

Islamic Feminism in Europe



Semester & Location: Spring 2025 – DIS Copenhagen

Type & Credits: Elective Course – 3 credits

Major Disciplines: Religious studies, gender studies, and anthropology

Prerequisite(s): None

Faculty Members: Jesper Petersen (current students please use the [Canvas Inbox](#))

Program Contact: Xxx Xxx - xxx@dis.dk

Time & Place: Thursdays 14:50 – 17:45
Classroom: TBA

Course Description

Within the last decade Islamic feminists have opened mosques with female and/or LGBTQ+ imams in most western European countries. Simultaneously, Muslim youth have organized in civil rights organizations that fight discrimination, racism, and Islamophobia, and every year Muslim authors publish their debut novel or poem collection while other Muslim artists produce Islamic pop-music – a genre that emerged at the turn of the millennium, when the first large Islamic pop record company took off.

Other young Muslim women isolate from society or find ways of living in piousness. A small minority of these women migrate to join terrorist organizations abroad. Although such women are often described as brainwashed, the process of radicalization is one in which women show a high degree of agency, and they often experience it as empowering – not unlike how women feel empowered when they take to the pulpit as imams. Indeed, some female imams are prior Salafis.

Although this course focuses on Islamic and Muslim feminisms (in the plural) it also cover women's experiences with radical Islam, masculinities, LGBTQ+ Islam, and

similar phenomena. The course consists of five modules. In module 1 we study Muslim migration to Denmark and explore Islam in Copenhagen through a field study in which students will do photo-journalism. In module 2, the focus is on female and LGBTQ+ imams in Europe, and in module 3 we read and listen to artistic productions by Muslim minority women and men in the form of novels, poetry and music. As part of this module students will be required to do a semi-structured interview with either a Muslim or a non-Muslim on private and public perceptions of Islam. Modul 4 investigates current Muslim civil rights organizations, and module 5 focus on Muslim female piousness.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course not only have gained significant insights into Islamic feminism and Muslim youth culture in Europe and how new Muslims and religious identities emerge. You will also have learned to do multimodal analysis by skills such as visual methodologies and how to analyze sound. Finally, the course will enable you to apply gender theory to real world situations.

Faculty

Associate professor and Sapere Aude research leader on the research project "Non-Muslim Islam" at Copenhagen University. Petersen has published multiple books on gender and Islam. His latest book on this topic ["The Making of a Mosque with Female Imams" \(open access\)](#) is an ethnographic account of how the first female led mosque emerged in Denmark.

Readings

All texts for this course are available on Canvas. There is not textbook for the course. Rather we will read excerpts from a range of textbooks.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Ackfeldt, Anders (2024). *Islamic Themes in US Hip-Hop Culture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Aidi, Hisham D. *Rebel Music: Race, Empire, and the New Muslim Youth Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 2014.

Bøe, Marianne Hafnor. "Halal Dating and Norwegian Youth Culture." *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 7, no. 3 (2018): 265-82.

Brinkman, Svend, and Steinar Kvale. *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage, 2015.

Ermers, Robert. "Apostasy in Terms of Moral Deviance." In *Religiously Exclusive, Socially Inclusive? A Religious Response*, edited by Bernhard Reitsma and Erika van Nes-Visscher. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023.

Inge, Anabel. *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Jaraba, Mahmoud. "The Practice of Khul' in Germany: Pragmatism Versus Conservatism." *Islamic Law and Society* 26, no. 1-2 (2019): 83-110.

Lamrabet, Asma. *Women in the Qur'an: An Emancipatory Reading*. Markfield: Square View, 2016.

- Leeuwen, Theo van. *Introducing Social Semiotics*. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Mattu, Ayesha, and Nura Maznavi. *Love, Inshallah: The Secret Love Lives of American Muslim Women*. New York: Soft Skull Press, 2012.
- Nassri, Lamies. "Islamophobia in Denmark: National Report 2022." In *European Islamophobia Report 2022*, edited by Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez. Vienna: Leopold Weiss Institute, 2023.
- Otterbeck, Jonas. *The Awakening of Islamic Pop Music*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021.
- Otterbeck, Jonas. "Experiencing Islam: Narratives About Faith by Young Adult Muslims in Malmö and Copenhagen." In *Everyday Lived Islam in Europe*, edited by Nathal M. Dessing, Nadia Jeldtoft, Jørgen S. Nielsen and Linda Woodhead. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Petersen, Jesper. *The Islamic Juridical Vacuum: An Ethnographic Study of the Emergence and Institutionalization of Parallel Legal Institutions in Denmark*. Leiden: Brill, 2025.
- Petersen, Jesper. *The Making of a Mosque with Female Imams: Serendipities in the Production of Danish Islams*. Leiden: Brill, 2022.
- Petersen, Jesper. "Media and the Female Imam." *Religions* 10, no. 3 (2019): 159-72.
- Petersen, Jesper. "Pop-up Mosques, Social Media Adhan, and the Making of Female and Lgbtq-Inclusive Imams." *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 8, no. 2 (2019): 178-96.
- Petersen, Jesper, and Anders Ackfeldt. "The Case for Studying Non-Muslim Islams." *Method & Theory in the study of religion* 35, no. 2-3 (2023): 241-59.
- Rose, Gillian. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*. 4th ed. Los Angeles: Sage, 2016.

Field Studies

This course has two field studies:

On the first field study, we will go to the Mariam Mosque, which is the first mosque with female imams in Scandinavia. Our focus will be on both the mosque and an Islamic divorce council that the mosque has set up to provide Muslim women with divorce in a parallel legal practice.

The second field study goes to Nørrebro, which is the neighborhood in Copenhagen with the highest concentration of mosques. After a brief tour, students will be asked to do photojournalism fieldwork for their second paper.

Guest Lecturers

This course has two guest lectures:

The first guest lecturer is a representative of a Muslim civil rights organization, who will explain how the organization works with issues such as racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia. These all constitute serious challenges faced by Muslim minority people, as documented by the Danish Institute for Human Rights.

The second guest lecturer is a published author (novel or poetry), who will talk about the literature he/she has published. The topic of such literature is often on forced marriage, life in the ghettos, honor based abuse and violence, etc.

Prior to the guest lectures, students will have read and discussed relevant texts on the topic so that they can make the most of the guest lectures in terms of discussion and asking relevant questions.

Approach to Teaching and Expectations to Students

I teach a flipped classroom, which means that most classes constitute workshops, fieldwork, and similar activities that require significant student participation while any necessary lecturing is delivered as video material to watch before class. My philosophy is that students learn by doing and that our time together is best used by teacher-assisted student work. This requires that students arrive well prepared for classes, and that all students take an active part in the learning activities.

Evaluation and Grading

This class requires student participation, mainly in the form of group work and contributing to workshops. All such student to student activity contribute to the participation grade for the course. I reward quality of contribution over quantity of contribution. The evaluation criteria for each of the course's three assignments are included in the instructions for these assignments.

Assignment	Percent
Photo Journalism	20%
Semi-structured interview or text analysis	30%
Final paper	30%
Participation	20%

DIS Accommodations Statement

Your learning experience in this class is important to me. If you have approved academic accommodations with DIS, please make sure I receive your DIS accommodations letter within two weeks from the start of classes. If you can think of other ways I can support your learning, please don't hesitate to talk to me. If you have any further questions about your academic accommodations, contact Academic Support acadsupp@dis.dk.