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# ‘How is one supposed to sleep when the Ka’ba is over there?’ Empirical Data on Swedish Muslims Performing the *Hajj*

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to present data from the first study using interviews with Swedish *hajj* pilgrims, conducted during 2016 and 2017 by the Institute for Language and Folklore, Gothenburg; the Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg; Södertörn University, Stockholm; and Gothenburg University. Among the questions asked within the framework of the project were, for example, how Swedish Muslims experience the *hajj*; how they prepare for the trip to Saudi Arabia; how the pilgrimage is organized by Swedish Muslim organizations (e.g. *hajj* travel agencies); whether the pilgrimage is only perceived as a religious journey; and whether the intergroup conflicts and variations that exist among Muslims effect the *hajj*? The last question will be addressed by focusing on how Swedish Ahmadiyya Muslims are affected by the fact that the Pakistani and Saudi states do not regard them as Muslims.

## Keywords

*hajj* – lived religion – ritual – Sweden – Ahmadiyya – *hajj* travel agencies – religious experiences

The aim of this article is to present data from the first study using interviews with Swedish *hajj* pilgrims, conducted in 2016 and 2017 by the Institute for Language and Folklore, Gothenburg; the Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg; Södertörn University, Stockholm; and Gothenburg University. Among the questions asked within the framework of the project were for example, how Swedish Muslims experience the *hajj*; how they prepare for the trip to Saudi Arabia; how the pilgrimage is organised by Swedish Muslim organisations; and whether the intergroup conflicts and variations that exist among Muslims affect the *hajj*? The last question will be addressed by focusing on how Swedish Ahmadiyya Muslims are affected by the fact that the states of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia do not regard them as Muslims.<sup>1</sup> This may affect their ability to perform the *hajj*, which is an obligatory ritual for them, just as it is for all Muslims with the physical and financial means to do so.

## 1 The Dataset, Method and Theory

As demonstrated by earlier studies of pilgrimages, the *hajj* is a complex ritual with, for example, religious, social, economic and psychological dimensions.<sup>2</sup> Participation may therefore entail many things, and the *hajj* itself can be studied using many different methodological approaches. For those interested in dogmas and ritual prescriptions, it can be useful to consult theological texts that present an ideal understanding of how the *hajj* should be performed and why it is obligatory for Muslims to undertake it. Those interested in the so-called lived experiences of pilgrims must resort to field studies. However, since this ritual is only open to Muslims, and non-Muslims are barred from entering Mecca or Medina, this was not an option for the current authors. The data for this article were therefore collected by means of a third method of studying the *hajj*, namely by conducting interviews with individuals living in Sweden who self-identify as Muslims and who have performed or who would like to perform the pilgrimage.

The authors of this article were part of a team of researchers from the Södertörn University, Gothenburg University, the Museum of World Culture and the Institute for Language and Folklore, which produced the first book in Swedish on the *hajj* ritual. For this project fourteen individuals who

1 On this topic, see, for instance, Larsson, Göran, "Muslims Accused of Apostasy: An Ahmadi Refutation," in *Exploring the Multitude of Muslims in Europe: Essays in Honour of Jørgen S. Nielsen*, Niels Valdemar Vinding et al. (eds.) (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2018), 172–182.

2 Porter, Venetia (ed.), *Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam* (London: British Museum Press, 2012).

self-identified as Muslims were selected for interviews. The interviews were conducted by Aroma Abrashi and Ratiba Hanoush who were connected to the project as research assistants, while the interviews with Swedish Ahmadiyya Muslims were conducted by Simon Sorgenfrei. The voices presented in this article should not be viewed as representative of Islam and Muslims in general, but are rather to be understood as individual voices pointing to a multitude of ways in which Muslims may reflect on or relate to the pilgrimage.

Even though the selection of the interviewees was pragmatic and those interviewed were primarily asked to recommend other individuals who might be willing to participate in the project, the aim was to include a wide range of different voices with regard to ethnicity, gender and denominational variations within Islam (e.g. Sunni, Shia and Ahmadiyya Muslims). The snow-ball selection that guided the sampling process has both strengths and weaknesses. The most obvious problem is that those who participate might hold similar opinions and come from the same background. This problem was partly counteracted by the fact that the selection of the interviewees was collectively discussed in the research team in order to make sure that those who participated in the study had different religious, ethnic and gender backgrounds. The two research assistants had also different networks for recruiting participants in the study and they provided two rather different samples.

All the interviews were semi-structured, with a focus on experiences or expectations about the *hajj*, but the interviews were also informed by an approach that could be classified as life-story interviewing, that is, conducting a lengthy interview that aimed to place the individual's life in focus. The interviews were analysed with the aid of qualitative methods with a specific focus on three themes: preparing for the *hajj*; performing the *hajj*; and being excluded from the *hajj*. By asking fourteen Swedish Muslims questions about how they prepared for the *hajj*, how they experienced the *hajj*, and whether and how the pilgrimage transformed them, it was possible to analyse how the interviewees wanted to present their experience of the *hajj*. It was also possible to compare and cast light on the diversity that exists among some Swedish Muslims concerning the *hajj*.

From a theoretical point of view, we wanted to explore the tension that exists between the ideal (the prescribed duty for all Muslims to perform the *hajj*, and *hajj* as a symbol of Muslim unity and equality) and the lived reality of Muslims who have participated in the ritual or would like to do so. Despite the fact that the *hajj* is ideally mandatory and an (if not the most) important ritual expression of Muslim unity (*tawhid*), it is also a ritual that can be given many meanings and it may even be performed with some minor variations based on individual or denominational interpretations. Most importantly, the *hajj* can

also be used to expose power relations and cast light on the battle for authority to prescribe how Islam 'should' be interpreted and lived. The unquestionable status of Mecca and Medina is central to all Muslims and, by having authority over the most holy places in Islam, various Muslim authorities have in past and present times been able to stipulate how Islam 'should' be interpreted and performed by those who undertake the *hajj*. This power hierarchy shows that not all Muslims have been treated equally and that some have even been excluded from the ritual, so the *hajj* is not in fact open to all Muslims, even though it is a prescribed obligation.<sup>3</sup> In this article, this contradiction is analysed with the help of a small number of Ahmadiyya Muslims residing in Sweden. How do Ahmadiyya Muslims view the religiously prescribed norm of pilgrimage and how do they adjust to the fact that they are prohibited by the Saudi government from entering Mecca?

Besides analysing internal variations among fourteen Swedish Muslims who have conducted the *hajj*, our analysis is also informed by theories on ritual and ritualisation. As we are interested in the relation between normative ideals and individual approaches to the *hajj*, we shall make use of the concepts of deferentiality and inferentiality in relation to ritual practice as developed by Sorgenfrei,<sup>4</sup> where these concepts are defined as follows:

A deferential approach focuses on the expressed beliefs and practices of founding figures in a normative past held to have been handed down unaltered through chains of practitioners which connect the present to such normative pasts. A deferential approach also entails adopting at face value the expressed beliefs and practices of groups and individuals that successfully claim or are invested with authority.

An inferential approach refers to individualised experientially- and/or intellectually-based claims to be able to sift out the essence or underlying intention behind a certain tradition and making that essence or intention the basis for a formulation of 'true' authenticity more or less at variance with established beliefs and practices. Through an inferential

3 The struggle for control over Mecca, Medina and the *hajj* is not unique to the present day. For several historical examples, see, for instance, Teitelbaum, Joshua, "Hashemites, Egyptians and Saudis: The tripartite struggle for the pilgrimage in the shadow of Ottoman defeat", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 56/1 (2020), 36–47.

4 Sorgenfrei, Simon, *American Dervish: making Mevlevism in the United States of America* (Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, 2013).

approach, authenticity and authority are hence connected to subjective reasoning and emotional experiences.<sup>5</sup>

As we are interested not only in the ritual performance itself, but also in the interviewees' expectations and preparations for the *hajj*, we also apply the concepts of ritualisation and framing as used for example by Catherine Bell,<sup>6</sup> who has suggested that 'ritual acts are not a clear and closed category of social behavior' but instead rather fuzzy around the edges. She therefore proposes a focus on the ways in which certain social actions are strategically distinguished from and privileged over other forms of social actions through a process that she calls *ritualisation*.<sup>7</sup> Bell defines ritualisation as:

... a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities. As such, ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane,' and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actions.<sup>8</sup>

One way to create such 'qualitative distinctions' is with the help of what is often called *framing*. For instance, rituals are commonly framed by alterations in body postures, clothing or location.<sup>9</sup> But, as will be touched upon in this article, framing can begin even earlier through, for example, preparations to participate in a ritual. As will also be suggested, architectural or geographical realities may also function as framing for a major ceremonial ritual such as the *hajj*.

Before we turn to our informants, it will be relevant briefly to present the history of Islam and Muslims in Sweden. As this article deals specifically with *hajj* pilgrims from Sweden, the historical overview includes an account of the specialist *hajj* travel agencies that exist in Sweden.<sup>10</sup>

5 Sorgenfrei, *American*, 81–82.

6 Bell, Catherine, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Bell, Catherine, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

7 Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 74.

8 Bell, *Ritual*.

9 Bell, *Ritual*, 73.

10 The presentation of the *hajj* travel agencies in Sweden is based entirely based on Grinell, Klas, "Resebyråerna", in *Röster om hajj*, Klas Grinell et al. (eds.), (Göteborg: Institutet för språk och folkminnen, 2017), 28–37.

## 2 The Swedish Context

Muslims first arrived to settle in Sweden in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,<sup>11</sup> but Swedish relations with Muslim cultures and states go back to the so-called Viking (c. 700–1100) being further intensified from the sixteenth century, when Sweden developed diplomatic contacts with the wider Muslim world.<sup>12</sup> Larger-scale immigration of Muslims to Sweden began after the Second World War, when Sweden opened its borders to labour migrants from neighbouring Nordic countries, as well as from southern Europe, the Balkans and Turkey. These early Muslim labour migrants were later followed by their families, and in the 1980s and 1990s by refugees from a wide array of Muslim-majority countries, such as Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Syria.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike countries such as France, Britain and the Netherlands, Sweden did not have any colonies in the wider Muslim world and therefore does not have one dominant group of Muslims connected to one nation or geographical area. Instead the Swedish Muslims community, or rather communities, in Sweden are heterogeneous and diverse in their ethnic, linguistic and religious composition. Swedish Muslims are today represented by seven umbrella organisations that are recognised by the Swedish state. Even though most of the umbrella organisations – apart from the Bosniak Islamic Association (BIS, *Bosniakiska Islamiska Samfundet*), formed in mid 1990s–recruit members from different ethnic backgrounds, there are in Sweden a fairly large number of smaller, ethnically defined organisations and congregations. These include congregations and organisations, such as the Ahmadiyya community, to which we return below, that for different reasons do not belong to any of the seven official national organisations.<sup>14</sup> In addition to these national umbrella organisations, there are also Salafi and Wahhabi groups, which have tended to attract followers from diverse ethnic backgrounds,<sup>15</sup> and

11 See, for instance, Sorgenfrei, Simon, *Islam i Sverige: de första 1300 åren* (Bromma: Myndigheten för stöd till trossamfund, 2018); Sorgenfrei, Simon, “Establishing Islam in Sweden: The First Tatar Community and Muslim Congregation and Their Sources”, *Acta Orientalia Electronica*, 8:2 (2020), 82–95.

12 See Sorgenfrei, *Islam i Sverige*, Chapters 1 and 3. On Arabic sources that deal with the Nordic countries, see Birkeland, Harris, *Nordens historie i middelalderen etter arabiske kilder: Oversettelse til norsk av de arabiske kilder med innledning, forfatterbiografier, bibliografi og merknader* (Oslo: Norske videnskaps-akademi, 1954); Dozy, Reinhart, *Los vikingos en España* (Madrid: Ed. Polifemo, 1987).

13 See Sorgenfrei, *Islam i Sverige*, chs. 4 and 5.

14 Sorgenfrei, *Islam i Sverige*.

15 Olsson, Susanne, *Contemporary Puritan Salafism: A Swedish Case Study* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2019).

Sufi groups,<sup>16</sup> some of which are ethnically homogeneous, while others are more mixed, particularly those that are led by and recruit Swedish converts.

There are different estimates of the number of Muslims residing in Sweden, but no reliable statistics. The most accurate estimate of the numbers of members of the umbrella organisations mentioned above is that provided by the Swedish Agency for Support for Faith Communities (*Myndigheten för stöd till trossamfund*; generally abbreviated as SST), which gives financial support to religious communities that are recognised and approved by the Swedish state. According to SST's latest calculations (for 2019), there are 181,820 Muslims in Sweden.<sup>17</sup> However, this figure is problematic, for a number of reasons. For example, it does not include all the individuals in Sweden who self-identify as Muslims, but, as just noted, only members of the seven national organisations that are in receipt of state funding. A much higher figure is also given by the Pew Research Center, which estimates that approximately 810,000 persons living in Sweden identify in some way as Muslims.<sup>18</sup> This figure includes individuals who use 'Muslim' as an ethnic rather than a religious identification, while the statistics provided by SST only cover sections of religiously organised Muslims in Sweden. How many Muslims actually live in the country thus becomes a matter of definition.

Even though there is a large and growing body of studies of Islam and Muslims in Sweden,<sup>19</sup> to the best of our knowledge there are no studies of Swedish Muslims participating in the *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca. In order to grasp how many individuals travel to Saudi Arabia and how the *hajj* is organised from Sweden, Klas Grinell conducted a study of so-called *hajj* travel agencies in Sweden.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, it is rarely possible to say if and to what extent the *hajj* travel agencies are linked to one of the country's seven Muslim umbrella organisations mentioned above. However, the data provided by Grinell indicate that the *hajj* travel agencies were often associated with a specific mosque, while as Sorgenfrei has studied, some Salafi groups also offer guided *hajj* travel.<sup>21</sup> The purpose-built mosques in Stockholm and Göteborg,

16 Sorgenfrei, Simon, *Sufism i Sverige: en lägesrapport från Stockholm, Göteborg och Malmö* (Stockholm: Nämnden för statligt stöd till trossamfund, 2016)

17 See SST, "Statistik om trossamfund", <https://www.myndighetenst.se/kunskap/statistik-om-trossamfund.html>, accessed 3 June 2020.

18 Pew Research Center, "Europe's growing Muslim population", <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/>, accessed 3 June 2020.

19 See Larsson, Göran, *Islam och muslimer i Sverige. En kommenterad bibliografi* (Göteborg & Stockholm: Makadam, 2004) for an overview of earlier studies on Islam and Muslims in Sweden.

20 Grinell, "Resebyråerna".

21 Sorgenfrei, Simon "Branding Salafism - Salafi Missionaries as Social Media Influencers", *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* (Forthcoming); Sorgenfrei, Simon

which are both associated with *Islamiska förbundet* (the Islamic Union), as well as the Shia mosque in Järfälla, which is the headquarters of the Shia umbrella organisation in Sweden, had their own travel agencies.

The extent to which this is having an effect or impact on the design of *hajj* travel packages warrants more research and further interviews. However, from earlier research it is evident that the *hajj* is a global enterprise that involves massive amounts of time and money. For example, according to official data provided by Saudi Arabia, more than five thousand licensed bureaus provide services for *hajj* pilgrims on a global basis, and approximately 3,500 businesses are specifically involved in arranging *hajj* travel.<sup>22</sup>

With growing numbers of pilgrimages (in 2016, 1,862,909 individuals participated in the *hajj*<sup>23</sup>), the Saudi state has been forced to take measures to ensure the safety of pilgrims and make the pilgrimage a positive experience. To maintain its control and guarantee the pilgrims' safety, Saudi Arabia has started to issue so-called travel quotas for all countries with a Muslim population. For the year 1437 AH (October 2015 to October 2016), Sweden's quota was 1,679 pilgrims. This number was distributed between eleven travel agencies that had been approved by the Saudi state. In 2015, there were ten agencies in operation, and again the quota was distributed among them.<sup>24</sup>

The names of these travel agencies indicate that they are run by both Sunni and Shia Muslims. The names *Ahl al-Beyt* and *Al-Hosein* indicate Shia associations, but it is evident that the travel agencies are located in different parts of Sweden (primarily Malmö and Stockholm) and we have not been able to establish whether, for instance, Shia Muslim travel agencies are open to non-Shia Muslims or vice versa. In addition to the figures in Table 1, Sweden was also given the opportunity to add fifty Iranian Shia Muslims via the Al-Zaharaa Islamic foundation but the figures were adjusted by the Saudis, and the final quota for *hajj* pilgrims from Sweden in 2016 was 1,400.<sup>25</sup> As pointed out by Grinell, it is very difficult to know how many Swedish Muslims actually participated in the *hajj*. Sweden has allowed dual citizenship since 2000, so it is possible for Muslims with a second citizenship to apply for a *hajj* visa via another country. If we use the figures provided by SST for 2015, the number of individuals who were registered as members of Islamic organisations was 139,759,

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"Crowdfunding Salafism – Crowdfunding as Salafi Missionising Method", *Religions*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2021)

22 Grinell, "Resebyråerna", 28–29.

23 Grinell, "Resebyråerna", 32.

24 Grinell, "Resebyråerna", 30.

25 Grinell, "Resebyråerna", 32.

TABLE 1 Swedish *hajj* travel agencies in 2015

Name of travel agency	Number of travellers per travel agency
Ahl-Al Beyt Haj & Omra Travel Kommanditbolag	130
Scandinavian Foundation of Islamic Services	75
Al Hoseins Kulturförening Malmö-Sweden	90
Salama Haj and Umra AB	110
Hadj Omra resor Handelsbolag Stockholm	565
Riksförbundet svensk islamisk samling	80
Komtransa Sweden	54
Thakalen Tours	200
Aliman Haj & Tours handelsbolag	125
Royal Resor Skandinavisk Handelsbolag	125

Source: Grinell, "Resebyråerna", 31.

suggesting that approximately 1% of the members of the national Muslim organisations participated in the *hajj* that year.<sup>26</sup>

Swedish *hajj* agencies' services include, for example, visa applications, booking flights, arranging accommodation in Mecca and facilitating guides who can help the pilgrims participate in the various *hajj* rituals. The guides may also function as interpreters and cultural brokers, as they speak Swedish, Arabic and any other language the pilgrims require. Quite often, Swedish seems to be the language that unites the Swedish pilgrims, suggesting that they become more Swedish when travelling to Mecca than when they are back in Sweden, where they often identify primarily as Turkish, Somali, etc. The question of Swedishness was therefore raised during both the interviews and the *hajj* pilgrimage. Moreover, many travel agencies provide lectures and basic information about the *hajj*, both practical (what to pack) and theological (explaining the reasons for going on pilgrimage). Tents with beds and air conditioning in Arafat and Mina are generally included in the price charged by the agencies. The average cost of a twelve-day *hajj* is approximately 33,000 to 45,000

<sup>26</sup> Grinell, "Resebyråerna".

Swedish krona (ca. €3,000–€4,100), depending on how one travels and where one stays in Mecca.<sup>27</sup>

For those who do not have the financial means or physical ability to travel, it is also possible to buy a so-called *hajj badal* alternative for approximately 7,000 Swedish krona (ca. €700). This will allow a Muslim who lives in Mecca or Medina to do the *hajj* on your behalf. This is not only less costly, but it is also possible to delay the payment and to pay over a period of twelve months without extra costs. It is even possible to do a *hajj badal* for someone who has died. Some Swedish *hajj* travel agencies (e.g. Aliman Hajj & Tours) also provide an option in which a sheep is slaughtered during the *qurban* ritual and the meat distributed among the poor in Mecca. The price for this is 1,000 Swedish krona (ca. €100), but the reward is 100,000 in *hasanat* (divine credit) according to the travel agency.<sup>28</sup>

### 3 Swedish Voices on the Hajj

In a brief text like this, it is difficult, of course, to do justice to the complexity and nuances found in the original interviews. However, to provide an overview of how some Swedish Muslims perceive the *hajj*, we have arranged the pilgrims' voices under three themes: 'preparing for the hajj', 'doing the hajj' and 'those who are afraid to go'. The last section contains voices from Ahmadiyya Muslims who would like to go on the *hajj* but are discouraged by the fact that they are not viewed as 'true' Muslims by the Saudi Arabian state. The discussion about the Ahmadiyya Muslims is relevant because there is almost no research on how members of this branch of Islam perceive or conceptualise the *hajj*. Before we turn to the interviews, however, it is again important to stress that the boundaries between the themes, especially between 'preparing for the *hajj*' and 'doing the *hajj*', are often blurred. Hence, as Bell has underlined, it is difficult to say exactly where the framing begins and when ritualisation becomes ritual proper.

#### 3.1 *Preparing for the Hajj*

It should not come as a great surprise that the majority of the fourteen voices included in this study expressed religious motives for going on the *hajj*. In particular, the seven individuals who were interviewed by Aroma Abrashi, one of the research assistants who conducted the interviews, explicitly made

27 Grinell, "Resebyråerna", 33–4.

28 Grinell, "Resebyråerna", 35–7. Information on the price and the number of *hasanat* received for the *qurban* alternative was retrieved from <http://www.alimanhajj.com/hajj.php> (accessed 27 October 2019).

TABLE 2 Aroma Abrashi's seven informants (anonymised)

Name	Age	Background
Engjell	34	Kosovo
Fuad	26	Somalia
Mubarak	29	Somalia
Maha	51	Lebanon
Murat	40	Kosovo
Sara	26	Kosovo
Teuta	55	Kosovo

Source: Grinell et al., *Röster om hajj*, 69.

reference to religious expectations and the obligation to perform the *hajj* for those who have the physical and financial ability to do so. Aroma's sample consisted of interviews with the following individuals (all names are pseudonyms).

Most of the participants in our study were young or middle-aged (see table above), and several had made extensive preparations before travelling to Mecca and Medina. No background information was collected regarding the participants, but the informants interviewed by Abrashi were literate, and even though some of them had been born outside Sweden, they had all lived in the country for a long time. Consequently, they read books, took part in courses and lectures organised by mosques or *hajj* travel agencies, watched video-clips and took online tutorials. Some of them had also tried to prepare themselves physically for the *hajj*. For example, Mubarak had started to build up his physical condition by going jogging in order to prepare himself for the long walks that are part of the *hajj* rituals. It is also important to be mentally prepared for all the emotions and the stress that many participants experience during the *hajj*. For Murat, the most valuable advice was to pack one's luggage with patience (*sabr*) rather than with clothes.

Such preparations can be studied as expressions of a deferential approach to the ritual, reading up and trying to learn a normative ritual script for how the *hajj* is ideally to be performed. But the material further suggests that the pilgrims also made other preparations, such as jogging or other forms of physical exercise and, as we shall see in the following, highly inferential and subjective approaches and interpretations of the actual ritual performances were common.<sup>29</sup>

29 For a further discussion on deferential and inferential approaches to ritual performance, see Sorgenfrei, *American Dervish*, 81–2.

As will be shown in the next section, the *hajj* can also be very demanding, involving a lot of discomfort and obstacles that can easily threaten to destroy all the pilgrim's good intentions, no matter how faithful one is. Some participants were also afraid that they might miss some important aspect of the pilgrimage and that they would become too tired, fall sick or even die during the *hajj*. Some were also afraid that they would not be able to experience the 'right' emotions and that the pilgrimage would not live up to their expectations. This anxiety also had to do with the fact that they had invested a lot of money in going on the pilgrimage.

### 3.2 *Doing the Hajj*

While the previous section dealt primarily with informants' views and preparations before going on the *hajj*, we now turn our attention to their actual experiences during the *hajj*, and especially to the mixed feelings they had about the experience.

For example, as Mubarak said when he was asked about his expectations: 'I looked forward most to having the possibility to be reborn and cleansed from sin.'<sup>30</sup> However, this understanding was not unique to Mubarak, as several of the participants in our study said that the *hajj* was an occasion to express gratitude to God and to one's loved ones (especially to one's parents), as well as being an opportunity to make a fresh start in life and to ask forgiveness for one's sins. This understanding of the benefits of *hajj* is part of dominant theological teaching about the *hajj* among both Sunni and Shia Muslims. But it was also a way of regaining one's faith and experiencing the presence of God. One participant compared the *hajj* with a 'car inspection: you recharge your batteries and fill up your *iman*, your faith'.<sup>31</sup> Several stories about the *hajj* referred to strong emotions. For example, Sara remembered how she felt when she arrived in Mecca:

I did not even want to rest when we arrived. I just felt that how is one supposed to sleep when the Ka'ba is over there? Once we got there and I went to the Ka'ba, I had to slow down and just take in where I was going and what I would soon see. Then suddenly I saw a glimpse of the Ka'ba further away and ... I became very, very emotional, I can say.<sup>32</sup>

To see the Ka'ba for the first time is generally a very emotional moment for the *hajj* pilgrims, and some of the participants in our study even said that they

<sup>30</sup> Grinell et al., *Röster om hajj*, 69.

<sup>31</sup> Grinell et al., *Röster om hajj*, 71.

<sup>32</sup> Grinell et al., *Röster om hajj*.

started to cry when they saw it. In order to explain how it felt to see the Ka'ba, one informant compared the experience to trying out a new food. Murat said: 'You can't know how anything tastes before one has really tried it. That's how it is with the *hajj*.'<sup>33</sup>

Scholars such as Alfred Schutz and later Christoph Wulf have analysed how rituals often contribute to creating a sense of communality and feelings of belonging among participants, and in many ways the *hajj* may be analysed as a ritual designed to manifest and strengthen Muslim social identity.<sup>34</sup> As stated above, the *hajj* might be understood as the foremost ritual embodiment of the Islamic belief in divine unity and monotheism (*tawhid*). Among all of our informants, reference recurred to the experience of the unity of all Muslims.<sup>35</sup> To become a Muslim *umma* (community) and to feel unity with other Muslims from around the world is another of the central expectations tied to the *hajj* ritual. By travelling, eating and sleeping together, strong bonds and a sense of equality were shared by several of the informants in our sample. These feelings are also enhanced by the fact that all participants in the *hajj* put on *ihram* clothing. By adopting the same dress code, differences in socio-economic class, ethnicity and language should be less obvious. An often-stated ideal explanation for why everyone wears the *ihram* clothing is that men and women, no matter what their economic status or physical appearance, are equal before God.<sup>36</sup>

As already indicated, the *hajj* can easily create a strong sense of joy and meaningfulness, but frustration and anger are also common emotions during the pilgrimage. Several informants spoke about the physical aspects of the *hajj*. The flight to Saudi Arabia from Sweden takes a long time, and the sheer number of people landing in Mecca at that time makes the logistics at the airport difficult and time-consuming. Once in Saudi Arabia, one has to walk long distances in very hot weather, and there are so many people that even shorter distances (like walking seven times around the Ka'ba during the *tawaf* ritual) take a long time. To run between the two hills, Safa and Marwa, is also one of the most exhausting parts of the *hajj* according to the participants in our study. For example, Fuad remembered this part of the ritual as follows:

33 Grinell et al., *Röster om hajj*, 72.

34 Wulf, Christoph, "Praxis", in *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, Jens Kreinath; Jan Snoek and Michael Stausberg (eds.) (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 395–412; Schütz, Alfred, "Making music together: A study in social relationship", *Social Research*, 18/1 (1951), 76–97.

35 Grinell et al., *Röster om hajj*, 77–78.

36 Tufekcioglu, Salih, "5 saker som du måste ta med dig när du besöker Mekka", *5 Pelare*, 30 August 2015, <https://www.5pelare.se/islam/5-saker-du-maste-ta-med-besoker-mekka/> (accessed 24 September 2020).

The worst thing is that all men have to be without shoes, that you are barefoot. It is really difficult because it is very hard to run that distance seven times, and the length of it feels much longer than it is. Your legs hurt, you get pain in your back, and at the same time you should pray and think about God and what he wants to say. There are a lot of people who do not think about how physically demanding it is before they arrive here.<sup>37</sup>

To arrive in Mecca can be a shock for many pilgrims. Apart from the number of participants in the *hajj*, the weather is very hot (especially compared with Sweden), and one's ideal perceptions of Muslims are readily put to the test. People can express irritation, frustration and anger, and even take advantage of others for their own benefit. These mixed feelings were expressed by Fuad when he remembered the *tawaf* ritual:

One problem is that everybody wants to touch the [black] stone [in a corner of the Ka'ba], so it can feel like a war there. People kick and box there, it was a bit tragic. To touch the stone is not something that you have to do in Islam, but people still want to feel that they have arrived all the way and touched the stone.<sup>38</sup>

Another Swedish *hajj* traveller, Engjell, also felt the commotion and heated emotions around the Ka'ba. People were really fighting and pushing each other in order to touch the stone, but for Engjell this was not a good experience. 'What would happen if I hurt a fellow Muslim when I try to reach for the holy stone?', he asked. So instead of pushing himself forward, he decided to take a step back and focus on the positive and important aspects of the ritual.<sup>39</sup>

The logistical changes the Saudi state has implemented to make the *hajj* as safe as possible have also altered the structure of the city of Mecca,<sup>40</sup> and today the Ka'ba is overlooked by the Burj complex, including a massive Hilton hotel. For some of the participants there is a risk that the *hajj* has been commodified and that its 'original' and 'genuine' aspects might be lost. The *hajj* is also connected with shopping, especially as purchases of gifts for family and

37 Grinell et al., *Röster om hajj*, 79–80.

38 Grinell et al., *Röster om hajj*, 82.

39 Grinell et al., *Röster om hajj*, 73.

40 Some of these changes in Mecca are also related to theological disputes that emerged with the rise of Wahhabism in the eighteenth century. On these matters, see, for instance, Teitelbaum, "Hashemites", 38.

friends are obligatory for all pilgrims. However, as scholars such as Michael Stausberg have pointed out,<sup>41</sup> religious rituals have always been closely linked to trade and have had their economic aspects. It is even possible to regard religious pilgrims as a category of tourists. Although these ideas clearly came up in the interviews, few participants were keen to address them because such thoughts might reduce the importance or the sacred ambiance associated with the *hajj*.

Most of the interviewees prepared for the *hajj* by reading up on theological literature and instructions about how the *hajj* rituals should ideally be performed, and so took on what in the theoretical literature have been called deferential attitudes. But we can also see in the interview material expressions of inferential attitudes, where subjective or individualised motives behind the ritual participation were more important.<sup>42</sup> For example, the interviews showed that there were individuals who did not go on pilgrimage primarily or only for religious reasons, or who made personal and subjective interpretations of parts of the *hajj*. As shown by Ratiba Hanoush, the second research assistant, who conducted five interviews with individuals who had all made the *hajj* when they were younger, before they came to live in Sweden, it can raise mixed feelings. Compared with the interviewees who spoke to Abrashi, these informants had lived a shorter time in Sweden and most of them had performed the *hajj* before arriving there.

TABLE 3 Ratibah Hanoush's five informants (anonymised)

Name	Age	Background	Time in Sweden at the Time of the Interview
Dalal	61	—	Ca. four years
Sahar	29	Syria	Ca. one and a half year
Hussein	60	Iraq	—
Talal	—	Iraq	Ca. thirty years
Younes	—	—	—

41 Stausberg, Michael, *Religion and Tourism: Crossroads, Destinations, and Encounters* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

42 Sorgenfrei, *American Dervish*, 81–2.

For at least four of the informants in Table 3, the decision to go on the *hajj* was not their own, some of them having joined their parents because they wanted to go or because some family member was sick or had died. For example, Hussein openly described himself as an atheist and said that he had been a member of the Communist party in Iraq when he went on the *hajj*. Nonetheless, he regarded it as one of the best things he had done in his whole life. The main reason for his going was that his mother had lost her husband (Hussein's father) and to go on *hajj* with her was a way of taking away some of her sorrow and reconnecting with her. To his great surprise, and despite his attempt to suppress his emotions, the pilgrimage transformed Hussein and made him feel a strong connection to God and his mother. When interviewed, Hussein explained his change in attitude as follows:

In fact, I've never wanted to talk about it before. Even when you asked me, I did not want to. What made me change was when you said that the story should not be about religion, but more about emotions. Then I decided that it was time to talk about my trip, because *hajj* is a very different trip, which is unlike anything else. This is because you primarily reset through your emotions and not with your body. When I got there, I felt at home.<sup>43</sup>

To be in Mecca was completely different from being back in Iraq. In Mecca he felt strong and brave, and he even talked with God. Earlier he had been afraid of God and of dying, but in Mecca he felt peace and found it possible to think freely. He was happy and even cried when the pilgrims took part in the same rituals.<sup>44</sup> However, when he returned home, he lost this sense of connection and gravitated back to his former life.

All the while, I hoped that I would be able to live in Mecca, so as not to regain my communist thoughts. I felt that I belonged to this place and that I could see my true personality here. But unfortunately, everything disappeared when I returned home.<sup>45</sup>

Hussein's answer suggests that he holds the subjective emotions awakened by the *hajj* as more important than the physical practice. Through the pilgrimage and in the "holy" city of Mecca he experienced that he got in contact with his true, authentic self. These experiences however soon began to fade and

43 Grinell et al., *Röster om Hajj*, 58.

44 Grinell et al., *Röster om Hajj*, 58–61.

45 Grinell et al., *Röster om Hajj*, 61.

after the pilgrimage he felt like a 'despicable man', but was afraid of going on another *hajj*, as that might change him forever.<sup>46</sup>

Mixed feelings are also found in Dalal's description of the *hajj*, which she undertook when she was a child, going on the pilgrimage with her parents and her older sister, who at the time had a serious illness. Once in Mecca, she found herself filled with mixed feelings. On the one hand she prayed to God for better health for her sister and her family, but she also prayed to God that he should punish her friend, who had stolen the love of her life from her. This created anxiety and bad feelings in Dalal and it was not possible to get rid of these negative thoughts. In Mina, she was not thinking of stoning the devil when she threw pebbles at the stone pillars, but rather of her teacher, who had been abusive and mean to her in school. When she returned home everybody greeted her, but inside she felt bad and thought that she was an evil person. 'What would happen if somebody fell sick or died because of my prayers', asked Dalal, filled with remorse. The only way of getting rid of these bad feelings was to go on a second *hajj*. That time the experience was much better, and Dalal found some relief from her bad thoughts.<sup>47</sup>

Thus we see that activating such inferential or subjective motivations behind going on *hajj* or performing parts of the greater ritual invests the *hajj* with new and individual meaning. For some pilgrims, such subjective experiences might make the ritual performance more valuable than expected, while the contrast between the ideal and reality might result in cognitive dissonance for others and hence evoke feelings of guilt or remorse. Then, the ritual as an expression of theological and social unity is endangered and, rather than reaffirming the pilgrim of his or her place in the larger Muslim *umma*, it comes with the risk of pushing him or her out of the community.

### 3.3 *Those Who are Afraid to Go*

In our dataset there are also examples of Muslims who would very much like to travel to Mecca on the *hajj* but are afraid to do so. These are all members and followers of the Ahmadiyya movement.

The Ahmadiyya movement was founded in India in the late nineteenth century by the charismatic reformer Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908). Ahmad had declared himself to be a *mujaddid*, that is, a renewer of Islam, and later he also claimed that he himself was the messianic redeemer, *al-Mahdi*, as well as the promised Messiah (*Masih*). Most of his followers also regard him as a non-lawgiving prophet who came to revive the sharia in a way similar to how Jesus

46 Grinell et al., *Röster om Hajj*, 56–62.

47 Grinell et al., *Röster om Hajj*, 45–9.

came to revive the law of Moses.<sup>48</sup> Because of these and his other theological teachings, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and the Ahmadiyya movement are regarded as heretical by the majority of the world's Muslims. However, members of the Ahmadiyya community define themselves as Sunni Muslims in the sense that they follow the Sunna and the Hanafi school of law. They read the same Qur'an as other Muslims and, like other Muslims, should ideally follow the five pillars of Islam, that is, the profession of faith, prayer, almsgiving, fasting and pilgrimage, so they are obliged to perform the *hajj* if they can. However, the Ahmadiyya community are defined by the Pakistani state as non-Muslims and are therefore registered as non-Muslims in Pakistani passports.<sup>49</sup> This makes it impossible for Ahmadiyya Muslims from Pakistan to enter Saudi Arabia, as the pilgrimage sites are only open to those the Saudi state recognises as Muslims.

However, in Sweden, Ahmadiyya Muslims do not have their religious affiliation stamped in their passports and are therefore able to travel to Mecca and Medina on the *hajj* and *'umra*, but because Saudi Arabia views Ahmadiyya Muslims as heretics and apostates, many Ahmadis in Sweden are afraid of going. For example, Kashif and Zaheer from the Ahmadiyya community – both of Pakistani origin and in their mid- or late thirties – spoke of the *hajj* as potentially dangerous. It is difficult, Kashif said, and the general security situation surrounding *hajj* is poor, as the accidents of recent years have shown. They are also concerned about somehow being identified as Ahmadiyya Muslims and therefore getting into trouble.

For Shia Muslims, who throughout history have often lived as an exposed minority among Sunni Muslims, the opportunity to hide or conceal their affiliation (*taqiyya*) is offered in potentially dangerous situations (i.e. during the *hajj* if necessary). However, Swedish Ahmadi Muslims strongly reject this idea. 'We would rather act cautiously', said Kashif, while Zaheer again stressed that many Ahmadi Muslims do not go because they are afraid of what will happen if other Muslims find out they are Ahmadis. Nonetheless, Zaheer said that he was planning to take his family on the *'umra* in order to practise and prepare for the real *hajj*. It is common, they said, for Ahmadi Muslims to go on *'umra* and to travel in small groups, as that is safer than going as a large group.

However, the difficulties and dangers that might be connected with going on the *hajj* have not made the pilgrimage any less important for Ahmadis. Rather, the opposite might be the case: Kashif and Zaheer have not been yet gone on the *hajj*, but they both dream of visiting Mecca, the city where the Prophet lived, and to walk around the Ka'ba as generations of Muslims have done for

48 See, for example, Ross-Valentine, Simon, *Islam and the Ahmadiyya Jama'at: History, Belief, Practice* (London: Hurst, 2008).

49 Larsson, "Muslims Accused".

nearly one and a half millennia. They find it difficult to quench the feelings the thought of such a journey awakens, and in response Kashif quoted instead a poem by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, beginning: ‘My life and heart are an offering for the graces of Muhammad / I am equal to the dust of the alleys belonging to the progeny of Muhammad.’<sup>50</sup>

It is obvious that the subject is difficult for Kashif and Zaheer. The pilgrimage is obligatory for Ahmadi Muslims who have the opportunity to go, and it also has strong emotional, theological and ritual meanings for them. Even so, Kashif knew of only approximately ten members of the Swedish Ahmadiyya community who have performed the *hajj*. They always need to be concerned about the security issue. So, to the final question, did they think they would ever be able to do the *hajj*? Kashif answered: ‘Yes, I really believe and hope so, depending on whether I fulfill the conditions; to be able to afford it, to be in good health, to have security.’

#### 4 Conclusions

As with other major religious rituals and events, the *hajj* has been thoroughly theologised and invested with ideals which, as this article has showed, Muslims relate to when preparing for and participating in it. Theorists within the field of ritual studies have long pointed to how ritual practice often tends to evoke individual meaning-making, rather being an enactment of purely theological ideals.<sup>51</sup> For instance, Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, in an influential study, focus on how rituals tend to be invested with individual meaning or how persons may participate in ritual action without rendering the practice especially meaningful or symbolically laden.<sup>52</sup> In the current article we have shown that Swedish Muslims may have varied and highly subjective interpretations and experiences of the *hajj*. While some did their best to apply a deferential attitude to the ritual, others allowed themselves subjective inferences. In both cases, we see how individual experiences vary from a sense of strengthened social identity, to feelings of guilt – often when dissonance occurs between ideal and practice, groups/family expectations and individual motives.

50 The original poem is available at <https://www.alislam.org/urdu/pdf/DurreSameenPersian.pdf>, p. 147 (p. 145 in pdf; accessed 3 June 2020).

51 Dressler, Markus, Geaves, Ron, and Klinkhammer, Gritt, “Introduction”, in *Sufism in Western Society: Global Networking and Locality*, Markus Dressler; Ron Geaves and Gritt Klinkhammer (eds.) (London: Routledge, 2009), 1–12, p. 5; Bell, *Ritual*, 189f.

52 Humphrey, Caroline, and Laidlaw, James, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 89.

Besides 'expected' answers about the *hajj*, that is, answers Muslims have learnt through religious education and socialisation in families and via religious texts and other media (such as YouTube and various Muslim online environments), the information gathered in this article also contains other kinds of answers. Together with the expected responses about strong religious feelings, some pilgrims experienced negative feelings during their *hajj*, feelings that might very well be enhanced by unmet expectations surrounding the pilgrimage. For instance, negative experiences in relation to such an important religious rite and ceremony might be extra difficult to deal with and become a source of anxiety or even doubt about one's religious, Muslim identity. It is unfortunately not possible to say how far that is true of the Swedish Muslims presented in the current article because of the small size of the sample.

However, it should also be stressed that some relate that they embarked on the *hajj* for mainly social reasons, as we saw in the case of the respondent who had a Muslim family background, but who self-identified as an atheist. Here, the emotional pull of the *hajj* had the opposite effect, as Hussein seems to have discovered a religious identity during his pilgrimage. Further studies of how secular Muslims or atheists from a Muslim family background relate to and experience the *hajj* would be another highly valuable subject for further studies. This is an example of how the ritual may have a strong and unexpected effect on those who perform it and also, as suggested by Gavin Brown, for example, how ritual meaning may change over time and, as in this case, during the ritual performance.<sup>53</sup>

Besides religious or spiritual experiences, the *hajj* can also give rise to frustration, anger, anxiety, remorse and even guilt and irritation among its participants. While a common trope is that the *hajj* is a ritual designed to make all Muslims equal, with clothing and physical actions being used to hide financial, national and denominational differences, not everyone self-identifying as a Muslim is necessarily included. Although the *hajj* is supposed to be a ritual for all Muslims, not all Muslims agree on who should be allowed to self-define as a Muslim. One example we focused on in this article was the Swedish Ahmadiyya Muslims, who are not acknowledged as Muslims by other Muslims, and therefore feel insecure and threatened in a way that makes them reluctant to take part in the *hajj*. But, as discussed in the introduction, Sweden's Muslim landscape is, by European standards, very diverse, and *hajj* travel is offered by both Sunni and Shia travel agencies, as well as Salafi organisations. We know from earlier studies that there are tensions and conflicts between Muslim

53 Brown, Gavin, "Theorizing ritual as performance: Explorations of ritual indeterminacy", *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 17/1 (2003), 3–18, pp. 12f.

groups in Sweden,<sup>54</sup> but to what extent such tensions also affect the *hajj* is another subject requiring further investigation. Like other pilgrimages, the *hajj* is a complex ritual with various religious, social, economic and psychological dimensions.

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54 See, for instance, Sorgenfrei, Simon, *Sufism i Sverige: en lägesrapport från Stockholm, Göteborg och Malmö* (Stockholm: Nämnden för statligt stöd till trossamfund, 2016); Larsson, Göran and Sorgenfrei, Simon, *Andra antireligiösa hatbrott och diskriminerade attityder* (Stockholm: SST, 2018).

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