individual believers maneuver and may even outmaneuver strategic religion when they practice their everyday lived religion, sometimes within an institutional framework that exerts strategic power (Heelas et al. 2005; Jeldtoft 2011; McGuire 2008; Otterbeck 2010).

Although Islam is often reified as a unit in Danish media and politics, productions of Islams in Denmark are developed in relation to a number of different agents exercising strategic power, among them the Danish state, for-

eign states, media, and Muslim institutions, although the latter merely exercise strategic power within the confines of the national communities to which they belong. For that reason Muslim communities have also been unable to form a proper representative body or respond to journalists and politicians as a group, even when they are under severe pressure to do so (Kühle and Larsen 2017: 79–81).

## 2 Islamic Institutions in Denmark

In 1990, the first partial mapping of mosques in Denmark demonstrated that these were segregated along denominational and national lines (Simonsen 1990). Two later mappings in 2006 and 2017 demonstrate that this is still the case, but to a lesser degree (Kühle 2006; Kühle and Larsen 2017).

In 2017 there were approximately 170 mosques in Denmark, and their composition reflect the high demographic diversity of Muslims. Of these, the Mariam Mosque belongs to a group of just four mosques that does not follow the pattern of denominational and national segregation; instead, these four mosques have highly diverse congregations.<sup>3</sup> The most common location for mosques in Denmark is old industrial buildings and apartments, and thus the location of the Mariam Mosque is normal in a Danish context. In 2021, only nine mosques in Denmark were purpose built and merely four of them had minarets (Jensen and Petersen 2022).

The latest mapping project also concluded that while some mosques are funded by foreign states or transnational organizations, the majority of mosques in Denmark reflect a typical way of organizing in associations (*foreninger*), which means that they have members that fund them with regular contributions (Kühle and Larsen 2017: 50), although many mosques are struggling economically and cannot afford to pay salaries. Only around 33% of Sunni imams in Denmark receive a salary and the majority of these are Turkish imams paid for by Diyanet. This means that most Danish Sunni imams are volunteers who perform this role in their spare time and only around 70% of Sunni mosques have an imam with some form of religious education (Kühle and Larsen 2017: 52–54).

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3 Kühle and Larsen's list includes a "mosque" called Musallah situated in a shopping mall, which I have excluded because I consider it a *musallah* (prayer room). This also fits the description given by Kühle and Larsen: they explain that it is a room made available by the shopping mall and it therefore has no board or organization behind it (Kühle and Larsen 2017: 45). An imam leads the daily prayers for around 50–100 people, but no Friday prayer is held in this musallah.

In other words, the Mariam Mosque, which is an association that does not pay salaries but relies on volunteers, resemble other Danish mosques in terms of organizational structure, economy, location, and it being run by volunteers. The pop-up feature may be seen as different but because other mosques in Denmark, Germany, and Sweden have also existed as pop-up mosques before becoming permanent (Petersen 2019b) this should not be overstated.

### 3 Danish Born Muslims' Producing Islam

Out of 55,000 Muslim children between 5–18 years of age in 2012, approximately 4,000 attended Muslim private schools and 6,300 attended Islam classes in a mosque in any given week (Bisbjerg 2011: 41–42; Nielsen and Otterbeck 2016: 88). As the latter number is a mere snapshot of attendance, the accumulated number of children receiving religious instruction is likely to be much higher.

With the exception of Khankan and the converts, almost all other members of the Mariam Mosque who are descendants of Muslim parents have attended either a Muslim private school or a mosque where they received religious instruction. However, none of them internalized the teachings as intended by their teachers; instead they employed tactics, which, according to Woodhead, is a general pattern:

Many second- and third-generation European Muslims are skeptical about the religious authority of parents and mosque leaders. Instead, they turn directly to the Quran, which they interpret for themselves, perhaps in dialogue with peers, and charismatic preachers whom they find to be authentic. The primary intention is a tactical one: to appropriate religious truth in a way which can make sense of “my” life, and “my” identity—a process which some have described as an “individualisation” of Islam ...

WOODHEAD 2016: 18

In his study of “nine young Muslims who do not invest all their time or social prestige in being as though through Muslims as possible” Jonas Otterbeck (2010: 15) demonstrates how his Danish and Swedish informants’ Islam is grounded in their everyday lives and identity formation. Thus, the young peoples’ Islams are produced in the present context, and while it may be inspired and affected by older generations’ Islams, it is significantly different at the same time. This pattern has also been found by Garbi Schmidt (2007) who in her study of Muslim youth movements in Denmark explains that her informants were unhappy

with the Islams preached in the mosques founded by their parents' generation, mostly because it was not meaningful or practical to them.

In his study of Islamic history, Richard W. Bulliet (1994: 183) remarks that "what makes the question-and-answer motif distinctive in Islamic religious history is the variability over time of the parties deemed capable of answering questions authoritatively". It would seem, based on Otterbeck's and Schmidt's studies (and my own study as presented in later chapters) that a significant variable in relation to obtaining the authority to answer questions on Islam is based on what answers one gives: these must be meaningful and practical.

Muslim teachers may employ strategies such as religious instruction to transmit their Islam from one generation to the next but, as Woodhead remarks, students may tactically produce an Islam that is meaningful to themselves and only partially in continuity with the Islam they have been taught. This simultaneous continuity and rupture became more evident when the first generation of Muslims, who had grown up in Denmark, started to found youth organizations, as these constituted religious spaces that were less structured by the strategic Islams of established mosques (Schmidt 2007).

#### 4 Youth Organizations

While the religious instruction provided in the abovementioned institutions can be seen as an attempt to secure continuity of religious practice after migration, descendants began to found their own organizations starting in the late 1980s (Schmidt 2009). More youth organizations had been established by the turn of the century which, despite their not having more than approximately 1,000 members between them, were still significant in that at an early stage they became representatives of Islam in Danish media and many contemporary Muslim leaders, including Sherin Khankan, started their career in them (Schmidt 2007: 50).

In 2001, Khankan (b. 1974), together with Henrik Plaschke, an associate professor at Aalborg University, founded Forum for Critical Muslims (*Forum for Kritiske Muslimer*), which encouraged "Danish secularly oriented Muslims" to engage in public debate and argue against both monolithic representations of Muslims in Danish media and "Danish Muslims who neither accept diversity nor secularity":

Only God has the right to enunciate definite truths. The rest is interpretation, and Islam does not give us an indication of different interpretations' correctness. The imam's answer is merely one interpretation among many

possibilities, and it should be evaluated on equal terms with these. Thus, the criteria for this evaluation becomes important, and they cannot be just theological. Other forms of knowledge must be included on equal terms with religious knowledge.

KHANKAN and PLASCHKE 2001

While Forum for Critical Muslims, like any other youth organization, had its unique characteristics, it resembled most other groups in that it propelled its leadership into public debate, and it created a forum for discussion and practice of Islam that was not, or only partially, structured by strategic religion. This is also evident in the quote above where the imam's interpretation is reduced to one among many possibilities, all equally valid.

The youth organizations neither rebelled against nor made a clean break with strategic religion (Schmidt 2007). They were a consequence of tactics employed by young people who would still attend rituals such as Friday prayer in the established mosques. This pattern is repeated among some congregants of the Mariam Mosque who regularly attend Friday prayer in other mosques but also complain about the content of the Friday sermons and the rules, or strategies, that regulate these mosque spaces. That is, they were looking for an alternative mosque space and that is their reason for coming to the Mariam Mosque.

## 5 Women's Authority and Possible Role as Imams

Aminah Tønnsen, a Danish convert and autodidact religious authority who has written several books on Islam, suggested female imams in a piece published on 10 January 2003 in *Weekendavisen*, titled "Why not female imams?":

According to Abu Dawood, the Prophet Mohammad allegedly appointed an older Meccan woman, Umm Waraqa, to lead the prayer for her own house, both for women and men ... Around the country Muslim women teach and lead prayer for small groups of women. I am sure that there are some among them that will be capable of leading the prayer and delivering the Friday sermon in a responsible way for a larger congregation of women—and men for that matter. In most mosques in the country, women have separate prayer rooms, which are connected with the imam in the men's prayer room via a loudspeaker. So, a female imam would not risk disturbing the men's ability to concentrate. In fact, nothing more is required than installing loudspeakers that work the other way around!



But in order not to shock them too much, women could start by just holding their own Friday prayer. It cannot be that hard just to push the off-button on the loudspeakers. I am sure that a new kind of Friday sermon will come along that is so exciting that the men, when the initial fright has settled, will become curious and want to listen in.

TØNNSEN 2003

By suggesting that women should “push the off-button on the loudspeakers” Tønnsen challenges strategic religion in the space where it is strongest. She breaches what Alberto Melucci (1996a: 24) calls the “*the limits of compatibility* of the social system of relationships within which the action takes place”,<sup>4</sup> which he defines “as the range of variability in the systemic states that enables a system to maintain its structure” (Melucci 1996a: 24). Tønnsen is not suggesting a tactic but a rebellion: that the weak through collective social action play the role of the powerful and employ a strategy that will alter the space which is currently structured by the strategy that bans women from delivering the Friday sermon. To employ strategy is what social movements are made of, but this is a fundamentally different type of struggle than the tactics employed by the youth organizations.

A year earlier, on 14 January 2002, Khankan had already published an article called “Female imams wanted”, in which she argued for the legitimacy of female imams and her youth organization, Forum for Critical Muslims, later published a manifest in 2006 which suggested Friday prayer with a *khatiba* (female Friday preacher) who would deliver the Friday sermon to a mixed gender congregation and then lead prayer for the women while a male imam led the prayer for men (Khankan 2002c; Khankan et al. 2006). Both ideas remained unrealized.

Tønnsen’s opinion piece demonstrates that Khankan was not the only Muslim who envisioned female imams. Rather, the two abovementioned opinion pieces by Tønnsen and Khankan imply the emerging demand for female imams among a segment of Danish Muslims—a demand that is also implied in polls. In 2008 Catinét Research (2009: 71–72) asked refugees and immigrants from Turkey, Pakistan, former Yugoslavia, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Lebanon (refugees with Palestinian origin), “What do you think about the idea of a female imam?”. The result divided the respondents into three groups of equal size: 29% in favor, 27% neither in favor nor opposed to the idea, and 28% opposed. Catinét Research’s poll is rather simple, and it is unclear what exactly is meant by a

4 Emphasis is in the original.

female imam. One interpretation may be that it means a female equivalent to the male imam, but another interpretation is suggested by Kühle and Larsen's (2017) observation that in some Bosnian and Turkish mosques female teachers were sometimes addressed as imams. That is, female imam can also be interpreted as an *ustadha* (female teacher).

This chapter has demonstrated the ruptures between the Islam of Muslim immigrants and descendants, analysed as emerging demands catered to by youth organizations, among others' Khankans Forum for Critical Muslims. In Chapter 5 I will elaborate on the emergence of the specific demand for female imams, but before that, I will introduce Khankan in Chapter 4 as one of the main drivers behind the emergence of the Mariam Mosque.

## Sherin Khankan

Half of my roots are from Damascus where Paul underwent his conversion and real Christianity was born. Christianity spread from East to West and Jesus' message became my mother's faith. Later a new prophet arrived and that became my father's faith.

KHANKAN 2002a

Khankan was born in 1974 to parents who had both immigrated to Denmark in the early 1970s—her father as a political refugee and her mother as a nurse looking for work. Dogma boundaries based on strategic religion did not play a role in Khankan's upbringing; she would hear her father's Quran recitation and join her mother when she went to church, but she was neither raised Christian nor Muslim. Khankan often calls herself a *halfie* or a *both-and* as opposed to *either-or* (see for example Khankan 2001a, 2010a).

Khankan did not get a traditional religious upbringing but embraced Islam in 1993 at the age of 19 when she fell in love with a Muslim man. This was also when Khankan registered her nickname Sherin (the sweet one) as a part of her otherwise Christian first name, Ann Christine.<sup>1</sup> While the relationship did not last, Khankan matriculated at Copenhagen University in the mid-1990s where she took a master's degree in sociology of religion and philosophy. As part of this degree students are required to learn the language of a major religion and, in February 1999, Khankan traveled to Syria for a four-month Arabic language course at Damascus University, which led to a further seven months conducting fieldwork for her MA thesis starting in December 1999. When Khankan tells her story, she observes that this is where she started to consider the possibility of the Friday sermon and subsequent prayer being delivered by a woman.

However, before going any further with Khankan's life story, a theoretical question on perspective needs to be addressed. Asking about the origin of Khankan's idea of female imams will inevitably result in retrospective construction of a trajectory that explains the present. That is, as a researcher I am not observing this life story in real time, I approach it retrospectively through the sources I have available, or as Alberto Melucci puts it:

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1 Around 2000, Khankan stopped using the name Ann Christine on publications. The last publication marked A.C. Sherin Khankan is, with the exception of her book *Islam and Redemption* (Khankan 2006b: 11), a book chapter from 2002 (Khankan 2002d).

While we remain aware that the future is born of the past, it is equally true that the past is also continuously shaped by the future. Whenever we confront the possible—as planning for the future—when we make a decision and anticipate the action to come, the past is re-examined, amended, and given a new meaning. We thus continually rewrite our own pasts and that of the world. Our memory is selective and reconstructs history and biography according to a project for the future.

MELUCCI 1996b: 12

The retrospection in this chapter poses a complication. Had Femimam not emerged, I would not have written on Khankan's ideas of female imams and, had interreligious Islamic marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men not become such an important part of her activism, this would not have constituted a section in this chapter as it plays an insignificant role in her authorship at best.

My researching Khankan's authorship and interviewing her is due to the emergence of the Mariam Mosque in 2016. There has for example never been a study of the Muslim Manifest in which Khankan and others in 2006 announced their intention to introduce female imams in Denmark (Khankan et al. 2006). The manifest was published in the largest newspaper in Denmark, *Politiken*, but as the authors' plans never materialized it did not become a research question. That is, the relevance criteria for this analysis—and thus focus of the chapter—is retrospective even though it applies a genealogical approach in the analysis of the selected material.

This retrospection-on-purpose also means that some material, which plays a significant role in Khankan's authorship, is not included in the analysis because it is oriented towards other parts of Khankan's life and engagements. Khankan is, for example, also a mother of four, but while this may play a major role in Khankan's life, it plays no role in the analysis, and her book written for Muslim parents, *Paradise lies at Your Mother's Feet*, is not included in the literature on which this chapter is based. Although I discuss some of Khankan's activism and political career, I do not attempt to give an exhaustive or complete account of her authorship or life.

This chapter has four purposes. The first is to identify “possibilities that were not realized” (Foucault 1994a: 369) because only then is it meaningful in Chapter 5 to ask why Khankan's announcement of a mosque with female imams on 5 March 2015 was realized, unlike earlier announcements. This does not mean that the chapter identifies the origin of Khankan's ideas, because, “as it is wrong to search for decent in an uninterrupted continuity, we should avoid accounting for emergence by appeal to its final term” (Foucault 1994a: 376).

While Khankan says she had not considered female imams before her time in Damascus, she also describes her father as a feminist and claims that she has, through her upbringing and education, been formed in a way that makes her expect equality between men and women. In other words, the origin of Khankan's idea of female imams "lies at a place of inevitable loss" (Foucault 1994a: 372).

The second purpose is to give a rich introduction to an accumulation of semiotic resources that has played a role in Khankan's development of a Islamic marriage ritual that uses Quranic references but also quotes philosophers, poets, and sometimes the Bible if the marriage is interreligious between a Muslim and a Christian.

The third purpose is to give an introduction to Khankan's religious views within a framework that is not politicized. When Khankan started her political career in 2001, she was immediately seen through a politicized lens that made some characteristics hypervisible while obscuring others. To mark as clearly as possible the contrast between Khankan's views as she expresses them, and as they appear in the media, I only use empirical material that Khankan has produced herself.

The fourth purpose is to introduce Khankan's abovementioned politicized identity and lay out a theoretical framework within which it can be analyzed. Khankan has continuously been produced as a radical Islamists by some non-Muslims and a few secular Muslims since an event in 2002. This phenomenon of primarily non-Muslims' producing Khankan's Muslim identity plays a role in Chapter 5–11, but in Chapter 11 I venture into an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon.

Thus, overall, the chapter establishes, at least partly, the discursivity of Sherin Khankan, and it provides details that are important for understanding her speech, writing, and actions. The chapter is based on two semi-structured interviews with Khankan on 4 November 2016 and 15 June 2017 and a selection of Khankan's authorship: two books (Khankan 2006b, 2010b), two book chapters (Khankan 2002d, 2005), sixty opinion pieces, thirty-six blog posts on a web forum called religion.dk, and Khankan's MA thesis at Copenhagen University. As it is important that the chapter reflect Khankan's position in a way that she can recognize herself, I asked her to read the final draft for the chapter. She found it a balanced and representative account of her discourse and did not suggest revisions.

## 1 Education, Damascus, and Fieldwork in the Abu Nur Mosque

During her first stay in Damascus in February 1999, Khankan met an Ibn al-Arabi scholar, Ryad Atlagh, who both introduced her to Ibn al-Arabi and taught her one of his main works, the *Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fusus al-Hikam*): a book that, among other topics, focuses on dissolving dichotomies, the singularity of existence (*wahdat al-wujud*),<sup>2</sup> and reaching perfection as a human being (*al-insan al-kamil*) (Abrahamov 2015). In addition to Ibn al-Arabi, Khankan started to research Sufism and became particularly inspired by Rabia al-Adawiyya, a famous female Sufi saint. Like Ibn Arabi, she taught the dissolving of dichotomies, but she is primarily famous due to hagiographic narratives that present her piety as much admired and far beyond her contemporaries' practice, setting up an ideal that her followers can aspire to emulate (Smith 2001).

Khankan's interest in Ibn al-Arabi inspired her to visit his tomb, located close to the Abu Nur Mosque where the grand mufti of Syria, Ahmad Kuf-taro, preached until his death in 2004 (Stenberg 1999). After a short visit to the mosque, Khankan decided to return to Damascus in December 1999 for seven months of fieldwork among the female activists in the mosque for her MA thesis, *Islamic activism in Syria: The Islamic awakening in the Abu Nur Mosque in Damascus seen through the grand mufti of Syria Sheikh Ahmad Kuf-taro's sermons and its female members' interpretations* (Khankan 2002b).<sup>3</sup> The theoretical foundation for much of what Khankan would write and discuss in public debates afterwards is present both in her first opinion piece from 1999 and in this final thesis (Khankan 1999).

With reference to Michel Foucault's "Discipline and Punish" (1991), Khankan explains that the power to define knowledge is unevenly distributed in society; meanwhile, drawing on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979/2003), she also suggests that people often define themselves in opposition to others who thereby become their ontological Other. Thus, the Occident identifies itself as civilized and peaceful by attributing the ontological negative—uncivilized and barbaric—to the Orient. With inspiration from Sadiq Jalal al-Azm (1981/2000), she expands on this to observe that the Orient also defines itself by comparison

2 In writing this I am aware that Ibn Arabi never used this term, but it has later been attributed to him. William Chittick (2019) explains that "[t]he first author to say that Ibn 'Arabi believed in *wahdat al-wujud* seems to have been the Hanbalite polemicist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who called it worse than unbelief". However, as I am studying how Islam is produced in contemporary Denmark, or in this case, the reception of the idea of al-Ibn Arabi—not the actual Ibn al-Arabi—I have ignored this historical detail.

3 Khankan wrote her MA thesis in Danish. The quotes are, therefore, my translation into English.

with the Occident as its ontological Other, describing it as decadent, materialistic, mechanical, Darwinian, Marxist, secular, liberal, and imperialistic. Specific constructions may vary and Khankan makes no exaggerated claims nor does she try to generalize based on this well-known semantic observation; she merely notes the existence of the phenomenon and claims that the power to define knowledge about Islam in Danish media is asymmetrically distributed in favor ethnic Danes who do not necessarily know much about Islam and therefore present their prejudices as Muslim beliefs.

Much of Khankan's struggle in the public sphere has been oriented towards defining knowledge in opposition to the pronouncements of what she calls pseudo-specialists (Khankan 2006c). This debate has specifically revolved around the definition of sharia, which Khankan, like many other Muslims, understands as ritual instructions and ethics (Khankan 2007, 2011c). However, because this term has been politicized in the Danish media and is frequently associated with barbaric punishment and terrorism, Khankan, like other Danish Muslims, cannot publicly embrace sharia, even as she defines it herself, without causing an outcry.

Khankan's struggle to defy and change what non-Muslims take to be common knowledge about Islam has also involved issues such as questioning what constitutes a defining moment in history. In a commemorative speech one year after al-Qaida's coordinated attacks on the USA east coast on 11 September 2001, Khankan questions why some tragedies are seen as more important than others and highlights the premises of this construction:

This is not the right time to direct attention towards the terror and injustice that has overcome the Palestinians, Jews, or the children of Iraq or Rwanda. But maybe at a later time we can consider why some people's lives seem to be more valuable than others. Maybe this is where the seed of terrorism is buried. However, now it is time for silence and reflection.

KHANKAN 2002a

Khankan uses her academic background to identify and analyze power asymmetries and how discourses are constructed, but she is also an activist who speaks out against power, and who builds bridges between academic theory and religious concepts. Based on the work of Berger and Luckmann (1991), Khankan explains that the meeting with an Other can result in two processes, therapy or negation, noting, "With therapy one tries to incorporate the foreign into one's own world view, and with negation one attributes a negative ontological status to the foreign" (Khankan 2002b: 22). The concept of therapy and Ibn al-Arabi's and al-Adawiyya's attempt to dissolve dichotomies appear

to be two different ways of understanding Othering for Khankan, each with its own back catalogue of discourse. That is, Khankan describes the dissolving of dichotomies as therapy from a theoretical academic point of view, but she also expresses it by quoting Ibn Arabi, “A faith or dogmatism that denies other creeds also denies the Truth which is the common root that all beliefs emerge from” (Khankan 2011a). There are many overlaps between Khankan’s theoretical academic approach and her Sufi approach, and likewise there are areas where the dissolving of dichotomies is oriented towards religion only. The latter is reflected in the following quotation by al-Adawiyya, which Khankan often repeats:

God, if I strive for You because of fear for hell—burn me there. If I strive for You because I want paradise—shut me out! But if I strive for You because of You and nothing else, then do not deny me your endless beauty. I carry a lamp in one hand and a pitcher of water in the other: with these two I shall light heaven on fire and extinguish the fire in hell, so that the travelers to God can rip the curtain to the side and see the true goal.

KHANKAN 2006b: 54

Khankan wrote her MA thesis within a post-Said orientalist academic tradition, with the Arabist and historian of religion, Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, as her supervisor. This means that, in addition to her personal religious beliefs, she observes Islam from a researcher’s perspective, providing an overview of theological developments, such as those instigated by the *islah* reformers of 19th century Egypt, as well as the emergence of different Islamisms in the 20th century. She also notes that Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida understood sharia’s role in society as ethical, whereby “the idea that jurisprudence [*fiqh*] should dictate the political structure of society is exchanged with the idea of jurisprudence as ethical guidance” (Khankan 2002b: 40).

Khankan does not adhere to an essentialized view of Islam as a singular phenomenon, and in her MA thesis she notes several Islamic ideals, such as the dissolving of dichotomies, which she herself endorses, from a researcher’s perspective. In what follows I provide a single example of this to illustrate how this stance has influenced her way of building the Mariam Mosque as an inclusive space.

Khankan uses Berger and Luckmann (1991) to demonstrate how her informants to some extent define themselves in opposition to both Syrian society and the Occident, while also claiming to dissolve this dichotomy as part of their adherence to Sufi doctrines. She points out that Ahmad Kuftaro claims that the three Abrahamic religions have a common root and that all religions emerge



from a common universal religion, yet repeatedly assumes Islam to be superior to other religions (Khankan 2002b: 42, 49, 35, 65, 75, 77). Likewise, he creates a dichotomy between the members of his Sufi order and regular Syrians who live in a state of *jahiliyya* (pre-Islamic ignorance), the nodal point in this discourse being the idea of *hijra* (exodus) to his Islam (Khankan 2002b: 101). Khankan remarks that, according to Kuftaro, the state of *jahiliyya* is not a matter of formal knowledge of scripture and Islamic traditions, because he makes the same claim about the *ulama* (Islamic clergy):

He [Kuftaro] believes that the reason Muslims have not successfully reconciled the religions through the bond of faith is due to the *ulama*'s orthodox and erroneous interpretation of the Quran. According to Kuftaro, the *ulama* has distorted the picture of the true Muslim identity in an attempt to monopolize Islam.

KHANKAN 2002b: 43

Khankan observed several of these dissonances between idea and practice in the Abu Nur Mosque; consequently, she makes the difference between her perspective as a sociologist of religion and her informants' essentialization of Islam explicit in a discussion of Said:

The critique of Said is significant because it stresses a central dilemma in the study of Islamic activism, which is the relation between essence and construction. Documenting the changeability of Muslim interpretations, that it is affected by modernity, that it does not have an authenticity and essence in and of itself, is in contradiction with the Islamic activist's own discourse. The conception of Islam as a global and timeless system does not just exist in orientalist discourse, it is also present among Islamic activists. However, these two groups do not agree on what Islam is in its essence. For many Islamists, Islamic activists, and traditionalists there is only "one form of Islam", that being the one that existed at the time of Prophet Mohammad.

KHANKAN 2002b: 21

Needless to say, Khankan does not produce an Islam she understands to be timeless and reducible to an essence that can be described in language. Quite the contrary, she believes in the common root of all religion and that her Islam is one among several paths that lead to God, or as Khankan expresses it herself, "Ibn al-Arabi challenges the inclination of humans to assert the right to define the truth" (Khankan 2013).

## 2 The Common Root of All Religion

While Khankan's embrace of Islam has dogmatic implications, such as her seeing Jesus as a prophet, not the son of God (Khankan 2001c), this does not lead her to negate the truth of the other Abrahamic religions. As she has said, "I believe that it is the same God, right. There is one God, Allah, and then there are different paths to that same God. So, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are paths that lead to the same God" (interview 15 June 2017). While this perspective is not unique, Khankan seems to take it more literally than is often the case, and to have incorporated it into her religious practice in that she also goes to the church to find God:

I have always felt that God is here, there, and everywhere, and that God manifests himself in many forms. I therefore still visit the Danish churches with their resounding grandeur and beautiful architecture. They have been the frame around my need to be completely alone with God. Also, the many church concerts are popular [with me]. They are one of the reasons that I still regularly attend the people's church [the Danish state church—*Folkekirken*].

KHANKAN 2011a

When Khankan attends services such as those at Easter, which are saturated with Christian dogma on the resurrection, she looks for common ground between Christianity and Islam. "I am Muslim, but I have always celebrated the Christian Easter with my mother. Easter has always been important to me; not because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but because it symbolizes the ideal of pure thoughts, not just pure actions" (Khankan 2001c). When Easter is understood in this spiritual way "the pilgrimage to Mecca can be equated with the Christian Easter" (Khankan 2001c).

While Khankan is well aware of the dogmatic differences both between Islam and Christianity and between groups within these religions, she does not enter into these discussions; she merely states that she does not believe in the trinity or that Jesus is the son of God. Instead she understands different religions to be manifestations of the truth, writing, "The truth can, according to the Sufi master, Ibn al-Arabi (1165–1240) manifest itself in many forms but is not restricted by any of them" (Khankan 2013). Elsewhere, she focusses on the common ground between religions with a reference to the first line of the Quran 2:177:

All our interpretations of God's word are approximations of the truth but never truth in and of itself. Only in the light of this recognition can we

raise ourselves over the discussion about the true interpretation of faith and unite around universal values such as human rights, equality, democracy ...

KHANKAN 2002a

Khankan often, as in the last line of the excerpt, refers to the prime liberal values of enlightenment philosophy as if integrated into Islam. That is, rather than seeing them as in conflict with or in relation to Islam, she claims that they can also be seen to originate in Islam or any other religion because they are universal values.

Khankan's focus on dissolving dichotomies even extends beyond the Abrahamic religions. Quoting Rumi (1207–1273) she also includes so-called infidels, idolaters, and Zoroastrians: "Come, come, whatever you are, it plays no role whether you are an infidel, idolater or worship to the fire, come, our gathering is not a place of despair, come even if you have broken your promise a hundred times before, come again" (Khankan 2013). She explains that a key characteristic of Sufism is that it extends the idea of the brotherhood and sisterhood to the whole of humanity, not just to Muslims:

In the Muslim self-perception the concept of brotherhood and sisterhood refers to the ties of devotion and unity that bind Muslims together. Sufis extend this concept so that it includes all humans. The Sufis' focus on the spiritual and universal traits in the Quran can pave the way for peaceful co-existence between Jews, Christians, Muslims, and other belief systems.

KHANKAN 2013

This perennialist and inclusive approach to religion can also be seen in Khankan's use of the New Testament as a source on Jesus' words and deeds (Khankan 2012b) and in her use of a cabalist-inspired Lord's Prayer called the Aramaic Heaven Prayer as a form of *dua* (supplication prayer). As she explains, "But also the Aramaic Heaven Prayer, which Lars Muhl believes to be the original Lord's Prayer, plays a role in my life. I say it every night with my children, especially with my 8 year old daughter as a form of *dua* after the Islamic prayer" (Khankan 2012b). Because the Aramaic Heaven Prayer, as Muhl (2009) points out, is inspired by Kabbalah, it bears a close resemblance to core ideas within Sufism—such as the extinction of one's *nafs* (soul) and the multiple layers of meaning that become accessible as one progresses through stages of conscience—and the prayer is intended for use in a ritual that closely resembles *dhikr* (Sufi ritual). Khankan herself explains this in my interview with her on 15 June 2017:

Khankan: As you know, I was raised with a Christian mother and I have prayed with both her and my father.

Petersen: With folded hands as Christians do?

Khankan: I have prayed the Aramaic Heaven Prayer ... It is a bit different from the Lord's Prayer. In the Aramaic Heaven Prayer one does not say "our Lord", one says: "Heavenly Creator [*Himmelske Ophav*], you who are everywhere, holy be thy name, and relieve us from—not from the evil—but free us from ourselves." So, one believes that the evil comes from inside of us as in Islam, so the Aramaic Heaven prayer is very close to the Islamic prayer.

It is important to underline that Khankan's inclusive approach should not be mistaken for indifference or superficiality. Much of her religious practice is not publicly visible, such as the disciplining of the nafs and ritual prayer, nor does she preach an orthodoxy that she expects others to believe in, which means that she is rarely, if ever, quoted giving instruction on how to practice; her insistence on inclusiveness is what is most cited, and this does not signal any specific practice.

Due to both her education and her spiritual engagement, Khankan possesses a vast knowledge about religions in general and Islams in particular, and this may be the origin of her confidence and insistence on being allowed to practice her own personal tactical religion in a space that is otherwise structured by strategic religion. That is, she explicitly states her personal beliefs as legitimate and sound, rather than tactically and stealthily maneuvering through strategic spaces.

### 3 The Women in the Abu Nur Mosque and Feminism

On 4 November 2016, three months after the first Friday prayer in the Mariam Mosque, I asked Khankan, "When did you come across Islamic feminism for the first time?" She replied, "When I went to Syria for the first time"; this was followed by an explanation of what she experienced there and how it inspired her. I had expected her to tell me about her reading of Islamic feminist literature and maybe that the Mariam Mosque could be understood as the reception and manifestation of that literature. I therefore asked her again with slight disbelief in my voice, just to be sure, and she elaborated and explained in a bit more detail about her experience in 1999–2000:

It is with my introduction to Ibn Arabi that I start to take an interest in Islamic feminism. I don't think that it has been there before. It is in

those four months, on that journey [to Damascus]. I frequent the [Abu Nur] mosque, listen to the women's *tafsir* [exegesis], and listen to Kufaro's Friday sermon. And then I go back for another 7 months, and that is when I start to get these thoughts. I am really fascinated by the women's activism. I like that they are so active. Even though they have children, they leave the house and socialize, and when I compare that with others: those young women who just sit at home, putting on nail polish and makeup while watching Arabic soap-operas. I mean, there is such a difference between, on the one hand, these women who are Islamic activists, who engage in all sorts of humanitarian projects, doing all sorts of things, finding the time to go out and be active, and, on the other hand, those women who just stay protected at home—they only come out when there is a wedding and then of course when they see their friends. I found this very interesting, and this is where I start thinking about why it is not a woman [who preaches in the mosque] [short pause]. I mean why? [pause] I become part of this Sufi community and see how Sheikh Kufaro is admired by thousands of worshippers every Friday. There is a visible hierarchy, and he has this status, and I start to wonder whether it could be a woman, and why not a woman. And I ask the women, "Could you see yourself in his role? Could you imagine a female sheikh or a female imam?" That is how my thoughts started.

Interview with KHANKAN, 4 November 2016

During her fieldwork in Damascus, Khankan started to wonder what kind of Islam would be preached if a woman were to take over from Kufaro. As can be seen in her MA thesis, Khankan actually discussed this with one of her informants (Khankan 2002b: 94), so this is not a mere retrospective construction.

Khankan also saw similarities between Kufaro and her own teacher in the mosque. The latter, Umm Umar, would enter the mosque after dhikr, and the women would rise and some would try to kiss her hand to obtain blessings (*baraka*) (Khankan 2002b: 80). Furthermore, Umm Umar was not a mere extension of Kufaro. Her interpretation of the Quran differed from Kufaro's interpretation on significant topics such as Islam's relation to the other Abrahamic religions, whether good actions should be motivated by fear or love for God, and the view of the West. Indeed, Khankan observed that she took the opposite view to Kufaro on all these topics (Khankan 2002b: 82, 83, and 97). In other words, despite being a teacher in the Abu Nur Mosque, Umm Umar took the liberty to interpret Islam independently, even when the outcome differed from Kufaro's interpretation, and this is something that seems to have inspired Khankan:

It seems to me that women play an essential role in Islamic activism in Abu Nur. They are not mere passive observers. Through their religious engagement they have themselves gained a voice, and they take part in defining the public discourse on themselves and others. They define what they themselves understand to be true Islam and they pass this knowledge on to the next generation through the religious training in the mosque.

KHANKAN 2002b: 104

The women in the Abu Nur Mosque played an important role in Khankan's early texts on gender in Islam, where she repeatedly refers to her informants' high level of agency. This does not mean, however, that Khankan agrees with the women's interpretation of Islam, which advocates the submission of women to their husbands: women should be patient with their husbands and not complain; under specific circumstances a husband is allowed to hit his wife; and "the woman exists for the sake of man" (Khankan 2002b: 93, 94, and 97). Nevertheless, Khankan sees an empowerment through agency which is similar to the one Saba Mahmood (2012) describes in Cairo:

Even though the women want a return to the ideals at the time of Mohammad, they want this to be on modern terms. The women's narratives break away from the traditional view of women. They emphasize their role in the Islamic awakening and see themselves as indispensable agents in the strategies for Islamization. Thus, they break away from orientalist and Muslim perceptions of the traditional Muslim woman. The women emphasize the equality of men and women, which they legitimize with the Quran. Nevertheless, they claim that women and men have different natures. They set up a new dichotomy which is based on the idea of complementary gender roles. They argue for a separation of the genders based on the idea that the woman has a vulnerable nature, which needs to be protected from men's eyes. Nevertheless, with their own entry onto the public stage they symbolize their own example, and they are equal with men in terms of determining the values of the future.

KHANKAN 2002b: 107

This description fits the women in the Abu Nur Mosque, but it also fits Khankan herself. She likewise breaks away from both "orientalist and Muslim perceptions of the traditional Muslim woman" and enters the public stage where she attempts to define Islam on equal terms with representatives of strategic religion. In a chapter written for an anthology on feminism, Khankan expresses her

own view on gender in Islam, saying, “I simply do not believe that women and men are of two different natures” (Khankan 2002d: 67). Instead she believes in a reinterpretation of gender roles to fit contemporary society:

Many women are economically independent of their men and make their own money. In some cases, it is the woman who provides for the man and it is likewise some men who are mainly responsible for raising and parenting the children because the woman works away from home. In this context, it is the Quranic verses about the importance of helping, supporting and cooperating in a marriage that becomes the crucial matter. In this context it would, furthermore, make no sense if the husband inherits more than the woman because the traditional Islamic framework of maintenance and duties have been switched around.

KHANKAN 2006b: 160

When Khankan returned to Denmark on 1 June 2000 she started searching for a community to which she could belong; something that resembled what she had been part of in Damascus. She tried a number of different mosques but never found a place she felt was right; therefore, in August 2001, she founded and chaired the youth organization mentioned in Chapter 1, Forum for Critical Muslims. This was for many years the platform from which she expressed her views, including her suggestion for female imams.

#### 4 Female Imams

On 29 May 1999 a national newspaper, *Kristeligt Dagblad*, advertised for employees that could lead a pioneer project called religion.dk, and in 2000 religion.dk went online as a database of links to quality websites on religion, faith, and ethics.<sup>4</sup> This was in the early stages of the internet before modern search engines, when information on the web was often organized in link collections or inventories. At the beginning of 2001, before 9/11, the website managers decided to set up a panel of religious leaders with a focus on variation, and Khankan was one among other Muslim leaders who accepted the invitation.

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4 My description of how religion.dk was founded and the early strategic decisions taken is based on an interview on 28 November 2019 with Ander Ellebæk Madsen who was the editor of religion.dk at the time of its launch.

Initially, the platform was mainly a place where panelists answered questions from the public, but it later developed into somewhere panelists would publish texts on their religious beliefs that could then be spread via social media. This gave panelists a place where they could publish without adapting to the relevance criteria set by mainstream media. That is, Khankan and others could communicate on their own terms and try to reproduce or explain Islamic discourses that would otherwise be beyond common discursivities.

In one article, for example, Khankan (2011c) defines sharia in her own terms and tries to reproduce it within a non-Muslim discursivity by calling it ethics—not law, as practiced within a territorial nation state—which is by no means strange or different from common Muslim definitions. Khankan’s opponents, however, have extensively utilized some of her articles, which they understand strictly within their own discursivity, to frame her as a radical Muslim (see below and Chapter 11). In other words, even if Khankan and other Muslims are not subjected to the relevance criteria of the media on religion.dk, their texts are published for everyone to read and may be used against them.

However, religion.dk created a space where Khankan and other Muslim women would answer questions on Islam side by side with men who were acknowledged as religious authorities, and this meant that they took part in defining Islam publicly. It was, in other words, a platform that framed them in a position of religious authority. A number of Muslim women, three of whom later delivered a khutbah in the Mariam Mosque, were panelists on religion.dk.<sup>5</sup>

Khankan’s first public suggestion regarding the introduction of female imams appears in an answer to a question on religion.dk where a person called Jacob asks, “Is it possible for women to educate themselves to become imams, muftis ...?” On 28 December 2001, a Danish imam from the Danish Islamic Center, Fatih Alev (2001), answers that it is not possible for women to become imams, but they can educate themselves to take other religious offices. A few days later, on 4 January 2002, Khankan answers that women can indeed become imams, and this answer is also published as an opinion piece on 14 January in *Kristeligt Dagblad* titled, “Female Imams Wanted”, and subtitled, “It is not stated anywhere in the Quran that women cannot speak to a male congregation”. In this first argument for female imams, Khankan writes about the women activists in the Abu Nur Mosque and builds an argument based on the ideal state of faith in Mecca.

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5 These were Saliha Marie Fetteh, Nour Tessie Jørgensen (presented in Chapter 10), and Khankan herself.



In Mecca, women and men circumambulate the Kaaba together. Mecca is the symbol of the ultimate state of faith. Mecca is characterized by the abolition of segregation. Race segregation, economic segregation, national segregation, cultural segregation, and gender segregation. Everyone is equal before God. Only in spiritual excellence and righteous conduct is one human different from another. Everyone is equal and everyone receives God's blessing. Why not try to convert this ideal state into reality? ... Women and men have equal access to education and are thus able to acquire the same knowledge. Therefore, women should have an equal opportunity to become imams. Women should be able to speak in the mosque for both men and women. In the Quran there is no rule on whether women can become imams ...

KHANKAN 2002c

According to Khankan the prohibition against female imams is grounded in a hegemonic and conservative view of women as emotional and men as rational, which she does not believe in, explaining the current state with reference to it being a mere popular opinion:

Women can teach, preach on Islam, and lead prayer for women, but not for men. Female imams do not exist today, but this is primarily because the majority of Muslims (in particular male imams) want to preserve the gender segregation in the mosques.

KHANKAN 2002c

Interestingly, it was Jacob's question that occasioned this answer and Khankan did not publish on the idea again until 2006. Indeed, at about the same time as she wrote her answer to Jacob, Khankan contributed a chapter to an anthology on feminism in which she speaks about both Muslim and non-Muslim suppression of Muslim women, but at no point does she mention female imams (Khankan 2002d).

Khankan published her first book, *Islam and Redemption* in 2006. The same year, on 10 February, when the Mohammad Cartoon Crisis was peaking, *A Muslim Manifest* appeared, written along with nine other members of Forum for Critical Muslims (Khankan et al. 2006). In these texts, Khankan and others argued against gender segregation, envisioning a mosque where women would deliver the Friday sermon and lead the subsequent prayer. However, they adapted the linguistic frame surrounding the concept of imam, with a female imam now being addressed as a *khatiba* (speaker), which sounds less like a transgression, something further lessened by the suggestion that she will only lead women in Friday prayer:

One of our visions is a mosque with a female khatiba. That is a woman who delivers the sermon (the khutbah) to both men and women before the Friday prayer. After the sermon, the female khatiba can lead the prayer for women while the imam leads the prayer for men. A female speaker, khatiba, will strengthen the harmony and balance between the genders and send an important signal about equality, cohesion, community, and cooperation between the genders to the next generations of Danish Muslims. In Mecca, which is an example of the ultimate state of faith that symbolizes a repeal of all types of segregation, men and women circumambulate the Kaaba together.

KHANKAN et al. 2006

The theological argument in the manifest is a shorter version of the ideal state of faith in Mecca but there is no reference to the women in the Abu Nur Mosque. While the 2002 argument constituted an answer to a question, this is a pledge to work proactively for the introduction of female imams in Denmark, and the text is, therefore, much more oriented towards finding a reasonable compromise and positioning the initiative in relation to existing mosque communities.

In *Islam and Redemption*, Khankan elaborates and explains that the goals of having women take to the pulpit and gain a voice in this space and then in the subsequent prayer can be kept separate if that is what Muslims prefer:

I deliberately use the term *khatiba* and not the term *imam* to underline that the goal is a woman who delivers the khutbah ... by using this term I avoid conflating the debate on female *khatibas* with the debate on female prayer leaders. The goal is not that women should lead the prayer for men and women. If the majority of Muslims want to pray segregated, there is no reason to problematize this ...

KHANKAN 2006b: 156

Here, Khankan primarily focuses on hearing a woman intellectually address a mixed gender audience, thus having Muslims attribute the same importance to a woman's perspective on Islam as male perspectives. Further, Khankan insists that women should take part in leading the Friday ritual on equal terms with men rather than merely being led by them. It is, furthermore, important to note that Khankan and her co-signers only suggest an alternative to existing communities and explicitly write that "we respect those who want to keep this segregation" (Khankan et al. 2006). Thus, Khankan merely wants to found a mosque that caters to a religious demand that remains unserved, not fight the

existing services. That is, Khankan defines what she wants to introduce rather than picking a fight with established Islamic authorities:

I myself belong to this group of Muslims who have not found a place with which they can come to terms within the existing mosque communities. I dream of a mosque in Denmark that is characterized by both men and women delivering the *khutbah*, and in addition to this an atmosphere of community and spiritual intimacy that transcends gender and national identity, and which includes and respects different interpretations of the Quranic message.

KHANKAN 2006b: 24

The pledge never manifested itself as social action and Khankan only made four references to female imams between 2006 and November 2014 (Khankan 2010b: 83 and 157–158; 2011a, 2011b, 2012d). Interestingly, Khankan does not use any Islamic feminist literature in her arguments and it was not until she attended the 2006 WISE conference that she learned about Amina Wadud's prayer on 18 March 2005 as this was not reported in Danish media. Thus, as mentioned above, when I asked Khankan about Islamic feminism in an interview on 4 November 2016 she referred to her experience in Damascus, Ibn Arabi, and traditional Islamic literature. At this stage, in 2016, Khankan had only read Fatima Mernissi (1992), Shahen Sardar Ali (2000), and Leila Ahmed (1993), and this is an important point, because it demonstrates that Khankan's feminism is not based on Islamic feminist theological arguments. It is a feminism she herself envisioned and developed within her own discursivity, grounded, inspired, and influenced by Sufi literature on the dissolving of dichotomies and her academic education.

It is also important to note that Khankan did not imagine herself as the imam of this mosque; she wanted to be part of a congregation that was going to be led by a woman, and she set a high standard for anyone delivering the *khutbah* by requiring them to be scholars with the educational rank of *alima* (Khankan 2006b: 157).

On 20 March 2005, two days after Wadud's Friday prayer in New York, a man with the username Mustafaa (sic) wrote the first lines of a new entry in Wikipedia which is today titled "Women as imams".<sup>6</sup> Wikipedia is an example of convergence culture, one that marks a shift in how encyclopedic knowledge is produced and what is considered relevant knowledge (Jenkins 2006).

<sup>6</sup> I have determined the date by using Wikipedia's edit history function.

“Women as imams” soon attracted the attention of other online activists in favor of female imams and with knowledge about local or international activism which they added to the entry. This means that a group of anonymous activists started to accumulate knowledge relevant to Islamic feminist activists in favor of female imams and to write a text that presumably attested to the presence of an international Islamic feminist movement.<sup>7</sup>

The Wikipedia entry plays a significant role in the public legitimation of Khankan’s 2015 announcement of female imams, as evidenced by her uploading it to Forum for Critical Muslims at some point between 21 December 2014 and 10 February 2015,<sup>8</sup> and her extensive use of the information it contains in debates and in her announcement in *Politiken* on 5 March 2015:

There are women-only mosques with female imams in China (since 1820) and in Los Angeles (2015), and from 2005 it became possible for female imams to lead the khutbah and mixed gender prayer in Spain and Toronto. Amina Wadud held the worldwide discussed Friday prayer in New York in 2005, and in 2009 Toronto’s Unity Mosque, where men and women takes turn leading both khutbah and Friday prayer, was founded ... In South Africa there have been female imams since 1995. British Muslims experienced a woman who led the Friday prayer in 2010.

KHANKAN 2015c

While some of the information in the Wikipedia entry is true and accurate, much is misleading at best, but it appears that scholars have used it as their source when asked to confirm Khankan’s claim in Danish media. The Wikipedia entry also contributed relevant hadith material on the topic, such as the Umm Waraqa hadith about a woman who was delegated the job of leading prayer by Mohammad:

[A]s it can be seen, female imams are not a new revolution, and the tradition contains a hadith called ‘Umm Waraqa’ ... which confirms the

7 This entry has also influenced scholarship to some degree as some researchers use the information collected to describe the emergence of Islamic feminist activism internationally (e.g. Bøe 2019:107–108). I argue that a thorough methodological discussion on Wikipedia is needed before using its content to describe the emergence of an international Islamic feminist movement. The authors within the convergence culture that produced the “Women as imams” entry seem biased in their sampling strategy, exemplified by the authors’ reframing of heterogeneous phenomena as female imams.

8 I have determined this timespan as the upload time using the web crawler “web.archive.org” which has taken a snapshot of the webpage on 21 December 2014 and 10 February 2015.

story about a woman by the name Umm Waraqa who led the khutbah [Friday sermon] and the prayer for men and women at the time of prophet Mohammad.

KHANKAN 2015c

In her opinion piece on 5 March 2015, Khankan announced that a mosque with female imams leading a mixed gender congregation in prayer would open within five months, but she also made a number of other announcements leading up to this, including the suggestion for a house of all three Abrahamic religions in November 2014, to which I return in Chapter 6.

## 5 Interreligious Marriage

Although interreligious marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men has, as I demonstrate in Chapters 8, played a major role in the founding of the Mariam Mosque, Khankan has published very little on the topic. What follows below is an analysis of the few mentions that can be found in Khankan's authorship.

There is a consensus (*ijma*) between the *madhhabs* (schools of thought) that interreligious marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man is forbidden (*haram*). However, Khankan disagrees with this view, which she expressed for the first time on 14 May 2001 on religion.dk in an article titled "The Potential Revolution":

There are also young people who have had a good Muslim upbringing who sincerely want to marry a believing Muslim but end up falling in the love with the "wrong" person. With love there is no choice. It does not know the narrow limitations of nationality or religion. That is exactly why it rebels.

KHANKAN 2001b

Khankan herself hopes for a Muslim but she will take the person she falls in love with. As she wrote the following year, "when my family in Syria asks me by what criteria I will choose my husband I answer that my primary criteria is love and that I hope for a Muslim" (Khankan 2002d: 75).

It is not until 2006 that Khankan published an argument on interreligious marriage, one that relates to the Quran (5:5) and references Shahen Sardar Ali's (2000) doctoral dissertation at the University of Hull titled, *Gender and Human Rights in Islam and International Law: Equal Before Allah, Unequal Before Man?*

Khankan explains that Muslim women are merely recommended to marry Muslim men, “there is no talk of a ban, it is a recommendation. There is no coercion in religion” (Khankan 2006b: 160).

Khankan derived permission for interreligious marriage from the Quran for the first time in 2012 when she interpreted verse 2:221, which prohibits a Muslim woman from marrying a man who is not a *mumin* (a believer). The core of the argument is her interpretation of the term *mumin*, which is commonly understood as synonymous with Muslim; Khankan, however, understood its meaning as also including others who have a belief in God:

A Muslim man can marry a woman from ‘the people of the Book’. That is, a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim. When it comes to Muslim women then the Quran emphasizes that she should marry a man who is righteous, affectionate, and sincere in his commitment to God. A believer (*mumin* in Arabic) refers to a person who is affectionate in his commitment to God. Thus, interfaith marriage is compatible with the Quran’s message.

KHANKAN 2012d

The above argument from 2012 appears in a newspaper article titled, “As the devil reads the Quran”, in which, as a Muslim, Khankan tries to reclaim the right to interpret the Quran from non-Muslim politicians, debaters, and journalists who make claims on Islam based on their own Quran exegesis (non-Muslim Islamic authorities). The above argument supporting interreligious marriage, therefore, appears to be an example of Quran exegesis that contradicts non-Muslims’ production of Islam rather than being a statement in its own right. In this context it is interesting to note that Khankan, when engaging in public debates, primarily engages in theological discussions with non-Muslims.

Khankan did not publish on this topic again before she performed her first interreligious marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man on 8 August 2015 (see Chapter 8).

## 6 Poetry, Philosophy, and Theology

While Khankan’s vision of a mosque did not materialize, Forum for Critical Muslims became a space where Muslims met to discuss the Quran and Sufism, and Khankan was for a long time both a teacher and occasionally a student. It held Quran meetings which attracted several prominent guests, two of whom became more or less regular: the first was Amér Majid who translated the Quran into Danish in 2015 and wrote a biography of Mohammad based on Ibn

Hisham's copy of Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah* in 2004 (Majid 2011, 2017); the second was Aurangzeb Moghal who was a disciple of the South African sheikh, Fadhlalla Haeri.

Interestingly, even though Khankan has been very inspired by both Moghal and Haeri—she has read several of Haeri's books and considered making him her sheikh—neither of their names appear in any of her published articles. Ultimately, she decided against committing fully to Haeri because he practices polygamy, which Khankan could not come to terms with. However, the spiritual inspiration remained and Khankan was thrilled when Haeri's second wife congratulated her on the phone at the inauguration of the Mariam Mosque on 26 August 2016 and passed Haeri's endorsement of the mosque on to Khankan.

Khankan also takes a great deal of her inspiration from sources that cannot be considered part of the Islamic discursive tradition as Talal Asad (1986) understands it. She often uses poetry and literature in articles, both to tease out nuances and make points, and she frequently quotes Gibran Khalil Gibran and the Danish poet Benny Andersen in her marriage rituals. In this context it does not matter to Khankan that Andersen and Gibran are Christians as they have written poetry that is meaningful in the context of the marriage ritual. That is, these become Islamic semiotic resources—or they are Islamized—because that is how they are constructed by Khankan, who—as so many other Muslims—does not limit her production and appropriation of the Islamic tradition to what is typically considered the standard catalogue of Islamic semiotic resources.

Philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas, Søren Kierkegaard, and K.E. Løgstrup also play an active role for Khankan; she describes herself as very inspired by the latter two, but she sees them as being in compliance with Islam and their work as ultimately the expression of ideas that are also present in the Islamic tradition. Indeed, Khankan's discursivity comes from her study of Kierkegaard and Løgstrup and this makes her capable of reproducing their ideas as Islamic discourse. From an etic perspective, she simultaneously appropriates and produces the Islamic tradition as she introduces the discourses of Kierkegaard and Løgstrup to it. In other words, she produces an Islam that would not have been possible if she had not read these two authors.

This is evident in her understanding of the activism expressed in Kuftaro's sermons (Khankan 2002b: 30 and 66), and by the women in the Abu Nur Mosque, as complying with existentialist philosophy. As she writes, "The existential approach to life is something all religions engage with. The theologian, Paul Johannes Tillich (1886–1965) thinks, just like Søren Kierkegaard, that the purpose of religion is to make people reflect radically on their own existence and the meaning of life" (Khankan 2012a). This stance implies a call for the individual worshipper's awakening, which Khankan regards as a universal feature

of religion that is also present in Islam: “The prophet Muhammad agreed with Kierkegaard in this respect. The prophet expressed the demand for an awakening with the words: ‘die before you die’” (Khankan 2006a). The meaning of “die before you die” is traditionally understood as an extinction towards which the Sufi strives. However, Khankan puts it into a new context and explains that Mohammad’s words mean “wake up before you die” and thus the meaning is the same as Kierkegaard’s and Tillich’s conception of radical reflection on one’s own existence. To Khankan, this again underlines the similarity between religions, despite dogmatic differences:

The Prophet Mohammad and Kierkegaard are both important sources in my life. I have often sought refuge in God’s houses, that being in mosques, synagogues, and churches ... In my longing for a real mosque in Copenhagen I have often sought refuge in the city’s churches ... And with Kierkegaard in my thoughts I will continue to visit Copenhagen’s churches and support the work for the founding of a magnificent mosque on a par with Vor Frue Kirke [Copenhagen Cathedral] in the heart of Copenhagen.

KHANKAN 2006a

As the comparison between Muhammad and Kierkegaard demonstrates, Khankan transitions between discourses with ease. In an article on Israel’s 2009 bombings in Gaza, Khankan starts with a quote by Løgstrup, which explains that to remain passive is an active choice. In compliance with Løgstrup’s concept of ethical duty (*den etiske fordring*), Khankan explains that neighbor-love (*næstekærlighed*) constitutes an “obligation to find all humans of equal value and equally worthy of being loved, appreciated, and protected” (Khankan 2009). Finally, Khankan quotes the novelist, Paulo Coelho, before moving on to her protest against the media coverage of Israel’s bombings of Gaza and the passivity of the international community.

It should be noted that Kierkegaard’s conception of neighbor-love is radical in the sense that he insists that merely loving one’s own kind constitutes self-love and, therefore, neighbor-love only becomes meaningful if it is extended to one’s radical Other. That is, one should love the radical Other as much as one’s own kind, or else neighbor-love is reduced to self-love. When Khankan applies this in a political context it turns into a question, posed to politicians and public debaters about why 9/11 victims are worth more than children in Gaza.

Khankan’s point is that to care more for some and less for others is hypocritical, but when she expresses this idea, she states it as universal and thereby detaches it from Kierkegaard. That is, she finds the idea in all religious tradi-



tions, not because it is there, but because she produces it in her reading. In the following she attributes the idea to Levinas and combines it with Kierkegaard's/Mohammad's idea of existential philosophy/Sufism without mentioning them explicitly:

Neighbor-love [*Næstekærlighed*] on the other hand is unselfish and does not take sides, and it includes its own opposite and the one who is far away from you, the stranger and the outcast. According to the Jewish philosopher Levinas, neighbor-love refers to the duty to find all humans valuable and worthy to be honored, loved, appreciated, and protected. Neighbor-love is a duty to act, when a nation, in this case Israel, attacks and kills innocent civilians. The world society's passivity and acceptance of Israel's bombardment of innocent civilians confirms the thesis that some human lives seem to be worth more than others and for many Palestinians that is exactly where one of the causal explanations of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is buried.

KHANKAN 2014

Whom Khankan quotes in a particular context depends on what will make the strongest argument or make the most sense. In the above, it seems like a strong argument when the idea of neighbor-love is attributed to Levinas and, as Khankan explains in other contexts, she understands these values to be universal: "The Christian values such as neighbor-love, equality, and forgiveness are universal and present in all religions" (Khankan 2001c). However, as she points out, they are only universal in principle, because power asymmetries between nations and people render some lives more valuable than other lives in practice.

## 7 The Politicization of Muslim Identity on the Geopolitical Scene

In the spring of 2001, Khankan appeared to be what Mahmood Mamdani (2004) has described as a "good Muslim". Shortly after coming home from Damascus, she joined a well-established centrist political party, Radikale Venstre, and, as described in *Politiken*, spent her summer vacation in the struggle for human rights:

However, not everyone is equally interested in hearing about torture, the death penalty, Milosevic, or the next Israeli ambassador in Denmark, Gillon, and his past, on this rainy Friday afternoon on Vesterbro [neigh-

borhood in Copenhagen]. “No, not today, I am going to a birthday”, a woman hisses and rushes off with a pamphlet from Amnesty. But the many rejections that one faces on a five-hour shift does not remove the smile on the project employee Sherin Khankan’s face. Seconds later she approaches a young man in a sports jacket: “Hi, would you like to support Amnesty International?”

HENRIKSEN 2001

Mamdani argues that in the public debate on Islam in the USA Muslims are framed as either good or bad, and whether a person is one or the other depends on their allegiance to so-called Western ideas: “good Muslims are modern, secular, and Westernized, but bad Muslims are doctrinal, antimodern, and virulent” (Mamdani 2004: 24). That is, “judgements of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ refer to Muslim political identities, not to cultural or religious ones” (Mamdani 2004: 15). The European politicization of Muslims primarily focuses on domestic populations of Muslims and their allegiance to the nation state and endorsement of values associated with it (Cesari 2013; Nielsen 2016). A systematic survey of the coverage of Islam in four major Danish newspapers, selected with the goal of getting a wide frame of reference, from mid-October to mid-December 2011, concluded, “Islam is often portrayed as a religious and ideological threat against democracy, freedom of speech, or other so-called ‘Danish values’”, however, “Muslim voices are completely absent in 75 percent of the mapped articles” (Jacobsen et al. 2013: 127 and 31), and

... *when* moderate Muslims appeared in the Media it tended to be in articles dealing with extremism, where a distinction was indirectly made between the liberal, moderate, modern Muslims and the extremist, Islamist, traditional Muslims. In this, the moderate Muslims became the good guys that were on ‘our’ side in the fight against extremism ...<sup>9</sup>

JACOBSEN et al. 2013: 14

In other words, the conceptualization of Muslims as either good or bad is a common distinction in Danish media. However, it is important to note that while Muslims may adopt a behavior that will identify them as good Muslims, they do not themselves define the binary, and yet they cannot escape it (cf. Jeldtoft 2011: 1136; Renders 2021: 210–215).

<sup>9</sup> Emphasis is in the original.

Nadia Jeldtoft (2016) argues that media frame their portrayals within a geopolitical conflict that is structured according to a *script* which is played out on a *scene* performed by people cast in *roles* (Jeldtoft 2016: 24–25). If Mamdani's dichotomy of Muslims is applied to Jeldtoft's theatric terminology, Muslims are cast in one of two roles, good or bad, when they perform on the geopolitical scene, and they do so according to scripts. That is, the good versus bad Muslim dichotomy "pushes Danish Muslims to formulate their struggle in terms that make sense to a non-Muslim audience" (Renders 2021: 55).

When Muslims enter the geopolitical scene by engaging in public debate, they do so within the confined space of media discursivity and, as mentioned above, this means that they cannot necessarily convey their discourse in a meaningful way to non-Muslim audiences that lack the necessary discursivity. Khankan entered the geopolitical scene with an opinion piece in 1999, but already in the summer of 2001 she was suspected of being a bad Muslim (Dahl 2001), and in 2002 she became the center of a controversy that have rendered her status as good or bad ambiguous until the present. I will present the events of 2002 below based on news articles collected in the media database, Infomedia, and then return to the topic of Khankan's framing as a bad Muslim in Chapter 11.

## 8 Genealogy of Khankan's Bad Muslim Framing

In the summer of 2001 when Khankan worked as a facer for Amnesty International, had recently joined the political party, Radikale Venstre, and founded Forum for Critical Muslims, she started to engage in public debate via opinion pieces published in national newspapers. Between 10 May 2001 and 21 October 2002, during her short-lived political career, Khankan published 16 opinion pieces.<sup>10</sup>

Khankan was not the only Muslim who was a member of Radikale Venstre and entered public debate just around the turn of the millennium. Naser Khader (b. 1963), a Syrian refugee who had become a Danish citizen and a member of Radikale Venstre in 1984, was put forward by his local borough on 23 May 2000 as their candidate for the parliamentary election that would take place in 2001. Khader became the first Muslim candidate to stand for election to the Danish parliament, and he is a rare case of a Muslim politician who

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<sup>10</sup> Khankan was taken off the ballot by her constituency on 5 March 2003, although she remained a member of the party. However, I interpret 5 March 2003 as the end of her political career.

managed to avoid the bad Muslim label. A year later another Muslim candidate, Mona Sheikh, tried to get on the ballot in the same borough as Khader, but she lost the race after months of scandals related to her engagement in Minhaj-ul-Quran's Danish Youth League (Jørgensen 2011; Petersen and Vinding 2020: 192–193). However, Radikale Venstre continued to attract Muslim members and, during the spring of 2001, while the Mona Sheikh affair was peaking, rumors started to circulate that the party leadership was holding secret meetings on how to avoid attracting additional Muslim candidates. Meanwhile, the tabloid press started to speculate about the fear of a Muslim takeover within the party and ran headlines such as “Radikale fears a coup”, “Radikale is being infiltrated by Islamic fundamentalists”, and “Radikale—or Muslim people's party” (Adler 2001; Eskholm 2001; Svane and Mortensen 2001).

In a complete coincidence Khankan's and Henrik Plaschke's opinion piece in Denmark's largest newspaper *Politiken* announcing the founding of Forum for Critical Muslims was published on 12 September 2001, the day after the al-Qaida coordinated attacks on the USA east coast (Khankan and Plaschke 2001). Thus, Khankan was propelled into public debate and started to appear regularly in Danish media as a debater and aspiring politician. Endorsed by Khader, whom Khankan had herself endorsed in other contexts, she soon found a place on the ballot to run for parliament as Radikale Venstre's second Muslim candidate (Khader 2001b; Khankan 2001a).

However, Khankan's political career was cut short, as she fell out with both Khader and a large segment of the party at the party conference in September 2002 when she voted against a condemnation of sharia, later addressing its content as based on a too narrow understanding of sharia. The story soon spread in the media where it was understood as a second Mona Sheikh Affair: that is, a rerun of the script written in 2001 that has been played out multiple times since then (e.g., in the Asmaa Abdol Hamid and Safia Aoude affairs). The party chairman, Søren Bald, encouraged members of the local borough either to ask Khankan to clarify her position or find another candidate. As observed by a journalist in *Berlingske*:

At Radikale Venstre's party conference a resolution titled “no to sharia-laws” was accepted with an overwhelming majority. The occasion was that a woman had been sentenced to stoning for adultery in Nigeria. Sherin Khankan would not support the resolution. “I think it is factually wrong to write ‘no to sharia laws’. Instead it should have said, ‘No to barbaric punishments and the death penalty everywhere in the world’. Including the USA. I do not think the resolution is far reaching enough”, explains Sherin Khankan, who opposes both the death penalty and stoning. But the chair-

man of Radikale Venstre, Søren Bald, does not accept this explanation. “Sharia-legislation is based on religious principles and not worldly principles which are linked to the human rights. That is an important point, because we actually only recognize human rights as a point of the departure for legislation”, says Søren Bald. He does not want to comment upon whether Sherin Khankan’s standpoint should have consequences for her candidacy for parliament: “If I lived in Sønder Storkreds [the borough] where Khankan is running, I would do something. I think that they should at least discuss with the candidate [Khankan] whether there is sufficient background for her standpoint. I don’t think there is”, he says. The resolution is authored by members of the board Ole Dall and Naser Khader, who, like Sherin Khankan is a Muslim.

THOBO-CARLSEN 2002b

While Khankan won a small victory within the party where an alternative resolution along the lines she demanded was adopted (Thobo-Carlson 2002a), she eventually lost the theological battle to non-Muslim Islamic authorities who defined sharia as an unchangeable legal code (for an explanation of the difference between sharia and law as this is conceptualized today, see Hallaq 2009: 1 ff.; Petersen and Vinding 2020: 1 ff.; Vikør 2005: 1 ff.).

On 5 March 2003, Khankan was taken off the ballot by her local borough, leaving Danish politics branded a bad Muslim, just like Sheikh, who ironically embarked on a career as a researcher of radical Islam. In both cases, and in multiple cases since then, the bad Muslim candidates have had the disadvantage of knowledge about sharia. That is, because they have a rich understanding of sharia, they have felt a need to set the record straight leading to their being categorized as bad Muslims while the question of definition has been dealt with by non-Muslim Islamic authorities. Khankan continued as a common member of Radikale Venstre for a few years but ultimately left the party.

## 9 Looking Back

In a blogpost from 31 September 2012, Khankan looks back on the first decade of her political engagement. Although the blogpost is titled, “No, Muslims are not allowed to lie”, and addresses the common theological claim by non-Muslim Islamic authorities that the doctrine of *taqiyya* constitutes a carte blanche for Muslims to lie, it is primarily a text in which she looks back on a decade of debate on Islam in Denmark:

When, in August 2001, I took part in founding the Critical Muslims association, the goal was self-critique among Muslims and a critique of the rigid traditions and interpretation of the Quran which set up a gender hierarchy. The goal was primarily to talk and write to Muslims. However, I must admit that, unfortunately, the last 10 years have largely ended up revolving around basic enlightenment on Islam for Danish Islamophobes. Self-criticism among Muslims and the need for reform of Muslims' interpretations of the Quran are all too often drowned in Danish Islamophobes' crusades against Islam.

KHANKAN 2012C

Looking back, Khankan is frustrated with the discursivity available in the public sphere and the presence of non-Muslim Islamic authorities who to a great extent get to both define Islam and Muslim identity within this knowledge space. Interestingly, she observes that her theological discussions have mainly been with non-Muslims. Khankan was as explained above branded as a bad Muslim in the aftermath of Radikale Venstre's party conference in 2002, and she would later incur additional affairs that added to her framing as a bad Muslim, even after the inauguration of the Mariam Mosque in 2016 (see Chapter 11).

Both Khankan's politicized identity and her non-politicized identity are important to understand the serendipities and emergence of the Mariam Mosque described in later chapters. Furthermore, the politicized identity and the theoretical framework of good/bad Muslim is important to understand how Khankan navigates mediatized spaces, and the non-politicized identity is important to understand what Khankan is trying to achieve. Additionally, the analysis of Khankan's accumulation of semiotic resources with which she produces Islam is important to understand the institution that she eventually founded. Finally, it should be noted that the serendipities described in Chapter 6 only makes sense if one knows the history of Khankan's (and others') repeated attempts to found a mosque in which women deliver the Friday sermon and lead the subsequent prayer. The next chapter analyzes the emergence of a demand for female imams beyond Khankan and the community around Forum for Critical Muslims.

## The Emergence of a Religious Demand

Contemporary movements are prophets of the present ... They announce the commencement of change; not, however, a change in the distant future but one that is already a presence.

MELUCCI 1996a: 1

In Chapter 3 I hinted at the emergence of a demand for female imams by quoting Aminah Tønnsen's opinion piece on the subject and by paraphrasing Catinét Research's poll among refugees and immigrants from 2008 in which 29% of respondents were in favor of female imams, which I also remarked is an ambiguous term. Although some refugees and immigrants do attend the Mariam Mosque, it is mainly attended by descendants, born and raised in Denmark, and converts.

As mentioned in Chapter 3 almost all members of the Mariam Mosque, born to Muslim parents, had either attended a Muslim private school or a mosque in which they received religious instruction. However, this instruction was largely unsuccessful in terms of re-producing Islams because the discourses that they preached were seldom internalized to any great degree by the students attending them (Otterbeck 2010; Schmidt 2007). Rather, young Danish Muslims produced other Islams than what they were instructed to—Islams that were meaningful within their own discursivities, which due to their being born and raised in Denmark differed significantly from their parents' discourse. In other words, the production of Islam does not begin with reading the Quran; it begins with socialization and disciplining within a discursive space—much of it subtle such as the learning of a mother tongue, decoding of social patterns while still an infant, etc. Variables of this kind forms the person that may later engage in textual study, asking questions related to the here and now; or, as is often the case, use Islamic semiotic resources to Islamize values shared in the societies they live in, thus transforming the mundane. However, the religious instruction did provide most of the young Muslims in the Mariam Mosque with the competence to engage in communal prayer and recite short passages of the Quran, which is the most basic intended learning outcomes of the Quran schools' courses (Bisbjerg 2011).

This chapter analyses the demand for female imams, which already had a presence when Femimam emerged. It is based on semi-structured interviews with the co-founder of the Mariam Mosque, Hicham Mouna (b. 1987)

and three volunteers, Rania, Fawzia, and Halima, all in their early twenties. They joined the Mariam Mosque within the first five months of its opening in August 2016. I have selected Rania, Fawzia, and Halima because of their commitment to the Mariam Mosque. Rania still (in 2020) takes care of much of the mosque's administration, and Fawzia often called the *adhan* and *iqamah* (different types of call to prayer) and she delivered the Friday sermon on two consecutive months within the first year of the inauguration of the mosque. That is, although there were many young congregants, these three women took a leading role in the youth community. Furthermore, Rania and Fawzia were the only former members to join when Khankan re-built the Mariam Mosque after its collapse in July 2017.

Mouna has, along with Khankan, been one of the most active and important persons in the founding of the Mariam Mosque so I delve more deeply into his biography at the end of the chapter.

## 1 The Minority Context

While scripts play a major part in setting the geopolitical scene, it is primarily the roles used to frame Muslims in the media that have an important presence in Muslim's everyday life, as the vast majority of them are not directly involved in the controversies that become hot topics of media discussion. The geopolitical scene for example enters the classroom where non-Muslim students put pressure on their Muslim co-students in inquisitorial debates in which the Muslim students must prove the orthodoxy of their Islam with reference to scripture. However, as Rania explains, this approach is sometimes also taken by teachers in compulsory religion classes:<sup>1</sup>

Rania: In that context, I often had to defend myself, because I was the only Muslim in my year.

Petersen: Also against the teacher?

Rania: Yes, she often made use of me as someone who had to defend [Islam] against what she and the [other] students said. She would always ask what I had to say about this, or whether that was true. As if I were the one who could confirm or deny it. I found this highly inappropriate [*ekstremt grænseoverskridende*] because, first of all, "You are my teacher in religion, you are supposed to be objective, and you are

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1 Comparative religion classes are compulsory in Danish gymnasiums.



not supposed to ask me. I am not the answer key.” That was when I realized how little they [religion teachers] knew ...

Rania adds that even dinner conversations when visiting a non-Muslim friend could turn into theological discussions that were focused on her identity as a Muslim. These encounters required theological knowledge as Rania felt the need to defend herself against the attacks from non-Muslim Islamic authorities. As she said of one incident, involving a friend from her school:

She was very antireligious, especially when it came to Islam. And I was her only Muslim friend. And I remember a time when I was with her and her parents and they just stamped on it [Islam]. You know, pedophilia—it was just the worst words they could produce about Islam, right? And this really hurt me, I became really sad. And they just continued, showing me references from the Quran, and saying, “Can’t you see it?” and that sort of thing. And I was like, you know, I was really; that really hurt me, right. And this is actually the point when I took the initiative to borrow a Quran myself and then read it through, and understand it, and then use it against her the next time we met, right. Yes, I do remember, that is when I started to read the Quran myself.

It is well established within research on Danish and Swedish Muslim youth that a key motivation for Muslims’ getting engaged in scriptural studies is their interaction with non-Muslims, either because they are looking for answers to questions posed by non-Muslims, who are curious about Islam, or looking for passages with which they can defend themselves in theological debates with non-Muslims (Minganti 2012; Otterbeck 2000b, 2010; Schmidt 2007). Garbi Schmidt argues that to defend Islam in a non-Muslim majority setting has an impact on identity formation, writing that, “When friends and teachers ask questions about being Muslim, it requires knowledge and confidence, but it also requires the person to whom the questions are addressed to choose to take up the challenge and *become* that identity—that he/she lets himself/herself be marked as different” (Schmidt 2007: 25). The above quotations demonstrate this point, but they also exemplify how Rania primarily ventured into theological debate with non-Muslim Islamic authorities, and to a much lesser degree with Muslims. This is a shared pattern, not just with the other three interviewees, but also with congregants, who on Fridays after the prayer would rant about both Muslim men’s and Islamophobes’ Islams.<sup>2</sup> Fawzia for example remarked that

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term Islamophobe here because that is the term used by my informants. I do not use it as an etic term.

non-Muslims would often use her stance of female imams against her in theological debates: “Islamophobes often use it [the standpoint on female imams] against us. [They say] that Islam is very misogynistic et cetera, and ‘you are not real Muslim’ et cetera”.

The interviews with Rania, Fawzia, and Halima, indicate that the need to distinguish between Islam and culture primarily is a defense tactic that lets young Muslims deny non-Muslim Muslims’ authenticity by categorizing them as culture rather than Islamic (Johansen 2002; Liebmann and Galal 2020; Otterbeck 2000b). Without my asking about this, Fawzia for example explains that,

I can tell you when I started to distinguish between culture and Islam ... That was around the age of 14, right, because that was the time when I had a lot of fights [with non-Muslims] because I went to a Danish-majority school, right. And this is when I got a new understanding of what Islam is, right.

Interestingly, non-Muslim Islamic authorities seem to exclusively to preach an Islam of values and selected rules, never dogma. So far, I have not heard of non-Muslim Islamic authorities arguing Sunni standpoints against Shia (or vice versa), take a stand on predestination (*al-qada and al-qadar*), insisting on specific prayer times,<sup>3</sup> or the like. I presume this is due to non-Muslims only getting involved in Islamic theological debates, which matters to them. However, as I have not ventured into a study of non-Muslim Islamic authority it is not clear what topics are important to non-Muslim or why these are important. The most important observation to be made in the above is that non-Muslim Islamic authorities and their Muslims play a major role in the formation of Muslim Islam and Muslim identity.

In *A sociology of religious emotion*, Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead (2010: 3) remark that it has become common for studies to assume “that an inability on the part of individuals to articulate their beliefs clearly and systematically implies a dilution of diminution of religion”. Although there has been a movement in the direction of deconstructing power asymmetries (in the form of dangerous supplements Derrida 1967/1997: 141–164) within the anthropological study of Islam (e.g. Bowen 2012; Otterbeck 2021) scholars have for a long

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3 This is a hot topic among especially Arab Islamic authorities in Denmark where several prayer schedules are in circulation. Furthermore, Danish mosques generally use different prayer schedules dependent on the national heritage of its congregants. This poses some problems during Ramadan—especially during summertime—as this means that Muslims do not necessarily break the fast simultaneously.

time attributed greater authenticity to seemingly systematized Islams, and this is also the dominant pattern among the non-Muslim Islamic authorities, whom Muslims encounter in their everyday lives. The consequences of this are evident in the above quotation in which Fawzia states that non-Muslim Islamic authorities do not take her Islam to be “real” Islam.

Once Rania, Fawzia, Halima, and Mouna became older, they gave up on debates with non-Muslim Islamic authorities. Rania remarks that at some point the debate on Islam in Danish media became “totally irrelevant for me. I could not find the connection to Islam at all ... I distance myself from [that debate]. I do not want to, neither have I ever felt like taking part in that debate. I think it is just silly.” Most of my informants had given up on social media debates. Halima for example remarks that,

In the beginning I was pretty active online ... but in the end I gave up. I concluded that people who do not like religion—and those are usually the ones who have difficulties spelling and then they judge you based on a TV program that they have seen at some point, which on closer inspection turns out to be an ad for something. I have given up on this, but if my friends do it [short pause]. They have also started to engage in it lately. I have experienced that some of them use the media and generalize and say that all Muslims must leave, and all Muslims are this and that. And these are personal friends that I have known since kindergarten. Then they write a short message to me afterwards saying, “Just to make it clear, I am not talking about you.” But it is the religion that I practice, and these are my people, so it is about me in many ways. So, I have just given up on it.

It is interesting to note the class difference that Halima highlights when saying her encounters are with people who cannot spell. Halima was at the time of the interview finishing her education as schoolteacher and is well read, but in her interaction with non-Muslims she is often reduced to a Muslim who is merely good or bad.

In the above I have emphasized the influence of non-Muslim Islamic authorities on my informants’ initial venturing into theological debates and in the process producing somewhat individualized Islams and adopting a Muslim identity. While this is an important—and often overseen variable—there are other important variables such as Muslim Islamic authorities, but my informants tactically maneuvered the spaces of strategic religion in different ways than they maneuvered on the geopolitical scene. They, for example, seldom—if ever—ventured into long and heated theological arguments with Muslims

Islamic authorities; for the most part they ignored Islamic authorities with whom they disagreed. Echoing Rania, Fawzia, and many other congregants in the Mariam Mosque, Halima remarked that “as time passed by, I trusted imams less and less”. Halima adds that “my parents have primarily been of the opinion that they do not want me to go to the mosque [on my own] because they are afraid that I will become brain-washed”. It was a general trait of parents to young Muslims in the Mariam Mosque that they wanted their children to learn how to pray and recite the Quran, but they did not want them to become too zealous or extreme in their practice. Rania was for example reprimanded by her parents when she donned the hijab outside the Quran school.

When Rania, Fawzia, and Halima engaged in debate on theology with Muslims it would primarily be discussions with their peers. Fawzia, who is by far the one who has engaged most in these debates, states that, “I also know a lot of Salafi-types, right. I meet them in my everyday life, right. And some of these sometimes convinces me of something, but then I am like: ‘no, no, I must remember that I must investigate things myself, right.’” However, in general these discussions seemed to be antagonistic, and primarily in opposition to what was described to me as Salafi-like Muslims, often mockingly addressed as the haram-police or Google sheikhs—the first to capture their attitude to Islam and the latter to highlight the presumed shallowness of their knowledge.

However, most members of the Mariam Mosque did not engage in discussion with or take much notice of Muslims that were opposed to their own (only in conversation with non-Muslims). Instead, they directed their attention towards religious preachers that they liked. Halima for example watched Islamic preachers on TV with her family, but as she says, “If we do not like them, then we change the channel. That is how it has always been; that has been the principle. If he says some shit, then we turn away from him ...” Halima also took inspiration from Danish authors such as Rushy Rashid (Petersen 2018a) and Aminah Tønnsen, who as mentioned in Chapter 3 suggested female imams in an opinion piece in 2003. The transition from first taking religious instruction from one’s family and later taking inspiration from Muslim Muslims available on TV, online spaces, or in local youth organizations is a dominant pattern in the Mariam Mosque. Fawzia for example explains that she originally found religious answers by asking her family, but this changed as she grew older:

You know, in the past it was primarily in my family ... but now I have started to become very [short pause]. Now I have been introduced to this new community, and then there are many of these modern Islamic

women, whom I like. You know, I really like—I follow Amina Wadud on Facebook and I read what she writes. There is also another Islamic feminist, Asma Lamrabet. The things she writes in English, I read those.

It should be noted that both Halima and Fawzia are Shia Muslims, but this does not have much effect on their choice of sources. Halima's daily prayer ritual for example takes inspiration from an Egyptian Sunni sheikh and she reads Sunni literature, and Fawzia has previously taken much inspiration from Salafi websites (and still did to some degree) and prays like a Sunni (for an analysis of Sunni-Shia relations in the Mariam Mosque, see Petersen forthcoming-b). Another woman, who will be introduced as one of the Mariam Mosque's religious leaders in Chapter 10, Nabila, had a Sunni background and was raised with instructions according to the Hanafi *madhhab* (school of thought), but she is also a follower of Sheikh Fadhalla Haeri (a major inspiration for Khankan as well—see Chapter 4). Therefore, she followed the Jafiri madhhab in some of her religious practice as this is the madhhab of Haeri. This is further complicated by Haeri's having received parts of his spiritual training from Swami Chinmayananda, who is an Indian Brahmin, Vedantic scholar, and Guru (Haeri and Haeri 2016: 18–19). This may be considered odd or maybe even contrary to how Muslims are expected to undertake religious education, but it is important to be aware that neither Haeri nor his followers see this as strange or even an issue. Likewise, Fawzia and Halima did not see anything odd in their using Sunni Islamic authorities and sources as inspiration for their religious practice.

While individuation, as can be seen from the above, has had a major impact on the discursivity of Rania, Fawzia, and Halima, there are still elements of their Islams that are influenced by strategic religion such as their unwillingness to marry non-Muslim men. That is, while they to a large degree are free to develop an Islam that works for them, they must still to some degree tactically navigate spaces structured by their family and strategic religion. This includes maintaining a stable social identity as a Sunni or Shia, irrespective of whether this reflects their beliefs, and follow rules that are determined by strategic religion such as rites of passage and celebration of religious holidays. The emergence of the Mariam Mosque influenced these power dynamics as it provides a space within which Muslims may fulfill religious requirements in a way that is more aligned with individual beliefs. However, as I will demonstrate in the next section, it produced a cognitive dissonance for all three once they embarked on this religious path.

## 2 Embodied Exegesis

Emotions play a significant role, if not a primary, in most productions of Islam, and I therefore use the term *embodied exegesis*<sup>4</sup> to describe my informants' reading and use of religious texts. Before venturing into this, it is important to note that emotions also play a primary role when well-versed theologians perform exegesis (see for example the fuqaha in Bowen 2012: 138–155). This is well-exemplified in Amina Wadud's (2008: 200) refusal to accept what she herself identifies as the primary reading of the Quran 4:34: "There is no getting around this one [the Quran 4:34], even though I have tried through different methods for two decades. I simply do not and cannot condone permission for a man to "scourge" or apply *any kind* of blow to a woman"<sup>5</sup> (cf. Shaikh 2007).

If scripture is reduced to merely a text, then Wadud's exegesis becomes paradoxical. However, if one highlights the readers' construction of an internal author in the text (Allah), whom the reader constructs in compliance with their own emotions, then Wadud's rejection becomes meaningful. Following this logic, Allah cannot possibly have intended to legitimize spousal violence with the Quran 4:34 and, therefore, he did not. Thus, it must be something different Allah wants to communicate. Like Wadud, my informants also construct Allah as a god with the same ethical ideals and values as themselves, and this construction is the main source of their Islam, irrespective of whether they engaged with texts or not.

Abstract emotions such as sin, conscience, and sense of justice, just to name a few, are not universal; they are learned through socialization and disciplining (Barrett 2017; Lazarus 1994; Riis and Woodhead 2010). In other words, emotions are discursive. That is, emotions are produced within a discursivity, and to be able to decode other people's emotions and produce appropriate emotional responses in specific situations is an important competence that children acquire during their upbringing. I emphasize this to underline that the embodied in embodied exegesis is not universal; it is—in relation to this study—a discursivity that has been formed in 21st century Denmark. Embodied discourse such as emotional triggers, what feels right, and a sense of justice, can be difficult to change using rational arguments, and although some religious people attempt to disciple embodied discourse (Inge 2017; Mahmood 2012; Schielke 2015), this is not the norm. My informants invoke the Quran verses with which

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4 I have taken inspiration from Sa'diyya Shaikh (2007) who uses a variety of terms with identical meaning to describe embodied exegetical practices: *tafsir* (exegesis) of praxis, *tafsir* through praxis, and embodied *tafsir*.

5 Wadud's own emphasis.

they agree and can accept, while dismissing others, using hermeneutical strategies such as the one expressed by Wadud in the above. That is, they tended to align scripture with their embodied discourse rather than align their embodied discourse with a supposedly primary reading of scripture (Eco 1994; Ricoeur 1981).

When I asked Rania whether she could construct an argument for female imams theologically, she gave the clear and straight forward answer, “No, not at all”. However, when I changed the timeframe and asked whether she would be able to do so as a written correspondence with two days between the exchange of letters, she took it as a challenge oriented towards producing an interpretation that was in compliance with her embodied exegesis:

Rania: 100 per cent. I would ask everyone for advice, Google it, and do everything in my power to do it.

Petersen: But could you do it from the knowledge you have now?

Rania: No ... I would not be able to do that. I would not feel that what I have to offer is good enough. It is not enough.

Petersen: Have you built these kinds of arguments for yourself?

Rania: Well, I use the argument that men and women ought to be equal.

I just try to be logical about it ... I have used my logical sense, I think.

But of course, I should back it up with [the Quran]. I would most likely just use my own logical explanations [laughs].

Rania distinguishes between what is good enough for herself and what is required of a publicly stated argument. Her own Islam is on the topic of female imams grounded in logic deduction based on her personal values. However, Rania understands that strategic religion dictates a certain way of arguing a point, and she is up to the challenge of building these arguments. In other words, she consciously plans to appropriate the Islamic tradition in a way that reflects how she wants Islam to be. Halima expresses this in a blunter way stating that she does what feels right while Fawzia seems slightly more up to the challenge when she answers that, “no, not in a public debate, but maybe more in a private debate”.

Embodied exegesis also produced severe cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) for Rania and Halima as they both—in compliance with a consensus among *fuqaha* (Islamic legal scholars)—felt strongly that interfaith marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man was not allowed, but they were at the same time both in a serious relationship with a non-Muslim man. Neither Rania nor Halima changed their views on interfaith marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man even though their curiosity on the

topic meant that they were presented with plenty of theological arguments in the Mariam Mosque.<sup>6</sup> They wanted to feel that it was Islamically legitimate, but they could not.

Interestingly, some informants who came to the Mariam Mosque also experienced cognitive dissonance due to the woman-led prayer. However, this was to a great degree offset by a religious authority, Nafisa (presented in Chapter 10), who was skilled in *tajwid* (Quran recitation), fluent in Arabic, well read in Islamic studies, modestly dressed, and always wearing hijab. While some of the young people in the mosque including Halima were not convinced of the theological arguments for female imams, they reasoned that if a person like Nafisa accepted female imams as legitimate, then it could not be forbidden in Islam. Echoing many conversations I had with young people in the Mariam Mosque, Halima for example explained to me that, “I really like Nafisa, because I think her knowledge is enormous and she knows her arguments well, so it appears me that she is so good.” After Friday prayer, Nafisa would often be found in the sofas in the mosque’s lounge with young people around her, answering questions and giving religious instruction. However, Nafisa was (as Fetteh) against interfaith marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim men; or to be specific, she framed herself as undecided until the topic had been properly investigated.

### 3 Hicham Mouna

Hicham Mouna,<sup>7</sup> the co-founder of the Mariam Mosque, was born in 1987 to Moroccan parents who had immigrated to Denmark. He suffered from cystic fibrosis, a long-term disease that meant he could not expect to live beyond 35–40 years of age, as he would frequently say when asked. He felt that his life path precluded a lifelong relationship and the founding of a family. I am using the past tense here because Mouna died of cystic fibrosis in October 2018, aged 31.

6 In relation to the discussion on macro structures in Chapter 1 it is worth noticing that the contemporary demand for scriptural grounding of Islamic discourse among the non-clergy originates in the 19th-century’s modernist movements and is made possible by the introduction of public school systems, mass media, and the printing press (Bowen 2012: 75; Waardenburg 1978: 332). It is, in other words, a novelty historically.

7 It should briefly be mentioned the methodological issues related to highlighting Khankan’s Muslim identity and only presenting what is relevant to this book’s argument also applies to Mouna (and any other informant). Mouna was for example a gamer and painted Warhammer figures for role play. This played a significant role in his life but has, along with other details, been excluded from my presentation of him.



Except for the disease, Mouna's life looked like that of most other young members of the Mariam Mosque. He was, at the time of the interview, writing his master's thesis in pedagogy on the problems faced by Muslims parents whose children come out as homosexuals.

While growing up Mouna was torn between his Danish and Muslim identity, as he put it, and like so many other young Danish Muslims, including Rania, Fawzia, and Halima, he oscillated between these two identities (Petersen 2018a; 2020b: 76–82). The driving force behind his oscillation was emancipation; he wanted to be allowed to ask questions and form his own opinions instead of being coerced into a position, an inspiration he took from the Danish school system:

I really wanted my family background, my religious background, to work with a more—I do not want to say Western—but, you know, this life where you are allowed to investigate and make decisions yourself instead of having things dictated to you. I really liked the critical aspect in school. You know, this idea that you are allowed to question things; it is not written in stone that a novel should be understood in a specific way or that this was the only correct way of living. [In school] there were many ways to look at the world and I really liked that, and I wanted to make that part of my own religious background, so what I started to do was to look at—I started to research a lot on Islam. At one time I fervently embraced Sunni-Islam, and I followed the traditional well-known Sunni-Islamic approach. But the more I learned the more I also realized that there are some tendencies in that way of living that I could not reconcile myself with. One of the big questions for me was, for example, the story about the Prophet Mohammad who married Aisha at a very young age, right. She was very young, right.

Mouna's eventual rejection of what he calls the Sunni-Islamic approach is based on embodied exegesis. It is interesting to notice that his religious life as a Sunni did not constitute a return to the Quran school or mosque, not even for Friday prayer. While he may wanted to follow a similar Islam, he did not like the approach and he therefore stayed away:

Petersen: Did you go to the mosque?

Mouna: No ... they did not understand my questions and always tried to inhibit it [the questioning] or stop it. You were not allowed to ask questions. That is how it was. It was primarily rote learning which many Muslim institutions suffer from in relation to the teaching; that this is how it is. And the questions that are asked are not really critical but

more like, “Isn’t it true that this and that?” And the answer would be, “Yes, it is true that it is like that”, or “No, that is not correct. This is how it is.” These are leading questions which are [pre]approved. They are not [genuine] questions that question whether we have understood things in the right way.

Neither the mosque nor Mouna’s parents could give him satisfying answers, and some questions were not allowed. His parents, for example, explained that Mohammad’s marriage with the young Aisha was part of culture at the time of Mohammad, but that things had changed, and this was not something Muslims did anymore. It should be noticed that Mouna’s parents’ answer resembles the tension-relieving strategies described in the above. That is, they discard unwanted semiotic resources by categorizing them as cultural, not Islamic (cf. Johansen 2002; Liebmann and Galal 2020; Otterbeck 2000b).

Online, Mouna became part of what Henry Jenkins (2006) has calls a convergence culture: that is, a group of people that collectively explores a topic online by putting bits and pieces together, contributed by individual members. It is important to underline that convergence is a process, not an endpoint, and, as Jenkins demonstrates, often involves very open processes where discussants are persuaded by new information and arguments proffered by individual members. To take part in a convergence culture often means many hours of study as one reads up on others’ arguments while undertaking careful independent research to get a foothold in the discussions. Mouna was no exception to this, and he soon started to read the hadith collections by Abu Hanifa, al-Bukhari, and Muslim, among others:

I just read them [Hanifa, al-Bukhari, and Muslim] to find out what is actually written in them. And when I began to read them, I saw that there were things where I thought, “This does not make any sense. I mean, what is this? I have never heard about these things before. It makes no sense in relation to the understanding I have of Islam.” So, I started to search, “what does it mean ...” like on Google ... I searched in all sorts of ways: forums, media, and you name it, found books, read the Quran two or three times in different English translations. Some of these only had the translations while others also had an explanation [of the text]. I tried to pit interpretations against each other to find some sort of common ground between them, but I realized that Muslims are far from in agreement on how to understand it.

Like the other members of the Mariam Mosque Mouna did not internalize the Islam preached in the Quran school, and while his family was for a time his main source of Islam, he ended up venturing into other forums to explore other Islams and develop his Islam. This process was to a great degree facilitated by the internet:

I found an internet forum with people; some of them were autodidacts, some were university students within Islamic studies and Arabic linguistics and dialects, et cetera. They had found this space where they could talk freely and discuss various topics ... I felt that forum was what I had been missing. You know, it was a place where I could actually discuss Islam.

Discussions were in English as the forum had members from around the world with very different backgrounds, and Mouna made personal friends of some of them. Furthermore, members were allowed to question even those elements that are considered part of the core of common constructions of Islam:

For example, the five prayers, right. ... I find it interesting that they have such a strong resemblance to the Zoroastrians' five prayers, for example. That they are performed at somewhat the same time; and many elements of Islam seem to—if one starts to research it—be inspired by culture or religiously inspired from other religions and introduced to Islam through hadith, for example.

Mouna adds that he sensed that some of the hadith, including those from al-Bukhari's renown collection *Sahih al-Bukhari*, served male self-interest and were of a very sexual nature, "You don't have to read many of al-Bukhari's hadith before you realize that there is something absurd in what they say, right. Some of them are very sexually inspired, and some are very violent .... When I read the Quran, I did not feel that they correlated with it."

Ultimately, he rejected most hadith, and the madhhabs as well, but as time passed, he felt the need to be part of a community in Copenhagen as the online world was distant and only fulfilled his intellectual need for clarification. Yet, as he had told me, the established mosques did not appeal to him, and he did not see ritual practice as a core element of Islam anyway:

As I mentioned in relation to the story about prayer before. The more I learned the more I realized that the mosque communities that exist in Denmark today do not appeal to me. That is, in a nutshell, what has been

the problem my whole life. I have not been able to find the Islam that appeals to me.

A while before Khankan announced her intentions to open a mosque with female imams, Mouna tried to join a Quranist group whose members announced they were going to found a congregation in Copenhagen, but this initiative never materialized. When I interviewed Mouna he was still very interested in this approach, and he asked me about literature recommendations and whether I knew of a group he could join. This theological position puts his engagement in the Mariam Mosque into perspective, as the mosque was, to a large degree, oriented towards a ritual practice that he personally did not see as important. As he explained, "Many of the ritual practices that are seen as or attributed to Islam, I do not necessarily see as being Islam; they are culture that is inseparable from common human conceptions of what Islam is." Mouna did not believe in the separation of Islam and culture; rather, he saw culture as necessary for Muslim understanding of the divine and as something that facilitates worship of God. This also led him to state that he did not belong to the same religion as that worshipped in the mosques. As he would sometimes say to Khankan, "The Islam we follow is not the same [as that in other mosques]; it does not even look like the same religion. It may just as well be another religion"; and, "Stop comparing yourself with other mosque communities, because to some degree we do not follow the same Islam. Their religion could just as well have been a completely different religion." Mouna's motivation for putting his time and energy in Femimam was primarily that he wanted to create a forum in which other young Muslims could find and develop their Islam, like he had done: "I realized for myself what I felt was right, and now I want to create a space where people can come and find their Islam". As I will get back to in Chapter 7, Femimam members were not originally oriented towards the founding of a mosque; rather they wanted to create a knowledge center that had women-led Friday prayer as one among other activities.

Mouna was about twenty years old when he started his online engagement, which became more and more time consuming as he got deeper into the convergence culture. His engagement slowed again when he was in his mid-twenties due to the demands of his studies, but by then he had asked many of the questions that had troubled him. However, Mouna never left the online community completely.

#### 4 Agency, Structure, and Serendipities

Femimam did not create a demand, it emerged by tapping into a demand for an alternative to existing mosques. Congregants did not necessarily arrive to the Mariam Mosque with a firm belief in the legitimacy of female imams or in pursuit of a feminist stance, although this was the case for some congregants. Rather, congregants seemed to be attracted by the inclusive space and their longing for a less regulated Islamic space. A significant number of congregants, who were regular mosque goers, continued to attend their everyday mosque and saw the Mariam Mosque as a supplement, whereas others gained renewed interest in Islam and only attended the Mariam Mosque.

As I will argue in the subsequent chapters, the emergence of the Mariam Mosque cannot be explained solely as a combination of Khankan's agency (as presented in Chapter 4) and a structural demand (as presented in Chapter 3 and 5). Rather, its emergence was to a large degree caused by a media serendipity, which I will analyze in detail in the next chapter, and a long range of subsequent serendipities, which are the subject of the following chapters.

Just to be clear, I am not arguing that the emergence of the Mariam Mosque was unexpected. Rather the opposite, while it could not have been predicted that the Mariam Mosque would emerge, or that it would emerge in the way that it did, it was highly likely that an alternative to established mosques, catering to a demand for female leadership, would emerge. This has also been the case in other parts of Europe, exemplified in the Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque in Berlin (2017), the Die Offene Moschee in Switzerland (2018), the La Mosquée Fatima in Paris (2020), and the Inclusive Mosque Initiative in London (2012), just to name a few (see also Calderini 2022: 147–179; Petersen 2019b, 2019a).

## The Serendipitous Spread of a Story

Petersen: How did you decide that you wanted to found Femimam?

Khankan: Actually, it simply did not happen in a way where I thought, “OK, now I will do this.” I did not put it down on paper and say, “Now it is going to be like this and this, and therefore I must do that.” Actually, it was not like that.

Interview with KHANKAN, 4 November 2016

In the late summer of 2014, Khankan made a series of life changing decisions: she enrolled as a student in cognitive therapy, started divorce proceedings to end her 11 years of marriage, and founded Exitcirklen, which is an NGO that helps women out of abusive relationships. At this stage, Khankan was still formally the chairwoman of Forum for Critical Muslims, but the association had been dormant for some time. It existed as a network of people who knew each other well, but there were no activities and many of the core members had moved on to careers and jobs. This is one among many reasons that Khankan did not organize Exitcirklen within Forum for Critical Muslims, although the association had actually run a predecessor called Face to Face a decade earlier (Khankan 2006b: 101–105).

This chapter explains how the structures analyzed in previous chapters coalesced into a media serendipity and produced Femimam in March 2015. I recognize that “there is at the outset no determinate, enumerable set of factors, the totality of which comprise the situation. To suppose otherwise is to confuse a retrospective standpoint with a prospective one” (MacIntyre 1981/2014: 116). That is, the founding of Femimam cannot be reduced to any single one of these structures and none of them alone provides causes; they rather constitute the structures within which the serendipities occurred, and without which they could not have taken place.

### 1 Structure of the Chapter and the Argument

The chapter begins in the summer of 2014 and focuses on Khankan as an individual with a number of ideas. She met and recruited Saliha Marie Fetteh in November 2014 and announced her intentions to found a house for all three Abrahamic religions almost immediately. While this was published in a news-

paper, the story did not spread. After that, Khankan talked of her plans to open a mosque with female imams on multiple occasions without the media taking much notice. On 3 March 2015, however, Khankan appeared on the front page of *Information* beside the headline “Denmark’s next imam?” Overnight she wrote an opinion piece on the subject for *Politiken* (Denmark’s largest newspaper), which the editor decided to publish on 5 March. The news about a female imam spread rapidly and remained prominent on the media agenda for a long time.

To explain this sudden and rapid dissemination I introduce Henry Jenkin’s concept of spreadability, analyze three previous announcements, and argue that it was the terror attack in Copenhagen on 14–15 February that made the announcement spreadable (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013). Thus, the terror attack produced a context in which the non-Muslim majority and a segment of the Muslim minority were demanding reform and for a while Femimam became the example par excellence. It was enough time for a group to form, which is the focus of Chapter 7.

I analyze the announcements focusing on context, dwelling at length on power asymmetries and the framing that took place before the first two, and then move on at a rapid pace after having introduced them.<sup>1</sup> This largely reflects how all three were handled in the media, but it also works well from an analytical point of view. There are many variables that coalesce into a moment where an announcement can be made but if no one stops and takes notice of it, the moment passes at a rapid pace and, while the announcement may be uttered, it does not happen.

I slow down the narrative with Khankan’s announcement of her plans to found a mosque with female imams on 19 February, four days after the terror attack, because a journalist actually responded and reacted to it: that is, the announcement almost happened. Then follows the 3 March announcement, which finally spread the message through the Danish media landscape and internationally.

The announcements are to some degree a product of my analysis, as I attach specific importance to them with a retrospective gaze. Therefore, it is important not to construct a plot or a trajectory oriented towards 3 March as the culmination of events as Alasdair MacIntyre explains with reference to Jean-Paul Sartre (1962/2000):

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1 This effect is amplified by switching between narrating in the past and present: I slow down and immerse in the situations by using the present tense and then speed up by switching to the past tense when the moment is over. I apologize to readers who find this distracting, but I hope most readers will recognize this pattern from popular fictional writing and, thus, find it helpful in terms of understanding how marginal the events I highlight in the text were in their original context.

... to present human life in the form of a narrative is always to falsify it ... Human life is composed of discrete actions which lead nowhere, which have no order; the storyteller imposes on human events retrospectively an order which they did not have when they were lived.

MACINTYRE 1981/2014: 248

Therefore, I will describe an unplotted series of events rather than telling a plotted narrative. However, this is only to a degree as some order must be introduced to make the events intelligible. In writing it I will use an observation by Steven Hutchinson and Pat O'Malley who state that,

A genealogy, we might say, is a history without a forward trajectory, logic, or purpose, and one devoid of all-transforming ruptural events ... the future is not determined by a certain logic, but is at least partially invented, and often somewhat accidental ... Central to genealogy, therefore, is the role of contingency: the failure of plans ... the impact of unforeseen circumstances and mistakes ...

HUTCHINSON and O'MALLEY 2018: 71

As I argued in Chapter 1, while social processes are serendipitous and somewhat unpredictable, some serendipities are more likely than others, and only by studying the unrealized and making comparisons with the realized can we gain an understanding of why some things materialize while others do not. Thus, earlier dispersions, exemplified in this case by Khankan's previous ideas about a house of worship for all three Abrahamic religions, may play an important role in understanding that what is realized often happens by accident. Only through retrospection does the realized moment become an important point in time through which other moments may be understood; this is how the illusion of a plot or trajectory emerges. It is therefore important to recover and present the unrealized moments with their original degree of importance, and as it happens, no one was interested in Khankan's idea of a mosque with female imams before it was inserted into the ongoing debate on terror on 3 March. That is, it is important to keep the fleeting unrealized moments in the margin of the present chapter to represent the proper contextualization of their original position.

The chapter is based on archival work in Infomedia and Mediestream and semi-structured interviews with Khankan, Ellen Chakir, Jacob Holdt, Saliha Marie Fetteh, and Hicham Mouna. In my work of reconstructing events and for the purpose of triangulation I have, furthermore, had conversations with six other informants, five of whom remain anonymous while the sixth, Saer



El-Jaichi, is presented in the chapter along with Chakir and Fetteh. Some informants have also been helpful with the reconstruction of events by checking their private communication services, such as email and Messenger, both to jog their memories and provide accurate information on events.

## 2 Searching for and Recruiting a Female Imam

During the fall of 2014 Khankan put the idea of female imams to people in her network. At this stage Khankan, as in 2006, wanted to be part of the congregation, not an imam, and one of her close friends advised her to start the mosque in her own home without drawing any media attention to it. Khankan paraphrased the advice in one of our interviews:

Start it here in your home in peace and quiet. Ask the people you know to come. Just start it slow and easy without any media attention. Build it at a slow pace. Maybe it will start with five people that becomes ten and then it will grow from there.<sup>2</sup>

Interview 4 November 2016

On 12 October 2014, Khankan reposted the Muslim Manifest from 2006 on Forum for Critical Muslims' Facebook page, which had otherwise been dormant since December 2013, but people did not interact with it to any great extent; two days later the first comment said "cool" and a month later another user commented with a heart emoji.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of a mosque with female imams was at this stage a side project that Khankan would pitch to individuals for feedback on how to proceed. She was primarily engaged in the founding of Exitcirklen, her education in cognitive therapy, discussions over separation and divorce, the public debate surrounding the recently declared Islamic State, and her position on the role of religion in a secular society. The latter two entailed Khankan being repeatedly interviewed or asked to speak at events and it is in that context the idea of female imams re-emerged publicly.

In November 2014, Khankan was travelling to attend the Danish-Arab Interfaith Dialogue conference in Istanbul when, by coincidence, she spotted Fetteh in the boarding area before her flight from Copenhagen airport. Fetteh is a

<sup>2</sup> I later spoke with the friend who tells a similar story.

<sup>3</sup> Forum for Critical Muslims, Facebook post on 12 October 2014, accessed 25 April 2020, [https://www.facebook.com/kritiskemuslimer/posts/1549781375238743?\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=K-R](https://www.facebook.com/kritiskemuslimer/posts/1549781375238743?__tn__=K-R).

well-respected convert with a master's degree in Arabic from Baghdad University (and the woman mentioned as speaking on the radio in the introduction). Khankan and Fetteh had not met before, but they had noticed each other in the media and Fetteh had read Khankan's book, *Islam and Redemption* (Khankan 2006b), while Khankan had read some of Fetteh's posts on religion.dk.

Khankan introduced her idea of a mosque with female imams to Fetteh who agreed to take on its religious leadership. Although she refused to adopt the imam title, by the time they landed in Istanbul she had agreed to be called a *khatiba* (preacher), *murshida* (leader/guide), and/or *bønneleder* (Danish: prayer leader). As Fetteh explains:

I think, for Sherin, it was a matter of finding someone who dared to do it. I am not afraid of admitting that it had its consequences to go into this, to walk into the lion's den [*stikke hånden i hvepsereden*]. I do not have children or anyone else that I have to consider, so I have been almost—not completely, but almost—unaffected by it.

Interview with FETTEH 23 November 2016

Like Khankan, Fetteh had struggled for Muslim women's rights for years in both mosques and the public sphere. By the time she met Khankan, Fetteh had already led women in prayer in her own home, although she was aware of the disagreement among Muslims on this topic. However, as she had been regularly led in prayer by a Syrian woman affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in a Danish mosque almost twenty years earlier, Fetteh had good reason to assume that this was within the limits of acceptable Islamic conduct. As she said, "She [the Syrian woman] belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood, so you have to say, 'If she can accept it, then I am sure this is possible'" (interview with Fetteh on 23 November 2016). This kind of prayer leadership is not uncommon in Danish mosques.

During the encounter in Copenhagen airport and the ensuing flight, Khankan introduced Fetteh to the Umm Waraqa hadith, which she had herself recently learned about. This hadith is often understood by feminists as Mohammad's appointing a female imam in Medina, thereby legitimizing their position. Fetteh is not fond of posing religious questions to "Uncle Google" as she calls the search engine; rather, she found the hadith in Tabari's *History of the Prophets and Kings*, which is a one of her favorite go-to books. As she told me, "I like Tabari, because he collects several versions of many events and I like that" (interview with Fetteh on 23 November 2016). Fetteh also consulted both Sunni and Shia fiqh literature on the subject and found various stances, but she did not research Islamic feminist literature:

Petersen: Have you ever read Islamic feminist literature?

Fetteh: I have, but the literature that I have read, I don't know what people in Sherin's world would think of it, because I have read Zainab al-Ghazali, and as you know, she is *ikhwan* [Muslim Brotherhood]. I have read quite a lot of Turkish literature, but that was also quite, you know, influenced by the Brotherhood. But you could say that they were also very rebellious, those women. They went to prison and all sorts of things. Really, Zainab was one of my, you know, "Wow, she is really tough, right, she is not afraid, and she does exactly what suits her, and she says exactly what she wants," and that sort of thing.

Interview with FETTEH on 23 November 2016

Like Khankan, Fetteh was inspired by her role models' agency and integrity without agreeing with their discourse in toto. She was not particularly interested in what is often referred to as Islamic feminist literature, noting that due to her job at the university she primarily read books on Islam written by Western researchers. As she teaches Arabic, she had also come to know many of her female role models through Volume Two of the *al-Kitaab* textbook from Georgetown University that she used in her classes.<sup>4</sup> These are primarily Egyptian feminists such as Huda Sha'arawi, Nabawiyya Musa, and Malak Hifni Nasif to name a few.

Fetteh does not embrace the idea of the common origin of all religion—neither does she seem interested in the question—but she firmly believes in peaceful co-existence. Likewise, she does not expect others to believe in her Islam and she is well aware of the differences between her own faith and Khankan's:

Some people say that Sufis are not real Muslims. I am sure you have met these [people]. I will not accept that; I say that any person who says the declaration of faith and claims adherence to Islam is a Muslim. How individual Muslims think and act is between that person and our Lord [long pause]. But I do not, like Sherin, have those Sufi [pause] you know, I call

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4 This information is not from the interview on 23 November 2016. It emerged while I lived in Jordan and came to know of Fetteh's teaching practice and use of this particular textbook. I attended language classes myself and had noticed how this textbook had awakened an interest in Arab and Muslim feminists among the language teachers at the school. It seemed that, among Arabic teachers, these women from *al-Kitaab* constituted a base curriculum of feminists that everyone knew and the ones with interest in the topic, such as Fetteh, had further researched.

it software, very, very soft, you know [long pause]. She is also educated within philosophy. Could you imagine me reading philosophy? Jesper, that would be a catastrophe ... A shovel is a shovel and that's the end of it.

interview with FETTEH on 23 November 2016

Fetteh has never attended *dhikr* (Sufi ritual), neither was she curious about it, although she said that she may attend someday just to see what it is, adding, "There are many ways of practicing your faith and that has always been the case, no matter whether you look at Shia or Sunni history" (interview with Fetteh on 23 November 2016). In other words, Fetteh is neither bothered nor feels threatened by other ways of being Muslim and she does not try to force her personal faith on others; in that way her practice is close to Khankan's position on the common root of all religions, but for very different reasons.

When Fetteh and Khankan talked on their way to Istanbul, they did not settle the details of what the mosque would set out to do, and Fetteh explained that they did not talk much at the conference due to Khankan's engagements there.

The meeting and agreement between Fetteh and Khankan in Copenhagen airport were produced by several serendipities such as both Fetteh and Khankan being invited to the conference, their booking on the same flight, Khankan's spotting and recognizing Fetteh, their having read each other's texts, etc. However, it is also important to point out Khankan's agency (her approaching Fetteh with an idea) as this increased the probability of her finding a prayer leader. Khankan had previously asked other prominent women the same question, among others Aminah Tønnsen whose opinion piece was quoted in Chapter 3, suggesting that women should turn off the loudspeaker in the women's section of the mosque and have their own women-led Friday prayer. Thus, Khankan's finding an "imam" eventually was not an unlikely event, even if the actual event of her finding one was serendipitous.

### 3 Announcement in Istanbul in November 2014

Having found her "imam", Khankan announced the project at the conference, where she was scheduled to talk on relations between secularism and religion. In front of an audience of priests, rabbis, and imams from both Europe and the Middle East she announced her project in a final remark after having finished her speech but before leaving the podium:

Male imams have to promote and allow female imams to give khutbah [Friday sermon] in mosques all over Europe and in the rest of the world.

I have recently established a committee in Copenhagen that consists of female imams and their supporters and in the end, I have a vision of a united place of prayer for Muslims and Christians and Jews. So, my last point; you can read it within yourself and thank you so much for your time. [applause]<sup>5</sup>

Here, Khankan mentions a house of worship for all three Abrahamic religions. When I inquired about this, she explained that she had unsuccessfully tried, on an earlier occasion, to persuade a church and the synagogue in Copenhagen to go into such a project; the idea was in her mind in Istanbul because, shortly before the conference, she had seen a project in Sweden involving fundraising for a house of all three Abrahamic religions.<sup>6</sup>

As the conference in Istanbul was an interfaith conference with leaders from all three Abrahamic religions, it posed a unique opportunity for Khankan to propose and discuss the idea of a house of all three Abrahamic religions, and maybe find a partner who would lend some space in a church or synagogue to such a project. Khankan's proposing this idea at the conference increased the likelihood of a serendipity that could have produced a house of all three Abrahamic religions, but this did not happen.

It is important to stress that Khankan did not have a clear idea of what she was trying to realize. She played around with several ideas until one suddenly germinated at the beginning of March 2015 but, as explained above, this did not erase the earlier dispersion of ideas. Khankan still wanted to bring faiths together in the Mariam Mosque by, for example, having a priest deliver the khutbah, and she also wanted Christians to attend the mosque (see Chapter 7).

The Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which funded the conference in Istanbul, also invited a journalist, Pernille Bramming from the weekly newspaper, *Weekendavisen*, to report on the event. This turned into a full-page article titled, "The Way Forward", that starts like this:

ISTANBUL—What is it like to be a Muslim currently? What is it like to be attacked on two flanks from the Islamic State and from the internet and media, which are boiling with hateful accusations against Muslims in the world?

5 Khankan's talk at the Danish-Arab Interfaith Dialogue conference in Istanbul, accessed 20 August 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pIuI3xdFoA>. This speech was in English and is therefore merely transcribed, not translated.

6 *Guds Hus* homepage, accessed 25 April 2020, <http://gudshus.se/>.

“It is certainly not fruitful to go into defense mode. So many horrible things are committed in the name of Islam; if you were to condemn all of it, you would get very busy,” says the Danish Muslim, Sherin Khankan.

As an intellectual, author, and activist, she has on the contrary decided to take the bull by its horns and not be deterred:

“I focus on reforms, and right now it is the work of getting female imams in Denmark which occupies me,” says Sherin Khankan who is educated as a sociologist of religion.

Last month she and others founded a committee that has the purpose of paving the way for female imams, a project that she has worked on for many years:

“It sets a new course, and I would rather engage in that than spend my energy on discussion of the Islamic State and their primitive world. Any sound and rational human being condemns the Islamic State.”

BRAMMING 2014

Bramming’s article does not give the impression that Khankan wanted to open a house of worship for all Abrahamic religions, but it may well be that Khankan did not focus on this in the interview. The article moves on to explain that Khankan had put her idea of female imams to the audience, criticized the Turkish concept of secularism, suggested Shia-Muslim Abdol Karim Souroush’s concept of secularism as more appropriate, and demanded that Middle Eastern states stop giving precedence to Islam over other religions. Even though Bramming does not seem to have noticed the significance of presenting these ideas and demands in that specific context, they appear in her article, but framed for a Danish audience:

“In a secular society all citizens are of equal worth. That is what we want for the new Middle East, that Islam does not take precedence, but all religions are equal.”

For the same reason, Khankan advocates that Denmark become a secular state:

“The Danish constitution is one of the most discriminating in Europe because of the precedence given to the People’s Church [*Folkekirken*]<sup>7</sup> and the monarchy. There are more than 125 faith communities in Denmark and they ought to be on equal footing,” she says.

BRAMMING 2014

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7 Folkekirken constitutes the state church in Denmark.

Interestingly, the announcement of a committee that would pave the way for female imams did not spread to other Danish media. The only comment on the article in *Weekendavisen* is an opinion piece in a tabloid newspaper, *Ekstra Bladet*—that quotes an opinion from their web forum, *The Nation*, responding to the suggestion of placing all religions in Denmark on equal footing—in which it is said, “No rational human being would want to place Islam, as it has developed, on an equal footing with any other religion” (Olsen 2014). Likewise, the four last lines of the quote above were published out of context in four local subscription-based newspapers as the quote of the day.

On 19 November, Khankan also announced her talk in Istanbul on Facebook, but she only mentions female imams in one sentence, “In a world where the written and oral interpretation of Islam still is dominated by men and the lack of female imams/khatibas”.<sup>8</sup> This did not spread much or generate any debate, but on 9 December Khankan posted a request for new members for Forum for Critical Muslims and specifically for a project on women in Islam that went as follows:

#### REFORM ISLAM IN EUROPE

Forum for Critical Muslims are seeking new, engaged members. If you want to make a difference by spreading a reformed Sufi-oriented interpretation of Islam then write to Sherin Khankan at [talskvinde@krititiskemuslimer.dk](mailto:talskvinde@krititiskemuslimer.dk) (or here).

We are, among other things, working on an exciting project on women in Islam.

This post spurred debate and the coordinator for *dawah* (mission) in the Minhaj ul-Quran Women Youth League responded that they were interested in collaborating. While it is unclear exactly who attended and what was discussed, Khankan's post led to a meeting on 18 December where she pitched the idea of a mosque with female imams. The meeting did not take the project forward, but a convert to Islam, Ellen Chakir, decided to join.

Khankan and Chakir had not met previously, but Chakir and Fetteh had met on Facebook and in real life when Chakir attended Fetteh's 50th birthday party in 2012. Chakir is the only person among the founding members of Femimam who read Islamic feminist literature, and in her comments to the post quoted above she encourages Khankan's opponents to read authors such as Asma Barlas, Amina Wadud, Khaled Abou el-Fadl, Reza Aslan, and Laila Ahmed.

<sup>8</sup> The original is in English.

As Khankan at this point understood her engagement as a continuation of the Forum for Critical Muslims' project from 2006, both Chakir and Fetteh were added to the board on the association's webpage along with a new tab that contained a copy-paste of the Wikipedia entry "Women as imams".

#### 4 Spreadability

Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green teach a seemingly simple rule about stories in any given media, "our message is simple and direct: if it doesn't spread, it's dead" (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013: 1). In their book *Spreadable Media* they argue that terminology within media studies has caused some fundamental misunderstandings about how stories spread: content does not spread as viruses do and audiences do not get infected (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013: 16–23). Instead, "audiences play an active role in 'spreading' content rather than serving as passive carriers of viral media: their choices, investments, agendas, and actions determine what gets valued" (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013: 21). In other words, content changes when audiences spread it because audiences typically spread content as part of ongoing conversations; they want to say something, make a point, or do something when they spread content. In short, they "retrofit it [content] to better serve their interests" (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013: 27).

If journalists and debaters are seen as an audience that interacts with content and uses it to make a story or a point, then it appears that Khankan's announcements from November 2014 to February 2015 were not malleable enough to spread. That is, content is spreadable if it is malleable to the extent that individuals can produce their own meanings with it and thereby use it to express themselves and/or insert it into ongoing discussion in which they are engaged.

As is evident from the description above, a small part of Khankan's interview with *Weekendavisen* spread, but not the announcement as a whole. Her statement on the Danish state church was made relevant in the Danish context by taking it out of the original context, thereby making it provocative in a Danish debate on Islam. In other words, a small segment of Khankan's interview spread as audiences saw the opportunity to make their own points with it, and it could be argued that they even altered the meaning of the original to do so.

In the following I track the spread of three additional announcements on 13 January, 7 February, and 19 February to highlight and contrast the unrealized moments that preceded the 3 March 2015 announcement, which spread far and wide in a rapid pace and created the narrative about the imminent opening



of a mosque with female imams in Copenhagen. As stated in the beginning of the chapter, I thoroughly analyze the creation of the moment in which the announcements were made.

## 5 Announcement on 13 January

On 7 January 2015, brothers Saïd and Chérif Kouachi attacked the French satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo, killing 12 and injuring another 11 people. Even though this put extra pressure on Muslims engaged in the Danish debate to condemn the attack, Khankan and several other Muslim leaders insisted that Muslims have nothing to do with terrorism and were therefore under no special obligation to condemn it. Khankan argued that no one should be considered guilty by association, and that every citizen should be treated equally in this regard. She went on to say, “We do not ask Danish Jews to condemn Israel’s terror and killing of 450 children in the summer of 2014, nor do we ask Christians to condemn Breivik”<sup>9</sup> (Damkjær 2015). However, Khankan conceded that as the chairwoman of Forum for Critical Muslims she could be required to make a statement, and in that capacity, she condemned the attack (Khankan 2015a).

On 12 January, the host of *Deadline*, an agenda-setting TV program in Denmark, stood with a Quran between his hands as the cameras started rolling for a 14-minute item on the Charlie Hebdo attack. As an introductory remark before presenting his two guests he proposed two frames of reference for understanding the attack:

Can terror be understood by recognizing that it is caused by the terrorists’ economic and social conditions? Just look at the Algerian terror brothers, they were marginalized and by several media described as products of a failed integration policy. Or, have we misunderstood the extreme nature of Islamism if we think that it can be fought with more social workers, better integration, and language classes? Instead, some people think we should focus on the ideology that is used to justify terrorism, that is, political Islamism, and to understand it we must have a closer look at this book, the Quran [holding the Quran up to the camera].

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9 Anders Behring Breivik was a terrorist who on 22 July 2011 killed 77 people in two subsequent attacks in Norway.

To answer these questions, *Deadline* had invited Jørgen Bæk Simonsen, an associate professor specializing in Islamic history and religion,<sup>10</sup> and Tina Maggaard, an associate professor at the Technological Institute (Aarhus University) working with culture, globalization, human resources, and sustainability, with a PhD in French literature and presented by the journalist as “someone who knows Islam”. This claim was based on her authoring two reports on Islam in Denmark for the ministry of integration and the ministry of welfare and gender equality and a number of book chapters and articles related to Islam. As the frame presented by Maggaard was forced upon Khankan in an interview the following day, I delve into the discussion between Simonsen and Maggaard to demonstrate the effect of framing on the speaking position of Muslims.

After the opening remark, Simonsen went first and explained that Islam is always interpreted in a context and that there is a wide range of interpretations, something clearly evident in this particular case in that there were Muslims on both sides of the conflict. So, the question the journalist should be asking is how and why certain people, with reference to the Quran, think that their violent acts are justified by some higher cause. As he points out, “It is important to remember that the interpretation of the Quran is not automatized. The Quran does not make people do things.” He then attempts a quantitative argument:

If you have been following what the majority of imams said during the Friday prayer this weekend, then it was unambiguous dissociation from the idea that this [the attack on Charlie Hebdo] in any way could be legitimized with reference to [gesturing towards the Quran on the table] ... That is, they disagreed with the assumption that the two brothers made, that it could be legitimized with reference to the Quran.

Seen from Simonsen’s perspective, Islamic terrorism is based on an interpretation of Islam, but all interpretations of Islam are products of the context within which they emerge.<sup>11</sup> This view differs significantly from Maggaard’s standpoint as she claims,

This is an internal Muslim encounter, which has not been completed, and which have in fact been ongoing [sigh], since the birth of Islam—a struggle between literal and less literal [Muslims]. And now we have become

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<sup>10</sup> For the sake of transparency, Jørgen Bæk Simonsen supervised my MA thesis at Copenhagen University.

<sup>11</sup> Simonsen uses the of-sentence so I have reproduced it as such.

involved in that struggle because there are Muslim faith communities in Denmark.

Magaard constructs an ongoing internal conflict originating in 7th century Arabia between good and bad Muslims whom she calls literal (bad) and less literal (good) Muslims, with reference to their approach to scripture. She further explains that non-Muslim Europeans are caught in the fire between these two groups due to Muslim immigration to Europe. Therefore, she thinks that Muslims not only have an obligation to dissociate themselves from the terrorist attack, they also have an obligation to reform Islam and thereby end the conflict. That is, a reformed theology is needed to defeat the literal Muslims theologically.

However, Magaard agrees that there are multiple causes of terrorism and she recognizes that imams in France have dissociated themselves from the attack on Charlie Hebdo, meanwhile claiming that much of this is Muslim leaders paying lip service to non-Muslims. Magaard has, on several occasions, called for a reform of Islam research in Denmark, which she finds uncritical and too little interested in the role of scripture in its explanations of contemporary Islam (Magaard 2006, 2016).

Simonsen and Magaard disagree on how Muslims interpret scripture. Simonsen focus on the plurality and role of context whereas Magaard claims that scripture limits interpretation. She suggests that there is a primary, superior, or preferred reading, which she calls literal, and only by being lax or ignoring this reading can one construe other interpretations, which she calls less literal.

Magaard takes the role of a non-Muslim Islamic authority who can extrapolate the literal meaning of the text and thus define orthodox Islam. Towards the end of the program the journalist says, "We have flicked through the pages of the Quran and found some quotes ...". He picks one and reads, "And kill them wherever you find them and banish them from the city they banished you from, because persecution is worse than war" (Quran 2:192).<sup>12</sup> Turning to Simonsen he asks, "Is there an inherent problem in the whole fundament of the Quran meaning that it is easy to abuse?" Simonsen explains that such verses appear in many religious texts, and that the real question is how and why some people interpret them in specific ways, adding that "many Muslims can easily find encouragement for peaceful co-existence [in the Quran] as we see it predominantly". However, Magaard stresses that the Quran only has one interpretation

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12 I have translated the text that appeared on the screen during the program as it was this quotation that was the center of debate.

(the literal interpretation of bad Muslims), a point which she argues by applying the principle of *mansukh* (abrogation):

The reason we must take an interest in what Muslims do with this text, that is—and Jørgen Bæk Simonsen is also aware of this—that it is, in the Muslim tradition, it is said that the later a verse is revealed the more weight it carries. So even though in the early Suras you can find expressions such as, “Well, we have different faiths, you go your way and I go my way,” in reality the sword verses have canceled this or, if they are weighed against each other, then it is the sword verses, the late verses from the Medina era, that weigh the heaviest.

Magaard applies the concept of *mansukh* to abrogate one of the earliest Suras (Sura 109) despite the fact that this particular sura is not the subject of discussion on abrogation among Muslims.<sup>13</sup> She implies that verses on jihad take precedence over other verses, thus giving preference to the interpretations of reactionary Islamists instead of leading Muslim intellectuals. It should be noted that Magaard uses the plural “sword verses”<sup>14</sup>—as opposed to the singular “sword verse” which is commonly understood as the Quran 9:5—implying that she considers this to constitute a type of verse revealed in Medina rather than a single verse.

With this combination of an exaggeration of the extent to which *mansukh* is commonly applied and the idea that there is an inherent and clear meaning embedded in what she calls the sword verses (in the plural), Magaard puts herself in the role of a non-Muslim Islamic authority and produces an orthodoxy that frames other Islams as diluted, lax, or sloppy constructions rather than equally valid Islams.

*Deadline* is a prominent forum for debate and it often sets the agenda for other programs, and when, the following day, two journalists on the radio pro-

13 Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen explains that this sura is not seen as abrogated by Muslims. Rather than being abrogated he explains that it is highlighted. “Let me give you an example. In one of the last Suras in the Quran, number 109, the last verse says, You have your religion and I have mine’. Around the world this verse is highlighted in sermons and schools—also here in Denmark—as a verse of toleration” (Skovgaard-Petersen 2018: 3). Skovgaard-Petersen then goes on to explain how the verse can be interpreted in very different ways, but the point is that Muslims, whether they are tolerant (good Muslims), Salafi, or Jihadi militant (bad Muslims), they do not see this verse as abrogated.

14 The plural ending is more distinct in Danish (-ene) than in English (-s), and as Magaard repeats it three times during the program she does not seem to leave any doubt as to whether she means singular or plural.

gram *Orientering* interviews Khankan and an imam from the Danish Islamic Center, Fatih Alev, they adopt and thereby spread Magaard's Islam by insisting on the orthodox nature of it. Simonsen is erased.

The radio program starts with a presentation of the exemplary conduct of a number of good Muslims—Naser Khader, among others—who had co-signed an advertisement in the *New York Times* funded by the right-wing think tank, Gatestone Institute, led by John R. Bolton.<sup>15</sup>

The terrorist attack against Charlie Hebdo has again started the debate on Islam and this religion's role in society. The other day a range of prominent Muslims from the USA, England, Canada and Denmark—that is, Naser Khader—placed an ad in the *New York Times* in which they encourage all Muslims to clearly dissociate themselves from those who abuse Islam to legitimize violence and terror, whether it is the Islamic State, the Iranian theocracy, or the terrorists in France. It is, according to the signees, all Muslims' duty to fight for human rights, for equality and freedom of speech. Yesterday, it was an associate professor at Aarhus University, Tina Magaard, who in *Deadline* on DR2 called for changes within Islam: "it applies to a lot of aspects. It applies to both women's rights, penal law, but also the many, many references in the Quran, in hadith, which say that it is not just legitimate but also a duty to engage in armed combat for Islam. That is not the whole of Islam, there are many other aspects of Islam, but in order for other aspects to become more visible, and in order for one to say that, 'no, it is actually not legitimate in the name of Islam', you have to work with that."<sup>16</sup>

Alev is the first to respond and he rejects the premise of Magaard's idea and explains that throughout Islamic history, there has been continual discussion of interpretation and in that sense, reform is ongoing within Islam. In relation to the sword verse he explains that the context of revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*) plays an important role for the interpretation. According to Alev it was revealed in a context where the Muslims were outnumbered and on the verge of obliteration and it allowed for violent actions in those particular circumstances, not today. Furthermore, Alev explains that he is baffled by Magaard's presentation of Islamic history:

15 Cision PR Newswire, accessed 25 April 2020, <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/gatestone-institute-places-the-question-offered-by-ahmed-vanya-in-the-new-york-times-what-can-muslims-do-to-reclaim-their-beautiful-religion-300019923.html>.

16 P1 *Orientering*, 13 January 2015, 16:07–18:05.

The notion of reform is built into Islam. If you know the history of the interpretation of Islam—and apparently Magaard doesn't, which really surprises me a lot ...—then you know that there has always been a wide tradition for interpretation and large internal disagreement on various questions.

The journalist interrupts to state that Magaard knows what she is talking about, thereby, knowingly or unknowingly, re-enforcing Magaard's non-Muslim Islam. Even though Alev, as a Muslim Islamic authority, rejects the frame that the journalists have adopted from Magaard, he is unable to escape it. This is also reflected in the speaking position given to Khankan when the journalist asks, "Sherin Khankan, you are the spokesperson for Critical Muslims, and you call yourself a reform movement with a democratic and pluralistic attitude to Islam. What kind of reforms do you see a need for?" In her answer to the question and opening statement on the program, Khankan takes the opportunity to announce her intentions to introduce female imams in Denmark:

We have for ten years continuously worked to promote female imams. That means, we want equality between women and men within all spheres, including the religious sphere. We work for a modernistic interpretation and understanding, and a new reading of the Quran where men and women are equal ...<sup>17</sup>

Khankan takes the same position as Alev on the interpretation of the Quran, that the verses in question should be read in a specific historical context, explaining, "These verses hold no validity today, because as Alev said, they appear in a specific historical context ..." With most of the scheduled 14 minutes left of the interview and both guests having rejected Magaard's interpretation of the Quran in their opening statements—and with Khankan's also having introduced her idea of female imams—the journalists choose to double down on the frame they have chosen. This is reflected in their following questions, which approach Islam as a homogenous entity; sometimes with agency, making it a subject that can take a verb: "Is it because—as you also comment upon Sherin Khankan—that Islam does not in adequate degree separate religion and politics?" and "What is it with Islam, since Islam apparently can be interpreted in this way?" Both Alev and Khankan repeatedly answer the questions by explaining that there is quite a span of interpreta-

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17 P1, Orientering, 13 January, 16.07–18.05.

tions of Islam and that they all emerge in specific contexts. At one point, Khankan presents her own interpretation of Islam and says that there is a need for a reformed politicized Islam that can counter more extreme interpretations:

A person who is radicalized will not be receptive to a Sufi approach to Islam. Ibn Arabi, who is one of the great reformers within Sufi-Islam said, "The infidel is the one who denies other faiths." He turns things upside down, because if you deny other faiths then you deny the common root from which all faith emerges. That will not appeal to these radical Muslims who are extreme. But we need some politically oriented Muslims, who have politicized Islam, but who can take the politicized Islam in a more reformist direction, in a more moderate direction. That is what we need in this context.

As Khankan's voice lowers, indicating she finished talking, the journalist gets the interview back on track again by saying, "Let's go back to Tina Maggaard who was on *Deadline* yesterday. She talks about the lack of a break with the old traditions in Islam." It is important to notice that Khankan at this point has suggested female imams, equality between the sexes, and a somewhat perennialist approach to religion, but the journalists do not ask a single follow-up question on this. Instead they return to Maggaard's frame of the issue at hand and her interpretation of the Quran by playing the soundbite from *Deadline* where Maggaard explains abrogation (see the quotation above). That is, there is no progression in the interview, and the journalists more or less starts over by yet again requiring Khankan and Alev to respond to Maggaard's claim of a supposedly orthodox and unambiguous Quran interpretation, saying, "In the end, there is just one way of reading the verses ... the ones that have been written later always trump the others and therefore it is hard to break with the texts. What do you say about that?" To this, Alev gives a long explanation of how abrogation works, and Khankan adds that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the political hypocrisy involved in, for example, the sale of arms and chemical weapons to the Middle Eastern regimes may be important reasons why some Muslims have strong political opinions that guide their interpretation of the Quran. With time running out, she ends by saying,

It is this hypocrisy that so many [Muslims] react against. It is a range of political motives that we have to take into consideration. Another fact that is also quite crucial when we talk about terror in the world today is this: who has the right and power to define what constitutes a defining

moment in world history. I feel deep sympathy with the bereaved families, I think it is a tragedy what has happened in France, and I condemn it strongly. But I also find it to be tragedy that 450 children who died in Gaza in the summer of 2014 and why did that not become 9/11?

Khankan's standpoint is immediately dismissed by one of the journalists as a way relativizing the problem and he emphasizes that today's debate is on what is going on in Islam. The last words in the interview fall to Alev who restates Khankan's point (and echoes Simonsen's explanation in *Deadline*), "It is not the Quran's text that makes these young people carry out terrorism, it is the situation that they find themselves in, and in that situation, they can use whatever; the Quran can be utilized and that is what they do."

Even though the interview could be seen as a chance for Alev and Khankan to dispute Maggaard's claims, it also erases both interviewees' own voices. Alev and Khankan are repeatedly required to speak in relation to or within the frame set by Maggaard, whose non-Muslim Islamic theology the journalists elevate to the status of orthodoxy despite Alev's and Khankan's objections. That is, neither of them got to talk about their Islam because of the frame chosen by the journalists, which dictated that they should respond to Maggaard's understanding of the issue. This is neither a new situation for Khankan nor other Muslim leaders. In an article from 2006 titled "Islam's pseudo-specialists" Khankan objected to journalists'—and specifically *Deadline's*—tendency to frame people without any, or with only very few, formal credentials as specialists on Islam (Khankan 2006c). Maggaard is one of the pseudo-specialists whom Khankan mentions in the article, but, as demonstrated above, Khankan was still speaking on Maggaard's terms eight years later.

Although Khankan's opening statement could be seen as significant, the only spread of this interview appeared in an opinion piece by a gymnasium teacher who claimed that both Alev's and Khankan's interpretations of the Medina verses were erroneous, stating as a non-Muslim Islamic authority, that they had both misunderstood the context of revelation. He follows this up with a rhetorical question and a re-statement of the rule of abrogation, "Khankan wants to separate religion and politics, but how will she do that without dissociating herself from the Medina verses' mix of religion and politics?" (Grimstrup 2015). He then presents a series of Quran verses that he interprets for the reader, finally making the accusation that Khankan mixed politics and religion in her statement about what constitutes a defining moment in history and the 450 dead children in Gaza, thereby allegedly proving his point. This is just one of many examples of non-Muslims producing Islam, meanwhile dismissing Muslims' Islam as misunderstanding, erroneous, or heterodox.



The framing effect was strong in most of the contexts and platforms where Khankan talked in the following weeks. She mentioned her intentions, for example, in a double-spread article in *Jyllands-Posten* in which seven Muslims were asked questions that reflected a demand for reform. Here, with reference to the 2006 Mohammad Cartoon Crisis, Khankan is confronted with Khader's ideas of reform via the Democratic Muslims while the Forum for Critical Muslim's "Muslim Manifest" is erased (see Chapter 4):

*Naser Khader talks about a European reform of Islam. Can you follow him today?*

I completely agree, and that is what I have been promoting for 15 years. The reform has already started and I, for example, am fighting to introduce female imams. There are plenty of reform initiatives.

*Jyllands-Posten 2015*

In this context it is important to notice the distinction between good and bad Muslims that is embedded in the framing. Khankan repeatedly states that she wants reform, but because she talks against power she is framed as a bad Muslim of whom journalists may make demands, whereas Khader, because he has declared loyalty to power, is framed as a good Muslim who takes part in making demands on Muslims. Khankan wants to make reforms while Khader demands them (Blicher 2006; Khader 2001a, 2001c; Krogsgaard 2006), but because of the framing they end up on opposite ends of the spectrum in the debate; this gives meaning to the question of whether Khankan now realizes that Khader was right when he demanded reform in 2006 during the Mohammad Cartoon Crisis (even though both of them argued for reform back then).

While Khankan's announcements may seem vague in the two examples given above, this does not explain the absence of spread. As I demonstrate below, Khankan also announced specific plans for the opening of a mosque without the news spreading.

## 6 Announcement on 7 February 2015

A month after the attack on Charlie Hebdo, on Saturday 7 February from 9–10 PM, half an hour before *Deadline*, DR2 aired a program called *Muslim Voices*, which was a onetime event that bore close resemblance to the radio program *Arab Voices* in which journalist Steen Nørskov interviews people from the Danish-Arab minority about culture, religion, and the Middle East. The radio program is characterized by Nørskov's curiosity and ability to create an interview situation where his guests can speak on their own terms.

In the pre-interview that is usually done as part of the planning before these kinds of TV programs, Khankan mentioned that she was going to open a mosque with female imams, and it was, therefore, decided to dedicate thirteen minutes to this discussion. On air, Khankan went head to head with a well-known Danish imam, Kassem Rachid, who opposed her initiative. Again, despite the serendipitous process that led to this moment, it is evident that Khankan's agency (her proposing to make an announcement on air) had an impact on subsequent events and thus heightened the probability of a spreadable moment like the one to follow on 3 March.

For the first time since her first public statement on female imams in 2001, Khankan was very specific about her plans: she was going to open a mosque with female-led prayer in the summer, only a few months away, and she was currently looking for a building. At no point did she state that she herself would be one of the mosque's multiple imams, but it could be understood as implied in the situation. Khankan mentioned that a women-only mosque had recently opened in Los Angeles (The Women's Mosque of America opened on 30 January 2015). This was the first time Khankan publicly legitimized her position with a list of other female imams from the Wikipedia post "Women as Imams".

Even though Khankan presented concrete plans on national television for the imminent opening of a mosque with female imams, only a right-wing online newspaper, *Den Korte Avis*, picked up the story and published an article titled, "You can't believe your ears when an imam explains why women can't become imams" (*Den Korte Avis* 2015). The article first explains that Khankan intends to open a mosque with female imams in the summer, and then it goes on to criticize Rachid for not endorsing Khankan's initiative. Simultaneously, the newspaper decries Khankan's position that menstruation makes a woman unclean and therefore temporarily incapable of leading prayer and ends up concluding, "Thus, there is no prospect of a great reformation of Islam on the part of critical Danish Muslims when they do not even want to give up the idea that women are unclean when they menstruate" (*Den Korte Avis* 2015). It is clear, not just from the quote above but also from Maggaard's demands, that non-Muslims set the standard for what constitutes a sufficiently reformed Islam or, in other words, how one qualifies as a good Muslim.

I am not suggesting that this is proper or improper; that is irrelevant to the analysis. The point is that the deliberative conversation between minority and majority co-produces Islam, as the latter defines the scale on which Muslims' Islam is evaluated, thereby also, to some extent, orienting reform in the direction of assimilation with the majority.

Another panelist on the program, Saer El-Jaichi, found Khankan's project interesting. They did not know each other, but when Khankan's announcement

spread in March 2015 he got onboard at Khankan's request. El-Jaichi was at the time a PhD student in Islamic studies at Copenhagen University doing research on Arab philosophy and Sufism with a focus on al-Hallaj. I return to this in Chapter 7 as El-Jaichi was one of the four members present when the first meeting of Femimam was held on 26 April 2015.

The day after *Muslim Voices*, Khankan tried to untangle herself from the power dynamics embedded in the debate on Islamic terrorism, stating in a Facebook post that her plans to open a women's mosque had nothing to do with the demands for reform being made by some non-Muslims.

The debate on DR2, *Muslim Voices*, raised an important question about reform of Islam. In connection with this it is IMPORTANT for me to mention that reform of Muslims' interpretation of Islam is a topic that should not be debated in light of the terror action in France. It is simply ABSURD. In the same way as we do not link the need for reform of Christianity with Breivik's terror massacre in Norway.<sup>18</sup>

In her post Khankan resists a narrative about her being coerced into advocating reform of Islam due to non-Muslims' demands. She also rejects the definition of certain values as Danish and she makes it very clear that she expects to be included in the imagined community called Danes, saying, "Democracy, freedom of speech, and human rights are not OUR Danish Christian core values ... [sic] they are universal values that are shared by humans around the world."<sup>19</sup>

As the above indicates, Khankan was framed as a good Muslim but her announcement of very precise plans did not spread, with the exception of a story in an online newspaper *Den Korte Avis* that defined Khankan's reform as insufficient.

A week after the *Muslim Voices* program a young Muslim man committed a terror attack in Copenhagen and this intensified the demand for reform. In the following section I present a radio interview in which Khankan once again announced the mosque, this time causing a role reversal from bad to good Muslim. This is interesting as it demonstrates a dynamic that is not just important for the understanding of the 3 March announcement, it also happened on *Deadline* that same day (discussed in more detail below).

18 Khankan's Facebook wall on 8 February 2015 (caps by Khankan), accessed 25 April 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/sherin.khankan/posts/10152784240308732>.

19 Khankan's Facebook wall on 8 February 2015 (caps by Khankan), accessed 25 April 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/sherin.khankan/posts/10152784240308732>.

## 7 Terror in Copenhagen, Role Reversal, and the 19 February Announcement

On 14 February, a week after Khankan's appearance on *Muslim Voices*, a young Danish-Palestinian man, Omar el-Hussein, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State on Facebook and attacked an event titled "Art, Blasphemy, and Freedom of Speech", attended by, among others, Lars Vilks who in 2007 published a drawing depicting Mohammad as a dog. El-Hussein shot and killed one person at the event and after midnight he also shot and killed the guard outside the synagogue in central Copenhagen. As this was the first—and to date only—executed Muslim terrorist attack in Denmark, it was the highest item on the news agenda for months. Five days later, on 19 February, the radio program *P1 Debat* took up the debate on Islam and terror with participants that included Naveed Baig, an imam from the Danish Islamic Center; Marie Krarup, a member of parliament representing the Danish People's Party; Thomas Hoffmann, a Professor in Quranic studies; Geeti Amiri, a debater; and Khankan.

The interview is somewhat similar to previous ones. The journalist reifies Islam and demands reform and so does Krarup. Interestingly, neither Muslim interviewees nor scholars such as Skovgaard-Petersen, Simonsen, or Hoffmann are able to change this frame. In this particular interview, Hoffmann (2015a, 2015c), while thinking the Quran has more influence on Muslim behavior than Simonsen and Skovgaard-Petersen, explains that it does not determine behavior in and of itself. He goes on to say, "and that is also what you can see in history, that Muslims have not necessarily let themselves be completely determined by the Quranic message and descriptions; they have made it work in the societies as they were". The journalist interjects that it is often argued that it is hard for Muslims to "take it easy with what is in the book [the Quran]" because they consider it the word of God and asks, "How wide are the real possibilities for interpretation if one believes that it is the revealed word of God that one has to fiddle with?" Hoffmann answers, "It actually opens enormous possibilities for interpretation; there is a huge exegetical tradition of interpretation that fills many libraries, and I will go further to claim that even if one interprets it fundamentalistically, literally, even then there is actually a very large span of Muslim interpretations." Hoffmann then adds that literal interpretations have dominated within the Islamic tradition, but this does not mean that metaphorical and spiritual readings have not existed.

Krarup takes an ambiguous role as both a self-proclaimed expert on Islam and a non-Muslim Islamic authority and opposes the three Muslim panelists. Hoffmann is therefore called upon for perspective from time to time but framing and power asymmetries between the panelists are in Krarup's favor

throughout the debate: the Muslim panelists must negotiate their speaking position simultaneously with engaging in the debate. This is evident when Amiri introduces herself, as she starts by attempting to break free of the geopolitical scene's framing by rejecting the good-Muslim label "moderate". However, the journalist is not ready to accept this and asks,

But Geeti Amiri, if I am not even allowed to call you a moderate Muslim ... How should I relate to different streams of Islam if I cannot put some label on them and say that some are moderate, others are ultra-conservative, some are extremists and so on and so forth?

Amiri also demands that her Islam be taken as authentic on her own terms rather than letting this depend on non-Muslims' evaluation of her Islam. However, Krarup, as a non-Muslim Islamic authority, is able to enforce her theological rules on how Muslims should argue their case throughout the interview:

Every time I read these moderate Muslims' statements, I can just see that it is not coherent. I mean, it is simply intellectually on too low a level. It is not a coherent theology. It is simply ignorance and that does not work. To be able to convince oneself and others that one has a peaceful religion, one really must be able to argue it. And I just haven't heard anyone do that until now.

Amiri opposes this set of rules by saying, "I easily manage to understand my religion in the contemporary context" (cf. Ahmed 2016: 3), demanding that Krarup takes her Islam seriously as an authentic Islam. In the same breath Amiri denounces violence and extremism in the name of Islam and again argues that she is a Muslim, not a moderate Muslim, because the latter frame gives extremists the power to define Islam. Krarup responds by demanding that Amiri's interpretation live up to her standard of theological rigor followed by a quantitative argument based on a study by Ruud Koopmans (2015) that was mentioned by a panelist on *Deadline* the day before.<sup>20</sup> Then, with a mix of sarcasm and gravity she more or less rejects Amiri's position.

I have until now not heard anyone who was able to provide an argument on why you are allowed to break free from all other Quran interpretations.

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<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, another panelist on *Deadline* rejected Koopmans' conclusions by citing numbers from the EU barometer but, as with the debate between Magaard and Simonsen, this panelist's view was erased and not mentioned a single time on the radio.

And I think it is wonderful if you can, so please do continue doing that. But I just haven't heard anyone doing it coherently, and I can also see that this argumentation does not get through to the masses. This study that has been mentioned from Germany says that three quarters [of Muslims] believe that there is only one interpretation of the Quran and, you know, it is not their own. They believe it is an interpretation that is given to them, right. That is problematic, so I just want to say that there is quite some work in front of you.

Krarup continually demands Quran interpretations that live up to her standards, interspersed with remarks such as, "I am waiting with longing for a well-argued theological and systematic break with Sura 9, for example." Turning to imam Baig, who has provided such an argument, she says,

It is very sweet and appealing what you say, but you [Baig] represent a very small minority. And I think that your job is to get out and do more and say that the Quran is of course a historical book and of course we can dissociate ourselves from parts of it, and this is theologically sound. You have to create that new Islam if you want us to believe that Islam is peaceful.

While Baig does not dissociate himself from the Quran, he does provide Krarup with an interpretation of Sura 9, which he says was revealed in a specific historical context and permitted Muslims to take up weapons to defend themselves. Krarup, who has two years of formal university education in religious studies, argues that reform is not enough; Muslims must break with the past and renounce ideas such as the Quran's being the revealed word of God.

I do not think Islam needs a reformation because that reformation has already taken place. That has been the fundamentalist wave in the last century and it is still ongoing. You know, Luther went back to the texts and did away with the tradition. That has also been done in Islam and that is a disaster because one goes back to these texts which are filled with that kind of violence-rhetoric ... It is not just Sura 9 that talks about one having to kill the infidels. So, it is Islam that needs to break with the Quran. It is a break with the dogma about it being revealed. There is a need for a relativization of the Quran and [for people to] say, "That sura verse does not work. That is not relevant today. It has no meaning for us and so on and so forth." [Baig can be heard in the background saying, "But that is what I say. I have just said that," and Krarup continues.] Yes, and there is a

very small segment of Muslims that thinks like that, but not the masses. The masses take it absolutely literally and see it as Allah's revealed word which one has to take very seriously, and unfortunately, we cannot just change that.

Khankan enters the debate after 30 minutes, a few minutes before the quote above, and she takes the same position as Baig and Amiri, arguing that reform is ongoing, that a correct and approved interpretation of the Quran does not exist, and that the majority of Muslims are moderate (good Muslims)—the latter being a label which Khankan, unlike Amiri, claims for herself. Like the other Muslim participants, however, she is not able to change the terms of the debate, which are by now firmly in Krarup's grip. Nonetheless, with just nine minutes to go, Khankan addresses Krarup directly and gives an example of reform:

I have myself started a project concerning female imams. That is, we want to pave the way for female imams in Denmark and hopefully with time, in the rest of Europe. There is a need for female imams because women are important, women matter, and because the one who has knowledge should have the word. And I just want to add, Martin Luther is not my role model ... Martin Luther, who is the Christians' great reformer, has written the most hateful text on Jews in world history called *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* [On the Jews and their lies], which is foundational for the Zionism that we experience today, so maybe there is need for self-scrutiny and an extra look at your great reformer. My point is that there have always been people who have abused religion for political purposes and who have used religion for something negative, but we must understand that Muslims are not like Christians. Our reformation, or re-reading of the Quran, does not have to constitute a break with the belief in the Quran as the word of God. If we do that, we lose many practicing Muslims. It is possible to maintain the belief in the Quran as the word of God, while reading the Quran metaphorically, spiritually, ethically, as a spiritual guideline.

Interestingly, the journalist takes Khankan's announcement at face value and does not attempt to push her back into the bad Muslim category. Instead he turns to Baig and uses Khankan's announcement about female imams to put pressure on him. It is important to notice the spread mechanism: Khankan's announcement is utilized and thereby takes on a function that is not in her original statement; it is added by the journalist as he spreads it. He frames the role reversal as Khankan's delivering "the full package":

Journalist: I would like to ask you, Naveed Baig, in relation to what Sherin Khankan just said about her working on making room for female imams. How do you feel about that? Do you see it as a possible interpretation of Islam that there should be female imams?

Baig: Yes, but that depends on what one means by the term imams. Is it about leading prayer? Is it about teaching? Is it about leading other women in prayer? Is it about writing on religious topics and giving religious precepts?

Journalist: And it includes all that, right, Sherin Khankan? Is it the full package you want, right?

Khankan: Yes ...

Journalist: So, the answer you started on, Naveed Baig, it almost sounded like a no to the whole package on female imams?

Baig: No, what I am trying to say here is that the most important thing is not who leads in prayer; the most important thing is what relation one has to God irrespective of whether one is a man or woman, and that is the central question for me [interrupted by the journalist].

Journalist: But what is interesting for me is to look at the possibilities of this new interpretation, reformation of the Quran, or what we should call it, and if a moderate Muslim like you is against a mere question on female imams, then there seems to be a long way ahead ...

The discussion above is interesting, because Khankan started off as a bad Muslim in a defensive position, but as soon as her Islam is taken at face value she is re-framed as a good Muslim. But the power dynamics on the geopolitical scene entail that, as a good Muslim, she is immediately pitted against Baig with whom she has until now shared a speaking position.

Baig never produces a clear answer to the journalist's questions on female imams. Instead he tells an anecdote about how, before the civil war, the grand mufti of Syria was considering appointing two women as muftis, adding, "I like the concept of female imams who lead the prayer in, for example, a women's mosque, if that is what is needed, but there are also some restraints in relation to Islamic theology." At this point the journalist interrupts Baig and says that they are running out of time, and he wants to give the floor to other guests waiting to talk before the end of the program. After Hoffmann, Krarup gets the last word and in a thick sarcastic voice reaffirms her position:

I think it is wonderful to hear that Sherin Khankan is able to come up with a new reading of the Quran, which clearly says that previous interpretations have been mendacious [*løgnagtige*] and wrong translations.



That is wonderful. That also means, then, that a completely new Islam can emerge which does not contain the killing of infidels, women bashing, and all that. I am really looking forward to that. However, I think it is necessary that you beat the drum for it and make it clear to all the other Muslims who have got hold of the wrong end of the stick.

Krarup is interrupted by the journalist who declares the debate over and thanks his guests for their participation. The power asymmetry in the above interview is very clear: Krarup makes demands on the Muslim panelists, and she disqualifies their answers as either theologically inconsistent and/or merely representative of a minority of Muslims. This is then the basis for further demands: namely, that Amiri, Baig, and Khankan should convert the masses into moderate Muslims. Krarup had on a previous occasion argued that the only way to solve the problem with radicalization and terror was to have state-funded missionaries convert Muslims to Christians (Domino 2017; Redder 2017).

Krarup sees a clash between civilizations but this perspective differs from Maggaard's conceptualization of an internal clash between good and bad Muslims, which non-Muslims have been caught up in. Interestingly, Khankan and the other Muslim debaters must respond to and to some degree accept these very different frames and conceptions of Islam when they take part in such debates, producing a somewhat uncanny situation in which the theological exchange becomes one between non-Muslim Islamic authorities and Muslim Islamic authorities rather than an internal debate between latter. This is a product of the power asymmetry between majority and minority speakers that empowers Krarup and others to take the authoritative role, enforce their terms on a debate, and define Islamic orthodoxy. This power asymmetry also enforces the good/bad Muslim binary, which Muslims in the studio must tactically navigate between or try to outmaneuver, but this too has a silencing effect as they never get to speak on their own terms. That is, there is little or no space for Muslims' Islam. This interview did not spread.

## 8 The Spread of the 3 March 2015 Announcement

On 3 March 2015, Khankan appeared on the front page of *Information* beside a headline that asks, "Denmark's next imam?" (see Figure 1). It is interesting to note that the announcement that started to spread on 3 March is retrofitted to make it the stuff of front pages. Khankan had no intention of becoming an imam, but by phrasing the headline as a question—"Denmark's next imam?"—the newspaper made the story relevant in the Danish context without making



<p><b>NORMANDIET D-DAG</b> MILITÆRHISTORISK REJSE</p> <p>Rejseselskabet m.m.   7 dages rejse med 10 foredrag og 10 koncerter 7 dage i luftbus   med 100 km i bus og 10 km i bil</p> <p>Rejseprisen: 22. juli - 17. august   11. august - 14. september   pr. pers. inkl. bus og 3,50%.</p> <p>Se hele programmet på: <a href="http://www.cultours.dk">www.cultours.dk</a></p>	<p><b>SEMINAR FOR LÆRERE I GRUNDSKOLEN:</b> <b>Hvordan underviser jeg i EU?</b></p> <p>Tirsdag 24. marts kl. 13-18 i Mønteriet, Fælledvej 17, Kbh. N Onsdag 25. marts kl. 13-16 på UGL, Åstygade 7, Hønsø C</p> <p>Hver dag starter med en engelsk lektion, som gør undervisningen i dansk og i de andre sprog lettere til. Både for lærere og for elever. Der er gratis frokost til en af de to dage.</p> <p>Se mere på <a href="http://www.deo.dk">www.deo.dk</a></p>	<p><b>NY STOR HISTORIEFESTIVAL</b> 14. - 15. MARTS 2015</p> <p><b>HISTORISKE DAGE 2015</b></p> <p>100% ROB STRÅKS BILLET 150% BILLET TIL 150% BILLET TIL</p> <p>OKSNEHALLEN 14.-15. MARTS</p>
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FIGURE 1 Front page of Information on 3 March 2015

the claim on Khankan’s behalf. The claim was strongly insinuated, however, and only if one focuses narrowly on the semantics and grammar of the sentence while ignoring contexts and how texts are interpreted by readers (Iser 1972) can one argue that Khankan was not being proposed for the role.

Inside the newspaper, one finds a story on Khankan and her intentions to open a mosque with female imams. She calls the initiative Femimam (as in female imams) and adds that the group behind the project will write a manifest demonstrating that female imams are in compliance with Islamic tradition. At the time, Khankan had just separated from her husband and suggests that her new home could be the location of the mosque. In the article she notes, “If we

have not found a room before summer our small congregation can meet here in the beginning' says Sherin Khankan with reference to the renovated manor that she and her family has just moved into" (Piil 2015).

The story and many of the quotes had been disseminated by Ritzau (news agency) on 2 March 2015, so the story appeared in the 7AM news on radio P3 and in the 9AM news on radio P1 and P3.<sup>21</sup> It was also uploaded as a story on the front page of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's webpage. Ritzau frames the story as Khankan's struggle against male imams:

In Denmark and in the world, male imams have a monopoly on conveying the content of the Quran but the spokeswoman for Forum for Critical Muslims, Sherin Khankan, thinks that it is neither in keeping with the times nor in line with Islam. Therefore she has an ambition to start a mosque in Copenhagen where female imams will deliver the sermon, which is called the khutbah, and the prayer for both women and men.

RITZAU 2015

The above quote comprises the first lines of the story sent out by Ritzau, and as the recent terrorist attack was still high on the agenda, the story spread in the media as the answer to the demand for reform and soon became one of the big stories of the day.

In the evening of 3 March, The Danish Broadcasting Corporation aired a documentary on the 14 February terror attack in Copenhagen in which Alev, the imam from the Danish Islamic Center mentioned above, had caused controversy by saying that he could learn something from Hizb ut-Tahrir about how to attract young Muslims with clever slogans, good Islam courses, and social community building. This caused outrage and he was therefore on *Deadline* that same evening to defend his statements in a 19-minute-long interview.

As in the interview referred to above, Alev again argued that reform is ongoing among Muslims and to take up new discussions on emerging topics is part of the natural developments. With six minutes left, the journalist picked up a newspaper from the table and showed the front page of *Information* with Khankan. He then put Alev under pressure in much the same way as the radio journalist had treated Baig:

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21 P1 and P3 are two of the most popular national radio stations owned by the Danish Broadcast Corporation. P1 is a talk show radio oriented towards culture and debate while P3 is oriented towards music and entertainment.

Journalist: This is the front page of today's *Information* showing the spokeswoman for Forum for Critical Muslims. She talks about whether one can imagine female imams. You know, as part of a modernization of the way Islam is practiced. What do you say to such an example, to such a specific proposal?

Alev: You know the diversity that exists within Christian congregations and the different Christian understandings of how Christianity should be interpreted; you will also see a similar diversity among Muslims, with some Muslims going their own ways, and Sherin may be one of them. So that is quite normal.

Journalist: Female imams in Denmark. What do you say?

Alev: Yes, for the Muslims who think that makes sense, maybe they will have female imams. That is not something that I personally think is part of the normal way of practicing Islam, but then there are some who may want to do it, and they can practice religion that way.

Interestingly, there is not much difference in content between Khankan's announcement on 7 February, 19 February, and the announcement on 3 March. However, as the terrorist attack intensified the demand for answers, Khankan's announcement spread because journalists found it a useful frame for their features. Thus, the announcement did not spread before it was inserted into the hottest and most well covered story at the time. When it spread, it was due to the meanings it could produce on the geopolitical scene in this particular script. As can be seen from the above interview with Alev, Khankan suddenly played the role—even while absent—of the good Muslim demanding that bad Muslims reform.

Khankan explains<sup>22</sup> that she was surprised by the spread and, overnight, spontaneously wrote an opinion piece titled, "We need female imams", for the largest newspaper in Denmark, *Politiken*, which published it on their webpage at midnight between 4 and 5 March and printed it in the newspaper on 5 March with a referencing headline on the front page. In it Khankan states, "In August 2015 Femimam will call the first Friday prayer with well-educated female imams and a focus on a new reading of the Quran ... The female imams will stand in the middle of the two rows in front of women and men and lead prayer" (Khankan 2015c). It furthermore talks about Forum for Critical Muslims' newly founded committee for female imams, Femimam. However, as it will become clear in Chapter 7, members of this committee had not yet met each other.

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22 This is an explanation Khankan gave to other members of Femimam on 22 August 2015, which was recorded by Skovgaard.

## 9 Back in the Car

All of the above was unknown to me when I heard Fetteh speak on the radio while I was taking the highway to northern Jutland to give a series of lectures on Arab first-wave feminism. I took the next exit, parked the car, and found my laptop. The news on Femimam was everywhere and I assumed that it was a proper organization that I had somehow overlooked.

It turned out that many people had made this assumption, which is how Femimam was produced in the subsequent weeks. Khankan was asked to speak as an imam, documentarists wanted to produce the narrative, an old friend of hers (Jacob Holdt) offered to donate space for the mosque, journalists wanted to interview her, and soon Muslims also started to request services such as *nikah* (Islamic marriage), Islamic divorce, *aqiqah* (name giving ceremony), and conversion.

This chapter demonstrates that the emergence of Femimam was not planned; it was produced by a media serendipity. However, structures and agency played a major role, even if neither can be understood as driving forces that led to the emergence of the Mariam Mosque. Khankan was not solely oriented towards founding the Mariam Mosque, but she grabbed the opportunities as they presented themselves. Thus, while Khankan did not plan the series of events, nor the end goal, she played along pushing in a direction that could have had many different outcomes.

Fetteh was rather surprised to see Khankan's announcements on 3 and 5 March, but she assumed that more people were involved and that Khankan was acting on everyone's behalf. It is also obvious from her own sharing of the 5 March announcement that she was not onboard with mixed gender prayer. When a person commented that women cannot lead mixed gender prayer, Fetteh answered, "I agree with you on the point about [not] leading mixed gender prayer because of our praying position, but otherwise not ..." Fetteh made Khankan aware of their disagreement and after discussions back and forth, Khankan posted an update that mentioned both her acquisition of a place for the mosque and the change from mixed gender prayer to women-only:

*Assalamu aleikum*, dear sisters and brothers. The mosque will become a women-only mosque with female imams. There is space for approximately 100 and our location is going to be in the heart of Copenhagen, close to the universities downtown. The decision to make it a women's mosque is based on the demand we have seen in the letters we have received from women. Likewise, there is a majority in the committee for female imams that votes for a women-only mosque.

Facebook 17 March 2015

This post soon spread in the media where it was generally understood as inadequate in terms of the reforms non-Muslims were expecting, and Khankan was again assigned a somewhat ambiguous position as both a good and a bad Muslim. On that same day, a blogger on *Berlingske*, for example, raised Khankan's refusal to vote for a condemnation of sharia in Radikale Venstre and claimed that she had taken part in a demonstration arranged by Hizb up-Tahrir (Pedersen 2015). I will return to the bad Muslim framing in Chapter 11.

## Planning the Founding of Femimam

As noted in the previous chapter, when the story about Femimam spread and became big news in Denmark, Fetteh texted Khankan to say that she did not want to lead mixed gender Friday prayer and, after having texted and called back and forth, Khankan called a meeting within Forum for Critical Muslims, which had been dormant for years. Board member Ellen Chakir had noticed that a young man, Hicham Mouna, had been defending Khankan on Facebook using theological arguments and she invited him to the meeting. Chakir and Mouna had become Facebook friends in the fall of 2014 as they found themselves engaged in the same debates on the platform.<sup>1</sup> Mouna initially declined the invitation, but Khankan invited him for a personal meeting and convinced him to join.

No one seems to remember much about the meeting and the only thing that can be established with certainty is that it took place in March 2015 and that there was a vote on whether the Friday prayer should be mixed gender or women-only, which ended in favor of the latter with a one vote majority. It is also clear that Khankan and Mouna voted for mixed gender prayers, whereas Holdt and Fetteh voted for women-only, but it is unclear who else voted. This was then communicated to the press.

On 18 March, Khankan set up a public Facebook group called “Female Imams” and a private group called “Female Imams—Komité”. The latter group mainly consisted of people who had been active in Forum for Critical Muslims and people who had joined the new initiative, such as Mouna, Fetteh, and others who came later. In total, the group consisted of seven active members (an eighth active member joined in February 2016) and a fluctuating number of either temporarily active or inactive members. Almost all were highly engaged in other volunteer work and were typically studying or had finished a university education. They were resourceful but busy people, and this influenced Femimam as it never became the main focus of anyone’s volunteer work, with the exception of Mouna and Yasmin Abu Bakir (see below). That is, Femimam had very few available resources, understood as work hours.

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1 This may be seen as a contradiction of the dominant pattern presented in Chapter 5. Mouna was engaged in theological debates on Islam with both Muslims and non-Muslim on Facebook when I met him. However, he gave this up in June 2017 when he deleted his account and opened a new account, just for private use. That is, he follows the same pattern as Rania, Fawzia, and Halima who also gave up on theological debate with non-Muslims.

Posts on the private Facebook group primarily focus on the organization of meetings and sometimes follow-ups on meetings and sharing of information. The interaction between members is minimal and several posts have few or no comments. One of the first posts consists of two copy-pasted offers from the Danish Broadcast Corporation (DR) and Skovgaard who both wanted to make a documentary about the mosque, and it is later communicated to other members that Femimam has decided to accept Skovgaard's offer.

This chapter is a comprehensive account of the eleven<sup>2</sup> meetings that were held between 24 April 2015 and 5 April 2016 in Femimam. The account is based on Skovgaard's recordings comprising a total of 16½ hours of video. There are lapses in a few of the videos which means that not all meetings are recorded in toto. In some videos, Skovgaard for example joined the others for dinner which entails a gap in the recording. The meetings are primarily focused on writing a manifest, opening a bank account, registration as a faith society, and building a webpage. All meetings end with these foci unresolved and I have, to reflect this pattern, written my account in a slightly repetitive and directionless style; or unplotted as I have called it in previous chapters. The nature of the meetings was the primary reason that temporary members either decided to leave Femimam or merely stopped showing up.

I have watched Skovgaard's videos in chronological order and coded them using time stamps that contain a short description of what happens in the stamped frames. I have used open coding as an exploratory method and as patterns emerged in the code, I have used the small descriptions to select passages that reflect tendencies in the material (Bazeley and Jackson 2013; Saldana 2016). The chapter is also based on information from the private Facebook group and interviews with Ellen Chakir, Saliha Marie Fetteh, Hicham Mouna, Sherin Khankan, and Jacob Holdt.

Although this is a comprehensive account in the sense that all meetings are reported irrespective of content, it is not an attempt to give a full account of everything that happened. The material is, as mentioned above, very repetitive, and contains a large number of ideas that were pursued for a short while and then abandoned. I have selected passages from the material that give a some-

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2 I am not counting a meeting on 9 April 2015 where Skovgaard presented her film to a few of the Femimam members. Neither Fetteh nor El-Jaichi were present at this meeting. I have, however, chosen to count 30 December 2015 as a meeting even though it was merely planned as a drop-in to see the apartment where the mosque would be set up. As this is the only time Khankan, Mouna, El-Jaichi, and Holdt met between 1 November 2015 and 15 February 2016 it did serve as a meeting where the usual topics were discussed.



what representative account of the meetings and at the same time demonstrate the point about the mosque and imam making happening in a series of serendipitous events that ran parallel to, but not independent of, the meetings. These events are analyzed in the next chapter.

The previous chapter explained how the story about Femimam unexpectedly spread rapidly in March 2015, putting pressure on Khankan to both identify and interact with the narrative that she and Danish media had co-created about a women's mosque that would open in August 2015. Danish Media continued to play a major role for Femimam and to some extent oriented it towards the opening of a mosque, but this chapter focusses on what happened internally in the group. The analysis begins with the introduction of an important concept, warping, followed by the first meeting in Femimam.

## 1 Warping

The discursivity available on the geopolitical scene restricts what meanings can be produced there, and this means that Femimam must “translate” their discourse so that it becomes meaningful in public knowledge spaces such as in Danish media. That is, discourse cannot transition from one discursivity to another without becoming warped, because its emergence within a new discursivity entails an original production of a new discourse. As this chapter demonstrates, the members of Femimam are aware of this phenomenon, which means that they cannot be understood on their own terms on the geopolitical scene, nor can they produce their discourse in a meaningful way within this discursivity. Therefore, they must find ways of tactically producing new discourse that is meaningful within the discursivity available on the geopolitical scene.

Warping is amplified by a cognitive bias popularly known by the acronym WYSIATI, or “what you see is all there is” (Kahneman 2011: 85–88). WYSIATI is the assumption or overconfidence that one has all the information needed to make an informed judgement on a matter, thus ruling out the possibility that there is something one does not understand. This means that the warped Islam, which Muslims present on the geopolitical scene is taken to be all there is, a “true” and accurate account of their beliefs, and thus, the warping process is erased.

The analysis in this chapter is similar to Johannes Renders's analysis of Danish Muslim discourse in that it describes “the inner workings of a religious discourse, the statements of which fail to ‘make sense’ in the public sphere” (Renders 2021: 73). While Renders focusses on rupture between discourses and

discursivities, I focus on the warping of discourse as it “moves” from one discursivity to another.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 A Meeting in Femimam and the Recording of a Documentary

Femimam chose to work with Skovgaard, but Khankan also accepted an offer from DR to produce a documentary on the brown women’s struggle (*Den brune kvindekamp*),<sup>4</sup> as it is frequently called in Danish, for the celebration of the 100-year celebration of universal suffrage on 5 June 2015. Consequently, when Khankan called the first meeting on 24 April 2015 of what was to become Femimam, this was both an invitation to a brainstorming session and the recording of DR’s documentary. Skovgaard has recorded this behind the scenes starting with Khankan, after having her microphone adjusted, being asked to take a seat closest to the windows while El-Jaichi, Fetteh, and Mouna take the remaining seats around a table in a bright room on Copenhagen’s harbor front.

Khankan knows everyone around the table but as El-Jaichi, Fetteh, and Mouna have never met, they begin with a round of presentations. When it is his turn, El-Jaichi starts by wondering how he ended up in the meeting as he had not participated in the discussion on Facebook. Khankan explains that they met on a TV program<sup>5</sup> and El-Jaichi remembers and then starts to express his vision for Femimam:

I think this project has huge potential. In addition to being a mosque, it can also be a space where people are presented with alternative ideas and interpretations. That is, interpretations that people do not normally encounter even though they are, in fact, part of the Islamic tradition. It could be such a place or a forum for Muslims with different backgrounds who are curious and non-dogmatic, who have this open approach to being a believer and an inquiring human being.

Everyone in the room agrees with El-Jaichi’s focus on open mindedness and the need for an inclusive space where Muslims can practice Islam without condem-

3 The metaphor refers to Albert Einstein’s theory of general relativity in which the fabric of space-time is warped by gravity. Likewise, discursivity warps discourse as it passes through knowledge spaces.

4 This is a common euphemism for Muslim or non-Western minorities’ women’s struggle (Danish statistics distinguish between Western and non-Western immigrants, even if they are Danish citizens).

5 Khankan and El-Jaichi met on Muslim Voices as described in Chapter 6.

nation or dogmatic restrictions. Mouna adds that there have already been many questions on the public Facebook group which he now administers, and he provides a few examples of answers that he has given. This turns into a discussion where individual members provide their answers to the questions raised and it appears that they do not agree, but, interestingly, everyone accepts the answers Mouna has provided as legitimate and adequate. That is, the participants in the meeting, like in all subsequent meetings, practices the open mindedness and inclusion that the group wants to institutionalize. Fetteh, who presents the harshest arguments against Mouna's answers, ends by stating "that won't come between us ... there must be space enough for disagreement", and when Mouna, who is an autodidact, follows up with a statement that could be understood as anti-clerical, El-Jachi, who is writing a PhD in Islamic studies, merely moderates it:

Mouna: This is also a way of demonstrating that it is not just scholars who can interpret the Quran, it is also common people, because in many ways it has become an elitist religion where it is only scholars who have a right to hold an opinion.

El-Jaichi: That is true. Of course, one must acquire some qualifications before engaging in interpretation. So, it is not just anybody who can do it. Likewise, not everyone can read a literary text and then arrive at a new theory within the genre of novels or something like that. Consequently, one must have some qualifications, and it sounds like you have them.

El-Jaichi merely requires interpretations to be informed, primarily focusing on having people reflect on and spark curiosity about the wider Islamic tradition among Muslims. Then Fetteh presents herself, but the conversation soon turns back to the dogmatic and narrow-minded approach taken in some Quran schools and how some Muslim parents abstain from sending their children to them because of this. They agree that there is a need for an alternative and Femimam should provide that. At this point, the documentarist from DR interrupts and requests a scene, before they move on, in which Khankan asks Fetteh whether she will take the imam title upon herself. So, a staged scene follows and then the conversation turns back to the topic of authority and hierarchy. Khankan describes a vision she has about opening up the *khutbah* (Friday sermon) to young people so that it is not merely religious authorities who deliver it:

Earlier today, Saliha and I spoke about opening up the *khutbah*, so that it does not become an elitist position where maybe just four women deliver

the khutbahs at a lofty and advanced level; rather, we should open it up so that a young Muslim girl of 19–20 years can [take on the role] if she has specialized in something she wants to talk about. Maybe she writes poems or is a poet [El-Jaichi, “Yes, fantastic”] or has read some Sufi poetry or she has something in her heart—something she is dying to say—then that person can send her speech and request to come and deliver the khutbah on a Friday, so that we open up the rostrum.<sup>6</sup> That is something that will make the mosque *folkelig* [for the people or by the people].

Khankan’s idea meets unanimous approval and the brainstorm moves in the direction of founding a knowledge and youth center to revive parts of the Islamic tradition and learning. El-Jaichi, Fetteh, and Khankan, who all teach Islamic studies at different university extensions (*folkeuniversiteter*),<sup>7</sup> remark that even though their courses often cover parts of the Islamic tradition that is seldom taught in Danish mosques, the audiences primarily consist of non-Muslims. Therefore, the knowledge center should primarily reach out to Muslims so that these subjects can be taught and debated in a way that accommodates believing Muslims.

With Femimam’s being founded in the intersection of two fields that define knowledge about Islam in different ways—strategic religion and the geopolitical scene—all agree that neither are homogenous and that they must address their ways of controlling knowledge (Foucault 1991). Strategic religion controls what is being taught in mosques, and the state controls what is being taught in the Danish educational system. Both appear, with some notable exceptions such as the university extensions and a few progressive imams, to suppress the Islamic tradition that the group wants to produce:

El-Jaichi: So, it could be a place where one encounters presentations and content that take their point of departure from the humanities’ view of education [*dannelse*], the Enlightenment and so on and so forth. Read-

6 Khankan says rostrum (*talerstol*) and not *minbar* (Arabic for a specific kind of rostrum), and when this was pointed out by another member at a meeting on 10 June 2015, she explained that she did not like the hierarchies that the *minbar* implied. This is one of the reasons that there is no *minbar* in the Mariam Mosque. She, furthermore, explained that she consistently uses the Danish word for speech (*tale*) rather than sermon (*prediken*) to translate *khutbah*, because she thereby avoids the connotation of an asymmetrical power relation between clergy and congregation.

7 A university extension is an institution that disseminates research and academic knowledge to the public through public lectures and courses. University extensions exist in all major and many small cities in Denmark.

ing the Islamic tradition, right? Because there are many ways one can take this. Islam has been the greatest disseminator of Greek philosophy and all sorts of things.

Khankan: Well, I think that this mosque could be part of a revival of the Islamic history and cultural tradition which is neglected in the Danish education system. I have studied philosophy at university; I am a sociologist of religion with philosophy. There is nothing about Islamic philosophy [in this education]; there are also many other philosophical traditions that are not presented, that we are missing [pause]. So we could introduce this to a new generation and put a focus on it; the forgotten female characters. Not many people know about them.

El-Jaichi: Also that Islam isn't just jurisprudence. It is not just about old men who have read texts with the intention to delimit and define what is halal or haram et cetera. There is a rich tradition for reflection and thinking which we have completely neglected, and is being neglected in the Danish educational system, as Sherin mentions, but we also do it ourselves. We are ourselves guilty ... However, this will not become a place where we say, "No, we have nothing to do with that tradition." No, quite the contrary, we will rehabilitate those parts of the tradition which have been forgotten.

It is interesting to observe that the hermeneutical framework proposed in the above discussion cannot be discursively imagined without the discursivity of the humanities. El-Jaichi, Khankan, and Mouna idealize an approach to Islam inspired by the humanities as this is their educational background. They speak about *dannelse*, or *Bildung* as it is called in German, which in this context means the formation or sculpting of the individual through enlightened education that emancipates the individual from blindly following dogma. While the genealogy of this ideal is long, its current meanings emerge from the Enlightenment, as El-Jaichi notes, while he also un-reads the Eurocentric bias by pointing to the role Muslims have played in the formation of this ideal.

As Melucci (1996a: 1) explains, collective action does not announce the commencement of change, it announces a change that has already happened. In that sense it is noteworthy that everyone at the meeting is already engaged on the individual level in doing most of what they hope to do collectively in Femimam. This renders Femimam both a continuation of things already taking place, and an expansion into actions that are currently not on the agenda. Khankan wants to have women-led Friday prayer and El-Jaichi wants to bring his scholarly engagement into a framework that is not restricted by the institutional settings of the university. However, as the non-Muslim majority may

experience this as an initiative taken by good Muslims, it may end up framing other Muslims—the people Femimam wants to reach—as bad.

Khankan is worried about the effect Femimam could have on how other Muslims are framed in the media, saying, “We shall not become an attempt to dehumanize the traditional position or the Islamist position ... We are not here to undermine other positions.” She wants the media to frame Femimam as an alternative position and abstain from using it to frame other Muslims as bad. In other words, she does not want to operate according to the terms of the geopolitical scene, with Femimam first being assigned a role as good and then set on a stage where everyone else is regarded as bad, and expected to fight them. Instead, Khankan imagines that Femimam can change perceptions of Islam in the media as it will offer journalists access to an alternative position when they are calling around to get responses from Islamic authorities.

It is somewhat ironic that this is what Khankan has been doing for the last fifteen years and in the prior weeks she has been framed as a conservative Muslim and an Islamist due to the change in plans from mixed to women-only Friday prayer (see Chapter 11). The conversation at the table takes a turn in the direction of Danish media, and Khankan explains that she is frustrated with *Deadline*, which has invited her on the show that evening to respond to Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s new book in which Ali (2015b) talks about the lack of reform within Islam and the need for Muslims to recant the idea that the Quran is the word of God. With this, Ali defines a rule whereby one can categorize Muslims as good or bad depending on whether they recant or not, and Khankan objects to the idea that she and other Muslim leaders are reduced to respondents to Ali’s discourse. However, the irony of the situation becomes even thicker when the documentarist from DR again interrupts and brings the conversation back to the mosque, which is the symbolically laden narrative of the documentary she is producing:

Documentarist: I have a wish and you may say yes or no. Could you briefly discuss the fact that you have found a place for the mosque; not where it is or who [has donated it]. We know that we are not allowed to speak about that ...

Khankan: OK, we’ll do that [turns around to the three others]. As you have probably heard and read, we have found rooms for the mosque. The conditions are ascetic ...

Khankan starts to talk about how she imagines the mosque. She would like beautiful carpets, calligraphy on the walls, Quran verses but also a visual resus-

citation of Muslim women's history through quotes by, for example, Rabia al-Adawiyya, and a library with all the best literature, a whole wall of book shelves. The other members respond by starting a discussion of Islamic literature, but this is again interrupted by the journalist who asks, "Isn't it also important that the location of the mosque is kept a secret?" As I discuss further below, the secrecy about the address was frequently interpreted by journalists as fear of radical Muslims, but it was in fact the donor of the apartment within which the mosque would pop-up from time to time who feared attacks from the political right wing and newspapers due to his donation.

A further ironic aspect of the situation is that the reduction of Islam which the group problematizes is ongoing while they speak. The questions the documentarist asks demonstrate this clearly as they relate to the criteria of relevance that is dominant in the media. She even makes this explicit when she interrupts a conversation on the manifest later in the meeting and says, "... we talked about people in the media who have been very focused on the development from a mixed to a women-only mosque". Khankan responds, "Oh yes, that is true, we can do that", and turns back to the others, saying, "There are just two things before we end the meeting. There has been much discussion about whether it should be a mixed or a women's mosque ...". The staged conversation only stays on course for a short while so the documentarist interrupts again, "Sherin, before you go any further into that [other discussion], could I get Saliha's [perspective] ...". Khankan then turns around and asks, "Saliha, why do you want a women's mosque and not a mixed-gender or gender-neutral mosque?"

Interestingly, even though the documentarist repeatedly re-orientes the conversation towards a mosque, this only seems partially relevant for Mouna, Fetteh, and El-Jaichi. In fact, after Fetteh has given her answer to the final interruption by the documentarist on why she is against mixed gender Friday prayer, El-Jaichi states this explicitly:

To be completely honest with you, I am not the kind of person who cares much about whether a new mosque will open, so [I am] fine with a women's mosque et cetera. I do not use mosques, but what I am looking forward to and am excited about is that we will have a place—I have missed such a place—where people can go and discuss what they have read, [anything] which is interesting and important to know and become acquainted with as both a Muslim and a non-Muslim—and to have some presentations and debate evenings.

El-Jaichi's perspective was shared in the group and at times it became the dominant idea in subsequent meetings where Femimam worked in the direction of a knowledge center that would have women-led Friday prayer as one activity among others.

Given the content of the discussion described above, it can seem odd that the documentarist from DR is so focused on the mosque, Friday prayer, and female imams, but these symbols have a high value in the context within which the documentary is going to air. In other words, the documentarist has been made responsible for the production of a narrative that is intelligible within the discursivity of her audience and which is tailored to its tastes (Abu-Lughod 2013), and this requires her to warp the discourse of Femimam members significantly. Furthermore, the documentarist is working under time restraints as her film is scheduled to air in just six weeks and the planning of the mosque is at a very early stage. In fact, the members meet for the first time while she is recording, at which time they are not even focused on the opening of the mosque. To make matters worse, she cannot record in the place that the mosque will open, and this produces an absurdly staged scene in which Khankan and Fetteh are asked to consider opening the mosque on the first floor of a popular night club, *Søpavillonen*,<sup>8</sup> overlooking the lakes of Copenhagen. Here the viewer is presented with Khankan hoping that the *qibla* (direction of prayer) will be in the direction of the lakes and both of them measuring up the space and making guesses about the capacity.

Femimam members—Khankan in particular—was unhappy with the documentary, to put it mildly. Their critique mainly targeted what they saw as an orientalist approach to so-called brown feminism. They argued that they were being portrayed as the last people to finally take up the gender struggle that Danish women had already embraced. In other words, they felt that their discourse had been warped. Furthermore, the critique targeted the absurdity of some of the scenes such as the one at the night club. However, the documentary strengthened the narrative about Femimam being on a path towards the opening of a mosque, and this became the basis of Khankan's interaction with the media going forward, a narrative with which she identified.

It is important to note that the documentarist is expected to deliver on the announcement that spread in March 2015, but in the form of a documentary. This means that—while there may be many other interesting stories to cover and Femimam may be something different to what she expected and what Dan-

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8 *Søpavillonen* is a notorious night club, popularly nicknamed "chlamydia castle".



ish media had indicated—she must still deliver a documentary that is meaningful in the context within which it will be aired. That is, whether the media version of the story exists or not, it must be told.

### 3 Femimam and Forum for Critical Muslims

The second meeting in Femimam took place in Chakir's apartment. Immediately before going there Khankan registered Femimam online as an association, thereby acting according to the institutionalized idea (Jepperson 1991) of what constitutes a religious institution in Denmark (Kühle and Larsen 2017); indeed, a significant amount of time and energy went into attempting to write the statute for the association as is required for registration. Likewise, election of a chairperson and vice-chairperson, an annual general assembly, a board, accounting, and so on, were taken as given in the organizational structure of a mosque. In short, in Denmark a mosque is an association and therefore the Mariam Mosque took the form of an association, but this also means that Danish law on associations and faith communities is a source of Islam in a similar—but not identical—way as the Quran is a source of Islam. This is most evident in the Mariam Mosque's striving to fulfil the requirements for registering as a faith community and thus be issued with a license to perform marriages that would render Khankan's Islamic marriage ceremonies valid under Danish law Vinding (2020).

The second meeting in Femimam is therefore dedicated to writing a statute for the association but ends up focusing on just the mission statement, which is discussed almost without interruption. Khankan, Chakir, Mouna, El-Jaichi, and Skovgaard are present at this meeting on 20 May 2015. Khankan had also invited a female exchange student from the Middle East because she had shown interest in the project after her teacher<sup>9</sup> at a college in Copenhagen, who knew Femimam from the media, had told her about it.

During the small talk before the meeting El-Jaichi assures the exchange student that her Islam is correct, saying, "You don't need to go to someone who is smart and knowledgeable. You can just follow your own intuition. Just be more confident that the way you are a Muslim is a true one. There are many different ways of being Muslim." This is followed by a discussion of approaches to and interpretations of the Quran, with El-Jaichi, without claiming that one of them is true, presenting a variety of ways of reading the text. As the knowledge cen-

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<sup>9</sup> This teacher was not me.

ter El-Jaichi wanted to found was never established, these short encounters are the closest he got to practice his idea within Femimam.

When the meeting starts, Khankan takes charge, wanting input to the mission statement in the statute. With her computer open and ready she asks, "The mission of the association is ...?" This sparks an open discussion on whether the association is a faith community or a forum, and whether it should therefore take the form of a mosque or a knowledge center. Within just a few minutes, members explicitly decide to make Femimam a knowledge center with a mosque rather than a mosque with a knowledge center. This distinction is important as subsequent meetings were primarily oriented towards the founding of this knowledge center.

The idea of a knowledge center has a striking resemblance to Forum for Critical Muslims. Khankan points this out for the first time when Mouna suggests that they name the knowledge center Forum for Pluralistic Approaches to Islam, asking, "But why do we need a new statute? This is what Critical Muslims stands for." Forum for Critical Muslims was a forum and had a pluralistic approach to Islam and declared in its 2006 manifest that it intended to found a mosque with a female *khatiba* (Friday preacher) who also leads prayer for women while a male imam leads the men (Khankan et al. 2006).

This became the first example of a series of recurring discussions in which Khankan proposed to solve problems by taking inspiration from Forum for Critical Muslims or merely continue the work on Femimam within this association. However, Mouna and El-Jaichi did not want to inherit the history of another association that they did not know; they wanted a fresh start. Another discussion that kept being raised was whether the prayer should be mixed or women-only. Khankan consistently pushed for various compromises that would accommodate both.

At this particular meeting, Khankan states that she does not want the words "women's mosque" in the statute, as this will restrict the association from also setting up mixed-gender Friday prayer at a later date. Then Chakir announces dinner and Khankan puts the computer away. During the meal Khankan mentions that she has received a text message in which a non-Muslim woman, who has until now supported Femimam, explains that she has retracted her support due to Mouna's handling of Femimam's public Facebook page. Mouna therefore gives an update on the public Facebook page where he is experiencing a lot of pressure from primarily non-Muslims who insist, for example, on posting on Ayan Hirsi Ali's new book, and others who want to set an agenda on their own terms. Mouna vets all posts before they are published, and he consistently rejects these kinds of threads as he does not want Femimam to be associated with Ali's ideas or be hijacked by others' agenda.

That is, he does not want Femimam to be defined on non-Muslims' terms or by demands for answers that may be relevant to them, but not to Femimam.

Mouna explains that users often get angry when their posts are rejected, and some even claim that Femimam is against women's rights as it is unwilling to discuss Ali's arguments. Some users have even condemned Femimam. El-Jaichi interrupts, "What [do they think] is wrong with this initiative?" Mouna explains that some users claim that by not agreeing to discuss Ali's new book Femimam is censoring women. El-Jaichi grins and remarks, "We haven't even started yet." It is interesting to note that even though the documentarist from DR is not present, the geopolitical scene still has a strong presence in the situation.

Critique of this sort, and input from people who wanted to have a say in what Femimam ought to think and do drained resources from the very beginning. Quickly, the pressure got so great that Femimam members did not have sufficient time to respond to feedback or engage in debate, which meant that its Facebook page was neglected; emails from potential international partners were sometimes only discovered weeks or even months after they were received, and many correspondents did not receive an answer as the group simply did not have the resources to follow up in a meaningful way.

This was an issue from the beginning that only got worse with time as Femimam began to receive more media attention, both locally and internationally. Khankan and Mouna, who monitored communication, found that incoming emails, messages, and activity on Facebook tended to come in bursts when Femimam had appeared in the media, but between these bursts in the early days there could be long quiet periods where they merely received an email a day. However, as both Khankan and Mouna were busy with other volunteer work and studies they never caught up with the incoming communication.

#### 4 **Khankan Becomes an Imam**

Femimam came to exist in two parallel forms. On the one hand, it was a group that met approximately once a month to discuss the founding of a knowledge center; on the other, Khankan and Mouna responded to requests for rituals and quasi-legal services made by Muslims to Femimam and it is the latter interaction that with time produced the Mariam Mosque and Khankan as an imam. The reason Khankan and Mouna ended up in the position of founders is largely because they were the interface for incoming communication.

At the fourth meeting on 8 July 2015, Khankan announces to El-Jaichi and a temporary member, Laila, that she has received a request for an interfaith

*nikah* (Islamic marriage) between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man who want to marry on 24 July 2015. Mouna already knows about the request and has worked on a draft for a *nikah* contract that reflects the views of Femimam as he saw them; he requests the help of El-Jaichi and Laila to finish it, as there are still many unresolved questions. Likewise, Khankan asks for inspiration and input in holding a proper *nikah* ceremony. El-Jaichi and Laila pledge to help but say, along with Mouna, that they need more time, so the *nikah* must be postponed; however, Khankan feels a responsibility towards the couple, who have gathered their families for the occasion, and opposes a long delay.

Although *nikah* is Arabic word for any kind of marriage, I consistently use the term to signify unregistered Islamic marriage, which must be distinguished from marriage registered under Danish law. However, this differs from my informants' terminology which is evident from the quotes in which they primarily use the Danish term for marriage (*ægteskab*) to signify both *nikah* and marriage. They only use the terms Islamic marriage or *nikah* as opposed to civil marriage, registered marriage, or Danish marriage on occasions where it is important for them to make the distinction.

On 8 August 2015, Khankan performed a *nikah* ceremony for the couple based on a contract Mouna had drawn up with assistance from the information available on the internet and his network online (see Chapter 5). In other words, while Femimam's meetings were focused on the founding of a knowledge center, Femimam emerged as a mosque institution when Mouna formulated an 8-page *nikah* contract and Khankan became an imam by performing the *nikah*. The latter is obvious from Skovgaard's recordings after the *nikah* ceremony when she asked Khankan a few questions to which Khankan could not really find answers, instead explaining that she was processing what had just happened. As a rule, Skovgaard does not interrupt the scenes she films; she merely records what is happening, but she sometimes asks Khankan questions when she is one on one with her.

Two days later, on 10 August, Femimam holds its fifth meeting and Khankan brings up the *nikah* in side remarks in two different discussions. The first is a discussion on media tactics in which some members argue that Khankan and Fetteh should engage less in public debate, while others find it important to reclaim Islam publicly. As this turns into a discussion that addresses the imam title, where they should draw the line in terms of inviting journalists to follow them backstage, and what to publish and what not to publish, Khankan gives the example of the *nikah*, saying, "We have just married a couple. This is history; we have written history this Saturday." Khankan's point is that while they have written history they have not announced it publicly and this is an example of where she draws the line.

The group is both happy to hear about the interfaith nikah and glad that Khankan and Mouna did not go public with it. Interestingly, no member of Femimam questioned the legitimacy of nikah between Muslim women and non-Muslim. It later emerged that some members had theological arguments for the legitimacy whereas others were satisfied with ethical arguments based on contemporary ideas about individual freedom and the equality of the sexes. Both types of arguments are guided by embodied exegesis, which means that individuals construct arguments that merely satisfy themselves: one is a reading of Islamic sources whereas the other is an Islamization of contemporary ideas that are just as widespread among non-Muslims. This also means that none of the arguments are systematic or developed in way suitable for theological debate within a space structured by strategic Islam.

Later in the meeting, in a discussion of the importance of members other than Khankan and Fetteh associating with Femimam publicly, Khankan returns to the nikah ceremony she had performed and explains how this has had an effect on the confidence with which she makes her claim:

It is actually not until I was done with the marriage ceremony this Saturday; it was not until then that I felt worthy of calling myself an imam. Until then I almost wasn't able to get the word past my lips. This is partially because we have normalized a way of thinking in which only men can be imams and that has an effect on me. It affects the brain and one's thoughts. The things we hear again and again and again affect us. So it is really difficult, and lots of women have asked me, "Why do you insist on that term? Use another term. Call yourself a spiritual care giver. Why do you have to call yourself an imam?" But why shouldn't I? That is the question. Even though one can rationally tell oneself that of course we can call ourselves imams, it is difficult in some way. I remember one of the first [TV] programs that I was on, I almost couldn't [pause] I became all [pause] I almost couldn't say the word. But after this Saturday I can feel that something has happened.

Until the nikah ceremony, Khankan had only laid claim to the imam title in non-religious contexts such as in the media, debates, and at lectures. The nikah ceremony was the first occasion at which she performed the role of imam in a religious context and became an imam in her own self-perception and in relation to everyone present at the ceremony, including Mouna and two friends whom Khankan had invited to assist her.

Interestingly, it was enough that there were plans for the mosque to open at some point in the future for Khankan to be recognized as an imam by both

Muslims and non-Muslims. This is evidenced by her receiving requests for Islamic rituals such as the abovementioned nikah ceremony, but she was also nominated for an award (Trine Bryld Prisen) and added to the “Women’s Blue Book”—an index of important women in Danish society—when it was published in an edition to celebrate the 100-year jubilee of universal suffrage. Under the reason for her inclusion one can read:

Sherin Khankan (SK) is [an] obvious [candidate] for the Women’s Blue Book. She has through the last 15 years worked tirelessly to challenge stereotypes of the relation between Islam and gender in Denmark and to make Muslim women equal with men in the religious sphere and the public space. SK is the founder of a number of movements that support these efforts, the latest being the founding of FEMIMAM, which promotes female Muslim leadership with a focus on the establishment of one of Europe’s first mosques with female imams.

This is merely the first of many honors and awards Khankan was given over time due to her engagement in Femimam. Media played an important role in framing her as an imam, and the first instance where she acted as an imam in a religious context was indirectly a consequence of her media engagement. The couple that she married had been unable to find an imam in London who was willing to marry them, so they contacted Muslims for Progressive values in the USA who had heard about Femimam in the media and therefore referred them to Khankan. Likewise, media played a role in recruitment of what for the most part came to be temporary members. However, the effects of engaging in the public debate was also a major concern for Femimam, which had a strong influence on the meetings, as most discussions revolved around the consequences of taking certain positions or being coerced to take a position on topics with which they did not plan to engage, such as homosexuality.

## 5 Navigating Spaces that Warp Discourse

When Femimam met for their seventh meeting on 17 September to discuss the manifest, registration as a faith community, bank account, and webpage, Khankan and Mouna had performed their first *aqiqah* (name giving ceremony) and announce that they will do another nikah on 20 October. The only further mention of this is when Khankan observes she would like to have interfaith nikah between Muslim women and non-Muslim men written into the mani-

fest, adding, “Here we have good theological well-founded proofs.” Mouna is a bit reluctant but accepts it, saying, “That is also a relevant topic that we will be asked about.” The conversation then moves in the direction of another topic on which Femimam will be expected to formulate an opinion: homosexuality.

The meeting ends up spending considerable time on a discussion about same-sex marriage;<sup>10</sup> as Femimam now offers *nikah* it must take a standpoint with regard to this. That is, even though the group sticks to the idea of having Friday prayer as an activity within a knowledge center, the focus of the discussion now revolves around the emerging mosque, called a faith community in their discussion. A mosque is an institution that defines itself by offering certain ceremonies and not others, among other things, and this comes into conflict with the core idea of an open forum situated in a knowledge center. This is evident from Mouna’s attempt to focus the discussion on getting something down in written form:

We need to write a manifest and discuss the fundamental standpoints and write it down on paper so that we have it as a PDF or something like that; as long as people can read it. My initial thoughts are that we all agree on some fundamental standpoints within Islam. I presume that we all advocate the acceptance of homosexuality within Islam and we advocate marriage between homosexuals ... It is not necessarily a bad thing if we disagree because that only demonstrates that we are open towards different paths and approaches; I mean, that is one of the pillars of our faith community.

This is the beginning of an hour-long discussion on same-sex marriage that clearly demonstrates the difference between beliefs held on the individual level and standpoints taken as a faith community. Everyone agrees that there is no contradiction between being Muslim and homosexual, and Khankan is ready to perform *nikah* ceremonies between homosexuals. El-Jaichi is the first to raise the point that there is a difference between beliefs on the individual and institutional level:

There is an important difference between what we think about same-sex marriage on an individual level and what we think as an association slash

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10 I have chosen to stick with same-sex marriage in my description as I have never heard anyone in the Mariam Mosque call it same-sex *nikah*.

faith community. There is a huge difference that we need to be aware of ... we can think whatever we want as individuals but when we receive a request then we speak on behalf of the faith community ...

Chakir then suggests that individual imams should be free to do what they think is right and Khankan adds, "I have no problem marrying people of the same sex ... I believe in love so ...". El-Jaichi interrupts, stating, "There has to be theological arguments behind what we do and say and the standpoints that we take [as an association slash faith community]. I find it very difficult to find theological arguments for same-sex marriage, but I can easily find humanistic and moral arguments for same-sex marriages." Khankan immediately replies, "Then we will just use those [arguments]." As the discussion progresses it appears Mouna has found theological literature on this topic produced by the Calem Institute, which he believes is founded by a homosexual imam called Ludovic, while Chakir presents a Quranic argument for the acceptance of homosexuality within Islam based on the Lot story in the Quran. However, El-Jaichi thinks that these arguments will not solve the problem as it is also a matter of tactics. He foresees significant warping:

I can see what is going to happen; believe me, I can see what is going to happen. Sherin announces that we marry homosexuals; believe me, it will overshadow everything we do ... The media will love it, they will focus on it. However, in the greater Muslim public a distrust for the place will emerge. There will be a minority of young people who will contribute to the place and have a sympathy for [it], but it will end as a small sect that slowly dies. We have to create a project that is sustainable, so let's not burn bridges right at the beginning.

El-Jaichi's remark demonstrates a tactical paradox because, on the one hand, Femimam will be coerced into answering the question on homosexuality in the media, but at the same time they have to abstain from answering the question in order to reach their core audience and thereby gain influence among Muslims. Formulating an answer to the LGBTQ-question means quilting Femimam's discourse according to another master signifier, thus warping the discourse. After twenty minutes of brainstorming on how to find a solution to the tactical paradox, Chakir says, "I know that I am returning to the beginning now. However, if the Quran is going to be open to the individual's own interpretation [in Femimam], then why [is it] not [open to] homosexuals?" Khankan adds with a laugh that she is going to marry homosexuals in secret and after a few minutes it is decided to move on with the issue unresolved.



One could argue that here Femimam is planning a strategy but, as the weak side of the power asymmetry, they must plan the strategy tactically. That is, they plan on exerting strategic power in the sense that they want to change how space is structured so as to emerge as they are without warping. However, devoid of such power, they must resort to tactics, which ultimately means navigating the space structured by the strategic power of others.

The discussion on homosexuality demonstrates two points. Firstly, there is a tension between the individual and institutional levels. When an opinion is expressed either in writing or as action on an institutional level it must obey the rules of strategic religion, such as the demand for any action or opinion to be legitimized religiously and grounded in scripture. El-Jaichi states this explicitly when he first remarks that he has no problem with same sex marriage, "People can do whatever they want, but when you ask for a marriage based on Islamic sources, then I cannot myself mobilize arguments grounded in Islamic texts that makes it allowed." El-Jaichi does not say that same-sex marriage is not Islamically legitimate; he merely stresses that he is incapable of fulfilling strategic religion's demand for scriptural accountability. Therefore, it becomes a matter of finding the arguments before moving on to action, but Femimam is planning the first Friday prayer in December 2015 so the question is urgent. As Mouna remarks, "I completely agree that we must carefully pick our battles in the beginning, but this question is going to be asked, and we have already encountered it. We can't just wait for it; we have to make a decision on this." In other words, Femimam must have a tactic that accounts for the inevitable warping of the their discourse.

When Femimam emerges in the institutionalized form of a mosque, it also enters the geopolitical scene, and this means that its members are forced to take a stand in the struggles that are played out. They are, so to speak, coerced into co-writing the script on the affair and therefore have to decide whether they want to play the role of good or bad Muslim, but as demonstrated above they are trying to write an alternative role. In other words, Femimam cannot struggle for Muslim women's rights and remain indifferent to other causes that are defined as important on the geopolitical scene. Interestingly, there are no members in Femimam who self-identity as homosexual, nor have any except for Fetteh engaged in the struggle for LGBTQ-Muslims.

After the meeting, while Khankan and Mouna are cleaning the room, they discuss the dilemma and Mouna expresses his frustration with having to justify his beliefs in a different way just because he is institutionalizing his views, "Why can't we just have it the way we want it without having to justify everything?" Khankan agrees, "It is strange that we live in a world where this is something we discuss ... why isn't there just complete inclusiveness?"

The discussion of same-sex marriage demonstrates how the geopolitical scene and strategic religion to some degree form beliefs when they are institutionalized. That is, although almost all members wanted to introduce same-sex marriage, they choose not to do so due to the inevitable warping this would entail on the geopolitical scene. It is important to note that the group also predicts significant warping if their discourse were to be reproduced within a space structured by strategic religion as this for example imposes specific rules on how to produce Islam.

## 6 Femimam without Fetteh

Dear Committee

I have today decided to resign as the chairwoman for Femimam because I have decided to partially move to Jordan on 1 December 2015. As a consequence, I will only be in Denmark when it is demanded by my employer, which I hope to do something about with time as I have to juggle many balls in Amman. However, I would be happy—and proud—if you could use me as an ambassador.

I hope you understand my decision.

Regards Saliha

On 22 October Fetteh announced her resignation in the private Facebook group. In an attempt to create unity and avoid Femimam's becoming exclusively associated with Khankan and Mouna, Fetteh had been elected as chairwoman and El-Jaichi vice-chairman. This was also a tactical decision in line with envisaged strategies as Fetteh and El-Jaichi had the best formal educational credentials within Islamic studies, and Fetteh was the only woman who was willing to lead Friday prayer. Furthermore, it was a way of distributing the individual ownership Femimam members would have over the association. The departure of Fetteh was a major setback.

At the beginning of the eighth Femimam meeting on 1 November, the owner of the apartment, Holdt, explained that he had been under severe personal attacks from right wing debaters and journalists due to his interreligious dialogue projects, and that he now had some temporary reservations in relation to the Femimam project. Holdt, presented in more detail in Chapter 9, was in the middle of a number of scandals. At intervals of approximately a month apart, he was accused of having lied in a passage of his book, *American Pictures* (Bjørnvig 2015; Hansen 2015), of transferring money from a charity project to his personal bank account (Holdt 2015; Lynge and Hansen 2015), and of receiv-

ing large sums of money from the KGB during the Cold War (Brøndum 2015). Holdt himself, although he admitted that he had romanticized the passage in his book, understood this to be an orchestrated attack on him from the right-wing, as he explained at the meeting:

I have never experienced such a media attack from the right wing [Sherin: “Welcome to my world”]. Yes, and it is controlled by Islamophobic powers ... [long explanation of the scandal with named individuals] ... Right now I am under attack from forces on the right-wing which I can see in reality is due to me defending Muslims all the time, right. Or because I have a reputation of being a halal-hippie.<sup>11</sup> That is what controls them, right. Why else would they dig up a 35-year old book and start to find errors in it? That is meaningless; the book is out of print. So, it is something completely different that controls them, right. And because of that I must be careful about announcing anything about this mosque before it is actually there. That is something you have to remember, right ... that word “mosque” terrifies these people.

Due to this bombshell, Khankan suggests a Friday prayer without press coverage in December or January, but there is no support for this as members agree that no one will show up if it is not announced. Holdt has, furthermore, hired a press officer to handle the scandal and she has advised him to keep a low profile about his work with Muslims for the time being; he therefore encourages the group only to start up if and when they are ready and their mosque is sustainable.

With Fetteh’s departure the discussion on mixed gender or women-only prayer is reopened, and it is even suggested during the meeting to include male imams in the mosque to make up for the lack of female imams, or maybe to have male and female imams take turns. The discussion is short lived, and the focus is soon directed towards convincing Khankan to take over Fetteh’s role as prayer leader. However, Khankan does not feel qualified, as she finds it important that an imam is properly trained in *tajwid* (the art of recitation) and she is still taking classes at a lower level. The rest of the group insist on hearing her recitation and approves of her level of skill. In the end, Khankan agrees to intensify her study of *tajwid* and promises to be ready to lead prayer within a few months.

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11 Halal-hippie is a person who is completely blind to problems pertinent to Muslim minorities. The word is used as a slur and has connotations of being naïve, a bit thick, and persuaded by some hippie approach that turns a blind eye even to obvious problems. The opposite equivalent are the slurs racist and Islamophobe.

El-Jaichi tries to get the meeting back on track and says that Femimam is not just about prayer, adding that, if it was, there would be no need for him. Then, more than half a year after the first brainstorm, Mouna brings up a previous agenda and invites people to discuss the manifest. El-Jaichi starts:

This manifest should not stifle the development of ideas and I think that the development of ideas comes before the manifest. The problem with the manifest has been that we simply haven't thought the idea through, and I think that is why it is so hard to formulate something specific. And this is, among other things, about figuring out what kind of place it is [that we want to found]. In addition to being a place where there is Friday prayer, it is a place where one can get teaching, a place that offers courses in philosophy and theology, and a place where there are panel debates and presentations et cetera. We must think this through and maybe write a bit on it, so that we have a text that we can use as a starting point to then say something specific in relation to a manifest.

The similarity between meetings is remarkable and when Mouna left Femimam in June 2017, the manifest was still not written, the web-page was empty of content, the application to become a registered faith community had not been written, and a bank account had not been opened.

When the discussion on a manifest comes under way at this meeting, it is decided to exchange the word mosque with institute so that it becomes the Femimam Institute, but as this is almost the only decision that is being taken Mouna gets frustrated and says they are going in circles; everything that is being said has already been stated at previous meetings and Femimam is not moving forward. While not everyone agrees with Mouna, his expression of frustration for a brief moment gives the meeting direction and it is decided to define a number of core ideas for a manifest, and individual members are then made responsible for writing a bit on one core idea each. However, as the group—with the exception of four members who visit the apartment proposed for the mosque—does not meet for the next 3½ months this plan is never carried out.

## 7 A New Beginning

On 30 December Holdt and Khankan give a short tour of the apartment to El-Jaichi and Mouna. Holdt again emphasizes that as things are at the moment, they can use the room for meetings and the like, but they should abstain from unnecessarily inviting guests and must keep it secret that he is the donor. As

Khankan is showing the others around she brings up the discussion on mixed gender or women-only Friday prayer by suggesting that men can pray in one room and women in the other, but as on previous occasions this proposal is rejected. Khankan then changes the subject and explains that she has recruited a man who is willing to lead a monthly *dhikr* (Sufi ritual) in the Femimam Institute and she has found a teacher with multiple *izajas* (traditional authorization to transmit Islamic knowledge) who can take the classes that Fetteh was supposed to teach. Both pieces of information come as a bit of a surprise to Mouna, especially as the man in question has publicly opposed Femimam in the past. However, it emerges that he had later spoken with El-Jaichi who explained the open and inclusive idea behind the institute and that the Friday prayer was merely one activity among others in an inclusive knowledge center. This is a short informal meeting without an agenda, but before people go home, Khankan reminds Mouna and El-Jaichi about the manifest and they plan a meeting on 15 February 2016.

When Femimam meets again in February, Khankan is frustrated because Denmark's largest newspaper, *Politiken*, has run front-page headlines in both the main paper and the culture section in which they claim that Femimam is keeping the address of their mosque secret due to the risk of reactions from conservative Muslims (Giese and Olsen 2016; Giese 2016). Two imams had contacted Khankan and complained about being framed like this without having done anything wrong. The occasion of the story was that Khankan had invited a reporter to the apartment and announced that the Mariam Mosque would soon open, and the story went worldwide. Mouna notes that Femimam's inbox is booming and that they have received four new requests for nikah ceremonies. This may have been due to Khankan's having been photographed for the article in *Politiken* while preparing for a nikah ceremony.

Khankan, Mouna, and Holdt are joined in the meeting by two temporary members, and then Yasmin<sup>12</sup> who almost immediately took over much of Mouna's administrative work and came to be a core member of Femimam. Most of the time is spent getting to know one another and Khankan presents both Femimam and some of her other ideas, such as her dream of a house for all three Abrahamic religions, which she also announced at the conference in Istanbul in November 2014 (see Chapter 6):

My dream is to have a church [*kirke*] that is both mosque, church, and synagogue; a house that encompasses all three, with three separate doors

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12 Yasmin was recruited by Khankan after a lecture she gave in January 2016.

POLITIKEN

KULTUR

Torsdag 11. februar 2016



Den excentriske spildesigner Jonathan Blow har gjort det igen. Spillet The Witness er skævt, vildt svært og lidt af en åbenbaring.

KRITIK DEBAT NAVNE



Opgør med islams patriarkat

Skandinen får nu sin største roser for kvinder, Mariam Mosken. Bag projektet står blandt andet Danmarks kvindelige imam, Sherin Khankan. Hun kalder det et feministisk projekt, at kvinder skal indtage talerstolen og få lige rettigheder med mænd.

LIKGESTILLING INTERVIEW

Hvorfor er jeg ikke bang?

Sherin Khankan tænker sig lidt om og tager en lille åndehæft. Vi sidder i hendes stue. Hun dørers står en god stund i døren. Bag hende kan man se hendes søn, der sidder på gulvet og spiller med sine legetøjsfigurer. Sherin Khankan er en af de få kvinder, der har været med til at starte det danske muslimske miljø. Hun er en af de få kvinder, der har været med til at starte det danske muslimske miljø. Hun er en af de få kvinder, der har været med til at starte det danske muslimske miljø.

DET SEER

Religiøsitet og filosofi, specialiseret i islam, fortæller, debatter og mor til tre. Og en altså Nordens første kvindelige imam og leder af projektet Femina. Det sidste har hun brugt på sammen med en gruppe, primært kvinder, der skal være rammerne omkring en videnskabskonference. Den hedder Mariam Mosken, opkaldt efter Mariam Mosken, opkaldt efter Mariam Mosken, opkaldt efter Mariam Mosken.

der er konsensus omkring, at hvis der er vold i et selskab, er det automatisk oplyst. Det bliver bare ikke praktiseret. Men det er to kvindelige imamer, moskeer, Sherin Khankan og Salma Marie Fethi, står om bestyrelse på til heraf to mænd.

Mænd ingen adgang Hver fredag under fredagsbønnen er mødernes forbeholdt kvinder, men derudover er lokalerne åbne for alle til eftermiddag, koranmøder, islamisk meditation og spiseforening.

Det her projekt handler om at andre hilles og oplyses om islam i Danmark. Det er kontroversielt i islam at blande kvinder og mænd til fredagshøring. For eksempel kan det kombineres, da den amerikanske kvindelige imam og islamist feminist Amina Wadud i 2006 offentliggjorde en erklæring om, at kvinder og mænd ikke kan stå sammen i bøn. Sherin Khankan, som er den mest kendte muslimske imam i Danmark, mener, at det er vigtigt, at kvinder og mænd kan stå sammen i bøn.

Med da hvad, mænd har monopolet på 99,9 procent af alle Danmarks moskeer. Så jeg kan altså ikke tage mig af, om nogen synes, vi diskriminerer mænd. Sherin Khankan kvinder er mere fællesskab, og sådan komplementerer vi hinanden. Det gør vi også. Vi siger, at kulturen er ligestillet. Vi er islamiske feminist, og det betyder ikke, at vi er mod islam. Vi er islamiske feminist, og det betyder ikke, at vi er mod islam. Vi er islamiske feminist, og det betyder ikke, at vi er mod islam.

for islam den traditionelle, den islamistiske og den progressiv/spirituelle. Femina vil være den tredje, her fortæller der på kvinders rettigheder.

For if Femina-projektet er kontroversielt og nok kan forventes en vis reaktion fra mere reaktionære muslimske miljøer, holder Femina indtil videre adressen på møder hemmeligt. Men den ligner faktisk, hvad kaldet i den by København. Mosken vil også begynde deres fredagshøring i det skulptur, under det store teaterhus.

Der findes ikke en imam-uddannelse i Danmark. De imamer, vi har, er enten frivilligt udsædte med en islamisk teologisk uddannelse fra Mekka, eller også er det imamer, der er blevet imamer i kraft af folk søger dem og giver dem anerkendelse og legitimitet. Og det er det, vi bliver vores legitimitet. Folk søger os, fordi de har brug for os. Siden 1978 har jeg haft en synskråk. I Frankrig er der en imam, der var hollandsk. I Canada og Los Angeles er der moskeer for kvinder. I Holland i England er der en på vej, og i Italien er der også en. I Danmark er der ingen. Sherin Khankan mener, at det er på høje tid.

BLÅ BOG SHERIN KHANKAN

Debatter og forelæsninger: Født 1974 af en irakisk mor og en norsk far. Cand.mag. i religionssociologi og filosofi. Sidsåtte (2002) forening Kritiske Muslimer, som arbejder for demokrati og pluralisme. Nigang til islam bl.a. med lægning af mænd og kvinder. 2014 etablerede hun EnStrikket, der er en samling af kvinder og mænd, der er udført for psykisk vold og social kontrol. Hun har desuden arbejdet med piger og kvinders ligestilling med for islam i Arabien. Research: Politikens Bibliotek. @sherin\_khankan

FIGURE 2 The front page of the culture section of Politiken 11 February 2016. The headline reads "Rebellion against Islam's Patriarchy" and the text under the picture explains that Khankan is preparing for her first nikah ceremony. The latter is a bit of a misunderstanding as this was in fact her fourth nikah ceremony, but the first to be held in the apartment.

... I got that idea ten years ago. I spoke with Marco Everistti; he is an artist. He would like to be part of it. That is, [he would like] to draw it. It could be so beautiful; a giant building and then three doors that lead to one room ... to demonstrate that there are three religions and then they meet in one room ... because this demonstrates that all paths lead to God, so there is a symbolism in it. Three doors lead to the same God ... You know, Jacob and I have talked about asking the Progressive Jewish Forum whether they would like to have their synagogue here. Then we could have it on Fridays and they could have it on Saturdays.

The quote demonstrates both how far Khankan's thought process on the house of all three Abrahamic religions has gone on a previous occasion, and also that she had not discarded the idea. Rather, bits and pieces of it would resurface from time to time, such as when Khankan raised the idea of having a priest deliver the Friday sermon in the Mariam Mosque or when she noted that she appreciated Christians' also attending the mosque.

At the meeting, Khankan follows up a bit later by asking one of the temporary members, a Christian, whether she could imagine attending the mosque on a regular basis, saying, "I think it would be wonderful if people who are not Muslim would also like to come and learn about Islam or because they feel that the room is inclusive enough for them to attend as well." This leads one of the other temporary members, who is Muslim, to explain that, "I have personally felt more at home in other places [churches and synagogues] than in mosques ... they [mosques] have such a static understanding of things. I can sit in a church and feel that I have a greater connection to God than I have in a mosque." Khankan replies,

I know exactly what you mean. I grew up with a Christian mother, so I have also attended churches, and that is exactly what we want to create here. A room does not have an energy in and of itself even though I feel there is good energy in this room—I like the energy in this room—but it is people who create good energy; when people arrive here they should have a feeling that there is good energy. You know, that feeling that you are embraced and accepted.

While the Mariam Mosque is oriented towards Islam it is simultaneously oriented towards inclusion and an acceptance of people as they are. Khankan has a strong focus on avoiding any kind of dichotomy and she does not want to delegitimize other positions; she repeatedly talks about Femimam as an alternative and says that even Islamist positions such as the position of Hizb ut-Tahrir can

be understood as legitimate, and one should, therefore, engage in debate rather than condemnation. This is also the position Khankan has taken publicly, but in relation to the Mariam Mosque she wants to be more neutral and take up the position of an alternative without engaging in the struggles characterizing the geopolitical scene. That is, she does not want to play the scripted role of a good female imam who fights bad Muslims, even if this is a very meaningful role geopolitically. That is, Khankan wants to avoid warping of her neutral position into one of struggle against people constructed as bad Muslims.

This meeting is in many ways a turning point as Khankan seems to have accepted that prayer will be women-only and she proposes to set up a series of Quran meetings under the name Femimam Academy. These reflect practice in Forum for Critical Muslims, but Khankan has accepted that the group does not want to become a continuation of this organization. However, Holdt explains that he prefers that they wait with this, due to his current situation, and when Mouna inquires when they can open for Friday prayer, he replies that he still needs the approval of the fire department to make the apartment available for public use but he expects to receive this soon. At this meeting Khankan is focused on recruiting a woman to lead Friday prayer while she herself will deliver the khutbah. The argument is the same as in November; she does not feel that her recitation is good enough.

## 8 The Decision to Hold Friday Prayer in August 2016

Khankan arrives a little late at the eleventh meeting in Femimam on 5 April because she has been to the police station to report an attack on her by a man with strong views on Islam who recognized her from television. Since the last meeting Khankan and Mouna have performed their first Islamic divorce, but as there are many new members at this meeting—among others Fetteh who has come back and the woman with multiple *ijazas* (traditional authorization to transmit Islamic knowledge)—Khankan does not mention the attack. Instead, she welcomes everyone to the Mariam Mosque and the Islam Academy and introduces them to the thoughts behind Femimam.

The meeting starts with a round of presentations and a new temporary member introduces herself as Christian with a monotheistic inclination:

I am Christian but I have from childhood been very inclined towards monotheism; so much that I have been in doubt whether it was right for me [to be Christian]. It is a journey; I am on a journey, and this journey has taken me many different places ... I see this [place] as me being a step



further on my journey, but I hope to get a more heartfelt relation to this place, and I would also like to contribute with something.

Apart from Holdt and a temporary member at the previous meeting, all members of Femimam have so far been Muslim, but the Mariam Mosque came to attract people from other religions as well, especially Christians with a monotheistic inclination or perennial tendencies. They responded to the inclusive and spiritual nature of the Mariam Mosque rather than the Muslim religious identity that most of its members professed. The latter is also the case for many Muslim users who in general were not aware of who were Sunni or Shia by heritage (for an analysis of the Sunni-Shia dynamics in the Mariam Mosque, see Petersen forthcoming-b).

Formally the meeting is an annual general meeting with elections for the board and, as Fetteh does not want to continue as chairwoman, Khankan is elected. Likewise, El-Jaichi had resigned from the board for personal reasons and Mouna is elected as vice-chairman in his place. Going forward from that point El-Jaichi continued to support Femimam when it needed his competence but, except for being a vital helper in getting the mosque ready in August 2016, he primarily played the role of a Muslim Islamic authority publicly supporting the Mariam Mosque and arguing its case whenever needed. Although he mostly came to play a minor role after the inauguration of the Mariam Mosque, in a few situations he played a decisive role, such as when the Mariam Mosque collapsed in the summer of 2017 and Khankan started to rebuild it (I will return to this in Chapter 10).

The idea to start up Friday prayer develops during the meeting. Khankan suggests that the Mariam Mosque could start having it every third month and then with time and as it recruits more imams, it could take place more frequently until it becomes a weekly event. Fetteh agrees to a commitment on this scale and Mouna suggests having the first Friday prayer within a month or two, but as this does not fit Fetteh's calendar and due to her being in Jordan over the summer, they plan on having the first Friday prayer on 19 August 2016, a date that was later postponed a week due to Khankan's vacation plans.

Khankan stresses that Friday prayer is not going to be open to the media and when Holdt asks whether they can make an exception for a documentarist who is currently producing a documentary about him, Khankan declines. Holdt explores a few other options, but Khankan stands her ground. Femimam stuck to this decision in terms of permanently forbidding any kind of audio or video recorders in the mosque during Friday prayers, which meant that journalists present at the first Friday prayer were without cameras. Interestingly, no one at the meeting mentioned Skovgaard's camera and neither did this become an issue at the opening, when Skovgaard recorded extensively.

The details of the first Friday prayer are debated back and forth for quite a while at the meeting and many different constructions are suggested. It is decided early on that Fetteh will both deliver the sermon and lead the prayer but as Khankan and Mouna are focused on integrating the knowledge center and the mosque they try to combine the prayer with a conference, lectures, or a debate. However, as no decisions are made on the subject, only the prayer is planned. None of the temporary members present at this meeting, including the teacher with multiple *ijazas*, are recruited for Femimam.

With the exception of a trip made by Khankan, Mouna, and Yasmin to Bradford (United Kingdom) to represent Femimam at the yearly Daughters of Eve conference in May on an invitation from Muslim Women's Council, the group did not gather again before setting up the mosque in the apartment on 21 August 2016.

## 9 Concluding Remarks

This chapter demonstrates that the power dynamics on the geopolitical scene had a strong effect on what Femimam became. It began with a demonstration of how a documentarist quilted Femimam's discourse with a liberalist conception of freedom as its master signifier (cf. Renders 2021), thus warping Femimam's discourse and producing a narrative for consumption on the geopolitical scene. Femimam members had not predicted this warping, but they did predict later warping events.

Femimam members continuously discussed how to write a role for themselves that would avoid rendering them either good or bad, a role that would not insert them into an already fixed script such as the LGBTQ-struggle, and thus result in their discourse becoming warped. As the Femimam members realized that this was not possible, they started to discuss, on a tactical level, the problem of how meanings are warped by power dynamics when entering the geopolitical scene. This is evident in El-Jaichi's comment that the media will love the Mariam Mosque for performing same-sex marriage, so much so that it will overshadow everything else; on the other hand, refusing to perform them will render them bad Muslims. That is, meaning is warped by power dynamics as they enter the geopolitical scene, and as their position cannot be re-produced within this space, they do not progress in their discussions. It is difficult—and sometimes maybe even impossible—for Muslims in Denmark to engage in public debate as good Muslims and simultaneously take a position of indifference towards the LGBTQ-struggle—even if they are otherwise sympathetic to it—as this struggle has already been scripted, and one cannot play a role in a script without being in it, so to speak.

The power dynamic of strategic religion is also present in the meetings, and in the LGBTQ-discussion it becomes obvious in the logics of scriptural accountability. This is most evident in Khankan's and Mouna's frustrations over not being allowed simply to marry LGBTQ-persons without having to justify it according to rules that are enforced by strategic religion. However, it is also present in El-Jaichi's insistence on proper scriptural grounding and dismissal of Chakir's argument as insufficient.

Strategic religion and the geopolitical scene intersect in the meetings. The geopolitical scene consists of a number of scripts in which Muslims must play one of two roles, and if they choose the good Muslim role, they will most likely end up antagonizing a large segment of Muslims. Likewise, if they want to minimize transgression within the field structured by strategic religion, they may end up as bad Muslims on the geopolitical scene. This means that they must pick their battles and avoid controversial topics (those that have been pre-scripted geopolitically). In other words, the intersection of the two power structures, strategic Islam and the geopolitical scene, constrains action, as pleasing one antagonizes the other.

Although both strategic religion and the geopolitical scene transcend the meetings, Femimam members at times discussed their ideas without having this in mind. Interestingly, these discussions were focused on founding a knowledge center, which was never realized. Instead, as I demonstrate in the next chapter, the media narrative about Femimam as a mosque meant that Muslims expected it to perform Islamic rituals and that, in the end, Khankan's and Mouna's living up to these expectations produced the Mariam Mosque as a mosque institution. That is, Femimam became a mosque because it was presented as such on the geopolitical scene, and the knowledge center that Mouna and El-Jaichi wanted to found was forgotten as Femimam, in December 2015 and the spring of 2016, became increasingly oriented towards planning the inauguration of Friday prayer. It is also interesting to note that the two founders of the mosque, Khankan and Mouna, who originally voted for mixed gender Friday prayer, ultimately introduced women-only Friday prayer, and this continued to be women-only even after many of the members, including Fetteh and El-Jaichi, slowly drifted away from the project in 2016/17.

## The Serendipitous Emergence of an Institution

This chapter explains how Femimam became an institution and Khankan an imam in the series of events that ran parallel to the planning meetings described in Chapter 7. The analysis builds upon earlier chapters. In Chapter 4, I made a genealogical analysis of Khankan's position on interfaith Islamic marriage and I provided statistics on demography in Chapter 2 that highlights that Muslims make up less than 5% of the Danish population thus increasing the likelihood of interfaith couples (cf. Jawad and Elmali-Karakaya 2020). Thus, there are important variables of agency and structure going into the serendipities that I will investigate in this chapter.

The Mariam Mosque emerged in Khankan's and Mouna's response to Muslim women's requests for Islamic divorce and couples' requests for interreligious marriage between Muslim women and non-Muslim—a union that *fuhaha* (Islamic legal scholars) deem not allowed. Both services were in demand in Denmark but uncatered for. No one in Femimam had predicted that Femimam would provide such services, and thus, the processes that I investigate in this chapter were unplanned. As demonstrated in chapter 7, neither of these topics were discussed at meetings other than in relation to the requests. In fact, Khankan and Mouna originally rejected the first request for Islamic divorce and referred the woman in question to other imams. However, these two services became (and still are in 2022) defining for the Mariam Mosque.

It is important to highlight that the abovementioned requests were directed towards Femimam because of the media attention caused by earlier serendipities starting with the March 2015 spread of a story. In other words, because it was announced that a progressive mosque would soon open in Copenhagen, a segment of Muslims began to expect these kinds of services from it. Thus, previous serendipities paved the way for new serendipities.

It is interesting to note how representatives of strategic religion such as *fuhaha* are largely ignored by both Femimam and the people who make requests to Femimam. Services such as *nikah* (Islamic marriage)<sup>1</sup> and Islamic

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1 *Nikah* does not mean Islamic marriage as such. It is the Arabic word for marriage, but, as mentioned in Chapter 7, I use it in the meaning Islamic marriage to distinguish between *nikah* and civil marriage.

divorce are supposedly defined by specialists—in this case *fūqaha*—but individuals may, as my analysis demonstrates, produce unauthorized meanings and discourses such as *nikah* between Muslim women and non-Muslim that become institutionalized. That is, tactical maneuvers may become *strategi* religion.

The chapter begins with an analysis of Khankan's and Mouna's response to requests for interfaith *nikah*, then follows a short analysis of Khankan's imam dress, and the chapter ends with an analysis of the emergence of the Mariam Mosque as a quasi-legal institution administering Islamic divorce. The chapter may be seen as containing much more information than needed to make the argument. However, this "excess" information is included to underline the pattern of serendipities of Khankan's and Mouna's continuous facing the unpredictable, and thus, creating an institution that was not planned as such.

The first part of the chapter on *nikah* is based on seven of the thirteen *nikah* rituals performed by Khankan between August 2015 and June 2017. Skovgaard has recorded three of these while I took notes as an observer, another three are solely based on my notes, and a single case is solely based on Skovgaard's recordings, which total four recordings with a length of 3 hours and 50 minutes.

I have used a combination of structural and open coding for the video analysis (Saldana 2016). As these are videos of a ritual that is likely to have a somewhat similar structure, a structural code provides an overview of ritual sequences, preparing the data for cross comparison. Open coding is a typical method used within grounded theory, which also means that it is seen as an initial coding cycle that "breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examines them, and compares them for similarities and differences" (Saldana 2016: 115). I have used open coding to avoid forcing a structure on to the ritual and to explore other patterns than those I expected to find. For example, a pattern of multiple congratulations (see below) emerged from the open code, and when I re-watched the videos to explore this pattern it appeared that participants in the *nikah* ritual were often unsure about when it was completed.

Khankan has provided me with her speeches for all thirteen ceremonies and the *nikah* contract for three of them. These are unsigned copies of the Mariam Mosque's *nikah* contract which I collected in order to track changes in the standard contract over time. For the purpose of identifying changes over a longer period I have collected speeches and contracts for four additional *nikahs* after June 2017, the last being in January 2018. In addition to these sources, the chapter draws on my field diary, Femimam's private Facebook group, an interview with Mouna on 13 June 2017, and one with Khankan on 15 June 2017. All couples, their friends and families are anonymized.

## 1 The First Request

Femimam received its first request for a religious ritual in the summer of 2015. A Muslim woman wanted to marry a non-Muslim man, but they could not find a local imam in London who would perform their nikah due to the *ijma* (consensus among Islamic legal scholars) which dictates that Muslim women can only marry Muslim men.<sup>2</sup> When they contacted Muslims for Progressive Values (MPV) in the USA, they were advised to contact Femimam, which MPV had heard about in the media. This is the request Khankan and Mouna discussed at Femimam's fourth meeting on 8 July 2015 (see Chapter 7). It should be noted that Femimam had not announced that they performed interreligious nikah; on the contrary, the introduction of interreligious nikah emerged as a response to this specific request. The ceremony was performed on 8 August 2015 and both the ceremony and the nikah contract became a template for all future practice.

To request an interreligious nikah between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man is paradoxical in the sense that it is a request for a ritual that is in continuation with tradition but at the same time breaks with tradition: continuity and rupture at the same time. When Khankan and Mouna decided to act upon the request they did so on behalf of a mosque that only existed as an idea projected into the future, but by performing the interreligious nikah in the name of the idea, they brought an institution to life. This is what Jacques Derrida calls "the instituting moment" in a debate with John D. Caputo et al. at the inauguration of a new doctoral program in philosophy at Villanova University:

The paradox in the instituting moment of an institution is that, at the same time that it starts something new, it also continues something, is true to the memory of the past, to a heritage, to something we receive from the past, from our predecessors, from the culture. If an institution is to be an institution, it must to some extent break with the past, keep the memory of the past, while inaugurating something absolutely new.

CAPUTO 1997: 6

In the quote, Derrida seems for once to have defined a moment, or an "event" as he would say, so it comes as no surprise that this moment on closer inspection

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that this service is available in the UK, but the couple was unable to find it.

is deferred (Derrida 1978). The moment has in fact already happened or it is going to happen, or both. Teachers have already been assigned, the curriculum has been decided, students have been enrolled, and the building is fitted out and ready, so the moment has passed before the inauguration, but one could also say that it has not really happened yet as no students have had classes and most institutional activity has not started. The institution both exists and does not exist in the instituting moment and this is also the paradoxical existence of the Mariam Mosque.

The instituting moment in the Mariam Mosque was constructed as a Friday prayer on 26 August 2016. By this point, however, the moment had already passed, which is evident by its having performed four nikah rituals, a conversion, an *aqiqah* (name giving ceremony), and an Islamic divorce. Moreover, even if one accepts the construction of the moment as what it claims to be, the moment is still deferred as a pledge to hold Friday prayer at regular intervals in the future because a single Friday prayer does not make a mosque; continual Friday prayer does. As all moments are deferred, it is impossible to determine when the Mariam Mosque came into existence, but Derrida's philosophical framework defines how it existed prior to the constructed moment of instituting it.

In this chapter I demonstrate how the Mariam Mosque came into existence as actions. Every action taken became both a template for future actions and a pledge to deliver services such as nikah, conversion, *aqiqah*, and Islamic divorce upon request in the future. However, it should be noted that this is not the only existence Femimam had; it was also constructed as a narrative in the media. That was, after all, how the couple who wanted to get married found Femimam.

## 2 Danish Nikah Practices

To speak about nikah as a rite of passage performed by an imam contradicts how nikah is conceptualized within *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) where nikah is understood as a civil contract concluded in the presence of two witnesses, with one party offering nikah and the other party accepting it. The speech acts that produce the nikah are, from a *fiqh* perspective, performed by the bride and groom or their guardians, not by an imam (Dessing 2001: 79–80; Hallaq 2009: 271–280). Nevertheless, having an imam deliver a wedding sermon (*khutbah al-nikah*) is recommended, and in the Danish context it is common for the imam to formalize the offer and acceptance in a ritual sequence (Liversage and Petersen 2020; Petersen and Vinding 2020).

The Muslim minority in Denmark is very diverse and consequently there is considerable variation in nikah practices and traditions. However, there are only three ways in which one can marry: 1) under Danish law; 2) under foreign law (e.g. in one's country of origin or parents' origin); 3) nikah without registration. The first two are administered by legal systems whereas the third is regulated by the social dynamics in the communities where it is practiced.

Faith societies in Denmark can apply for recognition and have marriage licenses issued to their "priests" (*Lov om Trossamfund uden for Folkekirken* §15). This means that if an imam who has been issued with a marriage license performs a nikah, he can also, if the couple wish it, register this as a valid marriage under Danish law (Vinding 2020). In other words, the legal structure of Danish law reflects a Christian conception of religion where it is the priesthood that performs marriages. The Mariam Mosque, however, is not a registered faith society and Khankan therefore does not have a marriage license. This means that her nikah ritual leads to a type three marriage, which has no validity under Danish law and can therefore not be enforced in Danish courts (Vinding 2020). As discussed further below, there can be reasons for imams—even if they have a marriage license—to perform nikah-only marriages (type three) and, although the Mariam Mosque over time became stricter in demanding that couples register their marriages under Danish law (type one) prior to their nikah (type three), there can be reasons for waiving this demand.

It is important to stress that type three marriages are unregistered and that there is no Islamic juridical institution that holds jurisdiction in Denmark. Although *fiqh* exists as a scholarly discipline, there is no centralized juridical system that oversees and regulates nikah (type three)<sup>3</sup> in Denmark and this means that nikah and Islamic divorce are regulated by the social dynamics in the networks of Muslims where they are practiced, not by Islamic legal tradition as some scholars assume (Dessing 2001: 79–140; Roald 2009: 81–134). There is a difference between how *fuqaha* (Islamic legal scholars) and ordinary Muslims understand nikah and the first group's perception is not a good hermeneutical framework for understanding the latter. As Dessing, for example, explains:

According to the Hanbalites, who are less strict than the Hanafites, Maliki-tes, and Shafi'ites with regard to marriage settlements, it is permitted to insert stipulations in a contract of marriage on condition that these stip-

3 It should be noted that state regulation is far beyond the discursivity of the *fuqaha* who originally conceptualized nikah.



ulations are not contrary to the *shari'a*. For example, the obligations of paying a bridal gift (*mahr*) or providing for the wife's living (*nafaqa*) cannot be abrogated, because both are legal effects of marriage under Islamic law.

DESSING 2001: 86–87

This presentation is not incorrect, but Dessing fails to demonstrate the relevance of it, or identify a link between the four positions she presents and what Muslims think and do. Fuqaha may understand nikah as the groom taking on the responsibility of *nafaqa* (maintenance) but that does not mean that all Muslims understand the act of concluding a nikah in that way. In a similar manner, fuqaha may consider nikah a contract on the basis of *do ut des* (Dessing 2001: 86), with the *mahr* (dower) an essential part, but Muslims may omit the *mahr* because they see it as an outdated practice or reinvent it as a romantic symbolic gesture. If one interprets the latter action within a juridical hermeneutic it would seem like compliance with fiqh, but if this hermeneutical logic is dropped it could just as well be understood as resistance or indifference. In other words, the action taken by individual Muslims when they enter into nikah must be based on how they themselves understand their actions (Hussein 2018; Petersen and Vinding 2020). In some cases where women enter into nikah with men from their parents' country of origin it may even be part of the agreement that they provide for their husbands for the first years of their residence in Denmark (Cekic 2009; Rashid 2000). These marriages are contracted as nikah and understood as such by the Muslims who conclude them, irrespective of what fuqaha think about it.

In other words, fuqaha may define nikah within strategic religion, but if their definition is not meaningful or practical for Muslims in their everyday life, tactics may be used to maneuver around it. While they have requested the ritual from a representative of strategic Islam, that does not mean that they attribute the same meaning to that person's ritual performance. That is, the ritual is encoded in two different ways within strategic and tactical Islam. When Khankan and Mouna offer an interreligious nikah between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man, it becomes a discursive intervention that facilitates the practice of tactical religion otherwise impossible due to fuqaha's attempt to control institutions such as nikah.

Khankan was often perplexed by the variation in approaches to the nikah contract that she sends to couples prior to the nikah ritual in the Mariam Mosque. As part of Khankan's nikah ritual couples are asked to write the agreed *mahr* on a line in the nikah contract before they and witnesses sign it. However, couples would frequently end up asking questions about the *mahr* as they

either did not understand what it was or had not made an agreement on it. When the groom put a ring on the bride's finger, this was typically written into the contract as mahr, but at other times, when couples were completely unprepared, the situation could become a bit awkward as it would interrupt the flow of the nikah ceremony.

As many of the grooms are non-Muslims it is to be expected that they do not know what mahr is, but it is also interesting that this should be the first time they are introduced to it. In other words, the family has not demanded that the future husband observes this custom. In one of the nikah rituals that I observed, the mother of the bride, who was Muslim, even asked Khankan to clarify the meaning of mahr. In other cases, couples came prepared or found a quick solution in the situation so that the ritual could continue more or less uninterrupted.

Perhaps the clearest break with fiqh is the conception that nikah is a ritual performed by an imam as a rite of passage. This perception closely resembles the way marriage is conceptualized within churches, appears in the media, and is popularized through films and TV series produced in a cultural Christian setting; it is also a widespread conceptualization of the nikah ceremony among Danish Muslims (Liversage and Petersen 2020; Petersen and Vinding 2020) and a notion that all the couples in my sample subscribed to in one way or another. This means that while fuqaha do not ascribe a role to the imam some Muslims think of him as essential to the rite of passage and the Danish state only recognizes the legal validity of a nikah ritual if it has been performed by a "priest" licensed to do so. In other words, the production of sharia as a social phenomenon in Denmark takes place at the intersection between fiqh, common Muslim perceptions, and Danish law.

It should be clear at this point that a mere focus on fiqh as a hermeneutical framework for understanding Muslim behavior is inadequate; nor can Muslim practice be understood simply as a consequence of churchification, ecclesiastification, *Verkirchlichung* et cetera: all terms that focus attention on how Islamic institutions become more like churches when they adapt to the institutional framework of church and state in Europe (for an overview of these theories see Vinding 2018; Raciuc 2020). The Danish state's way of administering marriage licenses, which gives the imam a role similar to a priest's function, is a good example of churchification. However, the role of a registrar as a person who administers a fiqh-compliant rite of passage is not exclusively a European phenomenon; it is also widespread in Muslim majority countries (Dessing 2001) and may have more to do with the introduction of state regulation of marriage than imitation of churches. It should be remembered that marriage was unregulated and practiced in much the same way as nikah (including concubinage)

until the Catholic church as part of the counterreformation introduced marriage as a sacrament that needed the presence of a priest at the Council of Trent in 1547 (Brundage 1982). In a similar manner, Muslim majority countries have, since the 19th century, started to regulate nikah according to their interpretations of fiqh and this produces a similar effect that is sometimes reduced to churchification.

I am not arguing that churchification is irrelevant, but its explanatory power should not be overstated. Regulation in general has implications for how Muslims practice Islam and in that sense the state can be understood as a co-producer of Islamic practice. John Bowen has, for example, demonstrated that the ban on slaughtering without a license means that many French Muslims are forced to reshape sacrifices such as *eid al-adha* (Bowen 2012: 75–101). The reshaping of *eid al-adha* and *aqiqah* as charity paid to relief work overseas is also practiced in Denmark, and is another clear indication that the Danish state is a co-producer of Islam (Petersen and Vinding 2020: 89).

My point is that to understand Muslim nikah practices, researchers must focus on Muslims' conceptions of nikah without assuming a hermeneutic that may not be relevant, and in the case of fiqh may not even be known to the individual Muslim partaking in nikah ceremonies. As the Mariam Mosque offers interreligious nikah and is not registered, not only does it break with traditional fiqh, its nikah is void under Danish law. That is, the nikah ritual in the Mariam Mosque is an Islamic rite of passage that does not abide by these logics.

### 3 The First Nikah on 8 August 2015

Although Khankan invented the specifics of Femimam's nikah ritual, it is important to note that the concept of an interreligious nikah was already encoded in the request she received. Furthermore, the gravity of the issue and Khankan's assumed ability as an imam to perform a nikah are underlined in the request by the couple's willingness to travel from abroad to Copenhagen. That is, the gesture of requesting acknowledges a reality in which Khankan is the imam of a mosque that is about to happen.

The nikah ritual's most significant effect was misrecognized in the ritual itself (Bell 2009: 81–82). While it was presented by participants as a nikah ceremony, it also produced Khankan as an imam and, by being interreligious, it made the rupture part of tradition. The first couple's request had consistently been rejected by the representatives of strategic religion so they turned to Khankan who, thus, through practice became able to "reproduce or reconfigure a vision of the order of power in the world" (Bell 2009: 81). Khankan

and Femimam were promoted to strategic religion in their relations with the couple and maybe also in their own self-perceptions. Defining this feature of practice as “redemptive hegemony”, Catherine Bell explains that “the redemptive hegemony of practice does not reflect reality more or less effectively; it creates it more or less effectively” (Bell 2009: 85). That is, the ritual performance of the interreligious nikah ritual “more or less effectively” produced the rupture as tradition, Khankan as an imam, and Femimam as strategic religion.

On 8 August 2015 Khankan, Mouna, and two of Khankan's friends received the groom, bride, and the bride's mother and sister in Khankan's home outside Copenhagen. Khankan had donned a hijab for the occasion and dressed in what came to be known as her imam dress (see below), but the bride and groom needed to change and did so upstairs. Meanwhile Khankan went over the details with Mouna. She had a ritual planned but was still undecided as to whether people should be seated or standing while she delivered her speech prior to the commencement of her nikah ritual. Mouna replied that he had no knowledge of how these things are performed and therefore suggested that he just follow Khankan's lead.

Skovgaard's video records that when the couple comes downstairs, the bride is in white with some of her hair covered by a shawl and the groom is wearing a suit. The mother has also drawn a shawl over her already covered hair and one of Khankan's friend, who does not normally cover her hair, has also donned a hijab.<sup>4</sup> These changes in appearance constitute what Bell calls strategies of practice: that is, ritual actions that “strategically distinguish themselves in relation to other actions” (Bell 2009: 74). With reference to Pierre Bourdieu (2005), Bell warns against the application of an intellectualist logic in the analysis of strategy, noting, “Practice, as real activity in time, by its very nature dodges the relations of intellectualist logic and excludes the question asked by the analyst” (Bell 2009: 82). While the analyst may be able to identify strategies of practice, these acts themselves do not exist as such outside the theorist's analysis of the habitus, which “is an instant of practice, an irreducible ‘unit’ of culture that cannot be broken down into any autonomous, constitute forces” (Bell 2009: 79). In other words, the strategy as a feature of practice says something about what distinguishes ritual action from non-ritual actions and thereby how ritualization and its effects are achieved. While it may be impossible to analyze individuals' actions on a deeper level, it is obvious that the event constitutes a disruption of habitus that means people act and dress in different ways in what is now a ritual space.

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4 The other wears a hijab in her everyday life.

Participants' decoration of their bodies with Islamic semiotic resources and adopting a serious mien are not the only strategies employed. The ritual takes place in the living room, but part of this is temporarily produced as a ritual space when Khankan asks participants to form a circle while she delivers her speech, which she starts in English, saying,<sup>5</sup> "Beloved sisters and brothers, I salute you with the greeting and blessing which has been handed down to us by generations of devout seekers who, in all times and places, have worshipped and celebrated the One True God ..." There are eight ritual participants in the circle and Khankan stands in the perimeter with only the bride's mother separating her from the couple.

Her speech focuses on marital life and, while stating that "a perfect marriage is an illusion", Khankan delivers both a poetic description of it and sets up an ideal of equality between spouses. The speech does not address the rupture that the inter-faith union represents; on the contrary, its silence on the matter produces the interreligious nikah as being in continuity with tradition. However, the interreligious nature of the ritual is evident from the combination of Islamic and Christian semiotic resources and it is stated as a fact in the beginning where Khankan quotes a poem by Benny Andersen:

A famous Danish poet once wrote, "You kiss a mouth and you marry a people". These words make it clear that a marriage is not only the unity between two lovers. It is the unity of two families, two cultures, different nationalities and in this case different religions. It is a small but important step in uniting humanity.

Benny Andersen is one of the most famous and beloved poets in Denmark, which is reflected in the fact that his collected poems is the best selling book of poetry in Danish history (Dannemand 2014). His inclusion in the ritual is an example of what Ronald L. Grimes calls ritual creativity. Grimes understands the development of ritual as an artistic process that "model[s] actions into paradigms that wrap ideas and values into a blanket of feeling and multisensory stimulation" (Grimes 2014: 315). In my interview with Khankan, she explains her reason for including Andersen's poem:

Khankan: It is because of what he says; he describes the fusion and how serious a matter it is to marry. It is due to the content of what he says that I have included him, not because he is Danish.

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5 The ritual was performed in English, so the quotes in are not translated from Danish.

Petersen: So, it is the content that matters to you and an English or Arabic poet could have done the job as well?

Khankan: Yes, one hundred percent. But it is also fun to include him; I find it interesting to include a Danish poet in an Islamic marriage ceremony because we live in Denmark. So, of course there is an element of that, but it is primarily due to the content, because I could also have found many other quotes that focus on this fusion. Nonetheless, I find this poem to be special, especially the sentence with kissing a mouth and thereby marrying a people, because it is so serious. Especially in an interreligious marriage. You have to be aware that although it is so easy to love one's chosen one—it is like kissing another human—this seriousness is present, and there is a lot of work in marrying between religions and uniting cultures and religion; it is hard work.

In other words, Andersen captures the seriousness and implications of “kissing a mouth” and that is the reason for his inclusion. In subsequent nikahs Khankan included longer passages of the poem and sometimes also pieces by the Lebanese-American Christian poet Gibran Khalil Gibran.

Khankan's speech continues and she quotes the Quran 49:13, 2:62, and a selection of hadiths taken from [sufism.org](http://sufism.org).<sup>6</sup> Further, she cites Rumi, Ibn al-Arabi, the story about Jesus and the Samaritan woman, and Paul's letter to the Corinthians 13. The speech is also personal to the bride and groom whom Khankan has asked to describe why they have chosen one another in a single sentence, and these are read aloud shortly before Khankan announces, “I will now proceed with the marriage ritual, so if you will come forward [and stand] in the middle.” Khankan asks everyone to take their places in the circle which by now has become slightly deformed because those participating have oriented themselves towards Khankan for the speech. Then the nikah ritual commences:

I hereby ask you [groom]. Do you want [bride] as your wife and spiritual equal partner? [Groom: Yes]

So, repeat after me: [done bit by bit]

I [groom] accept [bride] as my wife and spiritual equal partner. In the name of Allah, the most Merciful and All-compassionate, and in front of witnesses I promise to respect, protect, and provide for her as long as I live and in the hereafter. I have no right to change her but can only try to

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6 The Threshold Society, accessed 26 March 2020, <https://sufism.org/origins/hadith/the-saying-s-of-muhammad-2>.

change myself. I promise to make her happy and to value her as well as her family and loved ones. I promise to respect her religion and her right to practice her religion.<sup>7</sup>

I hereby ask you [bride] ... [inversed repetition of the above]

In the name of Allah, the most merciful the most compassionate, I hereby pronounce you husband and wife. May Allah bless us all and his Angels walk with you.

Let us all rise and pray al-Fatiha aloud.

At the end of al-Fatiha (recited in Arabic), Khankan smiles and says, "You may kiss the bride now." Some participants clap and the circle breaks apart as the mother and sister move forward to hug and congratulate the bride and groom. Khankan lets approximately a minute pass and as the congratulations come to an end, she moves on with the ritual by saying, "We are not finished yet," asking the couple to take a seat on a sofa where they are handed the nikah contract.

This sequence of the ritual seems to offer a temporary break and people talk more casually about matters unrelated to the nikah. After about ten minutes, during which time the contract has been signed by the couple, with the bride's mother and sister as witnesses, Khankan asks everyone to resume their positions, saying, "If you will please come closer, then we will complete the ceremony ... we will complete the ceremony by praying al-Fatiha together aloud." This time, the couple stands in the perimeter of what is by now a half-circle and with al-Fatiha recited Khankan says the last words, "Now you are officially married, congratulations." Everyone claps and a new round of congratulations, hugging, and handshaking starts.

After some small talk, the bride and groom go upstairs to change back into the clothes they arrived in and Khankan's friend and the mother take off their hijab and shawl. Likewise, Khankan removes her hijab, but she remains in the imam dress. Everyone then gathers around the dinner table for light refreshments before the taxi arrives to pick up the couple, mother, and sister.

#### 4 The Invention of an Interreligious Nikah Ritual

As there is no precedent for an interfaith nikah ritual between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man, I focus on how Khankan has invented one. Anne-

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<sup>7</sup> The last two sentences of the vow were edited out in subsequent nikah rituals, but otherwise the exchange of vows have stayed the same.

Christine Hornborg suggests, based on her studies of the Mi'kmaq in Canada, that new rituals can be produced by

reusing and combining well known acts found in other rituals in the community. These ritual acts function as scattered quotes, similar as we in texts find quotes or allusions to other texts which would be referred to as intertextuality. But in the ritual case we may talk about this phenomenon as *interrituality*, a practice that is especially important in designing new compositions of performances.<sup>8</sup>

HORNBORG 2017: 18

During their colonial history the Mi'kmaq have been exposed to French Catholicism and then Anglican Christianity, and Hornborg demonstrates how the first influence in particular has been incorporated into Mi'kmaq rituals and thereby become part of Mi'kmaq tradition (Hornborg 2004). With inspiration from literature studies, Hornborg introduces the neologism “interrituality” to describe this phenomenon, the idea being that rituals are made up of sequences in a way that resembles how texts are made up of past citations or, as Roland Barthes puts it,

any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognisable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture. Any text is a new tissue of past citation. Bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc. pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text.

BARTHES 1981: 39

The idea of taking literary theory as inspiration for ritual studies is not new. Bell, whose theoretical framework I applied in the analysis above, also uses literary theory for her second feature of practice, which she calls situational (Bell 2009: 81–82). However, Hornborg takes this idea literally and defines an irreducible unit of ritual meaning by applying Roy Rappaport's definition of ritual as a specific type of act and utterance. As he writes, “I take the term ‘ritual’ to denote *the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances, not entirely encoded by the performers*” (Hornborg 2017: 17; Rappaport 1999: 24).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis is in the original.

<sup>9</sup> Emphasis is in the original.



Hornborg argues that the success of a newly invented ritual depends on the use of ritual acts and utterances, as defined by Rappaport, that are recognizable as traditional, noting that “practicing formal acts and utterances ... give authority to the new performance and have the quality to turn an invented ritual into a ‘traditional’ ritual” (Hornborg 2017: 18); otherwise, “an invented ritual always runs the risk of being a total failure and a charade and an embarrassment for the participants” (Hornborg 2017: 18).

Khankan’s nikah ritual is structured as a combination of Islamic and Christian acts and utterances that are performed in a sequence interspersed with features of Khankan’s own ritual creativity. As noted above, Khankan herself divides her performance into a speech and a nikah ritual; the latter consisting of two sequences. The structure of the first sequence bears a close resemblance to the exchange of vows in church liturgy but it is also saturated with Islamic semiotic resources such as the language used for the vows, the Sufi-inspired circle, and its completion with the recitation of al-Fatiha. The second sequence primarily focuses on the formal fiqh-inspired completion of the nikah and takes the form of signing the nikah contract.

The traditional offer and acceptance discussed at the beginning of the chapter is not performed as part of Femimam’s nikah ritual. This reflects Khankan’s perception of validity which is oriented towards the participants in the ritual rather than fiqh. When, on 15 June 2017, I asked Khankan about what makes the Mariam Mosque’s nikah ritual and contract valid, she answered, without hesitation, that “people who request them understand them to be valid”. In her elaboration of this answer, she explains that the demand for this type of nikah is enough to legitimate it. That is, the legitimation is encoded as a premise that is accepted before the request is made and while, on occasion, Khankan provides theological answers to this question, this is primarily for people who oppose her views not those who accept them.

Hornborg explains that “a person’s memory is only a life-time short and what is *experienced* by a person as being done a long time ago could at most refer to one’s childhood” (Hornborg 2017: 17). By defining tradition narrowly as what an individual has experienced, continuity with tradition is reduced to the continuous production of something that may only have been experienced by the individual a few times. Khankan explains that she produced the nikah ritual herself and did so on the basis of experience:

I haven’t got a manual, and when we started Femimam and the Mariam Mosque, that was learning by doing, a trial and error process ... when I performed the first marriage I had only attended two Islamic marriages, one of them being my own.

Khankan then explains that she checked the requirements for a nikah which comes down to the contract and then she constructed a nikah ritual with components as she remembered them and felt were meaningful and aesthetic.

Khankan's approach to the nikah should not be mistaken for indifference towards tradition, as it is evident from her performance of other Islamic rituals, such as aqiqah and Friday prayer, that compliance with tradition is important to her. As she explains,

... in relation to the aqiqah ritual I read a lot because that was very new to me ... so I read up on the literature, and I found out that there are many different positions. That is, there are quite some differences between what [Islamic scholars think] should be said and what should not be said.

In other words, observance of tradition is important to Khankan, but she finds the nikah ritual to be more flexible, which makes sense when one considers that except for the contract (expressed orally) there are really no requirements within fiqh, just recommendations. This has meant that she has relied to a greater extent on a personal back catalogue of literature she has read and her own life experience rather than imitation of others' performances. YouTube and similar platforms provide visual access to ritual performance and are a well-suited supplement to the convergence culture of Wikipedia on how to perform rituals. Convergence culture online has played an important role for Khankan, as mentioned in previous chapters, although she did not use the internet for the nikah ritual. "I have not googled videos, actually not at all," she told me. "That is what I have done with the call to prayer and many of the other things, right. But not in this context." YouTube and similar services have to some degree extended the range of subjects that one can study without enrolling as a student at an educational institution and Khankan has both had a private *tajwid* teacher (Quran recitation teacher) online and used YouTube to practice.

Khankan understands her nikah as a combination of tradition and her own personal style and explains that the latter is important because rituals become more meaningful for participants when they are also personal, adding that "personal style is 50% percent of ritual". As explained above, Khankan had asked the first bride and groom to write down why they had chosen one another in a single sentence for the first nikah ritual. During the evaluation after the couple and family had left, there was a general agreement that this part had worked very well, and Khankan therefore made more space for this in subsequent speeches. The single sentence became a short paragraph and in some cases a whole page, and Khankan also wrote a personal address, specific for

each couple, for the beginning of the speech, just after Andersen's poem, from which Khankan now recited four lines rather than just the one.

The nikah ritual was repeatedly evaluated and slight changes introduced from time to time, but Khankan and Mouna were also willing to make significant changes to accommodate situation-specific requests. This responsiveness is demonstrated by an exchange in February 2016 with a Christian woman who wanted to marry a Muslim man. Both of them seemed to find it important that their marriage would be performed in accordance with their respective religious traditions, but they were starting to realize that this might not be possible, as the conversation indicates.

Christian woman: Neither of us wants to convert so we realize that we may have to compromise in terms of the way we marry.

Khankan: I can conduct the Islamic marriage and if we can find a priest who will agree to participate, then it could be really beautiful if we did it together so that it takes place in the same room. [Mouna: "Exactly"]. I could do the Islamic marriage and then he will do the Christian marriage ritual. [Mouna: "He or she."]. Yes, he or she ... I know [name of priest] who has the [name of church] and I could imagine that he would take part in this.

Mouna then proposed that both ceremonies be done in the church. However, the Christian woman explained that she has asked around a bit and discovered that other Islamic authorities find it important that the nikah is performed last because otherwise the church marriage would negate the nikah due to the man's temporarily leaving Islam. Khankan found this argument interesting and inquired about the sources, which the woman did not know. Khankan then promised to investigate the fiqh before they met again so that the interreligious construction did not risk being invalidated by the order of the rituals. However, as the woman never came back, this type of interreligious nikah/marriage ritual was never performed.

At the eighth Femimam meeting on 1 November 2015, Khankan and Mouna suggested that Femimam should write a ritual handbook so that other members could also perform Islamic rituals. It is clear from this and other short discussions of a somewhat standardized ritual that Khankan and Mouna wanted to encourage and help other members get involved in the ritual performances. Although Khankan saw her ritual as the Mariam Mosque's ritual, the handbook was intended as a general guideline, not a narrow liturgy that must be reproduced exactly. The following extract from one of our interviews explains this further:

Petersen: Do you understand it [the nikah ritual] as your personal ritual or the Mariam Mosque's ritual?

Khankan: The Mariam Mosque's ritual.

Petersen: So, if others were to perform a marriage ceremony would you expect that it was similar [to yours]?

Khankan: No, in fact I would like them to put their own mark on it, but they would of course have to use the same template.

Petersen: OK, so the template should be the same, but you could have different versions?

Khankan: Yes, I am very flexible in relation to that. I like the idea of people having their own versions.

At the time of writing (August 2020), no other member of the Mariam Mosque had performed a nikah ritual. This means that the practice is only performed by Khankan who is also strongly associated with many of the Mariam Mosque's other symbolically significant acts, such as the claim to the imam title and Islamic divorces. This is an important observation given that the Mariam Mosque, as discussed through the frame of Derrida's concept of the instituting moment, primarily exists in the form of actions, and as these actions are primarily carried out by Khankan, she more or less is—that is, embodies and personifies—the Mariam Mosque. Other members' actions remain hidden to outsiders and this means that the Mariam Mosque is strongly identified with Khankan in the public sphere.

A similar effect could be observed at Amina Wadud's 2005 prayer in New York. There were a lot of people and organizations involved in the prayer and Wadud led it on their request, not as an organizer of the event (Hammer 2012; Nomani 2006; Wadud 2008). That is, Wadud responded to a request in which the symbolic action was already encoded, just like Khankan, and similarly the performance and ritual is often identified with Wadud.

## 5 Ambiguity in Ritual

Skovgaard's recordings indicate that the sequential structure of Khankan's nikah ritual causes confusion in some performances, as it is unclear—or at least ambiguous—at what moment the nikah happens because Khankan pronounces the couple husband and wife after the exchange of vows, only to retract this and move on to the nikah contract. This produces two rounds of congratulations. Khankan herself understands the nikah to be concluded at the final recitation of al-Fatiha, which she explains seals the nikah. However,

this was only understood by one couple of the four nikah rituals that Skovgaard has filmed. In another recording the moment seems to occur four times. The first happens when Khankan pronounces the couple husband and wife, but when Khankan presents the couple with the nikah contract, the groom takes out a ring and gives a short speech while everyone resumes their positions as during the ritual. When he puts the ring on the bride's finger everyone claps and there is a round of congratulations again and the bride thanks Khankan for the ritual as if it were completed. Then the contract is signed, people clap, and Khankan congratulates the couple followed by the re-formation of the circle and the recitation of al-Fatiha. A final round of congratulations takes place after this.

In the last of the recorded nikah rituals, Khankan tries to bridge the gap between the two sequences by asking participants to form a circle around the couple while they sign the nikah contract. Thus, Khankan keeps participants engaged in the ritual and ritualizes the space within which the couple signs the contract. However, the performance breaks down as the circle disintegrates due to individual participants' leaving it to sign the nikah contract as witnesses without returning to their positions. When the last verse of al-Fatiha is recited an awkward silence follows. Khankan tries to break it by offering her own congratulations but when this is not echoed by the other participants, who are still focused on Khankan, she delivers a short talk and asks if they want to have their photos taken. This is the moment everyone realizes that the ritual is over and, when the first photo has been taken, the congratulations start.

My interview with Khankan was just days after the latter nikah ritual and when I used this example as an opening into a conversation about how the nikah ritual had changed over time, Khankan explained that she is still trying to find a way to bridge the two sequences without interrupting the ritual:

Petersen: What about the last marriage ritual. I noticed we were standing in a circle during the signing of the contract, and that is a new thing.

Khankan: Yes, but that is because I feel that something abrupt happens; it is alienating in some way that we are standing there, it is intimate and then suddenly we have to go [to the table] and sign [the contracts]. They are stooping over the desk and it is suddenly impersonal and technical, right. So, in an attempt to avoid breaking the atmosphere and the circle I thought that it would be better if they sat in the middle and everyone were seated around them. I thought that would give a better continuity when it is done in that way, and much more pleasing for

everyone. [In that way] everyone is included ... so that the transition becomes smoother. And it was actually not something I had planned; it just happened spontaneously in the moment.

At the interview, Khankan had already evaluated the unsuccessful bridge between the two ritual sequences and decided on a new strategy. The attempt to smooth the transition was done standing and that was probably the main reason it did not work, but she later fixed participants in their places by arranging a number of Moroccan cushions in a circle so they would have a seat to return to. However, the *nikah* ritual never developed a fixed form. On the contrary, Khankan would make slight adjustments depending on factors such as the number of participants and their relation to the couple. On 7 April 2016 there were three *nikah* rituals in the Mariam Mosque on one day, and each time Khankan assessed the situation, ultimately performing the ritual with people seated in three different ways. Only the final circle and recitation of *al-Fatiha* was done in exactly the same way.

In some cases, Khankan also adjusted the ritual to accommodate individual requests, and here ambiguity in the ritual could be why the adjustments worked. In one of the first *nikah* rituals the mother of a Muslim woman demanded that the groom, who was a Christian, should convert; otherwise she would not accept him as her son-in-law. The couple had therefore edited the *nikah* contract, writing into it that he could not be coerced into converting, but meanwhile he would say the *shahada* (confession of faith) along with everyone else before *al-Fatiha* was recited towards the end of the ritual. The only demand the mother made was that the groom should pronounce the *shahada*, and the only demand the groom had was that this would not make him a Muslim. The mother and groom clearly understood the ritual in very different ways, but this ambiguity or individual understanding of the ritual is why it worked (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994).

In some cases, Khankan would give spiritual care sessions or engage in actual negotiation on behalf of a couple before a *nikah* ritual. This is one reason why it proved almost impossible to formulate a policy demanding that couples had a registered marriage before the *nikah* was conducted. For example, Khankan performed the *nikah* ritual for a couple who had a secret relationship that they wanted to pursue as a registered marriage. However, to get the families on board they needed time and the *nikah* in the Mariam Mosque was done as a safety precaution in case the truth about the relationship came out too early in the process. In such a case they could use the *nikah* to ease the situation. However, it never came to that, and later they both registered a marriage and entered another *nikah* with the families present.

In other cases, couples were older and did the nikah with Khankan as a way of breaking free from social control exerted by their families, and in yet others, people merely came to the Mariam Mosque because that is the place they wanted to get married. When the nikah ritual is analyzed in terms of the social dynamics within which it is practiced, it emerges that it can have very different functions depending on what it is supposed to achieve. Either way, it should be clear by now, how the request for a nikah instituted a practice of nikah that produced Femimam as an institution and Khankan as an imam. I will therefore return to the instituting moment and finish the argument with a brief account of Mouna's and Khankan's deliberations when writing the nikah contract, and then turn to the production of a new Islamic semiotic resource, the imam dress.

## 6 The Nikah Contract

As described in Chapter 7, Khankan and Mouna asked for help to write a nikah contract at the fourth meeting on 8 July 2015. However, the notice was too short, and they ended up writing it themselves. Much of what the contract set out to achieve was already stated indirectly in Khankan's announcement on 5 March 2015 in *Politiken*:

Female imams may to a greater extent than male imams be focused on teaching Muslim women about their basic rights based on Islamic references.

A topic for a khutbah/Friday sermon could be to enlighten women in Denmark about their being allowed to set up the premises for their Islamic marriage contract when they enter into a Muslim marriage so that over time they can avoid problems. The woman can, for example, demand that the imam who performs the marriage add three clauses to the marriage contract:

1. that polygamy is not an option for the husband;
2. that the woman can demand an Islamic divorce from her husband;
3. that the Islamic marriage is automatically dissolved when the Danish marriage is dissolved by law.

These simple measures can prevent some of the problems Muslim women have in Denmark. It sometimes happens that they are threatened with polygamy or that the husband in fact marries a second wife behind their back or without their consent, while simultaneously obstructing their attempts to apply for or obtain an Islamic divorce. Some women live in psychologically violent marriages without access to Islamic divorce.

The paragraph does not indicate that Khankan is going to perform *nikah* rituals; it merely states that she intended to inform women of how egalitarian *nikahs* can be contracted. In fact, Khankan is at this point focused on the Friday prayer, which she has recruited Fetteh to perform. However, the text is easy to convert into an Islamic legal document and that is what Khankan and Mouna did.

The contract template is seven pages long and reflects the content of Khankan's speech during the *nikah* ritual in a more juridical tone. The two first pages define *nikah* as an equal partnership, then comes the line about *mahr* followed by technical Islamic juridical matters such as a prohibition of the husband's taking additional wives, a pledge to try to resolve issues before moving on to divorce, the woman's right to divorce, and a statement on child custody in case of divorce. The latter is merely a short paraphrase of Danish law and a pledge to work constructively with each other for the sake of the children in case of a divorce. Signatures are on the last page and usually consist of bride, groom, Khankan, and two to three witnesses. Khankan prefers to have a member from each family sign the contract as witnesses, but the Mariam Mosque's members sometimes sign as professional witnesses. Women's and men's signatures are considered of equal worth in Mariam Mosque. Although there have been minor changes over time, the first contract that I have collected, from February 2016, is almost identical to the last from August 2017, and these are almost identical to the template Khankan was using in July 2018 when I again inquired about the content.

The only recurring discussion about the contract has been in relation to *mahr*. It was originally Mouna that insisted on including *mahr* because he found compliance with this rule very important to uphold the validity of the contract, so the offer and acceptance are performed in written form: "[groom] gives and [bride] accepts a *mahr* of [blank] amounting to [blank]."<sup>10</sup> Khankan made a few objections to this inclusion as she perceived it to be an outdated custom but as Mouna argued that this would also make the contract valid in Muslim majority countries, she accepted it. This is similar to the conversion document that the Mariam Mosque issues. Mouna was very observant about fulfilling the requirements for such a document, and three weeks after the first conversion he updated the private Facebook group with a new conversion document which, he explained, fulfills the requirements for obtaining a *haji* visa (pilgrimage visa to Saudi Arabia).

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10 Emphasis is in the original.



Mahr has, as mentioned above, on occasion produced awkward moments in the nikah ritual and Khankan has therefore considered taking it out a few times because it does not seem like a meaningful practice to the couples who enter into nikah in the mosque. However, it was never changed because of the potential consequences of removing it. Instead, greater care is taken to inform people of the custom and guide couples through it in a meaningful way, with Khankan adopting Mouna's view and continuing the practice after he had left the Mariam Mosque.

Khankan always explains to couples that they are welcome to edit and personalize the contract so that it reflects their ideal of nikah. This complies with *fiqh*, but Khankan has also, on occasion, suggested that couples insert a poem or something similar that has a special meaning to them.

## 7 The Imam Dress

Hornborg extends Rappaport's definition of ritual as acts and utterances to ritual objects which she defines as "not entirely encoded by the performers" (Hornborg 2017: 21–22; Rappaport 1999: 24). In other words, because objects play a role in rituals, they, like acts and utterances, are "defined as sacred or tradition" and, therefore, "give authority to the new performance and have the quality to turn an invented ritual into a 'traditional' ritual" (Hornborg 2017: 18). Garments are often ritualized, a transition that was made very clear in the first nikah ceremony when the bride and groom went upstairs to change into clothes that they had brought with them specifically for the ceremony, which they took off after it was over, before having refreshments while waiting for their taxi. Likewise, before the couple arrived, Khankan donned a hijab and one of two dresses that came to be known as her imam dresses.

Both outfits were given to her by her father while she was doing fieldwork in Damascus for her MA thesis in 1999–2000. They are Syrian folk dresses which would be unusual to wear outside the home in modern Syria, although they are still worn on some formal occasions. Khankan has worn these dresses on many important occasions such as debates, performances, and when hosting events throughout her career, so there was never any question of what she would wear as an imam. This poses a problem in relation to Hornborg's theory of interrituality as these dresses are part of Syrian folklore and not encoded as ritual objects by their inclusion in Islamic rituals. However, if Hornborg's definition of what constitutes a ritual object is extended from Rappaport's definition to Bell's concept of ritualization, it may be argued that because the dresses are so visually distinct, they become ritual objects when they are used in

the context of ritual. In fact, Khankan encodes them as ritual objects by using them as imam dresses and this is recognized by other participants who easily identify these dresses as distinct (although it should be noted that in many contexts long robes are symbols of authority and are donned for ritual purposes).

The clearest identification of Khankan's dresses as imam dresses occurred in Aarhus Cathedral where Khankan was invited to deliver a sermon on a Sunday evening, 19 February 2017, as part of an ongoing theater performance where a new speaker was invited each day to "preach". Her invitation sparked controversy as some people were provoked by the idea of having an imam deliver a sermon in the state church (Espersen 2017; Hvorslev 2017; Vester 2017). The dean of the cathedral, P.H. Bartholin, tried in vain to contain the controversy by insisting that this was a theater performance to which seven people had been invited to speak, irrespective of the creed they confessed (Niebuhr 2017). As the question revolved around whether Khankan spoke in the capacity of an imam, she had brought two dresses to the cathedral: one of her imam dresses and an everyday dress with flowers on it.

In a back-stage conversation Khankan asked Bartholin about his views on her wearing the imam dress or the everyday outfit as her choice would most likely be received in very different ways. Khankan had already asked several people about this, some of whom were of the opinion that she should don the imam dress to make a statement while others thought it would be best not to provoke. Bartholin was of the latter opinion and Khankan, therefore, wore the flowered dress. This incident clearly demonstrates that the present Khankan had received from her father some 17 years earlier had become an imam dress through ritualization. That is, Khankan had through ritual performance produced a folkloristic dress as a new Islamic semiotic resource: the female imam dress (Leeuwen 2005: 4). Interestingly, Khankan did not suggest wearing the hijab, and she only does so for Islamic rituals. In public she usually wears a scarf over her bosom, thus indicating that there is a difference between dressing as an imam for ritual and public engagements.

The transformation of Khankan into an imam through ritual performance has a parallel in her and Mouna's Islamic juridical performance of divorces. In the below, I therefore investigate the emergence of an Islamic divorce practice, which with time developed into a sharia council that officially offers Islamic divorce as a service to Muslims (Petersen forthcoming-a).

## 8 The Emergence of a Quasi-Legal Institution

Dear Sherin. I am writing to you because we have a Muslim woman who has divorced her husband under Danish law, but she also wants a Muslim divorce. Is that something you do? And if there is a theological problem in relation to the women's mosque, could you recommend a male imam who does divorces on the woman's initiative? Best regards [name] [city] [municipality] ☺

SMS sent to SHERIN KHANKAN in March 2018

The above is a typical example of a text message that a segment of Danish imams periodically receive from NGOs, women's shelters, and social workers trying to help their female clients obtain an Islamic divorce (Liversage and Petersen 2020: 221). Imams and other Islamic authorities also receive many requests from the women themselves who expect imams to take on the role of a *qadi* (Islamic judge) and issue Islamic divorces without the consent of their husbands (Liversage and Petersen 2020: 177–185). This is a diaspora phenomenon that is predominantly an issue among migrants from countries that have implemented religious family law. The religious courts are only available within the territorial boundaries of the states within which they hold jurisdiction, and this means that they are absent in the diaspora. This produces what I define as the *Islamic juridical vacuum* (Petersen 2020a), a space structured by both the absence of and demand for a religious court. That is, Muslim women wanting to Islamically divorce, not just divorce under Danish law, create a demand for this Islamic juridical service, even if they are aware that an Islamic divorce performed by a Danish Islamic authority is unlikely to be recognized by Islamic judicial systems abroad. For the women, it is often a matter of ending Islamic marriage socially and psychologically (Liversage and Petersen 2020; Petersen and Vinding 2020; Petersen forthcoming-a), and if their husbands are reluctant to acquiesce, they need the intervention of a quasi-legal institution. Therefore, they project the demand on to Islamic authorities whom they frame in the role of Islamic judges. However, Islamic authorities in Denmark are in general reluctant to involve themselves in conflictual Islamic divorce cases (Liversage and Jensen 2011; Liversage and Petersen 2020). Because Femimam posed as an institution, the demand for Islamic divorce was soon projected on to it, and the same situation as the one analyzed in the above using Derrida's idea of an instituting moment emerged.

Between December 2016 and May 2018, the Mariam Mosque handled eight divorce cases. In five of these, divorces were issued without the consent of the husband, while the remaining three—between couples who had married in

the mosque—were done by mutual consent. Section 9–13 demonstrates how the first divorce in the Mariam Mosque created a precedent for all subsequent cases, establishing it as a quasi-legal institution. Since the inception of the practice there has been a steady increase in cases: 2 in 2016, 3 in 2017, 6 in 2018, 7 in 2019, 6 in 2020,<sup>11</sup> and 20 in 2021 (for an analysis of later developments see Petersen forthcoming-a).

The names of both the male imams and the first woman who received an Islamic divorce in the Mariam Mosque are pseudonyms. I have also given the two additional mosques that are mentioned in the chapter fictive names.

## 9 The Mariam Mosque Receives Its First Islamic Divorce Request

In December 2015, Khankan received her first request for an Islamic divorce. Fatima, subjected to coercive control for almost two decades, had reported her husband to the police and he had been given a prison sentence and expelled from Denmark in the fall of 2015.<sup>12</sup> Now Fatima also wanted an Islamic divorce, but her (ex)husband refused to issue it and she therefore wanted an Islamic legal institution to issue the divorce by judgement. However, as explained above, there are no Islamic legal institutions in Denmark that can make such a judgement and therefore Muslim women often request this service from mosques and Islamic authorities.

Fatima had married in her parents' country of origin and registered the *nikah* as a civil marriage in Denmark, and on the basis of this registration her husband obtained a residence permit via the rules for family reunification. The physical abuse started within the first year of her husband's arrival in Denmark, and after a few years Fatima fled to a women's shelter with the couple's first child while pregnant with the second. This is the beginning of a well-known behavioral pattern with women who are subject to coercive control: Fatima went back to her husband, fled, went back, and fled again (Stark 2007; Crossman and Hardesty 2018). After a little more than eight years—enough for her husband to secure an independent permanent residence permit—Fatima applied for a divorce under Danish law and subsequently asked an imam to help her obtain an Islamic divorce. Shortly after the divorce under Danish law, Fatima's husband agreed to an Islamic divorce. However, the pattern associated with coercive control repeated itself, and the same imam married the couple Islamically

11 COVID-19 is likely to have reduced the number of divorces in 2020.

12 The presentation of the case is purposely vague in order to guarantee Fatima's anonymity.

a few months later without civil registration of the nikah. This was followed by another Islamic divorce shortly after and another nikah without civil registration a few months later again. A third Islamic divorce would be final, and the couple would therefore not be able to enter into a fourth nikah.

Having entered into her third nikah, Fatima stayed with her husband for a few years even though the violence against both her and the children continued. Her husband's behavior became particularly severe before and during a family visit to his country of origin, and when the family got home, Fatima again fled to a women's shelter and reported her husband for the abuse, which resulted in the conviction described above. However, her husband's jail sentence and expulsion from Denmark was not the end of this case for Fatima as she still felt the need to obtain an Islamic divorce, and her husband refused to consent to this. She therefore needed it by judgement but because of the Islamic juridical vacuum she ended up in nikah captivity (marital captivity within an Islamic symbolic frame of reference. See Liversage and Petersen 2020: 7; Liversage 2022; Petersen 2020a; Petersen 2021).

Fatima asked the imam who married her to issue an Islamic divorce but he refused to do so without her husband's consent. A second imam gave the same answer and Fatima therefore inquired about the costs of filing a case for divorce under Islamic law in the country where she and her husband had originally registered their nikah, but this turned out to be too expensive.

When Fatima contacted the Mariam Mosque, Khankan initially suggested that she should file her case in a British Sharia council, but as Fatima could not afford it Khankan started to explore other options for her. She presented the case to people whom she thought might be able to formulate a divorce well-grounded in fiqh and did some initial research on the internet into rules regulating Islamic divorce. In other words, Khankan used the resources available to her and it should be noted that her approach resembles that taken by many male Islamic authorities when they get their first divorce case. As formal education within fiqh related to Islamic divorce is not widespread among Danish Islamic authorities they normally read up on it when they get their first cases. Some even explain that they do not use fiqh; instead they evaluate what is just and fair from their own point of view as this is, in the end, what it is all about (Liversage and Petersen 2020: 180–182). From a sociological perspective this makes good sense, because the Islamic authorities have no judicial power and only by presenting their opinion on cases as just and fair they may be able to persuade a reluctant husband or family that he should consent to divorce.

Khankan did not make progress in Fatima's case as she could not find an Islamic authority who would take the role of qadi upon himself. Her last attempt was with a prominent Danish imam, Hakeem, who discussed Fatima's case with his colleagues, and this ended with him suggesting an ad-hoc divorce council that could deal with Fatima's case:

As salaam alaykum dear Sherin,

Good to see you.

I and my colleagues have discussed the case you passed on to us. Some of us are willing to sign a declaration of khula [Islamic divorce]. However, we have the following remarks to make, which have also been part of earlier discussions.

There is a general need for more imams in these kinds of divorce councils so that they become representative and we therefore have to contact more mosques/organizations. That will strengthen the verdict and forestall the situation of someone complaining about it to other imams and possibly even having it overturned. This is why it has to be discussed widely [i.e. with a broad range of Islamic authorities] and with valid arguments.

There can also be considerable risks (safety-wise) if individuals or single imams sign from the point of view of one partner or family. That has happened before.

We also need to discuss how we understand the case fiqh-wise and the language that we will employ. Do we understand it the same way—also in relation to the different fiqh traditions?

This is why it is important to found a divorce council, which some imams are working towards.

Salaam

Hakeem

The Islamic juridical vacuum is easily identifiable in the answer. Hakeem explains that Danish Muslims must “found a divorce council” and that in relation to Fatima's case the status quo produces a need to “strengthen the verdict” to avoid the husband's “having it overturned”. He also mentions the security risk and the need for common ground, fiqh-wise, on Islamic divorces in Denmark. In conclusion, Hakeem seems to suggest that Khankan must find a temporary solution to the Islamic juridical vacuum in the form of an ad-hoc divorce council if she wants to help Fatima. Interestingly, the imam does not comment directly upon Fatima's being Shia, while he and his colleagues are Sunni, but it is possible that he is unaware of Fatima's creed.

Hakeem's answer is similar to other answers Khankan received from both fiqh experts and colleagues, and this produced a clear dissonance between the urgency of Fatima's situation and the speed with which an ad hoc council could be formed. In the end, Khankan and Mouna decided to issue a divorce themselves and the document they drafted became a template for all subsequent divorces in the Mariam Mosque—both Sunni and Shia.

## 10 The Writing of a Divorce Document

On 11 March 2016, Khankan issued an Islamic divorce to Fatima on behalf of the Mariam Mosque. Fatima and members of her family came to the apartment where the Mariam Mosque was inaugurated a little more than five months later. Fatima and Khankan, with a member of the family acting as a witness, signed the eight-page long divorce document printed on paper bearing the Mariam Mosque's letterhead. This document was a product of Khankan's and Mouna's combined efforts to fill in the Islamic juridical vacuum.

The document consisted of four sections: 1) the identity of the involved parties including children; 2) a presentation of the case; 3) an Islamic ruling in the form of a khula that argues for the validity of the action taken by the Mariam Mosque based on the information in Section Two; 4) a concluding summary of the ruling in short form with signatures on the same page. Some of the later cases also have an appendix with evidence such as pictures of bruises, reports from women's shelters, text messages with threats, hospital reports, and court rulings that back up the woman's story.

Khankan and Mouna formulated Fatima's divorce in English as a case specific argument, but when the Mariam Mosque received its second request for a divorce, they reused the theological argument from Fatima's divorce, which thereby became a template. The theological argument for the validity of the divorces appears in the middle of section three which is preceded by the Islamic ruling and followed by an explanation of why attempts at reconciliation have been skipped:

Firstly, we will deal with the issue of said husband, [name], demanding that khula not be given to his wife seeking it.

Most schools of fiqh agree that husband's agreement is a basic procedure and essential to the granting of divorce, unless extenuating circumstances apply. While this is the prevailing interpretation, other interpretations suggest that the husband does not have to consent if the grounds of divorce are valid, such as cruelty (*darar*), impotence (if undisclosed

to bride at time of marriage). In addition, if a husband cannot provide his wife with basic marital obligations, such as shelter or maintenance, a woman may be granted khula.<sup>13</sup>

We wish to give light to the following verses in the Quran stating the following:

**4:19** “O You who have chosen to be graced with belief! It is not lawful for you to force women into marrying or holding on to them in marriage against their will. Pressuring women to remain in wedlock by threatening to take away the marital gift is forbidden. A wife could forfeit the right to the marital gift only if she has indulged in clear lewdness. You shall treat your wives nicely. Even if you dislike them, it may happen that God has placed much good in what you have failed to realize.”

**4:35** “If you fear a breach between the two of them (husband and wife), appoint two arbiters, one from his family and one from her family. If they decide to reconcile, God will help them get together. Surely, God is Knower, Aware.”

**4:128** “And if a woman fears from her husband contempt or evasion, there is no sin upon them if they make terms of settlement between them—and settlement is best. And present in [human] souls is stinginess. But if you do good and fear Allah—then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.”

This argument for a woman’s right to an Islamic divorce takes inspiration from knowledge produced by online convergence culture (Jenkins 2006). Mouna searched the web for information and discussed the case with his friends in the online forum mentioned in Chapter 3. Here a Pakistani lawyer explained that he used 4:19 in his practice and therefore Mouna included it in the Mariam Mosque’s divorce document along with 4:35 which he added himself. The section on fiqh at the beginning and the reference to verse 4:128 are the result of internet searches, which takes inspiration from Wikipedia, parts of which is quoted ad verbatim (see note 13). This is why verse 4:19 and 4:35 are from the

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13 This paragraph originates with the Wikipedia entry, “Khul”, which reads: “In regard to the consent of the husband, most schools agree that husband’s agreement is a basic procedure and essential to the granting of divorce, unless extenuating circumstances apply. While this is the prevailing interpretation, other interpretations suggest that the husband does not have to consent if the grounds of divorce are valid, such as cruelty (*darar*) or impotence (if undisclosed to bride at time of marriage). In addition, if a husband cannot provide his wife with basic marital obligations, such as shelter or maintenance, a woman may be granted khul.” (accessed 19 August 2020). This is a clear example of how convergence culture provides knowledge that is mobilized in activism (Jenkins 2006).



translation by Shabbir Ahmed whereas 4:128 is from Umm Muhammad, also known as Sahih International. Khankan had originally suggested a few hadiths that could be used in the argument but Mouna disagreed with this based on his general objection to the use of hadith, and as it was Mouna who compiled the final divorce document from Khankan's notes and his own research it became a purely Quranic argument. Mouna and Khankan also received assistance from a Femimam member based in London and got feedback on a draft from an Islamic scholar based in Scotland who also endorsed the Mariam Mosque when it was inaugurated.

Even though neither Khankan nor Mouna have formal educational credentials in fiqh, they were able to write an Islamic divorce document by using the information produced by convergence culture online in the form of Wikipedia, web forums, and other sources that, although they do not appear in the document, have informed their practice. In other words, Khankan and Mouna used the information produced by convergence culture to support their activism, which in this case was to help a woman obtain a divorce.

## 11 The Founding of a Divorce Practice

On 13 June 2017, three days before we went to Berlin together for the inauguration of the Ibn Rushd Goethe Mosque, Mouna and I sat down to go through the three divorces that the Mariam Mosque had issued to date. Mouna and I had spoken about the divorces several times before as Mouna was uncomfortable with the practice, which he thought should either be abandoned or firmly grounded in fiqh. In his mind this would require assistance from a *faqih* (Islamic legal scholar) and he had on earlier occasions suggested that the Mariam Mosque should ask a qualified expert such as Halima Krausen, an Islamic scholar from Hamburg, whether she would review their divorce documents and practices, but he never got around to contacting her.

At the time of the interview, Mouna was writing a fourth Islamic divorce and he explained, as he had done on previous occasions, that this would be the last one because he did not feel theologically qualified for the job. Furthermore, he and Khankan had an ongoing disagreement over how to deal with the divorces. This tension was mainly caused by their respective roles in the divorce practice. Mouna dealt with the Islamic legal arguments and therefore insisted that all cases be backed up by evidence other than the testimony of the women involved, whereas Khankan provided them with spiritual care and found that asking for evidence compromised the trust relationship that was an essential part of this practice. This difference in perspective resulted in arguments in the first two cases, but in the third and fourth, Khankan collected the

evidence from the women before Mouna asked for it. As the Mariam Mosque in Mouna's eyes did not, as such, have the authority to Islamically divorce couples, he found it important that the evidence was included because, to his mind, it legitimized the divorces and he thought it might even convince the husbands that their actions were tantamount to divorce.

Mouna was, furthermore, worried that some women would use the Mariam Mosque to facilitate halal dating which he defined as a *mut'ah*-like practice, referencing the temporary nikah arrangements among young Danish Shia Muslims. Marianne Bøe (2018) has discussed the phenomenon of halal dating among young Norwegian Muslims and it is also a well-known practice among young Danish Muslims (Petersen and Vinding 2020: 137–138). Mouna argues in relation to halal dating that easy access to divorce devalues the nikah and if people contract nikah after nikah to render sex free of sin then there is no difference between nikah and dating. It is important to note that Mouna was not against dating and having relationships before nikah, but he insisted that the nikah be reserved for when a couple decides to live together and maybe start a family. Furthermore, he worried that the Mariam Mosque would not be taken seriously in the community if it came to be seen as a place that facilitated halal dating, even if this were not Khankan's and Mouna's intention.

Mouna also insisted that the women seeking divorce should return the *mahr* (dower) so that the Islamic divorce was by the book and harder to dispute. This turned into an argument on the day of Fatima's divorce when both Khankan and Fatima found this to be unfair in light of the husband's behavior. In Fatima's case Mouna insisted, refusing to delete the stipulation, but he excluded it from future cases to avoid further arguments. The practice of not paying back the mahr is, in other words, based on an embodied exegetical argument, not an argument grounded in *fiqh*. However, it should be noted that Bowen (2012: 155; 2016: 103–120) has documented how the individual *faqih*'s sense of justice (embodied exegesis) can affect the outcome of cases. In these cases, *fiqh* seems to be reduced to a language with which the *faqih* justifies and guarantees a just outcome in his own eyes; they *talk fiqh*, so to speak, or use Islamic semiotic resources to express their sense of justice (Leeuwen 2005: 4). As Khankan and Mouna had split the responsibilities between them, it became Mouna's task to find a *fiqh* argument for the practice of not returning the mahr, which he never did, and this caused him considerable distress. He wrote with other imams in mind as the intended audience, because he assumed that those were the people he had to convince, and he therefore tried to follow all the rules he imagined would be important for them. Shortly after Mouna wrote the fourth Islamic divorce he left the Mariam Mosque for reasons unrelated to the divorces and subsequent divorces were therefore written by Khankan using the template.

## 12 Reception of the Divorces

When I interviewed Khankan on 20 July 2018 and went through the, by then, eight Islamic divorce cases, she explained that she still recommended that women ask for assistance in the Ihsan Mosque if they are Sunni and the Al-Askari Mosque if they are Shia. She believed that an Islamic divorce issued by a well-educated and conservative imam would have greater effect than one provided by the Mariam Mosque, but she has often found that the mosques will not issue the divorces. At the time of the interview, Khankan had recently sent a woman to the Ihsan Mosque where the abovementioned Hakeem and his colleague Muhammed are imams, but she returned on SMS and requested another meeting with Khankan, adding,

I have, by the way, spoken with Hakeem and Muhammed and they say that they cannot help me. Hakeem admitted that he had helped women in my situation before but said that he no longer does that. They say that I should not worry about whether my divorce from the Mariam Mosque is valid or not, because it merely requires an imam with sufficient knowledge and authority, and with this in mind it does not matter whether it is a man or a woman. He explained that there are also female judges in Muslim countries who do the same thing.

Khankan then promised to issue the divorce and sent the relevant information and forms to the woman, but only six days later, the husband consented to divorce by saying *inta taliq* (you are divorced) and that was the end of it, so this case is not counted among those she executed. It is interesting to note that two established and well-known Islamic authorities such as Hakeem and Mohammed refer to the Mariam Mosque as an Islamic legal institution that provides a service unavailable in their mosque.

## 13 The Everyday Running of a Quasi-Legal Institution

The Mariam Mosque receives many more requests for Islamic divorces than it has resources to handle and Khankan is continually engaged with multiple cases. This is also a well-known problem among Khankan's colleagues; if it is rumored that an Islamic authority has issued a divorce to a woman, then he will suddenly get many more requests. This resource challenge is, besides the safety issues related to Islamic divorce without a husband's consent, an important reason for many Islamic authorities to reject divorce requests (Liversage

and Petersen 2020: 180–183). Khankan explains that many women give up in the course of the process or if they do not get an immediate response to their requests. There are also women who, after consultation with family or friends, do not come back because it becomes clear to them that a divorce from the Mariam Mosque is not going to make a difference. However, when women are able to persuade their family to engage in the divorce process in the Mariam Mosque the performance of a family member signing the divorce document empowers the woman as it is a symbolic gesture of family support.

When members of the Mariam Mosque sign divorces as witnesses they do so irrespective of their gender. This is not something that has been thought through as a type of gender activism; rather, the logic of men and women being equal in the role of witness may have been produced by Khankan signing the first divorce along with a member of the family. When I inquired about this, Khankan explained that she had not thought much about it, but on reflection, she felt that was how it should be. Maybe women had played a different role in society in the past, but in the contemporary world women are just as qualified to be witnesses as men, she said.

It sometimes took a bit of convincing to get members of the Mariam Mosque to sign the divorces as witnesses, as the cases often involved violent men. Some signed with a part of their name that they did not normally use, perhaps to anonymize their signature, whereas one male member made a point of signing with his full name and clearly, so that it could be read. With this, he demonstrated that he stood by the action taken by the mosque, showing a kind of solidarity with Khankan whose name was printed under her signature and therefore always readable.

In the three cases involving mutual consent, all married in the Mariam Mosque, only one couple asked for mediation before divorce. In the other two, the couples only returned to the mosque in order to get a divorce certificate, thus demonstrating the effect of the nikahs that Khankan had performed. Although these have no legal standing, as the Mariam Mosque is not registered as an acknowledged faith society with a civil marriage license, the couples have felt the need to terminate the bond that the nikah ritual produced.

## 14 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how Khankan became an imam and the Mariam Mosque emerged as an institution when Khankan and Mouna responded to requests made by Muslims, who took their posing as an institution seriously. It is important to underline the discrepancy between the plan-

ning of the knowledge center in Chapter 7 and how the Mariam Mosque actually emerged in an unplanned way due to serendipities in the form of requests and responses. Furthermore, it is important to notice that even if this was unplanned and the requests may seem unexpected to Khankan and Mouna, the likelihood of these requests is high due to the demography of Denmark and the structure of the Islamic juridical vacuum (Petersen 2020a, 2021).

Although the ritual and Islamic juridical practice made Khankan an imam, it is evident from Chapter 7 that Khankan did not want to become an imam in the sense of a person leading the Friday prayer. Indeed, she firmly opposed her adopting this role at several meetings prior to the inauguration of the Mariam Mosque. However, a serendipity on 26 August 2016, the day the Mariam Mosque was inaugurated, made her reluctantly adopt this role as well (see Chapter 10).

Nikah and Islamic divorce became defining characteristics of the Mariam Mosque. This is for example evident in Khankan's NGO Exitcirklen's campaign in cooperation with the Mariam Mosques in 2021 *Till Death Do Us Part*, Funded by Oak Foundation Denmark with 1.11 Mio DKK and an additional 779,000 DKK from other sources (approximately 250,000 EUR in total). This campaign aims to disseminate a revised version of the Mariam Mosque's marriage contract to other Danish mosques in which couples are required to register their marriage under Danish law before entering nikah, and which states that "divorce issued by the Agency of Family Law causes immediate Islamic divorce". Furthermore, this campaign disseminates the Mariam Mosque's position on women's right to divorce and offers to facilitate these through what is now the Mariam Mosque's divorce service. In short, while neither nikah nor Islamic divorce were planned to become part of the knowledge center discussed in Chapter 7, no other issue has been pressed as hard as these two in the years that followed.

In the next Chapter, I analyze the building of the Mariam Mosque in August 2016. This is followed by Chapter 10 in which I return to abovementioned serendipity that made Khankan a full-fledged imam, leading Friday prayer.

## The Pop-Up Mosque and Its Social Media Adhan

Dear user of the common room

All rooms should be cleared and appear neutral after use. Books, cushions, clothes, and carpets must be packed/rolled away so that other renters have a neutral room available. This also applies to the corridors + living room.

Note on the wall in the common room where the Mariam Mosque periodically pops up, 29 March 2017

The Mariam Mosque constitutes what I have earlier defined as a pop-up mosque, not a building: a mosque made up of social relations and actions, not bricks and mortar (Petersen 2019b). It exists in a place, the common room of an apartment in central Copenhagen, which is converted from another purpose into a mosque shortly before the Friday prayer is held in it. After each use, the space is converted back into somewhere that can be used by the owner himself and other occupants of the apartment, who are mainly NGOs. In between pop-ups, the mosque only exists as a social network of people and physical objects in storage.

Mosque typologies typically focus on buildings (Petersen 2019b). Shahed Saleem (2018: 11–15), for example, focuses on architecture and the history of buildings when he divides British mosques into house mosques, non-domestic conversion mosques, and purpose-built mosques. Lene Kühle (2006) focuses on internal organization and structures of authority in her division between organizational mosques, laymen mosques, and sheikh mosques, while Abdul-Azim Ahmed (2019) categorizes mosques according to the function they have in a community. In his typology, the *fard* mosques, where Muslims can perform their individual compulsory obligations such as daily prayers, offer the bare minimum required for a space to constitute a mosque. In addition to this, Ahmed identifies *fard-kifaya* mosques that also take care of communal responsibilities such as Friday prayer and rites of passage, and the *interspatial sunna* mosque, where recommended (*sunna* or *mustahabb*) actions take place. There is a wealth of models with different foci, but they all take a building to be an essential characteristic of a mosque.

However, pop-up mosques such as the Mariam Mosque are not buildings and therefore do not qualify as mosques under any of these typologies. Yet they typically have mosque in their name, they have congregations, they produce

Islamic authorities, they hold Friday prayer, and they sometimes perform rites of passage. In other words, they hold most of the characteristics of a *fard-kifaya* mosque, but they do not fulfill the minimum requirement to be categorized as a *fard* mosque as they are packed away between pop-ups and therefore Muslims cannot perform their daily prayers in them.

The pop-up mosque is a common phenomenon but it is often misrecognized as a permanent mosque as the semiotic resources associated with Friday prayer have a trace of permanence (Derrida 1967/1997). The Danish Islamic Center and the Mariam Mosque were, for example, both counted as mosques in national mapping projects while not having temporal permanence (Kühle 2006: 124 and 27; Kühle and Larsen 2017: 93). Likewise, The Women's Mosque of America (Los Angeles), the Inclusive Mosque Initiative (London), the Qal'bu Maryam Women's Mosque (San Francisco), and *Offene Moschee Schweiz* (multiple cities in Switzerland)—just to name a few—all constitute pop-up mosques but they are identified as mosques because this is the only word available to describe a place where Friday prayer occurs on a regular basis.

It should be noted that a pop-up mosque is not necessarily less influential than permanent mosques. One of Denmark's most influential mosques in the early 2000's was as a pop-up mosque, which only much later became permanent in the form of Danish Islamic Center (Kühle 2006: 124–127; Petersen 2019b: 182–186). The meaning of the word mosque is inextricably linked with the imam identity and in that sense the trace supports Khankan's and other women's claims to the imam title (Derrida 1967/1997). The Mariam Mosque is, thus, a part of Khankan's identity as it makes her an imam (Ahmed 2006). This illusion of permanence played an important part in producing the strong symbolism that Danish media started spreading in March 2015.

In this chapter, I initially analyze the first time the common room was fitted out as the Mariam Mosque. With inspiration from Michel de Certeau, I distinguish between place and space. Place is geometrically defined as three dimensions in which objects have a position relative to other objects. A space, on the other hand, is a discursive construction which, in the case of the Mariam Mosque, is mainly based on the intentions and actions of a group of Muslims that *does mosque*. "In short, *space is practiced place*" (Certeau 2011: 117).<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Mariam Mosque members' mosque-doing constructs the place as a mosque space. I will return to the mosque-doing in Chapter 10 on the inauguration and running of the Mariam Mosque.

Because space is a discursive construction, the same place can be constructed as different spaces by different individuals. To emphasize this per-

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1 Emphasis is in the original.

spective, and to emphasize how the Mariam Mosque is entangled with other narratives, I start the analysis with the owner of the apartment and his spatial construction of the apartment within which the Mariam Mosque regularly pops up. Then follows an analysis of the first time the apartment was fitted out as the Mariam Mosque and its continual popping-up in this particular apartment. The chapter ends with a discussion of the interaction between offline and online spaces, such as Google Maps and Facebook.

The analyses are based on a wide range of empirical data: fieldnotes and pictures taken during fieldwork; 5 hours and 24 minutes of Skovgaard's video recordings in the apartment on 21, 22 and 25 August when the mosque was set up for the first time; six semi-structured interviews between 24 February 2017 and 29 March 2017 framed as casual conversations about the visibility of the Mariam Mosque (two with young volunteers and four with religious leaders);<sup>2</sup> and an interview with the owner of the apartment, Jacob Holdt, on 26 February 2019.

## 1 Donation of the Room

Spaces are constructed in multiple ways by individuals and groups. To demonstrate this, I start with an analysis of Holdt's spatial construction which is closely related to his personal narrative. As de Certeau explains, this is another way of constructing space, "Stories thus carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places" (Certeau 2011: 118).

Holdt (b. 1947) has been part of Femimam from the beginning and has worked with Khankan almost since the founding of Forum for Critical Muslims where he was also on the board. The two of them have formed a team for many years, but they construct the mosque in relation to their own narratives. For Khankan it is the culmination of something that started in Damascus during her field studies in the Abu Nur Mosque in 1999–2000, but for Holdt it constitutes the latest chapter in his struggle against racism, starting in the 1970s. It should be noted that Holdt uses the word racism about any kind of out-group hatred.

Holdt is a famous Danish photographer who travelled, or vagabonded as he calls it, in the USA with his camera from 1970–1975. Even though he was a staunch socialist, active in the anti-Vietnam war protests, he fell in love with

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<sup>2</sup> One of these casual conversations was with Khankan, but I used an extended interview guide for this conversation.



the country and stayed on instead of going to Chile to support Salvador Allende as he had originally intended. In the USA he continually faced his inner racist, as he calls it, by joining the groups that his current social network found it legitimate to hate. That is, he continually moved to the out-groups constructed by his current in-group, socializing with them until they became his in-group, and then he would move to their out-group, and so on. As a result, he lived among black impoverished families, members of the Ku Klux Klan, white elitist families, drug dealers, white trash, and gang members. He did this for five years and photographed every bit of his journey before returning to Denmark just before Christmas in 1975. In his memoirs, *About Saying Yes*, he expresses his philosophy as follows:

It became a lifelong journey where I—like the persecuted Jew, Hannah Arendt—ended up rebelling against the ideologies that suppress both individualism and collectivism, and instead joined a pluralism that does not intend to form society in any specific way but, instead, unconditionally accepts and loves all groups within society as they are here and now, without in one's heart of hearts trying to assimilate or change them, and consequently destroy them. The only group that, throughout my life, I have tried to change and take responsibility for, is all of us who make up the suppressing majority—in fact without realizing it ourselves or being able to “see the beam in the eye”.

HOLDT 2019: 14

Shortly after arriving back in Denmark he set up a four-hour picture slide show where he took the audience with him on his continuous journey from in-groups to out-groups. These shows point to the inner racist that, according to Holdt, lives in all people. That is, with his show Holdt tries to demonstrate that even the most self-righteous among his audience members construct out-groups that they find it legitimate to hate or think less of.

The show was soon made into a fixed slideshow with a recorded narrator and became an immediate success which propelled Holdt into fame and money. The latter he invested in the show and in 1978 he bought the apartment located in downtown Copenhagen where the Mariam Mosque would open 38 years later. The acquisition was originally due to his temporary venue, the *Husets Teater*, being unavailable:

When *Husets Teater* [the House Theater] was booked for real theater after the summer, I negotiated with the Mermaid Theater about continuing there in the winter. But I soon realized that it was too small for my large

audience. So, the following year I bought an apartment registered for commercial use on Købmagergade 43 for a mere 590,000 kroner [today's equivalent of 287,000 EUR].<sup>3</sup> That became the headquarters of *American Pictures* for the subsequent 10 years where it was shown to 90 pupils daily and to the public in the evening. Today I still have the lecture hall and have fitted it out as a dialogue center and women's mosque where women before the Friday prayer take their shoes off when entering—on Red Annie's picture carpet which she made based on the picture of the man whom my friend Butch murdered in New Orleans.

HOLDT 2019: 416

The apartment was, in other words, acquired with the purpose of spreading the message about anti-racism through Holdt's show. His mention of Red Annie's picture carpet is a reference to the new décor of the apartment when it was fitted out as the Ubuntu House in 2016, (see Figure 3), but I am getting ahead of myself.

As *American Pictures* became a bigger and bigger success in the US, Holdt started to spend more time abroad and, while away, he donated the use of the apartment to refugees and other repressed groups in society. The wear and tear on the apartment meant that it soon needed refurbishment, and he closed it down for use in 1987 and spent approximately a million Danish kroner (today's equivalent of 250,000 EUR)<sup>4</sup> on restoration before renting it to the Spanish consulate to cover the costs. The final installment of the loan was due in 2016 when he intended to retire; the apartment made up part of his and his wife's retirement savings.

Jumping 28 years ahead to 15 January 2015, Holdt was diagnosed with prostate cancer on the same day as the Spanish consulate terminated the lease contract. Both came as a bit of a blow to Holdt. On 2 February he was operated on, and five days later Omar el-Hussein committed the terror attack that played an important role for the spread of the story about the Mariam Mosque as analyzed in Chapter 6. With the lease terminated, Holdt decided to open the apartment to activists again, and when Khankan made the news with her intentions to found a women's mosque in early March, she became one among several activists to whom the apartment was made available.

3 I have used the calculator on Statistics Denmark's webpage to calculate the inflation from 1978 to 2019, then converted to Euro assuming that 1 EUR equals 7.5 DKK and rounded to the closest thousand.

4 I have used the calculator on Statistics Denmark's webpage to calculate the inflation from 1987 to 2019, then converted to Euro assuming that 1 EUR equals 7.5 DKK and rounded to the closest thousand.



FIGURE 3 This photo is taken just inside the door. The shoe rack can be seen in the bottom of the photo and Annie's picture carpet on the wall. The front door is located to the left (out of frame).

Khankan announced that she had found a location for the mosque just a few days later, on 9 March, when she recorded a TV program called *Jeppesen Meets ...*, which was aired on 15 March 2015. However, Holdt did not want his name featuring in the media as he was planning a 40-year jubilee for his first *American Pictures* show in September 2016 when he would change the context from American to European racism. The new show, *My Life in Pictures*, a doc-

umentary intended for movie theatres, is Holdt's attempt to demonstrate the similarities that he sees in the way racism is structured in the US and Europe. In other words, the message is the same—everyone has an inner racist that they should face—but the focus has moved from interracial conflict in the US to Muslims on the geopolitical scene in Europe. In his memoirs Holdt defines the apartment as a space he calls the Ubuntu House:

The preface of *American Pictures* ended with my inviting travelers from all over the world to move in with me and integrate with one another in my home and lecture hall in Købmagergade in Copenhagen, where thousands over a period of ten years saw the show. In that sense, life goes in circles for me, because the reader is still welcome; I have fitted out the rooms as dialog and meeting rooms where Jews, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus, refugees, battered women, LGBT persons, and other persecuted groups can meet in safety and work together in what we now call the Ubuntu House—after Nelson Mandela's old African pluralistic term, "I am because we are".<sup>5</sup> So come and integrate yourself with each other ...

HOLDT 2019: 15

The Spanish consulate decided to extend their contract to 1 December 2015 and then it took almost a month to renovate the space. This is the main reason that the opening of the Mariam Mosque was postponed but, as mentioned in Chapter 7, Holdt also made headlines in several scandals starting in the fall of 2015 which made it even more important to him that the location of the mosque remained secret. Femimam held their first meeting in the apartment on 30 December 2015 and then started to plan their first Friday prayer shortly after.

The tension between permanence and temporal liminality is present from Khankan's first visit to the apartment. In a short scene from Holdt's *My Life in Pictures*, a dialogue between Holdt and his wife, Vibeke Rostrup Bøyesen, on the occasion of Khankan's second visit demonstrates this well:

Bøyesen: I don't think we need to fit it out as a mosque.

Holdt: It will be a mosque for just a few hours on Fridays. The rest of the time it is a meeting room. It is going to be all sorts of things.

5 This quote translates badly into Danish (*Jeg er kun noget i kraft af, at du er noget*) and Holdt has therefore reworked the sentence with a focus on preserving the meaning. I have not tried to translate Holdt's Danish wording back into English. Instead I have provided a typical English translation of the original Nguni Bantu term, Ubuntu.

Bøyesen: So, it is every Friday. I had not heard about that.

Holdt: In the afternoon. That hardly matters.

The apartment constitutes a significant part of Holdt and Bøyesen's retirement savings, which is evident in Bøyesen's reluctance to give the apartment away for free. Over time some of the offices in the apartment were rented out to NGOs but the Ubuntu House has been on the verge of bankruptcy since its inception in December 2015. The temporal liminality is easily discernible in Holdt's answers to his wife, which also frame the mosque as one among other projects.

In the next scene, Khankan and Holdt are alone in the room and Khankan starts explaining how she intends to fit out the room as a mosque. Here the tension is again apparent as Khankan imagines the room as a mosque that can also be used for other purposes, whereas Holdt imagines a common room that can be used as a mosque among other functions:

Khankan: I would like to have Quran quotes on the walls and quotes from great female characters in Islamic and theological history. Could you imagine that?

Holdt: Yes [intoned with a bit of reluctance].

Khankan: Everywhere. Could you imagine that?

Holdt: That is one way of doing it [again intoned with a bit of reluctance].

Khankan: Quotes by Rabia al-Adawiyya.

Holdt: It is also possible to arrange it so that it only materializes on Fridays. There are many ways to do it so that it can also be used for other things.

With inspiration from an interior designer, Khankan dreamt of a mosque that was decorated as such. Khankan gave me a tour of the apartment on 2 June 2016 when she mentioned some of her ideas, while others emerged over the summer of 2016. On the back wall she wanted a mosaic of a mosque, bookcases on the side wall, and calligraphy above that. The room has a high ceiling making it suitable for that kind of decoration. Furthermore, she dreamt of wooden beams in the ceiling with drapery in between them and colorful Istanbul lamps hanging from the beams. The floor she wanted covered with oriental carpets, Moroccan cushions along the walls, and light embroidered curtains in the windows. She also emphasized that she would use flowers and candles to set the right atmosphere.

For Holdt the Mariam Mosque was an important project among other projects that the Ubuntu House was going to host, all extensions of his original engagement with racism in the US. By facilitating activism Holdt was trying to

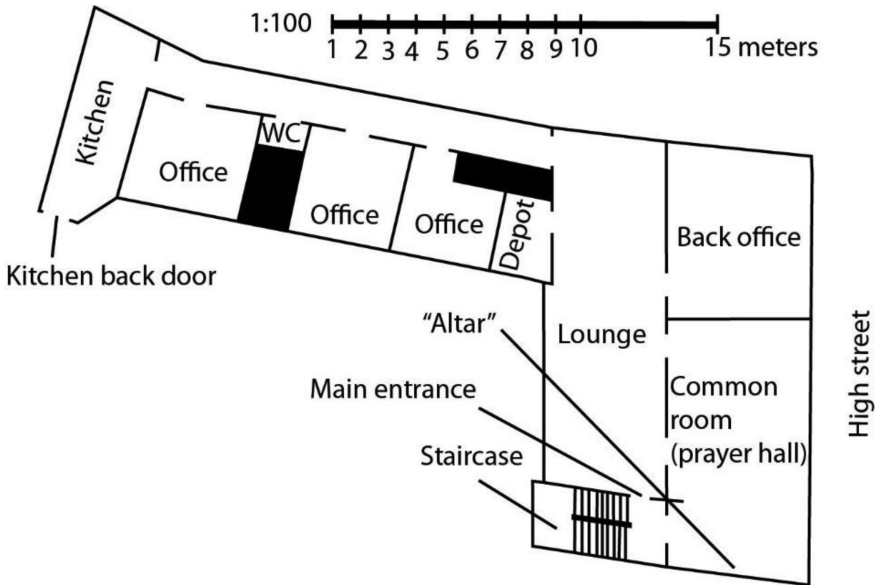


FIGURE 4 Layout of the apartment. There is only a single toilet in the apartment making on-site wudu almost impossible.

fight what he sees as rising European racism. He is not a Muslim; in fact, he comes from a family where the first-born son for many years has been named Jacob Holdt and educated as a priest. Holdt is the first-born but did not follow this life path (Holdt 2019). Instead, he has struggled against racism his whole life and the Mariam Mosque now plays a role in this struggle. His position is in many ways similar to Khankan's adoption of Kierkegaard's concept of neighbor love.

## 2 Building a Mosque for the First Time

On 5 August 2016, I was admitted to Femimam's internal Facebook forum which had existed since March 2015, and here I could follow the ongoing discussion between Khankan, Mouna, Yasmin, and Fetteh on how to transform the room. Most posts and comments revolved around fundraising and donations of books and carpets, and there was a bit of negotiation between Khankan and Holdt over the room's interior design, represented by Khankan's post of 5 August:

In relation to the mosque at Friday prayer, the style is going to be minimalistic because we have not yet received any donations. Red roses and plenty

of candlesticks. Bookcases with Islamic books. Saer has promised to ask in his network and I will ask Vandkunsten [a publisher]. Everyone is welcome to contribute books to the mosque. Everyone should bring things [to the mosque] which they think can give the room a personal atmosphere. [name of designer] will come in on Tuesday and give her suggestions on how to decorate.<sup>6</sup>

The day after, Holdt responded, “Wait a minute, where do you intend to place the bookcases? There has to be room for approximately 90 chairs for all the lectures that are going to be held ...” A few hours later Khankan replied, “Bookcases along the walls do not take up much space. We must have books in the mosque.” This is a typical example of the ongoing discussion between Khankan and Holdt over the interior design of the common room.

There are some basic things that most Muslims expect to find in a mosque like a *mihrab* signifying the direction of prayer, a *minbar* where the imam stands when he delivers the Friday sermon, minarets, a place to do *wudu* (ablutions), and a clock that displays the prayer times. The Mariam Mosque had none of the above at the opening. However, it should be noted that at the time only four out of Denmark’s approximately hundred and seventy mosques lived up to all these criteria, as it is common to house mosques in locations such as apartments and old industrial buildings (Kühle and Larsen 2017). In other words, while an apartment may not be understood as a mosque in some countries, it is not an uncommon location for a mosque in Denmark.

Over the summer, Holdt used the apartment for a range of workshops with Syrian refugees and in the weeks immediately prior to the opening of the mosque his son had booked the apartment, so it was not until 21 August, five days prior to the first Friday prayer, the transformation could begin. The mosque was set up over three days, 21, 22, and 25 August, and there is a clear pattern in my field notes indicating that Khankan wanted everyone to give the Mariam Mosque a personal touch of their own while it should also contain a library, carpets, new curtains, and calligraphy. Khankan donated two damasks and copies of her books and Fetteh donated a prayer rug and a few months later a few books, including her autobiography which was published in the fall (Fetteh 2016).

The common room is a very bright rectangle, 9 by 3.5 meters, and has a new thick white carpet. It faces the high street, which is easily audible: busking musicians often play the piano or violin, and most days, just before noon,

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6 Facebook: Female Imams—Komité, 5 August 2016.

the Royal Guard marches through the high street accompanied by music. The windows face northeast so during the summer months the room is very hot until the afternoon, but the noise from the street means that windows must remain closed during rituals such as Friday prayer and *nikah* ceremonies (marriage ceremonies). One of the volunteers pointed out that the musician who often plays beneath the windows arrives after the Royal Guard and he always plays the same song just before they call the *adhan* (call to prayer). In fact, I have quite a bit of violin playing on my interview recordings from the mosque.

When I arrived on 21 August, the first day of building, a professional designer and friend of Khankan was doing interior design on a budget and within the rules Holdt had laid down for the transformation. The side wall of the mosque would have shelves that protruded a mere 12 centimeters, enough for books to stand with their front covers facing the room yet sufficiently discreet for Holdt to accept them, and without taking up space on the floor. The designer had, furthermore, brought three thick pieces of hard foam board on which calligraphy could be written. By writing the calligraphy on boards, it could be taken off the walls after use.

The transformation of the prayer hall consisted of just four visual changes to the room: 1) bookshelves and a damask on the long wall opposite the windows; 2) a prayer rug on the floor indicating the position of the prayer leader and thereby the *qibla* (direction towards Mecca); 3) three rectangular pieces of thick white foam board with calligraphy, forming a sort of “qibla wall” that is 15 degrees off from the qibla; 4) candles and flowers on the windowsills and a sign on the door asking people to remove their shoes, thereby marking a clear border between the mosque and the rest of the apartment.

The following two sections contain an analysis of the three most significant visual changes to the common room. These are the installation of a library on the side wall (number 1) and the calligraphy and prayer rug (numbers 2 and 3). Both analyses start with a compositional analysis of how the objects were produced (Rose 2016: 56–84) followed by a study of how they changed over time and how individual members of the Mariam Mosque interpreted them. The analysis underlines how the meanings that were later attributed to the visual changes to the apartment (number 1–3) were not present at the time of their construction. This underlines the erasure of the serendipities involved in this process and how meaning was attributed after-the-fact.

### 3 The “Library”

As Khankan had encouraged everyone to donate something to the mosque, I brought two boxes of books I had written on feminism, one being on first





FIGURE 5 Khankan is holding up a damask she bought while in Damascus for her field studies in the Abu Nur Mosque (1999–2000). The damask was nailed to the wall in this location.

PHOTO TAKEN ON 21 AUGUST 2016. PHOTO BY MARIE SKOVGAARD

wave feminism in Egypt from the 19th century until Gamal Abdel Nasser took power, and the other called *Women in Medina: Imams, Scholars, and Warriors*, which is a presentation of selected female characters in Ibn Saad's *Tabaqat al-Kabir*, a famous encyclopedia of Mohammad's contemporaries (Petersen 2014, 2016). The latter is a short, inexpensive book, but as it contains a chapter on women, such as Umm Waraqa, Aisha, and Umm Salama, leading prayer, Khankan wanted to use it in her effort to inform the public about this chapter of Islamic history. As the Mariam Mosque ran out of the latter on the day of inauguration, I offered to donate further boxes of it as needed.

The publisher Vandkunsten decided to donate a complete collection of their book series, "The Carsten Niebuhr Library", which consists of 28 publications about the Middle East and Islam, so when the bookshelves were up, the books from Vandkunsten, Khankan's own books, and my two books were put on display in the mosque as decoration (see Figure 5). As most of the books for the mosque were donated by Vandkunsten they do not constitute a hand-picked selection. This demonstrates how Khankan's agency was constrained by the contextual materiality in that she wanted a library but the economic situation

of the Mariam Mosque meant that she could not hand-pick the relevant books as she would have liked. I therefore interpret the library as being primarily decorative and the starting point of a library that over time became better supplied with literature relevant to the mosque as individual members started to donate books.

It is also interesting to note that putting the books on display in the common room decorated it with pictures, which is atypical of mosques. However, as Torsten Janson and Jonas Otterbeck (2014: 79) point out, “In our icon driven society it is hard to keep pictures of living creatures [out of the mosque].” They give the example of emergency exit signs depicting a figure running out of a door, pictures of mosques in Mecca and Medina, T-shirts decorated with pictures, and the Levi’s jeans logo with two horses and two men; all common images that can permanently or temporarily be found in mosques. It could be added that the introduction of smart phones has considerably added to this development as people access the news, YouTube, and social media on these devices while in the mosque. Pictures in mosques are, in other words, common, but it is rare that they make up part of the interior design.

In an attempt to test what Gillian Rose (2016: 220–252) calls institutional ways of seeing—or the visuality dictated by strategic religion, to use this study’s terminology—I pushed Khankan a bit on her arrangements of books. By inquiring why the Quran was not situated on the top shelf in compliance with common practice among many Muslims, as my claim went, I brought the voice of strategic religion into this tactical space. Khankan immediately changed the position of the Quran, only to change it back again minutes later. This turned into a short debate in which it was first recognized that putting the Quran on the top shelf was a thing, but then it was decided that the Quran should be on the lower shelves so that it was within reach because that was the most important thing. Khankan applied the logic that I proposed when she subsequently asked what to do with her own books, but no one seemed to be bothered with this question and she therefore put them on the lowest shelf. During the day, the books moved around on the shelves, and before long my inquiry had been forgotten and books appeared at random again. The experiment demonstrates that neither Khankan nor the members restricted themselves to institutionalized ways of understanding the “correct” visuality of a mosque. I will return to this point in the next section on calligraphy and the prayer rug.

When the Mariam Mosque’s visuality had stabilized around January 2017 and it was more or less set up in the same way every time, I started to strike up interview conversations in which I would ask Fawzia, Rania, Mouna, Zaynab, Nabila, and Khankan to describe the mosque to me, followed by questions focusing on the library and the calligraphy. Zaynab and Nabila are religious

authorities who were recruited in the fall 2016 and are presented in Chapter 10. It was of course made clear to the members that this was part of my research, but I struck up the conversations on occasions when, by coincidence, I was one-on-one with the individual members. They were structured as Socratic interviews (Brinkman and Kvale 2015: 39–43) and I did not record them, since that would have given them an inquisitorial flavor and ruined the casual atmosphere.

When I asked members to describe the mosque to me, four made remarks about its not really looking like a mosque while at the same time being a mosque. This response seems to suggest that it is not the visual appearance of the space that made it a mosque; rather, the intentions and actions of mosque-doing converted the place into the practiced space of a mosque (Certeau 2011: 117). This conclusion is the same as in other European pop-up mosques (Petersen 2019b). While having a hard time putting a finger on what made it a mosque, everyone really liked the room and felt comfortable within it and understood it to be a mosque.

I then asked the members to focus on the library installation, which all but one described without noticing that there were pictures on the book covers. I then offered hints as to the direction of my inquiries until they either realized the presence of pictures themselves or I pointed it out. The realization took everyone by surprise and they were astonished that they had not seen it. At the same time, however, no one was really bothered by it, so I pointed out that the six volumes of the 1001 nights are decorated with a two-horned creature that is open to interpretation (see right-hand column in Figure 5). Everyone found the observation interesting and surprising but, once again, without being particularly bothered about it. These interviews did not start debates and I never heard anyone converse on the subject afterwards.

When I asked Khankan these questions on 29 March 2017, she first explained that the pictures were not a problem since they were cartoons, but when I pointed out that some were indeed photographs, she merely replied that she was not fussy about that sort of traditional rules. In my interview with Khankan, I also pointed to the oddities in the selection of books as, in addition to 1001 nights, the bookshelves contained works such as Carsten Niebuhr's travelogue, John Burton's *An Introduction to Hadith*, Patricia Crone's *God's Rule: Government and Islam*, and Michael Cook's *The Quran: A Very Short Introduction*. The latter three could for different reasons be categorized as orientalist while Cook and Crone are revisionists who have suggested an alternative account of Islam's origin that is hardly compatible with common Islamic historiography (Crone and Cook 1977). Khankan merely replied that the Mariam Mosque was an open-minded place and that the revisionist paradigm and orientalism are part of

Islamic studies and that there was no reason not to have books expressing these views in the mosque. As with the other informants, my inquiry did not result in any changes or further debates internally in the group.

Khankan and the other members of the Mariam Mosque do not apply traditional rules if they do not make sense to them. However, having pictures in the mosque was not a conscious choice; indeed, to some extent it happened because a wall needed decoration and a local publisher had made a donation many months earlier. In fact, this design was produced when Yasmin and Khankan met in the apartment on 22 August to go over some practical details and administrative work. At the end of this, Khankan started to unpack the boxes of books from Vandkunsten while Yasmin was finishing up, and Skovgaard has recorded the 20-minute scene of Khankan sorting the books according to topic and then organizing them on the shelves. The first books Khankan unpacks are the six volumes of 1001 nights, and after placing them on the shelves she remarks, "Okay maybe it is a bit dangerous with these men who are naked, with naked breasts"; she then decides to put them next to each other on the windowsill instead, thereby hiding the front covers. However, as the unpacking continues it becomes apparent that there are not enough books to fill the shelves and this, along with Khankan's plan to place flower and candles on the windowsills, was why 1001 nights ended up on the shelves.

A few minutes before Khankan leaves the apartment, Holdt walks in, seeing the transformation for the first time. Khankan holds the damask up against the wall and asks him what he thinks, and he jokingly replies, "It looks fine; we can always tear it down again", and laughs with Khankan. When Khankan adds that they would also like a copy of *American Pictures*, Holdt laughs again and says that his filthy literature, with its nudity, is not suitable in this context. His only serious objection to the library is that it does not contain sufficient material on interfaith dialogue and books from other religions. "Didn't you say that you were going to have some Jewish books?" he asks. Khankan and Holdt are on the same page but, as Khankan remarks, the Carsten Niebuhr Library contains no Jewish books. She intends to ask for a donation from a Jewish friend, wants to add a Bible herself, and remarks that one cannot be a Muslim without also believing in Judaism and Christianity. At this point, however, Khankan has to leave and the conversation ends.

The analysis of the library demonstrates that material constraints played an important role in the construction of a visually dominating part of the Mariam Mosque. The Socratic interviews have, furthermore, made it clear that the smaller components of this visuality are not saturated with meaning. Based on their intentions to do mosque, everyone understood the space as a mosque. When people were asked about the visual components, meaning was attributed

to them in the situation (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 101). That is, the individual components had the potential to be attributed with meaning in a number of ways, but attribution does not happen until a context within which an interpretation is needed presents itself; in this case, my asking questions. Whatever meaning these objects may be attributed with in the future, it was not present at the beginning and did not play a role in forming the objects. This is also the case with the calligraphy and the prayer rug but here serendipity played a much bigger role and as both, due to their location, could be understood as a mihrab, much confusion arose over their meaning.

#### 4 The Calligraphy and Prayer Rug

El-Jaichi knew a professional calligrapher who came to the apartment on 21 August to have a look at the job of decorating the Mariam Mosque. Upon seeing the three pieces of thick white foam board the designer had brought to the mosque, he suggested that the mosque should invest in plastic boards instead. Khankan thought boards decorated with gold paint would look nice, but upon hearing the price would be approximately 60 EUR per piece she resigned herself to the foam boards as the mosque did not have enough money to make the investment.

While waiting for El-Jaichi, Khankan suggested that two of the boards should say Mohammad and Allah in gold paint. The calligrapher explained that paint most likely would not stick to the glossy surface of the boards and that black marker would be the only option on the material and he then drew a few sketches in *thuluth* style, which is common in mosques. Khankan's acceptance of this compromise demonstrates the tension between her agency and the material conditions. That is, she was restricted by a number of factors, both the rules laid down by Holdt but also the economic constraints determining the calligraphy that could be produced.

Having decided what to put on two of the boards, one remained, and this put pressure on Khankan to find a quote that would become the only piece of scriptural decoration in the mosque. She suggested that it could be Quranic, from a great Islamic thinker, or "maybe we should take a quote by the prophet about women; where the prophet has said something about women. Can we think about it? [Yasmin], please ask Saer [El-Jaichi]." When El-Jaichi arrived he decisively said that it should be Quranic, later commending Khankan for suggesting the Quran 49:13. However, the calligrapher ran out of space when writing the quote, meaning that one of its four lines is written on the back of the board. This is a pure coincidence or miscalculation but, as it costs money to correct, Khankan accepted the board as it was.



FIGURE 6 From the left, Fetteh, Khankan, and Mouna answering questions at the press conference held in the evening of the first Friday prayer on 26 August 2016. The boards with calligraphy are on the back wall. Notice that the positioning of the boards differs significantly from Figure 7 where they are situated on what I have defined as the “altar”.

On the day before the prayer, a seemingly insignificant discussion on how to hang the boards on the wall took place. Some wanted to hang the boards from the ceiling on chains or strings, making them easy to set up and remove again, while others preferred sticky tack due to the high ceiling and the visibility of the chains. The discussion went on for a while and included a few other suggestions. Some argued that sticky tack would not be sufficient to keep the boards on the wall for a whole day, and that it would be embarrassing if a board should detach during prayer. In the end the group decided on sticky tack as they ran out of time and there was a bookshop around the corner.

A month later, on 23 September, when the Mariam Mosque was set up for the second time, the sticky tack could not be reused so it was decided to put the calligraphy boards on a table leaning against the wall. The table was decorated with one of Khankan's damasks, which was originally supposed to decorate a wall in the mosque but it looked good on the table. This was how the boards were arranged for the subsequent ten Friday prayers in my sample (October 2016 to July 2017). Due to the similarity between an altar and the table, which



FIGURE 7 The “altar” with two Qurans in the middle and candles on either side. The red carpet was donated to the mosque by one of Khankan’s friends in November 2016 while Holdt donated the other carpet which is out of the frame. This placement of Allah to the right of Mohammad is the conventional way of decorating a mosque, but if compared with Figure 6, which is just one among many examples of the opposite, it emerges that this appears at random in the Mariam Mosque. This is another indication that members of the Mariam Mosque are not particularly concerned with researching and copying tradition in every detail.

was often decorated with a book in the middle and candles on either side, I have defined it as the “altar” with quotation marks (Femimam members would merely refer to it as a table).

It was not part of the design to install an “altar”, and it only came about due to the decision to use sticky tack at the first Friday prayer and the lack of sticky tack at the second. The decoration of the “altar” changes from prayer to prayer, but usually contains a candlestick or two, sometimes flowers, rosaries (*masbaha* and *tasbeih*), and a Quran. At one Friday prayer the “altar” was decorated with an Arabic Quran, which could have had special significance, so I asked around among the members about the book placed on the table and why it had been chosen, but no one seemed to have taken much notice of it and did not know. It was just a decorated table that had the practical function of supporting the calligraphy boards. Interestingly, interviewees who did not know Arabic

did not know what verse was on the middle board, meaning that they could not have ascribed any specific meaning to Khankan's choice, neither could they see that part of the verse was missing.

Some members of the mosque came to understand the table as a mihrab even though, as can be seen by comparing the prayer rug and "altar" in Figure 7, it is off the qibla. Nonetheless, it draws attention and stands somewhat in the direction of prayer and it is difficult to attribute it with another meaning. Meanwhile, the prayer rug could be understood as having the same function as it is always oriented towards Mecca.

As with the library, no one could explain what this visual object was. Some said it was a mihrab, but then changed their minds, or vice versa, and some agreed that it looked like an "altar". Khankan got upset when I said this and immediately pointed out to me that it was a mihrab. It signifies the direction of the prayer and that is what a mihrab is supposed to do. When I pushed the visual dissonance between the "altar" and a traditional mihrab, she explained that she did not care much about superficial expression; ultimately, a mihrab is just something that directs attention towards Mecca and that is what this mihrab does. Furthermore, the three boards also made it obvious that this was not an "altar".

However, Khankan was not committed to the symbol for practical reasons. There was already stearin on the damask and on the boards, so it would probably be better to put them back on the wall, she said. The conversation about the table-mihrab ended with her asking me if I knew how to get stearin off a damask and whether I thought it would look nice on the wall. At the next meeting with volunteers two days later she emphasized that the mosque needed a solution to the problem with the calligraphy boards, and a new volunteer was made responsible for framing them and installing chains on which the boards could hang. As this never happened, the "altar" was set up again a month later for subsequent prayers. On 1 July 2017 the "altar" became the cover photo of the Mariam Mosque's Facebook page, which it still is to date (in August 2020).

In relation to both the library and the "altar", meaning was produced in the interview situation. This meaning did not exist before the interviews, and this is an important point, as it demonstrates how the visibility is capable of being attributed with meaning, rather than being saturated with meaning beforehand (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 101). It is produced in the course of activity in which the objects are either used or talked about, and the prayer rug was the only object that everyone could define clearly. This also demonstrates, as with the library, that whatever meaning was bestowed upon the "altar", this was neither present at the beginning, nor has it guided the production of it.





FIGURE 8 The common room on Holdt's 70th birthday (see Figure 8). Note that the carpets and the damask are present when the room has another function than as a mosque.

One of the six informants, in a conversation with Khankan shortly before my interviews on the library, problematized the fact that there was no mihrab in the mosque; she said that there should at least be a clear indication of the qibla. Khankan replied that she had not thought about this, but she was open to suggestions. A few days later, during the interview with the woman who complained, I pointed out that the prayer rug did indeed indicate the qibla, and she expanded on the critique. She did not like the table as it blocked the direction of prayer, and she added that a mihrab had to be permanent and, while a prayer rug would do for now, a permanent mihrab should be a priority. She liked the calligraphy, but she said that it should not be situated where the mihrab ought to be positioned. The interviewee said, like Khankan, that a mihrab orientates the whole room and marks where Muslims should direct their acts of worship, and therefore a mosque cannot be without a mihrab.

The interviewee confronted Khankan with her views at a later date, insisting that the table should be removed and the calligraphy boards relocated, and that the mosque should invest in some clear markers of the qibla. This was both due to her original insistence that such a symbolic presence was needed, but also because she, and a few others, were frustrated with Christians

who came to Friday prayer and kept orienting their prayers towards the table and not towards Mecca.

The Mariam Mosque acquired carpets in November 2016 and, as there was an offer on dark green Moroccan cushions in a local chain of supermarkets these were acquired in February 2017. Thus, as time went by the mosque became more permanent and that is what caused the conflict that led to the notice which was quoted at the beginning of the chapter. Holdt's use of the apartment also interfered with the mosque space as he, for example, decorated the whole apartment with a selection of his *American Pictures* for his 70th birthday (see Figure 8). The common room was mainly decorated with pictures of religion, but pictures containing nudity were hung in the corridor and ended up being a permanent installation—even on days when the apartment was a mosque. Likewise, other occupants of the room sometimes used it for purposes that were hardly compatible with the sacred nature of the space and Femimam members found it troublesome on a few occasions when these events were published online via social media.

## 5 A Typical Friday in the Mariam Mosque

At Friday prayers the congregation uses three rooms in the apartment: the lounge, the common room, and the back office (see Figure 4 for reference). Before the Mariam Mosque acquired carpets as a donation in November 2016, the white carpet in the common room was thoroughly vacuumed before every Friday prayer. The first congregants show up around noon and mingle in the lounge until the adhan is called and people move into the prayer hall (common room). After the Friday prayer, congregants move to the lounge again and many stick around for hours. Some may even stay until *maghreb* prayer and the subsequent *dhikr* (Sufi ritual) session after sunset. The lounge is the social epicenter of the mosque and some women who cannot make it to the Friday prayer sometimes arrive in the afternoon just to take part in the social activity in it. In other words, the lounge makes the Friday a social event in addition to a religious ritual. Men are allowed in after the Friday prayer, so the gender composition of the space also changes slightly.

As the time span between Friday prayer and maghreb prayer is long in the summer, some go out to eat and come back later. Although the prayer room is typically open the whole day, the *asr* prayer is not part of the official program and if anyone performs it, they usually do so on their own. Similarly, the *'isha* prayer after *dhikr* is rarely, if ever, observed in the Mariam Mosque. The time after Friday prayer is, in other words, primarily a time for socializing.



FIGURE 9 The lounge photographed standing with the back against the front door. The door to the back office is located between the large green plant and the red sofa.

Khankan is typically very busy between the Friday prayer and the *maghreb* prayer as she gives spiritual care and, until December 2016 when the Mariam Mosque introduced a complete media ban on Fridays, she also occasionally gave interviews. This is all performed in the back office, which also functions as a backstage for members of the Mariam Mosque (Goffman 1959/1990). People who are not volunteers in the Mariam Mosque typically only enter on invitation. This comes very naturally since the room is a bit secluded while having access to the lounge, meaning that backstage and frontstage are only separated by a door.

Khankan has encouraged other leading members of the mosque also to give spiritual care but, as it has been difficult to find a location for these conversations, it has never become an established practice. At times they have used the kitchen or the prayer hall, but conversations in those locations have often ended up being repeatedly interrupted, which meant that they eventually stopped using these. The layout of the mosque has, in other words, had an effect on the role of leading members of Femimam who could not do independent spiritual care because of the lack of available rooms.

## 6 Online Creation of Offline Spaces

Online communication plays an important role in pop-up mosques as people need to know when—and sometimes also where—the mosque will pop up. I define posts that contain this information as *social media adhans*, or SoMe adhans for short (Petersen 2019b). The SoMe adhan calls people to prayer and is a substitute for the sound adhan that can be heard in many Muslim majority countries. Rather than being soundwaves traveling through air, the SoMe adhan is transmitted through digital communication technology and appears as text on a screen.

The Mariam Mosque sends out a SoMe adhan on Facebook approximately a week in advance of Friday prayer. Due to inadequate washing facilities, the adhan instructs congregants to arrive in wudu (having done their ablutions beforehand), informs people that it is women-only prayer, and sometimes it introduces the *khatiba* (preacher) and the theme of her sermon. It is interesting to notice how the SoMe adhan, like the traditional adhan, has the function of calling people to the mosque, whereas the traditional adhan in Denmark is only called within the mosque as part of the ritual practice of the Friday prayer. In other words, the traditional adhan has become part of the ritual that takes place within the parameters of the mosque due to regulation of sound in the public sphere whereas the SoMe adhan has taken over the function of calling people to the mosque.

An adhan online can take many forms. Juliane Hammer (2012: 13–55), for example, demonstrates how the call to Amina Wadud's prayer in New York in 2005, before the widespread use of social media, was disseminated via webpages and email. However, the algorithm for how SoMe spread content online is different and continuously subject to change, as is SoMe users' adaptation to new online spaces.

Currently the SoMe adhan on Facebook spreads as users interact with it, a spread that is oriented towards users' friends. I therefore call these users SoMe *muezzins* (the one who calls to prayer). However, it should be noted that any kind of reaction will spread the SoMe adhan, so even users who strongly dislike the adhan will spread it to their network, and the same goes for politically engaged users who may spread the adhan by inserting it in a political debate (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013). Interestingly, if volunteers in the Mariam Mosque spread a SoMe adhan it makes their position on and involvement in the mosque visible to others. This was a reoccurring topic at meetings in the Mariam Mosque, because most of the volunteers did not want to be associated with the mosque online, or in public as some called it. They wanted to do their prayer in the mosque and be part of a religious community, but they did not want to become activists for a cause.

The consequence of only a few Muslim women engaging with the SoMe adhan from the Mariam Mosque was that it did not spread among the mosque's target audience. This is a common problem for women's mosques in Europe (Petersen 2019b). Halima, one of the young volunteers mentioned in Chapter 5, for example, learned about the Mariam Mosque through its SoMe adhan on Facebook, but only because it was used as an argument for the peaceful nature of Islam in a heated political debate.

Mouna bought advertising space on Facebook that ran for a week in Copenhagen, Odense, Aarhus, and Aalborg, hoping to increase the attendance at Friday prayer. This demonstrates a key difference between online and offline adhans: while the first travel through the air from where they are called, algorithms determine how an adhan spreads on social media, or targeting as in the case with Mariam Mosque's sponsored SoMe adhan. By paying for advertising, Mouna was able target the SoMe adhan so it would only be "audible" to young Muslim women, although it requires specialized skills to do so specific targeting as Muslims are not a category offered by Facebook; Mouna did what he could. His "calling" the SoMe adhan in four major cities hundreds of kilometers apart indicates that, in Mouna's mind, the Mariam Mosque was not a local community mosque; it was something he expected women might travel a long distance to attend.

The interactive basis of web 2.0 means that a SoMe adhan does not constitute broadcasting or one-way communication, which would be the equivalent of the traditional adhan. This means that SoMe users can comment on the SoMe adhan and open up a dialogue with not just the muezzins but also the Mariam Mosque. In the comments below the SoMe adhan Muslims may question the legitimacy of an event, ask about practical details, or come up with suggestions. Some users have, for example, suggested that the Friday prayer be held in the evening after work hours, which is also a debate that has been had at a meeting in the Mariam Mosque where some members suggested either doing two prayers with the same khutbah or moving the Friday prayer to after-work hours. Neither ideas were implemented.

Google Maps also play an interesting role for the mosque, because it provides it a degree of permanence. In the fall of 2017, a tech-savvy member of the Mariam Mosque registered the mosque on Google Maps so that it was marked as such. Although it was not intended, this meant that Muslims started to come to the apartment for their daily prayers when the Mariam Mosque was not assembled. This included Muslims who most likely would not have visited the apartment if they knew that the Mariam Mosque held women-led Friday prayer. That is, Google Maps produced the space as a regular mosque or a prayer room, not as the Mariam Mosque. In the reviews of the mosque

one can read that some users think it is a religious school while others give directions to the common room.

Interestingly, other users of the apartment would point out the common room as the mosque if it were not occupied by other users. Without the knowledge that this was a pop-up mosque, Muslim men would then perform their prayer, or do mosque, in the common room, thereby creating the space themselves. That is, based on their assumptions they would create a mosque space for the duration of their prayer, but this mosque space is very different from the Mariam Mosque.

As other users of the apartment grew tired of having to let strangers in and explain where the mosque was, it was decided to take it off Google Maps. Therefore, the Mariam Mosque again only existed as a space one Friday a month when it pops up, and as a network of people and physical objects stored in between pop ups.

## 7 Instituting a Pop-Up Practice

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the pop-up mosque space is produced by congregants engaged in mosque-doing. The ambiguity of the visuality of the Mariam Mosque is no hindrance to the creation of this mosque space. I have demonstrated this with an analysis of the “altar”, which many congregants decoded as a mihrab, and those who disagreed with this specific reading still saw it as a form of mosque decor. This—and other examples—furthermore demonstrate that the meanings congregants attributed to objects were not present when the objects were produced. That is, Mariam Mosque leaders, volunteers, and congregants rationalized the serendipitous production of visual markers of the mosque space after-the-fact, and thus, without knowing it they erased the objects’ actual production, and the serendipities involved.

Spaces are also constructed using narratives, and the chapter demonstrates how the narrative of the Mariam Mosque is entangled with other narratives such as Jacob Holdt’s. The chapter has also argued that in addition to the temporary presence of objects a mosque is made up of social relations and activity (mosque-doing). These two characteristics are the focus of Chapter 10.

## The First Mariam Mosque

In God's name, Most Gracious, Most Merciful  
Assalamu Aleikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatuhu  
Woman, come to prayer  
Come to unity  
Come with peace  
Come whoever you are, and wherever you come from ...<sup>1</sup>  
"Come, come, even if you have broken your vows a thousand times  
come yet again, because our community is not a place for hopelessness.  
Come, come again"  
(Rumi, paraphrased)

The Mariam Mosque is proud to present and invite women locally and abroad to Scandinavia's first Friday prayer for women, led by one of the mosque's female imamahs, Saliha Marie Fetteh.

The first lines of the Mariam Mosque's SoMe adhan published on Facebook,  
7 August 2016, English version of the post

On 7 August 2016, Khankan published a SoMe *adhan* (call to prayer on social media) on her own Facebook wall and that of the Mariam Mosque. It is two pages long and states that any "woman, regardless of her faith is welcome to join our Friday prayer" and explains that media "will not be allowed to join us during Friday prayers". Furthermore, the Mariam Mosque is framed as an initiative under Femimam that "offer[s] Friday prayers every second month until the mosque has recruited a team of female imams, who systematically can lead prayers every Friday".

Within just two months a whole mosque community formed, with several women who could both deliver the Friday sermon and lead the Friday prayer. As the Mariam Mosque is a pop-up mosque, it first and foremost exists as a network of Muslims, and because of an extensive and sudden change in these networks, I have conceptualized it as comprising a first and second Mariam Mosque. The first formed in the two months directly after the inauguration and collapsed at a meeting on 4 July 2017 when everyone, including Mouna, aban-

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<sup>1</sup> The text is not abbreviated. The three dots appear in the original.

done it, leaving Khankan as more or less the only member.<sup>2</sup> Khankan then recruited a new team that I have defined as the second Mariam Mosque.

The chapter is written in a way that may seem unstructured and chaotic; this reflects the process described. It is a strategy employed to emphasize the unpredictability of the social process and to avoid after-rationalizing it as a trajectory. When the world is observed during fieldwork it appears unpatterned, unplotted, unpredictable, and full of serendipities. By including variables that augment unpredictability my description offers greater explanatory power for understanding the past as it avoids erasing the prospect, present in every moment of social processes (MacIntyre 1981/2014). If unpredictability is not considered, theory may distort a chain of events by suppressing unfulfilled moments and dead ends that often leave no trace, thereby presenting the successful as predictable and planned.

My fieldnotes are full of descriptions of unrealized moments that could have impacted the course of the Mariam Mosque, but they didn't—not because anyone took a conscious decision, but because of serendipities. Femimam, for example, secured funding for a conference to be held with prominent speakers such as Amina Wadud and Halima Krausen who had themselves led mixed gender prayer but, as the Mariam Mosque collapsed, this was never realized. Likewise, a group of women from Denmark's second largest city asked whether they could open a branch of the Mariam Mosque, but this also never happened, nor was an offer followed up from an Azhari scholar, among others, who came to the mosque and wanted to help with the religious legitimization of inter-religious *nikah* (Islamic marriage) between Muslim women and non-Muslim men.

The first four sections of this chapter explain how the Mariam Mosque emerged, but they do so with a focus on highlighting the intersection between the predictable and the unpredictable. Some passages are merely written in a way that makes the intersection clearly visible while other passages are explicitly analyzed. There is an abundance of unrealized moments and dead ends in my data, of which I have mentioned just a few in earlier chapters, one being the challenge of finding a good tactical position in relation to the LGBTQ-cause. Section Four in this chapter returns to this analysis. I have chosen this case as it lies at the mentioned intersection: it is both predictable and unpredictable. The theoretical model I have used in preceding chapters predicts that, by coming into existence on the geopolitical scene, the Mariam Mosque will be categorized as either good or bad, and that this is mainly determined by a

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2 Rania and Fawzia eventually decided to stay.



non-Muslim majority that tests it on a number of topics such as its stance on the LGBTQ-question. Assessment of the position taken on the LGBTQ-struggle is one way among many to perform this test and, as demonstrated in Chapter 7, Femimam members also predicted that this issue would have a significant impact on the mosque. In other words, the serendipitous events that played out after the opening of the Mariam Mosque were predictable in the sense that it was very probable that something would happen in this locus, but what this something would be, when it would happen, and its exact details could not be predicted.

The chapter's four seemingly unstructured and disorganized sections are tied together by a chronological progression that somewhat disguises the abrupt changes in focus, thereby making the text more readable and less chaotic. While the sections focus on the unpredictable, they also question the idea of an official, agreed-upon narrative about the start of the Mariam Mosque by focusing on how narratives are produced. This is important as multiple narratives were produced within different discursivities playing out simultaneously, but not all were recorded. And almost all "recording" devices in the form of journalists were "situated" within the same discursivity (the geopolitical scene). On this micro level, the production of narratives and the production of small units of meaning become hard to distinguish, but the analysis demonstrates how the small pieces of data that are later identified as patterns emerge, while highlighting the absence of a pattern in the moment the data are produced.

This is followed up with a discussion in Section five on the linguistic frame where I also use a few comparative cases to highlight differences and similarities. The sixth section is an analysis of the Mariam Mosque as such, through a case study of a crisis in the mosque which indirectly led to its collapse, analyzed in the final section.

The chapter is based on my field diary, Femimam's private Facebook group, video recordings from Skovgaard, and work in two media archives, Infomedia and Mediestream, covering print media, radio, and television in Denmark. To be as attentive to details as possible and to explore patterns that I myself may not have been aware of when writing it, I have performed an initial cycle of open coding on my field diary and the three hours and five minutes of Skovgaard's video recordings on 25 and 26 August (Saldana 2016). I followed the first coding cycle with a second cycle in which I drew a timeline of events and reduced the complexity of the code by merging nodes to prepare the data for analysis. When constructing the timeline, I both recorded the trajectory as it appears in retrospect and included dead ends as they appear in real time (prospension), such as ideas that were temporarily pursued but then abandoned. I have merely used the remaining video archive supplied by Skovgaard

for reference and, when possible, to support my field notes. As in Chapter 6, I will be switching back and forth between present and past tense to control the level of detail in descriptions and the pace of narration (see note 1, page 82).

## 1 Getting the Ritual Just Right

Khankan had on several occasions stressed that she did not want media in the mosque for the Friday prayer on 26 August 2016 as this would be an invasion of the sacred space. Meanwhile, when Holdt's media advisor heard about the prayer she strongly recommended that it should be postponed until after the premiere of Holdt's new movie in September. The two factors resulted in a media tactic that Khankan presented to the private Facebook group on 6 August 2016, which read as follows, "We have sent out invitations for the first Friday prayer on 26 August and it is NOT for media; it is ONLY for Muslims and others who want to take part in the prayer. The official opening for media and others can take place in September as Jacob proposes."<sup>3</sup> However, this strategy failed in two ways. Firstly, either a significant number of journalists considered themselves "others who want to take part in the prayer" or else special deals were offered to a significant number of them; and secondly, due to the high number of media requests, the official opening in September became a press conference held in the apartment at 4 PM on 26 August.

Holdt voiced his concern about this tactic because the lounge is decorated with patchworks that are easily recognizable and would make it apparent that he is the secret donor, and he was worried that journalists would turn up incognito and report on their experience without permission. He turned out to be right about how the mosque was covered, but it seems from the reportage that access may have been negotiated by some journalists. As reported by a journalist from *Berlingske*, "To protect the guests at the prayer, the mosque has asked the press not to turn up. However, *Berlingske* has exclusively gotten permission to participate but promised not to take notes, not to photograph, and not to interview guests in the mosque" (Gottschalck 2016). However, other reports suggest that this exclusive deal was offered to many individual journalists, with a journalist from *Kristeligt Dagblad* noting, "The event has created international attention, and present at the prayer was also journalists from the *Guardian* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. However, as a sign of respect for the attendees they were not allowed to take notes, record, photo-

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3 Caps are in the original.

graph, or interview before all participants had left" (Hansen 2016). I entered the mosque shortly after the prayer and was interviewed in the prayer hall minutes later. I also observed that a few congregants were asked for interviews. This scene is important to further developments because special deals with journalists played a significant role in the collapse of the mosque, but I am getting ahead of myself. The following descripts are drawn from fieldnotes supported by Skovgaard's recordings on the final days leading up to the first Friday prayer.

On 25 August, while Mouna and Yasmin are setting up the mosque, Khankan and Fetteh are occupied with the ritual. To help them with this a member of Forum for Critical Muslims has asked two Islamic theologians educated in the Middle East to visit the mosque and assist in getting the ritual just right. The legitimacy of the event is assumed and therefore not discussed at this meeting. Most conversations revolve around topics such as whether *dua* (supplication prayer) should be in Danish or Arabic, the structure of the ritual, and minor details that the theologians considered important such as the *khatiba* saying *qad qamatis-salah* at the end of *iqama* (such as the preacher saying *prayer is to be performed* at the end of *the call to get ready for prayer*).

Fetteh mentions the audience, saying, "I am thinking about the people tomorrow; half of them are going to be Danes and they are not Muslims and we have to think about how they will understand what we are saying, and that is why I do not want to make this *dua* in Arabic ..." The question of language remains unresolved, but Fetteh's prediction about the composition of the congregation later turned out to be somewhat accurate. The conversation continues. Khankan is a bit insecure about her adhan, but after the two theologians have listened to it, they assure her that it is good enough and stress that there is not just one correct way of doing it. Khankan pursues the topic with rigor, however, and receives some instruction on how to follow a style that is close to the way she already calls the adhan. Although she has a very distinctive way of singing, rather than reciting, surat al-Fatiha, it is important to her that the mosque sound Islamically correct on its opening. Discussions of the formal requirements for the Friday prayer continue for at least an hour, and when the two theologians have left, Khankan starts practicing her adhan using YouTube as a reference point, as advised by the two theologians, while Fetteh, who came to the mosque with an idea for a *khutbah* (Friday sermon), starts putting it into writing.

Throughout the day, Khankan can be heard practicing the adhan again and again, but as the day turns to afternoon, the music from the street intensifies to a degree that causes concern within the group. From time to time members remark that they hope it will not pick up tomorrow during Friday prayer.

Everyone is now in the prayer hall. Mouna and Yasmin are putting up the curtains while Fetteh and Khankan continue the discussion about the ritual. There are many details that are unresolved; Fetteh, for example, is uncertain about what to say aloud and what to say to herself while leading the prayer. These discussions go on for a while and Fetteh remarks that she has not attended a Friday prayer since 2012 and therefore is a bit uncertain about the correct performance; she has, therefore, brought a ritual handbook to use for reference, and they both browse through some of the instructions. As they go back to practicing, Fetteh finds her prayer rug to rehearse and places it in front of Khankan's damask on the wall under the assumption that the damask is a mihrab (see Figure 5). Seeing this, Khankan quickly intervenes and places the carpet in the right direction. This event demonstrates how the room's semiotic resources could be read in a different way to the readings presented in Chapter 9.

In the evening Fetteh rehearses her khutbah, with Khankan, Mouna, and Yasmin as audience. It is structured around the topic of reviving Muslim women's history and is rich both in number and variety of examples. Asked for her opinion Yasmin remarks, "I think there were many good elements in [your khutbah]. However, I do not know why, but I felt it was a bit aggressive at times." While this conversation continues Mouna reads through the khutbah and finds an example, "See this part where you say that the time when women's most important role is to give birth, take care of the home, and please her husband, is over? I understand what you mean, but we have to respect the women who choose to be housewives." Yasmin is happy with this example and replies, "Yes, exactly"; then Fetteh rephrases it to make space for housewives. A similar discussion emerges over the interpretation of the Quran 4.34 when Fetteh and Khankan disagree on how to translate and interpret the verse. However, this problem is resolved by Fetteh's making a slight adjustment to her translation and an agreement is reached that Fetteh and Khankan will present two different interpretations in their khutbah and opening speech respectively.

The geopolitical scene also emerges in the discussions. This becomes most apparent when everyone reacts to Fetteh's inclusion of a hadith from Sahih al-Bukhari, which she interprets for the others: "unfortunately women are often their own worst enemies, and maybe that is why our prophet said, 'I looked in paradise and saw that the majority of inhabitants were poor people and I looked in hell and saw that the majority of inhabitants were women.'" A little later, when the khutbah is under discussion, Mouna remarks, "I am wondering about that one with al-Bukhari; is that a good one to include?" However, it seems that Fetteh finds some truth in it when it is applied to their situation and thinks it important to include due to non-Muslim Islamic authorities' expectations:

Fetteh: It is actually good to include ... if I am being completely honest, the people who have been most evil to Sherin on Facebook are all those [pause] I should not say that word.

Mouna: I really do not like it.

Fetteh: But we cannot get around talking about those hadith compilations at some point ...

Mouna: I have read al-Bukhari and it was hard to get through because of some of the things that it says. Do you really think it is good to include, if you are being perfectly honest?

Fetteh: Other mosques are always accused of sweeping it under the carpet. They manipulate the words, and they deny that there is any misogynist content in the texts. Of course, there is; the texts are from the seventh and eighth centuries. It would be stranger if there was no [misogyny in them], right.

Mouna: But would it be possible to make it more joke-like then? You know like typical Saliha [humor]; because I do not think we should legitimize him [al-Bukhari] being like that.

Khankan: I think we should take it out. Couldn't we take another one?

Mouna [turning to Khankan]: Do you know it [al-Bukhari]? Have you read it? [Khankan: "no"]. It is completely fucked up [*helt fucked*],<sup>4</sup> you know

...

Khankan: Couldn't we include some sentences about the prophet and what he has said?

Fetteh is trying to disarm the accusations that are commonly leveled against mosques on the geopolitical scene—especially by non-Muslim Islamic authorities—and her tactic is to talk about hadith and text passages such as the Quran 4:34 and al-Bukhari instead of ignoring them. She wants to take the bull by the horns and indirectly frame herself as a good Muslim instead of having to go through the unpleasant inquisitorial process that she has repeatedly experienced in the media and on Facebook from non-Muslim Islamic authorities. Mouna, Yasmin, and Khankan see no need to do this, since this kind of hadith, although it may be part of some non-Muslims' Islam, it is not part of their Islam.

Interestingly, at no point is it discussed whether the hadith is reliable or not; all the discussion focuses on what the khutbah should express, and the hadith is solely discussed as a semiotic resource and a way of expressing a meaning,

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4 Swear words like these are so integrated in spoken Danish that to swear in this context is not considered strange.

nothing else. Nonetheless, Mouna and Khankan are indirectly contesting that Mohammad ever said this, Khankan by suggesting that Fetteh should find a quote by Mohammad instead and Mouna by calling Sahih al-Bukhari “completely fucked up”. Their arguments are focused on the dissonance between their own values and the content (*matn*) of the hadith, and Fetteh tries to come to terms with this by applying it in a specific context. This is a clear example of embodied exegesis. It receives another layer of complexity when Mouna suggests the hadith be used as part of a joke, as this allows for an interpretation that merely takes the hadith half seriously, rendering it only somewhat reliable. However, he is not happy with the inclusion of al-Bukhari even as a joke:

Mouna: Isn't it [the joke] crazy to say though?

Fetteh: I think some women are bitches sometimes to be honest, sorry to say.

Mouna: Sure.

Yasmin: I think it is a bit too aggressive.

Fetteh: But it can be said as a joke ...

Khankan: Couldn't we replace it with another hadith?

The focus on “disarming” the hadith is not caused by individual members of the Mariam Mosque’s feeling a cognitive dissonance in relation to its existence. Everyone is on the same page in terms of the irrelevance of this and similar hadiths; their embodied exegesis does not allow for such source texts to be taken at face value. It is the geopolitical scene that produces an external demand for interpretation of this hadith, one that manifests itself on Facebook, for example, where some non-Muslim Islamic authorities use hadiths to produce a radical Islam, and then expect Muslims to dissociate themselves from it or in other ways relate to it by entering theological discussions on the veracity of the non-Muslim Islamic authorities’ exegesis:

Fetteh: The threads [on Facebook] clearly demonstrate that Danes read those hadith.

Mouna: They sure do. There are many who refer to them.

Fetteh: And they say, “Why don't you use that one? Why don't you take that one? Why do you reject that one?” And I am never going to deny [the existence of] these [hadith].

Mouna: I know what you mean, but then just make it very clear that it is a joke.

Fetteh: I promise that I will make it humorous.

This is the end of the discussion, but it is interesting to note that non-Muslim Islamic authorities play an important role in selection of religious content for the khutbah, and that interpretation is primarily guided by the power asymmetry on the geopolitical scene. The scene described above clearly demonstrates that non-Muslim Islamic authorities influence Muslim production of Islam, and as such they become co-producers of Danish Islam. Just to be clear, I claim that non-Muslims are a source of Islam—as is the Quran, hadiths, tradition etc.—when the production is analyzed from an anthropological perspective. That is, Islam may emerge as—and be grounded in—opposition to non-Muslim Islam.

Ultimately, although Fetteh did not remove the hadith from her khutbah, the way she frames it alters it from a reliable hadith about a segment of Muslim women to a joke, rendering its reliability ambiguous. A *muhaddith* (a traditional scholar of hadith) would have found it necessary to analyze the *isnad* (the chain of transmission), but that is not what is important here. The interpretation is oriented towards emancipation from the power asymmetry between the Muslim minority and a segment of the non-Muslim majority, not *usul al-hadith* (hadith studies).

When everyone has provided their feedback, Khankan rehearses her opening speech and it appears that she also expects a significant number of non-Muslims in the mosque, needing an explanation of what al-Fatiha is:

*Assalamu aleikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu.* A thousand times thank you for being here today. It is so nice to see that there are so many who have turned up—both Muslims and non-Muslims. I will start by reciting sura al-Fatiha, which is the opening sura in the Quran.

Like Fetteh, she gets feedback on her talk before they both leave for TV2 News where Khankan is pre-recording an interview with a news anchor to be used the following day. There has been intense interest in the opening of the mosque. Khankan is fully booked at different TV and radio programs the next morning so some interviews must be pre-recorded.

Khankan's and Fetteh's discussion on how to perform the ritual correctly continues even after they leave the mosque and, close to midnight while waiting for her interview, Khankan calls El-Jaichi to go over the ritual one last time. This means that some of the decisions taken earlier are reversed but Fetteh remarks, "I just need to get some sleep, then I will get it under control."

## 2 Inaugurating the Mariam Mosque

The next morning, Khankan, Fetteh, and I—though to a lesser degree—started the day giving interviews to radio and tv. Both Khankan and Fetteh were tired as they had only slept four hours, which caused many small mistakes. Khankan, for example, repeatedly explained that the Mariam Mosque was named after Mary, who is the only woman mentioned in the Quran by name and has a sura named after her, while also adding that Mary is an important character in all three Abrahamic religions, a symbolism that probably occurred to her in the moment as it worked very well in terms of the message about inclusiveness and therefore had a certain aesthetic to it. However, it is obviously incorrect; Mary plays no role in Judaism, and I have never before or since heard Khankan make this claim as she is very well versed on these matters. However, it demonstrates how a core part of a narrative, such as the thought behind the naming of the mosque, may be improvised as a gesture of inclusion. Unfortunately, I did even worse.

I was, likewise, very tired, and, as by far the least experienced in handling media, I played a part in producing a bomb threat against the mosque on live television when a journalist on the morning news asked me:

But nonetheless it has been controversial in some communities. One could add that the [address of the] Mariam Mosque was secret in the beginning. Now I assume that people know where it is located in Copenhagen if they want to go there. After all, it has resulted in bomb threats and large discussions. Why is it so controversial?

I was caught completely off guard and assumed that there had been a bomb threat which I had not heard about, so I ignored that part of the journalist's question and just addressed the controversy. A group of women took notice of this and came to the mosque shortly after to ask whether it was safe to attend the Friday prayer. Yasmin, who answered the door, was very surprised to hear about the bomb threat and suddenly there was uncertainty about whether there had been a bomb threat or not. When Yasmin asked me about it, I could only answer that I had also heard about it during the interview, but that was all I knew. However, there had never been a bomb threat, it was merely an assumption made by the journalist that started to circulate. Fortunately, no other media picked up the story.

The two incidents are merely examples of recurring misunderstandings that demonstrate the inaccuracy of the narrative produced by Khankan's, Fetteh's, and my interaction with journalists. Khankan tried to express inclusiveness



by adding a symbolic motivation for the naming of the mosque, and I did not inquire into a bomb threat that was false, thereby authorizing it as a fact. From the quote above, it also appears that the secrecy concerning the mosque's address was a security concern, which was a remnant of a misreport in *Politiken* five months prior to this interview (see Figure 2). That is, previous misreports seemed to inform new misreporting.

The spread and coverage of a story like the opening of the Mariam Mosque is to some extent a matter of chance as it competes with other current events. The day before, the Danish Minister of Taxation called for a press conference on 26 August when he would announce the government's response to one of the largest scandals in Danish politics in 2016 and it appears from the press release that drastic measures would be announced (Ritzau 2016). This became by far the biggest story of the day and the Mariam Mosque was reduced to a twenty to thirty second clip in most Danish news broadcasts on its opening day.

In the car on their way to the mosque, Khankan and Fetteh went over the ritual, discussing which suras Fetteh should recite for the prayer, but when they got to the rehearsal of the prayer Fetteh repeatedly got stuck in her recitation and could not recall verses. Khankan tried to help by reciting the suras with Fetteh, but as Fetteh also started to struggle with al-Fatiha and was getting stuck earlier and earlier in the suras, Khankan offered to stand by in case she needed someone to take over. Then Fetteh recited al-Fatiha twice and a further recitation before getting stuck in al-Fatiha again, and they decided that Khankan would lead the prayer. The rest of the car ride passed with rehearsals of this new setup. This is how Khankan became the imam of the Mariam Mosque.

When, in an interview with Khankan on 15 November 2016, I mentioned her opinion piece in *Politiken* on 5 March 2015 and referred to her as an imam, she corrected me and said that she never had any intention of becoming an imam herself; that was just something that happened. It was serendipitous that Khankan ended up performing the role for which she had recruited Fetteh in November 2014, and it is interesting to note that Fetteh ended up delivering the khutbah, which is the role Khankan at the time thought she might take upon herself someday. In other words, until the hours immediately before the Friday prayer on 26 August 2016, it was planned that it would solely be Fetteh taking the role of female imam, delivering the khutbah and leading the prayer. The switch was part of the process that gradually moved Khankan in the direction of becoming a fully-fledged imam. After the mosque collapsed in the summer 2017, she again had to take on the role of prayer leader as there would often be no one else to perform it.

As the time for Friday prayer drew closer, the apartment started to get crowded. Khankan starts her speech as planned and welcomes a congregation

of which around a third to half is Muslim. This frame is reflected in the way Khankan guides her congregation through the ritual, explaining the different elements and how they as congregants are supposed to act. She also invites non-Muslims to join the prayer, saying,

... then we will pray the congregational prayer and you are of course very welcome to join in, also non-Muslims who are here today ... just follow the movements as well as you can. You can't do it wrong, because it is a spiritual act that is about worshipping our creator, Allah, which is an Arabic word meaning God, and it is the same God we all worship. All religions lead to the same source.

Khankan's speech primarily focuses on the legitimacy of the Mariam Mosque and addresses two main suppressors: Muslim patriarchy and Islamophobia. In relation to the latter she observes that Fetteh, a veiled woman (bad Muslim), is going to perform a feminist act (good Muslim) and she hopes that this dissonance can produce a meaning that is otherwise impossible to produce on the geopolitical scene:

... and we also want to challenge islamophobia in Denmark. It is not a secret that Islamophobia is growing, not just in Denmark but also in other places in the world. However, it is very difficult to maintain the conception that Saliha [Marie Fetteh] is a suppressed Muslim woman just because she is veiled in the public sphere when Saliha takes the baton and delivers the khutbah and leads the prayer.

When Khankan is done with her speech, she gives the word to Fetteh, saying "Now I will call the adhan. It is part of the ritual at Friday prayer, and after I have called the adhan, Saliha will deliver her khutbah." Fetteh starts her khutbah with a long list of distinguished women in Islamic history: the famous, but also pioneers, such as the first to seek an education or jobs as taxi and bus drivers.<sup>5</sup> She goes on to add, "but we also have women, especially in the Middle East and Africa, who work very hard every day in the fields. We should not forget them, and the women in the homes who struggle every day to give their daughters a better life than they had themselves." Like Khankan, Fetteh also mentions

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5 In this context it would seem that Fetteh is thinking about women in the Middle East who have started to work as taxi and bus drivers. In 2007 the Jordanian Times reported on the first female taxi driver in Amman, where Fetteh has an apartment, and she has on occasion brought up the rising number of female taxi and bus drivers in Jordan.

two suppressors: Muslim patriarchs and Danish society. Both are addressed in her final remarks when she too brings in the symbolic gesture of naming the Mariam Mosque after Mary because she is an important character in all three Abrahamic religions. Fetteh has heard Khankan repeat this all morning on TV and radio and now seems to express it as one of the primary reasons for the mosque's name:

If you visit Mecca, the Kaaba, if you are doing pilgrimage, and both men and women do this, and they walk together. I mean, it is not gender segregated, so why can't they [men and women] go to work and eat their lunch together? Sometimes life in Danish society can be a problem. Not all workplaces are, for example, willing to hire Muslim women who wear a scarf, and this [veiled] woman has become part of a never-ending political struggle over values. I wonder how many people consider how she feels—the woman with the scarf—when feelings run high in various scarf debates ... I think we need to focus on other struggles. There are enough battles to be fought within integration. There is no reason to keep bickering [*kævle*] on about that hijab. In short, the time when a woman's only role was to give birth, hold house, and wait upon a man is over. Women—Muslim or not—they can do so much else if they want to and get the opportunity. We have proved this by, among other actions, opening this small mosque which we have named after Jesus' mother—Mary called Mariam in Arabic—because she has such great importance for Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and then she is actually the only woman in the Quran who has a whole chapter named after her.

The reason I put such emphasis on this minor mistake in the naming of the mosque is to demonstrate that the production of meaning is situational. The story about the naming is a gesture that welcomes all non-Muslims and builds bridges between the Abrahamic religions, but this gesture is only meaningful if it is misrecognized (cf. Caputo 1997: 18–19). That is, the gesture only works if it is understood to be true that the intention actually played a role in the naming of the Mariam Mosque, that it describes a real event.

While the misrecognition, and thereby the gesture, is quite obvious in this case, given that Mary does not play a role in Judaism—something both Khankan and Fetteh know—other misrecognitions may be less obvious, and this has a great effect on the narrative that is documented and the patterns which emerge. Gestures may be mistaken for descriptions of actual events that are not what they claim to be, and as there is often an element of embarrassment in recognizing gestures for what they are, this recognition is often suppressed.

The above is an exception as there is absolutely no doubt that Khankan and Fetteh know that the claim is incorrect.

Misrecognition is nevertheless a common phenomenon. An expression of creed is often a gesture of expressing belonging to a specific group rather than the profession of hard held personal beliefs. However, the social gesture of expressing belonging to a religious group only works if it is misrecognized as an expression of personal belief. The result is dogma as a social identity practice, not as a theology; or dogma as border defense, as Jan Hjärpe (1997: 268) defines it from a functionalist perspective.

While unpredictability and misrecognition combined produced the meaning described above, unpredictability can also play a major role on its own in the production of meaning: that is, the production of meaning that is not encoded by an agent. I have observed two inaugurations of women's mosques: the Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque in Berlin and the Mariam Mosque in Copenhagen (on video). Neither went as planned. Both were strongly influenced by impulses, responses to an unpredictable situation, and lapses from the planned ritual. Uta Christina Lehmann (2012) and Julianne Hammer (2012) give similar accounts of Wadud's two famous performances in Cape Town (1994) and New York (2005). In other words, these rituals are not enactments of what was planned, and none of them constitute rituals with a clearly encoded meaning. In fact, there is a still ongoing discussion as to whether Wadud's 1994 performance constituted a pre-khutbah or a khutbah, indicating that linguistic frames and thereby the meaning of events can be changed even long after they have occurred (Esack 1997: 246–248; 2015; Wadud 2008: 158–186).

When I interviewed Elham Manea on 27 June 2018 in Zürich, she explained that the tandem prayer she performed with Abdel-Hakim Ourghi at the opening of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque was something they had planned the day before and did not rehearse. When the mosque opened, they stood shoulder to shoulder leading the congregation, and only later when she saw the pictures did she become aware of the expression of diversity they had produced, as they present their prayer according to two different madhabs, which is evident in the position of their hands. That is, a meaning that was not intentionally encoded in the ritual was produced. But Manea nonetheless embraces and cherishes this symbolic gesture, which appears in the pictures that were published in the media.

However, unpredictability may also produce symbolic expressions that are disliked by the agents performing them. As no one knew that Khankan intended to lead prayer while standing in the first line, people respectfully took a step back as she started the prayer to give her a place in front of the congregation. This means that an important part of the ritual in terms of compliance with

Aisha's and Umm Salama's *sunna* (established custom), which Khankan found important, was transgressed, and Khankan's idea of dissolving dichotomies was reversed. Great care was taken at subsequent Friday prayers to make sure this would not happen again.

### 3 Recruitment and Meetings in the Mariam Mosque

At the first Friday prayer Nafisa—a woman well versed in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), who knows *tajwid* (Quran recitation) and is fluent in Arabic—came forward and offered her support as a prayer leader. This was the kind of woman Khankan wanted to recruit. However, the Mariam Mosque never developed an organizational structure that could handle offers and requests, which meant that the very limited resources available in terms of work hours continually focused somewhat arbitrarily on the most urgent tasks at hand. Nafisa, like so many others, never received a reply and could have been lost to the Mariam Mosque had she not herself followed up by contacting Khankan again.

Within just five months Yasmin was so overwhelmed by the workload that she left and Mouna put his engagement on hold just a month later due both to the lack of structure and in order to focus on his MA thesis. The lack of resources and structure was a continual problem in the mosque and a major reason for both long term and temporary members' leaving. However, I am again getting ahead of events.

Although there was an informal evaluation of the Friday prayer on 26 August, the Mariam Mosque did not meet again until 20 September, three days before the second Friday prayer. The SoMe adhan's announcement that the Mariam Mosque<sup>6</sup> would have Friday prayer every second month was a bit arbitrary as many other schedules had also been discussed. This is also reflected in a post on the private forum just four days after the first Friday prayer in which Fetteh asked when the September prayer would take place, as if monthly Friday prayer had been the plan all along. No one answered, but when Fetteh rolled out a Friday prayer calendar for the rest of the year on 2 September, other members began to respond. Yasmin commented that it was a good idea to have the dates for the rest of the year because then she could notify the police well in advance, but Mouna wanted an evaluation of the first prayer before setting up another.

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6 I have chosen to call the apartment the Mariam Mosque whenever it is used for mosque purposes including meetings between the members of the Mariam Mosque, even though some meetings were held without the mosque visually being assembled. Most meetings were held in the lounge rather than the prayer hall.

When Khankan replied a week later, "The dates are fine with me. Let's publish them, fast," the decision was taken. The Mariam Mosque never created a body to make decisions on behalf of the mosque, one of the major frustrations that eventually led to the collapse in July 2017.

A week before the 20 September meeting, Nafisa contacted Khankan again via text, saying, "It is about leading prayer. I said yes to leading prayer next time you hold Friday prayer and I would still like to do this if the offer still stands." Nafisa, who within a short time was to become one of the most important and active members of the Mariam Mosque, was therefore invited to the meeting.

According to my fieldnotes, the meeting starts with a short evaluation of the ritual performance on 26 August and then moves on to the presence of journalists, which almost everyone finds troubling. However, it is soon agreed that the inauguration was a special case and things will be different at subsequent prayers. Nafisa expresses sadness that there were not more women like herself, specifying that she means the type of women who wears the hijab. Many women in her network would have liked to join but had chosen not to for various reasons. She herself has longed for an alternative to the existing mosques for a long time.

Nafisa, who is the only regular mosque attendee at the meeting, goes back to the discussion of the ritual performance and gives very clear instructions on how to perform the Friday ritual. She does not comment upon Khankan's and Fetteh's performance; instead, she lays down the rules for how it should be done. This is received with relief by everyone, including Khankan and Fetteh, as the knowledge and experience is much needed. Nafisa's evaluation of the correct ritual observance became a reoccurring event and in January 2017 she wrote a one-page guide to Friday prayer for the others to follow.

When it is Yasmin's turn, Khankan asks whether she took part in the prayer but, because there were not enough volunteers, she says she was too busy with practical matters to take part. However, she remarks that she had not felt like joining in because she is used to mosques being quiet, spiritual places and that is not how she experienced the Mariam Mosque on that particular Friday. Nafisa and Fetteh intervene, saying that crying babies in Danish mosques usually turn the women's section into complete chaos, and they are often cramped due to lack of space. Yasmin explains that she only goes to the mosque in her parents' country of origin and she loves the Islam that is practiced there, but she cannot find this religion in Danish mosques. Like Mouna and some others in the Mariam Mosque, Yasmin would sometimes question whether her Islam and the Islam preached by conservative Muslims were the same religion.

Khankan explains that she experienced the day in a different way to Nafisa and Yasmin. She experienced redemption, a good atmosphere, and sisterly sol-

idity, adding that she had never prayed like this with non-Muslims before and she would also like non-Muslims to take part in the future: not to convert them, but to pray with them, although she predicts that many will convert even though this is not the purpose. Nafisa, on the other hand, found the experience of praying with so many women without hijab strange.

After the evaluation is done, Khankan takes the lead in a discussion on how to organize the next Friday prayer in compliance with the wishes that have been expressed during the meeting. A notable exception to this is a remark made by Chakir, who mentioned that a well-known homosexual Muslim from the LGBTQ-organization, Sabaah, would like to contribute to the mosque but would also like it to introduce mixed gender prayer so that male LGBTQ-Muslims<sup>7</sup> like himself can also attend. This request is somewhat ignored by the decision to extend an invitation to him for the next meeting. These types of decisions were, as mentioned above, rarely followed up in the Mariam Mosque and the person in question has never attended a meeting.

With everything planned, the time for evening prayer arrives and everyone gets ready. Fetteh does her *wudu* (ablution), others find their hijabs, and I leave the room. After prayer, the door opens again and everyone is sobbing. I try to make myself invisible, but it is hard as no one says anything, no one is trying to draw attention to themselves, and everyone has experienced something that I have not. When I inquire about this later in the course of small talk, I mostly receive answers that relate to the powerful nature of the experience and a definition of it as a kind of *forløsning*. This is commonly translated as redemption, but it has slightly different connotations in Danish. In this context it takes the meaning of being freed from something unpleasant, of a tension that has been dissolved, or something that has finally occurred.

Whatever happened, it was embodied, it was powerful, and to some extent it related to what individuals imagined the Mariam Mosque was or was going to become. It should be noted, though, that although the experience was shared, the individuals who took part in it imagined different spaces, had different reasons for joining the Mariam Mosque, and sought different kinds of redemption/*forløsning*.

Although the embodied emotional experience of activism can be difficult to describe, it may play an important role, as pointed out by Samuli Schielke in a description of the Arab Spring in Egypt:

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7 I realize that “male LGBTQ” is a strange formulation. What I mean is an LGBTQ person who would be identified as male in the heteronormative matrix set up as a premise for the gender segregation in the Mariam Mosque.

What happened in the revolutionary squares in January and February 2011 was not just a protest against an oppressive regime and a demand for freedom. In itself, it was freedom ... Ever since the first big protests in Tahrir Square ended after February 11, 2011, one of the key occupations of the revolutionary current has been to over and again re-create the fantastic moment of feeling fully alive in a meaningful struggle.

SCHIELKE 2015: 204

Whatever the emotions that run through bodies in these moments—and in the Mariam Mosque they seem to play an important role—it is the collective action of the members that makes it possible for the individual to experience it. However, the experience may be different for each individual. Protest may be very silent in the sense that it is experienced, not in opposition to the suppressor, but as a feeling of emancipation (or *forløsning*). It may be, as Schielke says, freedom in itself.

#### 4 The Emergence of a Mosque

The second Friday prayer on 23 September was very different from the first. Ten Muslim women, including the members of the Mariam Mosque, attended, as well as a few Christians, and the day was more or less in compliance with the wishes expressed at the meeting three days earlier. Khankan delivered the first khutbah and Nafisa delivered the second and led the prayer. Like last time, there was an evaluation on the day, but the next meeting in Femimam was on 17 October when two new members joined: Nabila and Zaynab.

Nabila was born in a family on the Sufi path belonging to a specific *tariqa* (order within Sufism) and Zaynab had chosen a *tariqa* herself. Both were religious authorities in other contexts, capable of leading *dhikr* (Sufi ritual), and soon became important core members of the Mariam Mosque which now had five women capable of delivering the khutbah and leading prayer.

According to my field notes, the meeting starts with a round of presentations followed by an urgent matter that needs to be addressed immediately. The leader of the Socialistic People's Party (SF), Pia Olsen Dyhr, has encouraged imams to walk in the gay pride parade, but no imam has chosen to do so. Therefore, she, along with the leader of Sabaah, Fahad Saeed, have published an opinion piece in *Jyllands-Posten*, coincidentally on the same day the meeting takes place, 17 October. Sabaah is the same LGBTQ-organization, oriented towards minority Danes, from which a member had made a request to the Mariam Mosque for inclusion of LGBTQ-men. Dyhr and Saeed describe the



problems minority LGBTQ-persons experience backed up with statistical information, and Dyhr presents the initiatives her party has taken to do something about the problems. This is then followed by yet another invitation to Danish imams to join the LGBTQ-struggle:

If they [imams] express unquestionable support, we can take a huge step forward in the struggle against homophobia. That is why, SF [the Socialistic People's Party] wanted just a few imams to attend the pride in Copenhagen. But no one showed up or gave their support in the struggle against homophobia ... We suggest [instead] to meet at Sabaah on Vesterbro [neighborhood]. It will send a clear message if we have this meeting. We will provide the coffee. The only thing we expect from you is that you show up and engage in a discussion on how we can do something about homophobia so that new Danes [ambiguous euphemism meaning Muslim or immigrants and descendants of immigrants from non-Western countries] won't feel pressured to hide their sexuality from their parents or be exposed to assault, discrimination, or consider suicide.

DYHR and SAEED 2016

Another article in the same paper explains that the invitation had been extended to twelve imams but only one unnamed person had accepted it while many others had turned it down (Johansen 2016). That person was Khankan and it appears that the Mariam Mosque had already, only two months after its inauguration, been trapped in the LGBTQ-conflict as predicted and discussed at Femimam's seventh meeting on 17 September 2015 (see Chapter 7). This posed a real danger to the Mariam Mosque and is a typical example of a contextual event that drained already scarce resources in the mosque.

As the discussion of the invitation got going members soon realized that this was a catch twenty-two. They could either say no, and be branded as bad Muslims, meaning that they would have to give up the struggle against Islamophobia, while still being able to struggle for Muslim women within Muslim communities. Another option was to say yes, burn their bridges to the Muslim communities, and join the LGBTQ-struggle. This would radically change the mosque from woman-centered to LGBTQ-centered and make it impossible for the mosque to reach its target audience. Some members felt that politicians were trying to coerce them into a struggle which they did not want to be part of, and certainly did not have the resources to join. This was especially the case with new members who thought they had joined a woman-centered mosque.

The reluctance to struggle for the LGBTQ-cause was not a matter of homophobia. It was a matter of not being stigmatized by the inclusion of LGBTQ-

persons and avoiding having another cause overshadow their own, but the effect of the rejection is similar to homophobia, even if the intention was different. Mouna, who was preparing to write his MA thesis on the challenges Muslim parents face when their children come out of the closet, strongly opposed any association between the Mariam Mosque and the LGBTQ-struggle. To his mind this was a tactical decision and the Mariam Mosque should focus on women, something which would be impossible if it did not stay on course. Meanwhile, he personally wanted to produce research that could provide a better understanding of the stigmatization of LGBTQ-persons' parents as he, like many others, had noticed this was a major problem in families with LGBTQ-oriented children. He borrowed Islamic theological literature on the topic from me, and successfully pitched a publication of a revised version of his MA thesis to Ani Zonneveld when we were in Berlin for the opening of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque in June 2017. This was after he had finally decided to leave the Mariam Mosque and was making up his mind whether he should work with LGBTQ-Muslims or adolescent minority men in danger of ending up in crime or gangs. However, as mentioned earlier, his health soon deteriorated, leading to his death in October 2018.

Khankan had already accepted the invitation, demonstrating an additional complication as this was not just about the Mariam Mosque, it was also about Khankan's public profile. The Mariam Mosque had produced Khankan as an imam and people on the geopolitical scene had expectations as to how she should administer this role. But the members of the Mariam Mosque also had expectations to Khankan, and they pulled in the opposite directions. Dyhr and Saeed expected her to make the "right" decision in the interest of LGBTQ-persons while mosque members expected her to make the "right" decision and favor the interests of the mosque. Thus Khankan was also caught in a catch twenty-two; if she said no to the LGBTQ-meeting, she risked once again being branded as a bad Muslim, and if she said yes, the Mariam Mosque would be transformed into an LGBTQ-mosque, something very different from the wishes of the group.

No member of the Mariam Mosque wanted to be part of "Dyhr's political project", as it was called, and there was a general agreement not to compromise the struggle for women by taking on the LGBTQ-struggle. The animosity towards the politicization of the mosque may have been caused by aspiring left-wing politicians' approaches to the mosque in the early days with various offers of affiliation and support, all of which were turned down or ignored. Ultimately it was decided to cancel the meeting on 31 October, reach out to Sabaah without the presence of journalists, and hope they would understand why the Mariam Mosque could not take part in their activities, thus attempting to kill the story

so they did not have to respond to it. This dodging of the invitation was successful due to Dyhr's and Sabaah's discretion on the matter and because the twelve names of invitees had not been published, nor had Khankan's acceptance of the invitation.

The rest of the meeting focused on planning the third Friday prayer on 28 October when Nabila would deliver the khutbah and invite a prominent member of her tariqa to lead a dhikr session, which would be mixed gender. Going forward Nabila and Zaynab would take turns leading dhikr sessions while Yasmin tried to organize a three-day prayer workshop for Muslim women who had never learned how to pray. In addition to this, Zaynab set up a Quran school now she had a place that she could turn into a classroom, something she had wanted to do for a long time. Thus, Zaynab ended up realizing a goal that Femimam members had already discussed back at their first meeting on 24 April 2015, although its realization had nothing to do with initiatives taken by Femimam. This was Zaynab's own initiative, but as she was now part of the Mariam Mosque her Quran school became a goal realized by the Mariam Mosque. This was evidenced by Zaynab's continuing her Quran school after the collapse of the first Mariam Mosque, demonstrating that, just as Khankan was the mosque, Zaynab was the Quran school.

The group was remarkably diverse in terms of personal beliefs and standpoints on religious matters, something exemplified when Nafisa inquired as to what, exactly, dhikr was. She knew it was some form of meditation, but she had never experienced it herself. Conversations over diversity were always respectful and variation of opinion was embraced. Yasmin, Mouna, and Nafisa, none of whom had participated in dhikr before, joined the first dhikr on 28 October 2016 but all decided that it was not for them.

## 5 The Linguistic Frame

What is the difference between a female imam that delivers the khutbah and subsequently leads a women-only *salat al-jumua* (Friday prayer) and an *ustadhha* (teacher) who on a Friday delivers a *dars* (lesson) followed by a women-only *salat al-zuhr* (regular midday prayer)? Obviously, there is a slight difference in liturgy—one prayer involves two *raka* (prostrations) and the other four—but the greatest difference is the linguistic frame, the intentions communicated, and the consequences for what is believed to constitute the performance of the female imam or *ustadhha*. Within *fiqh*, the former linguistic frame is a transgression whereas three of the four *madhhabs* (schools of thought) allow some version of latter (Zuhayli 2001: 164–165).

As Alberto Melucci explains, “Collective actors tend to emphasize the ‘highest’ meaning of their action and to claim a unity which they in fact rarely achieve” (Melucci 1989: 26). When Khankan legitimizes her position by referring to female imams in other countries she is applying her own linguistic frame rather than using these “imams’” own emic frames. In some cases she attributes a “higher” meaning to their actions than they do themselves, thus modifying them so their actions become meaningful in a local Danish context (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013: 27). This produces a discourse on Islamic feminism as an international movement. Something similar could be said about the Wikipedia page, “Women as Imams”, from which Khankan took inspiration, as it categorizes any woman who speaks or leads prayer on Friday as an imam.

Muslim activism produces meaning on the geopolitical scene and—as demonstrated above and in earlier chapters—the geopolitical scene transcends barriers to Femimam’s backstage, producing discussions such as how to deal with the LGBTQ-cause and specific hadiths. However, if the hermeneutical framework that is dictated by the geopolitical scene is disavowed, other suppressed realities emerge: realities that are produced outside the discursivity of the geopolitical scene (cf. Mahmood 2012: 154–155). In the following, I first demonstrate this with an example and then address the ongoing discussion of the linguistic frame in the Mariam Mosque.

On 16 December 2016, Khankan invited Nour Tessie Jørgensen to deliver the Friday sermon. Jørgensen is a convert who holds an MA in Islamic studies and several *ijazahs* (traditional authorization to transmit Islamic knowledge). At the time, she was a regular guest lecturer in my classes at the Danish Institute for Studies Abroad (DIS) and with time she took over a whole module of my course, Muslims in the West. On 2 January 2017, when I spoke to Jørgensen about a guest lecture she was going to deliver to my class later that month, she told me about an encounter she had had in the Mariam Mosque the day she gave the Friday sermon. Khankan had asked her whether she would also like to lead the prayer but Jørgensen declined, as she did not believe in the legitimacy of women leading salat al-jumua. Instead she planned on sneaking out and doing the salat al-zuhr in the room next to the prayer hall. Jørgensen suggested to Khankan that the Mariam Mosque should offer both salat al-jumua and salat al-zuhr, as she believed the mosque would attract more women if they were given the option. This proposal was not adopted.

Jørgensen’s suggestion of lessening the transgression is an example of an interesting dynamic as this could potentially be very popular among Muslims but damaging to the Mariam Mosque if journalists understood that this would constitute a “lower” meaning on the geopolitical scene (Melucci 1989: 26). In

other words, the suggestion clearly demonstrates how an action can symbolically be produced as discourse within two different discursivities: the geopolitical scene and the Muslim women's discursivity. It should also be noted that while the Muslim women's discursivity can produce both discourses, most of the non-Muslim majority will not be able to comprehend the Muslim women's discourse. The idea of a "lowering" of meaning is a "translation" from an Islamic frame of reference with all its connotations of embodied exegesis, fiqh, authenticity, and so on, to a frame of reference based on categorization according to allegiance to so-called Western values. It is a case of warping. The "lowering" will most likely just be translated as "not a Friday prayer" as this is the only action that can symbolically be produced within this discursivity. In other words, an ustadha who delivers a dars and leads the salat al-zuhr is not likely to be newsworthy even though it may appear very similar to a female imam who delivers a khutbah and leads the salat al-jumua.

Jørgensen never became a member of the Mariam Mosque and shortly after the guest lecture at DIS in January 2017, she moved to Iran to study Islamic ethics. On her return, she was again invited by Khankan to deliver a khutbah in the mosque on 15 December 2017. When Jørgensen and I did a sharia simulation workshop for students at DIS on 14 February 2018, she again told me about her experience, which was slightly different from last time. This was after the collapse of the first Mariam Mosque, the strong team of religious leaders had left, and Khankan was looking for new imams. Before the adhan, while mingling, Khankan came to Jørgensen and asked whether she would also be interested in leading the prayer. Jørgensen again explained that she did not believe in the legitimacy of women-led salat al-jumua, and she again planned on sneaking out to do the salat al-zuhr in the room next door. This time, however, Khankan insisted that Jørgensen should stay in the prayer hall and suggested that she could pray salat al-zuhr at the back of the room, while she led salat al-jumua herself.

The conversation was overheard by some of the Muslim women and when the time for prayer arrived, the congregation split in two with one half praying salat al-zuhr with Jørgensen and the other half praying salat al-jumua with Khankan. Jørgensen explains that the Muslim women present joined the salat al-zuhr as they were the only ones who understood the symbolic difference, while the non-Muslims joined the salat al-jumua. This was evident as the women in the salat al-jumua did not face Mecca but were oriented towards the "altar", and they did not know the movements of the prayer. This was a common problem, which at times frustrated some of the religious leaders in the first Mariam Mosque, who often had to give instructions, repeatedly straighten and orient the lines towards Mecca, and explain that the sunnah prayer is individ-

ual and not to be mistaken for the salat al-jumua. They always did this politely and with patience, but it caused frustration because their role as instructors stood in the way of their own immersion in the ritual. Furthermore, in some instances the religious leaders felt that, to a few of the non-Muslim guests, the Friday prayer was merely an exotic experience. It should also be noted that the Mariam Mosque also had regular attendees who were non-Muslims such as an Inayat Khan follower,<sup>8</sup> Catholics, and Protestants; however, they rarely, if ever, joined the prayer.

It is possible that Khankan's and Jørgensen's simultaneous prayer produced a cascade effect (Hendricks and Hansen 2016: 62). That is, as the women chose ranks, and the division between Muslim and non-Muslim became evident, the pattern may have formed the basis of all the congregants' subsequent choices. However, it is also possible that, given the choice, the Muslim women who were present on that particular Friday preferred to join the salat al-zuhr. Interestingly, a woman at the opening prayer on 26 August also continued her prayer and performed two additional raka, which caused much confusion to the non-Muslims behind her. Because the woman did *taslim* (the greeting to the person on either side which ends the prayer) after the two first raka, it may either be understood as a sunnah prayer or a modified salat al-zuhr performed simultaneously with Fetteh's inaugurating the mosque with a dua.

As mentioned above, *khutbah* is a polysemic word, and when I contacted Jørgensen on 2 April 2020 about whether she would prefer to be anonymized—to which she said no—I also queried how I should describe her action, asking her, “By the way, I would like to know whether you prefer me to use the word *khutbah*, *dars*, *pre-khutbah bayan* or something else. In your eyes, what did you do back then?” Jørgensen answered, “Probably a *dars* more than anything else.” As an individual, then, Jørgensen construed her actions in a different way to how they were linguistically framed officially and, as indicated by the actions of the women in the prayer hall, she may not be the only one.

On a side note, Jørgensen is one of the few Friday speakers in the Mariam Mosque who was announced by name in a SoMe adhan and this meant she soon became entangled in a script on the geopolitical scene when one of *Jyllands-Posten's* bloggers claimed that she was an agent for the Iranian regime, among other accusations (Tavakoli 2018). As the blogger also provided a selection of what she considered evidence and produced a mocking video,<sup>9</sup> this

8 Inayat Khan followers can be Muslim, but the movement insists that you do not have to be (Sedgwick 2017). The Inayat Khan follower in the Mariam Mosque was not Muslim.

9 Post on Jaleh Tavakoli's Facebook wall, accessed 7 April 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/jaleh.tavakoli/posts/10156055744233385>.

turned into a smear campaign against Jørgensen on social media that may seem insignificant in the larger media picture but had significant impact on Jørgensen herself.

Khankan was the only woman connected with the Mariam Mosque willing to claim the imam title. Fetteh did so reluctantly as she realized that other options, such as *khatiba* or *murshida* (leader/guide), were not intelligible to Danish media audiences. However, like most women in the mosque, she preferred not to have a title and she later renounced that of imam. Similarly, Seyran Ates, who founded the Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque in Berlin, became an imam due to her interactions with the media in the months preceding the mosque's opening. This is clearly evident both from interviews I made with Ates and from her biography, which was published on the day of the opening, as it states, "I still stick to this plan [having others lead the prayer]. I do not want to do it myself, but I will take care of other things. I primarily see myself as part of the believers behind an imam or a female imam" (Ates 2017: 205; Petersen 2019a). Ates' idea of being part of the congregation and a facilitator is very similar to the role Khankan originally imagined for herself. However, as journalists could not comprehend how a mosque could be without an imam, Ates became one through interaction with the media, and as this happened between printing and publication of her autobiography the above quote was published on the day she opened her mosque as its imam. Both Khankan and Ates are clear examples of how the "recording" device that produces the documentation for future reference is a significantly influential co-producer. It is also possible that some journalists just saw this linguistic frame as a better story and may even have thought they were doing the female activists a favor by framing them with a high meaning on the geopolitical scene. After all, journalists are active in the sphere and can be susceptible to narrowly understanding the stories within this framework.

It is important to notice the misrecognition at play here. I use the word "recording" in quotation marks to signify that the premise of journalism is that it records and documents real events. As demonstrated, however, such a "recording" is a narrow and co-produced version of a narrative that is molded by ideas such as criteria of relevance and the demand that it should be intelligible within a discursivity that can only reproduce a fraction of the discourse that is there. Thus, warping is to some degree a premise for journalism on this topic, and the word "recording" should be understood as producing (without quotation marks), as this reflects what happens in the "recording" situation. In other words, the interaction with journalists produces discourse within the power structure of the geopolitical scene, but the inadequacy of the discursivity within which this production takes place means that the discourse of the

Muslim women cannot be reproduced and thus cannot be presented to non-Muslim media audiences (Petersen 2019a).

There was a continuous struggle over the linguistic frame in the Mariam Mosque, and the mosque never arrived at a definition of titles such as imam or khatiba. No one except Khankan wanted to use the imam title and, backstage, even she would often call herself *in-the-process-of-becoming-an-imam* to “lower” the level of her claim. Zaynab added that she preferred some other word than khutbah. Likewise, many of the young congregants, including Rania, initially felt a bit uncomfortable with the imam title and the idea of female-led Friday prayer.

However, Nafisa’s visual appearance, dressed conservatively and with a hijab, and her habit of either discussing or giving instructions on Islamic matters in the lounge, put many of the younger members at ease. Nafisa would often sit on the red sofas in the lounge and engage in these discussions, and young congregants in particular would take a seat, listen, and ask questions. The topics of conversation varied from time to time, but the legitimacy of the mosque was inferred indirectly as the young congregants would typically say that if a woman like Nafisa is part of the Mariam Mosque then it must be halal, or if she is here it cannot be haram. During Friday prayer Nafisa would often give a short lecture on the Quran verses she recited and, like her conversations and instructions on Islamic topics, this became a stamp of approval for the activities in the mosque. Some of the young congregants added that Nafisa’s recitation sounded very authentically Islamic and that gave them additional confidence in her.

## 6 Decision Making

As has been mentioned, the first Mariam Mosque never developed a body that could make decisions and no rules were ever laid down. This meant that even major decisions were made somewhat arbitrarily, and this was one of the main reasons Yasmin and Mouna left; one such major decision involved opening prayer to men. On 13 January 2017, a young man asked Nabila and Khankan whether he could join the maghreb prayer, to which they said yes. With this new rule in place they also invited me into the prayer space as an observer, but I found this strange and peeked through the door instead.

Nabila had told the young man to stay at the back of the room which he did, but as Khankan had not heard this she gave him a signal to come and join the women. However, when he came closer, Nabila signaled that he should keep his distance, so he ended up praying in a “row” on his own behind the women. Yasmin got very frustrated when she saw what was happening, because she



and Mouna had for a long time tried to impose structure on the mosque, particularly problematizing the arbitrariness of decision making that took place. She was annoyed that such a major decision had been taken in a split second, without even consulting Nafisa and Fetteh who were standing in the first row and were unaware that a man was praying behind them. Yasmin decided to leave just a few days later and made this official at the upcoming meeting. When I asked Nabila about her motivation for saying yes to the young man, she explained that one is not allowed to say no to a person who is seeking God.

Throughout the spring, the male visitor sat on a stool at the back door behind the women, taking part in the Friday ritual through an open door. He was there because he was in a relationship with a woman who attended the Mariam Mosque. They had also attended church services together but after a bad experience with a priest who had been provoked by the woman's hijab, the Mariam Mosque became an alternative where they could attend together. When I asked Khankan about this, she explained that this was not mixed gender prayer as the man was positioned outside the mosque. The man was a respectful young student whom everyone liked so not even members such as Fetteh, who opposed mixed gender prayer, said anything about his sitting on a chair in the lounge peering in and praying along. It should be noted, however, that she may not have been aware that he also prayed with them. Interestingly, when Khankan questioned the young man on 31 March 2017, he explained that he had not converted to Islam, adding that he believed in God and believed in Mohammad as the last messenger. He later converted to Islam.

## 7 Announcing Interreligious Nikah

On 1 February 2017, Khankan announced on national radio that the Mariam Mosque performed interreligious nikah, which also produced an article on the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's homepage.<sup>10</sup> This came as a surprise to all the mosque's members. Mouna and Fetteh found out on Facebook, where a smear campaign was forming, Nabila was told by a friend, and Zaynab did not know that the mosque performed interreligious nikah but was in support of the ritual. It should be noted that Khankan had only performed two interreligious nikahs at this stage, but she had many more planned. The announcement became the beginning of the end of the first Mariam Mosque, effectively demonstrating how the Mariam Mosque, as a group within the space of strate-

<sup>10</sup> P1, *Tidsånd* (1 February 2017).

gic religion, intersected with Khankan's role on the geopolitical scene. I elaborate on this intersection before moving on to the announcement.

The Mariam Mosque primarily existed in two forms. It was a media narrative associated with Khankan, sometimes called the Sherin project by Mouna when he was annoyed by it, and as a network of Muslims engaged in mosque activities. All members of the first Mariam Mosque, including Mouna and Yasmin, continually problematized the presence of journalists, students, and other observers in the mosque. Likewise, they wanted Khankan to abstain from media interaction or at least keep it to a minimum as they wanted to focus on building a community rather than the struggle on the geopolitical scene. That is, many members primarily wanted to practice Islam, not struggle as activists against non-Muslim Islamic authorities, whom they called Islamophobes, by proving how progressive they were through their ritual practice in the Mariam Mosque, because this—to their minds—fundamentally changes what Islam is all about.

Interestingly, this tension also seems to have been present at Amina Wadud's 2005 prayer in New York where Juliane Hammer (2010: 50) explains that the organizers' "short comments [at the press conference preceding the prayer] highlighted the fact that they may have had very different agendas for the prayer, but were brought together by the symbolic potential of such an event".<sup>11</sup> As demonstrated by the emotional moment when Nafisa led the prayer at the meeting on 20 September 2016, this symbolism could be very powerful outside the geopolitical scene, and some women felt that it was compromised by making it a player in the public debate. Khankan, however, did not see this as either-or and tension grew over time. Discussions would often revolve around "the marathon Fridays", as the monthly Fridays when the mosque was open were sometimes called to signify the exhaustion many members felt after keeping the mosque open for 8–9 intense hours. As this is a pop-up mosque consisting of a social network, keeping the mosque open meant being present.

The tension was a structural problem. Many requests from the geopolitical scene made to the mosque were addressed to Khankan personally, which meant that the mosque members' demands for less pressure on resources and an exit from the geopolitical scene were hard for Khankan to deliver on, especially because Khankan received pleas for help from Muslim women and offers of great opportunities from potential partners, while journalists with whom

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11 The need for a press conference before a Friday prayer clearly demonstrates that the ritual played a role in other spheres than the immediate context within which it took place.

Khankan had spent many years building good relations also expected her to give interviews.

Members of the Mariam Mosque continuously complained that Khankan said yes to too many people, and that neither Khankan nor the group had the resources to deal with the outside pressure. The Azhari scholar mentioned in the beginning of the chapter was one among many people who experienced an overbooked Friday. He showed up for his appointment with Khankan, sat in the mosque for approximately an hour as other members entertained him, and left leaving his card, but he was never contacted. A priest showed up on the same day and—like the Azhari scholar—she was entertained by other members, sat in the mosque for approximately an hour and left. These situations were awkward, recurring, and produced considerable tension and resentment about Khankan's style of leadership.

It is important to notice that Khankan had a lot at stake due to her ongoing engagement with the geopolitical scene. She could not just withdraw from debates and, as mentioned above, decisions made in the mosque could potentially damage her profile as she would be held accountable on the geopolitical scene. Both Yasmin and Mouna spent a significant amount of their time putting out fires, as they called it. For example, when Khankan spoke publicly about interreligious nikahs, they would make sure that journalists knew that this was off the record. However, it is important to underline that Khankan was often under pressure as she was continually suspected on the geopolitical scene of being an Islamist (see Chapter 11), and the progressive initiatives that Yasmin and Mouna wanted to keep secret were at the same time the media stories that Khankan needed to prove that she was neither that, nor a radical Muslim.

On 27 January 2017, Khankan and Mouna were giving Islamic spiritual care and having pre-interviews for nikahs in the apartment, and a little later Nafisa and Nabila arrived to assist at a conversion followed by a nikah. My notes that day focus on the spiritual care session and the planning of a nikah between a Christian and Alevite, which I found very interesting as neither tradition is Islamic in the sense that neither adhere to *fiqh* as the basis of marriage. I also wrote a short note on a visiting journalist, Christoffer Emil Bruun, who merely came to see the mosque as Khankan had agreed to join him on his radio program *Tidsånd* (English/German: *Zeitgeist*). Khankan had forgotten the meeting and was therefore a bit surprised to hear that he had come.

Reprising my notes, it seems the day is a bit overbooked with meetings, so Khankan welcomes Bruun and asks him to wait. In the meantime, she suggests that he takes a tour in the prayer hall. As there are several people waiting to see Khankan, Bruun soon falls into conversation with a couple who is there

for a pre-interview for an interreligious nikah between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man. Bruun records a short interview with the couple, which is probably what alerts me as it is not public that the mosque performs these rituals, but Bruun does not seem to understand the significance of what he has just heard.

When Khankan and Mouna come out, I let them know about the interview but Khankan explains that there is nothing to worry about as this is a journalist who can be trusted. She has worked with him many times before. Then Khankan gives Bruun a very short tour and explains that the interreligious nikah is a sensitive matter that they are not ready to publicize yet. Bruun inquires about the nature of the sensitivity and after a short explanation he suggests that it may very well be the perfect time to announce it as she will have half an hour on live radio P1. Khankan explains that she will have to ask the other mosque members before going ahead with the announcement. However, she does not think they will mind, so Khankan and Bruun agree that Khankan will call Bruun and let him know a day in advance if they are not going to make the announcement. As Khankan must get on with her meetings and Bruun has many more questions related to the sensitivity of the problem, Khankan asks me to explain it to him and give a short interview on women's mosques worldwide.<sup>12</sup>

In the evening Mouna, Nabila, and Khankan discuss the offer from Bruun. Khankan wants to make a decision, but Mouna and Nabila insist that this question should be postponed until their upcoming meeting on 31 January. However, this meeting is canceled on the day and, as Khankan has forgotten to call Bruun, she decides to go ahead with the announcement.

In terms of fallout, this series of events culminated in a short-lived and insignificant story on the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's homepage that did not spread to any other media. This may be because its significance is unintelligible to most non-Muslims and it is difficult to "translate" the gravity of this ritual to something meaningful on the geopolitical scene. Interestingly, non-Muslim Islamic authorities did not seem to take notice of it either. They neither welcomed it, nor questioned it; the announcement simply passed without comments. However, it became a huge story in Muslim networks on Facebook, thus demonstrating a significant difference in criteria of relevance and discursivity between Muslims and non-Muslims. While woman-led Friday prayer has high-profile salience on the geopolitical scene, it was interreligious nikah

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12 My explanation of the significance of nikah between a Muslim woman and non-Muslim man was off the record and not recorded.

between Muslim women and non-Muslim men that was seen as the larger transgression within Muslim communities.

The announcement led to Mouna's announcing his potential resignation as he was fed up with the way things were done in the mosque and with Khankan's style of leadership. However, Khankan listened and promised improvements at a meeting on 6 February when she also gave an unreserved apology for her announcement without consent from the mosque members.<sup>13</sup>

Yet the announcement also posed other problems as the mosque was caught off guard, without having agreed on a theological argument for the legitimacy of the practice. Most members had their own private justifications, but everyone also recognized that a thorough argument was needed as this was not about satisfying themselves; it was about satisfying Muslims who disagreed with them and, whatever the argument was, it would have to abide by the rules of strategic religion. Zaynab, for example, feared that Muslim parents who sent their children to her Quran school would start to inquire about the theological basis of the interreligious nikah and other members who had associated with the Mariam Mosque suddenly had to defend the mosque's position in their own network. Nevertheless, it was decided to move on and Khankan again promised to defer decisions to meetings in the mosque in the future.

Interestingly, there is an inverse relation between Khankan's operations on the geopolitical scene and those of the members in their communities. Khankan won a small victory on the geopolitical scene by announcing the interreligious nikah while other members of the Mariam Mosque lost their battles in their respective networks and communities where some also had to distance themselves somewhat from the mosque or express even greater reservations about it. This inverse correlation was at the core of the tension between Khankan and the group; it also significantly increased the risk of joining or associating with the Mariam Mosque.

The interreligious nikahs produced a cognitive dissonance with some members. Fetteh was opposed to them and therefore forwarded requests to Khankan when she received them. Nafisa was also against them, but she immersed herself in Islamic feminist literature to re-evaluate the matter, while Mouna, who initially oscillated between opposing them on religious grounds and endorsing them when he saw how relieved and happy the ritual made the couples, eventually settled on the latter position.

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13 This scene and a short glimpse of the preceding discussion on the Mariam Mosque's internal Facebook group is reproduced as a scene in Skovgaard's documentary, *The Reformist*.

Many of the young members of the Mariam Mosque initially did not believe in the legitimacy of interreligious nikahs. Two of the young volunteers, Rania and Halima, had non-Muslim boyfriends and wanted a nikah, but not an interreligious nikah; nor did they want their boyfriends to convert unless their conversions were genuine, so they experienced severe cognitive dissonance. Several had searched the internet for answers and had found many arguments for the legitimacy of interreligious nikah without this making a difference to them, but as an interreligious nikah service had been announced and theological arguments were needed to support it, their online searches became valuable and were used as reference for more thorough theological arguments in its favor. This way of arguing is effectively described by Alasdair MacIntyre (1981/2014: 9), who explains that one does not have to understand the background of an argument to make it in a given situation as one can paraphrase the logic of an argument and this is “locally valid or can easily be expanded so as to be made so; the conclusions do indeed follow from the premises”. This meant that a conclusion (*hukm*) that is readily available online could be inserted into a debate without the interlocutors having a full understanding of the argument being made.

Some members of the Mariam Mosque, including Mouna, Nafisa, and to some degree also Fetteh, oscillated between accepting interreligious nikah and opposing it. They were all looking for what they considered a final—and to their mind—adequate scriptural proof that it was legitimate, but they did not find one before the mosque collapsed and the question thereby became irrelevant. However, it is interesting to note how the membership of a network can define a criterion of relevance. Neither Mouna, Fetteh, nor Nafisa were in a relationship or had any other personal reason to engage with the question of interreligious nikah.

## 8 Collapse and the Aftermath

As described above, the Mariam Mosque was not an entity with a clear position and theology. Quite the contrary, it was a network of Muslims with very different beliefs and backgrounds who engaged in Friday prayer once a month and a number of other activities in between. Although the “recording” of events in the media suggests otherwise, this is due to the mosque’s also existing as a “recorded” media narrative. This became very clear when the network collapsed but the media narrative did not, meaning that, as far as the media is concerned, there has only ever been one Mariam Mosque.

After the announcement of interreligious nikah, Mouna became less engaged because he was writing his MA thesis, and just around the time when

he came back in June 2017, the group had started to disintegrate. Many of the tasks, including setting up a website, application for recognition as a faith society, and the opening of a bank account had been taken over by a network of young volunteers who also set up a movie night and *iftar* (breaking of the fast) in Ramadan, advertised the Friday prayer with posters in educational institutions, and proposed many new initiatives, such as Facebook live streaming and an Instagram profile.

Most of the new volunteers were recruited by Khankan shortly after the meeting on 6 February 2017, but they soon found themselves a bit disconnected from the mosque's network of religious authorities, among whom tensions and problems were starting to build again; they were, for example, included in a separate private Facebook group and not the one that had existed since March 2015. At most meetings of the new volunteers I was the only person from the first Mariam Mosque group to show up (Khankan was seldom present at these meetings).

The actual collapse of the mosque started in early June when Mouna began to inquire about a series of events that had taken place in late May. This soon led to a controversy between Khankan and Mouna in which the whole mosque became involved. Mouna decided to leave the Mariam Mosque for good just before we travelled to Berlin on 16 June 2017. In Berlin, Mouna was worried about his future as he did not want to be associated with the mosque and he was preparing to approach Skovgaard to negotiate either a way out of her documentary altogether, or at least a framing that he could live with.

Other members of the Mariam Mosque were also considering their position and engagement before what was to become the final meeting of the first Mariam Mosque on 4 July 2017. This meeting actually had an agenda and, with the exception of Mouna, everyone wanted to save the mosque but, to a great extent, this depended on Khankan's response to their frustrations. Mouna had been invited so that his departure could take place in a good and orderly manner. However, the remaining members also decided to leave during the meeting and, although none of the religious authorities ultimately returned, they were still considering their positions over the subsequent week.

Everyone was unhappy about the collapse, including Khankan who at one point in the ensuing month proposed that she would withdraw from the mosque and let the group take it over. It was a chaotic period but, interestingly, the network without Khankan remained intact and started working on setting up another mosque, actually securing a place for an alternative pop-up space. They wanted no media attention or outside observers, and they would not define it linguistically: no titles, no name, just activity. While I gave advice on the project, I also advised strongly against involving even a researcher. To the best of my

knowledge the project did not succeed, but I do not know as I never inquired about it. Zaynab continued the Quran school with Mouna in the apartment, as Holdt was happy to donate rooms for this, but it was no longer associated with the Mariam Mosque.

The network that left the Mariam Mosque in July 2017 met regularly to catch up as friends afterwards. I was included in this network and—together with a few of the young people—I was part of both the first and second Mariam Mosque, as Khankan assembled a new team and continued the pop-up Friday prayer on 8 September 2017. She implemented a significant amount of the critique that had been leveled at her on 4 July 2017 in the new mosque. Firstly, she contacted El-Jaichi and wrote a manifest with him; she outlined a procedure for accepting new members in which they were informed about the Mariam Mosque's activities, such as interreligious nikah between Muslim women and non-Muslim men; and she instigated an absolute ban on all media and outside observers at Friday prayer. Such a ban had previously been introduced, although seldom enforced. With time she recruited new prayer leaders and slowly built a congregation that soon stabilized at around 15–20 Muslim congregants at Friday prayer.

A few of the volunteers in the first Mariam Mosque eventually returned, among others Fawzia and Rania whom I presented in Chapter 5. Khankan and many of the other volunteers and religious leaders from the first Mariam Mosque came on good terms again, albeit they neither returned nor became regular attendees of the mosque.

## 9 Serendipities in Everyday Life

This chapter has demonstrated that decisions that may seem major and defining for the Mariam Mosque were taken in response to emerging situations: mixed gender prayer was rejected once again at the meeting on 20 September 2016, but was introduced when a man asked if he could join on 13 January 2017; the announcement of interreligious nikah was announced because Khankan forgot to call the journalist who visited the mosque on 27 January 2017; a narrative of the thoughts behind the naming of the Mariam Mosque was introduced as a gesture; Khankan became an imam leading Friday prayer because Fetteh struggled with her recitation on their way to the mosque, etc. These dynamics, analyzed on the micro-level in this chapter, are reminiscent of descriptions in previous chapters where serendipity and individual's response to uncertainty has been an important variable. The example with Manea taking ownership of the serendipitous symbolism through her tandem prayer with Ourghi created



at the inauguration of the Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque, furthermore, demonstrates how people in some cases may even be aware of serendipities' influence on their own production of meaning. In short, serendipities are important variables in the production of religion, but they are often erased by the meaning events are later attributed with, and when narratives are erected.

The chapter has, furthermore, analyzed how warping occurs already at the time events are "recorded". This demonstrates that journalists' account of events, at least in the Mariam Mosque, are not a reliable record for future reference. Jørgensen's performing the role of *ustadha*, delivering a *dars*, and praying *salat al-zuhr* is to the vast majority of journalists unrecordable as they do not have the necessary discursivity to produce this meaning.

Finally, the chapter has demonstrated how non-Muslim Islamic theology transcends into the mosque space, even when non-Muslim Islamic authorities are not present. This can be seen from the discussion of a hadith from *Sahih al-Bukhari*, which was mainly aimed at responding to non-Muslim Islamic theology rather than Muslim theology. That is, even when there is no journalists around, enforcing the geopolitical scene, non-Muslim Islamic authorities remains a theological opponent important enough to be addressed in the Friday sermon.

## Politicized and Commodified Narratives of Sherin Khankan

A female imam leading women in Friday prayer is a powerful image. Khankan appeared on the BBC list of 100 inspirational and influential women in 2016 and she made number 197 on the Global Influence Top list in 2018.<sup>1</sup> She was also invited to have tea with the French president, Emmanuel Macron, in the Élysée Palace in March 2018, received a Global Hope Award in New York in September 2018, did two TEDx talks,<sup>2</sup> was a guest on the BBC's renown HARDtalk in October 2018, and published a biography in three languages that sold quite well.<sup>3</sup> This is not an exhaustive list, but the examples demonstrate that after the inauguration of the Mariam Mosque Khankan soon rose to international fame.

However, in Denmark things looked different. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 7, on the same day (17 March 2015) that Khankan announced that the Friday prayer would be women-only, not mixed gender as originally announced, Søren Hviid Pedersen, a PhD in political science and avid political commentator, insinuated that Khankan might be an Islamist:

And who is behind this new mosque? Well, it is no other than Sherin Khankan, a so-called moderate Muslim who, as everyone knows, at a Radikale [Venstre] party conference in [2002]<sup>4</sup> refused to vote for a resolution that denounced sharia and [in 2006]<sup>5</sup> participated in a demonstration arranged by Hizb ut-Tahrir, the organization that, as everyone

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1 BBC-News, accessed 2 May 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-38012048>, and Global Influence Top List, accessed 2 May 2020, <http://www.globalinfluence.world/en/global-2018/>.

2 Münster (Germany) on 2 November and Lausanne (Switzerland) on 5 December 2018.

3 At the time of writing (May 2020) the English edition of Khankan's book *Women are the Future of Islam* was number 41 on Amazon's bestseller ranking for Islamic Studies books in the United Kingdom.

4 The year Pedersen gives is 2006, but in order not to create confusion I have changed this to 2002, which is the year the party conference actually took place.

5 With reference to the party conference, Pedersen writes that Khankan participated in the Hizb ut-Tahrir demonstration "later that same year", but this is not correct. The party conference and the demonstration took place four years apart, in 2002 and 2006 respectively. In order not to create confusion, I have inserted the correct year.

knows, encourages the killing of Jews. Again, very progressive! Yes, Denmark's newest media darling is truly a good representative of "moderate Islam"!

PEDERSEN 2015

Since Radikale Venstre's party conference in 2002, Khankan has had an ambiguous position in Denmark as both a good and a bad Muslim and, as can be seen from the quotation, she was later implicated in additional scripts framed as a bad Muslim. The opinion pieces and blog posts in which Khankan has continually been categorized as a bad Muslim are very similar and typically refer to the same sources (See for example Henriksen 2016; Jensen 2017; Nissen 2017; Sennels 2016; Tavakoli 2017). Khankan's role is similar to that of many other Muslim women, who have ventured into discussion on the geopolitical scene, and it is well summed up in Naser Khader's blog post titled *Islamists with Lipstick*, in which he warns against the new face of Islamism. His blog begins by saying, "when one says 'Islamist' one almost automatically thinks of a long bearded and overweight man who is poorly dressed in trousers that are too short and a lame hat. But dear reader, the Islamists become more and more beautiful" (Khader 2009). The blog was published on 9 March 2009, the day after International Women's Day as a reaction to all the Muslim women who had made their voices heard in the preceding days. Khader elaborates on his warning:

Here at home people are so impressed by the well-spoken, well-educated, and oh so feminist debaters, bloggers, spokeswomen, and candidates for parliament, who intervene in the debate on behalf of Islam ... They get such an incredible amount of talking time, and journalists spend more time on their form than their opinions. They seldom get any hard questions [*modspil*] ... there are many who get away with it, such as the chairman for Critical Muslims, Sherin Khankan. However, it can be difficult to decode them. The problem is the insistent and circular rhetoric, which it can be very difficult to oppose, and most—including journalists—feel too little versed in the Quran to actually properly wrestle with these ladies ... However, do not let yourself be seduced by the outer appearance because their words speak for themselves. Lipgloss or beard, it is the same cause.

KHADER 2009

Khader is one among many politicians, journalists, and debaters who have framed Khankan as a bad Muslim, even after the opening of the Mariam Mosque. That is, although Khankan is an active producer of her own iden-

tity and narrative, other productions do exist, and some of them may even be seen as dominant in some knowledge spaces such as a segment of members of parliament and Danish media. In the above quotation it is interesting to note how Khader encourages journalists and others to adopt the role of non-Muslim Islamic authorities and venture into Quranic arguments with Khankan and likeminded Muslim feminists.

This chapter analyzes the identities and narratives of Khankan, which are produced by others than Khankan. It is by no means a comprehensive account, but the analysis demonstrates a phenomenon that exists beyond the case of Khankan. I begin by investigating framing by three members of parliament, move on to Danish media and commodification, and ends with Muslim Islamic authorities' reception of the Mariam Mosque.

## 1 Common Sources Used for Bad Muslim Framing

Khankan has continually been framed as both a good and a bad Muslim since Radikale Venstre's party conference in September 2002 when she refused to vote yes to a resolution titled, "no to sharia law", a resolution she understood as condemning sharia in toto. In this section I focus on the four sources that are most commonly used to categorize Khankan as a bad Muslim.

The first source is Khankan's objection to the resolution in Radikale Venstre. It was based on: 1) her knowledge as a sociologist of religion that tells her that sharia is an essential and indispensable part of a Muslim life; 2) her insistence that Radikale Venstre should employ neutral language, like Amnesty International, when issuing condemnations, instead of targeting a specific religion; 3) the fact that not all Muslims agree that barbaric punishments are part of sharia and Radikale Venstre should avoid legitimizing this interpretation as Islamic.

In response to Khankan's objection to the resolution, which produced an outcry in the media, Radikale Venstre in Copenhagen and Frederiksberg let her present her case in late September and ultimately adopted the neutral condemnation preferred by Khankan:

[The executive committee] strongly condemns any kind of gruesome and inhumane punishments regardless of their reason and juridical grounding [*juridisk ophav*]. Secular laws, which have been introduced following democratic principles and which accept universal human rights, are the only acceptable laws in any society.

Khader, who was part of the process, was unhappy with this alternative resolution, claiming, “Her [Khankan’s] argumentation belongs in a study circle in religious studies, not in a political party” (Thobo-Carlsen 2002a). Khader’s mention of study circles is a reference to Khankan’s use of her knowledge as a sociologist of religion. In fact, just a month prior to the party conference, Khankan had handed in her final thesis on Islamic activism in Damascus and she had worked for Amnesty International, which is why she was familiar with their best practices (see Chapter 4).

It is important to stress that Khader understood that Khankan did not condone stoning; the conflict was a disagreement over the wording of the condemnation. At the time, he applied the same distinction as Khankan between sharia as personal faith and as law and he argued on the premise that while they both condemn stoning, they disagree on how to condemn it (see for example Khader and Ziadeh 2002; cf. Khader 2002a; cf. Khader 2002b). Although it was clear in 2002 that Khankan neither endorsed stoning nor Islamic law, she has repeatedly been framed as an Islamist who condones stoning and endorses Islamic law based on her vote at the party conference—even by Khader (see the case below). Khankan was, as mentioned in Chapter 4, taken off the ballot by her local borough in March 2003 but remained a member of the party for a few additional years.

The second source of Khankan’s framing as a bad Muslim is an article she published in 2011 titled, “Sharia is compatible with European societies”, in which she explains that, to her, sharia is about ethics and rituals (Khankan 2011c). Further, she clarifies that she does not endorse sharia as a legal system. Yet the article has repeatedly been used as proof of her radical views and her endorsement of sharia as a legal system. Many non-Muslim Islamic authorities’ understanding of Islamic legal history and sharia as a phenomenon is significantly constrained by their discursivity and knowledge about the phenomenon; they confuse the technical juridical terminology that is employed within the study of sharia with terms used in contemporary legal systems. Researchers have dubbed this fallacy “the prison of language” (Hallaq 2009: 1) or “the linguistic challenge” (Petersen and Vinding 2020: 1; cf. Vikør 2005: 1). However, even taking this into consideration, non-Muslim Islamic authorities’ reading of this article is paradoxical.

The third article that is often referred to as proof of Khankan’s advocacy of sharia as law is titled, “Stoning is not part of the Quran’s message”, although it begins with the sentence, “I am against any kind of death penalty and barbaric method of punishment regardless of juridical, political, and religious origin” (Khankan 2011d). In the article, Khankan explains that the Quran does not mention stoning as a punishment for adultery, it says whipping. She then constructs

an argument about the gravity of adultery as a sin, based on the harsh punishment that is laid down in the Quran. However, as she does not explicitly state that she is against the implementation of whipping the sentence can be read as an endorsement of that type of corporal punishment as a deterrent, assuming that whipping is not barbaric in Khankan's book. If this reading is allowed, Khankan's exegesis of the Quranic text is suddenly ambiguous as she states that "the hundred lashes could be interpreted as a deterrent, an expression of adultery's reprehensibility," followed by an exegesis of how difficult it is to convict a person: an interpretation that is only possible by isolating this article from everything else Khankan has published and said over the years. In an opinion piece in *Politiken* the following year, she offered a clarification, saying, "The hundred lashes should be interpreted metaphorically as an expression of adultery's reprehensibility" (Khankan 2012d).

The fourth source is Khankan's alleged participation in a Hizb ut-Tahrir demonstration. This is typically proven with a picture in which Khankan is clearly watching a demonstration, standing next to her father in the second row, and unlike the Hizbi women she is not wearing a *hijab*. However, this story has a more complicated origin as Khankan was expressing sympathy for the cause of the demonstration, which was a protest against Israel's bombing of southern Lebanon in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006. On 25 July 2006, *B.T.* published a story, "Politician from Radikale Venstre supports Hizb ut-Tahrir", based on an interview with Khankan:

Hizb ut-Tahrir has previously encouraged the killing of Jews and is known for its warmongering tone towards Israel, homosexuals, and Jews. It was therefore a surprise to many that Khankan suddenly showed up at a demonstration organized by them. She herself rejects the affiliation. "I was there to show my sympathy for the Lebanese people. There were plenty of onlookers who are not members of the party," she says to B.T. Sherin Khankan has previously been in the press' spotlight when she couldn't dissociate herself from sharia at a Radikale Venstre party conference when a Nigerian woman had been given the death sentence after being raped ... She now admits that she actually does not think that Hizb ut-Tahrir should be banned even though her party strongly dissociates itself from it. The Radikale Venstre's superstar, Naser Khader, has in vain tried to ban the association [Hizb ut-Tahrir] by law.

"I disagree. I do not think they should be banned. It has never been proven that Hizb ut-Tahrir has been violent. On the contrary, they are against violence," Khankan says to B.T. ... "Of course Hizb ut-Tahrir can

function in a democracy. They already do. To demonstrate is democratic and peaceful, and they do not preach a violent ideology,” she explains. Can one function in a democracy if one is against it? “If one condemns people and demonizes them, they will just grow even stronger. We have to commit people to democracy instead, and that is done by including them ... When people start taking them seriously and listen to them and attend their meetings, that will entail that they will begin to participate on democratic principles. That is the approach we should take.” ... However, Sherin Khankan explains that she thinks Hizb ut-Tahrir has a number of unnuanced views when it comes to their jihad-threats. “I have heard all their speeches. They lack nuance, but they represent young people who are angry. And of course, I can understand that there is anger due to the things that are happening [in Lebanon]. I think everyone can. I think that there are many young people who feel alienated in Denmark with the invasion of Lebanon. Mass murder of so many civilians,” she says.

JENSEN 2006

Khankan was immediately denounced by the party chairman, Søren Bald, who on 26 July made it clear in *B.T.* that “Khankan is not a politician for Radikale Venstre,” pointing to the fact that she was not on the ballot and therefore merely a member of Radikale Venstre (Bald 2006).

In the quotation, Khankan argues that the right strategy to fight Hizb ut-Tahrir is to insist on democratic debate rather than condemnation of their views. This stance makes her vulnerable to being framed as supporting them. It has been rumored for many years that Khankan has some sort of affiliation with Hizb ut-Tahrir, but the picture and the above article is the closest that anyone has gotten to proving anything, and that may be the reason why it is used in such a paradoxical way.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted, though, that Khankan’s position on female imams, mixed gender Friday prayer, interreligious nikahs between Muslim women and non-Muslim men, LGBTQ-nikah, and so on, are incompatible with Hizb ut-Tahrir’s Islam.

## 2 A Case of Bad Muslim Framing

On 26 September 2017, Ritzau (2017) sent out a telegram announcing that *Radio24syv* was in possession of an email in which three members of parlia-

<sup>6</sup> It has also been rumored that Khankan’s ex-husband was a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir, but this is seldom expressed in public (for a rare example see Rohde and Borre 2017).

ment requested support from the opposition parties to overturn an administrative decision to fund the NGO, Exitcirklen, founded by Khankan and Khaterah Parwani, with 680,000 DKK (90,500 EUR).<sup>7</sup> This case eventually ended up in court where Khankan sued for libel; a case that she lost both in high and supreme court.

This section is based on the media coverage, books published by or about the involved parties, observations at the hearing in the high court on 25–26 May 2020, supreme court on 17 May 2021, and a 29-minute telephone interview with Khader on 29 June 2020.<sup>8</sup> I begin by introducing the email and explaining how it was produced. In the subsequent analysis I have a much narrower focus than the media coverage, and people familiar with the case may feel that important information is missing.<sup>9</sup> However, it is not the purpose of the analysis to decide the case outside of court on different grounds, and for people interested in the court case I therefore refer to the media coverage.<sup>10</sup>

The three MPs in question were Naser Khader from the Conservatives, Martin Henriksen from the Danish People's Party (nationalist centre-right party), and Marcus Knuth from Venstre (center-right party). In the leaked email—originally addressed to representatives of the opposition parties—they outlined their argument:

Sherin Khankan is maybe known to some people as the imam from the women's mosque that will not allow men inside and thereby maintains gender segregation in its Muslim religious preaching. Khankan said in 2015 that Christianity is an "überreligion" which, due to the constitution, is above other religions, and in 2016 [she said] that we should end the "superiority of Christianity".<sup>11</sup> The constitution is, according to Khankan, undemocratic. Khankan is also known for her unwillingness to

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7 Parwani was also framed in the email and the pattern is similar to the framing of Khankan. Although I have analyzed both framings, I have only included Khankan's framing for the sake of brevity.

8 On my requesting an interview with Henriksen and Knuth, Henriksen replied that he would like to do an interview but did not reply to a further email about setting a date and time. Knuth could not find time in his calendar in May or June 2020, and when I extended the window to cover the rest of 2020, he did not reply.

9 My reduction of the debate is of two sorts: 1) there was a significant number of high-profile people involved in this debate, whom I have not included in my presentation; 2) There was significant amounts of gossip published, which I have chosen to exclude from the analysis.

10 For the sake of clarity, I should make the reader aware that I have not involved myself in this debate. However, I have written three opinion pieces in which I have addressed the three MPs' and other non-Muslim Islamic authorities' lack of knowledge about phenomena such as sharia and religion (Petersen 2018b, 2018c, 2019c).

11 This is a reference to (Khankan 2015b).



reject sharia law, which she believes is compatible with Danish law. In [2002],<sup>12</sup> for example, she refused to vote for a resolution against sharia and the subsequent stonings in Nigeria, among others the stoning of Amina Lawal.<sup>13</sup> In 2011, Sherin Khankan defended whipping for adultery, [in an article] where she argues that the punishment should only be administered “if the persons who commit adultery insist on repeating their actions” and that [the threat of] whipping should be understood as a deterrent.

The text used hyperlinks that directed the receivers to the sources, which includes three of the four sources analyzed above, along with Khankan’s political position that Denmark should abolish the constitutional privileging of the state church and instead introduce equality of religion. As explained in Chapter 6, Khankan similarly demanded that Middle Eastern countries stop privileging Islam and likewise introduce equality of religion, a point that she raised at the interfaith conference in Istanbul in November 2014. That is, her argument on the Danish constitution was an argument for equality of religions in general. The email ends with a call to overturn the decision to fund Khankan and Parwani’s NGO:

Furthermore, we should not legitimize extreme political and religious convictions through public funding. Do the speakers [the addressees of the email] have faith in an organization that is led by such controversial figures? ... We would very much like to support good initiatives, but we think that it will be counterproductive to grant public funding to controversial political organizations.

Henriksen (2016) knew Khankan and had framed her as an Islamist on a previous occasion. This is also the case with Khader (2009), but Knuth had never heard about Khankan before. In court, the three MPs explained that they wrote the email under time pressure and that they distributed the task of googling documentation for the framing. This googling, which led to the framing of Khankan, was oriented towards achieving a political goal; that is, the conclusions presented in the first quotation above legitimize the political action proposed in the second quotation. This methodology suffers from confirma-

12 The three MPs wrote 2001, but the vote was in 2002.

13 The email states that the stonings were a result of Khankan’s vote against the resolution, but that cannot be what the three MPs mean. I have therefore interpreted the words “*heraf følgende*” as meaning “*herefter følgende*”. It should also be noted that Amina Lawal was never stoned because she won her appeals procedure (Sørensen 2003).

tion bias and while this may partially explain the paradoxical and contextless reading of the sources that I mentioned, it is not the full explanation. All three MPs also overestimate their knowledge of sharia, as I briefly demonstrate with Knuth as an example. However, this insistence on their knowing what sharia is—regardless of what Khankan says—is likely to have influenced their reading.

As an officer in the army, stationed in Afghanistan in 2008–2009, Knuth made a number of observations about how sharia was practiced among the locals.<sup>14</sup> From Knuth's participation in the debate around the leaked email, it is clear that sharia as a phenomenon is beyond his discursivity:

When the scandal [*sagen*] peaked, Professor and Quran expert, Thomas Hoffmann, from the Faculty of Theology at Copenhagen University explained in DR2 Deadline that one can distinguish between sharia as a term and sharia law ... However, this does not change Marcus Knut's position. "Listen, she has written an opinion piece titled *Sharia is Compatible with European Societies*. That is the same as saying that the law in Saudi Arabia would be good enough if we implemented it in Denmark. That is in contradiction with everything I have experienced with Islam in the world."

*So, it does not matter how much she dissociates herself from it, and what this professor says?*

Well, it is just as contradictory as if I say that I support the death penalty as long as no one gets hurt, and that the death penalty is a spiritual term. It is crystal clear that sharia means that the law comes from the Quran and that is the end of it.

ROHDE and BORRE 2019

Knuth is constrained by his discursivity to the degree that he cannot understand sharia as anything other than Islamic law, and he is not deterred in his insistence on his knowledge when presented with Hoffmann's explication of sharia. He adopts the role of a non-Muslim Islamic authority and states that "sharia means that the law comes from the Quran and that is the end of it", thus contradicting Khankan's theological standpoint as a Muslim Islamic authority. In an almost identical way, Khader rejected Khankan's standpoint and had on a previous occasion also rejected Professor Jørgen S. Nielsen's explanation in connection with a new government in Libya that "sharia can function within a

14 Knuth could not find the time to do an interview. I have therefore based my analysis of Knuth on his testimony in the high court, his appearance in the media, and his interview book (Thorsen 2019).

democracy” and that “sharia can be understood as ethical principles about, for example, justice ...” (Ritzau 2011).

At some point between 2002 and 2017 Khader stopped distinguishing between “sharia as personal faith and as law” (Khader and Ziadeh 2002; cf. Khader 2002a; cf. Khader 2002b) and instead, like Knuth and Henriksen, claimed that sharia is nothing but law. On 27 September 2017 Khader wrote in an opinion piece,

Let's be clear about this: Sharia means “the true path”. And there is only one path [the singularity is emphasized by writing *én*]. This means that it [sharia] is not compatible with other perceptions of society ... Sharia is an interpretation of God's word formulated in the Middle Ages and society has developed since then, to put it mildly. That is why sharia should be kicked back into medieval times. Sharia encompasses everything from how to greet, eat, and have sex, to building a state, war, peace, and jurisprudence [*jura*]. It includes punishments that were practiced back then when the laws were made. Saudi-Arabia is an example of a country that has implemented sharia on all levels ...

KHADER 2017

In contrast to his opinion pieces from 2002, Khader now seems to believe that there is a somewhat unambiguous law called sharia that can be implemented within contemporary territorial nation states. Furthermore, he does not distinguish between pre-modern and contemporary legal systems, and neither does he take into account the introduction of a European-inspired legal system, which largely meant that sharia became a discussion of ethics and ritual outside legal institutions (Hallaq 2009; Hirschkind 2009; Mahmood 2012). In other words, although Khader claims expertise within this field his understanding of Islamic legal history is simplistic and politicized. The most interesting question, however, is how he arrived at this standpoint and I argue that it was not through the study of Islamic legal history but rather a matter of changes in his political conviction, also reflected in his moving from the left-wing Radikale Venstre to the right-wing Conservatives. Based on Khader's literary production and a 29-minute interview on 29 June 2020 I demonstrate that he initially shared many views with Khankan—he was even a member and public supporter of her Forum for Critical Muslims (Khader 2001b).

In his first two books, *Honor and Shame* (Khader 2001a) and *Khader.dk—collected memories* (Khader 2001c), Khader tells a narrative about coming to Denmark as an 11-year-old and growing up as an immigrant. This is a story in which Khader—much like my informants in the Mariam Mosque—used

tactics to outmaneuver strategic religion, or “honor culture” as he calls it in his first book. His meeting with the Danish school system is similar to Mouna’s experience; they both cherished the idea of thinking for themselves. Khader later captured this idea in the identity “culturally Christian Muslim”, and, for example, presented the following argument in an article titled “Islam needs a little protestant theology” in 2005:

It is basically extremely [*fantastisk*] arrogant and an elitist view: only specially qualified persons—the scholars [*de skriftkloge*]—are allowed to define [*udtale sig om*] Islam. Unfortunately, this standpoint is in my experience not unusual. And it is—to put it mildly—not conducive to religious tolerance, democracy, dialogue, or mutual understanding, nor is it well thought out. It leaves important questions unanswered: why is it that individual Muslims are not allowed to think for themselves? Are we [Muslims] really like robots who park our standpoints with these imams who know the scripture exceptionally well [*særligt skriftlærde imamer*], without considering that they may be reactionary and one-sided in their interpretations? Is Islam too complex for the individual to understand? ... The individual’s right and freedom to interpret the Quran is in so many places trampled upon and Muslims [*man*] neglect to study Islam in its historical context and perform critical research in the Quran. Muslims [*man*] must accept that all ideas—even the religious—must be adapted to a changing reality in a different historical context.

KHADER 2005

In the late 1990s and early 2000s Khader was a pioneer in both explaining and addressing the problems within minority communities as he saw them and, as mentioned in Chapter 4, in 2001 he was the first Muslim candidate to become a member of parliament. In 2006, as the Mohammad Cartoon crisis peaked, he founded an association, Democratic Muslims, in an attempt to reform Islam. However it proved very difficult for Khader to get Muslims—and especially Islamic authorities—on board, and Khader, along with others, have interpreted this as an unwillingness to reform and an insistence on some form of orthodoxy. The founding of Democratic Muslims became the beginning of a process in which Khader changed his position on Islam, and during the Mohammad cartoons controversy he fervently defended free speech.

Around the time of the Mohammad cartoons controversy, Khader started to receive death threats to such a degree that the Danish Security and Intelligence Service put him under special protection. At the time of writing in July 2020, he is still under special protection. When I asked about this, he explained,

“Of course the police protection did something to me, but it was the time at Hudson Institute that opened my eyes. Here I worked a lot with Islamism ... it has clearly influenced my view on Islam, definitely.” Khader is referring to his four-year break from Danish politics (2011–2015) which he spent as a senior fellow at the Washington-based, political think tank, the Hudson Institute, where he became part of a research community working with US foreign policy. In Danish media the Hudson Institute is typically described as conservative or neoconservative (Davidsen-Nielsen 2015; Kaufmann 2018).

When Khader returned to Danish politics in 2015 he was elected to parliament for the Conservative party that, inspired by him, ran a campaign with advertisements saying, “Stop Nazi-Islamism [*Stop Nazi-Islamisme*]”; Khader defended his view that there are significant overlaps between Nazism and Islamism of which the public and decision-makers should be made aware (Khader 2015). Thus, it can be seen that he had adopted a different view on Islam, a much more aggressive rhetoric, and in the 2019 elections called himself “The Freedom Fighter”, using the slogan, “I fight for Denmark”.

In the court on 25 May 2020 Khader claimed, “If one endorses sharia—irrespective of what definition one uses—then one is an Islamist”, adding that, “Hizb ut-Tahrir are Islam’s Nazis” and by turning up at such a demonstration, Khankan had sent a message. Furthermore, Khader argued that “one cannot just choose parts of sharia—Islam is a system” and that Khankan’s belief in some form of “a la carte sharia” is it not sound, because one cannot half-endorse sharia: it is either-or. Thus, Khader produces an Islamic orthodoxy that he fights on the geopolitical scene by framing individuals as bad Muslims against whom he can fight (for a similar case see Jørgensen 2011)

Khader and Khankan dated for a short period around 2001, and Khader explains<sup>15</sup> that he did not understand Khankan to be an Islamist back then; nor did she have much knowledge about Islam. However, according to Khader, Khankan embarked on a personal journey towards Islamism around 2002 when she voted no to the resolution in Radikale Venstre, in 2003 married a very active member of Hizb ut-Tahrir, and from time to time defended the party in public. He remarks that he does not hold Khankan responsible for her ex-husband’s religious views, but her marriage to a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir is important if one wants to understand Khankan’s journey.

Khader pursues this argument further by drawing attention to Khankan’s stint as a schoolteacher at Nord-Vest Privatskole between 2006 and 2011, a

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15 This and the two following paragraphs are based on Khader’s statements in court, my interview with Khader on 29 June 2020, and his comments on an early draft of this chapter.

Muslim private school that lost its public subsidy because its education was substantially below the minimum requirements, and because inspectors found books on jihad in a copy room on a surprise visit in 2017. It was the latter that grabbed the most headlines and the school closed in September 2017 (Friberg and Karker 2017). Khader's point is that Khankan must have been aware of the religious views that were endorsed among some of the teachers at this school—she may even have been one of them—and her choice to stay silent on the matter, rather than informing the authorities, is suspicious. Khader further backs up his argument about Khankan's theological journey into Islamism by problematizing her frequent references to Tariq Ramadan, whom he sees as an Islamist and “the master of speaking with two tongues” (email correspondence with Khader on 31 July 2020).

In other words, Khader claims that Khankan is either still an Islamist and is lying about it or has an Islamist past that she is trying to hide from the public. Moreover, he understands the women-only Friday prayer in the Mariam Mosque as either an example of Khankan's compliance with Islamism or a naïve aspiration to become accepted as a female imam among Muslims.

I am not arguing that a rich understanding of sharia falsifies Khader's, Knuth's, and Henriksen's definitions of sharia as there are Muslims who agree with them. However, when they pose as either experts within Islamic studies or as non-Muslim Islamic authorities and claim that their definitions are the only valid definitions, they demonstrate a lack of knowledge about both religion and sharia as phenomena. Further, in their position as influential people with significant power to define concepts in society, they empower Islamists by defining their position as orthodox and then mobilizing this position in their struggle against Muslims, such as Khankan, who would otherwise be seen as good Muslims engaged in reform. This construction of orthodoxy becomes even more absurd when it is uttered while posing as authorities within Islamic studies, as it is well established that Islamism is rather innovative, originates in the early 20th century, relies heavily on contemporary ideas about the territorial nation state, and takes considerable inspiration from European legal systems (Mandaville 2007; Roy 1994; Zubaida 2003). In other words, where self-proclaimed experts such as Khader, Knuth, and Henriksen see continuity, academic experts see rupture.

The above analysis provides the logic for the absurd situation in which Khankan sued the three MPs for libel on the same day (15 March 2018) that she was greeted as a feminist heroine by President Emmanuel Macron in the Élysée Palace (Ritzau 2018). Furthermore, it demonstrates how influential non-Muslim Islamic authorities' theological positions are in some knowledge spaces. Not only do non-Muslim Islamic authorities have considerable power

in defining Islamic orthodoxy they may also define Muslim identity (Jeldtoft 2011: 1136).

While the effect of the three MPs' (and many others') categorization of Khankan as a bad Muslim is easy to identify, the many media narratives produced by journalists and production companies have a subtler effect: significant warping also occurs when Khankan is presented as a good Muslim. I begin the following section with a short discussion of yet another serendipitous, but somewhat predictable, LGBTQ-case (I hope the repetitious style of returning to the predictable serendipity of LGBTQ-cases demonstrates my point on some events being more likely than others).

### 3 Media Narratives

Part of the public debate is produced through genres such as documentary series, and production companies are always on the lookout for protagonists who can produce interesting narratives, discussions, and entertainment (Petersen 2019a). Early in 2018, a Danish journalist, Abdel Aziz Mahmoud, contacted Khankan in connection with a documentary in which he would come out of the closet titled "A Homo from Hell—A Muslim Comes Out" (aired on 9 and 16 April 2018). Mahmoud was using the amplification that adaptation to popular media genres can offer to take a leap in the struggle for homosexual Muslims, and in that context, he asked Khankan whether she would perform an interreligious LGBTQ-nikah on camera because he wanted to marry his non-Muslim boyfriend.

This put Khankan in an awkward position as it was almost a year since she had announced plans for interreligious nikah without approval from the other members of the Mariam Mosque, and she had now recruited a new team that wanted to be tactical about these kinds of issues. Meanwhile the scandal with the three MPs was still running and Khankan was preparing to sue them for libel. In other words, declining could potentially damage both Khankan and the Mariam Mosque significantly; however, Mahmoud accepted Khankan's reasons for declining to perform the LGBTQ-nikah and that was seemingly the end of it.

A few months after the documentary had been aired, Mahmoud contacted Khankan again to ask whether she would perform the LGBTQ-nikah off camera in private. Again, Khankan contacted members of the Mariam Mosque to hear everyone's opinion. In the end, a compromise was reached in which Khankan would give a speech at the wedding. This is a scene in Skovgaard's documentary in which Khankan, wearing her imam dress, gives a speech while the ritual

setup of the marriage ceremony is still intact. On 10 September 2018, Khankan uploaded pictures of Mahmoud and his husband stating, in English:

Our times lack Muslim spiritual religious leadership that understands that Allah has created a world of multiplicity because Allah wants us to want multiplicity, so as to understand Allah's Unity ... I stand behind and fully support Abdel Aziz Mahmoud and any persons right to choose his or her beloved. It's not a matter of interpretation. It's a matter of human dignity, humility and generosity, which are basic traits in Islam.

The day after, Khankan posted pictures on Facebook of herself with the couple and a text that celebrates their love. An hour later Khankan edited the post and added: "ATTENTION: I did not marry the couple. I was participating as a guest and gave a speech about the paths of love."<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, this discussion of the capacity in which Khankan had acted—as a private person or as an imam who performed a nikah ceremony—played an important role both on social media and among members of the Mariam Mosque. The idea of a nikah as a product of an imam's ritual performance was at the core of this discussion but, as explained in Chapter 8, there is no basis for such a function within *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). If analyzed with a *fiqh*-based hermeneutic, it would seem that Khankan had delivered a *khutbah al-nikah* (nikah speech) while the nikah constitutes a civil contract between the spouses unrelated to Khankan's performance. However, the *fiqh* interpretation is irrelevant to the Islam being produced in this context, and that is really the point I want to make. One can understand the actions using a hermeneutic inspired by *fiqh*, but this would neither reflect the discourse nor the Islam practiced by Mahmoud, Khankan, and the Muslims who got involved in the discussion of what Khankan's performance constituted. The application of such a hermeneutic would produce an Islamic-studies discourse that would be little understood by most of the involved parties.

By a complete coincidence the judicial system accepted to begin Khankan's libel suit in the high court rather than city court on the very same day as her speech at the wedding, 10 September. Thus, she made headlines in most Danish newspapers—and the front page of the third largest newspaper, *Berlingske Tidende* (Borre 2018). A journalist from *B.T.* saw the irony of the situation and

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16 In his book *Freedom through Submission* Johannes Renders (2021: 240) writes that, "... she [Khankan] pushes the boundaries of what is considered acceptable by officiating a same-sex marriage ..." As can be seen from the above and previous chapters, Khankan may wanted to officiate same-sex marriages, but she never did. Neither did she have a marriage license, as the Mariam Mosque is not a recognized faith society.



published a story on 11 September titled, “Female imam accused of defending whipping—now she celebrates famous homosexual couple” (Hansen 2018). Thus, another absurd situation was produced in which Khankan was both reported as celebrating homosexual marriage while also being categorized as a radical Islamist.

However, soon things were back to normal and on 10 October 2018 Khankan was again categorized as a bad Muslim who “refuses to dissociate herself from sharia and the dream of an Islamic caliphate” by a blogger on *Jyllands-Posten* (Jensen 2018). Paradoxically, the blogger on *Jyllands-Posten* puts forth her accusation with reference to *A Muslim Manifest* in which Khankan and others (2006) announced their intentions to hold women-led Friday prayer (Vestergaard 2018).

Khankan’s narrative is also used in foreign political debates to produce narratives and meanings that are relevant locally. As mentioned above, Khankan had tea with Macron in March 2018, but her narrative was also used by *Breitbart News* to support the narrative Donald Trump claimed during the US primaries in 2016.

On 13 February 2016, *Breitbart* published a story titled, “Denmark Will Build Secret Women’s Only Mosques to Protect Worshippers from Radical Islamists”, subtitled, “Denmark is to approve the building of a number of ‘women-only’ mosques in secret locations, due to threats from radical Islamists” (Lane and Tomlinson 2016). The occasion of this story was the misreport in *Politiken* two days earlier about the address of the Mariam Mosque being kept secret as a safety precaution (see Figure 2 in Chapter 7). The article claims that “The first female-only mosque has already been built in the Danish capital of Copenhagen”, going on to describe the general situation in Denmark: “The arrival of over a million migrants who often have ties to a far more radical version of Islam than Danish converts has led to many women in migrant centers demanding separate accommodation or they have left migrant centers entirely”. The context is the so-called Syrian refugee crisis, but it should be noted that the number of Syrian asylum seekers for the whole of 2016 is 8,406, far below the one million claimed by *Breitbart* (Udlændige-, Integrations- og Boligministeriet 2016: 55).

Lane and Tomlinson’s article contains a remarkable number of factual errors. However, as this story was published during the primaries when Trump was discussing Muslims and US immigration policy, facts hardly mattered. Khankan’s narrative is not disseminated because it is interesting in itself; it is retrofitted and utilized by foreign politicians to further their political agenda.

This and similar stories constitute what Dohra Ahmad calls “pulp nonfiction” and Lila Abu-Lughod calls the construction of “Islamland” (Abu-Lughod

2013: 68 ff. and 87 ff.), which is a politically constructed narrative of the Other that is utilized to legitimize a political agenda. Paradoxically, Khankan is trying to fight these kind of narratives, but in this context her narrative is being used by creators of pulp nonfiction to make their points.

#### 4 Commodification of a Narrative

Female imams have a commercial potential in media that both amplifies their message and to some extent funds their activism (Petersen 2019a). For example, Khankan and the female imam in the Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque, Seyran Ates, both have documentaries and books out on their activism. This seems to reflect an international trend (Hammer 2012): Ani Zonneveld<sup>17</sup> is the protagonist in a documentary called “Al Imam”; Amina Wadud is featured in “The Noble Struggle of Amina Wadud”; and Asra Nomani<sup>18</sup> is the protagonist in “The Mosque in Morgantown”. In fact, the famous prayer of 2005 led by Amina Wadud in New York was paid for by the publisher HarperCollins as a way of promoting Asra Nomani’s book, *Standing Alone in Mecca: An American Woman’s Struggle for the Soul of Islam*, which was rebranded with a new title and a new front page (Hammer 2012: 32–33; Nomani 2006).<sup>19</sup>

Khankan can be understood as sometimes a celebrity, sometimes a religious leader, but often she is both to some degree. Her celebrity status is an outcome of contemporary information infrastructures within which new identities, such as that of a celebrity, can be produced (Habermas 1989). They have also engendered new possibilities for building religious authority and becoming religious leaders (see Stjernholm 2019 for an example of DIY preaching on social media). It is important to stress that commodification does not devalue

17 Ani Zonneveld is a female imam and the president of Muslims for Progressive Values.

18 Asra Nomani is an American journalist who published an autobiography in which, inspired by Dalai Lama, she investigates her religious roots and finds her Islam (Nomani 2006). This investigation leads to activism such as the Muslim Women’s Freedom Tour and the organizing of Amina Wadud’s famous 2005 prayer in New York, paid for by her publisher.

19 Interestingly, it is becoming increasingly common to see overlaps between commodified knowledge and research knowledge in that both describe the “same” phenomena. John R. Bowen (2016), for example, did his research in the same sharia council as BBC Panorama filmed *Secrets of Britain’s sharia councils*, and many of Anabel Inge’s (2017) research locations and some of her informants were the same as in *Undercover mosque*. Likewise, I am writing this book on a mosque that has already been the topic of several documentaries, and the report on Muslim divorce practice referred to in Chapter 8 (Liversage and Petersen 2020) investigates the same topic as the documentary *Mosques behind the veil*.

religious activism; it is a condition of public existence and has been so for a long time. The history of religions have seen many theologians become public figures, and their books, portraits and sermons commodified (Hoover 2006).

Igor Kopytoff (1986: 64) explains that “the same thing may be treated as a commodity at one time and not another ...”. The distinction between narratives as personal and as commodities does not describe their essence; it describes how they are produced in different contexts (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013: 66). That is, one can identify with a narrative produced as a commodity, and a personal narrative can sometimes become valuable as a commodity because it may be seen as authentic and honest; however, personal and commodified narratives are produced in different ways.

Hitherto, I have discussed Khankan’s narrative within a commercial structure, without addressing the commercial aspect of it, as it seems irrelevant to analyze, for example, how Facebook makes money out of her Facebook activity; in this respect Khankan is no different than most other people. However, below I address the commodification of Khankan that takes the form defined by Lewis Hyde:

To convert an idea into a commodity means, broadly speaking, to establish a boundary of some sort so that the idea cannot move from person to person without a toll or fee. Its benefit or usefulness must then be reckoned and paid for before it is allowed to cross the boundary.

HYDE 1983: 105; quoted in JENKINS, FORD, and GREEN 2013: 67

Interest in Khankan, Femimam, and the Mariam Mosque has been constant but with the inauguration of the Mariam Mosque in August 2016 attention rose to a new level. Khankan received what seemed like an endless stream of offers. A Norwegian team of documentarists wanted to pay Khankan a salary to play the protagonist in their documentary on the Mariam Mosque. When this was blocked by Skovgaard who had been filming for one and a half years by then, the Norwegian team came up with a new idea: Khankan was to travel around Europe and discuss Islam with Muslim extremists. This would present the geopolitical scene as a reality show with Khankan on a new mission. In other words, as this narrative was in demand—a new commercialized script, so to speak—it could have reoriented Khankan’s engagement also on a personal level. The documentary was never recorded, but the structural similarity between this offer, and the Danish Broadcast corporation’s recording of the documentary about the path to opening a mosque—and thus production of a narrative—in April 2016 (see Chapter 7) is noteworthy.

Commodification entails Khankan's self-insertion into narratives that have been scripted by production companies, which ultimately produce a persona oriented towards consumption in media markets. Khankan plays an active role in her own insertion, but it is important to be aware of how commercial structures constrain her agency and ability to express herself.

From time to time Khankan would strongly object to the narratives into which journalists and production companies inserted her while at other times she would endorse and identify with suggested narratives. Indeed, she identified with Skovgaard's trailer for *The Reformist* to such a degree that she would frequently show it to visitors to the mosque and use it to communicate who she was, what the Mariam Mosque was about, and where it was heading.

Soon after the inauguration of the Mariam Mosque, Khankan signed a contract with the French publisher, Stock, which wanted to publish her biography, now available in French, English, and Finnish—but not Danish (Khankan 2017, 2018a, 2018b). She also started to give lectures, sit on panels, and appear on foreign talks shows and radio. Below, I discuss the production of Khankan's biography and her TEDx talk in Münster as examples of commodified products that people pay for in the form of books and tickets.

In spring 2017, Khankan asked me for Islamic feminist literature recommendations as she wanted to know more about this interpretive approach, and I lent her books by Amina Wadud (1999, 2008), a book by Kecia Ali (2006), and two booklets from Sisters in Islam. Later that year, she started to pitch ideas for her biography and she considered incorporating this literature as a way of legitimizing her activism to Muslim readers. It should be remembered that Khankan did not herself intend to become an imam when she wrote her opinion piece on 5 March 2015; she had become an imam due to circumstances over which she did not have full control. In March 2015, she had taken the initiative based on her knowledge that Wadud, for example, had led a mixed gender Friday prayer, legitimizing it with theological arguments. Thus, Khankan knew that there was an argument that could be made in its favor, but she had not herself read elaborate versions of it (cf. MacIntyre 1981/2014: 9). Now, however, she was supposed to produce her narrative and she had to decide to what degree it should be structured by strategic religion and the geopolitical scene.

Khankan would often ask for other people's opinions before making decisions and I had no privileged position in this respect. It was a way for Khankan to test, qualify, challenge her own views, and to see things from other perspectives than her own. This was also the approach I took to our conversations, one of merely trying to illuminate the questions asked without adding much to the exchanges. With regard to her question about her biography, I ventured

that it might be of benefit to incorporate Islamic feminist literature into the narrative but, in doing so, Khankan risked erasing herself and merely reproduce literature that was already available and well-disseminated. I had several conversations on the this and similar subjects with Khankan, but I never gave advice—neither am I sure that Khankan would have been interested in advice because she seemed, rather, to be looking for perspectives. Producing the biography became a complex matter, as introducing Islamic feminist literature as a source of legitimacy would profoundly change the role of Khankan's fieldwork in Damascus, which led to her first announcement on female imams (Khankan 2002c). I soon realized that we were discussing the construction of a narrative oriented towards its reception among Muslims.

The publisher, on the other hand, seemed more concerned with the book's reception among non-Muslims, and therefore tried to influence Khankan in other ways. For example, Khankan told me that "Tariq Ramadan plays an important role [for me] and I am very inspired by him, and I actually met him personally in 2002 right after I had founded Critical Muslims" (interview 15 November 2016). She had had lunch with Ramadan the day after he had given a public lecture in Copenhagen, and some of the advice he gave back then was still important to her in 2016 when I interviewed her. It was Ramadan who advised Khankan not to burn her bridges, which played an important role in her approach to activism until Amina Wadud in a private conversation in November 2017 convinced her that one must burn some bridges to move forward.

The French publisher, however, feared their product could be compromised if Khankan claimed inspiration from Ramadan, as his role as a good or bad Muslim was disputed on the geopolitical scene. It would be hard for them to commodify Khankan's narrative in France as that of a good Muslim if, as part of this narrative, she admitted to taking inspiration from a famous Muslim with an ambiguous status. Ultimately, the publishers had their way and Ramadan is only mentioned in one line in the French edition where it merely says that she bumped into the man whom she later married at a lecture given by Ramadan (the lecture mentioned above).

Interestingly, the rape charges against Ramadan, which Khankan followed closely and initially refused to believe,<sup>20</sup> broke in the media just after the publication of the French version of the biography, and when the English edition of the book was published even this indirect reference was removed. Com-

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20 This is based on conversations with Khankan during the fall of 2017, and I have not asked Khankan whether she has changed her opinion as the case evolved.

modification offers widespread dissemination, but it also comes at a price as one is expected to accommodate market demands—a sort of warping due to commercial interest, so to speak. On the other hand, Stock has proven to be a powerful public relations agent which, in a professional way, has controlled Khankan's categorization as a good Muslim to protect their sales and market their product. Khankan's image as a good Muslim is not significantly challenged in France, the UK, nor Finland, where her publishers have market interests.

Khankan's narrative has also been commodified by TEDx, which sells tickets to its events. Speakers at TEDx are offered a platform that includes a professionally edited recording of their talk, and subsequent dissemination through TEDx's online channels. Two days before her first TEDx talk in Münster on 2 November 2018, Khankan called me to ask my opinion of what she had in mind. She explained that TEDx would prefer that she avoided talking about religion, which Khankan found odd as she would be speaking as an imam. One solution Khankan was considering was to substitute her often used quotes by Ibn al-Arabi with the words of Pippi Longstocking, as the meaning is more or less the same and Astrid Lindgren's famous children's books had an impact on her as a child. However, she was not satisfied with the substitution, finding it cheesy. We therefore discussed what TEDx could possibly have meant and concluded that they probably wanted Khankan to focus on how to create change within a religious context rather than on the religious content itself. Longstocking was out and Ibn al-Arabi was back in. However, it is interesting to note how easy it is to switch in and out of a religious framework as some tenets that are produced as Islamic can retain a significant part of their meaning even though the Islamic semiotic resources are dropped.

Although Khankan does not actively struggle against extremism, this struggle would often be important to the organizations with which she became involved. This is exemplified by the publicity for her Münster appearance: "At TEDx Münster she will talk about what it is like to stand up for female freedom in a male dominated world, to oppose extremism and how things that are supposedly stuck in stone can change."<sup>21</sup> This was to become a recurring phenomenon, and when, at a meeting in the Mariam Mosque on 15 September 2018, Khankan announced that she would receive a Global Hope Award in New York on 27 September, she expressed uneasiness with again being framed as an imam who fights radicalization. This was heightened by the Global Hope Coalition's framing of the awards:

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21 TEDx Münster Facebook wall, posted on 30 October 2018.

Violent extremism is one of the gravest dangers of our time—threatening to unravel the fabric of our societies, irreparably destroy invaluable cultural icons and jeopardize the future of intercultural relations. The military defeat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria has not ended or even significantly diminished the threat: from the Sahel to Indonesia, jihadi extremism is on the rise. But around the globe, a new force is emerging: men and women who are taking great risks to oppose these extremists ... The Global Hope Award ... is establishing an international platform to empower courageous individuals who stand up to terror and violence, preserve our cultural heritage and building bridges across culture.

The Global Hope Award is not merely a prize handed out to activists; the Global Hope Coalition, a non-profit foundation based in New York, Zurich, and Hong Kong, has written a narrative in which prize winners' efforts are oriented towards the fight against terrorism and extremism. Accepting the award comes at the price of self-insertion into this narrative. In some contexts, Khankan would refuse to participate, but as local geopolitical scenes are inescapable, she developed tactics to maneuver these spaces. She would, for example, reframe the fight against radicalization and extremism as standing up for human rights.

I have pluralized geopolitical scenes in the above to remind the reader that the geopolitical scene analyzed in previous chapters is Danish, and thus Khankan's visit to the Élysée Palace and the Global Hope Awards are performances on foreign geopolitical scenes that, while they may present similarities to the Danish geopolitical scene, also differ in significant ways. In relation to this project, it is relevant to point out that Khankan was framed as a bad Muslim by a segment of Danish politicians and public debaters while she was seen as a good Muslim who fought bad Muslims by the Global Hope Award committee.

## 5 Reception of the Mariam Mosque among Islamic Authorities

Although Khankan is not accepted as an Islamic authority among Danish Islamic authorities, she is not completely isolated. This was briefly demonstrated in Chapter 8 when Khankan asked other Islamic authorities for help with an Islamic divorce and in the SMS where Hakeem and Mohammed endorsed her divorce practice. In addition to this, the Mariam Mosque was also partially recognized by a broader range of Islamic institutions when it co-signed a declaration with the Danish Islamic Center, the Danish Muslim Association, the Muslims' Joint Council, the Imam Ali Mosque, and the Imam Malik

Institute<sup>22</sup> in relation to a scandal that had erupted over an undercover documentary, *Mosques behind the Veil*.<sup>23</sup> However, when the signees pledged to work on a manifest the Mariam Mosque was excluded, but so was the Imam Ali mosque, which represented the Shia community in the press release (Johansen and Borg 2016).

While Khankan has received plenty of text messages calling on her to repent, been opposed by Islamic authorities in the media and online, and discussed her religious position with Islamic authorities on several occasions (Spillemoose 2016),<sup>24</sup> it is noteworthy that some—even prominent—imams do not oppose the idea of a women's mosque. I have not systematically collected data on this, but I have recorded occasions in my field diary when Islamic authorities would themselves raise the subjects of Khankan or the Mariam Mosque.

In the winter and spring of 2019, while engaged in a research project on Muslim divorce practices in Denmark at The Danish Center for Social Science Research, I interviewed a prominent imam who had no idea who I was or what I do (Liversage and Petersen 2020). Another prominent imam had vouched for me as trustworthy, so he gave me an interview and let me look into his archive of Islamic divorces. The chemistry was good and after approximately three hours he suddenly asked me whether I had heard about that female imam, to which I replied in the affirmative without disclosing anything further.

The imam tried to demonstrate to me that female imams are not controversial from a fiqh perspective by quoting the opinions of two extinct *madh-habs* (schools of thought), Abu Thawri and Jariri, both of which, he explained, allowed women to lead prayer (see el-Fadl 2003 for more on these two madh-habs). He then ventured into a long talk on opinions that support the founding of women's mosques and female imams, but he concluded that Khankan does not know enough to claim the title, so, while her project is legitimate, she is not the right person to be its imam. However, he then remarked that, given the state of affairs and the poor conduct of some Danish imams that we had just been discussing, Khankan does less harm than many of her male colleagues, and he would personally like to cooperate with her to get the theological foundation for the mosque right.

22 In Danish: *Dansk Islamisk Center, Dansk Muslimske Union, Muslimernes Fællesråd, Imam Ali Moskeen, and Mariam Moskeen*.

23 The press release was published on the Danish Islamic Center's homepage but is no longer available as the site is no longer online. However, references to the press release can be found in the media (Spillemoose 2016).

24 See also: Fatih Alev's Facebook Wall 6 April 2015, accessed 12 May 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/fatih.alev/posts/10152397199927395>. Another example is Waseem Hussein on TV2 News on February 11, 2016 at 7:20 PM.



I had a similar experience with another less prominent but well-educated imam shortly after the inauguration of the Mariam Mosque in August 2016. He invited me for dinner in his mosque and after a while the Mariam Mosque came up as a topic of conversation. This led to a somewhat similar conversation in which the imam explained that it is possible to argue in favor of Khankan's position; to demonstrate this he asked me to follow him into the library where he looked up a few of the sources he had in mind. He did not see a problem with the Mariam Mosque, per se, but he resented the fact that Khankan had founded and was leading the mosque without being able to provide such an argument. Like the first imam, he explained that he would cooperate with Khankan on this if she would just ask for his assistance. After this the conversation moved on to other topics and did not revert to the Mariam Mosque. He later contacted the Mariam Mosque to offer his support; this was briefly discussed among members who agreed that they should invite him to the mosque, but like so many times before, no action was taken and the imam never got a response.

Although the subjects of Khankan or the Mariam Mosque were not raised in most of my interactions with Islamic authorities, I had several conversations in which they were. In some it would be a mere mention but in six cases the conversations were substantial enough for me to record them in my field diary. I also had some discussions with Islamic authorities who opposed the Mariam Mosque, in two cases to such a degree that I noted it in my field diary.

While people held different positions on the mosque, there seemed to be agreement that Khankan's theological knowledge was insufficient to undertake such a project. Some, like the first imam mentioned above, explained that her religious education was better than some male imams' education and in that sense sufficient, but as Khankan had chosen to enter new territory educational credentials became much more important. Based on this it would seem that at least some Danish Islamic authorities accept Khankan's claim that an argument for her position can be made; however, they resent that she is not able to make it in a way that satisfies their standards for such an argument; therefore, she can be seen as not taking her responsibility as an Islamic authority seriously enough. Thus, their main concern is that Khankan has broken with the rules of scriptural grounding and accountability dictated by strategic religion.

The idea that Khankan's knowledge was insufficient was in some cases based on experience or rumors. Some Islamic authorities had discussed theological issues with Khankan and come to the conclusion that she was not sufficiently knowledgeable, while others referred to a number of discussions between Khankan and her co-students during a course on spiritual care at Copenhagen University's Faculty of Theology in 2015. Khankan had taken this course along with a number of Islamic authorities who had questioned the theological legit-

imacy of Femimam, and they were not satisfied with her arguments. When I asked Khankan about this, she confirmed that she had been challenged on her position during the course.

I happened to meet two of her co-students who, without my asking, explained that they had attended the course with Khankan and that she had claimed that proper arguments for female imams existed and promised to bring them to the table for a discussion. Yet she never did this and, as the two Islamic authorities in question knew that I was researching the Mariam Mosque, they politely inquired whether I knew what those arguments might be. They were, in other words, both curious and skeptical, and this is how two of the six above-mentioned conversations started.

Khankan's theological arguments did not live up to the standard defined by strategic religion and the story of Khankan's presumed lack of knowledge therefore became rumored, although it is important not to overemphasize this as Khankan is not an important topic of conversation among Danish Islamic authorities. Nonetheless, she is admired and respected for her work in *Exit-cirklen*, even by some of her strongest critics, and she continues to receive invitations to speak in Danish mosques in this capacity.

The court case against Khader also substantially improved Khankan's standing, as Muslims—including opponents, Islamic authorities, and prominent community leaders (men and women)—expressed strong support for her, even when she lost the case. Because Khader is so resented, particularly for framing a substantial number of Muslims who have opposed him as bad Muslims, Khankan's court case was relatable and followed closely. Her case became a proxy for their own "case", and her phone rang almost constantly in the days prior to the high court hearing as people called her to voice their support or give advice.

## 6 Final Remarks

This chapter has demonstrated how politization and commodification warps Islam. Interestingly, non-Muslim Islamic authorities have in some knowledge spaces successfully produced and disseminated a version of Khankan's Islam that is their own construction, and her identity as a bad Muslim (a radical Islamist). This discourse has even been dominant at times. The chapter has not investigated how or why non-Muslim Islamic authorities produce Islam, but it demonstrates the effect of their discourse, which strongly suggest that studies of non-Muslim Islams are needed. It should be noted that the case against Khader was one of the only in which she managed to muster significant resis-

tance and mobilize others in her struggle against the bad Muslim framing—a struggle she seems to have won after-the-struggle because Khader got caught in a #metoo scandal in the summer 2021 (Rye, Ledegaard, and Svendsen 2021). Henriksen lost his seat in parliament, subsequently lost an election for party chairman in the Danish People's Party, and left the party afterwards. Knuth still insists that Khankan is an Islamist, but he is not actively fighting her.

The chapter has, furthermore, demonstrated how market demands warped Khankan's narrative and Islam. Her position is both empowered and submissive. To publish a biography with a good publisher and be invited to the Élysée Palace are examples of empowerment, but this is secured by submitting to expectations: not claiming inspiration from Ramadan, for example, or submitting to scripts produced by organizations like TEDx and the Global Hope Coalition. In other words, these platforms are volatile and difficult to control, not least because others create narratives about themselves using Khankan and the Mariam Mosque as elements in their scripts.

# Conclusion

This study has provided a detailed description of how the Mariam Mosque was established and the kind of phenomenon it is. It has given a detailed description of how Islams were produced in Femimam and the Mariam Mosque prior to warping,<sup>1</sup> and it has described the process by which these Islams were warped. In the conclusion, I will first make five comments on methodology in the study of Islam, which—although they have played a role in the book—have not been emphasized, highlighted, or sufficiently discussed. I argue that the methodological choices of this study made the critical observations and the novelty of the outcome possible. This leads to two conclusions on serendipities and an etic concept of Islamic traditions that I would like to emphasize.

It should be noted that some of this study's most important conclusions such as the influence of non-Muslim Islamic authority on Muslim productions of Islam are not included below as these conclusions have been repeated several times in preceding chapters, and therefore, I see no reason to repeat them yet again. The conclusion ends with an epilogue in which I revisit the Mariam Mosque in the summer of 2020.

## 1 Methodology in the Study of Islams

I argue that the study of how Islams are produced benefits from following a similar methodology as that applied in this study. There are, however, downsides as it requires very rich material that is difficult for a single researcher to gather, which raises issues about possible shortcomings in research that lacks this possibility, especially when erecting narratives in retrospect and in regard to the consequences of doing so.

Nadia Jeldtoft (2016) argues that research methodologies to some extent determine results as they are built on definitions of Islam that influence sampling strategies and analysis of data. This observation stresses the importance of adopting and developing methodologies that are sensitive to the objects being studied. In the following, I therefore underline five methodological choices I made to sensitize this study in terms of sampling strategy, analysis, and communication of results.

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1 There is no absolute pre-warped state, as all spaces are structured by power, and thus, the geopolitical scene and strategic religion transcends into the space within which Femimam held its meetings. This is, for example, evident in the LGBTQ-discussions in Chapter 7.

First, by studying the production of Islam while it is taking place rather than in retrospect, I have been able to collect data on the production of Islams before they were expressed in spaces structured by strategic Islams or the geopolitical scene. This means that I have been able to describe the production of Islam prior to warping,<sup>2</sup> how members of Femimam have discussed the transition into spaces structured by strategic power (see Chapter 7), and finally the warped Islams. In short, I have been able to describe how Islams warp when Muslims express themselves in different spaces, and how the warping is caused by the power dynamics that structure spaces.

The concept of warping also poses a methodological problem as sampling Islams after warping does not say much about their production. It primarily says something about the power that structures the spaces within which Islams are sampled. Thus, the concept of warping highlights how data are always influenced by the power structures of the spaces within which they manifest. Therefore, research methodologies must take warping of space into consideration when collecting data on Islams.

Furthermore, the concept of warping problematizes the use of journalism as “recording” of actual events. I have seen too many scholars mistaking media narratives of Khankan and the Mariam Mosque for accurate descriptions of events.

Second, I have adopted analytical strategies that—as much as possible—have avoided the production of a plot or a trajectory. I could have analyzed my data with a focus on the events that led to the founding of the Mariam Mosque. However, this would have meant erasing a substantial proportion—maybe even the majority—of my data in the analysis, because the Mariam Mosque was not an obvious outcome of, for example, the meetings described in Chapter 7. I have adopted coding strategies that have preserved the chaos, dead ends, and lack of direction, instead of cleaning up the data and sorting information based on whether it has relevance for a trajectory that can be retrospectively constructed. By doing this, I argue that I have created a much more plausible description of the creation of the Mariam Mosque than previous research and journalism. As an effect, I have described events in a less condensed format than would normally be expected when communicating research results. However, the chaos, dead ends, repetitions, and changes of directions in these chapters avoided the introduction of a plot or trajectory in the communication of results. I have employed a similar strategy in other chapters where I have described events as live observations, while the analysis is

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2 See note 1.

based on retrospection. That is, my presentation contains all the data necessary to construct a trajectory but, in almost every description, I have deconstructed this trajectory by including data that points in other directions. Again, I argue that this was necessary to be able to illustrate and analyze the importance of the negotiations, trials, and errors that were intimate parts of the growth of the Mariam Mosque and, I propose, many other organizations are similar, not least in their initial phases.

Third, as a historian of religion specialized in Islamic studies, I risk desensitizing myself to the Islams that I observe if I excessively use my knowledge of other Islams to understand my observations.<sup>3</sup> Instead I have tried methodologically to dispose of my knowledge in order to sensitize myself to the research object. This has also applied to the criteria of what data was seen as relevant to collect. I have strived to adopt my informants' logic, to accept their understanding of what can be taken to be Islamic, and to investigate, rather than Islamize, phenomena (Jeldtoft 2011). Thus, I have taken it for granted that a Sufi sheikh can be trained by a Brahmin, that one can follow the Hanafi and Jafiri *madhhabs* (schools of thought) simultaneously, that Mohammad preached the same message as Kierkegaard, that Christians praying in the Mariam Mosque is meaningful, that prayer is not part of Islam, that prayer is essential to Islam, and I have listened tentatively when physics students expressed their religious discourse using mathematical discourse. The latter does not appear in my description; rather it is part of a large pool of data—including recordings of the Friday sermons—that I have collected but chosen not to include. A book that contained all the interesting analyses that could be made of these data would end up comprising multiple volumes. Regardless, I argue that investigating rather than assuming an "Islamic" logic has led to less biased descriptions of the Islams discussed in this study.

Fourth, I have been careful not to use linguistic expression whereby, as a researcher, I end up producing Islamic orthodoxy as a linguistic by-product. This is achieved by focusing on Muslims' and non-Muslims' productions of Islam and by maintaining questions of orthodoxy as emic expressions within

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3 The application of such a logic can be found in Lene Kühle's and Malik Larsen's mapping of Danish mosques in which they speculate on why the Mariam Mosque only has monthly Friday prayer: "The Mariam Mosque is, as is well-know, a mosque that only offers Friday prayer for women, so therefore it may not be so odd that it is not understood as necessary that there is Friday prayer every week, because this is not understood to be obligatory for women" (Kühle and Larsen 2017: 93). Kühle and Larsen apply a logic found within *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and it is a fair observation to make, but as demonstrated in Chapter 7, 8, and 10 it has nothing to do with why the Mariam Mosque only has Friday prayer once a month.

power dynamics. That is, whether something is orthodox is, from an emic perspective, an inherently theological question, but from an etic perspective it is a question of power: who has the power to define an orthodoxy within a given space, and what tactics are employed by the less powerful to maneuver this space? When scholars use terms such as deformed or diluted Islams (e.g. Roy 1994: 40), which constitute what Jacques Derrida (1967/1997: 141–164) calls dangerous supplements, they are privileging a theological standpoint with the power to define Islam instead of analyzing the power dynamic that renders these Islams orthodox in some spaces and heterodox in others.

Fifth, it is important not to overestimate social identities as this may not be fully congruent with individuals' inner worlds (cf. Inge 2017; Schielke 2015). That is, typologies of Islamic discourse may lead to misleading assumptions about social and psychological dynamics. Some members of the Mariam Mosque have, for example, at some point felt the empowering ruse and/or spiritual ecstasy of pious practice; some even joined Islamist and Salafi groups for a few years of their lives.<sup>4</sup> These women do not see their former Islamist or Salafi position as diametrically opposed to their current Islamic feminist engagement. Rather, they maintain standpoints such as Islamist critique of racism, discrimination, political hypocrisy, capitalism, and Salafi notions of striving for perfection of practice. Many components of their Islam practice remain more or less unaltered, even if they are now the basis of a feminist standpoint, meaning that they have added struggle against the patriarchal ideas found within Islamist and Salafi groups to their struggle for emancipation within Danish society. Thus, the relation between Islamism, Salafism, and feminism is also one of embodied exegesis (the ruse of empowerment sometimes combined with the ecstasy of pious practice). Although Islamism, Salafism, and feminism are commonly understood as separate ideal types of Islam they would be categorized as a single ideal type if indexed according to the emotions and activism they typically lead to. Thus, what may seem incommensurable from a discourse analytical point of view may be commensurable if one focusses on emotions, activities, and counter-position in relation to hegemonic discourses.

## 2 Serendipities in the Production of Islams

Khankan did not want to become an imam, but she did; Mouna did not want to open a mosque, but he did; Femimam did not intend to perform Islamic

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4 This is not a subtle comment on Sherin Khankan who has repeatedly been suspected of being a former member of Hizb ut-Tahrir by her opponents.

divorces nor Islamic marriages, but these became and still are core activities of the Mariam Mosque; and the list goes on. The Mariam Mosque was produced through agency within structures, but without the additional concept of serendipity its emergence cannot be explained. The Mariam Mosque was not planned, it just happened as Khankan explained in the beginning of Chapter 6. That is, the Mariam Mosque was produced through Khankan's and Mouna's responding to unpredictable events, which they were not in control of. They were not aware of what kind of an institution they produced, and often it would take months for them to realize what their actions had produced. For example, Khankan and Mouna did not understand the Mariam Mosque as a quasi-legal institution just because they had performed an Islamic divorce; only with repetition of this act of divorcing people did they become aware of the quasi-legal institution that they had created—an institution that eventually developed into a sharia council (Petersen forthcoming-a). Thus, agency is constrained by serendipities, which tend to change the course of events and detract agents from what they planned to do as they adapt to a developing situation.

This book is a paradigmatic study of a social process (Flyvbjerg 2006: 232) that highlights the role of serendipities in addition to agency and structure, and thus, it raises issues about possible shortcomings in research that does not consider this variable. Reducing the emergence of the Mariam Mosque to merely the agency of Khankan acting within structures would not only constitute a simplistic understanding of everyday life, it would also mean erasing the majority of my data and significantly misrepresenting the events as they happened in prospect. On the other hand, to highlight serendipities in the analysis is to highlight something that is commonly erased in retrospective analysis, thus demonstrating how little of what is planned (agency) is actually realized.

There is a need for a re-evaluation of normality (cf. Schielke 2015; Shiller 2015; Taleb 2010). While the Mariam Mosque cannot be categorized as normal, the emergence of mosques with female imams in European urban centers is to be expected. In other words, it is normal for west European capitals to contain at least one, and sometimes several, women-led mosques (for examples, see Calderini 2022: 147–179; Petersen 2019b, 2019a). Their individual emergence is serendipitous, and this is an important point, but if structural demands and the agency of activists are assessed, the pattern of these mosques' emergence in Europe and North America is not surprising; rather this is to be expected. In other words, the likelihood of serendipities can be assessed, but the concept of serendipity is needed to explain the social processes.

Finally, it is important to point out that serendipities are of different magnitudes. On the macro-level I have argued that the discursivity needed to produce Femimam is to a great extent caused by migration in the 20th century—



a phenomenon that like the WWII and other Black Swan Events, as Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2010) calls them, was unpredicted. Nevertheless, It has had significant consequences for the history of Islams as it caused new Islams to once again form at the edge (Bulliet 1994), and it highlights that macro-structural changes are important sources of Islam. On the meso-level, I have analyzed the demand for female imams, and thus, the likelihood of serendipities such as the ones that produced the Mariam Mosque. And, on the micro-level, I have described a selection of serendipitous events that had major implications for the emergence of the Mariam Mosque and the kind of institution it became. This includes minute details such as the table, or “altar”, that became a mihrab, not because it was intended as such but because it needed an explanation. Had the mihrab been studied in the retrospect—without the knowledge of the sticky tack incident that in fact produced this object—it would have emerged as a planned and carefully crafted object.

### 3 An Etic Concept of Islamic Traditions

Islams are products of human creativity formulated within discursivities that encompass the idea that Islam is singular and, when produced by Muslims in their role as believers, it is regularly claimed to exist independently of human communication and interaction. In short, from an etic perspective, people produce Islams (in the plural) when they appropriate Islam (in the singular).

However, people do not produce Islams as free agents. Their discursivity is formed by language, internalized in their interaction with institutions, and take place within existing structures. With inspiration from de Certeau (2011), I have focused on how institutions structure spaces using strategic power. Thus, some form of continuity does exist from an etic perspective as strategic power has an effect, but this continuity differs significantly from emic claims about continuity.

Continuity with tradition is, from an etic perspective, something people produce discursively; it is an emic claim that can be studied. The Islamic tradition (emic and in the singular) is simultaneously appropriated and produced and an important part of this production is the claim about continuity and singularity. It should be noted that Muslim Islamic authorities are in general aware of the rupture and plurality, but they conceptualize it in an emic way through the idea of Islam being contextual (a singular Islam that adapts and thus appears plural even though from a theological perspective it is singular) and the idea of *ikhtilaf* (acceptance of disagreement). These are theological claims about the existence of an Islam beyond human interaction and communication, an Islam

that in its transcendent existence is singular but may take many forms when it manifests in the world.

However, seen from an etic perspective the claim about continuity and singularity is made based on historically continuous morphing discursivities that both make new discourses possible, but also make the production of actual continuity impossible. From an etic perspective, even Muslims who may think of themselves as in line with tradition produce this continuity as part of their discourse.

Continuity is a discursive construction that needs to be studied as a phenomenon rather than adopted as an etic concept. The simultaneous continuity and rupture is, for example, evident in the first couple's request for a *nikah* (Islamic marriage). They understood an imam's performance of a speech act as a necessary requirement for entering a *nikah*, and it may very well be a necessary requirement within their community. However, within *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) the speech act is performed by the parties involved, and thus there is a clear rupture. I argue that this is not a misinterpretation of Islam; rather, it is a production of Islam that most likely takes its point of departure in the expectation in popular culture that the speech act should be prominent, but this rather novel production of Islam is then understood as a continuation of a tradition. Over time these kinds of tactical Islams may become strategic as discursivities and demands among Muslims change.

The point is that even if this conceptualization of *nikah* is foreign to *fuqaha* (scholars educated within *fiqh*), Muslims are able to produce this as Islam, but for researchers to say that *fuqaha* are right is to take a side in an inherently emic discussion; researchers should instead describe the power dynamics at play. Furthermore, even if *fuqaha*'s concept of *nikah* is grounded in scripture, they still conceptualize marriage within a contemporary discursivity. For example, they cannot escape the major changes to family structure caused by the introduction of capitalist economies (Habermas 1989; MacIntyre 1981/2014: 264–265), nor the structural changes to intimacy (Foucault 1988; Giddens 1992). That is, macro structures significantly influence their interpretation of the texts.

The production of Islam can contradict even core logics within *fiqh* to the extent that *nikah* captivity between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man may be a phenomenon that exists—and may possibly be identified in the future by anthropologists working with Islam.<sup>5</sup> The logic here is that *nikah*

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5 Since I wrote this sentence in 2020, I have in my ongoing research on Islamic divorces in Denmark identified four cases where non-Muslim women experienced *nikah* captivity.

captivity is a form of coercive control (Liversage and Petersen 2020) and thus defined within a power asymmetry where strategic Muslims may play a marginal role in the production of Islam. However, if research methods are not open to these types of phenomena, they will remain unnoticed.

In history, Richard W. Bulliet (1994) argues that the production of Islam at the caliphal center of political power has differed from production at the edge, and he demonstrates how local productions at the edge over time have influenced and sometimes become core parts of Islam at the center; a process he calls recentering. Denmark and many other non-Muslim countries are definitely located at the edge, and Bulliet (1994: 195–196) points out that, “To an extraordinary degree, individual Muslims were, and still are, free to choose their religious mentors and exemplars, particularly at the edge.” In other words, tactics produce Islam at the edge, because individuals are freer to bestow their religious alliance upon whoever seems best able to respond to their questions in a meaningful way, thus producing alternative Islamic authorities (Bulliet 1994: 200).<sup>6</sup> Whether these views will one day emerge as Islam at the center is still to be seen.

#### 4 Revisiting the Mariam Mosque in 2020

I terminated the ethnographic study of the Mariam Mosque in June 2017 when I moved to Jordan just before the first Mariam Mosque collapsed, but I continued to have regular conversations with members over Skype and messenger services, and on a few occasions I flew to Copenhagen for a few days to follow important events or conduct interviews focused on the collapse. When I moved back to Denmark in late November 2017, my visits to and engagements with the emerging second Mariam Mosque became less and less frequent, but I would still on occasion inquire of different members how things were going and take notes. On 31 July and 11 August 2020, I set up interviews with six current members, five of whom I had met on several occasions before, to check in on how things were going and see whether Covid-19 had had an impact on the mosque.

Both my ongoing data collection and the 2020 interviews consistently indicate that congregants at Friday prayer stabilized at around 15–20 women during the spring of 2018 and that this grew to 20–25 in 2020. The congregation is also

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Bulliet's theory of Islam at the edge today (1994: 185–207) is not, as his historical analysis, focused on geography. However, this point is not relevant to my argument, and therefore, left out.

much more stable in the sense that many women attend every month, and the young members explain that they also bump into each other at other social events in Copenhagen. Furthermore, Friday prayers now end with a reflection round when congregants can share stories, reflect, discuss, ask for advice, and so on, and this is followed by more casual conversation and socializing in the lounge.

The mosque now has three female imams who all publicly claim the title, and as one of them explained, Friday prayer on occasion takes place without Khankan's presence. The congregation was, for example, sorry to hear that there would be no Friday prayer in the summer of 2020 as Khankan was going on holiday with her children, and they encouraged the two other imams, Aliah Ali and Amina Elmi, to arrange it with just the two of them. This, coupled with a congregation that is now more tightly knit as a network, seems to suggest that the Mariam Mosque is not embodied by Khankan to the same extent as when it was the center of media attention. However, Khankan is still the only imam who performs *nikah*, *aqiqah* (name giving ceremony), and conversions, although Ali and Elmi often assist her.

Saer el-Jaichi and Rania were the only members from the first Mariam Mosque who were still affiliated with the mosque. However, Rania does not attend the Friday prayers anymore and merely takes care of administration, which she says is much less chaotic now, primarily due to the number of requests having reduced significantly after Khankan's new policy on media (see Chapter 10). Many people still contact the mosque but now most of these are Muslims requesting Islamic services, and all incoming communication is answered.

The mosque has also applied for recognition as a faith society but there are still administrative challenges that need to be successfully overcome to obtain recognition and, thereby, a license to perform marriages that are legally valid under Danish law. However, the homepage [www.femimam.com](http://www.femimam.com) is now up and running and the mosque will soon have the infrastructure to collect membership fees systematically.

In terms of rituals, the most interesting development was that Khankan now performs a ritual in relation to Islamic divorce. To initiate proceedings, Khankan typically has a phone conversation with the woman followed by a meeting in the mosque where other members help her fill out the *khula* application (divorce document). The ritual consists of Khankan going over the content of the *khula* application with the woman and signing it. After this everyone stands in a circle and prays *al-Fatiha* together to seal the divorce. Both Khankan and others who take part in this ritual performance says that it helps the women's mental transition into non-marital status.

Before Covid-19 the Mariam Mosque had 2–3 international guests at every Friday prayer but, like other mosques, it closed during the lockdown in the spring of 2020, and since the reopening there have not been any international guests. However, shortly before the lockdown, the Mariam Mosque had visitors from Finland who contacted Khankan in May 2020 because they wanted to open their own pop-up mosque with women *khatibas* who would lead a mixed gender congregation starting with the *eid* prayer. Khankan skyped with them to teach them what she had learned in the process of building the Mariam Mosque and gave instructions on how to perform the Friday prayer according to protocol. The two Finnish visitors went through with their idea and had ten congregants at their first prayer.

Thus, Muslims now take inspiration from Khankan's Islam and produce it as part of the Islamic tradition. Exactly how and under what conditions are topics for other studies.

## Ethical Considerations

I have not anonymized Khankan, Mouna, Fetteh, El-Jaichi and Saer El-Jaichi. All other informants have been offered anonymization, which all but Yasmin Abu Bakir, Ellen Chakir, and Nour Tessie Jørgensen accepted. Anonymized informants have been given fictitious first names, whereas Khankan, Mouna, Fetteh, El-Jaichi, and Chakir are referred to by their surnames. However, because Yasmin Abu Bakir's "surname" (Bakir or Abu Bakir) indicates a male, I use her first name, Yasmin, instead. All the above-mentioned informants have given their consent to not being anonymized.

Potential consequences of participating differ from person to person. Informants who aspire to become religious authorities may risk their reputation within some Muslim communities whereas for others it may be a matter of their family's standing in the local community. Thus, for most informants it has been a major decision to associate with the mosque publicly, meaning that they made the decision in another context prior to the publication of this study.

Based on my evaluation of the non-anonymous informants' previous engagements in the public sphere I concluded that all but Yasmin would be able to foresee the consequences of not being anonymized. Therefore, she was the only one with whom I ventured into discussion on non-anonymization and its potential consequences, a conversation in which I clarified that it made no difference to me or the project whether or not she preferred anonymity. Based on this conversation I concluded that she had made an informed decision in ultimately deciding not to be anonymous.

Khankan, Mouna, Fetteh, and El-Jaichi have publicly associated themselves with the Mariam Mosque and are therefore impossible to anonymize. Furthermore, this research project focuses on something that is considered positive in Danish society: the making of a women's mosque. The research project documents their activism outside of heated and polarized media discussions and demonstrates some of the challenges these discussions pose for Muslim activists. It is in the interest of key members of the Mariam Mosque to gain a deeper understanding of the power asymmetries and dynamics from which they are trying to emancipate themselves, and it is in their interest that the public also gains a better understanding of the repression of the Muslim minority, whether it originates with other Muslims or non-Muslims (Douglas 2014). The project—including the non-anonymization of key informants—has been approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority.

Other Islamic authorities that are included in the analysis have not been anonymized when I refer to previous studies or their engagement in public debate. However, I have anonymized all Islamic authorities in non-public contexts, including the analysis

of Islamic divorce in Chapter 8 and the reception of the Mariam Mosque in Chapter 11. All informants in the project have given informed consent and, while I have kept the content of the second diary and my thought processes secret, I have not engaged in deception. Furthermore, I have been attentive not to establish quasi-therapeutic relationships with young members of the Mariam Mosque (Brinkman and Kvale 2015: 95–96).

A significant part of the book demonstrates how Khankan continually seems to underestimate the leadership that is projected onto her, and how she, along with Mouna, founds the Mariam Mosque in response to both Muslims' and non-Muslims' expectations. The process can at times seem haphazard, but I give a respectful and fair account of this without producing a narrative with a plot. Further, by abstaining—to the greatest degree possible—from attributing a character to my informants, I do not significantly delimit their ability to produce the Mariam Mosque's narrative themselves by systematizing events into a plot and building their character within this narrative. I merely insist on a research epistemology when describing what my informants do.

It should be noted that some male Islamic authorities likewise seem to underestimate the leadership that is projected onto them and their responses to issues such as Islamic divorce seem just as haphazard as the processes described in this study (Liversage and Petersen 2020). In other words, the seeming haphazardness is primarily a product of expectations that social processes will obey certain logics in a structured and orderly manner. In fact, the processes that produced Khankan as an imam and Femimam as the Mariam Mosque are akin to how some male imams are produced, even some of Denmark's most prominent male imams (Petersen 2019b; Petersen and Vinding 2020).

Furthermore, Khankan is not trying to build Islamic authority in the conventional manner through formal Islamic educational training. Instead she has framed herself as an entrepreneur and activist who has sometimes had to take roles outside her comfort zone to move the project along. In other words, as Khankan is not claiming authority based on formal Islamic educational training, this account will not be detrimental to her project. On the contrary, it documents the Islamic production of Khankan and the members of the Mariam Mosque, and marginal groups, such as this one, have an interest in being understood and represented (Brinkman and Kvale 2015: 95–96; Bryman 2016: 126–128). Khankan and the Mariam Mosque as an institution have been surprisingly transparent in their presentation of themselves in the media, which means that I can discuss most of my data without venturing into themes that have not previously been discussed publicly by my informants.

With all this being said, it is important to stress that this is a study that is oriented towards pushing the boundaries of research, not towards achieving some political goal. I am, for example, not engaged in any kind of activism, have continuously distanced myself from my informants' engagements, and have taken the observer role to the

greatest extent possible, becoming an observant participant rather than a participant observer, so to speak. I therefore realize that my account and analysis may not portray my informants as they would like to see their religious strivings portrayed. However, as a researcher I must insist on this perspective—otherwise studying the Mariam Mosque would be pointless—but I do not claim that this perspective is universally better or more relevant than those of my informants; rather, it is a perspective informed by a scientific epistemology which confines the space within which it holds validity and relevance.

A scientific description of the Mariam Mosque is surely not the recipe for a best-seller, such as Sherin Khankan's biography *Women are the future of Islam: A memoir of hope* or Skovgaard's documentary *The Reformist*, which are both structured as narratives with a plot. Although both Khankan's and Skovgaard's accounts are true, they differ significant from each other as they focus on different narratives and, therefore, have different orientations: Khankan presents herself, while Skovgaard presents what she saw and experienced both front and back stage as an observant participant (Goffman 1959/1990). This study is merely different from these two accounts in its epistemology and orientation towards research; it does not contradict earlier accounts, but it says something new by applying a research epistemology.

Finally, I would also like to address the issue of portraying the segment of non-Muslim Islamic authorities who understand themselves to be critical of Islam and therefore as having a legitimate reason to fight what they themselves take to be Islam. It has not been possible to anonymize these as they are public figures—some of them members of parliament—and the location in which they put pressure on Khankan is the public sphere. As Khankan has continuously clashed with non-Muslim Islamic authorities throughout her career, and because they are important in the explanation of how the Mariam Mosque was produced, they also play an important role in the book. However, as they are not the object of research their views are only represented to the extent that they are relevant for the analysis and the legitimation of their discourses is therefore not discussed. This runs the risk of producing them as bad guys in a narrative about the heroine Khankan and her companions in the Mariam Mosque, which is both unethical and inherently uninteresting in terms of research output. A further complication is that, as a researcher—not as a politically engaged debater—I have opposed some of these people's epistemologies on several occasions in public debate (Petersen 2018b, 2018c, 2019c, 2020c).

To handle this ethical and research issue, I reached out to the three non-Muslim Islamic authorities (Marcus Knuth, Martin Henriksen, and Naser Khader) who are the focus of my analysis in Chapter 11. Khader, accepted my request for an interview,<sup>1</sup> and

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1 Henriksen and Knuth, initially accepted the request for an interview but were unable to find



thus, he chose to trust that I would be honest and fair, for which I am grateful. I sent an early draft of the text to all three, invited them to comment on it, and encouraged them to point out if I had not adequately portrayed their arguments in their full strength. Knuth and Henriksen did not respond,<sup>2</sup> but Khader responded by saying that he found it somewhat ok but remarked that I had excluded some important details and not adequately built up his argument. I therefore allocated more space to Khader's argument and strengthened it along the lines he suggested.

Thus, I have sent parts of the manuscript to all three informants, which serves the ethical purpose of giving the informants an opportunity to object to my presentation. This approach is inspired by native ethnography in which researchers engage informants in the production of knowledge by having them write texts themselves and/or comment upon the researchers' production of text about them (Bernard 2011: 409–415), a method that has also been employed by other Lund Islamic studies scholars (Otterbeck 2000a; Stenberg 1996). This is, furthermore, a methodological choice as I wanted my informants to venture into collaboration and thus coproduce themselves in my text. However, as mentioned above, only Khader took me up on this.

The study was published as a PhD dissertation titled *The Making of the Mariam Mosque: Serendipities and Structures in the Production of Female Authority in Denmark* in October 2020 and has been distributed to all informants mentioned in the text. Only Khankan has returned with comments expressing disapproval of two pictures showing the Mariam Mosque while in storage between Friday prayers and some minor comments on the section on the collapse and aftermath of the first Mariam Mosque in Chapter 10. I have therefore removed these pictures and made the minor revisions suggested by Khankan as these are in line with what I find in my field notes.

Finally, I would like to address the issue of merely focusing on politicians and debaters who opposed Khankan without including others who supported her. This choice is an outcome of my analysis. While supporters may have played a role for Khankan personally, they did not play a significant role for the Mariam Mosque as such, and even the strongest of her supporters would sometimes be framed as critics in the media (see for example Olsen and Thorsen 2016). Further, some supporters even became a problem for the mosque when they tried to steer it in a direction in line with their own political standpoints.

During the scandal over public funding for Khankan's NGO *Exitcirklen*, discussed in Chapter 11, Khankan received widespread support from many politicians and high-profile members of the cultural elite. However, this support was given in relation to the

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time for it in the upcoming months. When I responded by extending the time frame neither answered back.

2 Henriksen did respond in the sense that he replied to my email, but he did not engage in the discussion, even if on two occasions he expressed his intention to do so.

NGO, which both Khankan and her supporters tried to separate from the mosque in the public sphere. When Skovgaard's documentary was aired on national TV during the elections in 2019 and the focus was on the mosque, it proved very difficult—and often impossible—for the producer to engage the same politicians. In short, opposition to the Mariam Mosque has played a major role whereas support has been insignificant, maybe because women-only Friday prayer and similar ideas are seen as too conservative to promote as progressive in Danish politics.

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