

Introduction

Gender is a primary key for understanding Islam and Muslims in present day Scandinavia. Through norms and regulations, gender has proven inherent to how Islam is governed, perceived, and debated in public, but also pivotal for how Scandinavian Muslims understand, practice and negotiate their own religion. Moreover, the correlation between gender and Islam is a topic addressed by an increasing number of researchers in the Scandinavian countries. In this special issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of Islamic Studies*, we have gathered a selection of the ongoing research in this field. The articles included here, offer a peak into some of the currents in the highly diverse and emerging research field gender and Islam in Scandinavia. They also give an idea of the breadth of topics, disciplines, approaches and perspectives involved in such studies.

The 6 articles included in this Special Issue cover three topics: 1) Laws and legal regulations, 2) gender and Islam in the media and public sphere, and 3) negotiations of Islam and Muslim backgrounds. Although the articles approach gender and Islam from different angles, they all discuss the topic in connection to the minority status of Islam in the Scandinavian countries characterised by pluralities, competing norms and hostility towards Islam. Hence, all of the articles in this Special Issue contribute with knowledge on the various way in which the particular Scandinavian context intersects with the correlation of gender and Islam.

The first topic covers laws and legal regulations related to

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Muslims in two different arenas. First, Christian Lomsdalen's article "Islam, kjønn og fritaksproblematikk i skolen" (Islam, Gender and Exemption Related Issues in the School), published in Norwegian, investigates the Norwegian debate on Muslim women and girls' participation in school swimming lessons and use of public pools. Lomsdalen analyses a selection of cases dealing with swimming lessons and exemptions from such lessons on grounds of religion presented to the Norwegian State administration offices from 2005 until 2018, from the perspectives of human rights and pedagogy. The debate in Norway, resonates by and large with how such cases are dealt with in Sweden and Denmark where they have been linked to Islam and to issues of migration, integration, and national values. As Lomsdalen shows, there is not one solution to how these cases can be solved. Overall, he argues that more research is needed. However, to discuss exemptions from swimming on religious grounds from an exclusive human rights perspective, has proven difficult due to the complexities of values, rights and interests found in the school setting.

In the second article, we move from the Norwegian educational sphere to the legal field pertaining to hate crime in the Danish context. Natalie Gunthel's piece "Unveiling hatred - Delineating hate crime vulnerability of veiled women as a human rights issue", brings our attention to the kind of hate speech and stereotypisations experienced by veiled Muslim women. Using the concept of gendered Islamophobia, Gunthel investigates how veiled Muslim women, more readily identifiable as Muslims, are extremely vulnerable to hate crime. Although her study centers on Denmark, the concerns raised by Gunthel reveal the socio-legal reality and vulnerability faced by Muslim women who wear the hijab or niqab in several countries across Europe. Hence, as Gunthel underlines, it is imperative to map and analyse such experiences further in order to find efficient and productive ways of addressing what counts as a violation of human rights.

The second topic covers how gender and Islam are debated in the media and in the public sphere. Nanna Ellen Amer examines the mediation of Muslim gender norms in online platforms in Denmark. Through an inquiry of how religious Muslim YouTube bloggers mediate Muslim gender norms, both those who represent religious institutions and those who are independent of such institutions, Amer shows the different kind of

argumentation used in their articulation of gender roles and family structures. The dominant discourse found among the YouTube bloggers included in the study, uphold traditional gender norms and family structures. However, the arguments in use span from theological/Islamic, secular academic to arguments made against Western modern family structures. In the article, Amer shows how such modes of argumentation intersect and contains negotiations between secular and religious boundaries. The study thus contributes to the emerging research field on new online media and offers insights into how religious authority is constructed and transformed through such online platforms.

In the article "Forhandlinger med omkostninger: muslimske foregangskvinner i den norske offentligheten" (Negotiations with Costs: Muslim Pioneer Women in the Norwegian Public), published in Norwegian, Sissel Kveinå Tonstad focuses on Muslim women who have been visible in the Norwegian public sphere. Tonstad argues that gender is an important premise for the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the public sphere, which affects the media representation of the women in her study. Tonstad identifies a gap between how the women see themselves and how others see them. When confronted with collective expectations of what a Muslim woman should be from both the majority and minority society, they negotiate such expectations within their own autobiographic narratives. As a result, they forge their own paths in the secular public sphere, often at high costs such as alienation, loneliness, threats and hate speech. Nonetheless, in a media sphere where Muslim role models are lacking, the women in Tonstad's study become pioneers that other Muslim women can follow.

The third article in this section is authored by Jinan Hammoude and Fatima Al-Shamasnah. They address a topic that has been understudied within the field of gender and Islam, namely the gender norms and expectations that face Muslim minority men. With the short title in Danish "Mand, muslim og minoritet" (Man, Muslim and Minority), Hammoude and al-Shamasnah elaborate on the experienced positionings and coping strategies found among ethnic minority men with a Muslim background. They analyse how this group of men experience their masculinity in interaction with the Danish majority society. Such portrayals are often based on negative gender stereotypes, where they are depicted as uncivilized, violent, and aggres-

sive. Furthermore, the article highlights the kind of coping strategies they turn to in order to deal with the perceived positionings. A main finding in the article is that such strategies are dynamic and can involve both assimilation to and distancing from the gender norms of the majority society. Hence, the men in this study develop coping strategies that both moderate and negotiate ideas of masculinity, ethnicity, and religion, and which ultimately result in multidimensional masculinities.

In the topic covered by the Special Issue, two articles analyse with how different groups of Muslim women negotiate and relate to Islam and their Muslim background. Meltem Yilmaz Sener's contribution, entitled "Called to Being Religious Muslims: The Religification of Turkish Women in Norway", explores how women of Turkish background in Norway tend to be identified primarily by their religiosity as the main category of identity, and that they therefore are assumed to be religious Muslims. Using the concept of religification, Sener shows how such assumptions are interlinked and appear as a consequence of Islamophobia. Sener argues that assumptions about what it means to be a Muslim build on stereotypes about Muslim women as subordinate and oppressed and seem to permeate ideas and perceptions about this group of women. Sener rightly points out that although religification is a crucial concept for understanding the experiences of migrants from Muslim-majority countries living in Western contexts, it has by and large been neglected in academic studies. More research on the topic is therefore needed.

Eli-Anne Vongraven Eriksen's article, published under the Norwegian title "Muslimske kvinners forhold til islamske kilder og autoritet i Trondheim" (Muslim Women's Relation to Islamic Sources and Authority in Trondheim), demonstrates how women involved in a study group for Muslim women in Trondheim relate to different forms of Islamic sources and authority in their search for religious knowledge on Islam. More specifically, Eriksen focuses on a women's study group called *Søstergruppen* (the Sister group), associated with the mosque *Det Muslimske Trossamfunnet i Trondheim* (the Muslim Community in Trondheim). The participants in *Søstergruppen* seek to increase their theoretical and practical knowledge on Islam, and they touch upon various issues from how to perform specific rituals and practices in Trondheim, to obtaining knowledge on Islamic jurisprudence, *fiqh*. Eriksen elaborates on which sources and

authorities the participants in *Søstergruppen* rely on, how Islamic sources and authorities are applied, for what purposes and why. The article offers a local perspective on Islamic knowledge production, more specifically from the Trondheim context, that previously has not been thoroughly explored. However, Eriksen also joins a broader trend seen in recent years' research exploring Islamic knowledge production in Europe and more specifically the kind developed by women.

The ways in which gender and Islam intersect in the Scandinavia setting have not previously been explored in a joint publication of this kind. As editors of this Special Issue, we are therefore very excited to present a first publication that brings researchers addressing these issues within the Scandinavian context together. During the process, we also benefitted from a writers' seminar organised on 18 February 2022, where the authors contributing to this Special Issue gathered in a digital seminar. Here, the different researchers got a chance to meet and discuss each other's contributions. We hope that there will be more of this kind of interaction also in the coming time. A common thread in all articles presented in this Special Issue is that more research is needed on the different topics addressed, and on the correlation between Islam and gender more generally. However, the research should not only focus on specific national contexts, but also focus on trends and tendencies found across the Scandinavian context. Hence, we sincerely hope that this publication will be a first in a series of joint publications exploring the situation for gender and Islam in the years to come.