

NNSL

Researcher seeks to learn how Islam thrives in Inuvik

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Bouchra Mossmann stands in front of the Midnight Sun mosque in Inuvik. The researcher from the University of Southern Denmark is in town until Jan. 13 and plans to be back in June to conduct additional research. Photo courtesy Bouchra Mossmann

A German-born researcher from Denmark spent her Christmas in Inuvik learning how the

Islamic community fits into the town's cultural mosaic.

University of Southern Denmark PhD candidate Bouchra Mossmann wants to learn more about how Muslims in Arctic Canada have integrated with their community. She has been busy over the last few weeks interviewing residents of Inuvik about their experiences.

"When we look at Muslim diasporas, it's mostly bigger urban centres and it's mostly the standard regions and countries," she said. "When I started reading and I found out all of the territories in Canada had gotten at least one mosque in the past 10 to 15 years, I thought it was really interesting because it was a chance to witness communities in the making in a way.

"One more aspect I think is really important is the diversity of a community in a very small place. You can really see here in Inuvik, or also when I went to Yellowknife, you have people from places all around the world, but it's one individual or a family maybe. How do these different denominations work together? How do they find a way to agree on prayer times and practice?"

Mossmann began her research in Edmonton and then Yellowknife, pouring through the archives in the NWT capital before landing in Inuvik Dec. 18. Since then, she's been experiencing life in the Far North and learning about the various people who live in the area, including volunteering at the Inuvik Sunrise Festival to get a better sense of the town.

Initially reading about Inuvik from a story regarding the Midnight Sun mosque being delivered to town, Mossmann said she first developed her research concept after learning about the Islamic community in Tromsø, Norway.

The idea of people practising their religion and way of life so far away from their cultural point of origin fascinated her. But since most communities in Europe have histories going back decades or even centuries, she determined coming to Canada's North would enable her to see the development of a community in real time. She's also working in a relatively untouched area of research, with most of her field focused on communities in large urban centres, not remote Arctic ones.

As part of her research, Mossmann has also studied in several Middle Eastern countries, namely Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. She said part of her motivation was to help change the narrative and attitudes towards people displaced by warfare and other major geopolitical events who may find refuge in Europe or North America, but also to stop discrimination towards skilled workers seeking employment opportunities.

“I think it’s really important as a contribution against Islamophobic narratives that are very much present in the media all over the world,” she said. “We also have another case study that is looking at Norway. We are trying to gather data from different circumpolar regions and we would like to look at the everyday life experience of individuals in communities to see that Islam is not an entity you could describe in three sentences. It’s to humanize the experience and tell a story of an everyday experience in an unusual environment for those people is, at least in my hope, contributing to a more differentiated picture.

“I feel that by providing a more differentiated narrative and by telling the stories and the individual experience of those smaller communities up here, and what kind of solutions they find – and maybe also different solutions they find to navigate the challenges that come with practising their faith in this environment – can also show there are different ways of doing that.”

Mossmann is in Inuvik until Jan. 13 and plans to return this summer for a second round of research in June.

If you are interested in telling her your story, you can email her at bmos@sdu.dk to set up an interview.

“I’ve met a lot of interesting and inspiring people and I’m hoping to meet more,” she added.

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