



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

School of Global Studies

Individualized Islamic practices and proving ‘normality’

Thoughts and experiences of Muslim international students regarding their
Muslim identities and everyday religious practices in Swedish society

Author: Negin Mohaghegh Harandi

Supervisor: Magnus Berg

Master thesis in Global Studies, 30 hec

Autumn 2019

Word count: 19,412

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Aim and research question(s).....	2
1.2 Delimitation	2
1.3 Relevance to Global Studies	3
1.4 Background.....	4
1.4.1 Muslims in Sweden.....	4
1.4.2 Student migrants	6
1.5 Terminology.....	8
2. Previous research	9
2.1 Daily life practices and individualization of religion among Muslim immigrants	10
2.2 Social stigmatization against Muslim immigrants.....	11
3. Theoretical framework.....	13
3.1 Individualization of religion through the framework of ‘Everyday Lived Religion’	13
3.1.1 Contextual Creativity	15
3.2 Social stigmatization theory:.....	16
3.2.1 Resisting the stigma and normalization	17
3.2.2 Socialization of personal identity and information control.....	18
4. Methodology	19
4.1 Qualitative research and semi structured interviews.....	19
4.2 Respondent’s profiles.....	20
4.3 Ethical considerations and the role of researcher.....	22
4.4 Method of analysis.....	24
5. Results and analysis	25
5.1 Religious practices, restrictions and daily life in Sweden.....	25
5.1.1 Mosque and prayers	25
5.1.2 Ramadan	28
5.1.3 Halal food.....	31
5.1.4 Alcohol and social activities around it	32
5.1.5 Relying more on internet and social media.....	34
5.1.6 The respondents’ picture of their future.....	35
5.2 The Respondents’ thoughts on their image in Swedish society	37
5.2.1 Proving normality	40
5.2.2 Informational control	43

6. Conclusion and Future Research.....	47
References.....	49
Appendix - Interview guide	59

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I would like to thank all the respondents without whom this research would not have been possible. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences with me...

Thank you to my supervisor Magnus Berg for being patient, supportive and always helping me with your comments and inspirations.

Huge thanks to mom, dad and my dear brother Navid who have always been there for me, warmed my heart with their love and supported me during the time I was writing this thesis.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank my lovely friends back in Iran and Sweden for all the conversations, laughs and nice times we have had together.

Abstract

Due to a rapid growth of immigration from Muslim majority countries, the number of Muslims living in Sweden has dramatically increased since 1950s. Sweden has a very diverse Muslim population in terms of cultural, ethnic, political, linguistic and educational background. Therefore, social research on the Muslim population in Sweden should include different groups of Muslims.

This study aims to understand the thoughts and experiences of Muslim international students regarding their Muslim identities and everyday religious practices in Swedish society. I found international students a unique group since in addition to being identified as Muslims and immigrants, belonging to the academic world is a highlighted aspect of their identities and therefore, affects their experience of living in Sweden.

By conducting semi structured interviews, I go through the experiences of International students who self-identify as Muslims and come from Muslim majority countries. Questions stated are how the participants make sense of their everyday religious practices in Sweden and how they think they are seen in Swedish society. By analyzing the interviews, I discuss the restrictions of practicing Islam in their new host society and the ways they rethink and recreate their Islamic practices in order to keep up with their daily lives in Sweden. Moreover, I show that even though there are no direct stigma against Muslim international students, stigmatization against Muslim immigrants in general is affecting this group as well. Further, I explore how the participants react to the stigma.

Key words: Muslims, international students, individualization of religion, stigmatization, identity- practicing Islam- lived religion.

1. Introduction

The size of the Muslim population in Sweden has grown substantially over the past 60 years (The Living History Forum, n.d. 1) and it has been estimated that in 2016, 8.1% of Sweden's population were Muslims (Conrad, 2017). In Addition, Sweden's Muslim population is very diverse and consists of groups with different cultural, ethnic, political, linguistic and educational backgrounds (Larsson and Sander 2007, 180). Many young Muslims in Sweden have hybrid identities which includes both Muslim and Swedish components as well as religious and secular perspectives (Larsson 2006, 39). This complexity and diversity is very rarely discussed or presented in the Swedish media (ibid). Therefore, it is very important to highlight the diversity and focus on different groups of Muslims when conducting social research about Muslims in Sweden.

In Sweden today, there is a constant stream of attention being focused on Islam and Muslims. (The Living History Forum, n.d. 2). For example, discrimination in the labor and housing market, racist stereotypes in the media and hate crimes against members of Muslim communities (Maimuna 2016, 7). According to the report of the Swedish Integration Board (2004/2005), two-thirds of those surveyed felt that Islamic values are not compatible with the fundamental values of Swedish society (Larsson 2006, 38). Many people with Muslim culture and background are seen as the "Other" and left outside the circle of solidarity (Larsson 2007, 5).

International students are an important group because the recent debates on immigration targets all groups of immigrants, including them (Renee&Lucinda 2016, 3). Additionally, they are a unique group of Muslim immigrants because their identities are linked to being students and belonging to the academic world. In fact, this makes their experience of life in Sweden different from other groups of Muslim immigrants. I became interested in this special group when I realized most of the research about Muslim immigrants has neglected them. In general, the researchers have been very slow in including international students in the area of international migration and human mobility (Findlay 2005, 192).

In this research, I focus on the International students who self-identify as Muslims and come from Muslim majority countries. The aim is to understand their thoughts and experiences regarding their Muslim identity and religious practices in Swedish society. In line with this aim, I have divided this research into two main themes. In the first theme, I discuss the experiences and thoughts of the participants about Islamic practices. It is very important to note

that I look at this topic in the realm of everyday life. In fact, I find it very important to study how International students, as a minority group, make sense of their Islamic identities and practices in their daily life in Sweden. By doing so, I also show how being a Muslim gets combined with other identities and concerns in their lives such as being students, working, socializing in the society, making connections and their future plans. By having an emphasis on the individual's agency and the restrictions that the Muslim minority faces in Sweden, I then reflect upon the ways the individuals reshape and rethink their everyday religious practices. In the second theme, I follow the respondent's ideas about how they believe they are being seen in Swedish society and the way they react to this image. Then I show how the stigmatization of Muslim immigrants in Sweden is also affecting the international students. In the process of analysis, I focus on the concepts of normality and information control which are used as strategies of resisting stigma and distancing from this negative image of Muslim immigrants.

1.1 Aim and research question(s)

This research aims to understand the thoughts and experience of Muslim international students regarding their Muslim identity and religious practices in Swedish society. I have a focus on how the participants practice Islam in their everyday lives in Sweden and in addition, how they think of their image in Swedish society. The main research questions for this study are:

- 1- How do the Muslim international students make sense of their everyday religious practices and in what ways do they navigate the daily life restrictions of practicing Islam in Sweden?
- 2- How do the Muslim international students think they are being seen in the eyes of Swedish society and what are their reactions to it?

1.2 Delimitation

It is important to note that the focus of this study is on practical aspects of Islam in Sweden as well as the way the respondents think of their image in the Swedish society. This involves reflecting upon the participant's personal choices, ideas and experiences. The thesis does not have a focus on the Swedish migration policies or any other legal aspects. Therefore, I don't study the student mobility and Sweden's visa policies regarding international students. It is also worth mentioning that this thesis is not about how Swedish society looks at the international Muslim students but rather how the participants think of their own image in Swedish society.

In addition, while some of the concepts discussed in this study might be applicable to other Muslim immigrants, this thesis only studies Muslim international students who hold student visas and are a specific group of Muslims in Sweden with high level of education. Therefore, it does not include other Muslim immigrants with diverse backgrounds, nor does it include the second generation Muslim immigrants. At the same time, this thesis is only reflecting upon the thoughts and experiences of the participants and these participants are not representing any Muslim communities or international Muslim students in general.

Lastly, while I discuss subjects such as headscarf and stereotypes about Muslim women, this thesis focuses on a more general picture and does not have a merely feminist approach.

1.3 Relevance to Global Studies

Increased migration is one of the most visible and significant aspects of globalization. In today's world, growing numbers of people move within countries and across borders (Tacoli and Okali 2001, 1). Over the past decades, international student mobility and migration have significantly increased, both in numbers and political, economic and academic significance (Riaño, Van Mol and Raghuram, 2018, 283). Among all groups of migrants—including labor migrants, family migrants, and refugees—international students are the fastest-growing group (Riaño and Piguet 2016, 1) This phenomenon is known as the globalization of international education (ibid). It is not surprising that international students now form part of a considerable migration industry, which comprises international student recruitment teams, international education agents, and other institutions selling an international education (Beech 2018). International students should not just be seen as individuals moving between physical locations, but as key agents in transforming and constituting new global spaces of academic knowledge (Madge, et al. 2014).

Additionally, Europe today is not an isolated place. It is in fact part of a vibrant and globalized world (LERU, n.d. 2). Migration has led to the rise of non-Christian religious communities and Islam in particular has seen extraordinary growth in many European countries (ibid, 1). Sweden also has a relatively large number of diverse Muslim groups and is comprised of Muslims that have been living in Sweden for varying lengths of time (Larsson and Sander 2007, 180). International students are recognized as complex individuals who are entangled in a wide set of social relations. (King and Raghuram 131, 2013). Each immigrant embodies a portfolio of

human capital, a stock which also includes religious human capital (Chiswick 2014, 1). Religion and religiosity in the new host society are also an important aspects that can be discussed in line with the topic of student mobility and migration in today's globalized world. Additionally, the role of religion is very important for multiple collective identities. Particularly in the context of immigration, religion seems to play a role in the construction, preservation, or abandoning either of local and ethnic/national identities or of transnational and global ones (Saroglou & Mathijssen 2007, 178).

1.4 Background

In this part, I will explain the situation of Muslims in Sweden and after that, I will define and discuss student migration.

1.4.1 Muslims in Sweden

Before reflecting upon the numbers and statistics regarding the presence of Muslims in Sweden, I would like to discuss how Muslims are being defined in Sweden.

Beginning from the 1930s, no official statistics exist as to the ethnic and/or religious affiliation of immigrants, either prior to or after their arrival in Sweden. All statistics are based on nationality or country of origin (Larsson & Sander 2007, 153). Larsson argues that the "Ethnical" definition which is considered the widest scale when defining Muslims, is used in formal attempts to ascertain the number of Muslims living in a specific location (ibid, 155):

"An ethnic Muslim is defined as anyone who has been born in an environment dominated by a Muslim tradition and carries a name that is attached to that tradition; also included in this category are those who identify with, or consider themselves to belong to, one or the other of these environments. This particular definition is independent of cultural competence, religious belief, active participation in Islam as a religious system, and/or individual attitudes regarding Islam and its various representatives." (ibid, 153)

Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that this definition is used for estimating the number of Muslims living in Sweden (ibid 155). As Larsson argues, the available statistics are based on ethnicity and nationality, which at least for some national groups, is a poor indicator of a person's religious affiliation (ibid). However, in Sweden we are even confronted with various

sources providing different and sometimes very different figures for the percentage of Muslims living in Sweden (ibid).

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sweden was mainly a sending country (Roald 2013, 118). From the 1930s onwards, however, Sweden became a receiving country, with the Turkish-speaking Tartars from Finland and Estonia settling in Sweden as the first Muslim community (ibid). The Swedish Muslim population increased substantially during the last quarter of the twentieth century. It is estimated that the number of individuals with a Muslim background increased from a couple of families in the 1950s, to approximately 100,000 at the end of 1980s (Bevelander and Otterbeck 2010, 404). As mentioned before, the number of Muslims living in Sweden today is difficult to determine. However, a general estimation is that in 2010 there were around 400,000 Muslims in Sweden, constituting approximately 4.5 per cent of the total population. (Larsson 2009). A SST (The Swedish Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities) statistic from 2011 gives the number of 110,000 Muslims registered in Muslim congregations (STT 2013). It has been estimated that in 2016, 8.1% of Sweden's population were Muslims (Conrad, 2017). Most of the Muslim populations live in major cities, with more than 60% residing in three of the major city areas, Stockholm, Göteborg, and Malmö (Larsson 2007, 4).

Sweden's Muslim community underwent important changes over the course of the 1990s. one of the most significant changes was the increased heterogeneity of its population, which now consists of a relatively large number of diverse groups and is comprised of Muslims that have been living in Sweden for varying lengths of time (Larsson and Sander 2007, 180), Sweden may have one of the most heterogeneous Muslim populations in all of Western Europe: a minority population with a rich diversity of cultural, ethnic, political, economic, religious, linguistic and educational backgrounds (ibid, 160). It is also important to note that there are no statistics available regarding the number of Muslim international students in Sweden. However, While the proportion of Muslims who are highly educated varies from one ethnic community to another, the majority of Muslims in Sweden are not well educated (Roald 2, 2011). Roald argues that this is mostly because highly educated Muslim immigrants and refugees tended to go to English- or French-speaking countries, where they did not have to learn a new language in order to get a job (Ibid 3). However, there are certainly expectations. For example, there are many highly educated people among people with Iranian background (ibid).

As described above, Muslims in Sweden are diverse in many ways. As Larsson and Sander argue, this vast heterogeneity should make it clear that almost all generalized statements regarding Islam and Muslims in Sweden are more or less meaningless (Larsson & Sander 2007, 160). However, Muslims in Sweden are often ‘ethnified’ meaning that they are turned into a single ethnic group and ascribed a homogeneous culture (Roy 2004, 69-80). In addition, Strong evidence suggests that Muslims especially are perceived as a religiously distinct group by non-Muslims in Sweden. To be categorized as religiously different can create barriers and aggravations in daily life and can lead to lower chances in the housing and labor markets (Carlsson and Rooth 2006).

The Swedish central government has lessened the extent to which it has legitimized its authority and decisions by reference to religion, so tolerance towards religious minorities has increased (Living History Forum, n.d.). At the same time, this has led to a situation where religious ideas and practices are more often subjected to harsh criticism (ibid). For example, it is possible to make use of religious symbols in the context of comedy, satire, art and literature (ibid). It is also important to note that the Swedish statute book contains no law against blasphemy (ibid).

1.4.2 Student migrants

A student migrant can be defined as someone who leaves his or her country of usual residence to enroll at a higher education institution, or to pursue some other academically or vocationally recognized activities abroad, for at least a term (around three months) within their overall program of study in higher education (Findlay et al 2005, 193).

In Sweden, the scale of migration of third-country students has changed significantly during the recent decade. Up until 2010, this form of migration had increased strongly, to later decline by half during 2011 (Migrationsverket 2012, 7). In all likelihood, the decline during 2011 was caused by the introduction of tuition fees for third-country students that took effect in the autumn term 2011. (ibid, 8) The number of incoming students from abroad was at its peak during the 2010/2011 academic year (46,700) and declined at the lowest point to 32,600 in the 2013/2014 academic year, after the introduction of tuition fees. After a slight recovery, there were 35,900 incoming students from abroad at Swedish higher education institutions in the 2016/2017 academic year (ibid).

In general, there has been an ongoing change with the face of third country migration to Europe (Renee and Lucinda 2016,1). With traditional family and labor pathways to Europe being

increasingly restricted, and higher education becoming increasingly important, international student migrants now form a substantial share of non-EU flows to Europe (ibid). In addition, technological changes and increasing globalization have also lowered the costs of international mobility of the middle class (ibid, 7).

However, despite these major shifts, student migrants are generally omitted from migration research. Third country students are generally assumed to return home. Therefore, researchers interested in human mobility, particularly those investigating international migration, have been slow to appreciate the importance of international student migration. (Findlay 2005, 192).

Student mobility has typically been considered unproblematic from a host country perspective. Either because of their small numbers and assumed temporary visa status or because they are regarded as high skilled elites benefiting the destination country (Renee and Lucinda 2016, 1). However, these assumptions are not necessarily true. Despite the explicitly temporary nature of most third country student visas, students do transfer to other categories. In addition, they have become increasingly likely to settle since the 1990s (ibid). In Addition, as Renee and Lucinda argue, “the student visa remains the only viable option for many potential third country migrants” (ibid, 2).

Considering the fact that the current student migrants are now likely to show greater variation in terms of origins, skills, social position and settlement aims., they are also no longer unconditionally ‘welcome’ in the way that elite migrations have typically been characterized (ibid, 3). Heated debates on immigration increasingly target all foreign born while immigration laws restrict students’ future opportunities for residence and work. (ibid). At the same time, international students are also becoming the targets of increasing suspicion (King and Raghuram 2013, 131). Attacks on them in many countries have been mounting in recent years. Like other types of migrants, they are simultaneously desired yet treated with disdain. Their mobility is continuously under interrogation: are they really students, or are they workers? To what extent is internationalism, or permanent residence abroad, the primary aim of this mobility? Or, conversely, are students international enough? (ibid).

However, it is important to bear in mind that the international student’s situation in the host country is still different from many other immigrants. They generally enjoy documented status and at the same time, they know they have chosen to study abroad and are able to go back home when if/when they want (Thompson and Tambyah, 1999, 216). In addition, their high level of

education and relative sense of security enables a more frictionless move, with fewer transition costs. (Thompson and Tambyah, 1999, 216).

Regarding the reasons behind student migration, it should be noted that Geddie explains education through the notion of transitions as graduation appears to mark a point of transition between study and a more open horizon of opportunities (Geddie 2013). Student mobility arises from personal choices such as the wish to improve foreign language skills, future career opportunities, cultural experiences and personal development. However, background factors such as the socio-economic environment or previous mobility experiences also affect the decision to study abroad (Findlay 2005, 192). It has also been argued that student mobility is in fact reflecting personal characteristics such as gender, socio-economic background, language competence and personality (Dreher and Putvaara 2005). Additionally, one of the main reasons for student mobility is to acquire post-graduate employment in host countries (Suter and Jandl 2006). Approximately, 15-35% of international students can be expected eventually to work and settle in their host countries. It is important to note that higher level education means higher chances of staying in the host country after graduation (ibid).

It is also worth mentioning that international students are recognized as complex individuals who are entangled in a wide set of social relations. They are simultaneously family members, workers, students and etc (King and Raghuram 2013, 131). Therefore, while education can be considered as a basis of individual's social identities (Manstead, Easterbrook and Kuppens), the international student's social identity has multiple attachments (King and Raghuram 2013, 131). Religion also plays a role in the individual's social identity that should not be neglected. In this research, I focus on religion as an important basis of identity among Muslim international students who have moved to Sweden for the purpose of studies. The importance of religion is partly because, generally speaking, the construction of personal identity especially among adolescents and young adults, is to a certain extent influenced by religion (Saroglou & Mathijsen 2007, 178).

1.5 Terminology

Since this thesis consists of terms related to Islam and Muslim rituals, I found it important to describe them.

Daily prayers: Prayer is one of Islam's Five Pillars, the guiding tenets that all observant Muslims must follow. Observant Muslims say their daily prayers 5 times a day (Morning- early

afternoon- late afternoon- sunset- night). In Muslim communities, people are reminded of the daily prayers by the daily calls to prayer, known as adhan. The adhan are delivered from mosques (learningreligion.com).

Friday prayers: also known as Jummah or Congregational Prayer, is a prayer that Muslims hold collectively every Friday, just after noon (Wikipedia). In most Islamic branches, it is believed that Friday prayers are mandatory for men but they are not mandatory for old men, children and women (ibid). Friday prayers are normally held in the mosque (ibid).

Halal food: Halal is an Arabic word that means “permissible.” In terms of food, it means food that is permissible according to Islamic law. For a meat to be certified “halal,” it cannot be a forbidden cut (such as meat from hindquarters) or animal (such as pork) (thekitchn.com).

Khutbah: A talk or sermon delivered in mosques before the Friday prayer, or at other special occasions (Definitions.net).

Ramadan: The holiest month of the Islamic year is Ramadan. Observant Muslims will refrain not only from eating during the day, but also smoking, swearing, and even drinking liquids (Vocabulary.org). Muslims break their fasts at the time of sunset (Vocabulary.com).

Taraweeh: During Ramadan, special evening prayers are conducted during which long portions of the Quran are recited. These special prayers are known as taraweeh. It is recommended that Muslims attend the taraweeh prayers in the mosque (after the last evening prayer), to pray in congregation (learnireligions.com).

2. Previous research

This section is presenting and discussing previous research on Muslim immigrants in Sweden and other parts of Europe. According to the research questions and the main themes of this research, I have divided this literature review into two parts. At first, I review the research on individualization of Islam among Muslim immigrants. The second section will be on social stigmatization against Muslim minorities. Since there is not so much research done about Muslim international students in Sweden and Europe, I include research about different groups of Muslim immigrants in this literature review.

2.1 Daily life practices and individualization of religion among Muslim immigrants

As the debates about Muslim minorities and their practices became more highlighted, The Individualization of religious practices in the contexts of migration gained more attention (El Bachouti 2017). However, scholars have different views regarding the reasons behind the recreation, reinterpretation and individualization of religious practices among Muslim immigrants. In this regard, Roy (2004) believes that individualization of religion is a process that is accompanied by the fragmentation of religious identity in Europe (Roy 2004). Cesari (2003) also argues that in Europe and United States, the normative Islamic tradition transforms and dissolves as Muslim minorities settle and ‘a Muslim individual’ emerges (Cesari 2003, 259). Cesari thinks of individualization of religion as a development among Muslim minority groups which links them to modern societies in the West. In other words, he links individualization of Islam to secularization of western societies and fragmentation of authority structures (Cesari 2003, 260).

In addition, Mandaville has a focus on second generation Muslim immigrants and argues that the migration process has unsettled the social texture from which Muslims migrated. This has led to a critical attitude among second generation Muslims in Europe towards the ‘Islam of the parents’ and religious authority. He further argues that younger generations tend to break away from the ‘Islamic culture’ of their parents and considers this as the main reason behind individualization of Islam (Mandaville 2001, 2003). He also believes that individualization of Islam stems from related to new communication technologies, transnationalism and globalization (Mandaville 2004).

El-bachouti (2017), however, interprets individualization of Islam in West differently. He aims to understand the individualization of Islamic practices in Spain. He does not see the individualization of religion as the product of secularization or fragmentation of religious authority. Rather, he argues that religious practices have become silent and traditionally visible symbols of Islam are not as visible anymore. In addition, individualization of religious practice among Muslims is not produced by liberties in the West and they are resulted from the lack of opportunities and restrictions for the Muslims living in western countries (El-Bachouti 2017, 187).

Jacobson (2010) also does not believe that individualization of Islam in the West is resulting from a fragmentation in religious authority. In his research on Muslim youth in Norway,

Jacobson argues that Authorized Islamic discourses continue to form a basis for the Muslim immigrant's collective and individual identities. (Jacobson 2010, 44.) In this research, he argues that the respondents still believe that Islam has a core that is unchangeable. Therefore, they accept the authority of 'true Islam' (ibid, 374-375).

Moreover, Jeldtoft (2011) looks at practicing Islam among Muslims in Denmark and Germany through an approach which focuses on everyday life. She argues that being more private about religion and less visible in the public sphere, can be a minority strategy which works for Muslims to give them greater space to navigate in relation to critical majority discourses on Islam (Jeldtoft 2011, 1148). Therefore, she also does not believe that individualization of Islam among Muslim immigrants is merely the product of secularization in the West.

2.2 Social stigmatization against Muslim immigrants

In line with one of the main themes of this thesis, in this section I will review the previous research about the topic of stigmatization against Muslims in Sweden and other parts of Europe. The focus is on the excising stigma as well as how Muslim minorities react to it. It should be noted that the reviewed studies reflect upon different Muslim immigrant groups in different parts of Europe. However, social stigma is the common theme among all of them.

First of all, I find it important to discuss Larsson's work on the image of Muslims in Swedish Media and Academia (2006). According to this article, both media studies and large number of surveys have demonstrated that Islam and Muslim are often seen as different and non-Swedish in public debates. Larsson criticizes the media and mentions that in the Swedish media, there is little or no room to present a more heterogeneous picture of Muslims. For example, the media does not show that there is ethnic, political, religious and secular diversity among Muslims in Sweden (Larsson 2006, 38). Further, this article shows that Muslims are mostly being associated with violence, Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism and jihad in the media and this has an indirect message to the audience that Islam is a violent religion. These images indeed lead to stigmatization against the Muslim identity (ibid 38-39).

Frisina (2010) focuses on young second generation Muslims in Italy and explains how Muslims in Europe are seen as the alien 'Other' whose picture is linked to terrorism (Frisina 2010, 357). She further points out that being Muslim has become a burden in social situations and has put many young Muslims under a pressure to the point that they need to constantly 'justify themselves' in public spaces (ibid, 561). As a result, they try many different ways of resisting

the stigma and islamophobia in their everyday lives. These tactics include relying more on the strength of their religious identification, becoming politically active, getting involved in social promotion, questioning the Italian model of secularism and presenting themselves as ‘Moderate Muslims’ which is a global label for distinguishing ‘good’ Muslims from ‘bad’ (ibid 561-564). However, in this work, Frsitina argues that these strategies are not necessarily liberating and some can be just temporary escapes from the stigma without challenging the structural roots that make the Islamic difference something inferior (ibid 569).

Minganti and Österlind (2016) discuss stigma from a gender-based perspective. They show how Muslim women in Sweden are seen as passive victims to patriarchal oppression and in need of help from non-Muslims to be set free from cultural, religious and familial attachments (ibid, 41). Therefore, it become important for them to be recognized as full subjects and citizens. This study shows that some Muslim women have decided to resist the stigma by stepping into the realm of public visibility, mostly through media appearances (ibid). The authors explain how these active women simultaneously evoke celebration and fear, recognition and hatred and even doubt on their Swinishness. (ibid, 54) However, they argue the image of young Muslim women as front figures has led to Islam being presented as more diverse and less foreign (ibid, 55). Therefore, instead of highlighting the vulnerability of Muslim women, this article reflects upon their agency and how they actively try to change the stigma by being more visible.

Ryan (2011) also has a focus on stigmatization against Muslim women. Through interviews with Muslim women in London, she explains how each individual seeks to resist anti-Islamic stigma by claiming ‘normality’ (Ryan 2011, 1). In this research, we can see that the participants who wear identifiably Muslim clothing are more in danger of verbal abuse, labelling and stigmatization (ibid, 10). Ryan points out that these women’s position as ‘normal’ members of the British society is constantly being challenged because they are being visibly identified as Muslims (ibid, 13). In the process of interviews, all the participants claim they are ‘normal’ people and seek to distance themselves from the stigma. However, as Ryan argues, normality is an ambiguous and elusive concept. The women in this study defined normality in different ways and had varied interpretation of clothing and self-presentation (ibid, 14). In fact, they had different definitions of what is considered the normal identity, behavior and appearance in the British society

In addition, I found Ewing’s research on stigmatizing Muslim men in berlin relevant to this thesis. In this work, Ewing (2008) has conducted a research on Stigmatization against Turkish

Muslim immigrants in Germany. She has mostly focused on stigmatization of Turkish masculinities and Muslim gender practices in the German public debates. Her main argument is that the stigmatized and problematized picture of the Turkish Muslim Immigrants is the evidence for the failed integration policies in Germany. (Ewing 2008, 18). Through an analysis on Germany cinema, media, law and her own interviews, Ewing shows how the stereotypes about Turkish Muslim men have been constructed. Turkish men stand accused of locking their women in their homes and forcing them into veils. Ewing even argues that the academic research is dominated by negative stereotypes about Turkish Muslim immigrants (ibid, 97). However, it should be noted that the interviewees are among educated Turkish adults and young adults. Therefore, the research is not reflecting upon the experiences of individuals from a variety of social classes.

3. Theoretical framework

In this thesis, I use the individualization of religion and social stigmatization theory to make sense of my results. I chose these theories because they have matched patterns found in the interviews. I have selected theoretical frameworks and concepts that help me discuss the religious experiences of Muslim international students and explain how they believe they are being seen by the majority in Swedish society.

3.1 Individualization of religion through the framework of ‘Everyday Lived Religion’

Individualization of religion is not a new concept in sociology of religion. Thomas Luckmann (1967) was the first to advocate this thesis during the 1960s (Pollack and pickle 2007, 605). According to Luckmann, the individuals are no longer merely dependent on religious institutions. In fact, living in a modern society makes them “select certain religious themes from the available assortment and build them into a somewhat precarious private system of ultimate significance” (Luckmann 1967, 102).

In this research, the individualization of religion theory is approached through the framework of ‘everyday lived religion’. I found this framework appropriate for explaining how international Muslim students in Sweden make sense of their Muslim identities and daily lives in Sweden. The sociological ‘lived religion’ approach focuses on the experiences of religious individuals in everyday life, whilst also considering the institutional aspects of religion that

they may engage with. It emphasizes that individuals do not simply copy institutional religious prescriptions; instead, it posits that people have an active and reflexive role in shaping, negotiating and changing their own beliefs and practices (Nyhagen 2017, 495). This approach was developed as a critique of the view which puts a lot of emphasis in the role of religious institutions and organizations rather than the actual experience of people regarding religion in everyday life contexts (McGuire 2008, 12). As McGuire argues: “if we start with the assumption that individuals commit, or refuse to commit, to an entire, single package of beliefs and practices of an official religion, then we would misinterpret the individual religions of people” (ibid 10).

When we look at the individualization of religion theory through the framework of lived religion, “the work of social agents/actors themselves as narrators and interpreters of their own experiences and histories becomes very important” (Orsi, 2002). I found the lived religion framework important in the context of Muslim immigrants because they are often in need of choices which help them handle the everyday life situations in the host society while maintaining the connection with their Islamic identities. As McGuire explains: “Religion as lived is important as religion needs to make sense in one’s everyday life and it needs to be effective, to ‘work’, in the sense of accomplishing some desired end” (McGuire 2008, 14).

It is important to note that the everyday lived religion framework does not ignore the role of religious institutions and organizations. The Individual’s lived religious practices may be “closely linked with the teachings and practices of an official religion” (McGuire 2008, 98). However, the power and meaning of institutional forms of religion in people’s lives should not be taken for granted (ibid). Furthermore, the lived religion approach does not assume that religion is simply a private or individual phenomenon in modern societies. In fact, within the paradigm of lived religion, an individual’s religiosity is perceived as a changing, multifaceted mixture of beliefs and practices that can even be contradictory.

Regarding the case of Muslim immigrants in non-Muslim countries, several researchers have argued since the late 1990s that the Islamic religiosity of young Muslims in Europe is undergoing an individualization and privatization process (Bendixon 2013, 9) Scholars explain that migration and rural-urban mobilization lead to the development of individualization of religion (Schiffauer 1990). In the context of migration, individuals are thought to re-create the religious patterns of their daily life on an individual basis (Bendixon 2013, 9). As Jeldtoft argues about lived Islam, “being a Muslim is not just something that you are, but also that you can actively choose to do” (Jeldtoft 2011, 1142).

3.1.1 Contextual Creativity

In line with the individualization of religion theory, El-bachouti writes about the concept of contextual creativity. He uses the term 'Contextual Creativity' to explain the overlap between the individual's agency and the host society as a shared agency. Individuals are free to choose their actions, but they choose one action versus another to mitigate conflict within the host society (El-Bachouti 2017, 88). He further argues that individual's will is limited to set of options from among which the individual chooses how to behave in a society. This means that the individual's choices are affected by both the needs of the person and local/global power support. (El-Bachouti 2017, 98).

As McGuire also points out: "The social environment also has an effect on the individual's choices of religious practices. It is an important framework, where individuals can express and localize their religious identities and Islamic religiosity" (McGuire 2008, 12-13).

El-Bachouti explains the term contextual creativity to discuss how second generation Moroccan immigrants navigate being Muslim while overcoming the challenges of everyday life in Spain. Even though this thesis is about international students who have moved to Sweden from Muslim countries, I found the same patterns between what El-bachouti is arguing in his research and the experience of the respondent's group in this thesis regarding the individualization of religion. Therefore, I found the term 'Contextual Creativity' useful for explaining how the respondents actively choose between different pathways of religious practices.

Through this context, Individualization is not considered as an expression of liberties given to the Muslim immigrant living in Europe but mostly, it is the restrictions that are causing the development of individualization and shaping a form of contextual creativity informed by the broader structural context in which these Muslims are located (El-Bachouti 2017, 88). This means that the individuality of religion is based on people's agency and the host societies' restrictions, lack of options, fear of being judged and harassed (El-Bachouti 2017, 56). Individualization of religion is proposed to be read by not merely seeing it as a process where individuals become detached from their religion, or cherry-picking their practices, but as a thorough understanding of how and when they compensate for their 'traditional' practices with other 'non-traditional' ways in order to preserve the connection of their belonging to Islam (El-Bachouti 2017, 73).

3.2 Social stigmatization theory:

Goffman has defined Stigma as an attribute that can be deeply discrediting, which reduces whole persons to tainted and discounted others (Goffman 1963, 3). He characterizes stigma as a mark of social disgrace, arising within social relations and disqualifying those who bear it from full social acceptance. Marks take various forms: abominations of the body such as physical deformities, alleged blemishes of individual character such as mental illness or unemployment or tribal identities, such as religion or ethnicity. People who possess such characteristics acquire a ‘spoiled identity’ associated with various forms of social devaluation (Campbell 2006, 4). Therefore, stigma is defined as an attribute that is deeply discrediting. It reduces the person that possesses a particular quality “from a whole and usual person to a tainted and discredited one” (Goffman 1963, 3), whereby consequently the person is socially discounted.

More recent definitions of stigma explicitly adopt a social constructivist frame. For example, Herek defines stigma as “the negative regard, inferior status, and relative powerlessness that society collectively accords to people who possess a particular characteristic or belong to a particular group” (Herek 2009, 66). Link and Phelan define stigma as the co-occurrence of labelling, stereotyping, categorical in-group/out-group separation, status loss and discrimination. He emphasizing on the exercise of power as an essential element (Link and Phelan 2001).

It is worth mentioning that stigma is necessarily a social phenomenon. Without a society, one cannot have stigma. To have stigma, one must have a stigmatizer and someone who is stigmatized. As such, this is a dynamic and social relationship. Given that stigmas arise from social relationships, the theory places emphasis, not on the existence of deviant traits, but on the perception and marking of certain traits as deviant by a second party (Socialsci LibreTexts 2019).

Responses to collective stigmatization may involve complex and varied reactions from individuals but also from communities which seek to “unsettle, challenge and potentially transform the representations and practices that stigmatize” (Howarth, 2006, 445).

The stigmatization theory can be used in discussing the experience of Muslim immigrants in Europe. Due to huge waves of migration and incidents such as 9/11, social stigma and

stereotypes against Muslims have evolved in the recent years. The current ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe has resulted in public discussions about the threat that Muslim refugees pose to the Christian identity of the continent. (Goździak and Márton, 2018).

Stigmatization of Muslim immigrants are often associated with terrorism, extremism and being a threat to national identity. This goes further to considering Muslims as a monolithic group whose culture is incompatible with human rights and democracy (OSCE 2017). Young Muslim men in many European states are mainly represented as an anomaly and a disturbing element in the national and public spheres. With regards to young women, they are predominantly portrayed as culturally and religiously imprisoned. (Eliassi 2013, 34). Collective labelling of all Muslims within politics and public debates simplifies the diversity among Muslims (Ryan 2011, 14)

In Sweden, both media studies and a large number of surveys have demonstrated that in public debates, Islam and Muslims are often perceived as different and non-Swedish (Larsson 2006, 38). According to the report of the Swedish Integration Board (2004/2005), two-thirds of those surveyed felt that Islamic values are not compatible with the fundamental values of Swedish society (ibid). Many people with Muslim culture and background are counted as others and left outside the circle of solidarity (Larsson 5, 2007).

3.2.1 Resisting the stigma and normalization

Being stigmatized because of some illness, disability or religious affiliation can involve labelling, stereotyping, loss of status and discrimination (Goffman 3, 1963). The stigmatized may feel marginalized, hated, undermined and even threatened. Stigmatization threatens the labelled individual’s ‘moral standing’ (Yang et al., 2007, 1533). In other words, it challenges their ‘moral presentation of self’ (May, 2008).

Goffman provides an insight into how the stigmatized actor seeks to assert his/her normality. Normality is defined as what ought to be and is usually constructed in opposition to the ‘abnormal’. Any perceived deviation from expected norms may cause unease as the respondents begin to doubt the trustworthiness of the actor or the identity they have imputed to him/her (Mistral 2011, 314).

Goffman further suggests that normal appearances assure people that nothing around them is out of the ordinary and life is predictable. So, in the absence of anything unusual, they can continue their routines. (Goffman 1971, 317). He explains how actors seek to “reject an image

of the self as ‘abnormal’ (Goffman 1961, 50): “an individual does not remain passive in the face of potential meanings generated regarding him” (Goffman, 1961, 104). Attempting to resist stigma may take different forms. One strategy is to reassert one’s moral standing as a ‘normal’ member of society. As Mitzal notes, “when there is a high level of risk and when people need to act their way out of the threat, routine conduct is simply not enough... acting normally then requires self-conscious effort” (Mitzal 2001, 315). Another strategy is to reclaim normality by distancing oneself from the ‘deviant’ or ‘abnormal’ other (Ryan, 2011). However, constructions of what is ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ are situationally defined (Pyke 2000). The quest for normalcy among minority groups can involve both identification with and disassociation from the ‘normality’ and moral values of the majority population (ibid).

3.2.2 Socialization of personal identity and information control

Goffman describes socialization of the personal identity of a stigmatized person as a process of information control. The discreditable person manages information, continually judging whether or not to reveal their stigmatic quality (Carnevale 2007, 10). This means when the person is actually discredited, they are faced with managing the tension that will ensue. This information control relates to the management of signs and symbols that carry social information. “Controlling these will affect the visibility of a stigmatic quality – its perceptibility and obtrusiveness” (Carnevale 2007, 10). Consequently, the stigmatized people are attending continually to who does or does not know about their ‘secret’. People possessing stigmatic qualities frequently live biographical discontinuities, as they live double lives (Carnevale 2007, 10). Passing is a central concept related to information control. In this context, passing refers to when a person with a stigmatic quality manages information so that they can partly or fully ‘pass’ as a normal. Given the rewards of being normal, the stigmatized will attempt to pass if they can (Carnevale 2007, 11).

4. Methodology

4.1 Qualitative research and semi structured interviews

The methodology chosen for this research is of qualitative nature. The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the ‘human’ side of an issue (Mack et al 2005, 1). Qualitative research properly seeks answers by examining various social settings and the groups or individuals who inhabit these settings (Berg 201, 15). Since this research is aiming to understand the life experience of Muslim international students in Sweden, I found qualitative research method a proper way to approach this topic. Qualitative methods are typically more flexible – that is, they allow greater spontaneity and adaptation of the interaction between the researcher and the study participants (Mack et al 2005, 4).

Additionally, a qualitative method was applied since I did not have a predefined theory before starting the research process. Qualitative research usually emphasizes an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research and there is a focus on the generation of theories from data (Bryman 2016, 33). This means that in qualitative research the theory is emerging out of the research process (Bryman 2016, 37). This research has an inductive approach. I aimed to generate meanings from the data set collected in order to identify patterns and relationships to build a theory (Saunders et al 2012). Since people are the main focus of the study in qualitative research method, I found it a proper methodology that enables me to understand the respondent’s thoughts, experience and what matters most to them. In the next stage, I extracted the proper theories related to my findings.

In addition, I decided to conduct semi structured qualitative interviews. In qualitative interviews, the aim is to understand the world from the subject’s own perspective. (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 27). Semi structured qualitative interviews are more flexible and reflexive towards the participant’s social world (Bryman, 2016, 469). In semi structured interviews, there is a interview guide to be followed to a certain extent. However, the interviewer can depart from the interview guide and adjust the interview to the direction the interviewees take it (Bryman 2016 467-468). Therefore, even though I had a questionnaire (see appendix), I tried to be responsive to the direction the interviewee’s take the interviews.

4.2 Respondent's profiles

In this research, the focus is on the Muslim international students who are coming from Muslim majority countries and have moved to Sweden for the purpose of studies. I decided to focus on International students because I find them a unique group in the way that they are all students and have experienced studying in the Swedish system of education. They are in Sweden for perusing education and potentially finding jobs after graduation. At the same time, they are still relatively new in the Swedish society and their thoughts, ideas and experiences could be different from the immigrants who have been living in Sweden for a long time. International students are an important and special group of immigrants who have generally been omitted from migration research because they have always been assumed to go home after studies (Findlay 2005, 192).

In this research, all the respondents are living in Gothenburg (Sweden). I interviewed 10 people, 6 of whom study at Chalmers University of Technology and the other 4 respondents study at Gothenburg University. As mentioned before, the students are originally from Muslim majority countries including Pakistan, Egypt, Sudan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Turkey. I chose the participants from different countries and backgrounds with different ways of practicing Islam to get more diverse answers and results. While they are similar in education and identifying themselves as Muslims, they are coming from different cultural, ethnic, political, sociological and even religious backgrounds. It is important to note that the participants in this thesis are just reflecting upon their own thoughts and experience. In other words, they are not representing any groups of Muslims.

Regarding gender, 6 of the respondents are male and 4 others are female. While I was aiming for 5 female and 5 male participants, I found it very difficult to find female participants who were willing to take part in this research.

The respondents have been selected regardless of the length of their stay in Sweden. However, all of them have moved to Sweden for the purpose of studying. The interviewees have lived in Sweden between six months to seven years at the time of interviews. Therefore, it is clear that this thesis is reflecting upon the experience of the participants with not very long history of living in Sweden. Apart from one of the respondents who were doing one year of exchange studies at Bachelors level, all of the interviewees are either Masters or PhD students in different disciplines such as engineering, medical or social sciences. Four of the respondents mentioned

they work alongside their studies. Additionally, all the respondents have student residence permits.

Since the participants are international students, they all live in either student accommodations which are very mixed in terms of the tenant's backgrounds or in private housing in non-segregated parts of the city. In their daily lives, they interact mostly with a mixed group of other students and therefore, the circle of people they socialize with is not limited to other Muslim immigrants. All the participants mentioned they travel back to their home countries at least once a year and are in contact with their families back home. It is worth mentioning that I set only two requirements for being able to participate in this research:

1- To be an international student who is coming from a Muslim majority country and has moved to Sweden for the purpose of studies.

2- To identify themselves as a Muslim.

Therefore, regarding the religiosity and religious background of the participants, coming from Muslim majority countries and identifying themselves as Muslims were enough. When recruiting for the interviews, I even mentioned that actively practicing Islam is not a requirement. However, the only people who were interested to interview about the topic were Muslim students who were to some extent, actively practicing Islam. For example, all the respondents say their daily prayers, fast during Ramadan, don't drink alcohol and etc. Even though the level of practicing Islam differs among the participants, they are all practicing Muslims.

In addition, all the participants mentioned that they have been raised in what they consider as a religious family and their parents have been practicing Islam. At first, I was aiming to interview a broader group of participants so that non-practicing individuals who still identify themselves as Muslims could also be included. However, it was very difficult to find people who don't practice Islam and are still interested to be interviewed about being a Muslim in Sweden. I found two people who were willing to participate in the interview. However, they cancelled their interviewees and mentioned they were not sure if they really identify themselves as Muslims. So I decided to slightly change the focus of the studies and reflect upon the ideas and experience of Muslim students who have been actively involved with Islamic practices and rituals. This way, I also narrowed down the topic of the research and could focus more on the practical side of Islam and how the respondents make sense of it in their daily lives in Sweden.

In finding and selecting the participants, I used the purposive sampling method. The goal of purposive sampling is to sample participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions (Bryman 2016, 408). I found the participants through the Chalmers Islamic Förening (CIF) which is a non-political student association at Chalmers University of Technology, personal contacts and student groups on Facebook.

I then combined purposive sampling with snowball sampling, meaning that the sampled participants proposed other potential participants who have had the same experience or characteristics relevant to the research (Bryman 2016, 415). This way, I was introduced to more participants from more diverse backgrounds. Snowball sampling really helped me get a more gender balanced group of participants.

4.3 Ethical considerations and the role of researcher

The conduct of research with human participants that focuses on religion or spirituality can rise some ethical issues. In this thesis, the focus is on the religious identity and Islamic practices of Muslim international students in Sweden. During the process of interviews, the participants talked about their inner religious beliefs and personal ideas about different aspects of being a Muslim student in Sweden. Therefore, since this research is closely linked to religion and how the participants make sense of it in their daily lives, it could be regarded as a sensitive topic. Firstly, I would like to mention the importance of taking how the participants account for their symbols, rituals, texts and behaviors very seriously (Stausberg and Engler 2012, 46). In other words, it is important to pay attention to them in relation to the expressions, accounts and stories they voice and narrate and to describe their behavior in relation to the accounts they give of their behavior (ibid 84).

However, it is not always easy to stay unbiased, see and interpret the interviews through the lens of participants. It is important to acknowledge the uneven power relation between the interviewer and the interviewees. Even though there is an active dialogue and the focus is on the conversation between both interviewee and interviewer, the interviewer is still in control of what to say and how to write about it. In fact, while the interviews are flexible and reflect upon what the respondents find important, it is still the interviewer who decides on the main themes and questions (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 3). While it is not possible to eliminate the asymmetrical power relation, it is important to be aware of its existence and also critically reflect upon its impact (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015, 38).

Accordingly, it should be made clear that inevitable factors such as the researcher's identity and power relations has impacted this research process to some extent. As a researcher, I found myself close to the participants in some areas. I am also an international student coming from a Muslim majority country. Therefore, while I was keeping in mind to always look at the subject from the participant's point of view, I am aware that I had certain subjectiveness, my own thoughts and ideas about the research questions even before starting the interview process. However, In order to distance myself from the biasness, I tried to openly listen to the participant's thoughts, ideas and experiences and be flexible with where the respondents themselves prefer to take the interview as long as it was still in line with the main themes of the research. At the same time, sharing a similar background with the participants made it easier for me to understand the special Islamic concepts, terms and rituals that they were talking about.

In addition, when conducting research about religion, it is important to recognize religion as a social reality that is multidimensional (Stausberg and Engler 2012, 47). Although the researcher usually focuses on only particular aspects of religion, it is important to look it as a whole and keep in mind that religion plays a larger or smaller role in the lives of the people we are studying (ibid). In this research the participants are focusing on a few aspects of the religion. However, it should be noted that religion is a whole for them and affects different aspects of their lives in different ways which may not have been reflected in this thesis.

Moreover, I made sure that the participants are given appropriate and enough information about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research (Ibid, 4). It was also necessary to make the participants aware of their right to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason they wish. (Ibid).

Finally, as mentioned before, this thesis could entail sensitive subjects. Therefore, I made sure the respondents stay fully anonymous. This thesis will conceal the identity of the interviewees throughout the whole research process by using other codes in order to make them unrecognizable (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, 187).

4.4 Method of analysis

At first, it is important to note that the analysis of this research is based on grounded theory. Grounded theory has been defined as “a set of systematic inductive methods for conducting qualitative research aimed toward theory development” (Charmaz 2003). In grounded theory, the aim is to construct the theoretical framework directly from data analysis (ibid). I chose the grounded theory approach because it allows more flexibility, constant revision and fluidity (Bryman 2016, 573).

The first step was transcribing the interviews in order to build up the analysis. The next step was coding the interviews. It entails reviewing transcripts and giving labels to component parts that seem to be of potential theoretical significance. In grounded theory, coding is the first step in generation of theory (ibid 573). In the end, the identification of main themes resulted from coding the data made the basis of the theoretical framework which was used for analyzing and understanding my material (ibid).

It is important to mention that while I was aiming to extract the theory from the gathered data, I still had a few general concepts in mind before starting the interview process. In fact, I decided to focus on two main directions in this thesis:

1- The way the participants make sense of Islam in their daily lives in Sweden. I was curious to see how they combine their daily social lives in Sweden with their Muslim identities and Islamic practices. When I found a similar pattern in most of the interviewee’s answers, I came up with the Individualization of religion theory. In addition, I had a focus on several sub-themes which I believe are among the most important practical, daily life aspects of Islam; including daily prayers, Friday prayers, Ramadan, halal food and alcoholic drinks. Then, I divided this section according to these sub-themes to be able to clearly reflect upon the experience and thoughts of the participants about each sub-theme. In other words, to see how the participants handle their daily lives in Sweden while keeping up with their daily duties as Muslims.

2- The way the participants believe they are seen in Swedish society. When I found out that there is a common direction in the participant’s answers, I realized the social stigmatization theory can be a proper fit for the second theme of the research. In fact, at first I asked more general and open questions about how the participants see the image of themselves in Swedish society and whether they feel welcome in Sweden.

5. Results and analysis

This section has been divided into the two main themes which emerged from the interviews and built the theoretical framework.

5.1 Religious practices, restrictions and daily life in Sweden

Reflecting upon the theory of Individualization of religion, in this section I discuss how the respondents experience practicing Islam in their daily lives. I have divided this part into several sub-themes and under each one, I explore how the respondents' way of practicing Islam has been individualized. Therefore, the focus is on the individual's agency, and their active and reflexive role in shaping, negotiating and changing their own beliefs and practices (Nyhagen 2017, 495). As mentioned before, the theory of individualization is approached through the framework of lived religion which has an emphasis on people' agency and the social structure that makes them choose from different forms of religious practices (McGuire 2008).

5.1.1 Mosque and prayers

The respondents were asked about the Friday prayers in Sweden and all of them mentioned that going to the Gothenburg's main mosque frequently is not possible for them since it is far away from the university, student accommodations and city center. As most students have classes and projects also on Fridays, It is more convenient for them to say their Friday prayers in a university hall allocated for Friday prayers or just pray alone on Fridays.

Respondent 10 mentioned:

“I have been to the Gothenburg main mosque only once and it was far away. Back in my home country there is a mosque in each neighborhood but here I don't have many options. It still feels bad but I had to accept that some Fridays, I just won't be able to join the collective prayers because of studies and classes.”

Respondent 2 also pointed out:

“It is not very convenient to go to mosque every Friday because I usually have classes or group projects on Fridays and it is not close to the University. Some weeks when I find the time I go to Chalmers praying hall for Friday prayers but it doesn't happen very often. So, most of the

times I just say my prayers alone on Fridays. This is something I was not comfortable with in the beginning but life is different here and sometimes I need to compromise.”

As can be seen, while all the male respondents mentioned they used to take part in Friday prayers almost every Friday back in their home countries, they found it difficult to do so in Sweden because unlike in Muslim countries, they need to go to University or work on Fridays and the location of the mosque is not very close to the university. Attending the Friday prayers and the mosque less frequently can be considered as a change in the respondent’s religious practices. While all the students mentioned they still believe that they need to attend the Friday prayers, their situation in their new host society doesn’t always allow them to do so.

This is not limited to Friday prayers. When I asked the respondents about the places in which they say their daily prayers in when they are not at home, some mentioned the praying room in Chalmers University but most of them found it difficult to say their daily prayers on time sometimes as they are unable to find a place for saying their prayers, or because they are very busy at the praying times.

Respondent 6 mentioned:

“I have less help and support here because my family is not with me. Sometimes I really can’t say the daily prayers on time as I have a lot of responsibilities and also, here is not easy to find a place for saying the prayers. When I get home, I just say all my delayed prayers together. It is not nice but sometimes I really have no other options.”

Respondent 8 said:

“I don’t feel comfortable saying prayers in public and in my faculty, there is no praying room. I also haven’t found any praying rooms in the library. So, sometimes for saying the daily prayers I need to wait until I get home. It was not like this in my home country as there are always praying rooms everywhere and usually you have a break at work or university to say your daily prayers. I know that if I have the possibility, I should say my prayers on time but in Sweden it’s more challenging.”

Back to the topic of Friday Prayers, language was also mentioned as one of problems when attending Gothenburg’s mosque. The non-Arabic speaking participants mentioned that they are unable to understand the Speech before prayers (Khutbah) since it is usually either in Arabic or Swedish (apart from one of the respondents, rest of them were not fluent in Swedish).

Therefore, this makes it hard for them to feel as they are completely a part of the Friday Prayers. As respondent 10 mentioned:

“Being able to follow up the Khutbah before Friday prayers is very important for me because it makes me feel like a part of the Muslim community. When I don’t understand the language, it makes me feel like I don’t belong there. I never experienced this in my home country as all the Khutbahs were in my language. So I prefer to go to Chalmers’s University praying hall for Friday Prayers because there, a student volunteers and has a speech in English each time. This is more convenient.”

Respondent 2 also pointed out the language difficulties:

“It’s not all about Khutbah, in the mosque I often find myself not being able to communicate with people because they probably don’t understand my language. In my home country I used to go to mosque every Friday but here it’s different.”

In this context, the distance from the mosque, not always having access to praying rooms, having to work or study on Fridays, being busy at the time for daily prayers, and language barriers are considered to be restrictions caused by living in Sweden. How the respondents react to these restrictions is dependent on their choices as individuals living in a non-Muslim country. This can be described by looking at the individualization of religion through the framework of lived religion; Individuals have an active and reflexive role in shaping, negotiating and changing their own religious convictions and practices (Nyhagen 2017, 496). Therefore, they choose the activity which is effective and makes sense in their daily lives (McGuire 2008, 14).

We can see that the respondents mentioned that they didn’t have these problems back in their home countries as there is always easier access to the mosques and praying rooms, Fridays are weekends in their home countries, and they never experienced language difficulties when listening to Islamic speeches or communicating with other people in the mosque. The mix between the individual’s agency and limitations in the host society leads to contextual creativity (El-Bachouti 2017, 88), which, in this context is choosing to attend the mosque less often or accepting the fact that they won’t be able to keep up with their daily prayers on time. It is also important to pay attention to the participant’s multiple identities, it could be argued that being a student and having to keep up with their studies is a much highlighted aspect of their lives to the level that they have accepted to compromise on some of their traditional ways of practicing Islam.

The students mentioned that they go to the mosque less often due to its location, language, work and studies. However, it is important to note that the situation is slightly different for female respondents. As three of the female respondents explained, it is not common for women to go to Friday prayers in their home countries and in Sweden it was the first time they went to the mosque for the Friday prayers. Respondent 7 mentioned:

“Sometimes I go to Friday prayers with my sons. Even if my husband is not at home, I still manage it. In my home country the culture is different, women are not so much going to the mosque and only men go. Here, I found it a good opportunity to go there with my kids, I have two small boys. I mostly go because of them. In Islam it’s not mandatory for women to go. But it’s good for my kids to see me going for Friday prayers and get used to going to the mosque.”

Respondent 5 also said:

“Back in my home country, very few women go for Friday prayers. Men go to mosque and women will be just waiting outside for their husbands. Here when I went to the mosque I saw a lot of women so it felt more natural to be in the mosque as a woman.”

It should be noted that the contextual creativity does not just happen when there is an actual restriction. The individual’s strategies to keep up with their life in the new host society can also be affected by new opportunities. In Sweden, Since Muslims are coming from different countries, they have different cultures regarding the presence of women in the Friday prayers. Therefore, women are more present in the Friday prayers than some Muslim countries and this gives them the feeling that they are more welcome in the mosque. The female respondents are experiencing a change in the religious practice. They are given the option to attend the Friday Prayers more easily and all of them mentioned that they have taken this chance even though Friday Prayers are not mandatory for women, and that it is not very common for women to participate in the Friday prayers back in their home countries. During the interviews, three of the female participants pointed out that they actively chose to be present in the Friday praying and this explains the respondent’s active and reflexive role in shaping, negotiating and changing their own beliefs and practices.

5.1.2 Ramadan

When asked about their experience of Ramadan in Sweden, all the respondents mentioned that long days in Sweden makes it extremely difficult for them to fast during summer. The other practical problem associated with Ramadan is that sometimes it is exactly at exams time and

therefore, this makes it even harder for them because they need to keep up with their studies and fasting at the same time. It is important to note that the respondents mentioned in their country of origin, universities usually take it easier on students during Ramadan and sometimes even working hours change. However, fasting in Sweden means keeping up with all the responsibilities of normal life with no change. The respondent 2 mentioned:

“Last year was the first Ramadan for me in Sweden. I always fast the whole month back in my home country and I thought I would do the same here. However, even though I knew about the long hours of Ramadan, it still surprised me and I decided not to fast the days that I had to study because I just felt like it is not possible to manage.”

We can see how the respondents were justifying this flexibility by emphasizing that Islam also allows it. For example, respondent 8 pointed out:

“In Islam it is not permitted to hurt your body. I found out the long fasting hour in Sweden was really hurting me so I took a break between my fasts.”

This shows that even though all the participants were still believing in the importance of fasting every day in Ramadan, some of them have chosen to recreate religious patterns of their daily lives.

Participant 5 also said:

“It is hard in Sweden when we have Ramadan during summer because the days are so long here. Last summer, I would prepare food at 8 PM and time for breaking the fast was around 10.30 PM. I was getting less sleep. I was having breakfast at 2 of 3 AM. So I had less energy. It was also before the study break and I got lot of deadlines. It was really challenging to focus on studies. I was not used to all these differences but I think over time I learnt to be more flexible and just see it as a new challenge. I also needed to take a break from fasting some days because I needed the energy for studies.”

As can be seen, the practical obstacles such as long days during summer (which means longer hours of fasting and having to study for exams) have made some of the respondents rethink their religious practices. As McGuire argues: “if we started with the assumption that individuals commit, or refuse to commit, to an entire, single package of beliefs and practices of an official religion, then we would misinterpret the individual religions of people.” (McGuire 2008, 10). It is the combination of the restriction in the host society and the individual’s agency that leads to more individualized forms of religious practices (El-bachouti 2017). Therefore, even though

the participants are still believing in fasting the whole month, some of them have decided to compensate their traditional way of fasting by taking breaks during Ramadan.

I further asked the respondents about other differences they have experienced during Ramadan in Sweden. All of them mentioned how they would like to have time to go to the mosque to break their fast with a community and do Taraweeh together with other Muslim fellows but they don't have time to do that every day because they need to wake up early in the mornings and go to university, study for exam, work and etc. These practical problems make Ramadan a more private and lonely experience comparing to their home countries. The respondent 9 also pointed out:

“For the last two years I have experienced Ramadan alone. Especially during the summer, time to break the fast is at 10 pm then you do the prayers almost in the midnight, you don't want to be out of home at that time, especially the mosque is far. This is sad but I think living in Sweden requires Muslim to be more flexible about these practical things”.

Respondent 4 also mentioned:

“I was even thinking of going back to my home country during the next Ramadan, but I need to be here because of studies. It is annoying because there is no Ramadan atmosphere here. Sometimes I gather with my Muslim friends to break the fast but that doesn't very often. Having to cook alone and eating alone is something I never experienced back in my home country during Ramadan. Well it's annoying but I just I remind myself that I am not living in a Muslim majority country, I'm here for my studies and I need to be more flexible.”

As can be seen, the respondents have chosen to be more flexible and break their fasts alone because they believe their daily lives in Sweden, and what a respondent called “the lack of Ramadan atmosphere”, requires them to adjust their religious practices with their daily life. In such condition, the work of social agents/actors themselves as narrators and interpreters of their own experiences becomes very important (Orsi 2002). Most of the respondents have decided to be more flexible with Ramadan and the rituals around it. Even though the individuals prefer to break their fast with other Muslims and go to mosque every night during Ramadan, the restrictions in Sweden, and having to keep up with other aspects of their lives in Sweden such as studies has made them more flexible about it.

5.1.3 Halal food

All the respondents mentioned that they find halal food easily accessible. They had no problems finding halal markets and on the top of that, regular supermarkets have a few halal food options.

The respondents were asked about their commitment to eat halal food and whether there has been a change in their diet (regarding eating halal food) since they have moved to Sweden. While some of the respondents mentioned that they have been sticking only to halal food, others think they have become less strict about eating halal:

Respondent 4 mentioned:

“When I first came to Sweden I used to stick to halal food but then it was difficult to acquire halal food every time then I was not very sure which was halal and which was not halal... so I’m not really strict about it anymore but I try to minimize the non halal food that I eat. This is a grey area, some say if halal food is not always very easily accessible, then it’s ok to sometimes break the rule but some people believe you always need to stick to halal food anyways.”

And respondent 3 as well:

“Maybe sometimes I am not very strict with chicken but I mostly try to keep up with eating halal food. There are few supermarkets of course but they are not as many, sometimes I just have chicken that is not halal because I feel like being very strict about it makes life a bit harder in Sweden.”

The respondents expressed that the situation is easier for them when cooking at home, however, it becomes more complicated when they eat out or are invited to have dinner with their non-Muslim friends and classmates.

The respondent 5 expressed the situation as below:

“Most of the time I eat halal food. Sometimes it’s so difficult when I am with friends. So as long as I am not eating pork, I feel its ok. I am a bit careless sometimes, if I am having dinner at my friends place and I don’t know what is in the food and I don’t feel very comfortable to ask.”

It can be argued that students use different strategies to be able to handle the practical sides of religious restrictions of living in Sweden. This includes becoming more flexible with halal food when they are eating out with non-Muslim friends. We can see that some of the

respondents have actively chosen to become less strict about the halal food in Sweden. It is obvious in respondent's answers that they still believe in the necessity of eating halal food all the time. In this context, not living in a Muslim majority country affects the availability of halal food and this has made some of respondents more flexible with the consumption of halal food. However, it is important to note that not all the respondents mentioned a change in their habits of eating halal food. The respondent 7 said:

“I don't eat anything that is not halal. It is not always easy because the markets of halal food are very far from my house. I find a few halal foods in local supermarket anyways. Sometimes I don't know if the food contains alcohol or not. So when I go to buy something like chocolate, I am very confused because I also can't read Swedish so I just give up on buying something that I don't know if it is totally halal or not.”

Therefore, it can be argued that creativity and flexibility in religious practices is dependent on the individual's active choice and some of the respondents, of course, do not choose to recreate the patterns of their religious practices as much as others do. It should be noted that focusing on the individualized decisions of the participants does not mean ignoring the dependency of individual's on teaching and practices of an official religious institutions and organizations (McGuire 2008, 98). All the respondents are still believing that eating halal food is mandatory in Islam. However, some have chosen to be more flexible with it in some situations while others are still sticking to only halal food all the time.

5.1.4 Alcohol and social activities around it

All the respondents mentioned that they do not drink alcohol because it is forbidden in Islam and they have not even felt pressured to do so. However, when I asked them about the social side of drinking alcohol, they all confirmed that going out and drinking alcohol is a big part of socializing with people and finding friends.

The respondent 3 pointed out:

“Well I don't want to exaggerate but I think 75 percent of the social interaction here depends on drinking alcohol and partying. These are two things that I don't do. So this has of course led to some isolation”.

Respondent 8 also mentioned:

“Sometimes I feel really left out because all the fun is about partying and drinking and these are two things that I avoid because of my religious belief. It was very different back in my home country, you can find alcohol but you need to know the special places and the majority of people do not drink. So, alcohol is usually not involved in get-togethers. It was shocking for me to realize how much of social activity I miss here with not drinking”.

However, some of the respondents pointed out that they have found ways to feel socially less isolated in Sweden. As respondent 4 said:

“It is very common to go out for ‘After work’ here. People drink so that colleagues can get to know each other better. I still try to go with them, without drinking. I’m ok with it sometimes, but I don’t like to go all the time. It does not feel very comfortable for me to be in a bar where everyone else is drinking but I find it better than feeling left out from colleagues or classmates.”

The respondent 8 also made also stated:

“I try to socialize with people and even if they are drinking in front of me, I respect their choices and try not to see alcohol as something that restricts me from get to know my classmates and improve my social circle. We hang out together and I don’t drink. Sometimes it feels strange but people understand that I don’t drink and still want to hang out. I used to avoid people who were drinking back in my country but now I can’t avoid everyone and I learnt not to judge people for that”.

Respondent 1 also mentioned a similar point:

“I think in Islam you are not supposed to sit in a place where everyone is drinking. Even if you don’t drink yourself, socializing with people are drinking is not something Islam wants you to do but here it is different, when the majority of people you hang out with are not Muslims it is hard to be that strict. Back in my county we used to go for dinner or hikes with classmates and colleagues but here, especially during winter alcohol is always involved.”

Therefore, the participants mentioned a strategy that makes them less isolated from social gatherings with their non-Muslim friends or colleagues after work, university and on weekends. Going out to places where alcohol is being served is not something that the respondents felt very comfortable doing but they have found it as one of the only ways to feel socially involved with non-Muslim friends and colleagues. By considering the individual’s religiosity as flux aspect of life which is being defined and re-defined by their experiences and practices

(McGuire 2008), the participant's choice to hang out with their friends who drink alcohol in places where alcohol is being served can be explained. Some of the respondents have chosen to change their traditional practices (such as avoiding interaction with people who drink and not being present in bars) to be able to socially keep up with the everyday life in Sweden. It is interesting to note that the respondents focused on the social factor behind drinking alcohol and going out more than anything else. Therefore, the fact that unlike many Muslim majority countries, social interactions in Sweden is largely dependent on drinking alcohol or hanging out in places where alcohol is being served is considered a contextual and social restriction of living in Sweden.

However, this is not a personal choice made by all the participants. Some of the respondents mentioned they are still not comfortable to sit somewhere where everyone is drinking so they always avoid such situation. As the respondent 7 mentioned:

“For me, it's not even a choice, I never go to bars or parties because I know I feel comfortable and I just don't want to be in such a place that is prohibited in Islam even though it makes my social interactions limited. Once I remember alcohol was being served in the university welcome party, when they started to celebrate and talking to each other, I felt like where am I? why am I here? I don't belong to here. I felt like I must leave now because there is a lot of alcohol and I am not used to see that in my country. I felt strange and left early.”

In fact, it should be highlighted and not all the individuals decide to react to the restrictions in the same way.

5.1.5 Relying more on internet and social media

Some of the respondents explained how the lack of options in Sweden has made them rely more on the internet and social media in order to maintain their religiosity. Respondent 3 pointed out:

“In Sweden I don't really have the opportunity to listen to Islamic speeches at the mosque. I used to do this back home but here, I usually go on YouTube and listen to a speech online. If I want opinion of a religious scholar, I just look online. Luckily in today's world you are not limited to your geographical location. Things have globalized and this helps me not to lose my connection with the Islamic world.”

This is not limited to following Islamic lessons and speeches. Some of the respondents mentioned that through the internet, they get the chance to talk to their families after breaking

their fasts during Ramadan and this makes Ramadan a less lonely experience for them. As respondent 8 mentioned:

“I’m really happy that at least I have the opportunity to talk to my family during Ramadan. I am not used to breaking my fast alone so internet has really saved me from feeling too lonely.”

In addition, internet and social media are also platforms to build connection with other Muslim people living in Sweden, exchange information about halal markets, prayer times and even share stories and experiences. Respondent 4 pointed out:

“Back home, I had all the connections and information. Everything was very clear because the whole system is made for Muslims. Here, I joined Facebook groups for Muslims in Sweden and I got a lot of information from people there. I realized it would have been more difficult without having access to internet.”

Respond 10 also said:

“I managed to find some Muslim friends on Internet. Also, it was the best way for me to get the necessary information about the location of the mosque, location of the Chalmers’s university praying hall and halal shops.”

We can see that Individuals have chosen to keep up with their Muslim identities by being more dependent on the internet and social media. In fact, their choices of religious practices are limited by living in Sweden and they respond to this restriction by finding new ways preserving their connection to Islam (El-Bachouti 2017,73). In this context, the internet becomes a tool that helps them navigate the restrictions of practicing Islam in Sweden.

5.1.6 The respondents’ picture of their future

When I asked the participants about their future and whether they are intending to stay in Sweden after graduation, most of them mentioned they are aiming to stay in Sweden at least for a few years. Some mentioned they have considered staying in Sweden, finding a job, marrying and even having children in Sweden. For example, the respondent 8 explained:

“At first I wanted to experience something new but now that I am about to finish my studies, I am looking for jobs because even though sometimes it is challenging to live here as a minority, everything works well in general and I would be very happy to stay here.”

As mentioned before, we can consider education as a notion of transitions. Graduation appears to mark a point of transition between study and a more open horizon of opportunities (Geddi 2013). Additionally, one of the main reasons for student mobility is to acquire post-graduate employment in host countries (Suter and Jandl 2006). In fact, many former international students undergo a shift in status from students to work permit holders or permanent residents (Suter and Jandl 2006).

Most of the participant picture a future for themselves in Sweden and this can also be considered as one of the reasons behind flexibility in religious practices and a tendency towards individualized religiosity in their new host societies. Although it is true that that individuals have an active and reflexive role in shaping, negotiating and changing their own religious convictions and practices (Nyhagen 2017, 496), once again, I would like to highlight the fact that finding a balance between the Islamic practices and daily life in Sweden does not mean that the role of religious authority has declined in participant's beliefs. In most cases, the participants mentioned they still believe that if they had the opportunity they would practice Islam in the traditional ways they used to do back in their home countries. However, it can be argued that the restrictions in the host society mixing with the participant's tendency to peruse higher education, find jobs, even marriage and raising kids in Sweden has made some of the participants more comfortable with recreating the patterns of religious practices. In this regard, respondent 1 said:

“I think it's easier to go with your traditional ways of practicing Islam if you are sure you want to go back to your country after studies. But for me, even though I still believe in the traditional ways, I still think it's easier to be flexible if I want to stay here after studies. It is better to accept the reality that we're not living in a Muslim country and go with it.”

Regarding raising (future) children in Sweden, most of the participants mentioned they believe it would be challenging. However, they find Sweden a nice country to raise children and they would want the children to be familiar with Islam and still be able to compromise whenever necessary.

For example, respondent 6 explained:

“Of course I would want them to practice Islam but there is one thing I want them to learn. They need to be tolerant, flexible and respect everyone regardless of their religion. This way, life as a minority group becomes easier.”

It can be concluded that for most respondents, being able to find strategies to react to the host societies' restrictions is very important. It helps them maintain their social and professional life and reach their future goals in Sweden. Therefore, imaging a future in Sweden also becomes a motivation to adjust their Islamic practices to the daily life restrictions in Sweden.

5.2 The Respondents' thoughts on their image in Swedish society

The respondents were asked about how they think the Swedish society sees them. In other words, I wanted to recognize the image of Muslim international students in Swedish society from an insider's perspective. At first, all the respondents mentioned they feel comfortable living in Sweden in general. However, when I asked more detailed questions regarding how they think the mainstream Swedish society sees them, I found common key words such as stigma, stereotype, fear of unknown and lack of knowledge about Islam in the respondents' answers. In this section, I aim to go further into details of stigma against Muslims in Sweden and how the respondents react to it.

It is important to note that the respondents thought there is no certain stigma against Muslim international students in Sweden. However, they talked about how stigmas against Muslim immigrants in general, have affected them as well. Before reflecting upon thoughts and experiences of the respondents, it is important to define the concept of stigma. According to Goffman, stigma is an attribute that can be deeply discrediting, which reduces whole persons to taint and discounted others (Goffman 1963). Goffman characterizes stigma as a "mark" of social disgrace, arising within social relations and disqualifying those who bear it from full social acceptance. Marks take various forms: "abominations of the body" such as physical deformities, alleged "blemishes of individual character" such as mental illness or unemployment or "tribal identities" such as religion or ethnicity. People who possess such characteristics acquire a "spoiled identity" associated with various forms of social devaluation (Campbell 2006, 4). Clearly, in this research, the word stigma is used to point out the negative images associated with Muslims who are considered as a religious minority in Sweden.

In this regards, respondent 2 mentioned:

"I think Islam is tied with refugee crisis. I used to work at night as a newspaper distributor and sometimes some people were coming to me asking question. Sometimes it was offensive. I

think there is biasness about refugees here, but if you are not a refugee, then you are less of a threat to them. They don't care what your religion is if you are not a refugee. Refugees are seen as uneducated people who bring a completely different culture so they can't even integrate. It still happens to me that when someone meets me for the first time, they just automatically assume that I am a refugee. However, people treat me differently when they know that I study at Chalmers and pay tuition fees.”

Respondent 3 also made the same point:

“In the recent year, especially after the refugee crisis, people are worried and scared too much. I think, most people get all their information about Islam, Muslims and refugees through media and this is the worst way of getting information. Being a Muslim can mean being a refugee who doesn't have a job or education, getting government money and is involved in criminal acts”.

As can be seen, the respondents believe that the image of Muslims in Sweden is associated with the negative stigma against Muslim refugees. It is important to note that due to huge waves of migration and incidents such as 9/11, social stigma and stereotypes against Muslims have evolved in the recent years. The current “refugee crisis” in Europe has resulted in public discussions about the threat that Muslim refugees pose to the Christian identity of the continent (Goździak and Márton 2018). Back to the theory of stigmatization, the Muslim refugees have acquired what Goffman calls a “spoiled identity”. Not having a job or education, being involved in criminal acts and disability to integrate with the Swedish society are stigmas that the respondents pointed out. This reduces the Muslim refugee's to tainted or discounted others (Goffman 1963, 3).

However, as the respondents mentioned, the only stigma is not about the negative image of refugees. It goes further to Islamic extremism, terrorism and for the female respondents, being oppressed. In this respect, the respondent 8 mentioned:

“I think there are some extremist groups who have damaged the image of Muslims and sometimes it makes us also vulnerable in Europe. Even if we have nothing to do with those groups, we are still Muslims and we don't look European”.

Respondent 5 said:

“As a Muslim woman, I think there are so many stereotypes against us. Sometimes I get questions about forced marriage or my right to work at my home country, usually I take such questions as a joke. I don’t give very serious answers.”

Regarding the gender stereotypes, respondent 1 also pointed out:

“Sometimes, my Swedish or other non-Muslim friends ask me if women are allowed to work in my country or even get out of the house. I tell them my mom has been working for 50 years. It is annoying to realize how twisted the image of Muslim immigrants is.”

As the respondents also pointed out, Stigmatization of Muslim immigrants are often associated with negative picture of refugees, terrorism, extremism and being a threat to national identity (OSCE 2017).

Both media studies and a large number of surveys have demonstrated that in public debates Islam and Muslims are often perceived as different and non-Swedish (Larsson 2006, 38). According to the report of the Swedish Integration Board (2004/2005), two-thirds of those surveyed felt that Islamic values are not compatible with the fundamental values of Swedish society (ibid).

Young Muslim men in many European states are mainly represented as an anomaly and a disturbing element in the national and public spheres. With regards to young women, they are predominantly portrayed as culturally and religiously imprisoned (Eliassi 2013, 34). Therefore, from the perspective of the respondents, Muslim immigrants in Sweden and Europe in general, are struggling with social stigma. Even though there is no direct stigma against international Muslim students, the negative stigma against Muslims in general have affected how the respondents think about their image and situation in Swedish society. In other words, they believe they could be the subject of what Link and Phelan define as the process of “labelling, stereotyping, status loss and discrimination” just because they belong to the group of Muslims in the Swedish society (Link & Phelan 2001).

When I asked the respondents whether they feel welcome in Sweden as Muslims who are practicing Islam, they all mentioned they have never had any major obstacles when it comes to practicing Islam. However, when they were asked about the reasons behind the stigma against Muslim immigrants, reasons such as lack of knowledge about Islam, lack of interaction and the negative effect of media were mentioned.

Respondent 8 pointed out:

“It’s not that I face stigmatization every day in Sweden. In general I feel comfortable practicing Islam here. However, I can sense that we are being seen as others. I simply think there is not enough knowledge about Muslims and maybe the Swedish society is a bit too cautious to get closer to us and know us.”

The respondents also discussed the negative impact of the media in portraying Muslim immigrants and how it creates a barrier to have an active interaction with the society. In this regard, the respondent 10 pointed out:

“I think most people don’t dare or just don’t feel very comfortable to get really close to Muslim people and get to know them. They get the information from media and this information is not always true or neutral.”

Respondent 1 also said:

“I think lack of knowledge about Islam and very limited interaction between the Swedish society and Muslim immigrants have led to stigmatization against Muslims. In my opinion, people don’t know that Muslims coming from different cultures and backgrounds can have totally different ideologies and beliefs. This misunderstanding is mostly coming from media.”

Therefore, while Muslims who live in Sweden have hybrid identities, including Muslim and ‘Swedish’ components as well as religious and secular outlooks, this complexity is seldom analyzed, discussed, or presented by the media (Larsson 2006,38).

As Larsson argues, “when journalists report on Islam and Muslim affairs, it is often violence, war, and conflicts that are their main focuses. Although this is not necessarily the journalists’ intention, the indirect message to the audience is that Islam is a violent religion and that Muslims are more prone to violence than believers of other religions. The Muslim identity or affiliation becomes stigmatized by the overwhelmingly negative media coverage of Islam and Muslims (Larsson 2006, 38).”

5.2.1 Proving normality

It is important to point out the respondent’s reactions towards stigmatization against Muslim immigrants in Sweden. According to Goffman, being stigmatized because of some illness, disability or religious affiliation can involve labelling, stereotyping, loss of status and

discrimination (Goffman, 1963). When talking about the image of Muslims in the Swedish society, the respondents tried to distinguish themselves from the Stigmatized Muslim immigrants by bringing up the fact that they are Students.

Respondent 1 pointed out:

“I think there are some negative stereotypes against Muslims so it is on you to prove that you are different. For example, right now I am sharing a place with a Swedish person. When I wanted to first rent the place he was not sure because my name is a Muslim name. He asked me how long I have been here and what I am doing here. When I spoke Swedish it was really surprising to him. It was suddenly like ok! So you are a student, you have a job and you speak Swedish. He sounded very shady at first but when he met me and also realized who I am and what I do, even the way he spoke to me really changed and I got the place. I think knowing Swedish and being educated can really differentiate you from the negative image of Muslims”.

Respondent 6 also mentioned:

“I think being a good Muslim who does well in the society is very important since there are some groups calling themselves Muslims and they are representing Muslims in a bad way. They are bringing bad names to Muslims by being too extreme. I think we, as educated Muslims, should show that we are good people like everyone else. We need to be tolerant and flexible.”

In this regard, respondent 10 said:

“Sometimes I feel there is almost a pressure on me to prove that I am a good Muslim who is not extremist and respects Swedish values. I need to show that it is not harmful to socialize with me, rent me your place or work with me. I think the picture of Muslims is so bad nowadays and we need to show how different we are from that picture.”

As can be seen, the respondents mentioned their effort to prove their distinction from the negative stigmas about Muslim immigrants. This is indeed a strategy to resist the stigma. Attempting to resist the stigma can be in the form of reasserting one’s moral standing as a “normal” member of the society (Goffman, 1961, 104). Therefore, for the respondents, being a student becomes associated with being educated, moderate and able to integrate well into the society. This is very different from the stigmatized picture of Muslim immigrants which is linked to being uneducated, extremist, criminal and unable to integrate into the Swedish

society. This way, the students resist the “abnormal” (outsider) by asserting the “normal” (insider) (Ryan 2011, 13).

Reclaiming normality by distancing oneself from the “deviant “or “abnormal other” is a way to resist stigma (Ryan 2011,4). The respondents are consciously trying to prove the fact that they are “normal” and different from the stigmatized picture of Muslim immigrants. As can be seen in some of the quotes, they agree that some Muslim immigrants truly match the stigma but find it unfair to be included in the stigmatized group due to reasons such as education, work, paying fees and being moderate. Hence, the respondents believed that being international students changes their status in Swedish society. However, they still need to make an effort to prove they are educated and what is believed to be closer to “normal” in Swedish society.

Accordingly, the respondent 9 mentioned:

“I think it is important for Swedish society to understand that we are just normal students who want the good in the society. We go to university, eat, go to the park and do everything that a normal person does. Not every Muslim belongs to the extremist groups. We respect the Swedish culture.”

Respondent 10 also mentioned:

“I have a dark beard and I do look like someone who is coming from a Muslim country. My name is a Muslim name. So at first, I can be seen as a threat or someone from whom Swedish people need to keep distance. Then I need to explain what I do and who I am. after a while they realize I am a normal human being just like them”.

These quotes also confirm the respondents’ attempt to be seen as normal people in the Swedish society. However, constructions of what is ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ are defined differently based on situation (Pyke 2000). The quest for normality among minority groups can involve both identification with and disassociation from the ‘normality’ and moral values of the majority population (ibid). In this context, it is apparent that the respondents identify with what is perceived as ‘normal’ in the Swedish society and try not to be seen as extremist, uneducated, oppressed and criminal ‘abnormal’ other. In this sense, normality is also associated being moderate. Regarding moderation, respondent 4 mentioned:

“I think moderation is a value in the Swedish society and I, as an international student need to show that we are moderate. As a Muslim, I need to show that I respect everyone regardless of their religion and beliefs.”

Respondent 7 also pointed out:

“There is a misunderstanding that Muslims don’t respect other religions. By being a good person who is tolerant and moderate, I try to prove that not all the Muslims fit into the negative images about Muslims in Europe.”

It is very interesting to see that being moderate is considered as a value that distinguishes the respondents from the stigmatized group of Muslims. The respondent’s answers and their insistence on the fact that they are moderate Muslims shows their conscious effort to distance themselves from the stigmatized picture of Muslims. As Frisina also argues, a tactic to distance from the stigma is to present oneself as ‘moderate Muslims’. She calls moderation a globally circulating label for distinguishing ‘good’ Muslims from bad (Frisina 2010, 561).

Overall, it can be argued that the respondents didn’t mention any specific stigma against the Muslim international students and indeed, they believed their status as students have helped them gain distance from the common stigmatization against Muslim immigrants. However, they pointed out that often need to make a conscious effort to prove their ‘normality’ to the Swedish society. In this context, they perceive ‘normality’ as being educated, moderate, flexible and respecting the Swedish culture. This ‘normality’ is based on the opposite of what is believed to be the stigmatized Muslim immigrant who is uneducated, extremist, oppressed (as a woman) and unable to integrate into the Swedish society. Thus, differentiating themselves from the stigmatized picture and longing to gain the ‘normal’ image in the Swedish society is one of the strategies the respondents use to resist the stigma.

5.2.2 Informational control

It should be pointed out that normalization is not the respondents’ only reaction towards stigmatization. During the interviews, I realized that the respondents mention how they have become less open and comfortable talking about Islam, Islamic practices, their religious identity and showing visible symbols of Islam. As described, the respondents believe there are certain stigmas against Muslim immigrants in Sweden and they feel the need to distance themselves from the most common stigmas. Information control is another way to resist the stigma. The discreditable person manages information, continually judging whether or not to reveal their stigmatic quality (Carnevalle 2007, 10). In this context, showing the symbols of Islam and openly talking about practicing Islam can be considered as revealing their stigmatic quality. Respondent 1 mentioned:

“One thing that I did get told from other people before coming to Sweden was to avoid being so open about it. Being in a western society, it is not easy to be a Muslim. It is not that the laws and the system is making it difficult. It is mostly because people are afraid of you if you openly start saying something about Islam. I don’t have a beard but I think if you have a beard and dress in a certain way, that scares some people. So I try not to display it but it’s not like I don’t get to practice it. I do get to practice it. I can go to the mosque and pray but I know I’m living in Sweden and things are different here. I need to adapt myself. If someone asks me directly if I am a Muslim, I say yes but I wouldn’t just start talking about my religion without anyone asking about it. It doesn’t go like that.”

As can be seen, respondent 1 pointed out how they have been consciously trying to control revealing the information about practicing Islam and Muslim identity because they believe it makes the situation more difficult for them in the Swedish society and in other words, makes them a target for stigmatization.

Respondent 4 also said:

“Back in my home country, it is very normal to talk about Islam and daily practices but here, I don’t talk about Islam to Swedish people. If they ask something I explain but I never start. It makes me uncomfortable to show that I am a Muslim who is actively practicing Islam. I just hide some aspects of my life because I think it’s not very common to talk about religion in Sweden anyways and talking about Islam is even a more sensitive matter. I would say maybe it is even a taboo.”

While respondent 4 mentioned the fact that being open about one’s religion is not as common as in their home country, they also indicated that talking about Islam is even considered as a taboo. Therefore, their while their Muslim identity is very important for themselves, they feel the need to hide it or at least, not be open about it.

When I asked the respondents about the daily prayers, they all mentioned they feel uncomfortable saying their prayers in public places such as parks or public libraries. Respondent 3 mentioned:

“I definitely don’t feel that I couldn’t practice my religion but people sometimes are a bit skeptical. The first time I visited Germany in 2014 things were not that bad. If I was in a park I would say my prayers there. This is something I will never do anymore in Sweden or any other part of Europe. I would feel like I’d be taking a risk if I do! So I’m not very comfortable

with showing very openly that I am a Muslim in public. I know that some people can even be violent or treat you in a way that you feel belittled.”

Respondent 8 also said:

“I would rather be delayed with my prayers than saying my prayers in public. It’s not only about fear of being harassed but I feel like I might scare others by doing that. Because there is not enough information about Muslims, they might think I am a terrorist or plotting a terrorist attack if I start saying my prayers in public.”

Respondent 10 also explained their experience with Friday prayers:

“If I’m leaving university to attend the Friday prayers, I never tell my classmates. It can be at the lunch time and I just disappear without explaining where I’m going because I don’t feel comfortable talking about it. I’m scared they might think if I’m practicing Islam I’m an extremist.”

It is clear how the respondents try to manage the signs and symbols associated with the stigma by not saying their prayers in public and not talking about it. As Carnevalle argues, controlling these signs and symbols will affect the visibility of a stigmatic quality, its perceptibility and obtrusiveness. Consequently, the stigmatized people are attending continually to who does or does not know about their secret (Carnevalle 2007, 10). Therefore, belonging to the Muslim minority in Sweden can be considered as the stigmatic quality. The respondents are constantly trying to manage the visible signs of being a Muslim (such as saying prayers) in order to avoid the stigma. As can be seen, the respondent 8 is worried about being seen as a terrorist and even scaring the public. The respondent 3 also mentioned fearing the violence or any belittling behavior and respondent 10 has been silent about attending Friday prayers.

Regarding the headscarf, it is important to note that whilst 3 out of 4 female respondents wear Hijab in public, when I asked them about their experiences and feelings about it, respondent 7 pointed out:

“There are so many people wearing Hijab in Sweden. Usually I feel comfortable but when I hear that some incidents happen in Sweden and Europe to Muslims and especially those who wear hijab, then I feel insecure. Because wearing hijab makes me a soft target. Whenever I hear of those incidents, I feel really in danger and also depressed. But when I think I have never had any negative experience, it makes me feel better. I feel lucky to be here because I don’t feel so much hate towards me. At the same time, I can’t think I’m very comfortable wearing hijab

in Sweden because I am a Muslim woman covering my hair and that can be enough for some people to cause me trouble.”

Respondent 9 also said:

“I can’t say wearing hijab is something strange here. Actually I have this feeling that it is acceptable to wear hijab in Sweden. However, because it is an obvious symbol of being a Muslim, it makes me worried and concerned sometimes. For guys, it might not be 100 percent clear if they are Muslims but if you are wearing a hijab... especially in the current time in Europe that is not a very nice time! It’s more pressuring. Sometimes, it also feels like some people avoid me just because I am showing a visible symbol of Islam which is hijab. Sometimes, I cover my hair with a hat when I got to some places such as restaurants so that it is not an obvious that it’s hijab.”

In this regard, respondent 5 mentioned:

“I think Swedish people are generally accepting welcoming and I know some of my friends wearing scarf and being close friends to Swedish people. My friends who have experienced living in other cities think Gothenburg is a nice city and people are more tolerant towards wearing hijab but still, there are some insecurities.”

It is important to note that while the respondents have not experienced any negative experience regarding wearing hijab, they still feel concerned about the fact that they are showing a symbol of Islam and this can make them the target of hate crimes and stigmatization.

Attempting to hide their Muslim identity by wearing a hat instead of head scarf is a means of information control. As Carnevale argues, “this information control relates to the management of signs and symbols that carry social information” (Carnevale 2007, 10). In this context, wearing headscarf can be seen as the symbol of uneducated, oppressed and extremist Muslim woman. The Stigma that can be avoided by management of signs and symbols associated with being a Muslim woman.

The respondents mentioned their fear of showing visible symbols of Islam and how they are constantly in a process of information control. They mentioned how they fear harassment, stigmatization, being judged and being seen as a threat while showing symbols of Islam in public. It is worth drawing upon the concept of ‘passing’. Passing is a central concept related to information control. In this context, passing refers to when a person with a stigmatic quality manages information so that they can partly or fully ‘pass’ as a normal. (Carnevale 2007, 11).

In fact, by not saying prayers in public, not talking about Islam and even using hat instead of headscarf, the respondents consciously try to pass as what is perceived to be normal in the Swedish society and getting distanced from the stigmatized, abnormal other.

6. Conclusion and Future Research

This study explored the experiences of International Muslim students regarding their religious practices in their everyday lives in Sweden and in addition, reflected upon how they think they are being seen in the eyes of Swedish society. Therefore, this thesis has two main sections which are connected to different theoretical frameworks.

In the first section, I explained that the participants are faced with some restrictions and lack of options with regards to practical side of Islam such as saying daily prayers, taking part in Friday prayers, fasting during Ramadan, Halal food, and alcoholic drinks. In addition, I discussed what they think about the role of Alcohol in social interaction in Sweden. I further explored how the respondents' way of practicing Islam has been individualized. This means that in some cases, they have decided to actively negotiate, reshape and change their practices to be able to keep up with their daily lives in Sweden. In this section I approached this matter through the framework of 'everyday lived religion' which put emphasis on the individual's agency and the social structure in the host society. Accordingly, I argued that even though institutional forms of religion still play an important role in the participants' beliefs, the restrictions of the host society and their tendency to keep up with their daily life in Sweden, together with their plans to stay after graduation, find jobs and even having a family in Sweden has made them more flexible with some practical aspects of Islam. In this part I also showed that these Muslim students have other identities and concerns besides just being Muslims. In fact, being a Muslim is closely linked to their other identities, roles and daily life concerns.

In the second section, I discussed that the participants mentioned that while there is no certain negative stigma against Muslim international students, collective stigmatization of Muslim immigrants in general has affected how they think they are being seen in Sweden. Further they explained that they believe the image of Muslim immigrants in Sweden is associated with the negative images linked to the refugees, being uneducated and unemployed. It even goes further to Islamic extremism, terrorism, and for the female respondents, being oppressed. Accordingly, I discussed how the participants have been actively trying to distance themselves from the stigmatized picture of Muslim immigrants. This includes making an active effort to prove that

they are students who have perused higher education and think moderately. In fact, this way they prove that they are what is believed to be closer to ‘normal’ in Swedish society. This is associated with an effort to distance themselves from the extremist, uneducated, oppressed and criminal ‘abnormal’ other. In addition, in this section I discussed how the respondents have become less open and comfortable with showing visible symbols of Islam, talking about Islamic practices and their religious identities. This process of ‘information control’ is also a way to resist the stigma.

In general, I focused on the thoughts and experiences of International students and showed how they have made individualized choices regarding practicing religion and, in addition, I reflected upon stigmatization against Muslims and how international students respond to it. However, the focus of this research was mostly on the personal thoughts and experiences of this group. I would argue that future research could also look at this issue from the perspective of Swedish society and discuss in what ways it may be different from their views on other groups of Muslim immigrants in Sweden. Additionally, the visa policies and decisions about international students coming from Muslim majority countries, as well as this group’s situation in the Swedish labor market after graduation are among the topics that needs to be explored more. Furthermore, the future research could also be a gender based comparative study which looks at the ways female and male Muslim international students react to stigma and navigate their daily lives in the Swedish society.

References

- Abdullahi, Maimuna.2016. "The impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women in Sweden". *European Network Against Racism aisbl*. Available at: https://www.myndighetsst.se/download/18.1f4f2f6115680af2ce1a1303/1471273071822/fo rgotten_women_report_sweden_-_final-2.pdf Accessed 12 July 2019.
- Beech, Suzanne E. 2018. "Adapting to Change in the Higher Education System: International Student Mobility as a Migration Industry ". *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* .44 (4): 610–625.
- Bendixon, Synnøve K.N. 2013. "The Religious Identity of Young Muslim Women in Berlin." *Brill*.1-330.
- Berg, Bruce L.2017. *Qualitative Research Methods For The Social Science*. *California State University*.
- Bevelander, Pieter, Otterbeck, Jonas.2010. "Young People's Attitudes Towards Muslims in Sweden ". *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33(3). 404-425. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228294536_Young_People's_Attitudes_Towards_Muslims_in_Sweden/.Accessed 17 April 2019.
- Bryman, Alan. 2016. *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Brinkmann, Svend., Steinar, Kvale. 2005. "Confronting the ethics of qualitative research" *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 18(2).157-181.
- Burris, C. T., Branscombe, N. R., Jackson, L. M. 2000. "For God and country: Religion and the endorsement of national self-stereotypes".*Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 31, 517-527.
- Campbell, Catherine,Harriet Deacon. 2006. "Unravelling the contexts of stigma: from internalization to resistance to change". *Journal of community and Applied Social Psychology*. 16 (6). pp. 411-417. ISSN 1052-9284.
- Carlsson, Magnus.,Rooth, Olof. 2006 ."Evidence of ethnic discrimination in the Swedish

labour market using experimental data.”. *Iza-Discussion paper*, no. 2281. Available at: <http://ftp.iza.org/dp2281.pdf>. Accessed 5 May 2019.

Carnevale, Franco A. 2007. “Revisiting Goffman's Stigma: the social experience of families with children requiring mechanical ventilation at home”. *Journal of Child Health Care*, SAGE Publication, Vol 11(1). 7-18.

Cesari, Jocelyne.2003. “Muslim Minorities in Europe: the silent revolution”. *CNRS-Paris and Harvard University*. Available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3db7/a7876c9af2bc3f79259a87b31a5fef164ca7.pdf>. Accessed 10 February 2019.

Charmaz, Kathy. 2003. “Grounded Theory”.*The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*. 2003. SAGE Publications.

Chiswick, Carmel U. 2014. “Immigrants and Religion”. *George Washington University and IZA*.

Definitions.net. “Khutbah”. Available at: <https://www.definitions.net/definition/KHUTBAH>. Accessed 5 August 2019.

Dreher,A., and Poutvaara, P. 2005 . “Student flows and Migration”. *CESifo Working Paper*. 190, Konstanz

El-Bachouti, Mohammed Hicham .2017. “Individualization of Muslim Religious Practices Contextual Creativity of Second-Generation Moroccans in Spain ”. *Universitat Pompeu Fabra Barcelona ,Department of Political and Social Sciences*.

Eliassi, Barzoo. 2013. “ Orientalist Social Work: Cultural Otherization of Muslim Immigrants in Sweden”. *Critical Social Work 14(1)*. Lund University. Available at: <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/orientalistSWotherizationSweden>. Accessed 4 February 2019.

Ewing, Katherine Pratt. 2008. "Stolen Honor, Stigmatizing Muslim men in Berlin". *Stanford University Press*.

Findlay, Allan M., King, Russel.,Smith, Fiona M., Geddes, Alistair., Skeldon, Ronald. 2011. "World class? An investigation of globalization difference and international student mobility". *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37(1):118 – 131.

Findlay,Alan., Stam,Alexandra., King, Russell., Ruiz-Gelices, Enric. 2005. "International opportunities: searching for the meaning of Student migration". *Geographica Helvetica*, 192.200. Available at: <https://www.geogr-helv.net/60/192/2005/gh-60-192-2005.pdf>. Accessed on 20 July 2019.

Forst, David M. 2011. "Social Stigma and its Consequences for the Socially Stigmatized". San Francisco State University, *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*5/11 (2011): 824–839, 10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00394.x. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00394.x>. Accessed 1 May 2019.

Frisina, Annalisa. 2010. "Young Muslims' Everyday Tactics and Strategies: Resisting Islamophobia, Negotiating Italianness, Becoming Citizens". *Journal of International Studies*. 31(5). 557-572. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07256868.2010.513087>. Accessed 20 March 2019.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood, Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Goffman, Erving. 1971. *Relations in Public. Microstudies of the Public Order*. New York: Basic Books.

Goździak, Elżbieta M., Márton, Péter 2018. "Where the Wild Things Are: Fear of Islam and the Anti-Refugee Rhetoric in Hungary and in Poland, Central and Eastern European". *Migration Review*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2018, 125-151. Available at: http://www.ceemr.uw.edu.pl/sites/default/files/Gozdzia_Marton_Where_the_Wild_Things

[Are.pdf](#).. Accessed 15 December 2018.

Geddie, Kate. 2013. "The Transitional Ties that Bind: Relationship Considerations for Graduating International Science and Engineering Research Students". *Move Network*. University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland.

Hackett, Conrad. 2017. "5 facts about Muslim population in Europe". *Pew Research/Fact Tank*. Pew Research Center .Available at . <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/29/5-facts-about-the-muslim-population-in-europe/> . Accessed 9 February 2019.

Herek GM, Gillis JR, Cogan J. 2009. "Internalized stigma among sexual minority adults: insights from a social psychological perspective.". *Counsel. Psychol.* 56:32–43.

Howarth, Caroline. 2006. "Race as stigma: positioning the stigmatized as agents, not objects." *Journal of community and applied social psychology*, 16 (6). 442-451.

Jacobson, Christine. 2010. "Islamic Traditions and Muslim Youth in Norway". *Brill*. Leiden

Jeldtoft, Nadia. 2011. "Lived Islam: religious identity with 'non-organized' Muslim minorities". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34:7, 1134-1151.

King, Russell., Raghuram, Parvati., 2013. "International Student Migration: Mapping the Field and New Research Agendas." *Popul. Space Place* 19, 127–137.

Kvale, Steinar., Brinkmann, Svend. 2009. *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative Research Interviewing*. SAGE.

Larsson, Göran. 2007. "Muslims in the EU: Cities Report Sweden." *Preliminary research report and literature survey*, Open Society institute, 1-50, available at: https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/uploads/a801911c-65ac-4a92-a902-10ab06ebb750/museucitiesswe_20080101_0.pdf. Accessed on 2 July 2019.

Larsson, Göran., Sander, Åke. 2007. *Islam and muslims in Sweden : integration or fragmentation? : A contextual study*, LIT.

Larsson, Göran.2009. "Sweden". in *Islam in the Nordic and Baltic Countries*. Edited by Larsson, Goran (ed),. London. Routledge, 56-75.

Larsson. Göran.2006. "Muslims in Swedish Media and Academia". *ISIM review* 18.autumn 2016, available at:

https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/17083/ISIM_18_Muslims_in_Swedish_Media_and_Academia.pdf?sequence=1. Accessed 12 December 2018.

Learning about religion , "Taraweeh prayers in Ramadan". available at:

<https://www.learnreligions.com/taraweeh-prayers-in-ramadan-2003821>. Accessed 5 August 2019.

Learning about religion, "Islamic prayer timing". available at:

<https://www.learnreligions.com/islamic-prayer-timings-2003811>. Accessed 5 August 2019.

LERU office. 2018. "Research on Religion crucial for Europe's societies". Leuven, Belgium. Available at:

https://portal.research.lu.se/portal/files/55858759/20180514_Final_Agenda_THRS_TG_Workshop_14.05.2018_Brussels.pdf. Accessed 17 July 2019.

Link, Bruce J., Phelan, Joe C. 2001. "Conceptualizing stigma". *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27(1).363-387.

Luckmann, T. 1967. *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*. New York, Macmillan.

Mack, Natasha,. Woodson,Cynthia., Macqueen, Kathleen M., Guest.Greg., Namey, Emily. 2005. "Qualitative Research Methods: A data collector's fields guide,". *FHI 360*. Available at:

<https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/Qualitative%20Research%20Methods%20-%20A%20Data%20Collector's%20Field%20Guide.pdf>. Accessed 5 May 2019.

Madge.Clare., Raghuram Parvati., Noxolo,Pat. 2014. "Conceptualizing international education: From international student to international study". *SAGE journals*.

Mandaville, Peter. 2003. "Towards a critical Islam: European Muslims and the changing boundaries of transnational religious discourse". in *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe*, edited by Stefano Allevi., Nielson, Jorgen, Leiden Brill. 127–145. Available at:

https://dl1.cuni.cz/pluginfile.php/419356/mod_resource/content/1/Mandaville_Critical%20Islam%20from%20%5BStefano_Allievi%2C_Jorgen_S._Nielsen%5D_Muslim_Networks.pdf.

Accessed 7 December 2018.

Mandaville, Peter. 2001. *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma*. London. Routledge.

Manstead, Tony., Easterbrook, Matt., Kuppens, Toon. "The education effect: Links between educational attainment and personal and societal wellbeing". Available at:

<https://esrc.ukri.org/files/research/the-education-effect-links-between-educational-attainment-and-personal-and-societal-wellbeing-pdf-large-file/>. Accessed on 8 May 2019.

May, Vanessa . 2008. "On being a good mother: the moral presentation of self". *SAGE journal* .42(3): 470–486.

McGuire, Meredith. 2008. *Lived Religion*. Chicago: Oxford University Press.

Migrationsverket. 2012. "Immigration of International Students to Sweden". Report from EMN Sweden 2012:1,1-55, available at:

http://www.emnsweden.se/download/18.2d998ffc151ac38715917168/1484748705297/Nationell_International%20students_engelska_2012.pdf. Accessed 22 July 2019.

Minganti, Pia Karlsson., Österlind, Leila Karin. 2016. "New faces on a new phase: The politics of visibility among young Muslim women in Sweden". in *New dimensions of diversity in Nordic culture and society*, edited by Björklund, Jenny., Lindqvist, Ursula. . 41-60.

Misztal, Barbara A. 2001. "Normality and Trust in Goffman's Theory of Interaction Order". *SAGE publications. Sociological Theory*, 19(3), 312–324.

Nyhagen, Line . 2017. “The lived religion approach in the sociology of religion and its implications for secular feminist analyses of religion”. *SAGE journals*. 64(4), pp. 495-511.

Orsi, Robert. 2002. *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith And Community In Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*. Yale University Press.

OSCE. 2017. “Bias against Muslims”. Available at: <http://hatecrime.osce.org/what-hate-crime/bias-against-muslims>. Accessed 20 January 2019.

Pollack, Detlef., Gert, Pickel. 2007 . “Religious individualization or secularization? Testing hypotheses of religious change – the case of Eastern and Western Germany ”. *London School of Economics and Political Science*. ISSN 0007-1315.

Pyke K .2000. “The normal American family: as an interpretive structure of family life among grown children of Korean and Vietnamese Immigrants”. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62: 240–255.

Qianrue,She. Wotherspoon Terry. 2013. “International student mobility and highly skilled migration: a comparative study of Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom”. *SpringerPlus*, 2:132. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3648681/pdf/40064_2013_Article_245.pdf. Accessed 1 July 2019.

Riaño, Yvonne .,Van Mol, Christof., Raghuram, Parvarti. 2018. “New directions in studying policies of international student mobility and migration”. *Journal of Globalization, Societies and Education*. 16(3),283-294.

Riaño, Yvonne., Pigué, Eitenne. 2016. “International student migration- An annotated review”. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326231413_INTERNATIONAL_STUDENT_MIGRATION_-_AN_ANNOTATED_REVIEW. Accessed 10 June 2019.

Renee, Luthra., Platt, Lucinda. 2016. "Elite or middling? International students and migrant diversification". *SAGE journals*, Volume: 16 issue: 2, 1-41. available at: http://repository.essex.ac.uk/16431/1/Luthra_Platt_Ethncities_Final_Oct92015.pdf. Accessed 25 June 2019.

Roald, Anne Sofie. 2013. "Governmentality and Muslims in Sweden". *Culture and Society*, Malmö University, 20506.

Roy, Oliver. 2004. *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, London: Hurst.

Ryan, Louise. 2011. "Muslim Women Negotiating Collective Stigmatization: We're Just Normal People". *Middlesex University*, UK, PP 1-16. Available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.846.2099&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. Accessed 16 March 2019.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. Thornhill, A. 2012. *Research Methods for Business Students*. 6th edition, Pearson Education Limited.

Saroglou, Vassilis., Mathijssen, François. 2007. "Religion, multiple identities, and acculturation: A study of Muslim immigrants in Belgium". *Université catholique de Louvain*. Available at: <https://cdn.uclouvain.be/public/Exports%20reddot/psyreli/documents/2007.Archive.SM.pdf>. Accessed 16 February 2019.

Schiffauer, Werner. 1988. "Migration and Religiousness". In *The New Islamic Presences in Western Europe*, edited by Gerholm, T. and Lithman, Y. London: Mansell, 146–158.

Socialsci LibreTexts. 2019. "Deviance and Social Stigma". 5 June 2019. Available at: [https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Book%3A_Sociology_\(Boundless\)/7%3A_Deviance%2C_Social_Control%2C_and_Crime/7.1%3A_Deviance/7.1C%3A_Deviance_and_Social_Stigma](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Book%3A_Sociology_(Boundless)/7%3A_Deviance%2C_Social_Control%2C_and_Crime/7.1%3A_Deviance/7.1C%3A_Deviance_and_Social_Stigma). Accessed: 1 June 2019.

SST (the Swedish Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities). 2011. "Statistics for members registered in faith communities in Sweden in 2011". Available

at : <http://www.sst.a.se/statistik/statistik2011.4.4bf439da1355ecafdd2243b.html/> .Accessed on 28 January 2013.

Stausberg Michael., Engler, Steven. 2012. “The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion, A chapter Sampler”. *Taylor and Francis group*. Available at: <https://www.crcpress.com/rsc/downloads/EASR.pdf> . Accessed 25 December 2019.

Suter B, Jandl M. 2006. “Comparative study on policies towards foreign graduates: Study on admission and retention policies towards foreign students in industrialized countries”. *Vienna. International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)*.

Swedish Government Official Reports. 2018. “Summary of the reports SOU 2018:3 and SOU 2018:78 by the Inquiry on increased internationalization of higher education institutions (U 2017:02).” *Swedish Government Official Reports*. 1-41 . Available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/4ab6ff/contentassets/2cf334f2792c42d4b8c414076eb59204/summary-in-english-internationalisation-of-swedish-higher-education-institutions>. Accessed 10 July 2019.

Tacoli, Cecilia., Okali, David. 2001. “The Links Between Migration, Globalisation and Sustainable Development”. *International Institutes for Environment and Development*.

The Living History Forum. “Islamophobia English Summary”. Stockholm. Available at: https://www.levandehistoria.se/sites/default/files/material_file/islamofobi-english-summary.pdf .

Thekitchn. “what is halal meat”. Available at: <https://www.thekitchn.com/good-question-what-is-halal-me-60979>. Accessed 5 August 2019.

Thompson, Craig J., Tambyah, Siok Kuan. 1999. “Trying to Be Cosmopolitan”. *Journal of Consumer Research* 26 (3): 214-241. Oxford University Press (OUP). doi:10.1086/209560.

Van Mol, C. 2014. “Intra-European Student Mobility in International Higher Education Circuits. Europe on the Move”. *Journal of Consumer Research* 26: 214-241. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/24099030_Trying_to_Be_Cosmopolitan. Accessed

6 June 2019.

Vocabulary.org, "Ramadan". available at: <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/Ramadan>. Accessed 5 August 2019.

Wikipedia, "Friday Prayers". available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jumu%27ah#cite_note-1. Accessed 5 August 2019.

Yang, Lawrence Hsin, Arthur Kleinman, Bruce G. Link, Jo C. Phelan, Sing Lee, and Byron Good. 2007. "Culture And Stigma: Adding Moral Experience To Stigma Theory". *Social Science & Medicine* 64 (7): 1524-1535. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2006.11.013.

Appendix - Interview guide

General questions:

Where are you from?

For how long have you been here?

How do you like Sweden?

What did you use to do in your home country?

Why did you decide to move to Sweden?

What is your family's relation to religion? Do you think you are coming from a family that religion is important for them?

Did you grow up practicing Islam in some levels?

Did you have any thoughts about being a Muslim and how it will be before moving to Sweden?

How will you practice, how will the society see you?

Attending Mosques/ Islamic associations:

Do you practice Islam in Sweden? How? Have you ever been to a mosque or do you practice it more privately? If not, has it always been like this or did you stop going to mosques in Sweden?

If you have ever been to a mosque or Islamic association, what is your general idea about it? Did you like the experience? Why/why not?

How do you think it was different from going to mosque in your home country?

How open are you about practicing Islam (going to mosque, Islamic associations, saying prayers etc). Have you ever mentioned it when talking to your non-Muslim friends?

How do you feel like about talking about going to the mosque with your non-Muslim friends/classmates/colleagues?

Do you think living in Sweden has made practicing Islam for you more of a private matter?

Do you listen to any kind of Islamic speech (Khutbah) in Sweden?

Ramadan:

Do you fast during Ramadan? Is it important for you? If not, has it always been like this or did you stop fasting in Sweden?

How was last Ramadan for you? (if you were here in Sweden)?

How do you usually celebrate Ramadan in your home country?

In what ways you think it was different from the experience in your country?

Do you think it was more individualized for you or did you have the chance to experience it together with a community?

Do you wish you could be in your home country during Ramadan? Why? Why not?

How open are you about fasting with your non-Muslim friends? Do you often mention you are fasting? How are the reactions? How do you feel about it?

Food and Drinks:

Do you eat Halal food? If No, did use to eat Halal food before moving to Sweden?

If yes, where do you find it?

How do you feel about explaining to your non-Muslim friends about the halal food? Have you ever talked about it or been asked questions?

If you don't drink alcohol, have you ever been asked about it?

Have you ever felt like not drinking alcohol isolates you from socializing with your non-Muslim friends/ colleagues?

Head scarf (Hijab) and gender related questions:

How do you feel about wearing hijab in Sweden? Is it a different feeling in anyways from wearing it in your home country?

Is how you dress exactly the same as how you used to in your home country?

Have you ever felt any kind of discrimination because of wearing hijab?

Have you ever been asked about hijab, any kind of questions about it from your friends/ colleagues/ classmates? If yes, how do you feel like explaining about it?

Do you generally feel like wearing hijab is accepted in the society?

Do you feel safe wearing it?

As a Muslim women, do you feel like you are generally accepted among your friends/colleagues?

How do you think Swedes see a Muslim woman in general?

Contact with home:

Do you talk about your experience of being a Muslim in Sweden with your family/friends back home? Do they ask questions about anything?

Do you feel like the way you practice Islam now is different from the way they do it back home? In what ways?

Do you think religion is something that keeps you connected to your home country?

Do you follow the ideas and speeches of the Islamic scholars in your home country?

How often do you go back to your country? How is it practicing religion when u get back? Do you do exactly the same as you used to?

Inner beliefs:

Do you feel like there has been a change in how you see religion since you moved to Sweden? If yes, how do you see the change?

Do you have to make changes to make Islam and your Muslim identity fit your daily life in Sweden?

Their image on the eyes of Swedish society:

Do you think freedom of religion actually exists here?

How do you think of the general attitude of Swedes about Islam?

What do you think Swedish people think of Islam? Do you think they know the difference between different branches? Do you think they are aware enough?

How much do you follow news and media in Sweden?

How do you think Muslim immigrants are being shown in Swedish media?

Concluding questions:

In general, do you feel like you are welcome to practice your religion in Sweden?

Do you prefer practicing Islam in your home country or Sweden?

Do you think you have learnt something from the secular Swedish society?

Do you think Religion is more of a private matter in Sweden? If yes, do you find it a positive or negative issue?

Do you plan to stay in Sweden or leave? Would you like to raise your children in Sweden? How do you think they will make sense of religion in their everyday life in Sweden? Will you want them to practice Islam? Will you teach them about Islam?