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# Preface

This issue of *The Scandinavian Journal of Islamic Studies* highlights the multi-layered nature of Islamic practice and discourse in contemporary Scandinavia. More specifically, most of our contributions (whether in the form of articles or essays) highlight aspects of dialectic relationships between Muslim actors and their non-Muslim Scandinavian surroundings. They do this by describing and analysing how these Muslim actors have to manoeuvre between different power structures, discursive fields, and legal frameworks—some of which are the conscious expressions of Islamic traditions, whereas others are either ignorant of and/or disinterested in the issue of "Islam", or somehow see its presence in Scandinavia as problematic. In short, our articles show that the formulation and expression of Islam and Sharia in Scandinavia are often the culturally hybrid products of social engagements involving both Muslim and non-Muslim actors.

Niels Valdemar Vinding states in his introduction that "for more than a generation, Muslims and Islamic institutions in Europe have undergone highly critical deliberative questioning". The articles by Jesper Petersen and Mikele Schultz-Knudsen and Janet Janbek illustrate how public debates regarding the proper situatedness of Danish Islam affect the perceptions of both individual Muslim citizens and representatives of state institutions, respectively. Similarly, in describing how Norwegian Muslim approaches to *halal* slaughter have changed since the 1970s, Olav Elgvin also illustrates how intra-Muslim debates have been coloured by conditions set by "by juridical and political opportunity structures in Norwegian society"—that is, by laws formulated and debates initiated by non-Muslim actors.

Moreover, the presented articles also point to the more discrete and inexplicit influence of non-Muslim majority

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discourses on the formation of Scandinavian Islam—such as in Nora Eggen's analysis of how the treatment of the word "sharia" in Scandinavian contexts adds new meaning to the concept, based on Scandinavian conventions and discourses, while simultaneously contributing to an often unnuanced understanding of its inherent complexity.

Recurrently, the dialectic between Muslim and non-Muslim actors is partly characterised by the latter's lack of detailed knowledge about Islamic concepts and the lived realities of Muslims. Anika Liversage's article on the nuances of Muslim women's experiences of divorce in Denmark highlights the need for a broader understanding of the transnational contexts in which diasporic communities operate, so as better to take into account and offer support to people experiencing a sort of legal limbo in contexts lacking institutions dealing with Islamic family law.

Moreover, non-Muslim presuppositions about Islam and the lack of knowledge regarding Muslims' lived experiences may account for what Jeppe Schmidt calls the apparent "blind spots" of non-Muslim discourse on, and attempts at intervention into, so-called "honour culture" in Denmark. These blind spots are informed by non-Muslim and deterministic perceptions about gender, sexuality, and family relations—ones that often fail to anticipate or explain realities that are strikingly dynamic and fragmented, and in which male perspectives and experiences of victimhood are largely neglected.

Yet, while disinterested attitudes or a lack of knowledge about the nuances of Islamic tradition and Muslim experiences account for part of the dialectic context in which Islam is formulated in Scandinavia, it is also often the case that non-Muslim polemical actors actively seek to involve themselves in this process. In his essay dealing with some of the implications of Danish debates in which a female imam was accused of "Islamism", Jesper Petersen introduces the concept of "non-Muslim Islam" to describe how non-Muslim public figures interjected in the debate by basically acting as "non-Muslim Islamic authorities", actively participating in drawing the boundaries of what is to be considered properly "Islamic". Examining the content of the articles presented here and, thereby, considering the apparent significance of the dialectic relationship between various Muslim and non-Muslim discourses in contemporary Scandinavia, the relevance of Petersen's call for more theoretical and

empirical studies on the phenomenon of "non-Muslim Islam" seems self-evident. The internal complexity of Islam in Scandinavia, and the increasing influence of a younger generation of Muslims who have grown up in Scandinavia, means that we need to become better at understanding the process by which Islam is (re-)formulated in relation to non-Muslim discourses, societal structures, and so on.

However, this concern with dialectics and possible hybridity should not distract us from other aspects of Islamic practice and discourse in contemporary Scandinavia. While the impact of "non-Muslim Islam", or otherwise etic discourses, is apparently significant for many Muslims, this does not entail that its influence is all-encompassing, something perhaps illustrated by Michael Marlow's article on sorcery (*sihr*) among Swedish Muslims. An understudied yet significant phenomenon, the practice of *sihr* and *roqiya* can be encountered in many different Muslim contexts—including, of course, Scandinavia. Yet it operates largely "under the radar" of public debates scrutinising Islam—and is seemingly unaffected by these to a larger extent than, for example, the formulation of Sharia.

Thus, in our attempts to make sense of how Muslims are affected by Scandinavian contexts, we should not merely be looking at the impact of non-Muslim discourses and developing our theories on these dialectics and similar themes, but should simultaneously retain a broad perspective that also accounts for Islamic expressions rarely touched upon in public debates. In short, I mean that while there is indeed a great need for scholars to develop tools for making sense of things like "non-Muslim Islam", contemporary polemics should not distract us entirely from other things affecting Islamic practice and discourse. Rather, we also need to continue encouraging the study of pre-modern Islamic history and ideological trends—of which, by the way, the book by Ibn Rushd reviewed here by Tina Dransfeldt Christensen is an excellent example—as well as comparatively "obscure" and esoteric phenomena including *sihr* and specific rituals. Hopefully, *The Scandinavian Journal of Islamic Studies* will continue such encouragement and make sure that our research field is furthered enriched by different approaches and perspectives.

Overall, the broad range of topics covered in this issue—as well as the many different scientific disciplines and professional perspectives represented by our authors—helps illustrate the

many-sided and dynamic nature of the study of Islam in Scandinavia. It is a field that attracts not only Islamologists but also—within the context of this issue of SJIS—lawyers, medical scholars, and policemen. Given the obvious values associated with trans-disciplinary approaches, I sincerely hope we are able to maintain and accommodate this type of inclusivity in the future as well!