

**THE COMMEMORATION OF MUHARRAM:  
RITUAL PRACTICE AND NOTIONS OF BELONGING  
AMONG IRAQI SHI'A MUSLIMS IN COPENHAGEN**



The commemoration of Muharram is one of the many calendrical rites that Iraqi Shi'a Muslims perform in Copenhagen. These numerous religious activities have become possible, because the Iraqi Shi'a milieu in Copenhagen has grown extensively since the mid-1990s. In this paper I will focus on the activities taking place in women's *hussainiya*. The paper explores how women construct and negotiate different notions of community and identity through ritual performance, specifically, and through participation in the religious milieu, more generally. I argue that the religious milieu gains significance because it provides a social arena in which women can negotiate their sense of belonging in relation to both their socio-cultural background and their every day lives as part of an ethnic minority in Denmark. In particular, the celebration of Shi'a calendrical rites in Copenhagen enable women to form a moral, religious, and social community of Iraqi Shi'a refugees. This appears as one community but it draws on different historical, national, and local identifications. The ritual format of the events allows women to experience membership of a collectivity at the same time as they each participate and interpret the traditions in different ways.

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