



# Research on Islam Repositioned Seminar May 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> 2007

## **Research on Islam Repositioned**

- New Agendas in the study of Islam and Muslims in a politicised research field

Within recent years, Islam and Muslims have increasingly become subjects of political and media debate within the European context. When trying to explain topics such as integration, cultural conflict, religious radicalisation, security policy and terrorism Islam is used in the political and media discourses as an explanatory model for the behaviour of immigrant groups within European societies.

As Islam and Muslims becomes a centre of attention for political discussions, knowledge on Islam and Muslims increasingly turns into an important tool for political decision-making. As a consequence, scholars of Islam navigate in a highly politicised field when communicating their results. Within the current debate, Islamic studies scholars are frequently positioned as political actors and research results as ideological statements. For example, parts of the Danish press as well as Danish politicians have recently argued that Islamic studies scholars are acting as political agents because they intentionally choose to disregard certain topics, such as social processes in which Islam can be seen as an obstacle to integration and/or a potential security threat.

The current situation has thus brought to attention the different research ideals that characterises Islamic studies as well as the need for an ongoing discussion on the relations between academia and politics. A central question would be whether Islamic studies research in a European (and broader Western) context is forced into a defensive position by political agendas? And how is the current situation contributing to the ongoing formation of academic self-perception and research ideals?

One frequently raised critique is that the research community persistently portrays Muslims as victims of Western domination and thereby disregards potential links between radicalisation, Islam and terrorism, and the effects of organisational and ideological conflicts within religious networks. This critique is worth scrutiny and self reflection, not least to strengthen the platform for further research. Have our scholarly approaches (methodological, theoretical and philosophical) as well as the politisation of the field as a consequence that we avoid certain research topics and stress others overtly? How is this reflected in the substantial choice of research topics? And which other important research topics are left behind?

With this workshop, we invite researchers to contribute to the scholarly debate on academic research agenda in the study of Islam and Muslims by exploring the following questions:

- How do we as scholars approach politicised topics as the above mentioned?
- What determines our choice of research topics and what role are we as scholars playing in the current debate as well as in a broader societal context?
- How can we fulfil our obligation to communicate at times sensitive research results in public and still be able to maintain access to the empirical field in future research?
- Where does Islamic studies go and which new research areas should we address?
- And in more general terms: how do we communicate our research results to the public when constantly being positioned as part of a political agenda?