

Bibliographic Reviews

Jordi Moreras (coord.), Marta Alonso Cabré, Khalid Ghali, Alberto López Bargados & Ariadna Solé. *Dispersion and rituals.*

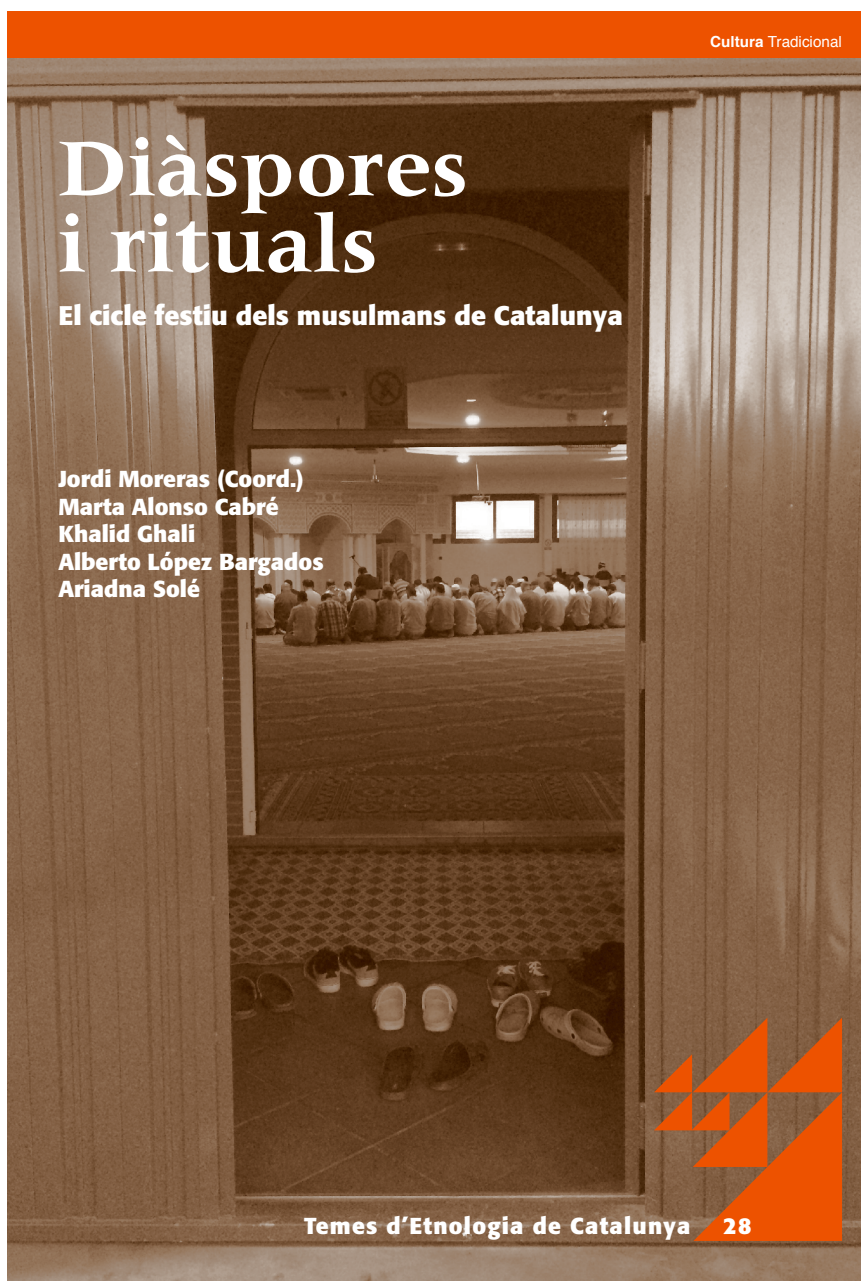
The Muslim festival cycle in Catalonia
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Dispersion and rituals is a monograph focused on the reconstruction and study of collective ritual practices within the Islamic communities in Catalonia. Through an ethnographic analysis of the four main Muslim collective celebrations – fasting during the month of Ramadan, the feast of sacrifice (*Aid al-Adha*), the celebration of the martyrdom of Ali (*Ashura*) and the feast of the birth of the prophet (*Mawlid*) – carried out in five Catalan cities (Criellell, Martorell, Lleida, Arenys de Munt and Barcelona), the authors explore the evident heterogeneity of this community and focus their attention on the various identity dynamics which condition it. According to the authors, the analysis of the Muslim festive cycle reveals that the ritual practices that comprise them go beyond religious observance, as they encompass different community reconstruction processes that are strongly determined by the context of dispersion in which they occur.

This monograph on the Muslim festive cycle in Catalonia must be



Cover of the book *Dispersion and rituals. The festive cycle of Muslims in Catalonia*

placed within the framework of academic work on Muslim communities that began in the Spanish state, especially from the nineteen-nineties. The coordinator of the work, Jordi Moreras, published one of the first monographs on these issues in 1999. *Musulmans a Barcelona. Espais i dinàmiques comunitàries* (Muslims in Barcelona. Community Spaces and Dynamics) is a seminal work that not only deals with analysing the community evolution of Muslim men and women and the dynamics underpinning it; instead, it is based on in-depth field work carried out in Barcelona in the second half of the nineties. Until then, most of the academic works on Islam and Muslimism in Europe were embedded in others that were essentially centred on the economic and labour side of migration. However, the monograph by Moreras focused on the religious dimension and revealed several questions. First of all, that Islam in Europe had become a new field of study for social sciences. But, furthermore, that this religious dimension needed to be analysed if we wanted to acquire more comprehensive knowledge about migrant populations. Finally, it was the confirmation that quantitative approaches could be complemented and even replaced by other ethnographic-type analyses. Almost twenty years have passed since then and this new work coordinated by Moreras is another milestone in his research career. The work, written along with four other researchers, pursues the same objective; that is, continuing to explore the sociopolitical, identity and religious dynamics that affect Muslim populations. On this occasion, through the study of ritual as a backbone of the community and taking as a starting point the disparity between the doctrinal and textual definition of these rituals and their adaptation to the context in which they are inserted. It is in this

space of contrast between the text and the context in which, according to the authors, identities are configured.

The book is made up of eight chapters. In addition to the introduction and the conclusion, the monograph has six more parts. After the introduction, a chapter explains what role rituals have played in the anthropological analysis of dispersion. The third chapter describes and analyses the Islamic religious field in Catalonia from the mid-1960s to the present. The use of the concept of *field* in a Bourdieu sense is quite relevant to account for the different identity-building processes determined by the actors' confluence and relationships and, in turn, conditioned by the sociopolitical context in which they are placed. In the four following chapters, the bulk of the monograph, these are reconstructed and four Muslim festivals are analysed: the celebrations that take place during the month of Ramadan, *Ashura*, *Aid al-Adha* and *Mawlid*. Of all these chapters, the chapter devoted to Ramadan is the densest, featuring a more complete analysis. The reason for this is not simply due to the central role that this holiday has in the Islamic ritual calendar, but also to the type of analysis made. Given that its practice is fundamentally determined by three dimensions – doctrine, society and relationships – the work shows that the configuration of the religious field in Catalonia is marked by very different dynamics, which demonstrate the heterogeneity of a community that adapts to context through the individualisation of its practice. In this same sense, the chapter devoted to the sacrifice festival, *Aid al-Adha*, addresses the controversies surrounding the celebration and how it has been and continues to be problematic in certain social sectors, which by ques-

tioning it demonstrates the use of the label of secularism to cast doubt over the legitimacy of certain religions. The following chapters, which are dedicated to the commemoration of the martyr Ali, *Ashura*, and the birth of the prophet, *Mawlid*, are less exhaustive, mainly discussing location within the framework of Islamic orthodoxy. This is especially true in the case of *Ashura*, a celebration practised by a relatively small group within the Islamic community of Catalonia.

On an international stage marked by Islamophobia and by a highly ingrained anti-Muslim racism in institutions, the most obvious expression of which can be seen in the state's securitisation policies, the study coordinated by Moreras is new and necessary. New because until now, few studies have attempted to analyse the meaning of the ritual practices of Muslim minorities, and necessary because it highlights its presence in the Catalan context, not as an external fact, but as part of it. This is the main value of the monograph: it seeks to shed light on, understand and normalise Islamic rituals, taking into consideration that they are community practices which, although registered in the religious social field, go beyond and compete for legitimacy along with other social actors. Likewise, the book successfully proves that the Muslim community is much more than a religious community and it does this, as contradictory as it may seem, by analysing religious practice through its ritual and collective aspects. ■