

Seyran Ates: Sex, Revolution, and Islam



Yesterday, Turkish-Norwegian filmmaker, Nefise Ozkal Lorentzen, came to visit. Soft-spoken, strong-minded, fluent in so many languages, Nefise's new documentary [Seyran Ates: Sex, Revolution, and Islam](#) is appearing at film festivals and has been entered in the competition for an Academy Award. The film is about my dear friend, Imam Seyran Ates, a fearless seeker of both freedom and God. Seyran must live and travel with 24/7 police protection—and why? Because she opened a mosque in Berlin that serves both women, men, and members of the LGBTQ communities. Why so **many** police? Because Seyran published a book titled *Islam Needs a Sexual Revolution*; the police advised her to get out of Berlin fast. And, when she did, she came to stay with me.

In the film, there are some extraordinary scenes: Young Sufi women dervish-dancing, Seyran and her mother talking about Seyran's near-assassination, nine female imams praying together

in China in an all-female mosque. They turn out to be fierce traditionalists. I love the scene in which Seyran talks with young Chinese Muslims who are wrestling with their sexuality and with their religion—but most of all, I love the scene where she enters a cave somewhere in Norway and calls for “freedom” and that call echoes again and again and again.