
CONSUMING EID AL-ADHA: CONSTRUCTING AND EXPRESSING THE MUSLIM IDENTITY

A m a r A h m e d

Introduction

The events of 9/11 led the Western public and academic interest in Muslims and their identity to grow especially in the United States. In Europe, the academic discourse increased following the so-called Muslim mass migration of 2015 and onwards. However, much of the literature – particularly the ethnographic – examines the community as a minority in the West from the contexts of discrimination,¹ especially against women wearing headscarves,² and the issue of Muslim integration and/or assimilation³. Even those who have conducted ethnographic research, whether in the MENA⁴ region or in the West, tend to have orientalist, colonialist, and/or essentialist perspectives⁵.

In this paper, a) I argue that there is a lacuna in the ethnographic research of Muslims and how they construct their identity in various sociocultural contexts that, consequently, will b) show particularism

¹ Karen J. Aroian, "Discrimination against Muslim American adolescents," *The Journal of School Nursing* 28, no. 3 (2012): 206, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059840511432316>.206.

² Rebecca S. Robinson, "Hijab in the American workplace: Visibility and discrimination," *Culture and religion* 17, no. 3 (2016): 332, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2016.1211543>.

³ Pippa Norris and Ronald F. Inglehart, "Muslim integration into Western cultures: Between origins and destinations," *Political Studies* 60, no. 2 (2012): 228, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00951.x>.

⁴ Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

⁵ Gabriele Marranci, *The anthropology of Islam* (London: Berg, 2008), 31–52.

among them. c) I write to contribute to this body of knowledge through analysing the meanings that Muslims associate with Eid Al-Adha which leads to their identity construction and expression through celebrating and consuming the holiday. d) I discuss the rituals surrounding the holiday which would reveal some of the significant values of the celebrators who would be under the umbrella of the Islamic culture; though the possibility of non-Muslims celebrating the holiday with their Muslim friends must be acknowledged – which ethnographic accounts could reveal – I concentrate on Muslims' celebrations in this article. Eid Al-Adha or Feast of the Sacrifice is one of two Islamic holidays – the other being Eid Al-Fitr – which is celebrated each year among the Muslim communities, and it is widely considered to be the holier of the two.⁶

Visible ethnographic literature investigating religious and cultural holidays mainly revolve around Western holidays such as Thanksgiving⁷, Easter⁸, and Christmas⁹. Islamic holidays – especially Eid Al-Adha – have not received the same scholarly attention, especially the research that would fit under the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) that offers a framework and bridges the gap between consumption behaviour and cultural meanings.¹⁰

In the context of this paper, using the term “consuming” does not refer to the traditional commercial meaning since one may consume an idea, an experience, a culture, and/or even a religion. For example, feasting with family during Eid Al-Adha is not simply about eating or

⁶ Ziasma Haneef Khan, P. J. Watson, and Zhuo Chen, “Meanings of animal sacrifice during Eid-ul-Adha: Relationships with religious orientations and Muslim experiential religiousness in Pakistan,” *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 37, no. 1 (2015): 37, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15736121-12341299>.

⁷ Melanie Wallendorf and Eric J. Arnould, “‘We gather together’: consumption rituals of Thanksgiving Day,” *Journal of consumer research* 18, no. 1 (1991): 13–31, <https://doi.org/10.1086/209237>.

⁸ Theodore Caplow and Margaret Holmes Williamson, “Decoding Middletown’s Easter bunny: a study in American iconography,” *Semiotica* 32, no. 3/4 (1980): 221–232, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.535.6958&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

⁹ Elizabeth C. Hirschman and Priscilla A. LaBarbera, “The meaning of Christmas,” in *SV-Interpretive Consumer Research*, edited by Elizabeth C. Hirschman (Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, 1989), 136–147.

¹⁰ Eric J. Arnould and Craig J. Thompson, “Consumer culture theory (CCT): Twenty years of research,” *Journal of consumer research* 31, no. 4 (2005): 868–882, <https://doi.org/10.1086/426626>.

drinking, rather it is about consuming a social setting. Through this social setting, Muslims express the importance of family and the value of collectivism as parts of their identity. These are the meanings associated with consuming the feast.

“Identity” may be defined as the idea an individual has about oneself, characteristics properties, body, and values, while “image” is the way others view and judge an individual.¹¹ Individualists define the term as to what a person owns or experiences; while collectivists define it through relationships, group memberships, and fulfilment of expectations. Nevertheless, religion plays a significant role in shaping people’s identity and behaviour.

When researching for ethnographic or sociological literature regarding the consumption of Eid Al-Adha, much of it came via newspaper articles and online blogs. That is not to deny the existence of studies in books and academic journals. Much of the academic research – especially in English – regarding Islamic holidays study Eid Al-Fitr, since it follows a month of fasting during Ramadhan.¹² Most academic papers concentrate on the sacrifice and the health-related issues such as viruses¹³ and nutrition¹⁴, and the meaning of the sacrifice¹⁵. Moreover, much of the academic debate revolves around the religious and historic aspects of the holiday and the story behind it.¹⁶ The more recent discourse focuses on animal rights and the ecology surrounding the sacrifice, since millions of animals are slaughtered

¹¹ Marieke De Mooij, *Consumer behavior and culture: Consequences for global marketing and advertising* (London: SAGE Publications Limited, 2019), 153–156.

¹² Xiaochun Yang, “The festival of fast-breaking Eid al-Fitr in the Great Mosque of Lhasa. Some observations,” *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* 47 (2016): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.4000/emscat.2867>.

¹³ Antoine Nougairède, Christelle Fossati, Nicolas Salez, Stephan Cohen-Bacrie, Laetitia Ninove, Fabrice Michel, Samer Aboukakis et al., “Sheep-to-human transmission of Orf virus during Eid al-Adha religious practices, France,” *Emerging infectious diseases* 19, no. 1 (2013): 102, <https://doi.org/10.3201/eid1901.120421>.

¹⁴ M. M. Farouk, J. M. Regenstein, M. R. Pirie, R. Najm, A. E. D. Bekhit, and S. O. Knowles, “Spiritual aspects of meat and nutritional security: Perspectives and responsibilities of the Abrahamic faiths,” *Food Research International* 76, no. 4 (2015): 882–895, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodres.2015.05.028>.

¹⁵ Khan, Watson, and Chen, “Meanings of Animal Sacrifice,” 37–53.

¹⁶ Asma Barlas, “Abraham’s sacrifice in the Qur’an: beyond the body,” *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 23 (2011): 55–71, <https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.67380>.

during that day each year.¹⁷ Sociologically, scholars investigate the challenges that Muslims face when celebrating in the West, such as in Canada¹⁸ and France.¹⁹

Torlak *et al.*²⁰ looks into the unique experiences of Turkish consumers to formulate the consumption ritual experiences and discourse of Eid Al-Adha, and Van de Bruinhorst's²¹ dissertation discussing the holiday using the example of Tanga in Tanzania are the most relevant ethnographic studies that I found. Ljamai²² concentrates on the sacrifice aspect of the holiday, similar to the majority of academic works that investigate Eid Al-Adha. This is understandable due to the richness of meanings constructed during the ritual. In this paper, not only will I analyse the sacrifice, but also other consumption rituals within the celebrations. It is important to note that each experience is unique due to the different sociocultural contexts that Eid Al-Adha is celebrated within and, therefore, one should not generalise or essentialise findings.

All in all, Eid Al-Adha has not received the deserved ethnographic attention that describes how its participants construct meanings as much as other prominent holidays have and do, such as Christmas, Easter, and/or even Eid Al-Fitr.

¹⁷ Wendy Doniger, "Afterword: Cruelty and the Imagination of Animals in India," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 2 (2015): 277–280, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-3139048>.

¹⁸ Amir Hussain, "Muslims in Canada: Opportunities and challenges," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 33, no. 3-4 (2004): 359–379, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000842980403300305>.

¹⁹ Anne-Marie Brisebarre, "The evolution of sacrificial practices for Eid al-Adha in urban France," *Ethnologie française* 168, no. 4 (2017): 607–622.

²⁰ Ömer Torlak, Müjdat Özmen, Muhammet Ali Tiltay, Mahmut Sami İşlek, and Ufuk Ay, "Ritual as assemblage: feast of sacrifice experiences of Turkish consumers," *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 10, no. 2 (2019): 476–494, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-05-2018-0091>.

²¹ Gerard C. Van de Bruinhorst, "Raise Your Voices and Kill Your Animals": *Islamic Discourses on the Idd el-Hajj and Sacrifices in Tanga (Tanzania)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 29–440.

²² Abdelilah Ljamai, "Sacrifice and Islamic Identity," in *Sacrifice in Modernity: Community, Ritual, Identity*, ed. Joachim Duyndam, Anna-Marie J.A.C.M. Korte, and Marcel Poorthuis (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 221–229, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004335530_014.

Background

Eid Al-Adha falls on the tenth day of *Dhu Al-Hijjah*, which is the twelfth month of the Islamic Calendar. In Islamic tradition, the background of Eid Al-Adha stems from the story of the Prophet Ebrahim (Abraham). One of the key trials of his life was God commanding him to sacrifice his son. It was on mount Arafah where the son was about to be sacrificed by his father to submit to the will of God. That is when the prophet Ebrahim was sent an animal to sacrifice instead to signify that he had passed the test and his sacrifice had already been accepted; hence, the name of the holiday and the ritual of the slaughtering and sacrificing of an animal which is usually a sheep. Prior to the act, the Devil had attempted to sway Ebrahim and his family away from actualising the commandment of God; however, the father threw pebbles at the Devil and drove him away. This created the ritual of throwing stones at pillars that signifies the rejection of Satan during Hajj rites.²³

Muslims rituals look to summarize the passages through journeys of human life.²⁴ In general, on the Day of Arafah, non-pilgrims (Hajj) have been observed to fast. The following day, special Eid Al-Adha prayers are performed at the mosques in congregation when it is followed by *Khutbah* (Sermon) delivered by the Imam and by the end of that attendees greet each other and shake hands as observed in many Muslim communities such as the Bosniak.²⁵ Sacrificing an animal is the next step of the celebrations – which is considered one of the most important rituals of the day – and the animal has to fit certain criteria and a specific ritual must be followed. The meat of the sacrifice is then divided into three parts, one third donated to the poor and needy, one to relatives, friends and neighbours, and the last part is kept at home to be cooked for the Eid feast and the following meals.²⁶ It is not unusual

²³ Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in holy lands: The evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael legends in Islamic exegesis* (Albany: Suny Press, 1990), 105–221.

²⁴ Marranci, “The Anthropology of Islam,” 27.

²⁵ Mehmed Handžić, “Kurban Bajram/Eid Ul Adha,” *Novi Muallim* 14, no. 55 (2013): 111, <https://doi.org/10.26340/muallim.v14i55.315>.

²⁶ Torlak et al., “Ritual as Assemblage,” 480.

for families and friends to gather and attend more than one feast a day during Eid celebrations especially in Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia.²⁷

Eid Al-Adha involves religious and cultural rituals which are performed by Muslims across the world. The doctrinal mode of ritual developments that are frequently repeated, such as annual celebrations, build a precise memory routine for the ritual's abstract or schematic organisation.²⁸ Despite the fact that over time some details of scripted actions may vary from one performance to another, the schematic sequence of events repeat in a fairly high degree of accurate repetition. This repetitive routine is typically guided by a firm social hierarchy which further minimizes unintended innovation, increases policing, monitoring, and sanctioning of nonconformity. Besides preservation, the implications of routinisation include identification of anonymous worshippers to include in a community. In short, the preservation allows rituals to withstand changes throughout generations, and for those who are performing those rituals to express their identity as part of the community.

The religious rituals of Eid Al-Adha are performed virtually identically among the members of the "imagined community"²⁹ around the world. However, different cultures and contexts can reflect particularism in the practices. For example, Muslims attend Eid prayer that includes a sermon. The topic or the language of the sermon can differ slightly across nations due to the context it is being delivered in.³⁰ Similarly, Muslims feast during the Day with the main dish tending to feature the meat of the sacrifice; however, the food in the feast is adapted to the local customs and even to specific household traditions - Van de Bruinhorst reports that his informants in Tanga were even confused

²⁷ Noraziah Ali and Mohd Azlan Abdullah, "The food consumption and eating behaviour of Malaysian urbanites: Issues and concerns," *Geografia-Malaysian Journal of Society and Space* 8, no. 6 (2017): 163, <https://ejournal.ukm.my/gmjss/article/view/20088/6386>.

²⁸ Scott Atran, *In gods we trust: The evolutionary landscape of religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 156.

²⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso books, 2006), 1–206.

³⁰ Van de Bruinhorst, "Raise Your Voices," 83–85.

whether spices and salt are allowed or not.³¹ Developing ethnography in various sociocultural contexts and geographical locations would reveal the meanings constructed and symbolism within the performance of the rituals. Moreover, it would allow us to examine whether those meanings remain the same across contexts since, for instance, prayers could mean submission to god and/or inclusion, the sermon may communicate the value of listening to the wise and elderly and/or supporting a shared cause, and feasting could construct and expresses collectivism and/or reward patience.

The Meanings and Values of Eid Al-Adha

Celebrations tend to be taken for granted by the participants as the cultural discourse negotiates meanings and issues that are difficult for many to acknowledge, recognise, articulate, and deliberate verbally.³² The reason this paper argues for the need for ethnographic research with regards to Eid Al-Adha is the fact that celebrators utilize actions and experiences to construct and express their identity. I will proceed to analyse some potential meanings and values that the celebrators communicate as parts of their identity.

Collectivism: The Social Aspects of Eid Al-Adha

Symbols may be seen as relations, rather than objects.³³ Hence, meaning comes from spatial and temporal relationships established between symbols that are objectively experienced throughout social interactions. Every single Eid Al-Adha ritual symbolises a Muslim's relationship with an entity. For example, 1) Eid prayers as a submission to God³⁴; 2) two thirds of the sacrificial meat are given to the poor and the needy and other members of the community³⁵; and 3) feasting tends to start with

³¹ Ibid., 139.

³² Caplow and Williamson, "Decoding Middletown's Easter," 221–32.

³³ Janet L. Dolgin, David S. Kemnitzer, and David Murray Schneider, *Symbolic anthropology: A reader in the study of symbols and meanings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 22.

³⁴ Van de Bruinhorst, "Raise Your Voices," 274.

³⁵ Torlak et al., "Ritual as Assemblage," 480.

the nuclear family and then expand to encompass the extended family and friends.³⁶

Moreover, Eid Al-Adha rituals highlight the collective nature of the Muslim culture in general. For instance, the animal sacrifice is for the family and community, the Eid prayers are generally collective and include public sermons, and family and friends are the centrepiece of the feasts. This expresses the significance of family and community.

Similar to what they do for *Iftar* during Ramadhan³⁷, many central mosques around the world arrange a feast, or at least offer some snacks and treats³⁸ with an open free invitation for anybody to attend, especially those who have no place, no family, or friends to celebrate with.³⁹ Some philanthropists and families even host open houses for Eid brunch.⁴⁰ This is important especially for immigrants who live and/or work abroad. This affirms the sense of inclusion as people donate money and food to mosques serving this purpose.

Eid Al-Adha coincides with and marks the Hajj season. I will further describe the rites in a coming section. However, it must be noted that the rites are performed by all pilgrims at the same period of time, wearing identical clothing, and aiming to achieve the same goal.⁴¹ People from around the world and from different backgrounds get together to perform the rites, which emphasises the membership in the “community”.

The celebratory atmosphere and joy that surround Eid Al-Adha is a common feeling⁴²; the shared religious, cultural, and/or national iden-

³⁶ Syen Adnan Raza, “A Pakistani Eid (1991),” *The Valpo Core Reader* 360 (1991): 5–6, http://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1310&context=core_reader.

³⁷ Trade Arabia, “Bahrain mosque serves iftar for 400,” July 5, 2015, http://www.tradearabia.com/news/MEDIA_285611.html.

³⁸ Zainab Iqbal, “Eid Al-Adha During a Pandemic,” *Bklyner*, July 30, 2020, <https://bklyner.com/eid-al-adha-during-a-pandemic/>.

³⁹ Santriani Bohari, “Here's How Muslims Around The World Celebrate Eid Al Adha,” *HHWT*, August 25, 2017, <https://www.havehalalwilltravel.com/heres-how-muslims-around-the-world-celebrate-eid-al-adha>.

⁴⁰ Tasmih Khan, “How Families Are Celebrating Eid al-Adha This Year,” *The New York Times*, July 31, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/31/parenting/eid-al-adha-families-coronavirus.html>.

⁴¹ Marranci, *The Anthropology of Islam*, 25–26.

⁴² Van de Bruinhorst, *Raise Your Voices*, 350.

tities in each context bringing the celebrators together. Everybody receives the same greetings and good wishes offering a sense of unity.⁴³ I stress the need for ethnographic research with regards to Eid Al-Adha as it will reveal which part of their identity the participants associate the holiday and its consumption rituals with. For instance, members of a Muslim community within a European country could only construct their religious identity through their celebrations since they would be coming from different cultural backgrounds; while celebrators in a Muslim-majority country could construct and express their religious, cultural, and/or national identities. Still, the common celebratory feeling should reflect some sense of belonging to an “imagined community”.

The main characteristic for the holiday is its social aspect. In order to comfortably participate in all collective rituals, one must be able to forgive. I believe that this assumption is reasonable since much of the consumption rituals are collective, such as the prayers and the feast. Should one have an issue with a community or a family member, it would make the meeting awkward. Eid brings the society together during prayers. Two thirds of the sacrifice go to other people, constructing the value that one's family is not reduced to their blood-relatives, but more generally the community in which they live. In some cultures, Eid breakfast puts the nuclear family around the same table.⁴⁴ The extended family surround the holiday feast. Afternoons mark the gathering of friends.⁴⁵ All those are opportunities for a person to come to a common ground with the people with whom he/she have differences with.

Family is an integral entity within the Islamic culture since Islam stresses the significance of strong family relationships and emphasises respect and kindness within the institution.⁴⁶ During the celebrations, Muslims visit and greet each other. Distant family members and acquaintances get together with some immigrant families returning

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 32–33.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁶ Nur Suriya Mohd Nor, “Islam and Buddhism: Similarities of Moral Practices,” *Al-Iqtan: journal of Islamic sciences and comparative studies* 3, no. 2 (2019): 31–34, <https://journals.iium.edu.my/al-itqan/index.php/al-itqan/article/download/117/49>.

“home” if Eid Al-Adha coincides with holidays, for example, French families of North African origin.⁴⁷ Therefore, positive kinship and family relationships are highlighted during Eid.

Eid Al-Adha organises the society and emphasises social order. Muslims attend Eid prayers lining up to pray to the same God regardless of social status. Eid prayers are additional to the daily five prayers that Muslims pray.⁴⁸ Prayers attendees perform the same rituals and listen to the same sermon, which is usually Eid-specific.⁴⁹ Being all under the same “rules” during Eid prayers reflects the Islamic value that all people are equal before God no matter one’s background.⁵⁰ The same applies to Hajj, where all pilgrims wear the exact same attire in order to perform the rituals which unify them. Last but not least, the fortunate giving to the unfortunate characteristic of the holiday stabilises the society and the feeling of equality is symbolically and periodically represented.

Submission to God’s Will: The Religious Aspects of Eid Al-Adha

Islam literally translates as “submission to the will of God”.⁵¹ The rituals of Eid Al-Adha are full of symbolism that are articulated and enacted.⁵² God has asked Muslims to be humble as all are equal in God’s eyes regardless of ethnicity and social status⁵³. This is enacted through bowing and prostration before God during prayers and through the rites of Hajj – to sacrifice if capable, which is articulated through the intention of the sacrifice prior to performing it, to care for the family

⁴⁷ Anne-Marie Brisebarre, “The Sacrifice of 'Id al-kabir: Islam in the French Suburbs,” *Anthropology today* 9, no. 1 (1993): 11, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2783335>.

⁴⁸ Hammudah Abdalati, *Islam in focus* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1993), 55–58.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 58.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 28–29.

⁵¹ Solomon A. Nigosian, *Islam: Its history, teaching, and practices* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), Preface.

⁵² Van de Bruinhorst, *Raise Your Voices*, 427–429.

⁵³ Samir Ahmad, Abuznaid, “Business ethics in Islam: the glaring gap in practice,” *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 2, no. 4 (2009): 284, <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538390911006340>.

institution that is seen as they attempt to come together, to engage in solidarity within the community as is observed during the prayers and exchange of meat, to listen to and respect the elderly, especially one's parents,⁵⁴ which is reflected in the interactions during the feasts, and to show compassion to the unfortunate⁵⁵ as realised through donating a third of the sacrifice to the needy.

The sacrifice ritual is an integral part of consuming the holiday. After all, the holiday is named after it. Sacrifice – specifically *Qurban* – means performing a holy act and etymologically it is performing an act that makes one closer to God that in turn one will be beloved by God. Throughout history, sacrifice can be found as an expression of penance and humility of humans before God with the aim to avoid God's punishment, regain His favour, show love to Him, and/or answer to His will.⁵⁶

Sacrifice refers to giving up things which are valued, desired, or loved for the sake of something which is more worthy. It can be tangible and countable such as wealth, possessions, or life, and it can be intangible and immeasurable as are love and other pleasures. Sacrifice aids peace and cooperation and societies would lack cohesiveness and strength without it. The ritual offers an abundance of symbols and symbolic meanings.⁵⁷ Symbols are “storage units” filled with information that transform human behaviour and attitudes, carry meanings, and are tools for “rousing, channelling, and domesticating power emotions”.⁵⁸

Atran argues that religious rituals give validation by satisfying the emotions that motivate religious beliefs and experiences as they are often sequential, rigidly formulaic, and publicly performed, thus forging

⁵⁴ Nor, “Islam and Buddhism,” 30.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁶ Mari Jože Osredkar, “Sacrifice – The constitutional element of the human and faith relationship,” in *Sacrifice: From origins of culture to contemporary life challenges*, ed. Robert Petkovsek and Bojan Žalec (Wien and Zürich: Lit, 2019), 114.

⁵⁷ Muhammad Shoaib Khan and Anwaar Mohyuddin, “Symbolic Importance of Ritual of Sacrifice on Eid Ul Adha (Research Based Study on Satellite Town Rawalpindi),” *IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Applied, Natural and Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2013): 59, <http://www.impactjournals.us/download/archives/--1376906657-7.%20Applied-Symbolic-Anwaar%20Mohyuddin%20Copy.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Victor Turner, Roger D. Abrahams, and Alfred Harris, *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 443.

personal identity and memory according to cultural parameters. They are set by signs and displays that manipulate individual sensations and coordinate the minds and bodies of the people involved into convergent expression of public sentiment.⁵⁹

Atran states that religious offering and sacrifice always yield non-recoverable costs, yet they are emotionally arousing. He shows how sacrifice – human or animal – has always been part of religious and cultural lives of mankind where often the animal is consumed by the congregation. Religious offerings of unrecoverable costs are involved in the selection of the item and the ceremony.⁶⁰

For Eid Al-Adha, multiple ethnographic studies regarding the process of sacrifice and its timing would show how codified it is across the world. For instance, the sacrifice must meet the condition and minimum requirements prior to the act, such as minimum age and type of animal. The sacrifice is divided into three equal sections to be consumed by 1) the person who performs that sacrifice and his family, 2) the person's friends, neighbours and acquaintances, and 3) the poor and the needy, yet, not necessarily universally.⁶¹

The animal sacrifice serves as a reminder of the prophet Ebrahim's story of willingness to sacrifice his son to comply with God's order. At least once a year, Muslims recognise the importance of appreciating God's wisdom when tested in life. Moreover, the sacrifice reflects one's appreciation for God's generosity in giving the individual life, health, money, time, energy, and other resources that a person uses to have a good life. Furthermore, it is a ritual that is performed by many Muslims around the world on the same day, which promotes the sense of community.

The prime reason for Muslim sacrifices is for the will and gratitude of God who is always present and will reward the sacrifice through various and eternal ways.⁶² Moreover, God demands individuals sacrifice

⁵⁹ Atran, *In Gods We Trust*, 173.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 114–117.

⁶¹ Van de Bruinhorst, *Raise Your Voices*, 82, 417–418.

⁶² Ibid., 327.

time, which is manifest as the most precious commodity in various ways, mainly prayers.⁶³

Besides the sacrifice and Eid prayers, millions of Muslims perform the Hajj rites prior to and during the Eid Al-Adha period. Hajj (Pilgrimage) to Mecca is one of the five pillars of Islam that must be performed by all financially and physically capable adult Muslims at least once in a lifetime and the rites mainly occur from the eighth to the twelfth of the same month, *Dhu Al-Hijjah*.

Marranci describes the Muslim pilgrimage ritual.⁶⁴ Hajj is a collection of rites that recall the relationship between Ebrahim, his family and God. Each pilgrim re-enacts Ebrahim's and his wife's *Hajar's* actions according to Islamic tradition. Marranci emphasizes the symbolism revealed during it with regards to the different stages of human life. Two of the rites during Hajj involve seven circumambulations of the *Ka'ba* and seven times running back and forth between two hills near the Ka'ba – similar to what *Hajar* did in search for water for her son. The important and emotional rite of *Waqfat Arafah* occurs on the 9th of the month where pilgrims stand on the Plain of Arafah where pilgrims ask God for forgiveness for their sins. It marks the moment where the pilgrim is purified by his/her repentance. Following the travel through the mountain pass of *Muzdalifa*, pilgrims go towards the valley of *Mina* where they recall Ebrahim's rejection of Satan's lure. The pilgrims throw seven pebbles at a tall stone pillar and then an animal, usually a sheep, is sacrificed to memorialise God's substitution of sheep for Ebrahim's son. During Hajj, all pilgrims wear identical garments called *Ihram Clothing* that signifies that all Muslims submit to God, that all humans are equal despite wealth or social class, serves as a reminder that life is finite since a Muslim is buried in a similar garment, offers a symbolic value of rendering the Islamic identity visible since more than two million Muslims perform the Hajj ritual yearly, and puts the "ummah" with its different cultural traditions under one creed. Similarly, men shave their heads and women cut a fingertip-length of their locks, a matter of fundamental importance in diminishing, symbolically, one's status in

⁶³ Nigosian, *Islam*, 103.

⁶⁴ Marranci, *The Anthropology of Islam*, 25–26.

traditional social order. The change from those garments to the resumption of everyday dress and shaving mark the end of the ritual.

To summarise, the sacrifice, Eid prayers for non-pilgrims, and Hajj, are religious rites that celebrators perform and consume as symbols to submit to God's will through reliving and experiencing the story of Ebrahim.

Giving and Charity: Eideyah and Meat

Eid Al-Adha is the time for the practice of *Eideyah*, a tradition that is performed within many Muslim communities.⁶⁵ While most popular holidays involve gift exchange, Eideyah is unique because it tends to be a one-way gift from specific people (elders) to certain members (children). Despite it being a system where everybody receives *Eideyah* at one point in their lives, it still differs from other one-way gift-giving systems such as birthdays or weddings. During the latter celebrations, the person celebrating the birthday and the couple getting married receive the gifts, the receivers are then still socially obliged to give gifts for the giver's birthdays or weddings. *Eideyah* on the other hand categorizes the givers and the receivers such that some are always on the receiving end. I believe *Eideyah* practice has not received the sociological attention it deserves akin to the gift-giving practice of, say, Christmas.

There is some particularism among Muslims regarding *Eideyah* as in some traditions and societies it is a monetary gift⁶⁶, while in others, they give out candies to the children or a small symbolic gift⁶⁷ instead of cash.⁶⁸ Some would argue that a monetary gift provides the opportunity

⁶⁵ Amjad Iqbal, "Demand for New Notes for Eidi rises," *Dawn*, July 16, 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1194767/>; Shailvee Sharda, "Eidi: A tradition wrapped in emotions & nostalgia," *The Time of India*, August 9, 2013, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/Eidi-A-tradition-wrapped-in-emotions-nostalgia/articleshow/21718937.cms>; Reza Jalali, "Muslims in Maine: Eid Mubarak!," *Maine Policy Review* 24, no. 1 (2015): 159–160, <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mprr/vol24/iss1/43>.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 159–160; A. Iqbal, "Demand for New Notes."

⁶⁷ Dawood Mohammad, "ديلاقبتلا دي صرر نم قدم اص لازل ال ... ادهو فيدي عالا [Eideyah only ... Still standing from the traditions]," November 27, 2009, <https://www.albayan.ae/our-homes/2009-11-27-1.496290>.

⁶⁸ Sharda, "Eidi."

for the receivers to obtain whatever they want.⁶⁹ In some societies, *Eideyah* is not exclusively a gift from elders to children since it can also be given to the mother, sister, aunts, grandfathers, and grandmothers.⁷⁰ Moreover, the gift-giving process during Eid reinforces values similar to those of other gift-giving rites, such as solidarity and kinship.

Eideyah is an important ritual during the celebrations. Rituals are opportunities to “affirm, evoke, assign, or revise the conventional symbols and meaning of the cultural order”⁷¹ and they are powerful tools to manipulate cultural meaning. The earlier image of researchers seeing gift-giving as a form of economic exchange has been transferred to the perspective of symbolic exchange to emphasise social bonds and may be guided by unselfish factors.⁷² Other studies argue that it is a form of social expression.⁷³ The Eideyah ritual is full of symbolic meanings such as unselfishness, generosity, sense of community and belonging, care for family institution, and special attention to children. Moreover, the uniqueness of the ritual and the “categories” of the givers and receivers express the identity of the participants.

Sherry breaks down gift-giving into three stages. The first step is *gestation*, where an event motivates the giver to obtain the gift which may be *structural* (prescribed by culture) or *emergent* (personal decision and idiosyncratic). The second stage is *prestation*, during which the recipient reacts to the gift and the giver evaluates this reaction. The third is *reformulation*, where the bonds are adjusted to mirror the new relationship emerging between the giver and the receiver. The second stage determines the third either positively or negatively.⁷⁴ The routinisation

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Mohammad, “Eideyah Only.”

⁷¹ Grant McCracken, “Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods,” *Journal of consumer research* 13, no. 1 (1986): 78, <https://doi.org/10.1086/209048>.

⁷² Tina M. Lowrey, Cele C. Otnes, and Julie A. Ruth, “Social influences on dyadic giving over time: A taxonomy from the giver’s perspective,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 30, no. 4 (2004): 555–557, <https://doi.org/10.1086/380288>.

⁷³ Russell W. Belk and Gregory S. Coon, “Gift giving as agapic love: An alternative to the exchange paradigm based on dating experiences,” *Journal of consumer research* 20, no. 3 (1993): 410–411, <https://doi.org/10.1086/209357>.

⁷⁴ John F. Sherry Jr, “Gift giving in anthropological perspective,” *Journal of consumer research* 10, no. 2 (1983): 164–165, <https://doi.org/10.1086/208956>.

of the process of *Eideyah*, especially the monetary type, is structural and leaves little room for surprises unless the giver decides to offer greater amounts than usual. Therefore, the reaction would be the same yearly. The relationships are affirmed between the givers and receivers. Interestingly though, the amounts that a giver gives could differ according to recipients' "needs", their financial situation, and age.⁷⁵ For instance, a teenager or an unemployed adult would "need" a higher amount of money than a six-year-old. The more ethnographic accounts are written, the more we can engage in comparative studies regarding what type of *Eideyah* is given in different societies, who tend to be the givers and who the receivers, and the societal and cultural values that the process constructs.

Mauss⁷⁶ reveals that moral obligations and construction of social bonds are main elements and reasons for gift exchanges, the gifts indicating social relationships and classifications. This naturally entails the loss of economic value to secure social value for the individual or group. The animal sacrifice for Eid Al-Adha is divided into thirds, in most cases, with the majority of the meat given to acquaintances, the poor, and the needy. This promotes numerous cultural values. Firstly, it brings neighbours and distant people together, constructing the importance of having good relationship with the rest of the society. Secondly, it encourages sharing and generosity. Thirdly, it is a reminder that charity helps enhance the life of the poor. This yearly occasion can turn into regular charity through contact with people in need.

It must be noted that *Eideyah* is also practiced during *Eid Al-Fitr*, however, Eid Al-Adha is marked by the sacrifice and unique due to the Hajj season.

Patience is Rewarded: Abundant Homemade Feasting

In the case of Eid, one of the rewards for being patient is the opportunity to indulge abundantly in life's pleasures, mainly food, drinks,

⁷⁵ Paltoday, "ما هي علة عيد عي؟ [What is the origin of Eideyah in Eid?]," August 19, 2012, <https://paltoday.ps/ar/post/144797/>.

⁷⁶ Marcel Mauss, *The gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* (London: Routledge, 2002), 83–107.

and social time. Many Muslims fast⁷⁷, save money⁷⁸, and go for wardrobe shopping⁷⁹ long before the event in preparation. Many observe Arafah Day through fasting that is followed by feasting on Eid Day, creating a meaningful sequential structure⁸⁰.

Martens and Warde state that scholarly work in sociology of dining is virtually non-existent at both the level of friends' homes and the extended families'. The authors find that the occasions are often not bound by a set of rules and conduct, but there are several forms of improvisation that either involve less effort for the host(ess), such as using home delivery services and supermarket meals, a communal effort, with each person bringing a course, or the service becoming a collective performance between the guests and the host(ess).⁸¹ In the Eid Al-Adha feast, it is common to find the collective effort in which the guests bring along some dishes and sweets, while the host(ess) cooks the main dish that features the meat from the sacrifice. On the other hand, it is actually rude to bring any sort of food to the host(ess)'s house in some cultures.⁸²

Moreover, celebrators would describe the food within the feast as being fresh, traditional, local, and "homemade," or "made from scratch".⁸³ Similar emic descriptions regarding Thanksgiving Day may be found.⁸⁴ However, in some cases during Eid the meat may not be local, the rice may be imported, and side dishes may simply just be "transformed at home". Consumers of Eid Al-Adha would argue that "as long as you put an effort in it and prepare at home, then it is homemade".

⁷⁷ Van de Bruinhorst, *Raise Your Voices*, 171.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 328.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 174.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 171.

⁸¹ Lydia Martens and Alan Warde, "Power and resistance around the dinner table," in *Consuming Cultures: power and resistance*, ed. Jeff Hearn and Sasha Rosenei (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1999), 92–106.

⁸² Elizabeth Devine and Nancy L. Braganti, *The Travelers' Guide to Asian Customs and Manners* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 142–194.

⁸³ Elizabeth C. Hirschman, Ayalla A. Ruvi, and Mourad Touzani, "Breaking bread with Abraham's children: Christians, Jews and Muslims' holiday consumption in dominant, minority and diasporic communities," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 39, no. 3 (2011): 439–441, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-010-0209-2>.

⁸⁴ Wallendorf and Arnould, "We Gather Together," 27–29.

The main dish is usually prepared at home. However, many of the side dishes, snacks, and drinks may be obtained from supermarkets and transformed by either removing the packaging and serving them on a plate or just combining several purchased elements together. For example, hummus and bread are sides that are often found during the feast in some Arab Muslim homes, and both may be made at home in certain households, especially in the Levant; but they also may be bought from supermarkets and bakeries. However, they could not be served in their original packaging. They are served on plates at home and may simply have olive oil added on top of the hummus. Salads are an example of combining elements, where the ingredients are bought and then simply cut and put together to be served in a bowl. Moreover, in some cultures, recipes have an element of secrecy to them as they are passed through generations and are rarely shared outside the immediate family.⁸⁵ Ethnographic accounts would reveal the particularism reflected among households even within the same sociocultural context studied.

In short, Eid Al-Adha consumers feast abundantly in social settings and go through great efforts to have the feast prepared and consumed at home. This gives the special sense to the holiday, marks it as unique from the rest of the days in the year, and gives participants the experience of reward for their patience and hard work throughout the year.

The Sacred and the Mundane

It would be interesting to investigate what the consumers of Eid Al-Adha consider as sacred within the celebrations and what is mundane. Sacred does not have to be religious in this case. Sacred in this context would mean the things and actions that the participants view as integral elements of the celebrations, the elements without which Eid celebrations are not complete. The mundane in this context are the things that tend to exist during Eid; yet, their absence would not really have an impact on the overall experience.

⁸⁵ Peter Heine, *Food culture in the Near East, Middle East, and North Africa* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 62.

During Eid, people do not go to work in Muslim-majority countries, which gives necessary time for visitations. The main aspect of the holiday is the social settings. Gatherings can be seen as the most sacred. Whether it is at the mosque for prayers, breakfast with the nuclear family, visiting distant acquaintances, feasting with the extended family, or going out in the evening with friends, the holiday could not be considered a “proper” one without the social gatherings. Various ethnographic accounts would showcase whether the social aspects are considered the most sacred among the holiday consumers, how they rank those social settings in term of sacredness, and the particularism reflected in those rankings in different contexts.

There is the “giving” aspect of the holiday. *Eideyah* plus giving out money and/or the meat to the needy make Eid special for givers and receivers. Some donate clothes to the poor as they see that as an important component of the holiday since one would not really feel that it is Eid unless they were wearing festive clothes⁸⁶.

Naturally, the religious aspects of the holiday are seen as essential. The prayers and the sacrifice are the backbones of the celebrations.

When it comes to food, abundance and variety are important in order to feel that the Day is special, and single it out from the rest of the year. Most families would have specific Eid dishes that otherwise would not be cooked or served. However, those dishes differ across households. Many would say that the food has to be local and “traditional”. It would be interesting to see if ethnography reveals that consuming “foreign” food such as pizza or burgers during the Eid main feast may be considered a “sin”.

Dishes and side dishes which are also prepared throughout the year can be seen as mundane. People may even attempt to refrain from eating them during the feast since they “can eat them anytime they want”. Moreover, the societies that go out in the evenings of the holiday to places such as restaurants, coffee shops, cinemas, etc., may do so less as they grow older in order to avoid traffic and crowds. Would they prefer to gather at someone’s place and either get food delivered, pick it up

⁸⁶ Van de Bruinhorst, *Raise Your Voices*, 174.

from restaurants, and/or consume the leftovers of the feast since the main point for doing so is to socialise?

Local Identity Expression (Particularism):
Clothing, Foods, Ritual and Practices

Muslims share the same religion, yet it would be naïve to assume that all their practices are identical since many factors affect those practices – especially the local culture. In CCT, the authors discuss Consumer Identity Projects being the ways consumers create a coherent self by utilising market-produced materials.⁸⁷ There is wide agreement within social sciences that people wear clothes as a statement of identity.⁸⁸ As mentioned earlier, many participants of Eid wear their traditional local attire which are newly acquired while they strive to be dressed their best to mark the special day. The traditional clothing is a statement of one's identity. During Eid, they are statements of national and cultural identities as local style of clothing differ across societies and communities.

Moreover, there is an emphasis on being well-groomed and “smelling good”. Going to barbershops to get a haircut and a fresh trim among men, and going to a hair salon to prepare for the holiday by women, are common practices in many societies hours before the Day, with many women getting Henna as part of their hair-salon ritual (for instance, in Bangladesh).⁸⁹ Many Arabs utilise the traditional *oud*⁹⁰ and/or *bukhoor*⁹¹ to smell good.⁹² This adds to the “special” feeling of the holiday that expresses the consumers' local identity.

⁸⁷ Arnould and Thompson, “Consumer Culture Theory (CCT),” 871–73.

⁸⁸ Fred Davis, *Fashion, culture, and identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 3–5.

⁸⁹ Nadia Tasnim Piya, “Cultural festivals those have an enormous impact on the fashion industry of Bangladesh,” *International Journal of Advance Research, Ideas and Innovations in Technology* 4, no. 5 (2018): 573–576, <https://www.ijariit.com/manuscript/cultural-festivals-those-have-an-enormous-impact-on-the-fashion-industry-of-bangladesh/>.

⁹⁰ Also called agarwood: a scent.

⁹¹ Incense.

⁹² Rosdalina Bukido and Laila F. Bamastraf, “The Acculturation of Local Culture and Arabic Culture in Manado of North Sulawesi,” in *International Conference on Ethics in Governance (ICONEG 2016)* (Paris: Atlantis Press, 2016), 184.

The same applies to food since what is eaten is part of one's identity. The fact that consumers would emphasise that the food and drink consumed during the Day must be traditional, local, and fresh reflects the notion that the holiday celebration is a marker of identity. They see that consuming the holiday as "traditionally" as possible is what makes the holiday special. For instance, some Arabs would even go camping in the desert and feast there as part of their celebrations due to their heritage as nomads.

There are practices and rituals that are connected to the holiday which are only local or regional. The *Heya Beya* is an example of that. This ritual is observed in Gulf countries such as Kuwait and Bahrain and is part of their folklore.⁹³ It is a small basket made out of palm leaves that holds plants such as wheat or barley which are planted weeks before Eid and hung around the house to grow. It is a children's activity – they water it every morning. On Arafah Day, children wearing their traditional dresses go with the family to the beach, wave the plant around while singing a specific chant before tossing the plant into the sea. The chant and the entire ritual are prayers to God to make Eid a happy holiday and to bring back the ones who travelled to Hajj safe, healthy, and with gifts for them. The ritual is a social activity that teaches children patience, care for belongings and others, and sacrifice. These are the same values that Eid Al-Adha constructs for adults. Moreover, being part of the local folklore with traditional elements, *Heya Beya* is a mean of local, national, and cultural expression of identity during a religious holiday.

Conclusion

This paper argues the need for more ethnographic research exploring the meanings and values that Muslims construct and express as parts of their identities. Muslim holidays, especially Eid Al-Adha, are under-researched from the point of view of what Muslims do and say

⁹³ Daily Tribune, "Heya Beya: Children learn joy of giving," *The Daily Tribune: News of Bahrain*, September 13, 2016, accessed July 2, 2020, <https://www.newsofbahrain.com/bahrain/24952.html>.

rather than what the scriptures and scholars say. The paper discusses the meanings of Eid Al-Adha that members of the community may associate with the holiday as part of their collective and individual identities. It showcases how identity and values are (re)constructed through consuming holidays. Moreover, it argues that extensive ethnographic research in different contexts would reveal the particularism among the “imagined community” which defies orientalist and essentialist points of views.

I believe that the most promising research questions in the future revolve around ethnographic accounts discussing sociocultural issues regarding the consumption of the holiday. Examples include, but are not limited to a) the particularism in practices such as *Eideyah* and the values it constructs in different contexts; b) the experiences and perceptions of the celebrators themselves, such as the positive and negative feelings they associate with the holiday and what they consider as sacred and mundane; and c) how the celebrations change, what aspects of them remain, and the challenges faced once an immigrant moves from a society where the majority celebrate a certain holiday to one where the majority do not.

When it comes to the Muslim identity, Marranci discusses one potential reason for the academic interest in it being recent. Social scientists initially were “too busy” attempting to investigate the way “Islam creates Muslims”. Only around the 1990s did research on Muslim identity fully develop in an effort to understand western-born Muslims. Still, social scientists have “privileged the *outside* perspective”.⁹⁴ Therefore, ethnographic research of Muslims from the *inside* perspective is required to describe the meanings expressed as parts of their identities.

The celebration of Eid Al-Adha is a collective ritual which celebrates material and spiritual abundance that is enacted through sacrificing, gift-giving (*Eideyah*), collective prayers, social gatherings, and feasting. Through consumption, basic needs are met abundantly, culture is expressed, and identity is constructed. Identity construction during Eid does not stop at that. The collective prayers are a way to consume the religious aspect of the holiday. The family and friends gathering is to

⁹⁴ Marranci, *The Anthropology of Islam*, 95.

consume the social side. The *Eideyah* and including the poor are parts of the charitable nature of the religion and culture. Hence, consumers not only construct their identity through market-produced material, but also through consuming spirituality and social settings.

The rituals of sacrificing, fasting, and praying affirm the religious identities of participants as Muslims. Consuming food, gatherings, and respecting the elderly while caring for offspring reflect societal values. Wearing traditional dresses and styles, eating local food, and celebrating by folklore are statements of national and cultural identities.

This paper contributes to our understanding of Muslims' consumer behaviour and how they utilise ritual consumption to construct their identity. It explores how the holiday is consumed to reflect the celebrators' religious identity, their most significant values, such as family, charity, sacrifice, and patience, what they consider as sacred, and how they may differ individually while being collectively Muslims. It shows how traditions may endure, to remain unchanged while creativity and change occurs when allowed.

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