The 21st Century
New Muslim Generation

Converts in Britain and Germany

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as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies

October 2012
Abstract

The dissertation focuses on the conversion experiences and individual processes of twenty-four native British Muslim converts and fifty-two native German Muslim converts, based on personal interviews and completed questionnaires between 2008 and 2010. It analyses the occurring similarities and differences among British and German Muslim converts, and puts them into relation to basic Islamic requirements of the individual, and in the context of their respective social settings. Accordingly, the primary focus is placed on the changing behavioural norms in the individual process of religious conversion concerning family and mixed-gender relations and the converts’ attitudes towards particularly often sensitive and controversial topics.

My empirical research on this phenomenon was guided by many research questions, such as: What has provoked the participants to convert to Islam, and what impact and influence does their conversion have on their (former and primarily) non-Muslim environment? Do Muslim converts tend to distance themselves from their former lifestyles and change their social behavioural patterns, and are the objectives and purposes that they see themselves having in the given society directed to them being: bridge-builders or isolators?

The topic of conversion to Islam, particularly within Western non-Muslim societies is a growing research phenomenon. At the same time, there has only been little contribution to the literature that deals with comparative analyses of Muslim converts in different countries. This dissertation is based on the conversion research methods by Wohlrarb-Sahr (1999) and Zebiri (2008), and further concentrates on the acute challenges and personal understandings of Muslim converts regarding cultural, religious, and moral changes, changes in belief and adoption of religious practices as well as social relations. Dissatisfaction with the former faith or given social norms, the appeal of the Muslim tenets, the search for identity and the desire to have a sense of belonging included the participants’ motivation for conversion. Taking the former into consideration enabled the result of providing a personal, lively yet rational insight into the lives of British and German Muslim converts.
Acknowledgments

This dissertation was prepared under the supervision of Professor Robert Gleave and Professor Sajjad Rizvi, to whom I am very grateful for their assistance, guidance and advice throughout the entire research. Particularly Professor Robert Gleave’s comments and criticisms on my research methods and draft copies greatly facilitated my work. I would like to express my gratitude to both of them for encouraging me to select and proceed with this dissertation topic.

I am thankful to my proof-readers Mrs. Sara Wilkinson and Mr. Mike Rose-Steel for their unfailing dedication, continuous enthusiasm, and generous feedback, and numerous colleagues and fellow Ph.D. students, particularly from the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, for their advice, assistance, interest in my research, and won friendships.

Special thanks are due to all the participants involved who have allowed me to enter their lives and to share their experiences and insights which made this dissertation possible. None of this work could have happened without their help, time and hospitality. It has been a rewarding learning experience for me. I am unable to list all of the benefactors who have contributed to this research, but I am endlessly grateful for every person who has directly and indirectly been involved.

I would like to give my greatest thanks to my husband for his continuous encouragement, pushing me past limits I had not known without him, enlightening conversations, and always being there for me.

And finally, I would like to thank God for the given challenges, opportunities and learning experiences.

As a small token of gratitude, I would like to dedicate this research study to all those who express flexibility in their attitudes towards others, especially when it comes to cultural and religious diversity.

“The fear of difference is a source of hate. However, difference is supposed to be a source of enrichment.”
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List of Abbreviations

AMJ: Ahmadiyyah Muslim Jamaat: Community of Ahmadiyyah Muslims
CE: Common Era
DITIB: Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği (Turkish), Die Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion e.V. (German), Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs
EU: European Union
FCC: Federal Constitutional Court
FOSIS: Federation of the Students Islamic Societies in the UK & Eire
GDR: German Democratic Republic
IGMG: Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüs/ German Islamic Community
IR: Islam Rat/ Islam Council
ISB: Islamic Society of Britain
IZ: Islamische Zeitung/ Islamic Newspaper
KRD: Koordinierungsrat der Muslime in Deutschland
MR: Moslemische Revue/ Muslim Review
NGO: Non-governmental organisation
NRW: New Religious Movement
PI: Politically Incorrect/ German-language political blog (immigration, multiculturalism, Islam in Germany)
SOAS: London School of Oriental and African Studies
STD: Sexually Transmitted Diseases
UK: United Kingdom
VIKZ: Verband Islamische Kultur Zentren/
ZMD: Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland/

Central Council of Muslims in Germany
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Although this study is an academic piece of work, it carries significant religious contents, and thus out of deference towards other Muslims and the respect they have for the Prophet Muhammad, using the term ‘peace be upon him’ whenever the Prophet Muhammad* is mentioned to convey this respect. Sometimes this is abbreviated as PBUH, yet, I have chosen to use an asterisk (*) instead.
Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. British and German Muslim converts: Alike or different?

Conversion to Islam is a complex phenomenon in modern Western society. Men and women choose Islam as an alternative lifestyle, to give their lives reason and meaning, and oftentimes in order to protect them from particular social habits and behaviour which they cannot identify themselves with. Although, Britain and Germany are Western-European countries, they offer different cultural and social settings which make them unique, and therefore converts to Islam in each country individually portray and demonstrate their national and religious identity in an intriguing manner. This dissertation will primarily focus on a set of personal interviews with Muslim converts in both Britain and Germany. The analysis of their adoption of Islam as a personal religious choice reveals an insight into the many changes and adaptations in their everyday life, e.g. the adoption of specific religious regulations, the reactions experienced towards the conversion within their immediate environment, behavioural changes towards the opposite sex, and provocative opinions on particular sensitive topics concerning sexuality. The evaluation of these aspects will address similarities and differences in the religious practice and understanding between British and German Muslim converts, their individual interpretations of religious incorporation, their self-perception in the light of Islam, and the perceptions they report about their families and friends. Consequently, the description will offer a factual, yet personal analysis of how similar yet again different British and German Muslim converts may be perceived and can be understood.

As the number of converts to Islam in Western-European society is growing, it is significant to take this phenomenon into consideration since this means that Muslim converts are and will be involved in the participation, change and formation of future society, and are thus influencing its social, cultural, religious as well as political conduct (Kern, 2012). Converts to Islam are a very distinct minority group within a minority religion, in a largely non-Muslim society; they play a particular role as mediators between the Muslim community as well as the non-Muslim community, an area which has academically only been partially examined. Although studies on Muslim converts exist, most of them refer to converts within one particular country; there are nearly no existing cross-national comparative studies, exploring whether the process of
conversion to Islam offers similarities or differences in the adoption or rejection of certain religious habits and interpretations, perhaps because Islam is often perceived as being culturally independent – separated from individual national cultures - and homogenous. It does not, however, demonstrate the current image: that Islam is enriched through the diversity of people of different cultures, nations and backgrounds.

Dealing with Islam as a Western-European Muslim convert and academic researcher currently seems like a minefield, not only in the debate with non-Muslims, but particularly within the intra-Islamic debating culture. On the one hand, there is a clash of cultures, a tension fraught with social misunderstandings and impasses, and on the other hand there are pre-existing intra-Islamic debating conflicts which in recent years have become part of the public debate. To lead an objective and scientifically neutral discourse is often hindered by individual religious, social and even political influences and personal experiences. Researchers stepping into this field will have to acknowledge that their research may not remain neutral as they themselves are influenced through their environment and in particular the on-going debating culture they are surrounded by. Any person committed to this dialogue will consequently portray a particular direction of thought which can involuntarily be incorporated into any academic study, no matter how neutral and scientific the researcher aspires to be.

In light of these concerns, this dissertation will attempt to explore British and German Muslim converts in the light of their personal conversion processes and changes that subsequently have occurred after embracing Islam. It will demonstrate the hurdles it had to overcome during the course of its development since various reactions reflect the sensitivity of researching the field of conversion to Islam. The phenomenon of Western-European socialised persons converting to Islam is only one aspect of contention amongst many present conflicts concerning Islam and Muslims because conversion to Islam is still primarily perceived with scepticism and misconceptions - not only among non-Muslims, but also increasingly among born Muslims.

The tendencies that research of this type can arouse became clear to me in the extremely detailed critical reviews of this project and its subject I have received.
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Amongst the expected concerns of such a sociological project which will be addressed in more detail in section 1.4., it became perceptible that there was a conflict between the researcher (myself a German Muslim female convert) and the possibility of obtaining honest responses from interviewees who were free from the influence of my role as a researcher. A significant aspect is that the researcher’s personal involvement in the object of study is both permissible and of value to the research process. Accordingly, these aspects combined inspired the initial research questions. It was subsequently my personal experience that influenced the choice of comparing Britain and Germany, two countries in which I have gained sufficient personal experiences that have provided me with an understanding towards the viewpoints of Muslim converts within each cultural context.

Devout researchers will be influenced by their religious motivation, and thus have to maintain a distinction between neutral questioning, academic research, and their personal religious influences. Therefore, a principle challenge of this study has been to conduct it in a professional, scientific, non-religious manner. There is little doubt that the fact that I am a German Muslim convert has affected the tenor of this thesis, not from a standpoint of personal opinion, but from one of access. As such I was able to gain greater extraordinary insights than if I had been a non-Muslim or born Muslim researcher. This interesting dimension concerning the relationship between the research subject and researcher should not be overlooked. Yet, in the case of this particular project, the research objective was to gain qualitative, individual descriptions of personal experiences rather than solely collecting quantitative data.

There are only a small number of thorough academic studies on converts to Islam, and even fewer of cross-national comparative design when it comes to reasons for conversion and adopting Islamic practices. There seems to be a general lack of study as to whether there has been adequate scientific examination in the process of conversion to Islam, resulting in a clear presentation of facts accumulated through

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1 Although there had been challenges and initial scepticism, it was easier for me to gain trust and access into the community of Muslim converts than this would have been for a non-Muslim researcher. There would also have been challenges if the researcher had been a born Muslim, however as a Muslim convert, similarities and common interests made it for me more easily accessible in order to win Muslim converts to participate in this project.
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fieldwork and theoretical research. Hence, this study’s essential background includes not only the reasons for conversion and integration of particular Islamic practices into everyday life but also offers unique insights on the personalised opinions regarding critical aspects within the religion itself, and how they are incorporated into the individuals’ religious context. This study is designed to serve as an eye-opener in order to question and change the seemingly on-going clichés about Muslim converts, and to demonstrate that this minority-within-a-minority (Brice, 2011) has a significant impact on the development of a future Western-European society. The British and German participants’ answers will be comparatively evaluated and their similarities and differences demonstrated so that a current image of Muslim converts in both countries can be obtained more accurately.

The current debates about Islam have turned the religion and its adherents into an on-going topic in the media; therefore, Islam is more than a present realistic alternative of religious conversion. Since World War II, conversions to other religions in Europe have been a persistent phenomenon. Although, no specific figures for this particular phenomenon as a whole exist, there are more conversions to Islam today than there had been in the late 19th and early 20th century. However, if one only relates conversions to Islam to famous public figures, one would be surprised that these numbers are barely noticed in current statistics of which none can be accepted as an official reference. Significantly, prominent or politically motivated converts to Islam only entail a tiny proportion of the real sum of converts to Islam. This factor was also a motivation for choosing participants for this study who have embraced Islam for personal not public reasons. The thesis focuses on Muslim converts who are not in the public eye, nonetheless a number of public figures who have converted to Islam will be addressed since some have influenced participants to think about becoming Muslim.

Selecting a religion and converting to it tends to derive from a conscious subjective choice. And herein lies the difference between the convert and the person who has been subject to a religion since birth. In certain denominations of Christianity,

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2 I am not counting enforced conversions. An example would be Jews who were often subjected to this enforced religious procedure in Medieval Europe. However, this is not relevant to this study.
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such as pietism, this conscious enactment of teaching is also called a ‘second birth.’ It is essential to note that the intensity of religious practice accords to the individual convert him- or herself; this study indicates, no convert practices the religion identically to another convert. If a religious experience was motivating enough – conditions which can also be individually different - then this could lead to the phenomenon of conversion. This also means, that the convert may create a version of Islamic theology that accords with (and may be approved of by) the surrounding society, insofar as this interpretation fits and reflects the convert’s perception and requirements. Equally, though, such a version may be critically received, and perhaps seen as bid’ah by traditional Muslims who view a reformation of the religion as a sin.

A convert faces both enhanced possibilities and potential challenges within a largely non-Muslim society. On the one hand, he or she holds a contradictory position between containment and dissociation denied to anyone within his or her birth religion since the convert can provide a bridge between two cultures and religions. On the other hand, the convert may remain an outsider among born Muslims as well as among non-Muslims, since in most cases he or she will have no family members who are born Muslim, and is thus exposed to other social and cultural influences which he or she needs to apply to the newly adopted religion. It is particularly this fact that forms the basis of criticism by those born into the Muslim faith and community which often results in giving Muslim converts a difficult time in becoming a part of their Muslim community without losing his or her own identity. Even more important is the idea of the family and its role as a safety net which a Muslim family often seems to embody which cannot be understood by outsiders, as often a Muslim convert discontinues his or her contact with non-Muslim family members, whether as a result of his or her own account or by choice of the relatives.

Comparing Britain with Germany, Islam does not inhabit the same status or image. Although, the history of Islam in both countries dates back many centuries, the religion and its adherents have been encountered differently in each country. Accordingly, the attitudes towards Muslims and Islam in each country will influence Muslim converts in multiple ways because they create their own Islamic lifestyle and habitat according to their known environment and what is offered to them. Whereas
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Britain seems to have managed to include Muslims in social, cultural and political affairs from the beginning, and thus incorporating and integrating Muslims into the British lifestyle, German politics have tended to separate ‘foreign’ Muslims from the German non-Muslim majority society, and thus not enabling a mix of common cultural and religious habits.\(^3\) The outcome is that converts in each country are attracted to Islam through different means and as a result, they adopt the religion according to the present possibilities. I will discuss this idea in detail later; nonetheless, it is necessary to mention that while British Muslim converts seem to mix their British identity equally with their religious identity, German Muslim converts tend to prefer to be recognized as Muslims rather than through their nationality. This is only one of the many differences between British and German converts to Islam that the dissertation has been able to verify.

1.2. The Research Question

This dissertation focuses on the conversion experiences and changes undergone by British and German Muslim converts, particularly with regard to their process of adopting the faith, adapting to Islamic regulations, stating their opinions about specific religious obligations, demonstrating the conflicts and challenges they have (had) with their families and friends due to their conversion, their changing behaviour towards the opposite sex and their attitudes regarding controversial subjects, such as polygamy, circumcision, homosexuality and more. The analysis offers a personal, yet, individual and factual description of how the participants react in terms of being asked about practicing their choice of religion. This information provides a critical evaluation which simultaneously includes a multi-faceted comparison on the understanding and practice of Islam in a cross-national and cross-sectional setting.

Converts to Islam are exposed to positive and negative reactions from their non-Muslim but also Muslim environment, hence their actions and changes of lifestyle are not only critically watched by the non-Muslim environment but also closely observed by the Muslim community. Embracing Islam not only includes a change in the

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\(^3\) This is a very rough and basic perception which will be refined and supported in Chapter 4.
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individual’s life history, social surroundings and personal relations but is also determined by the religion itself since the convert will be confronted with the faith in a more contextualized and accentuated manner than prior to conversion. Accordingly, this will influence their corresponding answers which will be addressed throughout the dissertation.

There are several objectives of this research: The first is to collect and record the conversion experiences of the participants involved; the second is to connect the conversion experiences of the British and German convert participants with one another, in order to analyse whether or not there are occurring similarities or differences in the conversion processes among British and German Muslim converts; and the third is to demonstrate answers for the following questions: What has provoked them to convert to Islam, and what kind of impact and influence does their conversion have on their former (primarily) non-Muslim environment? Regarding the adherence of religious regulations, what trends are emerging and how much does the change of lifestyle affect the Muslim converts themselves and their respective immediate environment? Do Muslim converts tend to distance themselves from their former lifestyles and change their social behavioural patterns? And what objective and purpose do they see themselves be in society: as bridge-builders or isolators?

1.3. Scientific approach to religious conversion

Religious conversion involves different definitions and understandings, as these vary according to the scholar or researcher who has formulated or is formulating a definition. Most definitions derive from conversion researchers with an anthropological scholarly background. Extensive research has been conducted on Muslims living in non-Muslim (mostly Western) societies; however, fewer extensive studies have been done on the phenomenon of conversion to Islam. Empirical research of the determinants of religious conversion are also typically focused on persons within a single country, and thus analytical cross-national studies on conversion to a particular faith are rare.
Introduction

Lofland and Stark (1965) specified the convert seeing himself as “becoming a world-saver”, which in the context of converts to Islam may relate to a small number of converts who connect their conversion with “making the world a better place”. The ‘world-saver’ model was unique in its combination of traditional ideas with contemporary issues in this field of research. The basic elements of the model involve three predisposing characteristics (possession of religious rhetoric and problem-solving perspectives, perception of long-term stress, and self-definition as a religious seeker) and four situational factors (1. reaching a “turning point” when existing actions no longer work, 2. development of affectionate ties between pre-converts and group members, 3. weakening affectionate ties with non-group members, and 4. intensive interaction with group members).

Lofland and Skonovd (1981) developed a descriptive typology of religious conversion, offering six conversion motifs which seem to have been sufficient for several researchers on the conversion to Islam. These include intellectual motifs, mystical motifs, experimental motifs, affectional motifs, revivalist motifs, and coercive motifs (Lofland and Skonovd, 1981). Their work demonstrated that conversion takes place within a historical-cultural context in which geographical location was often a significant factor. Gartrell and Shannon (1985:32) extended the framework by observing that “conversion hinges on actors’ perceptions of the expected rewards of converting relative to not converting”. Thus, they applied a rational choice approach to the descriptive setting of Lofland and Skonovd (1981).

According to Rambo, social scientific approaches to religion tend to be theory-based and analytical, carrying the risk of not taking the religious or spiritual aspects of the conversion seriously (Rambo, 1993). Accordingly, the desire for transcendence is rarely acknowledged as a motivating factor, although this is often stressed in the converts’ own descriptions of their experiences. This will be noticeable when reading the participants’ statements throughout this dissertation. Rambo feels that the presiding and overwhelming psychoanalytic literature on conversion has often determined religious conversion to be a ‘pathological phenomenon, with the convert as the passive agent’ (Rambo, 1993:10-11). Almost all researches on religious conversion have been conducted without or with very little reference to the conversion to Islam which seems
to represent a modern and growing phenomenon, particularly in Western non-Muslim societies.

Moreover, researchers who have concentrated on conversion to Islam have found little assistance, e.g. empirical data of existing materials on religious conversion. Rambo’s *Understanding Religious Conversion* has been found to be more helpful for understanding conversion to Islam even though it does not contain details of conversion to Islam but rather its contents offer insight on the phenomenon of religious conversion in an open and reflective manner. His ‘seven stages of religious conversion’ include ‘context; crisis; quest; encounter; interaction; commitment; and consequences’ (Rambo, 1993).

According to Wohlrarb-Sahr (1999), this requires two frames: The first frame is determined through the initial position of those who convert to Islam, that is, through their life history, their social environment and their link to those who introduce Islam into their given context. This particular frame may lead to the decision of conversion since the decision is based upon the contents and context of this frame, and thus the person within this frame will react accordingly. The second frame is determined by Islam itself, depending on how the convert individually makes this encounter in which it resembles a specifically contextualised and accentuated framework. Here, Islam is represented by born Muslims and/or other converts to Islam as well as the less mutable characteristics, such as decisions and traditions, and thus has particular social, cultural and historical connotations. Wohlrarb-Sahr states that “the subject of conversion to Islam cannot be adequately captured without taking both frames into account” (Wohlrarb-Sahr, 1999:20). Neither side is arbitrary: neither the background against which the conversion to Islam is taking place nor the new frontier of Islam by which the converts enter. Considering these conditions, this study demonstrates that the conversion of British and Germans to Islam, despite many similarities, tends to differ in practice due to their different social, cultural and historical backgrounds and settings.

According to Van Nieuwkerk (2006), there are certain points that make conversion to Islam attractive today. Some people search for a spiritual meaning in life which capitalism is not able to provide them with, whereas others seek stability which a
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Muslim lifestyle seems to be able to offer, with clear and simple rituals and regulations to follow. There are clear rules on dress codes and dietary habits, and the different social roles ascribed to men and women give a straightforward idea of which tasks are to be fulfilled by which gender. Van Nieuwkerk believes that Islam attracts people in Western-European society as a way to react against the social, political and sexualized chaos within a so-called non-Muslim society, and the conflicting demands forced on men and women within this social and cultural context (Van Nieuwkerk, 2006:102ff).

Since the conversion itself is an on-going process which continues long after the initial commitment, i.e. speaking the šahādah, it has to be noted that this dissertation concerns itself only with the conversion process after the commitment has been made, albeit some questions refer to the pre-conversion period. While the practicalities of arranging a study of this type naturally meant that participants were already converts, it is essential to bear in mind that the research demonstrates that conversion as an on-going process which neither begins nor culminates in the official commitment to the faith. For this reason, some of the questions posed relate to convert’s experiences and opinions before conversion, while others focus on their experiences since the conversion.

Converts tend to describe their conversion in personal, though mostly positive terms, referring to the already mentioned transcendence, explaining this move as a process of spiritual enlightenment in which most were guided by God or a ‘God’s advocate’ (Rambo, 1993:66). This experience is naturally not accessible to non-converts or to systematic study, meaning that the psychological, social and cultural elements that influence the process of religious conversion are rather readily available, and in that sense a unique object of study. Researchers who are not personally religiously motivated may conduct their research in a more academic and scientific than religious manner and may seek secular conclusions.

4 Consequently, a brief biography of each participant has been included as an appendix, allowing the reader to become more familiar with the participants’ individual backgrounds and conversion processes, placing their statements within the relevant contexts.
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1.4. Contributions to the field of conversion to Islam in Britain and Germany

The phenomenon of conversion to Islam has attracted much attention in academic as well as social literature during recent times; however, the former only offers a limited number of sources that are sufficiently well focused, designed and regarded to count as significant contributions to this particular field of study. Although, the number of case studies has increased over recent years, the participation of converts to Islam or conversion to Islam being a vital part of them, seem to remain noticed on a rather smaller scale.

There have been various biographies of converts to Islam, of which some are historical, such as Islam in Victorian Britain: The Life and Times of Abdullah Quilliam (Geaves, 2010) and Günther Windhager’s Leopold Weiß alias Muhammad Asad. Von Galizien nach Arabien 1900-1927 (Windhager, 2008), and other more contemporary works, such as Welcome to Islam: A Convert’s Tale (Bushill-Matthews, 2008) and Anja Hilscher’s Imageproblem: Das Bild vom bösen Islam und meine bunte muslimische Welt (Hilscher, 2012).

The probably most significant contributions made in qualitative research on converts to Islam in the UK are the following:7

Conversion to Islam: A study of native British converts (Köse, 1996); Understanding the Stages of Conversion to Islam: The voices of British converts (Al-Qwidi, 2002); British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives, (Zebiri, 2008); A Minority within a Minority: A Report on Converts in the United Kingdom, (Brice, 2011); and Islamophobia, Belonging and ‘Race’ in the Experiences of Muslim Converts in Britain, (Moosavi, 2011).

Probably the most significant contributions made in qualitative research on converts to Islam in Germany are listed below:8

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5 English translation: Leopold Weiß alias Muhammad Asad. From Galicia to Arabia 1900-1927.
7 See also: (Köse and Loewenthal, 2000).
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Konversion zum Islam in Deutschland und den USA (Conversion to Islam in Germany and the USA), (Wohlrarb-Sahr, 1999); and German Muslim Converts: Exploring Patterns of Islamic Integration (Bush, 2012).

Most academic studies on converts are based on qualitative rather than quantitative research, entailing detailed (sometimes standardized) interviews with a selected number of participants, concluding in a related analysis. By looking at the tendencies, the majority seems to concentrate on female converts to Islam. This tendency is however slowly decreasing since researchers are currently looking into the phenomenon of conversion to Islam as an entity, including both sexes because there are remarkable differences in the conversion processes among male and female converts to Islam. In order to establish a clear trend, reliable demographic figures would be needed which in terms of religious conversions, in particular to Islam, do not exist due to the fact that a conversion to Islam neither needs to be registered nor officially confirmed by any religious authority. This study is no different and must make the best use of the available statistics, which only results from the collected data within this research process with suitable qualifications about their dependability and accuracy. One additional factor in this case is that since the study covers two countries, the available information can be used for methodological analysis set in a cross-national comparative design.

1.5. Methodology and fieldwork

This dissertation comprises a comparative analysis of conversion processes to Islam in the UK and Germany. The empirical framework for this study includes biographical interviews and completed written questionnaires by male and female Muslim converts in both countries, entailing the following: on the one hand displaying their individual conversion processes, and their personal developments in religious practice and understanding after the conversion had taken place, and on the other hand

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8 See also: (Baumann, 2004) and (Filter, 2008).
9 There are no official statistics on converts to Islam, as the Muslim convert only needs to officially present a form when he or she anticipates completing the umrah (small pilgrimage) or hajj (main pilgrimage).
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evaluating their changes of behaviour towards family and friends and their respective responses as well as demonstrating their current understanding and reflection on sensitive topics from a Muslim convert’s perspective.

With these two national contexts, a contrast has been chosen that may not be apparent at first glance, however, it will reveal itself in the course of the dissertation. Based on the available sources, i.e. secondary literature on the phenomenon of conversion to Islam and related topics, together with the empirical part of the dissertation, significant elements have been elaborated and outlined. These include the attitudes of Muslim converts in Britain and Germany which demonstrate how conversion to Islam takes place today, and how it may continue to develop in the near future.

I decided for a qualitative research in order to establish a method that fits my research area and interview questions. The sample selection of participants and the semi-structured interviews proved challenging however I wanted to collect a profound rich qualitative data from different sources in order to complement my findings. Qualitative research is particularly important for studies incorporating participants’s view and personal experiences which can be explored in greater detail (Creswell, 2003).

Sample selection is a key concern for religious and cross-cultural research. For the exploratory study the goal was not to achieve a representative sample but to acquire a satisfactory selection that fulfils the criteria of the study. The participants in this study were selected via purposeful sampling, primarily focused on native British and Germans without migrant background who converted to Islam. The majority of participants originate from a white ethnic background, and most have been influenced by either a traditional British or German heritage. The intent was to gain qualitative in-depth information about their conversion, their subsequent experiences and changes in lifestyle, gender behaviour and religious input within their respective societies.

Sampling and fieldwork began in Germany in 2008 and ended in the United Kingdom in 2010. To gain attention for my fieldwork and to attract potential participants, I diversely advertised the project at sisters’ circles (halaqas) in Germany,
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on noticeboards at the University of Bremen and Hochschule Bremen, via German Muslim websites and word of mouth. Several participants in Germany included converts in Bremen (from where the sampling began), however the majority of German participants were widespread, hence I commuted to the following cities in order to meet the participants and conduct the interviews: Hamburg, Rostock, Berlin, Frankfurt, Hildesheim, Moers, Mutterstadt, Würzburg, Bremen, Erlangen, Gelsenkirchen, Koblenz, Hannover, Münster, Munich, Wetzlar, Bonn, Stuttgart, and Freiburg.

Although living in Britain during the interview period, I was not able to build as stable a social network with Muslim converts as I had been able in Germany over the course of several years. This means that due to my regular commuting between Britain and Germany, the networking was not as distinct in Britain as it is in Germany. The project gained greater publicity through using the intranet at the University of Exeter, British Muslim forums, and Facebook. Several British participants included converts from Bristol and Exeter, however also here, the majority were also scattered around in England, primarily residing in London, Birmingham, Basildon, and Milton Keynes.

One sampling challenge was the potential difficulty in locating converts willing to participate. Mistrust of outsiders and confidentiality concerns were a challenge, however this was partially overcome by sincere efforts to build on a common ground, e.g. religion as the main common denominator between the researcher and the prospective participants. My status as a Muslim convert allowed me to gain easier access to potential participants but I was regularly perceived with scepticism by some Muslim converts who questioned the purpose of my research and subsequent dissertation. The initial stages of the practical project precisely advertising for participants proceeded unevenly, and demanded considerable patience and endurance. It cannot however be denied that the researcher’s personal religious status has unlocked certain statements and opinions which may not have been given to a researcher with a different religious affiliation or background.

The final formal sample consisted of 37 semi-structured in-depth interviews (7 British, 30 German) and 39 completed questionnaires (17 British, 22 German). Several

10 This was particularly noticeable in Britain.
participants did not complete all sections of the questionnaire or did not answer all questions during the interview. These wishes were discussed prior to commencement of the interview or completion of the questionnaire, accepted in writing and taken into consideration for the purpose of this study. Other participants remained sceptical due to the contents of the study and the questions making up the interviews were often more in depth and intimate in nature than they were prepared to answer.\textsuperscript{11}

The interviews were conducted in a place of the participant’s choosing, which usually was their home or, if suitable, the researcher’s home. Interviews with male participants were primarily conducted in mosques, offices or other public locations. In a very small number of instances, the home was chosen as the setting for the interview. The youngest participant in the UK was 19, the oldest was 48, and their time as a Muslim ranged from 6 months to 26 years. The youngest participant in Germany was 18, the oldest was 48, and their time as a Muslim ranged from 2 weeks to 11 years. The interviews last on average 3-4 hours, with some completed in a much shorter time frame (45 minutes), whereas others last a lot longer (8 hours). Three interviews were not completed or their recordings turned out to be unusable, the participants involved completed the questionnaire instead.\textsuperscript{12}

All participants were encouraged to participate in the research by following up their own interest, including asking questions on the development of the research and being as open in their interview as they possibly could. For the protection of their identity, each participant was allowed to choose a pseudonym to be used instead of their real name. As the dissertation advanced, several pseudonyms had to be changed since the initial pseudonyms were most of the time the participants’ chosen Muslim names, and thus several of these names had to be changed in order to protect their identity. For easier distinction between the British and German participants, British pseudonyms are accentuated in \textbf{bold} and \textit{italics}, eg. \textit{Abraham Asad} or \textit{Jameela}, whereas German participants are accentuated in \textbf{bold} only, eg. \textbf{AbdulSamed} or \textit{Jesseniah}. This distinction

\textsuperscript{11} This will become particular evident in chapters 7 and 8.

\textsuperscript{12} Nour’s interview was not understandable from the tape due to excessive background noise. Jenna’s interview had to be interrupted so she could attend to her child. Hawwa-Maryam’s interview did not take place since she decided to feel more comfortable answering the questions in writing.
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will make it easier for the reader to understand when a British or a German participant has offered his or her opinion on a particular issue.13

The inclusion of a control group – born Muslim men and women in Britain and Germany – demonstrates a comparison but also contrast to the development of a Muslim identity as a convert. Thirteen women and two men between the ages 16 and 39, originating from Turkey (4), Lebanon (2), Tunisia (2), Syria (2), Morocco (2), Bulgaria (1), Egypt (1) and Indonesia (1), completed written questionnaires with similar questions as given to the main Muslim convert cohorts. Several questions were adapted accordingly; the questionnaire can be found in the appendices. The control group’s participants received a pseudonym like the main cohorts, and their names are accentuated in italics only, in order to separate them from the main Muslim convert cohorts.

It is common for most people to use the term ‘convert’ to describe someone who has either embraced a particular faith or exchanged one belief system for another. Many converts, particularly among this study’s British participants preferred the term ‘revert’ to describe the the process of their coming to Islam. As Islam holds that it is the inherent belief system of humankind, most Muslims see themselves and even others (who have not yet found Islam) as being Muslim from birth. ‘Reverts’ see themselves as having had to acknowledge this thought, ‘returning to the truth’ rather than finding it for the first time. I have, however, chosen to solely use the terms ‘convert,’ ‘conversion’ and ‘converting’ in this study for ease of understanding.14

It is my hope and quest that this dissertation will be a catalyst for more research into the phenomenon of conversion to Islam. One of the reasons for this is that it could

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13 Several participants asked whether I was a Muslim myself. Some asked quite early in the e-mail correspondence we engaged in prior to the interview, whereas other participants asked during or after completion of the interview. I had assumed my addressing participants with the Islamic greeting “As-salamu Alaykum” would imply my personal religious affiliation; however, this was not clear to everyone. Some saw this greeting as a form of politeness towards them but did not assume that I was a Muslim. One German participant noticed the affiliation after we had completed the interview. Although my function as a researcher had been fulfilled as professionally as possible, it has without a doubt been somewhat influential on many of the participants’ answers given the fact that their interviewer was a Muslim convert like themselves.

14 This distinction does play a role in some of the participants answer. I am not ignoring them, just using the more commonly understood term
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change the religious, cultural and academic landscape of Britain and Germany. Accordingly, it should act as a stimulus for religious institutions and adherents to the religion but also for other scholars and those generally interested in this current continuously growing phenomenon in order to respond to the challenge presented by the growing number of converts to Islam.

“The 21st Century New Muslim Generation: Converts in Britain and Germany” shows that Islam seems to provide a realistic religious alternative for many Britons and Germans seeking spiritual and practical answers to life’s most important questions regarding personal belief, social behaviour and matters of intimacy and sexuality. When examining the phenomenon of religious conversion, I intend to include all Muslim movements, even though some movements may be regarded as controversial. Consequently, this study demonstrates a detailed analysis of the thoughts, interpretations and practices of the British and German samples, concerning how they cope with identity issues and coming to terms with the embedding of that newly adopted identity in a society that at times remains indifferent at best but hostile at its worst.

As a standard anthropological approach, I have chosen to present the collected research materials through quotations of the participants involved. Demonstrating the participants’ most common denominator on a particular topic, the strongest and most suitable quotation was selected and entered into the main text. I felt rather than speaking for the participants, the necessity to offer quotations in order to let the participants speak for themselves. It has however be pointed out that this chosen type of methodology has its limits, and only approximately 20% of the raw data material has been used throughout this thesis. I am thus aware that the results arising from this methodology have incurred limits of time, content, and outlook. The goal of the study was not only to measure the impact of the selected participants or to assemble a representative sample of Muslim converts in Britain and in Germany but to explore their commonalities and differences which in turn influence their respective religious and social background. The choice of any methodology controls the nature of the conclusions, hence the research findings are limited to the nature of the thesis, its contents and future possible developments, and is thus recognised.
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1.6. Chapter overview

The first chapter is devoted to introducing the study, outlining its scope and structure. Its composition includes a summary statement on the phenomenon of conversion to Islam, in particular referring to conversion to Islam in Britain and Germany. This overview of recent studies on religious conversion in general as well as on conversion to Islam in Britain and Germany presents the methodology of the dissertation, its fieldwork and a summary.

The second chapter provides research into the phenomenon of religious conversion. It offers several definitions of what is meant by religious conversion since it is more complex than just a change of one’s affiliation; a change or embracing of a particular religion can simultaneously be perceived as an alternative lifestyle. In addition, older studies on religious conversion are brought in contrast to more recent studies on the phenomenon, and the chapter concludes with an enumeration of the relevant elements for a conversion to Islam.

The following chapter (3) introduces the reader to a brief overview on the history of conversion to Islam in Britain and in Germany. It highlights the first conversions to Islam during the life of Muhammad*, the subsequent conversions in neighbouring states when Islam spread, and what convinced Europeans to embrace Islam. The history of conversion to Islam in Britain and Germany offers a short, yet compact understanding, of how the interest in Islam has developed and changed within a century, and how the influence of Muslim converts has changed the status of Islam in each respective society.

The fourth chapter introduces the study’s participants for the first time and incorporates their statements and opinions into the development of the chapter, representing several events and situations in their personal process of converting to Islam. Initially, participants reflect on their memories prior to conversion e.g. experiencing visits to countries with a Muslim-majority society while being a non-Muslim. The converts’ narratives continue to offer different reasons for their decision to convert whether or not certain cultural (British or German) habits were kept up
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afterwards, and to what extent these are conform with the generally accepted Islamic code of practice. Since it is a duty for every Muslim to acquire religious knowledge, the participants were asked to provide the sources they used in order to acquire such knowledge, and last but not least, the challenge of forming a convert Muslim’s identity, which many faced, is described more closely, including how they managed to combine their existing identity characteristics with their new religious identity.

Islamic obligations and dietary laws form the foundation of the fifth chapter. It briefly discusses the functions of the five pillars of Islam, concentrating on the participants’ interpretations and practices regarding each pillar. In addition, it offers a summary on Islamic dietary laws, subsequently concentrating on the prohibition of consuming pork and alcohol, and the implications of trying to purchase and consume halal products. The reader will discover very different interpretations and observance of certain regulations, not only individually among the participants but also between the different countries.

From the sixth chapter onwards, the survey and its results are presented in greater detail than before since the development of personal relationships after conversion between converts and their families, and their changing circles of friends will be the primary focus. The reactions of individual family members and friends are demonstrated from the participants’ perspective, and any consequences thereof are analysed and presented in sub-sections. The seventh chapter deals with the changes participants have adopted in regard to their behaviour towards the opposite sex, while demonstrating their different views on premarital relationships. In addition, the concept of Islamic dating is discussed, as well as whether marriage remains ‘half of the deen’, and whether or not there is the possibility of choosing a spouse regardless of his or her religious affiliation.

The eighth chapter promises the reader an interesting climax of the dissertation by addressing seemingly sensitive subjects within the Islamic discourse. Why is it important to gain information on these topics? This survey is rare in being able to accumulate this kind of sensitive, informal and private information. Misunderstanding on the topics within this chapter have to be re-evaluated, understood and revealed by
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those who are particularly influenced and whose lifestyle and religious beliefs entail those sensitive issues which are now globally discussed. Gaining a personal insight into the lives of Muslim converts reveals that the tenor of understanding may be different to what seems to be expected. The participants were given the opportunity to discuss their interpretations and practices on the following subjects: ‘male circumcision’, ‘virginity’, ‘masturbation’, ‘polygamy’, and ‘homosexuality in Islam’. The results provide clear differences of understanding and practice among British and German converts which could be particularly noticed with the current on-going debate about male circumcision in Germany.

The ninth and last chapter assembles the main findings of the study in a condensed form and summarises the essential features of conversion to Islam. It explains the British and German participants’ fundamental differences of interpretation and practice of fundamental aspects of the religion, and offers a potential future outlook, as to how British and German Muslim converts could develop themselves within their continuing conversion processes, and what impact these developments may have on the society they live in.

This research is limited to these particular British and German samples of Muslim converts which is not representative of all conversions to Islam. The reader should bear in mind that the current status and understanding of conversion to Islam includes a greater understanding and variety of reasons than it has been theoretically and practically portrayed within this limited research study. The subject of religious conversion, in particular to Islam, offers a growing potential of further research in the 21st century.
Chapter 2 Religious conversion

2.1. Introduction

Researching experiences of religious conversion is defined by finding out to what extent and by what means they are instances of meaningful change, and whether they appear suddenly or gradually in the course of an individual’s life. This focus dictates to some degree the scope and methodology of this study: it entails research into individuals who have converted to Islam, who may or may not display visible changes. The interviews and questionnaires were based on self-study and open questions. The design and practice of the research was focused more on qualitative and quantitative results, since the interest lies in the rich information of individual, situated cases, rather than in producing generalisable data. It does not seek to define a rigid pattern of the conversion experience, but explores its complexity and variety, by establishing a multiplicity of views. This entails building a trusting relationship between interviewer and interviewee, enabling both parties to contribute honestly and openly.

Since these questions apply to any study of conversion processes, independently of any particular world-view, it is necessary to develop central ideas concerning the phenomenon of religious conversion. This chapter contains the definition of religious conversion, current and previous researchers’ perspectives, recent scholarly contributions, reasons for religious conversion, and conversion versus reversion to Islam, concluding with a brief description of periodical changes as well as historical developments in conversion to Islam since the early 20th Century.

Conversion phenomena attract much sociological and scientific attention since they raise a number of fundamental questions:

Is a radical change of belief/culture possible, and how is it be achieved? What instigates such a change? Is there a contrast of social and personal expressions of change prior to and after conversion? What is and will be the definition of the relationship between the individual and a particular religious group?
2.2. Definitions of religious conversion

Conversion is described as “a transition or leap from one world-view to another as a result of instability or breakdown of the existing one. It involves both the individual and the social” (Dollah, 1979:103). Durkheim (1995/1912) also contributed to theories on conversion and social stability, e.g. the functional theory, whereby Max Weber (1985/1922) argued that religion could be a force of change in society, emphasizing the interaction of society and religion. According to Jansen (2006:21), “conversion always has a double face, from the perspective of the receiving and of the departed religious group”. It seems as if the so called ‘double-face’ today is not necessarily, as Jansen states, from one religion to another, but to a religion from secularism. It will become obvious that a number of participants within this study have converted from atheism to Islam which is a key difference to the 19th century Muslim converts around Abdullah Quilliam who mostly were devout Christians prior to embracing Islam.\footnote{Follow Chapter 3 for further information on Abdullah Quilliam and the late 19th and early 20th century British Muslim converts.}

McFague (2001) on the other hand believes that conversion can mean and contain several things: An abrupt change in a religious attitude, accompanied by a highly emotional experience; converting from one perspective of reality to another, or a change from a lost and godless state of mind to a god-filled and peaceful disposition. In his opinion the before-and-after images portray a life of disarray and sin on the one hand, and peace and stability on the other.

Previous studies and experiences show that most conversions are not momentary and abrupt experiences; it can be a ‘painful’ and life-long developing process, fraught with doubt, ambiguity, great discomfort and risk (Wohlrab-Sahr, 1999). The majority of conversions demand a high degree of courage to pull through and stand by the decision, often making them into a life-changing experience. There are different types of conversion, which may be loosely characterised as: active, secondary, marital, forced, and deathbed conversion. The basic concept of religious conversion may be described as:
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A change in affiliation from one religion to another, or the transition from non-involvement to belief in a religion. It also designates a change involving a transformation and re-orientation affecting every aspect of a person’s life, which occur suddenly or gradually. (Goring, 1992:118)

Conversion is naturally situated within the society and context of the individual undergoing the change, so the modern experience will differ substantially to that of a convert a hundred years ago, even within the same culture and location, just as individuals in the same time period will have a diversity of experiences. Social, political and demographic dynamics all have their part to play in understanding a particular conversion event. However, while accounting for such divergence, certain strands seem to connect to the experience generally, such as the conceptualization of conversion as a calling:

As there is one blood in the veins of all nations, and one breath in all nostrils, so there is one divine spirit brooding over a striving within all souls. God has made all men with a capacity of conversion, with possibilities of response to the highest call. (Strachan, 1911:104)

2.3. Early religious conversion research

The social sciences began in the late 19th century to deal with the phenomenon of religious conversion. American psychologists primarily researched the reasons as to why and how someone moved from one religious community to another (Wieberger, 1990:5). Their studies included Christians who turned away from one church to join another church. A deeper psychological interest in the phenomenon of religious conversion had its documented beginnings in the very late 19th century. In the Freudian terminology of the time, an ‘irreconcilable’ idea was a desire incompatible with the subject’s moral ideals, consequently condemned and most of the time rendered subconsciously. Freud initially considered the mechanisms of conversion to be specific to hysteria.  

16 Freud’s point of view begins with the assumption that religion is an illusion, which naturally influenced his approach to the term ‘conversion’.
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The “choice of neurosis”, a problem Freud often returned to, only found its modalities of realization. In addition to fundamental conditions, “triggering factors” rooted in an individual’s history, i.e. childhood traumas and/ or sexual assaults initiated by an adult, found their ways in strengthening Freud’s position during the first years of his career. Later, in the early 20th century, he distinguished between ‘conversion hysteria,’ the mechanism by which symptoms are produced, and ‘anxiety hysteria,’ dominated by phobic mechanisms, without being accompanied by any dimensions of the conversion phenomena. Freud’s interpretation of religious conversion and experience placed the father at the centre of the potential convert’s life. He maintained that humans endow God with the same features that they had attributed to their own fathers during childhood. He claimed that the human’s relationship with God is always modeled after the relationship with the biological father, fluctuating and changing with it.

The pioneering works of James H. Leuba (1896), Edwin Starbuck (1897), and William James (1902) on the formal study of conversion, focusing on psychological aspects but also individual analysis, remain to be dominant approaches in the study of conversion. James discussed in The Varieties of Religious Experience a ‘sudden conversion’ model, which emphasised that conversion should be viewed as a process. James generally posited that there was a connection between the psychological and emotional state of mind and the possibility of a form of religion corresponding to that state of mind. He stated that “there would be ‘healthy minds’ but also ‘sick souls’, whereby the latter, those with neurotic constitutions and a proprietary ‘subliminal self’, would be especially susceptible to conversion experiences…” His definition of conversion is thus:

The process, gradual or sudden by which the self is divided, consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. (James, 1902:157)

Lofland and Stark’s (1965) “Becoming a World-Saver”, a conversion model in which they examined and compiled the interdependent factors relevant to an individual’s conversion process from a sample group of converts in, was a revolutionary approach. Accordingly, for a conversion to take place, a person must:
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(…) experience enduring, acutely felt tensions within a religious problem-solving perspective which leads him to define himself as a religious seeker; encountering the ‘divine precepts’ at a turning point in his life, wherein an affective bond is formed (or pre-exists) with one or more converts; where extra-cult attachments are absent or neutralized; and where, if he is to become a deployable agent, he is exposed to intensive interaction. (Lofland and Stark, 1965)

An often absorbed typology of conversion has been developed by Lofland and Skonovd (1981), also known as the conversion motifs model. Both broadly regard religious conversion as “the task of a world-ordering perspective in favour of another and distinguish between six ideal-typical motif patterns that can lead to a change or embracing of faith: a) intellectual, b) mystical, c) experimental, d) emotional, e) inspired, and f) forced. The researchers made a distinction between two categories of conversion conditions: the first addressing the specific conditions leading to the particular individual’s conversion, while the second makes a distinction between ‘verbal’ and ‘total’ classes of convert. Both classes are regarded as sincere and committed, but the ‘total’ convert is defined as displaying additional commitment through active involvement and religious practice.

Silverstein (1988) adopted James’ methods in the 1980s: He refers to a number of studies in which converts, when compared with control groups, showed significantly lower values in their general well-being, had more often taken or considered psychological help, and had also been hospitalized at a significantly higher degree than their control groups. Other conversion researchers such as Spellman et al. found higher levels of manifest anxiety in people who had experienced sudden conversion, as opposed to other religious and non-religious control groups (Spellman, Baskett and Byrne, 1971). From a psychological perspective, the above mentioned researchers seem to consider conversions as ‘pseudo solutions’ to the problems of converts. Some studies

17 “Intellectual” conversions usually take place without social pressure yet with a high degree of intellectual engagement with the religion. Even though emotions seem to rarely play an important role, it is within “mystical” conversions that emotions are emphasised in the process, as belief and spirituality is more emphasised on than the adherence of particular rules in a belief system. “Experimental” conversions are usually based on curiosity while here again emotional and social pressures appear to be low. Another category is “affective” conversion is preceded by a settling in the religious community or positive contact with a particular member of that religious community. “Inspired” conversions, by contrast, are often associated with mass gatherings and a high degree of peer pressure. Last but not least, “forced” conversions are challenging to accurately placing them, since an “inspired” conversion under peer pressure may also be a “forced” conversion.
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have found a connection between conversions and severe psychological crises, in which conversion may have a therapeutic effect in the short term but could prove later to be only a ‘pseudo solution’ (See Rambo 1993 – The crisis element is part of Rambo’s seven-stage conversion process).

2.4. Recent scholarly contributions

Recent research into the phenomenon of religious conversion has taken up a number of diverse positions, differing in both the approach taken, and the definition of conversion adopted. The majority of researchers share the view that conversion is an on-going and never-ending process. The British sociologist Eileen Barker researched the conversion processes of new members to the Unification Church. In her ground-breaking study *The Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing?*, Barker looks closely at the religious conversion process to the Unification Church and comes to the conclusion of rejecting the ‘brainwashing’ theory as an explanation for the conversion. In her opinion this cannot be ratified since during her research she attended many crowded events of the Unification Church, meeting many non-members but interested parties. Her approach was criticised by several brainwashing proponents; she was however able to clarify her understanding that religious conversion to new religious movements (NRM) is not all of a sudden, but takes place over an unknown period of time.

According to Barker, “there are people who seem to have started ‘preparing’ themselves for some of the beliefs and practices that characterise the movement which they will eventually join before they have ever met it or even heard of its existence” (Barker, 1989:22). The question arises as to whether the process of religious conversion is active or passive, and several indices suggest that it includes both, however depending on the individual’s development and input. Today the notion of “conversion” generally tends to connote some kind of group switching. It can be seen as the achievement of a new (religious) self which may be influenced by the personal wish of change by the individual wishing to embrace the new religious lifestyle and understanding but may
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also be influenced by the (missionary) methods of the adherents of the new (or potential) convert’s religion or religious movement.

Another model on religious conversion states that conversion goes beyond the process of change over a certain time period, which depends on the individual context and is influenced by a basic structure of relationships, expectations and situations. Rambo (1993) describes these factors in the conversion process as diverse, interactive and mutually reinforcing. These include cultural, social, personal and religious components (Rambo 1993:5). The convert goes through seven thematic stages during the conversion process:

1. Cultural, social, personal and religious context of the affected person;
2. A crisis as a trigger for change;
3. The search for fulfilment and their motives;
4. Meeting with advocates of the new religion/religious community;
5. Interaction and emergence of obligations;
6. The rhetoric and acquisition of new roles by the converts; and
7. Ties and obligations (acceptance by the convert as well as the effects and consequences associated with the conversion).

Although the participants of this study follow this pattern to a certain extent, Rambo’s stage model does not always cover - and by extension validate - each individual participant’s conversion process. Rambo’s second stage ‘crisis’ could not be detected in all participants’ narratives, since several did not point towards a crisis among the reasons to investigate further into faith or spirituality. Converts to a religion are often more likely than non-convert members of a religion to recognise the inconsistencies between their new religion and their followers over time. Evidence of this statement can be found in the chapters regarding active information from the participants. Thus it will be evident during the study that Rambo’s model only partially agrees with the motifs of conversion of this study’s involved participants.
2.5. Conversion to Islam

Streib (2009:21) refers to conversion factors as an “openness for experience” and a “higher sense of personal growth” combined with the tendency towards a “spiritual quest”, which in turn refers to an intense spiritual searching, which typically appears in adolescence and young adulthood. The process of religious conversion is spread over a long period of time, during which the convert not only masters the contingency but carefully chooses a structure within the development of his personal identity. What matters in effect is that the development of personality ends with the question of contingency, and directs faith development into new habits, and the absorption of traditions and religious ways of thinking within the particular religious community – theology, philosophy and rituals. Most converts do not necessary adopt all of the above stages but usually content themselves with the acquisition of general narratives of (community-) piety.

Luebbe (1990:160ff.), on the other hand, believes that commitment to a new religion can appear to be the (only) solution for adversities in life that a person would not be able to solve by himself. Here the act of faith seems to appear as a contingency of limitations of the self. Al-Qwidi (2002:43) states in her doctoral thesis that studies of early Christianity and the Roman Empire offer definitions of conversions in terms of orientation, in which individuals are clearly active in, and aware of, the processes of change involved. The understanding of what exactly conversion to Christianity means – to attain salvation – varies among the different churches and denominations.

According to most Muslims, someone will be Muslim who has recited the šahādah – the Islamic statement of faith – three times in Arabic, in the presence of witnesses, and has thus committed to Allah and His Messenger Muhammad*. Before reciting the šahādah, the converting person tends to complete a full-body wash – ghusl – in order to ‘free’ him- or herself from the ‘errors’ of the past, to start life as a Muslim or Muslima in a pure state of mind and body. Converts to Islam tend to have to identify

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18 One famous conversion is that of Augustine in his garden in Milan. It was stated by Augustine himself that the ‘hand of God’ was ‘clearly present.’ During his life and conversion process, active elements were involved in his transformation. The ongoing influential factor was Augustine’s mother, a pious Christian.
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themselves as Muslims through documented proof when going on Umrah or Hajj to Mecca and Medina. This document does not need to be issued at the time of conversion but can be completed at a later stage.

Many Muslims reject the concept of conversion to Islam, ‘according to the fitrah-concept, every human is born a Muslim and therefore only ‘returns,’ i.e. reverts, to Islam. Male circumcision is not usually required of adult converts; however, many undergo this procedure to feel more ‘complete’ and ‘at one’ with the faith. Many converts to Islam seem to choose a Muslim name. There is no obligation to do so, but it is often used to demonstrate affiliation with the new faith, and if the convert’s first name has a meaning incompatible with Islam, then the name is ‘corrected’ with a Muslim name. For Islamic scholars, the turn to Islam happens in accordance with ‘the natural disposition of man,’ also known as fitrah. Nonetheless, this outlook encompasses the idea of conversion in European terms, at least if the person has moved within the Abrahamic religious horizon. On the one hand, the Muslim convert so conceived discovers a great inner freedom which he does not need to reason theologically; on the other hand, the believer’s complete desire to practice this belief is demanded. In practical terms, this means: the believer must realize that he completely wants to fulfill his desire to pray, for example. In spiritual terms, the believer must really prove this earnestness of desire to God, not to people as perhaps often thought. The incorporation of the šahādah in compulsory ritual prayer thus renews one’s faith every time. From an Islamic perspective, conversion accords to a three-stage process as in the ḥadīth: Islam, Iman, and Ihsan (The Jibril hadīth):

As a first step, a person becomes Muslim or Muslima simply through speaking the šahādah. Adopting Islamic practices would be the second step, and as faith grows in the convert, one may speak of them having achieved a higher level of Islam, called Iman, also known as ‘belief from the heart’. Once converts have completed the rituals of conversion, many will be very strict in the observation of religious rules. Sometimes it

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19 Some people use different phrases for the embracing of Islam (reversion, conversion etc.), however within this thesis I have chosen to use ‘convert’ and ‘conversion’ for a general understanding as transferring from one religion to another or entering a religion.
20 See Chapter 8.
21 This possibly implies a first name originating from another religion or one’s previous religious affiliation.
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happens that not only non-religious people but also members of the newly embraced faith might find this change in behaviour strange. This heightened piety of converts often seems different from that of someone who has grown up with the religion as part of their everyday life. It may indicate that converts tend to convert to a religion with much hope of being welcomed into the religious community, only to find that often the welcome is not always as hoped for, as there might be the existence of a congregation’s reserved attitude, the possible discovery of strict customs the convert may not have been previously aware of, and the appearance of the convert’s idealistic notion of the religion. Although the wish exists to belong to a particular community, the difficulties that come with integration are challenges that are only revealed after conversion, or once the conversion process has started. The development of the crisis element often seems to be after the act of conversion rather than prior to it.

In the act of faith, the convert must make decisions about the contingent aspects of his behaviour, and these are not taken with a distanced attitude towards a universitas rerum, but involve the emotional concerns of the person (Luhmann, 1982:187; Hermann, 2012). It must be noted that the options one must address in life (both the simple and insurmountable challenges) are conditioned by the context of the individual. A random example may visualise the differences in challenges converts may be confronted with: A young Indonesian upon completion of the contingencies of religious traditions and cultural ways of life is able to internalise these aspects without difficulty, whereas the young European Muslim has to grow into the (Islamic) faith, i.e. from a practical point of view, he has learn Islamic religious orthopraxy before he can practise it. He will encounter with a belief which pays more attention to the hermeneutics of actions than of words.

Several researchers have highlighted differences between contemporary research on conversion to Islam and historic examples of it. Razaq (2005:9) believes that contemporary research examines how the “islamization processes occurred through different political, military, social and economic factors”. Eaton (1995:110) explains that conversion has different understandings, including forced conversion, conversion to improve one’s socioeconomic status, and last but not least what he calls the most popular theory of conversion to Islam being “the religion as social liberation”.

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Contributions in Europe on conversion to Islam include Britain (Moosavi 2010, Zebiri 2008, and Köse 1996), the Netherlands (Van Nieuwkerk, 2006), and Scandinavia (Roald, 2004). Germany has little research to offer, apart from the comparative study on conversion in both Germany and the USA by Wohlrarb-Sahr (1999). She defines conversion as a change of religious membership: Linked to this is, however, a second operation, namely, a change in the identity of the person, a personal process, which is associated with that membership change, that leads to a new self-definition of the person, and thereby a change of social relations, a change of friendship groups. Partial exploration on this phenomenon, albeit primarily through a journalistic approach has been done by Filter (2008) and Oezyuerek (2009).

There are several European researchers specialising on the phenomenon of religious conversion and particularly looking at conversion to Islam within Western European context. Allievi looks at the specific nature of Islam and what this religion has to offer (Allievi, 1998:315), whereas Van Nieuwkerk outlines two main approaches to conversion studies, i.e. the functional approach and the discourse analysis approach (Van Nieuwkerk, 2006:10). Roald on the other hand suggests that Rambo’s above mentioned seven-stage-conversion process model could be adapted to take into account the majority-minority dynamics that apply to conversion to Islam (as a minority religion) in the West (Roald, 2004:79). Wohlrarb-Sahr attempts to ascertain what challenges a potential convert may encounter and how these may be overcome. She suggests that for many people the conversion to Islam may be the solution of problems, such as the search of belonging, race and gender identity (Wohlrarb-Sahr, 1999:351-62). Not only are the reasons that motivate people to convert similar, but also the way in which converts of all denominations report it as formative event for them. This study will offer similar outcomes when reporting on the individual conversion processes of the participants, albeit in a different context by comparing British and German converts to Islam.

Many contemporary scholars believe that authentic conversion is an ongoing process of transformation. Initial change, although important, is rather the first step

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22 There are most certainly more studies regarding conversion to Islam in the different European countries, however, the above list should demonstrate that research on conversion to Islam is growing.
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within a long process. More profound changes may come in the months, and even years, after the initial conversion has taken place (Gelpi, 1989:1-30). Initial conversion is the first phase, regarded as moving from irresponsible to responsible behavior; this may be succeeded by ongoing conversion - the interaction between various dimensions of conversion and the continuous process of change throughout one’s life – and finally integral conversion, which is a commitment to implement these fundamental changes in all areas of life, including affectively emotional, ethical, intellectual and social factors (Gelpi, 1987:18-19).

Although converts can only speak in retrospect of their transfer to another religion, it still becomes – despite all biographical breaches – a logical sequential narrative: according to this process, it is only natural that a long period of time prior to conversion is marked by certain factors that encourage a possible upcoming conversion. As the current study demonstrates, there is still ongoing stereotyping of Muslim conversion. It is therefore essential to realise that converts who may radicalise themselves are an exception to the norm. For most converts, the change of religion is a crucial and decisive experience that changes many aspects in the individual convert’s life. The less the religion they are converting to is ‘recognised’ in the given society, the more serious and crucial the change will be that comes with it.

Contemporary researchers in the field have analysed religious conversion as a “radical break which includes a complete reinterpretation and reorganization of life” (Wohlrarb-Sahr, 1999), or as “…a religious development: for many Muslim converts, Christianity is part of their religion, in comparison to the elderly and earlier times when the focus was on following the path of salvation, which according to Muslim understanding, resembles a completion of the Islamic faith – Islam as ‘an update of Christianity’” (Baumann, 2003).

2.6. Diverse conversion dimensions, social class and gender

The phenomenon of religious conversion lies at the crossroads of several disciplines and different factors for initiation and interest can be detected in different
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time periods. Religious conversion appears to differ in the 21st century to religious conversion in the 19th and 20th Centuries. As mentioned above, contemporary research differs from historical approaches towards religious conversion. Research on conversion to Islam differs further prior to and after the events of 9/11, as new reasons and motifs came up for converting to Islam which had not appeared prior to this event. Social, cultural, ethical, academic, even financial factors influence the phenomenon of religious conversion. At the beginning of the 20th Century, converts to Islam were primarily from the wealthy upper class, or at least well-established middle class, who were privileged with the opportunities to travel and access to higher education. According to Geaves, however, the pattern of converts in Liverpool suggests a much more mixed differentiation of class, since Liverpool’s leading Muslim convert figure had mixed with privileged Britons as well as the (mostly Indian) lascars, setting the ground for a mixed class communication between them, resulting in British Muslim converts deriving from different social backgrounds (Geaves, 2010:131f.).

Nowadays, the majority of converts derive from the middle or working class, although there appears to be a trend toward conversion among the academic elite of society.23 The gender balance of this study could offer an insight as to whether more women than men or vice versa seem to have been converting to Islam in recent years: The British sample consists of 13 men and 11 women, whereas the German sample consists of 13 men and 39 women. It could suggest that more women than men convert to Islam in Germany, and the ratio in Britain could entail nearly 50:50, however focus in recent years has primarily been on the rising numbers of females converting to Islam, and only to a much smaller extent have male converts to Islam been a subject of interest, unless it was in relation with terrorism, fundamentalism and religious radicalisation.

Attempts have been made to give scientific explanations for the current upsurge in conversions in current Western-European society. Among the most popular assumptions are that people are in search of something; they are looking for meaning in their life, in terms of values and direction. In a world with a growing population,

23 There are no valid statistics, the observance however is that there is a growing number of academics, university students embracing Islam, and organising themselves to groups and organisations, particularly in Germany.
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increasing numbers of people who have access to global communication networks seek to hold onto something. While seeking spiritual knowledge and looking for a ‘way out’ from this unstoppable development, some people turn to religious or spiritual guidance, hence, major religions, spiritual philosophies and ethical groups receive a increasing interest, and consequently new members, and even converts. The following chapters will attempt to explain the above reasons through demonstrating the participants’ opinions as to whether they are in accordance with the direction they have searched for.

Some contemporary studies on religious conversion suggest that the term refers to “an abrupt religious experience involving an increased commitment within the framework of the person’s religious affiliation” (Allison, 1968). Other studies suggest that religious conversion designates “a change from one religious affiliation to another, in most cases to culturally deviant groups or from a non-religious background to an intense commitment to religious belief” (Salzman, 1953:177-187). Conversions often confront other members of the religious community with questions about their own claims to truth in their faith; they may feel threatened in their identity, as a ‘foreign’ religious newcomer may cause chaos and confusion. The differences of portraying a convert to Islam today in comparison to a century ago suggest a different understanding and approach in the adoption of the faith, its practice, and transferring the knowledge into practice during the process.

The participants offer differing stories in regards to their conversion to Islam, changing their religious affiliation from primarily being Christian. For instance, in Germany most participants had a Catholic upbringing, whereas in the United Kingdom the Anglican Church only played a minor role in the participants’ pasts. Several participants joined an Islamic organization, mosque or religious circle as it afforded an opportunity to learn something, to find out more about the faith, and to possibly convert to Islam as a consequence. As the thesis will show, many participants claimed that their conversion remained a private matter, and were therefore adamant that they neither belonged to a particular religious group nor followed a certain Islamic denomination. The participants’ message of their conversion to remain an entirely ‘private matter’ can only be understood from the researcher’s and/or an insider’s viewpoint. The publicly demonstrated religiosity in Western European societies has however steadily declined in
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the recent past, paving the way for secularism, banning religious practice to the private sphere, thus conversion to Islam cannot be understood as private in today’s context unless the convert remains ‘secret’.

Some conversions may indicate that they have occurred against a backdrop of either emotional distress or turmoil, or have been part of a search for a greater spirituality, for something perceived as less materialistic than general social norms. This backdrop to the conversion process is relevant to the individual’s experience, and revealed by each participant’s personal narrative. These responses may show the emotional and psychological stability that converts see as offered by the religious community, a powerful draw, alongside thoughts of spiritual guidance and religious conviction. Some converts tend to be social protesters who deliberately base their decision to convert on rejecting their home society, whereas others rationalize their conversion with the attempt of finding “their” identity, feeling otherwise somewhat “homeless”. Again others reject the notion of capitalism, secularism and feel the need to escape social inequality which is present due to the pressure put on individuals to further economics, basing their decision on moral and ethical reasons. Therefore, Islam is not only the “religion of reason and rationality”, but also the “moral and ethical path” for many converts, demonstrated as adding knowledge of agency in this comparative study of Muslim converts in Britain and Germany.
Chapter 3 History of Conversion to Islam

3.1. Introduction

The history of Islam is much more interconnected than it is often realised, if one considers the history of Europe, and with that the development of Europeans converting to Islam. Contact with the faith occurred as early as the 8th century CE, as large parts of the Iberian Peninsula were under Moorish rule during the Middle Ages. Muslims discovered, long before they immigrated or fled to Europe, what it is like to live as a minority. Most first generation Muslims who arrived in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s came from South Asia. They were mostly born in India before partition. They had a one hundred year-old history of living as a Muslim minority. The next wave of immigration came in from East Africa a place where Muslims also had a one hundred year-old history of living as a minority.

Britain was one of the most important imperial and colonial countries of Europe, and at various periods attracted large numbers of Muslims. Nowadays, Muslims represent a significant part of the British community. According to the 2009 study “Mapping the Global Muslim Population,” the number of Muslims living in Britain has reached 1.6 million, about 2.7% of the total UK population. Today, Islam is the second most popular religion in the country, and is continuously growing through British-born Muslims and conversions to the faith. The historical background of the high influx of Muslims into Britain is easily explained with the arrival of Asian immigrants as well as refugees from former British colonies during the 1950s. Part of the section 3.4., is dedicated to offering an overview of the history of Islam’s arrival and establishing itself in the UK, thereby aiming to construct a chronology of conversions to Islam within this context.

Germany currently has the third largest Muslim community in Western Europe, behind France and the Netherlands. Although both of the latter countries have a smaller percentage of Muslims living within their national borders than Germany, they offer a larger difference of Muslim inhabitants, in percentage terms. According to the above mentioned study, Germany’s Muslim population has reached more than 4,000,000

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which equals 5% of the total population (approx. 82 million), whereas the Netherlands count their Muslim population being 5.7% (total population: approx. 16.8 million) and France with respectively 6% (total population approx. 65.4 million). Most immigrants who arrived to Western Europe during the 20th century settled as labourers in industrial nations, such as the UK, France, Germany, and some of the Scandinavian states. During the 1920s, France, in particular recruited Muslims from the colonial territories in North Africa, whereas the German government started to recruit the first Turkish guest workers (Gastarbeiter) in 1961 (Bush, 2012).

Today approximately 45 million Muslims live in Europe, making Islam currently the second largest religious group in the West, after Christianity. Russia has been included in the above study “Mapping the Global Muslim Population” hence it has to be added that most Muslims who have settled there include fewer migrants from so-called Muslim states but do include Turk Tatars. As early as the 8th and 9th century, several parts of Central Asia's Turkish populations converted to Islam. Most of all, the countries which were once part of the Ottoman Empire started to emerge, including the laicism-oriented Republic of Turkey in 1923 which contained a majority of Muslims in their society. The same happened in the Balkans, where Muslims, Christians and Jews lived together peacefully until a religiously imbued nationalism tore the entire region into single states at war with one another.

This chapter highlights the cultural and social perceptions and development of Islam in Europe, particularly with reference to Britain and Germany for research purposes, as well as the interaction between Islam and the supposedly more diverse European faiths such as Christianity, and to a lesser extent Judaism, which have been dominant influences in European history, including religious conversions. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the development of conversion to Islam in Britain and Germany, demonstrating four periods – conversion history prior to 1900 up to 2000 - in which changes in the interest of and to conversion to Islam is presented, beginning at the converts’ understanding of Islam being “a religion of reason and rationality”, using

25 Ibid
26 Turk Tatars have lived for centuries on Russian territory.
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Sufism as a means of spiritual search, and completing the chapter with conversion as a possible trigger rejecting the 21st century capitalism and secular social lifestyle.

3.2. Early conversions to Islam

The conversion to Islam already occurred with the formation of the religion in the 7th century on the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, it is unsurprising that already the companions of the Prophet Muhammad* were understood as being converts to Islam themselves. Although there is no terminology for ‘conversion’ in neither the Qur’an nor the Sunna, there is a Qur’anic term which determines a person becoming a Muslim: aslama, meaning ‘to submit to God.’ Nonetheless, the Qur’an offers a missionary impulse, in that it requested Muhammad* to ‘spread the message,’ i.e. by inviting people to Islam:

Say (O Prophet): ‘This is my way: Resting upon conscious insight accessible to reasons, I am calling (you all) unto God – I and they who follow me.’ And (say): ‘Limitless is God in His glory; and I am not one of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Him’ (Qur’an 12:108).

When Islam emerged in 7th century Arabia, its inhabitants knew little about the existence of England or Germany, or Europe as a whole. According to Daniel (1975:10), Prophet Muhammad* was a young man when the Northern European countries turned to Christianity. Religion or at least religious rituals have always played an important role in the formation of civilising societies. Not every conversion occurred out of personal conviction. When Islam first expanded its borders, many tribes embraced Islam considering their conversion to be an act of political allegiance towards a particular leader (Nock, 1933:7). At the same time, it seemed as if these tribes were returning to their spiritual routes after Muhammad’s* death.

From the beginning, many non-Arabs converted to Islam. Africans, for example, were present at the very formation of Islam, as the life of Bilal ibn Rabah demonstrates. Bilal was of Ethiopian origin, and Islamic tradition suggests that he was born in the late 6th century. He was freed from slavery by Abu Bakr, companion and father-in-law to
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Muhammad*, and became himself a companion to Muhammad*. Bilal, however, was remembered for his wonderful voice, and he became the first official *muezzin*, the person who calls the believers to prayer. For many black Muslims, Bilal is important because he clearly demonstrates the African dimension of Islam.27

According to Zebiri (2008), the first non-Arab converts discovered hardship rather than ease following their conversion to Islam. In order to be accepted as Muslims, they had to be affiliated to an Arab tribe. The advantage of converting to Islam was primarily to gain a better social status in society since those within lower classes had the least to lose and the most to gain by embracing Islam. Particularly during the Caliphate of Umar (661-750 CE), non-Arab converts to Islam were treated as second-class citizens; only a small number of high-class converts established themselves during that same period. Nonetheless, conversions were closely related to the rapid spread of early Islam, as anything related to the religion (mosques, Islamic schools and Islamic courts) mixed with the culture of conquered tribes and societies, thus making conversions much more acceptable.

Bulliet (1979) suggests that the reasons for conversion often included social, but also political and economic advantages. Becoming Muslim gave way to evade the *jizyah*, to participate in the trade, escape (religious and status) discrimination and to gain a more advantageous position within the society. Conversions to Islam during the early rise of the religion were as simple and straight forward, as conversion to Islam is today: no official registration was/is needed and the only ‘formal’ requirement was/is to pronounce the šahādah. Marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims were permitted, and offspring from mixed-religious marriages were primarily brought up as Muslims. At the same time, it should not however be neglected that the conversion to Islam was seen as a one-way process. Apostasy from Islam often carried (and still carries today in some nations with a Muslim majority society) legal and social consequences.

27 According to Reddie, “the name Bilal is particularly popular among black converts to Islam in the USA and Europe” (Reddie, 2009:27).
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During the first 300 years of Islam rising and spreading, the conversions gained a snowball effect. The more Muslims and non-Muslims met and connected with each other, the more conversions occurred. After the 11\textsuperscript{th} and 12\textsuperscript{th} century, when most of the Islamisation process had been completed in those conquered, invaded or reigned areas, Muslim merchants and Sufis continued to spread the message of Islam in territories which had not been conquered by Muslim leaders. Conversions to Islam took place under their influence through living the religion as part of their character and culture. The success of Islam, even if it was far away in action and could only be explained as a spiritual need, the idea of Islam, demonstrated by Sufis and Muslim merchants, appealed to many. Most importantly, converts did not necessarily have to abandon all their previous beliefs and practices which made it more inviting for them to embrace Islam.

Nonetheless, it is inevitable that the formation of a particular national approach to Islam must be regarded as an inevitable outcome of the cultural encounter between the Islamic message conveyed and the particularities of its respondents. Converts always have to adjust their indigenous traits to fit into the framework of Islam. At the same time, however, it is impossible to separate religion and culture, as the two components have always been interwoven with one another; in some societies to a greater, and in other societies to a lesser extent.\textsuperscript{28} This tendency has emerged throughout history which explains the different faces and facets of Islam in different parts of the world, as well as the general compatibility of Islam with its individual local environments (Roald, 2004:viii).

3.3. The phenomenon of conversion to Islam in Europe

Detailed knowledge on the history of Islam in Europe among the general public, but also, albeit to a much lesser extent, among historians, is narrow, and thus the chronology of Islam’s presence in Europe must be pieced together from diverse sources and incidents. Most people are hardly aware of how many achievements and techniques

\textsuperscript{28} This is a sign of transculturalism. Today some Muslims confuse one with the other or try to live a religious lifestyle only which however is not possible without taking the cultural elements into consideration.
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of modern life can be traced back to the contribution of Muslim scholars, particularly in terms of medical, scientific, geographical or astronomical knowledge (Lüders, 2012:15). The massive construction effort of the mosque in Córdoba, for example, set off a number of similar looking buildings, becoming one of the first visual symbols of Islam in Europe. At the time it was the largest mosque in the world. All the styles of the Ancient world and the Orient combined formed a grand synthesis.

Islamic Spain, also known as Al-Andalus, covered at its height almost the entire Iberian Peninsula, with the exception of a marginal strip along the Pyrenees. The conquest started in 711 CE, and four years later, Muslims had occupied all the important cities in Spain and Portugal. Many of the Spaniards were not unhappy about this conquest, since the Muslims ended the foreign rule of the Visigoths. With the end of the former occupation, the Spaniards and Portuguese had greater freedom to practice their Jewish or Christian faith under the Muslim reign than before. Spain and Portugal were viewed as Islamic countries in Europe until 1492, when Granada was the last Muslim province to fall under Christian rule. After its fall, almost all Jews and Muslims were expelled unless they converted to Christianity. Although most people would agree that the Muslim occupation had many positive aspects, especially culturally, it was still an ‘act of conquest’.

In the social hierarchy, the conquering Muslims were at the top, followed by those Spaniards who had converted to Islam. The largest social group was formed by Spaniards who were nominally Christians, but had adopted the Islamic manners and customs. Men dressed in Muslim robes, learned Arabic and often lived in polygamy if they could afford it. As is often the case, the culture of the elite class came to be adopted by all levels of society, as a mark of sophistication and affluence (Lüders, 2012:15).

The power and wealth of Islamic Spain reached its zenith in the 10th century. After that, the central government began to collapse due to internal disputes. In 1085 CE, the Christian reconquest of Toledo marked their first victory in a centuries-long
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struggle to end Islamic supremacy.\textsuperscript{29} These actions were also directed against the Islamic culture, which was enormously shaped by the terrifying climax in the ‘war of cultures’\textsuperscript{30}, when Cardinal Francisco Jiménez of Granada had 80 000 Arabic books burned in 1499 and Arabic became classified as “the language of a heretical and despicable race” (Lüders, 2012:16). In contrast to Islam and the Arabs, there was now a militant Catholicism that dominated the religion. The inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula learned to perceive themselves only as Christians even though they belonged to a Spanish-Arab culture. Most of them forgot their Islamic roots, and the Arab-Islamic heritage was displaced. This not only affected Spain and Portugal, but reflects changes across Europe throughout the 11\textsuperscript{th} century.

One particular episode was that of the Arab population of Sicily and the reign of the Hohenstaufen Emperor Friedrich Wilhelm II. Prior to his reign, Islamic rule had presided over the Mediterranean island for about 200 years, beginning in 827 CE when the Arabs came to Sicily from Tunisia. Their rule ended in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century, when they were ousted by the Normans. The Norman kings, however, were no enemies of the Islamic culture, in fact some were even in awe, or used the Arab-Muslim lifestyle to their advantage. Sicily’s capital Palermo remained a centre of Arab art and science until the death of Friedrich Wilhelm II. in 1250 (Rader, 2012:31).

If one believes the admirers of the medieval ruler, Emperor Friedrich Wilhelm II., the relationship between him and Islam was characterised by mutual respect and affection. Contemporaries around 1228/9 CE mentioned that the Emperor was devoted to cultivating Muslim friendship and sometimes almost acted as one of them. Although the Emperor was known as a ruler of enlightenment and tolerance, it is still questionable if he really was a friend of the Muslims, as it is often claimed. In order to analyse his behaviour, one would have to learn more about his relation to Islam, especially the relationships he had with Muslims who lived in Sicily. His relations with Arab sciences and the policies that he pursued in the Holy Land remain significant features.

\textsuperscript{29} Toledo is the capital city of the province Toledo, located in central Spain.

\textsuperscript{30} The conflict of Catholicism versus Islam proposed a ‘war of cultures’ rather than religions.
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In the 9th century, the Arabs had conquered Sicily; in the 11th century, the Normans in turn took the island. The growing influence of Roman Catholic Christianity led the Islamic culture to step back little by little, and consequently some of the Muslims converted to Christianity, while others left the island to settle in Southern Spain, North Africa or the Middle East. The remaining Muslims at first held on to their traditional ways of life, but moved to the mountains near Palermo by the end of the 11th and early 13th century, where mainly Arabs had already settled for a long time. This evidence proves that culture and religion are connected with one another and results in religion being the trigger for migration.

In 1220 CE, Friedrich Wilhelm II began to fight against the rebels, which turned into a war that lasted until his death in 1250 CE. He won the war, with the result that the Muslims had to leave the mountain regions. Some fled, however, a substantial number were relocated at the Emperor's command. This may be conceived as a form of deportation or ethnic-religious cleansing since Muslims were relocated to new residential areas on the mainland, e.g. in Puglia, and therefore moved off the island.31 Thus the actions of the Emperor were far away from what we would call tolerance today. Yet, Friedrich Wilhelm's treatment of the displaced Muslims was unusual for his time. It was not necessarily the behaviour of a caring ruler over his followers, but he granted the Muslims a generous law of autonomy regarding the practice of religion, self-governance and jurisdiction. Many who had survived the resettlement and had not been killed, felt that it was an act of mercy on the Emperor’s part. Hence, early hostility was transformed into devotion and loyalty.

Friedrich Wilhelm II was aware of politics and flexible, rather than dogmatic, and used his sense of pragmatism when adopting a particular policy. In 1215, he took his vow to crusade and in 1228, he stepped on to Oriental soil. To the South of Acre, he pitched his camp and made contact with the Egyptian ruler, Sultan Al-Malik al-Kamil (1218-1238), a nephew of the famous Saladin. The Sultan had argued with relatives for years over the estates of his uncle in the Middle East, particularly in the case of Palestine. The negotiations took a long time, but ultimately Friedrich’s crusade ended differently than anyone else’s before: via a contract and without striking a blow, the

31 It is estimated that between 15,000 and 60,000 people suffered this fate.
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Emperor was given sole power of disposal over the holy cities of Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth, in March 1229. Here, too, Friedrich achieved his goal through skilful and pragmatic action. As well as acquiring Arab scientific knowledge, the Emperor had exchanged knowledge about mathematics and other subjects with the Sultan during their negotiations. Friedrich Wilhelm II understood the forms of negotiation of the Orient and applied them successfully.

Despite the achievements of Friedrich’s more considering style, by the end of the Crusades (around 1600 CE), anti-Islamic ideology was fierce and wide-spread, making negotiation and exchange much harder. This hostility towards Islam did not only stem from religious and ideological causes; the Papacy did not want the Christian states of Europe to fight with each other, but rather to direct their energies against the infidels beyond their national boundaries, and against the heretics inside their territories. Accordingly, the Crusades were quite unsuccessful; even though they were militarily, politically and economically unnecessary, they helped Western Europe to build a new identity (Rader, 2012:36). Between the 12th and 14th century, the image of Islam in Europe emerged, its effects still felt almost unchanged today: the depiction of Muslims as fanatical, violent and irrational, proselytizing with the sword. This impression was reinforced by the confrontation with the Ottoman Empire during the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the subsequent Islamisation of Southern Europe, and the occupation of Vienna by its armed forces in 1529 and 1683 (Molitor, 2012:54). After years of expansion, defeat by a combine Holy Roman Empire, Holy League and Habsburg force after the latter siege, the Turks gradually lost their hold on Southern Europe. Following years of dispute, however, the East continued to be perceived as a stronghold of darkness in Europe.

Osman I (1288-1326) founded the Ottoman Empire. The history of the Ottoman Empire began in the Middle Ages and ended in the 20th century, its rise and fall encompassing three continents, three religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), and many bloody wars. Some view the Ottoman Empire as a “600-year experiment” (Brunner, 2012:40). The capture of Constantinople by the Turks on 29th of May, 1453 occurred with almost no opposition. The city was rebuilt by its conquerors and renamed
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Istanbul\textsuperscript{32}. Additionally, the Ottomans already had a presence in South-Eastern Europe at that time. 200 years before the rise of the Ottoman Empire, the Ottomans had been a minor principality whose origins reached back to the Turkish-Muslim supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean. The roots of its originally nomadic Turks can be traced back to the Central Asian steppe folks. Coming from all different directions, among them were the Oghuz who set up a union of various tribes.\textsuperscript{33} Together with other tribes from the East, the Oghuz formed the Seljuk Empire, which included additional areas of Central Asia and extended to Anatolia in present Turkey. At the beginning of the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, it was divided into several emirates ruled by princes. Osman I was one of them who continued to become the founder of the dynasty which in turn would determine the fate of the region.

There are hardly any reliable sources about the early days of the Ottoman Empire. Most historians created chronologies starting about 200 years after its initial formation. As a consequence, the historical facts were mixed with legends. One thing that is certain is that Osman I proceeded very skillfully and rapidly to expand his dominion in North-West Anatolia. He conquered Bursa and Edirne,\textsuperscript{34} after which the latter served as the Empire’s capital for nearly a century. The Ottomans perceived themselves as the holy warriors of Islam, which encouraged them to undertake numerous further conquests (presumably under the banner of holy war). In 1389, they defeated the Slavs in the North-East of present-day Kosovo and occupied Macedonia, Albania and Thessaly. After the conquest of Constantinople, North Africa as well as parts of the Middle East had been conquered.\textsuperscript{35} The Ottoman Sultan also presided over the holy places of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem at the time.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{32} Prior to the city’s renaming, it was known as Byzantium and Constantinople. Its name Istanbul was officially given to the city in 1930. In the 19th century however, Europeans and Turks alike called the city Stamboul. Etymologically Istanbul originates from the Medieval Greek phrase εἰς τὴν Πόλιν which is known as „in the city“.
\textsuperscript{33} According to the travel diary of Ibn Fadlan who travelled with an Arab embassy to the land of the Oghuz, the Oghuz themselves had recited the Muslim creed of faith during negotiations with Arab merchants. Therefore, some have suggested that the Oghuz may have accepted the new faith for pragmatic rather than spiritual reasons, facilitating trade. Perhaps some saw similarities to their ancestral religion, since their shaman men had much in common with the Sufis who incorporate mysticism into their interpretation of Islam.
\textsuperscript{34} Bursa is a city in north-western Turkey. Edirne is also in north-western Turkey, close to Greece and Bulgaria.
\textsuperscript{35} Present-day Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Syria and Palestine.
\textsuperscript{36} The Ottoman Empire was founded by Osman I. The year 1299 is traditionally seen as the year of empire formation, as during that year Osman I made his emirate independent from the Seldjuk Empire.
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The rapid expansion of the Ottoman Empire allowed it to control the trade routes between the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean. At the same time (14th Century CE), Venice lost its supremacy and Istanbul became the centre for negotiations with European powers and trade. England, France and the Netherlands were particularly interested in obtaining trading privileges, and pursued good relations with the new masters (Brunner, 2012:40).

In the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire continued to flourish, especially under the reign of Sultan Suleiman I who led the Empire from 1520 to 1566 and who was also called "the Magnificent." Advised on many issues by his favourite wife Roxelane (reflecting a brief period of generally progressive attitude towards women), his list of achievements is long, reforming the kingdom from within by introducing a comprehensive system for collecting taxes. Under his reign, the Ottomans reached the borders of their perennial foes, the Habsburg Empire. In 1529, an attack on Vienna was attempted, but failed with the loss of 40,000 soldiers. During this time, the threat by the Turks to Europe was particularly felt: the Dutch humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote a treatise against the “vile Turk race” (Weiland, 1986:36) and Martin Luther perceived a Turk as embodying the Antichrist (Goffmann, 2002:109). Undoubtedly, the zealous forgot some basic things, such as that the Ottoman Empire was a multi-ethnic empire. Christians and Jews regulated their internal affairs relatively autonomously. Nevertheless, non-Muslims living in the Empire were tolerated rather than accepted. Additionally, they had to pay higher taxes, wear certain clothes, and were not permitted to build new houses of worship.

From the early 16th century until the early 17th century, the Ottoman Empire experienced a period of stability. Afterwards, a gradual and insidious decline began. In fact, it was corruption, cronyism, falling prices and lack of money that radically ushered in the decline of the Empire. In 1875, the Empire went bankrupt - money had mostly to be borrowed from the English and French - and the phase of reform, including the constitution, was abrogated by the Sultan Abdülaziz (1830-1876), who decided to retain power as an absolutist monarch. Young men under the Ottoman Empire began to call for a secular state in which the people had control over the Sultan (Brunner, 2012:41-43).
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In 1908, the Young Turks were able to gain political power, and with that a period of openness started: for the first time, freedom of the press prevailed in the country. However, these changes could not halt the decline for long. The only certainty was that the days of the Ottoman Empire were numbered. In 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk ended the history of the Ottoman Empire and formed the Republic of Turkey. The country changed from being a multi-ethnic state to a nation state, attempting to eradicate signs of their Ottoman heritage (Brunner, 2012:46).

It was only in the Age of Enlightenment and the rise of Romanticism in art that the image of Islam started to change in Europe. The Ottoman Empire was now no longer a threat and Europe had experienced the transition from a rural to urban-feudal society. The bourgeoisie was emancipating itself from the upper classes, such as the nobility and clergy. In this context, the East was interpreted as an enticing, magical and alternative world. Translations of Persian and Arabic poetry inspired many poets, especially Goethe, who published his collection of poems West-östlicher Divan (West-Eastern Divan) in 1819. Goethe and Edward Said viewed Oriental poetry as proof that the East and West were linked through the same moral values and a common quest for beauty. Public interest in Orientalism and Arabic studies, as well as Eastern culture and poetry rose in the late 18th and early 19th century, with poets and philosophers encouraging this social trend. Non-Muslim Europeans became interested in orientalism which in some instances led to conversions to Islam. The Oriental culture, including the religious and social lifestyle, attracted many converts. The interest promoted an ‘oriental phantasia’ to other cultural segments, i.e. fashions, furnishings, architecture, literature and lifestyle.

Unlike directly after World War II, the response today towards the migration of Muslims to Europe is often negative or resentful. The reasoning is different, depending on each country and its individual prevailing traditions. Muslim migration only increased in importance when the demand for labour increased in the industrialised countries. However, one should not forget that the first Muslim migrants arrived in Europe much earlier than after the Second World War. In particular, Britain and France welcomed many workers from their former colonies. The British merchant Marine Corps encouraged the migration of sailors from the British colonies, including Muslim
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sailors to English ports (Lawless, 1995:1-7). In Germany, on the other hand, Muslims, in particular Arabs, Africans, Indians, and Tatars were among the allied prisoners of World War I.

Today there is envy on both sides, in the East and in the West. For many Europeans, the Orient symbolises a part of their own history which they believe themselves to have overcome, e.g. the assumed predominance of a primitive irrationality and destructiveness over reason and awareness, whether in the public or private sphere. In Arab-Islamic society, however, the West is once more seen as being hypocritical and untrustworthy, as the source of constant conspiracies to humiliate Muslims and to deny them the space they deserve in this world. This is despite the fact that both sides draw the greater part of their traditions from the same sources – starting from the Abrahamic origins to the early cultural exchanges in Spain, and reflected in the shared forms of life of the Mediterranean – they meet as warring twins. Why do these stereotypes happen? Because it is easier not to step out of one’s own cultural terrain or cultural comfort zone, and to question one’s own set of cultural codes. The stereotypes keep particular thoughts in order without people having to question them.

In regions with a Muslim majority society, the conversion to Islam often presented the opportunity for social improvement. At the same time, there were many Muslim rulers who viewed converts with scepticism. Converts to Islam had neither within a non-Muslim nor within a Muslim society an independent status. Within the former, becoming a Muslim was understood as ‘becoming a Turk’, and with that joining the enemy, whereas within the latter, converts to Islam were not accepted as full citizens. Renegades as such were often not fully accepted in neither Muslim nor Christian society since their sincerity was doubted by both societies alike. They often had to prove their loyalty and faith to the Muslim leader. Zebiri’s example of a caliph who imposed restrictions on Muslim converts illustrates the distrust and scepticism converts had to encounter (Zebiri, 2008:32-33):

37 Mistrust is still a big factor which results in the convert still feels having to continuously defend him-/ herself, and to continuously explain him-/ herself. This factor seems not to originate from the change of religion itself but the change of society, a factor still existing today.
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If I were certain of your Islam, I would leave you to mix with the Muslims in their marriages and in their other business, and if I were certain of your infidelity, I would kill your menfolk, make captive of your children and make your property as booty for the Muslims, but I have doubts about your case (Garcia-Arenal, 1997:238).

If they had proven themselves, it was not uncommon however to find Muslim Europeans in Muslim countries having achieved high positions in politics, the military or society in general. Conversions to Islam by Europeans date back several centuries, however, only a small influencing number were documented. The majority of these converts seemed to have been men who were outsiders of society, i.e. adventurers, pirates, merchants, but also active in politics as well as in the military of their respective countries. This perception seems to describe a certain stereotype again, in that these converts enabled their identity to not only include their previous status but also to include a particular social status they had not accumulated before.

3.4. Conversion to Islam in Britain

A report by Ronay (1978:39) suggests that thirteenth century England came very near to embracing Islam as a state religion. In 1213, King John of England (1199-1216) sent a secret embassy to the Moroccan ruler, Muhammad an-Nasser, to ask for his military support against his own aristocracy. Further documentations state that King John’s relationship with the papacy was unstable; therefore, it may not have been a surprise for the King of England to seek help from the ruler of Morocco. Political and religious relations between the King and the papacy were problematic and at the time of his bid, high at stake. The King’s representatives were instructed to inform Muhammad an-Nasser that King John would give up his kingdom as well as his Christian faith, and would convert to Islam. The ruler of Morocco, however, turned down the King’s request since he considered his actions a betrayal against his own nation (Köse, 1996:11).

38 There were approximately 300,000 European converts to Islam between the 15th and 16th century, often known as ‘renegades’, as they were called by other Europeans (Allievi, 1998:51).
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According to Modood (1994:70), British Muslim converts were not numerous; nonetheless they have a tradition reaching back to the late 19th century. At some point in their adult life, many decided to take on a Muslim religious identity, viewing Islam as the religion of rationality and reason. In agreement with Ansari (2009:14-15), it is interesting to explore how converts to Islam, presumably more rooted in British society than in foreign cultural environments, have tried – and still try – to balance their British identity with their newly won Muslim identity. For most of these converts, it was important to make Islam socially acceptable which meant to reconfigure Islamic understanding by meaningfully connecting Islam with British social and religious norms.

Muslim converts during the late Victorian and Edwardian era primarily looked for similarities between Islam and Christianity (Ansari, 2009:15). Furthermore, most of them were inclined not to disturb cultural practices but deliberately ‘build bridges’, a conversion phenomenon itself which is still, albeit to a lesser extent, present today. Jesus Christ was acknowledged as a prophet of God, and no or little distinction was made between him and the prophet Muhammad* as deliverers of the holy messages.39

For some converts, being a Muslim was presented as being ‘a better Christian’. A play on words making Islam more acceptable became part of the Muslim converts’ communication methods. For example, the Woking Mission, established at the Woking Mosque (built in 1889) was often referred to as the ‘Muslim Church,’ and the Qur’an was often titled the ‘Muslim Bible’. Taking a rolemodel function, the Muslims running the mosque and Muslim centres presented Islam as compatible with being ‘British and Western,’ and thus their message was delivered in a vocabulary familiar to British understanding.

3.4.1. Up to 1900: The bonding with Christian rituals

England’s Muslim convert community of the late 19th century primarily focused around a Liverpudlian nobleman and lawyer by the name of Abdullah Quilliam. Although other Muslim convert communities were established in Norwich,

39 Islamic Review and Muslim India, February 1915, p.60
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Birmingham, Manchester and London, the Liverpool Muslim convert community offers the most profound image and reason for conversion to Islam in an otherwise primarily Christian-influenced society. Quilliam’s converts have mostly been known as people who had not lost faith in God, many of whom had been devout Christians prior to their conversion to Islam. The opportunity to search for and choose spiritual alternatives gave them the possibility to engage outside their Christian-influenced environment. According to Geaves, the 200 Liverpudlian Muslim converts were predominantly people who were in religious doubt which was not uncommon and a growing factor during the Victorian period (Geaves, 2010:292). This religious uncertainty was based on several factors: Christianity in particular rested on less secure foundations than the Church had done decades before this unrest and mistrust towards the Church had begun.

Most Muslim converts around Abdullah Quilliam had undergone a similar journey as himself, questioning the logic and rationality of 19th century Christianity. These journeys did not end in atheism, although it was regarded as an alternative solution to following the church. It was primarily acknowledged that Islam seemed to have the answers to all questions that Victorian time Christianity had not been able to give. Thus, Quilliam influenced ‘his’ Muslim converts by demonstrating his own conversion process, enabling most to undergo a similar spiritual journey as he had done himself. In turn, they demonstrated to British society that Islam was more than a culture or religion entered into by birth. It was possible for the late 19th and early 20th century for Muslim converts to show other Muslims, whether born into or converted to the religion, that it was possible to live islamically without living within an Islamic environment. This aspect is underlined in the following statement from Ron Geaves40:

> Muslim countries may have been dominated by Western technology and concomitant military might, but Islam as a religion could still reach the hearts and minds of the ‘infidels’ (2010:294).

Quilliam was an admirer of Sufism and mystic Islam, celebrated the birthday of the Prophet* - *Mawlid* – at his Liverpudlian mosque, and saw no objection in decorating it for the religious holidays. He rebelled against Wahhabism, as he was an advocate of

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40 Professor of the Comparative Study of Religion
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Ottoman traditions, customs and political leadership. Well-knowledged Muslims, such as Muhammad Abduh and Ahmed Sayyif Khan supported Quilliam in establishing a certain empathy for the heritage of traditional Islam, and established a common consensus among British Muslims (including converts) that it was only possible for Muslims born in Britain—regardless whether they were born into or converted to the religion—to establish a ‘British Islam’ which did not carry cultural ‘baggage’ from another country which is composed in a Muslim majority society. According to Quilliam and others of his time, “a Muslim has to practise their faith from conviction rather than by birth”. In 1896, he was quoted:

> English Muslims have adopted the faith not for personal advantage but because they believe it to be true, and the world will then know how to appreciate these courageous men and women who have boldly made a stand for truth (IW, Vol. 4, No. 39, July 1896, p.74).

Although Quilliam was confronted with opposition, it did not break his mission of successfully promoting Islam. According to the *Islamic World*, there were twenty conversions in 1896 alone (IW, 1986), and it was documented that within 20 years approximately six-hundred conversions followed. Most converts originated from professional middle class backgrounds. Particularly the Liverpool Mosque and Institute (LMI) were known for their mission to help people finding the path of Islam. In 1987, *The Crescent* printed Quilliam’s thoughts that “responsibility rests upon not one but all of us”. The LMI found a way to make Islam attractive to interested Christians by adopting a form of rituals they were accustomed to. These included morning and evening services on Sundays, and hymns were sung many of which were taken from Christian traditions and adapted by Quilliam and others to the Islamic faith and, most importantly, were ‘suitable for an English-speaking Muslim congregation’ (Ally, 1981:58).

Barakatullah, the Imam of the LMI at the time, stated that “...true Islam would revive from the West, simply because the Muslims in the West are Muslims by reason, not by birth.” Both Barakatullah and Quilliam began a discourse in raising the issue of people who were Muslim by birth and Muslim by conviction that remains highly
debated among contemporary British Muslims. Significantly, the understanding of being British and Muslim is an ongoing debate which had intensive phases in the late 20th century, and seems now to be arising again. Quilliam saw himself as “a loyal British subject by birth and a sincere Muslim by conviction” (Bonney et al., 2007:299), a status he wanted to pass on to like-minded people which still seems to present a great number of British Muslim converts.

There is one feature in all this Muslim ethnic, class and religious diversity that has so far not been achieved by Muslim communities in 21st century Britain, for all the rhetoric of unity. In Liverpool, they prayed together along with a mix of English social classes amongst the converts even if they would then return to their ethnic and class conclaves to conduct their private and public lives. However, by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Islam emerged as a practising religion of thousands of born and converted Muslims in Britain. Debates around gender separation, the rights of women, dress codes, food and the language in which Islam’s ritual life took place all happened in the context of reproducing Islam in a new cultural space, and the nineteenth and early twentieth-century communities achieved an adventurous spirit of investigation that has yet to be matched in the twenty-first century (Geaves, 2010:312).

3.4.2. 1900-1950: The establishment of British mosques and Islamic institutions

Parallel to the Liverpool Mosque and Institute, the British Muslim Society (BMS) was set up in 1914 under Lord Headley, an influential British Muslim convert, who had the objective of bringing Muslims and interested non-Muslims together. According to his observation, there were thousands of men and women who were Muslim at heart, who however did not want to publicly confess to their faith in fear of criticism by society (which still exists today). The Woking Mosque became the centre of Islamic mission and was responsible for many conversions. Its intention was to present Islam as
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“standing on a firm foundation, (...) a religion appealing strongly to the intellect as well as to the natural sentiments engrafted in human nature” (Headley, 1923: Foreword).

The BMS met regularly for Friday prayers and Sunday services, organised public literary events, and celebrated the Islamic holidays, including the Prophet’s* birthday in London’s best hotels. Muslims involved in the Woking Mosque and Woking Mission as well as the BMS were convinced that Islam would have to be presented in a modernist fashion to be appealing to British people, and the success of this particular approach proved right since it provoked many conversions during the interwar years. The persuasiveness of the leading Muslims at the Woking Mission in their debates with Christians becomes clear when comparing them with the testimonies of converts. They consciously tried to obtain respect for Islam by representing it as a progressive moral force. They were able to suggest that Islam could be relevant to people living in Britain and was no more an alien presence than Christianity itself. Some converts felt insistence on strict observance of certain practices would encourage Muslims to be open to the same criticisms that they made against Christians who gave rituals a central meaning in their faith.

The Muslim Literary Society (MLS) was founded in 1916 which included the work of those Muslims who added their British touch of social etiquette, conventions and customs, to convey as little ‘foreignness’ as possible (Ansari, 2004:130). Although little is known about MLS, the Qur’anic translator, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, resided as its president, and in 1917 the poet and novelist, Marmaduke Pickthall, converted to Islam after giving a lecture on “Islam and Progress” to the society. The latter was aware of the challenges that conversion to Islam posed to the British way of life, and recognised the difficulties experienced by converts in following the practices, such as fasting in Ramaḍān, and suggested a gradual shift towards total abstinence (Clarke, 1986: 43-44). Lord Headley, although a prominent Muslim convert, fought with personal challenges, such as giving up alcohol. It took him years after his conversion before he was able to give up alcohol completely. His idea of submitting to Islam was finding a compromise in many of the religious practices. For example, he felt that a “busy city man could not be asked to pray five times a day” but thought that “sending up the silent prayer” was sufficient enough (Ansari, 2004:132).
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Although many Muslim converts exist, only particular characters stand out from the crowd, presenting an Islam that influences those who are either interested in converting to it themselves, who are Muslim and who are inspired by such converts, and who may be in search for an alternative to the common religious denominations at hand. Lady Evelyn Cobbold was such a figure, falling in love with Islam, the Arabic language and the Arab world. Her father, the 7th Earl of Dunmore, was a renowned traveller and explorer, taking his family wherever he went, and through that it was that Lady Evelyn visited Egypt and Algeria, places that influenced her thoughts and actions. When asked, she could not recall the precise date for her decision to convert, as she had always felt that she was a Muslim at heart:

I am often asked when and why I became a Muslim. I can only reply that I do not know the precise moment when the truth of Islam dawned on me. It seems that I have always been Muslim. This is not so strange when one remembers that Islam is the natural religion that a child left to itself would develop. Indeed, as a Western critic once described it, ‘Islam is the religion of common sense’ (Jawad, 2012:46).

Lady Evelyn Cobbold married an English man while she was in Cairo. However, after the wedding, the couple returned to Britain where their three children were born. She did thoroughly attend to her duties as a wife and mother, nonetheless, her interest in the Arab culture and Islam did not lessen. Instead she travelled again, with a female friend to North Africa, a trip resulting in her first book Wayfarer in the Libyan Desert, in 1914. Her Muslim identity became more and more apparent as she regularly travelled to the Middle East, befriended Arabs, and according to Jawad, became closer to Marmaduke Pickthall, a fellow British convert to Islam. Her marriage changed into an amicable agreement, but did not sustain its emotional character. After her husband passed away, she decided to go on Hajj to Mecca which she did in 1933. She is known to probably be the first English woman who set foot in Mecca, who also decided to publish her diary impressions in a book, titled Pilgrimage to Mecca in 1934. Perhaps not influential at the time, Lady Evelyn Cobbold portrays an influential character of a female Muslim convert who “paved the way for mutual understanding between the two worlds she was very much part of” (Jawad, 2012:49).
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Prominent Muslim converts contributed to intellectual Islam during the early 20th century. Their efforts in highlighting most accurately and professionally, yet also personally, the teachings and principles of Islam from within and on their own terms are highly appreciated by many Muslims, and non-Muslims alike. Several individual Muslim converts have left a great intellectual Islamic legacy with regard to the history of Islam in Britain which has a great influence on British Muslims and non-Muslims who are interested in the faith. Nonetheless, it is essential to note that despite the fact that this intellectual Islamic legacy has changed the ‘thinktank’ on religion, it has not managed to keep that balanced and accurate view of Islam in Britain. The study of Islam, its representation and view is tainted by bias and prejudice which is nearly impossible to overcome. However, it should be said that, although time is not a factor, there are individuals such as Hamza Yusuf, Halima Krausen and Sarah Joseph who anticipate the pursuance of regaining that particular intellect and Islamic understanding which had been so famous for the late 19th and first half of the 20th century.

3.4.3. 1950-2000: A period of emerging and embracing Sufism

The subject of post-World War II Muslim converts is to be looked at against the backdrop of the process of modernisation and secularisation that Europe, including Britain and Germany, had undergone since the Renaissance. During this period, Europe witnessed drastic social, economic and political upheavals, as well as major intellectual and religious changes as a result of the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, the emergence of capitalism and the rise of modern science and technology. These developments paved the way for the emergence of a new Europe mainly based on anthropocentric rather than theocentric worldviews in which human beings became the centre of everything, or, to use Nasr’s phrase: “The new Europe replaced the kingdom of God with the kingdom of man” (Jawad, 2012:73).

There are two issues that led and continue to lead many people in the West, including, Britain, to turn away from Christianity and seek guidance, direction and spiritual fulfillment in Eastern religions. Some turned to Hinduism, others to Buddhism, and many to Islam, but particularly to Sufi teachings within Islam. The teachings of
Sufism continue to be the main point of entry to Islam for British people, in particular those within the elite and professional middle classes. Sufism is not popular among every Muslim group, school of thought or ideology. Nonetheless, it is a powerful opponent to religious extremism, as well as a significant source, both spiritually and intellectually, that is able to provide credible answers to the challenges that modernism presents to Islam.

The former Protestant Martin Lings, after his conversion in 1938 also known as Abu Bakr Siraj ed-Din, said:

Sufism is necessary because it is to Islam what the heart is to the body. Like the bodily heart it must be secluded and protected and must remain firm-fixed in the centre; but at the same time it cannot refuse to feed the arteries with life (Lings, 1975:106-7).

Accordingly, it seemed as if it was common belief that if one wished to appreciate the deeper motives for conversion to Islam, one could not afford to ignore this aspect of the religion. Sufism played a major role in spreading Islam and recruiting non-Muslims to the faith. Far from being ‘spread by the sword,’ as the common stereotype would have one believe, Islam was spread by peaceful means, i.e. by the preaching of the Sufis, on the one hand, and as mentioned before, by the impact of traders who often were Sufis themselves, on the other hand.

After the Second World War, growing numbers of British Muslims, primarily from a Sunni background, gradually organised themselves in Sufi orders or tariqas. Most of these orders were imported from abroad in ways not dissimilar to other Islamic traditions and became part of international networks with origins in the subcontinent, the Middle East and continental Europe. Their structures tended to be informal, while their leaders were essentially charismatic and attracted their followers through example and perceived qualities. Since their aims were to develop spirituality, engagement by these tariqas with the institutions of the wider British society was minimal. Prominent converts, such as Martin Lings and Gai Eaton, attracted a considerable number of converts to Islam.
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An early Sufi-Muslim movement – Al-Murabitun – was established by Abd al-Qadir as-Sufi, a Scottish Muslim convert who embraced Islam in Morocco in 1967 after his disillusionment with Western culture and its materialistic values. His North African Darqawiyah Order consisted mainly of Western converts who rejected any engagement with the wider society and its institutions and strove for a high degree of autonomy (website Al Murabitun and Nielsen, 1987: 384-394). Other converts were attracted to the charismatic Naqshbandi pir Shaykh Nazim, a Turkish Cypriot who first started visiting Britain in 1974. He operated from the Haqqani Islamic Priory in North London, became his movement’s central figure, and his lifestyle, dress, habits and spiritual practices gavethe group a unique character, with followers attempting to emulate their pir (Geaves, 2000:7). The number of people who have embraced Sufism and Islam is considerable. They include ordinary people who once sought inner peace, such as now middle-aged people who lived through the ‘hippie’ periods of the 1960s and 1970s and those who were and are disillusioned with the Western material way of life and have decided to embrace Islam to fulfil their spiritual needs. Furthermore, a significant number of Western intellectuals found consolation in the wisdom of Sufism, such as the already mentioned English scholar Martin Lings, and the former diplomat Gai Eaton.

Since the Second World War, converts to Islam have represented a small but significant group among British Muslims. Depending on their view of British society, they have adopted diverse strategies to sustain themselves. For some, conversion has meant a radical and profound break with previous beliefs, practices, and indeed identities. Many have idealised the apparent stability of Muslim family life, the absence of alcohol, drugs, and sexual ‘excesses,’ and the sense of ‘discipline’ and order in the individual lives of Muslims, and tended to consciously move away from the materialism and secularism of the mainstream society. It is difficult for a convert to become a ‘cultural or nominal Muslim’. The new Muslim presence brings people of various ethnicities together, forging a much needed unity in diversity. Black Muslim converts are a relatively new presence in the diverse religious tapestry of modern-day Britain. This presence is to be welcomed and affirmed as it enriches Britain’s faith community and disproves the notion that Islam is the sole preserve of South Asians in Britain. Of course, many converts can also be found within Britain’s White population. Book
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writers, such as Köse, Zebiri, Bushill-Matthews and Moosavi explore the experiences of White British converts to Islam (Reddie, 2009: 233).

3.4.4. From 2000: Combining Britishness with Islam: A tremendous challenge of perceptions or cultural conflict?

According to Jawad, it is difficult to ascertain whether there is a cohesive British convert community as such. There are groups dotted around the country and there are prominent individual Muslim converts here and there, but there is no single community in the literal sense. Statistically, there is no precise figure to put on the numbers of this particular ‘community’. There are different suggestions, such as Timothy Winter who believes the number of British Muslim converts to be around 50,000, whereas Yahya Birt suggests between ten- and twenty-thousand British Muslim converts. According to my findings, it seems that the majority of converts come from a previously Catholic, rather than Protestant, Jewish or Hindu background.

In the past, conversions to Islam seemed to be sporadic and predominantly took place among notable persons who had encountered Islam either by working in the Muslim world or by meeting some prominent Muslims in Britain. Most had been so impressed by the Muslim way of life or by the nature of their religion that they decided to embrace their faith. In recent years, particularly after the 9/11 attacks in the United States, the phenomenon of conversion to Islam has gained significance since the rate of conversions increased and became frequent particularly among members of the affluent British middle class. This generated interest, and even some unease among certain sections of the media which found it difficult to comprehend that a number of rich and educated British people chose Islam as an alternative way of life.

It is overwhelmingly believed that people primarily embrace Islam through missionary effects. To a certain extent this may be true, however, it seems that most convert to Islam for spiritual and intellectual reasons, and once they have converted, the majority stay loyal and uphold their new religious beliefs and practices. In the last 15-20 years, British Muslim converts have grown more and more confident to become active
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in influencing Islamic discourses. Particularly educated converts seem to be active in society and politics as a way for them to present Islam in a more balanced manner than it might be portrayed by the media. Their aims are to bridge the gap between Muslim communities and the mainstream British society; help the main Muslim communities to integrate; and to shape an Islam that is not only based on universal Islamic principles, but also routed in some of the celebrated British values, such as mutual respect, openness, tolerance, fairness and justice.

Conversion has usually not led to a complete rupture with the past or a total renunciation of their former religious traditions. Some converts have even discovered that what they learned from their previous religion helped them to understand Islam, and have believed that Jesus and Muhammad* had essentially the same mission. Islam has meant finding the end of the line started by Abraham, and simultaneously a culmination of the Jewish-Christian tradition. As a result, these converts display no hostility towards practising Christians or Jews. Köse’s research tells us that many ordinary converts, like their British-born counterparts of migrant heritage, have been fairly selective in how they incorporate Islam into their identities. Most retain their British names, exchange Christmas presents with their parents, and are not actively ‘puritan’ in their outlook on life. Most male converts do not change their dress at all even though “all the women converts wore clothes which covered their bodies, about a third of the women did not wear a scarf” (Köse, 1999:131-138).

A significant number of converts seem more at ease with the ‘do’s and don’ts’ of Islamic religious prescriptions. They adhere to prohibitions on alcohol, eating pork and sex outside marriage, but can find difficulty in praying (51%) and fasting (27%) regularly (Köse, 1999:137). It appears that for many of these converts religion as such is taken much more seriously than accompanying cultural traditions, whether Arab or South Asian. Thus, these Muslim Britons seem to be seeking ways of retaining their Britishness in combination with aspects of their new religious identity. Daoud Owen, president of the Association of British Muslims, an organisation which represents the majority of converts, suggests that a typical convert is “steeped in British culture”, and in contrast to the more ritualistically and indeed politically inclined strands of South Asian Islam, shows much greater involvement in “genuine mystic paths and matters”
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(The Independent, 26 Aug 1991). Most of Köse’s participants did not seem to have changed culturally to any great degree either and saw little conflict between “following British culture and adopting the religion of Islam” (Köse, 1999: 142).

Many Muslims are beginning to challenge or question the understanding of, on the one hand, ‘Westophobia’, and, on the other hand, ‘Islamophobia.’ Both terms are used in different contexts. The former refers to a perception of cultural decay and encourages young Muslims to engage in an affirmation of Islamic identity and revival of religious values. This perception indicates that 21st century Britain is viewed as perhaps fatally undermined by sexual promiscuity, alcohol abuse, psychological disorders, crime, drugs, the collapse of the family and juvenile disobedience to parental discipline. In opposition to this ‘social sickness’, Islam posits moral precepts of justice, equality, opposition to materialism, greed and egoism, and correct appreciation of family values. The challenge is though, to separate the rhetoric of the Islamists from the religious conviction that accepts the moral superiority of the Qur’an and the belief that the West has so much to learn from (Moosavi, 2011:247-286). Many Muslim converts use the approach of cooperation with the government and society, on the one hand, and Muslim communities, on the other hand, with a perception of combating the current stereotype of born Muslims and Muslim converts, extremism, alienation and Islamophobia. There is a great number of Muslim convert scholars who contribute to Islam by working privately or for higher British institutions in order to present the faith in a present intellectual manner, such as Tim Winter (also known as Abdal-Hakim Murad), Sophie Gilliat-Ray, Batool Al Toma (Mary Geraghty), Yvonne Ridley and Sarah Joseph. All of them contribute to the image of Islam in Britain in their own individual manner, yet, appealing to a wide audience with different interests.

This present-day challenge to establish convention meshes with the unsuccessful attempts of British Muslim converts in the past – to cut the ‘umbilical cord’ that has kept Islam closely tied to its Arab origins and thereby free Islam from its dominant cultural moorings. In the process, this would assert the universality of Islam while enabling it to connect more organically with particular local cultural traditions (Ansari, 2009:17). Many prominent Muslim converts emphasise the importance of acting as ‘bridge builders’ since a Muslim convert will be able to set foot in either ‘community’
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but simultaneously bring them closer together. Sarah Joseph clearly addressed this aspect when she said the following:

Change will not be effected and people of this island will not see the goodness of Islam if we choose to live (...) in isolation, it might be very convenient, but it is short-term thinking with potentially disastrous consequences (Rowan, 2005).

Accordingly, she highlights how British Muslims have to offer their help to solve the difficulties that the British society is facing:

We need to see ourselves and our faith as part of the solution to issues such as social deprivation, unemployment, alienation, extremism and racism (Rowan, 2005).

3.5. Conversion to Islam in Germany

Islam is today, with approximately 4.3 million adherents, Germany’s second largest faith after Christianity. Muslim individuals have been living in Germany over 300 years, however, only in the 20th century; great overlappings changed the course of Muslim presence in the country. Within a century the numbers of Muslims, including foreign workers, subsequent immigrating families, children, grandchildren, war refugees as well as converts to the faith, have grown. Thus, a small Islamic microcosm developed in Germany, and innumerable Islamic groups emerged. They include not only the major Islamic groups of the Sunnis, Shiites and Alevi, but also a variety of mystical brotherhoods and Sufi tariqas.

During the 1960s and 1970s – the years of recruiting guest workers – it was assumed that the Muslims would only temporarily stay in Germany, and as a side effect there would be a temporary mass presence of Islam in the country which would subside once the guest workers would have returned to their home countries. At the end of the 20th century, Germany had to deal with the permanent presence of Muslims, and since then more than Muslims have accepted German citizenship. The influence of Muslims
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on German non-Muslims contains great power, and it seems as if many of the latter embrace Islam every year. According to the head of the Islam Archive in Soest, Muhammad Salim Abdullah (converted to Islam in 1952, formerly known as Herbert Krawinkel), there are approximately 15,000 converts to Islam in Germany. These statistics, however, are not official since conversion to Islam is not registered. This type of religious change is completed without state registration. Only mosques and Islamic organisations may make a note of conversions taking place on their premises.

There are many prominent German converts to Islam who characterise the image of Islam with their individual religious practice, outlook and input. The following pages will give an insight into several male and female German Muslims who have influenced the history of a ‘German Islam’ who advocate the position of being bridge builders or who prefer to teach society an individual and personal lesson of Islam. The earliest German Muslim convert was Adam Neuser (1530-1576) who was a Protestant pastor in the city of Heidelberg. He was known for his antitrinitarian views (criticising its doctrine) and was consequently imprisoned. According to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, he converted to Islam, travelled to Constantinople where he served the Ottoman Sultan Selim II.

3.5.1. Up to 1900: The emergence of the Oriental fashion and military influenced conversions

When taking a closer look at the question „Since when do Muslims live in Germany?”, one would most possibly receive the answer that the first Muslims arrived with the labour migration in the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, Muslims with migrant background have been living in Germany since 1683. During this year, the second siege of the Ottomans occurred in Vienna. However, they were fought back by the German troops of the Holy Roman Empire. Several hundred Muslims became prisoners of war, and thus were kept on German soil. Some of them were forcibly baptised, whereas others were permitted to return home. Once more other Muslims decided to stay in Germany. Particularly the cities of Brake and Hannover are known of owning two of the
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oldest surviving Muslim grave stones in the country, with the former from 1689, and the latter from 1697.

According to Murad W. Hofmann, a German Muslim convert, the history of Islam started in Prussia. Although there were proven diplomatic contacts – including gift exchanges – between Karl, the Great, and the famous Abbasuid Caliph of Bagdad, Harun al-Rashid, one was only able to speak of true bilateral relations between Germans and the Islamic world from 1731 onwards. The Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm I recruited twenty Turkish soldiers for his guard, and in 1732 he had a prayer hall organised for them in the city of Potsdam. The bonds of friendship between Germany and the Ottoman Empire resulted in a rumour among the Tsarist army that the Caliph would declare a war against Russia. As a result, numerous Muslims who had been serving in the Russian army, ran over to the Prussians, forming an independent Bosnia troop in 1762, consisting of 1,000 men who even had an Imam nominated for them. Nearly a century later, the first Turkish cemetery was established in Berlin in 1963 which also counts as the oldest Muslim burial ground in Germany.

Between the 18th and early 20th century, the architecture in Germany began to include Oriental styles and ideas. At the time, it was common to describe it as ‘Turkish fashion’. One of these architectonic examples is the Red Mosque in the park of the city of Schwetzingen.41 It was built between 1779 and 1791, and its structures were back then regarded as a sign of tolerance and openness, and no one took offence to them. At the same time, it should be noted that this kind of architecture was more used for fashion than religious tolerance purposes. Another well-known example of the Turkish fashion is the 19th century Dampfmaschinenhaus (Steam Pump House) at the New Town Havelbucht in Potsdam.42 The probably most impressive architecture is likely to be the Tabakmoschee (Tobacco Mosque) in Dresden, also known as Yenidze.43 The architect, Martin Hammittsch, designed the building in 1907 for the tobacco investor Hugo Zietz who imported tobacco from Ottoman Yenidze. Since there were provisions in Dresden that no factory building that is recognisable as such should be built in the

42 Steam Pump House (Dampfmaschinenhaus): http://www.potsdam.de/cms/beitrag/10001016/34080/
43 Yenidze (tobacco mosque in Dresden): http://www.dresden-und-sachsen.de/dresden/yanidze.htm
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city centre, the idea to build the tobacco factory in an Oriental style had an immense advertising effect on the building and the product itself. Today, it serves as an office building that includes a restaurant.44

During the 19th century, German-Islamic contacts intensified. Several German men serving in the army, converted to Islam. The German Dr. Eduard Schnitzer embraced Islam in the late 19th century, and made a remarkable career as a civilian advisor and Ottoman official. Since he had also acquired the Oriental customs, it was difficult to imagine that he combined it with his Western European background. He was also known as Mehmet Emin Pasha when he acted as the governor of Equatorial Africa (Meissner, 1986:19ff.). Another adventurous German convert, Karl Detroit, became Mehmed Ali Pasha due to his position as a field marshal of the Ottoman forces. In 1843, he left home to go to sea, travelled to Turkey (which was referred to as Ottoman Empire at the time) and embraced Islam in 1846. As part of the Ottoman army, he fought against Russia, and was made general Brigadier and Pasha in 1865.

The Emperor Wilhelm II particularly stood out in his role as “protector of the Islamic world” in the fight against the British, French and Russians. His travels to Istanbul in the late 19th and early 20th century left a lasting impression there and back home. It may be surprising for some, but it was no accident that the driving force of the Young Turks, Enver Pasha, led Turkey into World War I since he was previously a military attache in Berlin. During the war, it was necessary to build another mosque for the approximately 1500 Muslim prisoners of the wars came from Russia, North Africa and Senegal. The mosque of Wünsdorf was inaugurated in 1915, in the presence of the Turkish ambassador Kemaleddin Sami Pasha. Returning to the existence of German converts to Islam, one is only able to speak of a first German-born Muslim community since 1922 which had ties with the Indian Ahmadiyyah-Muslim Maulana Sadr ud-Din, a man who took over the mosque in Berlin-Wilmersdorf in 1925.

44 Yenidze Kuppelrestaurant: http://www.kuppelrestaurant.de/index1.html
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3.5.2. 1900-1950: The Ahmadiyyah – Integration of Islam into German society

First organisational structures developed towards the end of World War I. In 1922, the Indian professor, Gabbar Hayri, founded the Islamische Gemeinde zu Berlin (The Islamic Community of Berlin). In the first few years of its existence, the organisation united a large number of 1800 Muslims who resided in Berlin as students or for political or economical reasons. Significantly, there are no statistics about this period, although according to Sahinöz (2009:12ff), Gerhard Höpp mentioned figures in the Moslemische Revue (Muslim Revue (MR)) in 1990. Projections and comparisons between particularly named Muslims from the time in the camps and known persons in the 1920s in Berlin, roughly confirm the given numbers. This first official Muslim community also counted about twenty German Muslims. Prominent Berlin converts to Islam include the historian Chalid Albert Seiler-Chan (conversion in 1922) and the journalist Leopold Weiss Muhammad Asad (conversion in Berlin in 1926). These can easily be verified through press releases, writings and particularly their names.

In October 1924, the Berlin-Wilmersdorf mosque was opened, since the Wünsdorfer mosque had been closed due to disrepair. However, an innerislamic-ideological dispute began among the Muslims who visited it. Upon the opening of the Wilmersdorf mosque, only members and sympathisers of the Ahmadiyya Muslim group, the builders of the new mosque, appeared. The Ahmadiyyah movement is associated with a variety of theologically motivated and divided groups from India, and has a history dating back to the 19th century. At the end of that century, the Ahmadiyyah emerged in India and dates back to its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) who originates from a wealthy family from Qadiyan in the Northern Indian province of the Punjab. The Islamic clergy, in particular the Sunnis and Shiites, have continuously criticised and still criticise the ideological and theological principles of the Ahmadiyyah, nonetheless, its expansion spread across the continents, reaching the U.S.A, Britain and Germany. The Pakistani Parliament decided in 1974 to exclude the Ahmadiyyah from the religion of Islam and declared both Ahmadiyyah groups as belonging to the non-Muslim minorities.

45 Organisationsstatut der Islamischen Gemeinde zu Berlin (Statute of the Islamic Community in Berlin), Berlin 1922, p.1
46 Der Tag, Berlin, 10th of October 1924
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After World War II, members of both (Qadiyan and Lahore) Ahmadiyyah groups lived in Berlin. However, it is not clear since when Ahmadiyyah Muslims have been living in Germany. The Indian Maulana Sadr al-Din founded in Berlin-Charlottenburg, a Muslim community whose centre was the Wilmersdorf-Mosque which was managed by himself as the first Imam. This mosque was open to Muslims from all theological backgrounds, and the guestbook they had kept, demonstrates that not only German Muslims and adherents of the Ahmadiyyah movement attended the mosque, but also Egyptians, Iranians, Turks, Moroccans, Indians, and foreign non-Muslim guests frequented the community. Worth noting is the preference of the German language used in the mosque in order to establish a common language among the Muslims of all nations and invite interested parties to join the mosque.

The Ahmadiyyah’s intellectual, philosophical and open-minded approach attracted many Germans, particularly academics, such as the Muslim convert from Judaism, Dr. Hugo Hamid Markus, as well as Dr. Arif Greifeld. Other important converts included the Austrian nobleman Baron Rolf Umar von Ehrenfels (conversion in 1927) as well as the German Amina Mosler (conversion in 1928). At the instigation of Maulana Sadr al-Din, a German-language quarterly magazine named Moslemische Revue (Muslim Review) began to circulate in 1924. Dr. Hamid Markus, Dr. Arif Greifeld and Dr. Khalid Banning were responsible for its contents and circulation. The popularity of the magazine soon extended to the Balkans where it was translated into the appropriate languages. Despite its popularity, it had to be suspended two years later since it was under financial constraints. However, in 1929 the magazine was available again and then continuously appeared until World War II began. In 1934, the first known German couple, Abdullah Dayer and Fatima Adaresh who converted to Islam, got married in an Islamic wedding ceremony at the Berlin-Wilmersdorf Mosque (Murtaza, 2011).

This little but very dynamic community was able to confirm the first German transmisson of the Qur’an from a Muslim pen. Under the directions of Sadr al-Din, it was Dr. Abdul Hassan Mansoor of the University of Berlin who translated an English translation of the Qur’an into the German language (Abdullah, 1981:22ff.). Meanwhile, it was Dr. Hamid Markus who was responsible for a readable German speech. The
translated work was completed in 1934 and the German Qur’anic translation went into print in 1939 (Sahinöz, 2011:8), the same year that Mohammed Aman Hobohm converted to Islam at the age of thirteen. Worth mentioning is also the creation of the Zentralinstitut Islam Archiv Deutschland e.V. (Central Institute Islam Archive Germany) in 1927. It registered approximately 1000 Muslims, including some 300 German Muslim converts living in Germany in 1933.

On 22 March, 1930, the Islamische Gemeinde Berlin e.V. was replaced by the Deutsche Moslemgemeinde (German Muslim Community) which was later known as Deutsche-Muslimische Gesellschaft (German Muslim Society) which was chaired by the German Muslim convert Dr. Hamid Markus. According to the organisation, the Muslims wanted to specifically express their ties to Germany, and to appear more inviting. Therefore, the organisation’s board of directors was not only represented by Muslims, but with non-Muslims as well, such as Mrs. Rodgez and Mr. Gotsheh. Their aim was to promote Islam and to foster companionship among Muslims in Europe (Ahmad, 2006:32).

The Nazi Regime changed many things for the congregation of the Berlin-Wilmersdorf Mosque. The Deutsche-Muslimische-Gesellschaft (German Muslim Society) was under observation by the German authorities and targeted as being an international standing organisation under Jewish-Communist influence. This accusation was primarily aimed at its chairman, Dr. Hamid Markus who was known to be of Jewish descent. Due to the emerging Palestine conflict, Nazis also mingled with Muslims, and some of them appeared receptive of the message of Hitler’s henchmen. Others felt patriotic and joined the German Wehrmacht (Armed Forces). It was Max von Oppenheim who presented the German Foreign Office a plan in 1940 – through abuse of Islam – to incite the Muslims in the colonised countries. Although there was no longer a present caliphate, it was the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Muhammad Amin Al-Hussaini, who would become the new leading Muslim figure within this war. First, the Muslims in Syria were caused to revolt; Oppenheim hoped that this spark would then jump over to Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia. At the same time, the Nazis also used the Wilmersdorf Mosque for their propaganda appearances with the Grand Mufti (Ahmad, 2006:60).
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The already above mentioned German Muslim convert, Amina Mosler, was in charge of the mosque and felt powerless against the actions of the Nazis. After the war, she took up the challenge and organised the cleaning and necessary repairs of the heavily damaged mosque. When she entered the mosque for the first time after the war, she found the bodies of fourteen soldiers of the SS who had positioned themselves in the minarets in order to hold back Soviet soldiers (Ahmad, 2006:45). Although, it was possible to restore the mosque, the Deutsche-Muslimische-Gesellschaft (German Muslim Society) was never able to restore it to its old dynamics again. This was impossible since the war counted many losses, and the Muslim guest workers had little use for the “Ahmadiyyah Mosque” and its Indian alignment. Consequently, the Deutsche-Muslimische-Gesellschaft (German Muslim Society) had to dissolve itself in 1954.47

After World War II, only a small number of Muslim exiles and refugees remained in Berlin. Nonetheless, with the influx of foreign Muslim students, intellectuals and German Muslim converts, a lively community life developed around the still remaining Maulana Sadr al-Din. He was known as a Muslim missionary of the Lahore-Ahmadiyyah and resided as its chair from 1951 until his death in 1981. Following his passing, the Berlin Muslims decided to join together as the Islamische Gemeinde Berlin e.V. (Islamic Community Berlin).

3.5.3. 1950-2000: Caught between resistance and embracement of Islamic ideologies

The specific orientation of the Ahmadiyyah theology did not seem to be a reason of conflict prior to World War II, especially since most German Muslims did not even know the specific background of Ahmadiyyan theological thought. Mohammed Aman Hobohm (conversion in 1939) was the first German Muslim to become the Imam of the Berlin mosque; in his writings he mentioned:

47 The Berlin-Wilmersdorf mosque is a historical monument since 1993. Since it was visited by fewer and fewer believers, it had to be closed in 2007, and is now only open for special events, such as the Tag der offenen Moschee (Open Mosque Day).
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I knew nothing, only read what was available to me. Most literature originated from published writings on the Ahmadiyyah movement by the movement itself. Nonetheless, it did not raise any suspicions about their orthodoxy. (Heimbach, 2001:40)

After the war, however, many foreign Muslims raised criticism in the teachings and practice of the Ahmadiyyah movement. To his dismay, Hobohm had to acknowledge that many migrant Muslims stayed away from the mosque due to his commitment to the Ahmadiyyah, and despite all his efforts, he was not able to stop the divide of the community. His opponents founded their own ‘Islamic community’ with a prayer hall on the grounds of the Turkish cemetery in Berlin (Hobohm, 1994:35).

Although the Ahmadiyyah lost influence in Berlin, the movement established several religious circles throughout the country, including Hamburg in 1949 and 1957, as well as in Frankfurt in 1959. Many Muslim converts of the postwar generation have come to embrace Islam through the Ahmadiyyah movement. In a 1977 article of the Sunni-oriented magazine al-Islam, German Muslims remembered the following:

We were looking for information about Islam and found the Ahmadiyyah because they (...) were the only people who were able to call a mosque their own (Abdullah, 1981:53).

During the 1960s, Christian institutions also met with the Ahmadiyyah community when they began to deal with the presence of Islam in Germany: The Westfälische Missionskonferenz (Westphalian Mission Conference) in Bochum 1961 as well as the Katholische Akademie der Erdiözese Freiburg (Catholic Academy of the Archdiocese Freiburg) in 1966 created the first attempts of a Christian-Muslim dialogue and turned to representatives of the Ahmadiyyah movements since their structures were the most clearly perceptible ones exhibited in Germany at that time.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Muslim life in Germany was dominated by the existence of primarily Turkish Muslims as Gastarbeiter (guest workers). Most of the men lived in residential buildings and met for prayers in rented halls. Only the family reunification made it possible for the Muslims already living in Germany to feel more at
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home and to take the first steps in the formation of Muslim organisations. Various Turkish Muslim organisations, such as the DITIB, Milli Görüs (IGMG), VIKZ, ATIB and others, have sprung from this period. As a result, practising Muslims began to organise the basic forms of everyday Muslim life, including communal prayer, Islam- and Qur’an classes for children and adults, and regular meetings within the community. The 1970s, in particular demonstrates the founding of more and more local mosques and Islamic associations which subsequently were joined together on a national level or connected under umbrella organisations, such as the Zentralrat der Muslime Deutschland (Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD)) and Koordinationsrat der Muslime (Coordinating Council of Muslims (KRM)).

Numerically, the largest organisation is the Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion e.V. (Turkish Islamic Union Institution for Religion also known as DITIB), founded in 1984. The connectivity with the country of origin is the greatest within this organisation, and thus crucial since it offers a more state-administered than self-organised Islam. The Imams within the DITIB are Turkish officials and until recently there were religious attachés in the Turkish consulates which directed the activities of the organisation. The other well-known Turkish-Muslim organisation is the Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüs e.V. (Islamic Community Milli Görus (IGMG)), founded through predecessoring organisations in the 1970s. IGMG has to this day a politico-religious double character because the organisation sees itself, on the one hand, as a religious organisation of Muslims in Europe, and on the other hand, belonging to the Islamic-oriented party movement of Necmettin Erbakan in Turkey. The Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren e.V. (Association of the Islamic Cultural Centre (VIKZ)), founded in 1973, originates from the Qur’anic course movement of the Islamic scholar Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan which started in the 19th century. The association’s reason for its establishment was Atatürk’s temporary abolition of the national indoctrinated religious education system, resulting in private Islamic teaching. The organisation now operates legally in Turkey, running several Islamic educations institutions. Tuhanan was also known as being a Sufi sheikh who belonged to the Naqshibandi-Tariqa48.

48 The Naqshibandi-Tariqa is one of the major Sufi spiritual orders in Islam. It is the only Sufi order that claims its lineage to be traced back not only to the Prophet Muhammad™ through his father-in-law and companion Abu Bakr, but also the Prophet’s cousin Ali (r.a.).
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Since the late 1970s, the majority of Muslims have entered Germany not as workers, but primarily as war refugees or due to persecution in their home countries. Most of these Muslims originated from Afghanistan, Palestine, the autonomous areas of Kurdistan, and Pakistan. Since the late 1990s, they have been replaced in numbers by Muslims from Bosnia and the Kosovo of which hundreds of thousands have fled to Germany. This divide in the motifs, characterises the Muslims of different nationalities in Germany and simultaneously makes them a perceptible feature. Whilst the Turkish, North African, Yugoslavian, Pakistani and Arab Muslims seem to come to Germany to live here permanently, it is the presence of Muslims of other countries which seems limited by time. Accordingly, Muslims who have joined clubs, groups, and associations, seem to have settled in Germany, whereas others may only be temporarily staying in the country. German Muslim converts have also contributed to the existing Muslim organisations, however, until today it has not been possible that the big organisations allow themselves to let go of their national character.

Although Islam has grown to become the second largest religion in Germany, also being the only one achieving a continuous rapid growth through continuous births and conversions, Muslims do not have the religious and political impact as it may be considered. Simultaneously, Islam has become a phenomenon in Germany which is generally negatively perceived within the non-Muslim German society. Their activities are noticed however not fully accepted in German society which means that although German society is opening doors for Muslims to receive recognition and acceptance, it has not been able to fully accommodate to the situation. As a result, Salafi-oriented groups, dissatisfied with the government and society as a whole, develop within their own community mechanisms, thus arousing a vicious circle of problems originating from both the non-Muslim majority society and the Muslim communities.

For more than thirty years, German Muslim organisations, particularly the Islamrat (Islamic Council) and the Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland e.V. (Central Council of Muslims in Germany), have been trying to run a variety of events concerning the inter-religious dialogue. Yet, it seems that the participating Muslims outside this circle of regular guests and interested people have little success within German society, and have subsequently become the targets of German politics. Both the Interior and
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Foreign Ministry have hardly seriously dealt with the concerns and needs of the Muslims living in Germany, especially as the formation of Muslim organisations have always been observed with suspicion.

It was only in the mid-1990s when Islam was no longer only regarded as a ‘foreign religion’ but received greater acceptance across the country. Consequently, the awareness grew that Germany was to be a country of immigrants and that the immigrants would remain permanently. Previously most of them had been regarded as foreigners, but not as a part of German society. This change of attitude confirmed the – at least officially – full acceptance of the permanent existence of Islam in Germany, as being the second largest religion after Christianity. Corresponding to this national acceptance of Islam in Germany, many Muslims began to understand their local existence as becoming permanent residents. This was particularly achieved by the second and third generation of the Gastarbeiter (guest worker) generation who have been born and raised in Germany. Accordingly, an increasing interest introduced changes in the nature of Muslim community life. In many places temporary ‘backyard’-mosques were established which later turned into permanent places of prayer and communal activities after the acquisition of properties by the mosques and Muslim organisations. The communities also began to claim their social, legal and religious rights from the state and society, in order to sustain the social existence of Islamic religious life as required: The supply of meat, slaughtered according to Islamic rites, Islamic religious education as part of the schools’ curriculum, university training of Islamic teachers and funeral services according to Islamic rules. All these demands have, however, only been able to slowly become the centre of discussion in the early years of the 21st century.

The number of German Muslims who have gone through the process of naturalization, has steadily grown in recent years. This should not obscure the fact that German Muslim converts – non-migrant Germans – only make up a small minority within the Muslim population.49 Considering the small number of German Muslim converts – in comparison to the rest of the Muslim population – it is not surprising that

49 The Zentralinstitut Islam Archive e.V. (Central Council Islam Archive) believes the current number of German Muslim converts reaches the amount of approximately 15,000 people.
they have not created an organisation or institution as large as those of the migrant Muslim population. The maintenance of their associations is limited to a smaller number of members. Nevertheless, they are worth mentioning since despite fewer numbers, German Muslim converts have developed significant activities that have made them indispensable for Muslim life in Germany. A brief overview of managed organisations by German Muslim converts will demonstrate the significance of their participation in an active Muslim life in Germany:

The Deutsche Muslim-Liga e.V. (German Muslim League (DML)) was founded in Hamburg in 1954. This league perceived itself as the “representative of the interests of Muslims with German citizenship” (§4 of their charter). A person was only able to become a member of the DML if the person was German, or born in Germany and raised as a Muslim (§6). The DML was the first Muslim organisation that already applied for recognition as a public corporation during the 1950s (Abdullah, 1980:50). Under the auspices of the German Muslim Sheikh Bashir Ahmad Dultz (conversion in 1950), some members of the DLM-Hamburg decided to found the Deutsche Muslim-Liga Bonn (DLM-Bonn) in 1989, and was to be treated as an independent organisation. Dultz believed that the foundation was necessary in order to allow appropriate interfaith orientation. Thus, the DML-Bonn saw it as particularly important to

follow the Qur’anic commandments, to compete with the adherents of the holy scriptures, i.e. Christians and Jews, in a good manner, and to fight for minority rights in the Islamic world which are enshrined in the Qur’an” (§4, 1, page 3).

The organisation itself is known for its participation in numerous interfaith activities, such as the JMC (Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Europe) and within the German section of the WCRP (World Conference of Religions for Peace). Their leader, Sheikh Bashir Ahmad Dultz, also leads the Tariqat as-Safinah which is a branch of the mystic Alawiyya community, while several DLM members are part of the Sufi community (Dressler, 1997:5).

Islamic mysticism, also known as Sufism, is popular among German Muslim converts, and thus several Sufi organisations are directed by them. According to
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Dressler (1997: 7), the Institut für Islamstudien – Sufi-Archiv Deutschland e.V. (Institute for Islamic Studies- Sufi Archive Germany) was founded in Brandenburg-Trebbus in 1992. It was then and there, that a branch of the Mevlevi-order was founded under the leadership of the German Muslim convert, Sheikh Abdullah Halis Dornbrach (conversion in 1965). Its primary function was the classical education of whirling dervishes whose Turkish facilities were closed during Atatürk’s power. The Haqqani Trust – Verein für neue deutsche Muslime e.V. (Association for New German Muslims) – another mystic Islamic association – was founded by the followers of the Northern-Cypriotian Sheikh Muhammad Nazim Adl al-Haqqani (Dressler, 1997:7f.). Since 1995, the association operates from their communal centre, the Osmanische Herberge (Ottoman Lodge) in Eifeldorf Kall-Sötenich.

Founded in 1995, the Weimar Institut für geistes- und zeitgeschichtliche Fragen e.V. (Weimar Institute for Questions Regarding History of Thoughts and Contemporary History) can be assigned to the followers of the Scottish Sheikh Abdulqadir as-Sufi al-Murabit (Kaweh, 1997:33). This group is particularly known for its fortnightly publications of their newspaper Islamische Zeitung (Islamic Newspaper) which has attained attention, such as with their recognition of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as a Muslim (IZ, No. 5, 1995) or the issuance of an Islamic currency (IZ, No. 9, 2009). The association has also received negative attention through Murabitun followers who had been suspected of anti-semitic and Nazi propaganda (Lemmen, 1999:36).

The Initiative „Haus des Islam“ (House of Islam (HDI)) was founded by the German Muslim convert, Muhammad Siddiq Wolfgang Borgfeldt, (conversion in 1962) in Lützelbach in 1982. The association’s mission included “a contribution to the correct understanding of Islam as a doctrine of faith and lifestyle” (§2, p. 2). The HDI makes its contribution by organising annual meetings of German-speaking Muslims, known as Treffen deutschsprachiger Muslime (Meetings of German-speaking Muslims (TDM)). These meetings take place over several days since several hundred German or German-

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50 Further information in the German language can be found at https://www.mevlevi.de, last retrieved 13/03/2013
51 Further information can be found at http://www.osmanische-herberge.de/, last retrieved 13/03/2013
52 Islamische Zeitung (Islamic Newspaper) can be found at http://www.islamische-zeitung.de, last retrieved 13/03/2013
53 transl. as „House of Islam“
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speaking Muslims nationwide attend the event. The TDM can be understood as ‘church conventions of German Muslims’ because it allows the participants to be part of numerous offers of individual religious experiences. Also the *Islamische Gemeinschaft deutschsprachiger Muslime & Freunde des Islam Berlin e.V.* (Islamic Community of German-speaking Muslims & Friends of Islam Berlin (IGDM))\(^54\) was founded in 1979, and is currently chaired by a German Muslim convert named Mohammed Herzog (conversion in the early 1980s). This community’s main task is to promote the exchange of dialogue and cooperation of German Muslims, as well as the dissemination of Islamic knowledge among Muslims and non-Muslims (§2a+b).

Leading German Muslim converts during this period include the couple Muhammad Abdul Karim (conversion in 1963; 1933-2009) and Fatima Grimm (conversion in 1960), as well as Sheikha Halima Krausen (who does not believe in conversion, but felt being a Muslim in 1963), Frank Abdullah as-samit Bubenheim (conversion in 1973), Rabeya Müller-Haque (conversion at the end of the 1970s), Abdullah Uwe Wagishauser (conversion in 1976), Murad Wilfried Hofmann (conversion in 1980) Andreas Ismail Mohr (conversion in 1981), and Annett Abdel-Rahman (conversion in 1995). Apart from Wagishauser’s specific position as the Amir of the Ahmadiyyah community, it is impossible to suggest the appropriate affiliations of the above mentioned converts within the German Muslim community.

3.5.4. From 2000: The development of converts being bridge-builders or isolators

Unlike migrant Muslims, people who themselves or whose parents come from foreign countries in which more than half of the population is made up of Muslims, there are no statistics nor demographics of German Muslim converts. At the same time, it should be noted that there is an increase in the functions of Muslim organisations and communities which are filled with German converts. There are two nationwide Islamic organisations, the *Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland e.V.* (Central Council of Muslims in Germany) and the *Islamische Gemeinschaft der schiitischen Gemeinden*

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54 transl. as „Islamic Community of German-speaking Muslims & Friends of Islam Berlin“
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Deutschlands (Islamic Society of Shiite Communities of Germany) which have German Muslim converts on their board of directors. Also the Aktionsbündnis muslimischer Frauen (Alliance of Muslim Women), an association dedicated to the improvement of social and political participation of Muslim women, owns a board of directors of which half is represented by German Muslim converts. Converts are also present in the field of Islamic education, such as at the Interdisziplinäres Zentrum für Islamische Religionslehre (Interdisciplinary Centre for Islamic Education) at the University of Erlangen in which conceptual and practical problems are tackled. According to Filter (2008: 198), their participants also research and publish texts on Islamic theological questions within the German context, as well as on social and political issues which are relevant to living as a Muslim in Germany.

Although, many converts are active participants of Muslim life in Germany, they are an ethnic group which has rarely been included in previous studies on Muslims in Germany. The official statistics in Germany do not include the aspect of religious affiliation nor is the Muslim community centrally organised. Therefore, there is neither information on a central Muslim converts organisation nor does a central register exist that lists German converts to Islam (Spiewak, 2007). Regardless of the different motives and motivations Germans converting to Islam have, it can be observed that a considerable number of Muslim converts actively participate in the activities of Muslim organisations and mosques. It is, therefore, to be assumed that converts who directly or indirectly engage in a Muslim lifestyle have activated a social, political and religious influence within the Muslim communities but also in the non-Muslim majority society.

Muslim converts are familiar with the social, cultural and religious codes of both the non-Muslim majority society and the Muslim community which means they can act as mediators – bridge builders – between the two ‘worlds’. Whether or not they engage in such activities depends a great deal on the interest of the individual convert. Roald (2004) believes that particularly Muslim converts from an educated background can distinguish between an ‘ideal Islam’ and the actual practice which frequently mixes with tradition and culture. They are able to pass on their knowledge of the social, cultural and political structures of the host country to the migrant Muslim communities. Converts from a lesser educated background, however, tend to adapt to the migrant Muslim
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community and their lifestyle. Nonetheless, the mediating role of Muslim converts suggests a better cooperation of Muslim communities with state institutions and the enhancement of the inter-religious dialogue.

What are the features and characteristics of 21st century converts when and if they see themselves as German Muslims? How can this be compared to second and third generation migrant Muslims? Although the latter have similar experiences within the German educational system, they differ in significant aspects – especially in regards to the identity-forming processes - from Muslim converts. Muslim converts have not been born into a Muslim family, they do not have a migrant background, and thus they do not own the experience of migration, i.e. the harsh experiences of overcoming one’s individual foreignness after the migration has taken place, trying to position oneself within a society with new social forms and values. In this context, it could be interesting to know how the children of Muslim converts are to be perceived since they are the first generation of born Muslims without a migrant background, and thus this field of study could be extended. The society as a whole could benefit from it in terms of understanding the dynamics of this phenomenon and in particular the challenges that affected families and their children have to overcome living in that kind of cultural mixture.

Despite intensive research, it was nearly impossible to find leading personalities among German Muslim converts who embraced Islam after the year 2000, and who individually characterise Islam in Germany, whilst being noticed and acknowledged by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The most famous German convert who embraced Islam in 2001 is the Salafi-oriented preacher, Pierre Vogel, also known as Abu Hamza. Sven Lau (Abu Adam) and Deso Dogg (Abu Talha Al-Almani) are also German Muslim converts who propagate Islam in a minimalist puristic fashion, operating alongside Pierre Vogel in their dawah (missionary invitation to Islam). There are also individual intellectual German Muslim converts who embraced Islam after 2000, however, so far they have not attained the degree of nationwide recognition. Among them are the Islamic scholar Kathrin Klausing (conversion in 2000) and the marital couple, Kai Ali Rashid and Katrin Aisha Lühr, who embraced Islam in 2004. Consequently this means that at present, German Muslim converts who embraced the
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faith in the 21st century are known as a mass group rather than through leading individuals.

There are several charismatic prominent Muslim converts who greatly influence their environment and particularly those they have “summoned” around them. This can occur having a positive or negative effect on a new Muslim, since he or she will follow this leading figure. Depending on the group’s ideology, the new convert will either choose to stay within the known mechanisms or he or she will choose to continue the spiritual path on his or her own terms. The dynamics between the differently influencing religious personalities and groups often cause tension between individuals and may even contribute zu extremism as well as the possible split of the Muslim community as a whole, thus it is a challenge for a new Muslim to find his or her way within the current supermarket of inner-Islamic directions. The chapter clearly demonstrated the change and development of how people become interested in Islam and the reasons as to why they choose to embrace the faith. Whereas the late 19th century offered converts to Islam searching for a steady religion of reason and rationality – which was not found within Christianity, although many of them were devout Christians -, reasons for conversion in the early 21st century appear to include the rejection of capitalism and secularism but simultaneously the challenging development of a Muslim convert identity.
Chapter 4 Why Islam – Developing a Convert Muslim Identity

4.1. Introduction

This chapter of the thesis will introduce the reader to the study’s British and German participants by addressing the first notable differences and similarities the participants have mentioned during their interviews. This empirical part will include a detailed description of the reasons for conversion to Islam and the forming an individual Muslim identity. Attitudes prior to conversion will be critically reflected and compared with the attitudes and behaviour after conversion. This chapter’s particular interest is the attempt to demonstrate the various development processes of conversion to Islam. These include the attitudes and experiences of a non-Muslim in a Muslim country prior to conversion, and the rationale behind the conversion, whether conceived as the result of practical reasons or due to a spiritual search. The need for an authoritative Muslim as a religious guide as well as the maintenance of or indifference to particular British or German traditions, and consequently the forming of a convert’s Muslim identity is discussed.

The publication of *Muslim life in Germany* seems to have confirmed many people’s existing prejudices on the issue (Haug, Müssig, and Stichs, 2009). It shed light on the reality of Islam, while negatively strengthening a certain image of Islam and Muslims, associating them with terrorism, forced marriages and honour killings. Nonetheless, the study also held positive surprises in terms of fostering a development towards more social interaction and making serious efforts towards a dialogue between a non-Muslim majority and a Muslim minority in German society. Unfortunately, the study does not include those Muslim who have not been migrants or come from that background. Although converts to Islam represent a minority group among Muslims, their numbers are growing rapidly. There are no figures officially recorded, but taking into consideration the unofficial rise in numbers, this could indicate that the usual explanations as to why people embrace Islam are no longer sufficient.55 Since converts to Islam as a group of individuals influence Muslim life in non-Muslim countries, it is unfortunate that they still do not receive much attention and are often not included in

55 These could include forced or inspired conversions, ie. in order to ‘fit’ into a Muslim family, or due to peer pressure by others.
surveys concerning general aspects of Muslim life in non-Muslim societies.\textsuperscript{56} Their influence on both the Muslim community and interactions with the given society is larger than the current view indicates. The current view of the input by Muslim converts into their respective societies seem to be mixed, which also depends on what kind of background the individual convert originates from and how he or she implements religious aspects into their everyday lives.

The annual numbers of conversions to Islam remain constant, though the statistics offer a difference in the motivations for conversion - spiritual search, academic and theological teachings or from meeting other Muslims (Brice, 2011:148-9). In the recent past, the majority of converts to Islam seemed to be females who embraced Islam as a consequence of their marriage to a Muslim partner (Brice, 2011:18ff). However today, even though females still make up the majority of converts to Islam, reasons now range from meeting a Muslim partner of either gender to a spiritual and intellectual engagement with Islam.\textsuperscript{57} Hence, Islam attracts people coming from all walks of life. This unique aspect is also reflected in the results of this study concerning converts to Islam in Britain and Germany.

One significant aspect is the changing lifestyle after conversion. No matter how liberally religious obligations and rituals are interpreted, they will still have a major impact on a person’s lifestyle. Some newly acquired Islamic principles may not coincide with cultural traditions. Depending on the individual convert, these traditions may be given up or adapted, in order to be able to adhere to the new religious norms and conditions. The key question may be: are the new religiously motivated rules interpreted and acted upon literally? If so: in what manner? Not only the general non-Muslim public but also born Muslims are brought to believe that converts to Islam tend to practice their new religion in a more puritanical and consequent fashion than many born

\textsuperscript{56} Here the extent to which converts have an influence is open to question. Certainly the growth of Muslim organisations connected with converts is an indication however they are still in the minority as an influence. It takes time to develop trust between Muslims born into the faith and those who have embraced the faith at a later age, being affiliated to another or no religion prior to conversion.

\textsuperscript{57} Famous female converts include Halima Krausen in Germany, Sarah Joseph in Britain, and Aminah Assilmi from Ohio, the USA.
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Muslims whereby the latter seems to be based more on cultural traditions than Islamic sources. The necessity to prove to fellow Muslims that the newly embraced faith is a life-changing decision is a perception that needs to be taken seriously.

Conversion to Islam is not a new trend; however, it has developed into a modern phenomenon which greatly influences the image of Islam and its followers. Yet, such an influencing impact should be put into perspective since the majority of Muslim converts have their personal reasons for embracing the faith. Often, their reasons have little or nothing in common with the current portrayal of Islam in the media and in common parlance. This thesis aims to enable a new way of viewing the issue, offering specific, authorised ‘coming out’ stories and narratives of converts to Islam. Each participant has experienced both positive and negative reactions, fear and a heart-warming welcome, mistrust and openness. These are ambivalent characteristics of strangeness or foreignness. Therefore there is still this experience of the inner and outer relationship the Muslim has with his/ her identity. For example, covering clothes and Muslim character (see at the end of the chapter), but mainly focussed on closeness and distance.

During my research for this study, I have gained the impression that in comparison to many non-Muslims but also born Muslims, converts to study the Islamic sources, i.e. the Qur’an and the ahadith (depending which direction and school they decide to follow) without the incorporation of cultural traditions from countries containing a Muslim majority society. This aspect, however, depends on the individual context and the social environment the convert lives in.

4.2. As a non-Muslim in a Muslim majority country

Travelling has always been of great interest to many people, and the possibilities of travelling to foreign countries are endless. Nowadays, nearly everyone can travel

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58 This may often include a greater overt observance of religious duties, such as daily prayers and/ or studies, i.e. learning Arabic, or perhaps staying within a purely Muslim environment.

59 In order to make the reading easier, I have chosen the term „Muslim country.” Although, this is by no means a strictly defined term, this study uses “Muslim country” to designate those states where the majority of the population is Muslim and the largest cultural influence is Islam. While recognising that this is a rather common and general definition, it is sufficient for current purposes to convey its meaning that refers to those countries which are mainly regarded as traditional Muslim countries.
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cheaply in order to enjoy different sceneries and cultures, and even for study purposes. Muslim countries have become more open to tourism and study travels, hence the possibilities to learn more about Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt etc., include more than a beach holiday in a tourist resort, and encourage personal experiences, such as learning the language, learning more about the local culture and the people. There are many converts today who initially came into contact with Islam on foreign soil prior to conversion. As already mentioned in Chapter 3, opportunities of travelling to Muslim countries and making contact with Muslims were rare before the mid-20th century. Nowadays, this phenomenon has expanded since the interest in travelling has increased, and with it the possibility of being able to engage in such activities.

Not all participants in this sample had been to a Muslim country prior to their conversion, however, the majority of those who had, did not feel that these visits had influenced their conversion to Islam in any way. The results of this study indicate that nowadays more women than men travel. The interest in experiencing a foreign culture, religion and society could be gender-related since more women carry an interest in travelling than men, whereas female participants also seem to be more willing to adapt to foreign surroundings when travelling abroad. The British sample presents 3 males and 8 females who had visited Muslim countries prior to their conversion. Most of the British participants explained that their experiences include both positive and negative memories. In contrast, the German sample reveals 3 males and 26 females who had visited Muslim countries prior to their conversion. Most German and several British participants recalled their visits as disappointing in regards to their experience with Islam. However, one has to consider the distinction between holiday resorts (tourists are made to feel at home with little or no evidence of ‘foreign’ influence) and regions or cities where residents live more according to their cultural and religious traditions (Saalmann, 2007).

60 In the beginning of the 20th century, it seems as if more British noble men or those men who came from distinguished families, travelled abroad and thus met with Islam on these travels. In this study however, travels seemed to have influenced German participants to a greater extent, albeit mainly German females, as they travelled the most to countries with a Muslim-majority society prior to their conversion.

61 See Appendix I, Table 1: Visits to Muslim countries prior to conversion.
Idris described the people on his visit to the Republic of the Maldives as being “clean, kind, thoughtful, gentle, openminded but also with a firm belief system.” He was shocked, yet excited to learn how ordinary people lived their religion:

“...lots of people asked me what my religion was and were upset when I said I had none.”

Michael, on the other hand, did not notice a “firm belief system” when he visited several Muslim countries. During his stay in Kano, the second largest city in Nigeria, he remembered:

“Local women, some of them prostitutes, arriving at my hotel, having to dress in abayas on their way there, only to reveal cocktail dresses underneath once inside. The hypocrisy was strange.”

Michael’s visit to Saudi Arabia influenced his decision on converting to Islam, however, without through leaving a positive impression of the country’s religious belief system and attitude:

“Whatsoever prejudices I may have felt beforehand about Islam and Muslims were really born out and reinforced there. I became Muslim not because of my experiences with Muslims but in spite of them.”

Many participants visited several North African countries, including Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, prior to their conversion only to re-visit after their conversion and ending up being disappointed. Certain expectations about the local people were destroyed. Layali travelled to Egypt, both three months prior to and two months after her conversion, expecting the inhabitants “to be more practising than they were.” Her impression was that:

“Egypt felt very much like it wants to be too Western (...) the values were less so. The clubs and the bar culture, the drinking (...). I found it disheartening, whereas then again you’ve also got mosques on every corner, and people in more rural areas who practice some form of Islam.”
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German female participants in particular mentioned their negative experiences in the above mentioned countries. Naima’s impression of Tunisia was that of “a strange image: female (bikini clad) tourists on the one hand, and a very conservative Tunisian society on the other.” Nour was particularly shocked by Tunisian male behaviour: “I was continuously hit on, even though I was in male company,” a statement only strengthened by Mariuma’s disappointing experience: “Local men working in the hotels are very clingy towards blondes with blue eyes.”

Turkey, on other hand is also a popular holiday destination for both British and German tourists. Souhayla moved to Istanbul three years prior to her conversion and stated that she still finds it difficult to describe Turkey as a Muslim country:

“The overall impression that I got was that Islam in Turkey was observed once a year under duress and in this respect was no different to the materialistic aspects of Christianity I disliked. As an outsider, I saw a lot of conflicts that do not represent Islam. People break their fast and go to a night club. They celebrate Eid with alcohol.”

Several German participants voiced a similar opinion, highlighting that although Islam is the religion of the majority society, it was mostly not openly practised. Khalid did

“...not see much open devoutness. In other countries, such as Morocco, people close their stores as soon as they hear the Adhan. This you would not see in Turkey.”62

People are strongly focused on what they see, i.e. visual symbolism. If Islam is not seen, then (for some) Islam does not exist. Nonetheless, Islam can also be practised in private. One example would be the laicist Republic of Turkey where religion plays an important role, however it does not connect with the politics of the country. Nonetheless it is not difficult to find religion within the social and cultural elements of Turkish society.

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62 This example allows the reader to find out and measure how much of Islam is truly integrated into everyday life. In some countries it is stronger than in others, depending on the political and religious interpretation of the individual country. SteinbA went a step further and described Turkey as a “Muslim country where Islam was nowhere to be seen”.

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Although negative experiences outweigh the positive ones, especially for female participants, visits to Muslim countries have also produced fond memories. **Abdou** travelled regularly, and worked as a head chef in different places, primarily in Muslim countries. Amongst other stays, he described his employment in Morocco as a positive experience when he describes the Moroccans as “friendly, open people.” After “a positive experience”, 63 he converted to Islam in Singapore. **Nour**, who spent several months in 2005 as well as in 2007 in Malaysia, found the inhabitants:

“...to be very hospitable, and Islam being present, but not too intrusive, since it is rather multi-cultural with Indians and Chinese also living in the country.”

**Saliha** and **Soraya** spent time in Bangladesh and India, and Indonesia, respectively. **Saliha** experienced Bengalis to be “warm people, but not implementing much Islam (...) the daily routine brings you closer to people no matter which culture or religion.” On the contrary, **Soraya**, did not personally experience bad situations, however, she did hear about “conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia.” 64 The experiences of visiting Muslim countries have been in many aspects similar among male and female, British and German participants. Several women were disappointed by indecent behaviour by local males; others expected more cultural enrichment than they received. One of the remarkable aspects is the different ratio of men to women who travelled to Muslim countries prior to conversion.

In this sample, 65% (9) of British men and 77% (10) of German men had not travelled to a Muslim country prior to conversion, and almost the same percentage have not travelled to a Muslim country since their conversion to Islam. In a striking contrast, 57% (6) of British women and 65% (26) of German women had travelled to Muslim countries prior to their conversion. Comparing these figures to those a century ago, it is clear that the ratio has completely swapped: A century ago, more men than women travelled abroad, suggesting that men were influenced by their findings and discoveries during their travels which they then brought home with them afterwards. Women on the

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63 **Abdou** did not explain in detail what his positive experience had been that had triggered his wish to convert to Islam.

64 **Soraya** was present when the Bali bombing occurred in 2005. After this tragedy, the German consulate advised her to leave Indonesia.
other hand were more influenced by a ‘national’ Islam. It thus seems as if women today who have travelled more than men, orientate themselves according to a more universal Islamic direction, having been influenced by experiences in Muslim countries, whereas men who come into contact with Islam in the home country tend to learn a rather home-grown Islam.  

4.3. Spirituality and reason

People who do not have a relation with Islam or identify themselves with Islam frequently not only ask for, but question the reasons of converts embracing the Islamic faith. The decision often seems to be beyond their conception. It is simply alien/foreign to them. They cannot relate to it because they do not share the same understanding of Islam as the converts do. Questions are often posed that reveal misconceptions of the conversion process or the religion, such as criticising the adoption of religious practices which seem so inherently different from those of one’s family, friends, and immediate cultural environment. Many participants in this sample perceive Islam to be a flexible religion that allows them to individually but also collectively practice the faith.

The majority of the participants believe that Islam teaches Muslims to see Christians and Jews as “brothers and sisters”. Not all Muslims however believe that Christians and Jews are their brothers and sisters in faith. However, they perceive them as sisters and brothers in humanity. One will find Shi’ites and Sufis who strongly believe that Christians and Jews are their siblings in faith since all monotheistic religions originate from Abraham/Ibrahim, while Wahhabis may not share this interpretation. This aspect underlines that humankind is born without sin and that Jesus was a prophet just like Muhammad*. Islam, whether progressively or traditionally practised, seems to provide practical everyday guidance for the individual’s life; a ritualized daily routine is an attractive factor for many to embrace Islam.

65 “Home-grown”-Islam: It is a direction developed in a predominantly non-Muslim environment which is rarely influenced by external political factors, but assumes certain already existing religious norms which are further developed.
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Sufism has in that respect earned great attention since traders and mystics belonging to Sufi orders have influenced the spread of Islam since their spiritual approach enhanced the interest of those societies not under Muslim rule. Non-Muslims often feel attracted to Sufism as its religious practices focus on strict self-control that enables the individual to gain psychological as well as spiritual insights, to lose one’s ego with the ultimate goal of connecting with God. Distinct forms of prayer and meditations heighten the spiritualism, an experience little found within other branches of Islam. Particularly traditional Islam such as the branch of Wahhabism has its criticisms on Sufism, however it is important to point out that both branches, no matter how different and opposing they seem to be, (potential) Muslim converts feel attracted to either one or the other form of religious practice and understanding.

55% (41) of all participants stated that they converted to Islam for spiritual reasons. Being spiritually interested and engaged in the religion is what led most participants to a personal search of the inner self and a deepening of the relationship with God. To understand the responses given by participants, a differentiation needs to be drawn between being spiritual and being religious, and the relation between these two terms. The term “religious” is usually interpreted as meaning adherence to a particular religion, orthodox doctrine, and consecrated belief structure, while “spiritual” is less rigidly defined and can encompass ideas from various, and sometimes seemingly discordant faith traditions, as well as personal spiritual paths. In this research, participants seemed largely to follow a spiritual search in order to find spirituality within a religious doctrine that they can individually adopt and implement.

The majority of British and German participants agreed that their journey and subsequent decision to become Muslim had primarily been a spiritual choice. Those whose decisions had been purely spiritual gained a wide variety of experiences during the conversion process. Some participants felt that their spiritual journey was connected to worldly practical catalysts which then became an encouragement towards converting to Islam. The various experiences of the participants demonstrate a personally and socially recognised transformation of the self. The internalization of Islam and its values brought about major changes in the individual’s subjective reality but it simultaneously encouraged a strong sense of continuity. Converts seem to strive to create coherence
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across all the major changes and interferences in their lives in order to make life meaningful on a spiritual, yet, also practical level.

58% (14) of the British sample stated their conversion to Islam was purely a spiritual choice. Nine participants stated converting to Islam was both a spiritual and practical decision, the majority being women. Six participants mentioned a rational consideration as a decisive trigger to convert, a result that was also influenced by religious/academic study and communication with Muslims. Three participants also mentioned a romantic interest, i.e. meeting a Muslim partner as the catalyst.

56% (29) of the German sample stated their conversion to Islam was purely a spiritual choice. Twelve participants stated converting to Islam was both a spiritual and practical decision, the majority again women. Six participants stated that their conversion was based on neither spiritual nor practical reasons. Three female participants emphasized the practical decision to adopt Islam due to their personal situation, whereas two participants withheld their reasons for converting to Islam.

Abdullah felt “spiritually void,” but when he converted to Islam his “void was filled.” Abraham Asad had always been searching for “something more than this life.” During childhood and adolescence he “toyed with the questions ‘Do I believe in God?’ and ‘Don’t I believe in God?’”. He concluded that not believing in God did not feel right. His challenge was that he was not sure whether he was able to follow a belief “in a sort of tangible form with rules and regulations.” From a spiritual perspective, however, Islam has given Abraham Asad “a purpose; something to focus on.” Zaynab-Ablah, on the other hand, had always been on a spiritual search. Converting to Islam for her meant the availability of a “religious framework” which could allow her to grow on a spiritual and religious level.

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66 There is a similarity to the British sample.

67 The reason for withholding their answers is unknown, but is likely to involve concerns over whether they can give a suitable or satisfactory reason in public form. They may well have still been in a process of developing the reasons for why they had converted to Islam, and felt it safer or more honest not to answer. No British participant withheld their reason to convert to Islam which demonstrates a small difference to the German sample.
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Even if most of the paths and backgrounds of converts were similar, there are exceptions, such as Natascha, who embraced Islam purely for spiritual reason. She had however neither read the Qur’an nor studied Islam on an intellectual level prior to conversion.\(^{68}\) Having moved her spiritual interest towards Sufism, she declared that her conversion was “solely an emotional and spiritual decision.” However, it is particularly interesting that there are conversions to Islam by formerly self-proclaimed atheists. At the age of 12, AbdulSamed told his mother he was atheist.\(^{69}\) He freely admits, however, that he never was a true atheist because he questioned the creation of the planets and the universe at all times. “Seeing a warm, white light,” and philosophising about God’s existence was an aspect in his conception of spirituality. Detaching himself from religious matters, he went through a more ‘worldly’ period, however, suddenly experiencing an existential crisis which led to questioning himself and resuming his quest for spiritual answers. The only practical part in the decision-making process, in his opinion, was the walk to the mosque and pronouncing the šahādah. Kulthum, also a former atheist, became “fascinated at the thought that she had been created.” This perception triggered further research and spiritual teaching which was completed by her conversion to Islam.

The majority of British females in this sample converted to Islam for a mixture of spiritual and practical reasons. Souhayla initially experienced a spiritual challenge: “There was a ‘feeling’ that Islam was the right path for me.” This ‘feeling’ inspired her to look into the rituals Islam requires, taking some of them up, and entering an intellectual exploration of the faith. According to Azizah, Islam provided her “with a relationship with God and a way of life to practically worship Him.” In terms of searching for spirituality, several participants emphasized the attraction of practising Islam. The fact that “Islam has guidelines for everything,” attracted Layali:

\(^{68}\) The question could arise here as to what extent it is even allowed to convert without Islamic ‘knowledge’. It is worth considering the differences implicit in conversion and what the individual has to do in order to be able to embrace a faith, which depends on the individual faith itself. If someone wants to become Muslim, (s)he needs not to attend classes and pass an examination, but solely and whole-heartedly believe in the Shahada, thus reciting it to become Muslim. Other religions such as Christianity and Judaism have stricter regulations, e.g. prior to the conversion, the religion has to be studied and will be tested in an examination.

\(^{69}\) AbdulSamed prayed to God as a child – his family was Christian, although not strictly practising the faith – and attended the children’s Sunday church. He decided not to get confirmed after asking others about their reasons for wanting a confirmation: “I asked them whether they believed in God. Most of them said no but that they wanted to be confirmed for the money they receive for it.” A confirmation in the Protestant church is an event which makes the confirmed person a full member of the church. It is a tradition that family and friends give gifts, mostly financial, which can often adds up to considerable sums.
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“I think we are all programmed, whether we like it or not, to follow rules (...). However, had I not been interested in the spiritual side of things, I would not have started to look into Islam.”

Two German male participants found the question about their own reasons for believing in and practising Islam to be very thought-provoking, even challenging, since – according to them - a balance between spiritual reasons and practical application should be considered. Both see a connection between the spiritual and practical aspects of Islam, to the extent that one cannot exist without the other. Mounir made this abundantly clear:

“God has revealed this religion. Is this spiritual or practical? For me, there is a symbiosis between the practical and spiritual side of Islam which in all reason should be within the pure religion of God.”

Nina follows similar views to those of Mounir, stating that, “properly lived Islam is much more practical compared to living unislamically.” The spiritual part should, however, not be underestimated, as “the path of Islam is the only walkable path to come closer to God.” Nasir also believes that both aspects led him to embrace Islam. Initially, he was more spiritually interested. However, he believes that adopting the practical aspects of Islam has influenced his life in a positive way. Although not favourably mentioned in discussions about conversion to Islam, the stereotype of women converting to Islam after meeting a born Muslim man (somewhat the norm in media coverage) is often an issue. Nonetheless, it is a fact that many people embrace Islam through personal relationships. Two British male participants specified a romantic interest as the catalyst to convert to Islam. Michael knew of the restrictions around Muslim marriage prior to his conversion:

“I knew if I wanted to marry a Muslim woman, I’d have to convert (...). Ultimately, the romantic relationship ended badly on a personal level but I nevertheless became Muslim due to the theological conviction, and have remained one ever since.”

70 Nasir includes among these guiding aspects refraining from pork and alcohol, the adherence to prayer and fasting requirements. 71 Although Michael did not want to convert at first, being a believing Christian and experiencing “hypocrisy among Muslims whilst working in Saudi Arabia,” his conversion to Islam did have a “genuinely spiritual nature”.

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*Idris’* catalyst was the same as *Michael’s*:

“Taking the šahādah was the necessary step to be able to marry my wife.”

Among British female participants only *Jameela* mentioned a previous relationship with a born Muslim man as an initiative to inform herself about Islam. However, it was not the reason to embrace the faith but rather a spiritual motivation. *Zaynab* also stated that a Muslim man had led her to Islam, but mentioned that she had no intention to marry him: “it was not like I had to convert to Islam in order to be with him.”

*Amro* converted to Islam for spiritual reasons. The catalyst to follow an interest in the religion, however, was a romantic one. Admitting to negative feeling towards foreigners, he was surprised when a Turkish woman whom he had a romantic interest in, gave him a Qur’an for Christmas. This invitation to read the Qur’an led to comparisons with the Bible:

“God was an old man with a white beard sitting on a cloud (...) that was my perception of God. The Qur’an, however, seemed to be clear in how it started to redefine my perception.”

*Asiye* on the other hand did not know how to use the term spirituality and stated that her boyfriend (now husband) was the trigger to embrace Islam. Nonetheless, she was adamant that her conversion did not entirely depend on her Muslim partner. *Amina*, on the other hand, believes that her conversion was largely influenced by a Moroccan man whom she met the same year she converted:

“I wanted to impress him with my knowledge, and somehow I think I converted to Islam just a little because of him as well.”

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72 *Idris* did, however, emphasize that he would have converted “within a matter of time anyway” since he considered himself “ready to do so”. His wife is Muslim of Maldivian origin.

73 *Amro*: “We talked a lot about religion although it was not my cup of tea, and then fiancally enough she gave me the Qur’an to read.”
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This is something she regrets a little, since the time she spent after conversion did not turn out as spiritually enhancing as she had expected it to be.74

A small minority among German female participants stated that they had converted to Islam solely for practical reasons. Nour grew up as a Catholic. However, she could never accept its core principles. She believes that within a marriage, both partners should follow the same religion, and since her husband is a born Muslim, the decision was already defined:

“It is better for both partners to pull on one (Islamic) string when it comes to marriage and bringing up children.” 75

Kathira, meanwhile faced a similar situation, but with a different goal; to be able to stay with her partner and establish a family she “had to convert,” otherwise she would not have been able to marry her husband:

“I had to do it for practical reasons, as my husband’s family is very devout. They did not care that it is permitted to marry a Christian woman.”

It was only slowly after the conversion that Kathira decided to continue a spiritual search of her own into the religion she had felt it necessary to adopt.

Some participants disagreed with all three options. SteinbA, who is officially still Catholic (for job-related reasons), said she feels that another female German convert influenced her interest in Islam’s attitude to science: “I was always someone who needed proof. I don’t believe in magic or coincidences.” She was shown specific verses (ayat) in the Qur’an which convinced her to convert:

“The Qur’an proved to me that it’s perfectly alright to find one’s way to God through science and research.”

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74 Over time, discussions and conversations with a Muslim scholar and friend improved Amina’s spiritual fulfilment.
75 This statement reveals some parallels to Selma who initially converted to Islam for the same reasons, wanting to avoid inconsistencies between her and her family members: “It just doesn’t work having two religions in one family with children.”
SteinbA’s reason for conversion coincides with that of late 19th and early 20th century Muslim converts in Britain who asserted Islam to be “a religion of reason and rationality”. It demonstrates a continuity of new Muslim thought which has spread across Europe and is represented, albeit by smaller numbers, through individual converts in the twenty-first century.

Iman-2 described her conversion to Islam as pragmatism regarding her spiritual life. Through a series of events, her attention was drawn to Islam, and after considering all aspects she came to the conclusion that

“...within a rational and logical framework, it was all too clear that there was no alternative to Islam”.

Apart from logical reasons, there are the influencing serious side-effects given by other Muslims of choosing to convert to Islam or not. One German female convert was told by a Muslim acquaintance, “You will die as an unbeliever if you don’t convert”, something that turned out to be the crucial factor for her. According to Varisha, this was crucial during the times she was still unsure whether or not to convert to Islam. This situation addresses an explicit pressure to convert, as this Muslim convert embraced Islam in fear of “going to hell” if she remained a Christian. The interaction with the above mentioned Muslim acquaintance, who in this case also acts as an “advocate” (Rambo, 1993:66f.), will have influenced Varisha’s decision-making process, as it is the advocate’s strategy to invite the potential convert to rethink the new religious option with the ideological background knowledge of ‘saving’ that person.

Although, there are only marginal differences between the British and German participants, the German sample tends to reveal more spiritual inclinations than their British counterpart.76 Interestingly enough, the percentages among the British and German samples considering ‘spiritual and practical reasons’ to have been at play in their conversion add up to 29% in both cases (7 British and 15 German participants). The difference is repeated in considering those few female German participants who chose to convert solely for practical reasons, whereas on the British side, no one

76 See Appendix I, Table 2: Spiritual/Practical reasons for conversion.
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suggested similar reasons. 13% (3) of the British participants mentioned other reasons than spiritual or practical ones, however, did not explain this as clearly the 19% (10) of German participants who responded in this way, adding that their conversions were based on scientific and pragmatic rather than spiritual or practical reasons.

4.4. Cultural traditions – A keeper?

Cultural and national traditions play an important role in every person’s life in any society. It is what distinguishes a person from someone from a different region or country. Culture refers to the patterns of human activity and the symbols that increase the significance of this activity. Additionally, the culture is represented through art, literature, clothing, customs and traditions of a community or nation (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). Therefore, different cultures exist in different parts of the world. The individual’s environment greatly affects the lifestyle of the given region, thus shaping the culture at the same time. Cultural values give a nation, region or community an identity of its own, while also laying the foundation for the culture to develop a character and personality of its own. Culture and tradition is shared among people, learned and passed on from one generation to the next. Language, art and religion serve as symbolic means of transmitting cultural traditions and values between generations.

Cultural traditions form a bond between people of one region, though the customs and traditions they mutually follow and the festivals and (religious) holidays they celebrate, the clothes they wear, the food they eat, and most importantly, the cultural values they maintain. Culture and its traditions can be seen as a system of social control by which the behaviour of people is shaped and restricted. The moral values form the founding principles of one’s life, which in turn influence the individual’s principles and philosophies, thus having a great impact on one’s social life as well. A culture’s uniqueness and significance lies in the fact that there is a link between a people and the system of its individuals.

77 Tylor, Edward B. (cultural evolutionism): Not only different cultures but also different interpretations of culture due to all the diverse and complex symbols that exist in a culture, which include not only the understanding of culture but also religion.
In defining the term ‘culture’, there are several elements that when brought together constitute the culture of a particular region or the culture of a particular group of people. Every society and nation has a set of norms and values, which are inseparable parts, and an essential element of the given culture. This can include the folk traditions, customs, taboos and rituals within a culture. One significant factor is cultural integration, which includes the degree of harmony or level of integration among the various elements of the given culture. Cultural elements include subcultures, local cultures and the difference between historical and cultural traditions, as well as political and social aspects. Last but not least, the religion and the beliefs of the people within a civilization play a significant and crucial role in shaping the culture as well.

In both countries, traditions and culture are of significant value. Additionally, maintaining traditions and cultural norms symbolises a sense of belonging to a particular nation and community. This is actually no different for a person who chooses to embrace Islam, since a shift in the sense of belonging takes place during the conversion process. Accordingly, the challenge is to figure out which kind of values end up being more significant, particularly in terms of religious or cultural values? In most situations the newly adopted religious values and rules prevail; however, not all Muslim converts reject cultural traditions even if they seem to stand in conflict with Islamic values. It is however important to note that the issue of mainstream norms and values are highly contested in Britain, whereas in Germany they may be of a lesser debate.

Societies currently deal with the question “Why has multiculturalism failed”, considering that particular aspects of the home culture and values are wished to be kept, and simultaneously trying to integrate foreign cultural aspects into the society. Multiculturalism includes not only being a demographic condition, a set of institutional arrangements, but also objectives of a political movement or a set of state principles (Vertovec, 2007:961-978). According to Howarth & Andreouli (2011:8) multiculturalism has failed for several reasons, such as increased racist and Islamophobic hostilities, and eased cultural tolerance, thus the appearance of a segregating society decreases the development of a multicultural and multireligious society.
4.4.1. Celebration of non-Muslim (religious) holidays

Celebrating Christmas, birthdays and Mother’s Day are important traditions in both Britain and Germany, and hence participants from both samples voiced their opinions and concerns considering the maintenance and neglect of such cultural elements. Celebrating Christmas appears to be a particular challenge for both British and German participants, illustrated by the mixture of decisions taken, and compromises and solutions found by the interview converts. There is an ongoing debate among both traditional and progressive Muslim converts, with the former often neglecting Christmas completely, and the latter choosing to spend such occasions with their non-Muslim families, celebrating it somewhat differently but still respecting family traditions.

*Anwaar* does not think of Christmas as a religious but rather a “cultural holiday.” He generally does not spend Christmas with his family, and whenever possible, he works on Christmas Day:

“I never liked Christmas. I just find it false and pretentious, and hence I’d rather not be involved in it...I feel like it is a form of oppression and does not benefit anybody but big companies.”

*Anwaar* also mentioned that his mother did not like the beard he wears:

“She was like: ‘I’ve brought you up to be a lovely Christian boy and look at you, look what you are doing now.’ I told her: ‘Christian? You brought me up to be a Christian? You know what, I’ll become Christian if you tell me one verse out of the Bible. Just one verse, and I’ll become a Christian,’ and she just went silent. This is one of the things I hate about Christians because people all year round do whatever they like and then at Christmas they go to church. It’s a bit like hypocrisy and I don’t like it (...).”

*Raif* agrees that Christmas for him is no religious holiday, but he nonetheless likes to socialise with his family:
“They value Christmas as a religious holiday and I don’t see any conflict of interest in me being with them during those days.”

“Keeping good family relations is a part of Islam” (Imaan-Yousef), and the reason for several participants to gather with their families at Christmas. Jameela sees no contradiction between her own Muslim identity and participating in her family’s religious holidays: “I’m eating the Christmas dinner, munching crackers and giving gifts (...) but I am not celebrating per se since in the Muslim faith we have our own two festivals”.

Some participants see no antagonism or mistake in “celebrating the Prophet Jesus’ birth” (Azadeh) since Jesus is regarded as a greatly respected prophet in Islam. Even though some British participants felt they are “a product of their family and society”, most do not perceive a conflict between the culture they have been brought up in and Islamic values. Nonetheless, several participants have discontinued celebrating the Christian holidays, such as Abdullah who distanced himself from Catholic traditions to solely follow Islamic practices, and Iman who does not take part, but sees no contradiction in mixing parts of her British culture with her Muslim faith.

75% (39) of German participants stated that Christmas is still a part of their lives, albeit not in a religious sense but as a time for respecting their Christian families’ traditions and thus spending time with them. Although most participants agreed to have neglected particular Christian-based traditions and beliefs, one religious element sticks out: the honouring of the Prophet Jesus (Isa) in Islam. In the Islamic context, Jesus is respected and acknowledged as well as the second most significant prophet after Muhammad.* However, he is not perceived as the ‘son of God’.

According to Touareg1801,

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78 Even though Raif now says that he has no problem with this, he still makes the distinction between him and them= the other. This distinction suggests a social distance which does not eliminate any conflict.

79 Iman has distanced herself from celebrating Christian traditions: “I don’t see a conflict between the culture I have been brought up in and my Islamic values, however, I do not celebrate Christian holidays...”
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“Jesus plays an important role in a convert’s life since he is mentioned in the Qur’an, therefore, there is a connection between the previous and the newly adopted faith.”

Most of those German participants who claimed they had been Christian prior to becoming Muslim have neglected Christian traditions but the degree to which they acknowledge some traditions out of respect for their relatives varies, such as AbdulSamed who spends Christmas with his mother since he perceives it as “a matter of respecting her.” Khalid also attends such family gatherings however mentioned that

“...some (Muslims) have the opinion that it is kufr to wish a Christian well on such occasions since one would congratulate the other person to his disbelief.”\(^{80}\)

A very small minority of German participants also mentioned decorating their homes for Christmas. Amro is married to a Christian woman, thus holidays of both religions are celebrated at home, whereas Aziz, who is also married to a Christian woman, spends Christmas with family but would not adopt Christian traditions in his home. Amina, on the other hand, has four sons, two of whom see themselves as Christians:

“We have a Christmas tree, sing Christmas songs, exchange gifts but at the same time remember that we do not celebrate Jesus Christ but rather the birth of Jesus, the prophet in Islam.”

The remaining 25% (13) have chosen to neglect Christmas completely, neither keeping up traditions at home nor spending time with their non-Muslim families during this particular Christian holiday. The primary reason for this choice can be assumed to accord with the opinion of Muslim scholars that

Muslims should not celebrate the religious and non-religious holidays of non-Muslims since this leads to imitation of their culture and lifestyle. Evidence is found in the ahādīth, such as “”whoever imitates is one of them” (Touareg1801).\(^{81}\)

\(^{80}\) Khalid is nonetheless of the opinion that “it is up to the individual how to deal with such celebratory messages and wishes.”

\(^{81}\) Hādīth Sahih Bukhary, No. 3512, narrated by Abu Dawood.
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Approximately 50% (12) of British participants and 75% (39) of the German participants do not celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday. However, family gatherings are of vital importance to participants of both countries. As a result, for most of the participants, spending time with their families on Christian holidays does not appear as a contradiction of Islam. In reference to Chapter 3, section 3.4.1., it is noticeable that a significant attitudal change has taken place, as late 19th and early 20th century Muslim converts, particularly in Britain, tended to rather bond with their former Christian values than reject them in the attempt to minimise Islam’s ‘foreignness’ in Western-European society.

4.4.2. Islamic lifestyle and individual cultural habitat

Not only religious but also social traditions present a challenge for converts to Islam. Both Britain and Germany have a striving pub culture, albeit very different from each other, yet, accommodating similar needs within the employment and business sectors but also for social gatherings of friends, family and co-workers. The pub culture in Britain is even more intensively observed than in Germany, since it is touches on most areas of British life. Social life in Britain revolves around the public house for a high percentage of people. They often have their so-called ‘local’ which becomes a natural gathering place for those who live close to it. This social tradition can present a challenge or discomfort for many Muslim converts since mainstream Islam theology prohibits the consumption of alcohol (or even sitting with people who drink alcohol).

Abraham Asad, Jameela and Zaynab stated that they still enjoy the public house atmosphere with their friends. Although they refrain from alcohol, they defend their decision to continue socialising with friends in places where alcohol is served because to them it is a cultural habit they do not want to neglect.82 In general, however, the majority of Muslim converts will refrain from socialising in this way since it is not considered appropriate to mix in a context that may not be compatible with Islamic rules and traditions.

82 Zaynab: “It is a compromise that suits both sides”.

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The majority of German participants have also rejected several cultural and socialising habits, e.g. drinking alcohol, socialising in public houses or bars, attending parties where alcohol is served, premarital sexual relations or public swimming. Changes in appearance, nutrition and dietary plans also serve to develop a boundary between the lifestyle prior to and after conversion. This does not apply to all converts to Islam, though most adhere to regulations, such as the prohibition of pork and alcohol (see Chapter 5).

Some German participants questioned what German culture and traditions entail, believing that Germany has no particular culture of its own but rather contains a mixture of cultural traditions. This notwithstanding, 5 female participants adamantly stated that despite their conversion they continue to perceive themselves as Germans, feeling proud of their cultural heritage.

Liyana says:

“I am German, and I do not intend to become an Arab (...). I like being German. I like this country, and this culture. Islam has nothing to do with it. I don’t intend to become a different person. Religion and nationality are two different things. For me, it makes no sense to stop using silverware, sit on the floor and to eat everything out of one bowl.”

SteinbA and Amina-2 emphasize the importance of German virtues, such as reliability, punctuality, democracy and equality. Specific cultural, educational and disciplinary traditions were mentioned by German participants, agreeing that without these characteristics and acquired manners, adopting Islam would have been more challenging. These challenges included “diligence and effort, punctuality and discipline, and cleanliness” (Abdou). Nurjan agrees with punctuality as a very significant aspect of German politeness, which according to her is very much compatible with Islam: “The Prophet (peace be upon him) was always punctual (...) and I am working on it.” Further agreement among German participants occurred concerning the virtue of ‘structured and organised work’ which according to my German sample matched well with the structure and timing of the daily prayers.
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“I reject everything that is in conflict with my religion, such as the drinking culture, or walking around barely clothed once the first shimmer of sunshine is felt,” says Amina-2, “however, I feel very connected to the German moral concepts, the German state and its history.” While referring to her personal identification with Islam, Jesseniah maintains her German roots and does not perceive herself as turning into an Arab just because she converted:

“I have kept my German traditions. Islam is not Arab to me. I don’t have to sit down and sip Turkish tea...not that I don’t like it but I don’t identify myself with that.”

The drinking culture is primarily mentioned by British participants. This may be due to the long-established pub-culture in Britain, which is quite distinct from the drinking culture in Germany. For this reason, German participants only marginally mentioned their abstinence from alcohol consumption since their conversion. Although socialising in Germany may be readily equated with visiting a beer garden in the summer, the alcohol consumption is not as engrained or as frequently observed as it is in the pub in the British culture. Consequently, in this respect British converts to Islam may have greater (social) hurdles to overcome than their German counterparts.

Last but not least, the majority of German participants emphasized the importance of not neglecting cultural traditions just because one has adopted a different religion. For many, but not for all, it is essential to maintain their lifestyle as long as it does not stand in conflict with Islam. The analysis of Muslim converts either maintaining or neglecting particular cultural or religious traditions indicates that their lifestyle does not fit into the lazy common stereotype. Not every Muslim convert leads a complete ‘Islamic lifestyle’ but rather enriches his or her already existing lifestyle with Islamic virtues, facets and practices. Even though common prejudices lead many to assuming the opposite, it is clear that not every Muslim convert rejects Western

83 Amina-2 also mentioned that she looks forward to Christmas and Easter every year: “I love painting Easter eggs, and I attended church for my niece’s confirmation.” She also values the German education system (“in comparison to others”) as well as the German welfare system and individual insurance possibilities: “Surely everything can be optimised, however, in comparison to other countries, one can live very well in Germany (...) as a Muslim.”
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European culture. In fact, many participants in this study continue their lifestyle – on the condition that its elements conform to Islamic standards.

4.5. A convert’s acquisition of religious knowledge

One of the most significant requirements in Islam is the seeking of knowledge. This obligation manifests itself in the Qur’an as well as in the aḥādīth. The believer’s attention is supposed to be constantly drawn to this duty and he or she should try to fulfil it whenever opportunities arise. Strengthening this religious requirement includes the following examples:

- “Read in the name of thy Sustainer, Who has created – created man out of a germ-cell.\(^{84}\) Read – for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One Who has taught (man) the use of the pen – taught man what he did not know” (Qur’an 96:1-5).
- The Prophet* said: “Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim (male and female).”\(^{85}\)

The challenge for converts is to find their own direction within Islam but also to implement it while living in a non-Muslim society. A further challenge is to be able to keep a balance between Islamic and worldly knowledge. Although, all Muslims believe in the One God and that it is their purpose to submit to and serve God while considering the Qur’an as the unaltered and final revelation of God, they also agree that the five pillars of Islam are basic (and for most obligatory) concepts of worship. Yet, between the different Muslim groups, the commonalities end here. All too often converts are advised to follow one particular Islamic direction, with the advice not to be confused by the vast number of alternative thoughts, opinions and interpretations.

A convert will be influenced through communication with other Muslims who follow a particular direction and/ or school of thought and/ or through personal interest.

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84 This is a development out of a fertilized female ovum.
85 Hādīth Sahih Muslim, narrated by Ibn Mādja.
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after having acquired the basic religious knowledge. Thus, it also depends on the individual’s character and personal development how he or she approaches the acquisition of religious knowledge. Some converts go directly to the sources, i.e. the Qur’an and the Sunna (for many) aḥādīth, whereas others prefer introductory secondary literature on Islam. Others again feel the need of scholarly guidance or at least some authoritative figure they can follow and who may be able to advise and guide them appropriately. It is only natural that convert attitudes can change over time with regard to how they negotiate Islam.

The desire to understand the basics of Islam is often already in place prior to a person’s conversion, though the majority of Muslim converts seem nonetheless to enter a more intensive period of studying after their conversion. At first glance, the basics of Islam appear to be easily understood and self-explanatory. Yet, if the interest in Islam moves to a deeper level, Islamic theology or even its metaphysics are more challenging to understand or put into action. It depends on the individual as to how he or she approaches the vast amount of information available on Islam.

Not every Muslim convert uses the same sources – with the exception of the Qur’an – as an additional resource. This aspect often depends on the convert’s immediate social environment, which may or may not include an existing Muslim community, and thus information on Islam is often sought not only through personal communication with Muslims nearby but through secondary literature, books, and nowadays overwhelmingly by means of internet sources. The choice of the extent to which knowledge is sought and put into practice seems to be an individual choice since some will enter Islam by embracing every aspect (they know to that date) without questioning, whereas others may critically question it or need clarification on certain issues before incorporating it into personal practices or thoughts.

The majority of the British sample included reading the Qur’an, introductory literature to Islam, pamphlets for ‘new Muslims,’ and specific academic and theological literature, and incorporating it into their acquisition of Islamic knowledge.

86 These pamphlets are usually distributed in mosques, Islamic events and festivals, and by Muslims within the immediate environment of the convert.
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Although the internet serves as a direct source of finding answers, it was not mentioned by British participants as being the primary source for gaining religious knowledge. The preference seemed to be for interaction with other Muslims as well as reading secondary literature in book form. One of the aspects that particularly stand out among British participants is the interest in literature by renowned Sufi authors and scholars. Several British participants mentioned having read, amongst others, literature by Jalāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī, Ibn ʿArabī, Shaykh Nazim, and Timothy Winter. The conclusion that can be drawn from the above is that access to diverse Islamic literature is much greater than in Germany. The vast amount of literature from different Islamic sources translated into the English language has created a mass of choices for the prospective convert. It is therefore not only a matter of interest but also one of access availability that differs in the possibilities of knowledge acquisition and personal interest.

Zaynab-Ablah gained her initial interest in Islam through college education. She researched about Islam at an art college, read up on Islam from authors such as Shirin Neshat, and developed an interest in Islamic poetry while concentrating on politics and colonialism within heavily Muslim populated areas. Souhayla also read up on Islam prior to conversion, and was particular interested in literature by Gai Eaton, Leila Ahmed and Margot Badran. Her primary interest included “the exploration of women in Islam.”

Having these aspects in mind, the impression arises that Muslim converts feel like researchers when they embark on their journey to acquire Islamic knowledge.

87 Abd al-Ala, for example, read books by Shakh Muhammad Nazim Al Haqqani (also known as Mehmet Nâzım Adıl – a Sufi Sheikh and leader of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Order), Hajja Aminah (also known as Hajja Aminah Adıl, the former wife of Mehmet Nâzım Adıl and renowned author, lecturer and spiritual advisor. She passed away in 2004), and M.I.H. Pirzada (also known as Shaykh Muhammad Imdad Hussein Pirzada, Shaykh of the Chishti Nizami Sufi Order), and attended several lectures and zikrs (meditative remembrances of God).

88 In comparison, only two German participants mentioned interest in Sufism or Sufi literature.

89 Shirin Neshat, born in 1957, is an Iranian visual artist, living in the United States who is primarily known for her work in film and photography.

90 Several participants mentioned an intensive interest in searching for the truth in the religion by looking at the original sources rather than being influenced by foreign traditions which have shaped Islamic cultural elements. Converts seem to divide their knowledge of religion according to what is relevant to the faith and what has been mixed with cultural elements, which in turn however may not be consequent on religious understanding.
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Depending on the level of knowledge already acquired, the reading list generally constituted by introductory literature on Islam but also on other religions for comparison, and general information of the appearance and history of Islam. This was complemented by more intellectual and in-depth literature by Muslim as well as non-Muslim authors. The criticism made by some German participants on reading literature on Islam by non-Muslim authors suggests that German participants prefer literature written by Muslim scholars or authors. Some British participants used the internet as one of their primary sources, and generally concentrated on Muslim discussion forums, which included not only single-gendered but mixed-gendered groups. Jameela, for example, joined a ‘sisters’ forum’ where she was able to share questions and experiences with other women in similar circumstances.91

The internet not only provides a vast amount of Islamic literature but has in recent years developed up-to-date learning opportunities, such as online lectures, classes (pal-talk) and courses. There are online Islamic universities which offer distance courses in Islamic Studies and Islamic Theology etc., as well as Islamic websites offering fatāwā for Muslims when in need of a religious solution to a problem. As the internet provides information on all different groups in Islam – Sunni, Shia, Sufi, Ahmadiyyah, Ismailis, and Salafi, to name a few – such information has to be carefully digested since its sources can rarely be objective and neutral. Consequently, Muslim converts often feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of different opinions and codes of practices. Although, the internet is currently the fastest means of finding answers, it also seems to provide an overload of information that is often difficult to separate and to digest. Nonetheless, the internet has become the most popular source – even for reading and listening to the Qur’an online – for general information about Islam, especially for those who have converted in recent years.

German-speaking converts seem to have less access to varied sources. Learning about Islam in their own language remains a challenge since contributions to Islamic research and theology are more likely to be found in English, creating greater

91 Jameela: “There was a forum on ‘Islam-Way.’ It was like a sisters’ forum. I went on there and it was a huge support for me. There were a lot of women in a similar situation to me, having thoughts on Islam, wanting to learn about it, and answering my questions.”
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possibilities for English speakers to choose what they would like to inform themselves about. The demand for well-researched and easily understood introductory literature, in particular, is growing. The German language reading materials are limiting compared to English in terms of Islamic sources on the internet. Not every German (potential) convert is familiar with the English language and thus he or she is limited to those sources that are available and comprehensive. Traditionally, particularly Salafi-oriented Muslims have detected this gap. As a result, websites were developed specifically for German-speaking Muslims and those who want to convert, so that they are able to learn more about (the basics of) Islam according to their (majoritatively “according to Qur’an and Sunna”) views and practices. Such sources are apparently attractive to German converts since the opportunity to inform oneself about the religion elsewhere is limited.

It is therefore not surprising that nine German participants mentioned the same website – www.diewahrereligion.de – which was used as their primary source of gaining basic knowledge on Islam. Now that the website has become independent, the main attraction of this website was their head leader Pierre Vogel, a German convert, who is popular amongst young (born and converted) Muslims today. He propagates an Islam with traditional values. Though he is not a scholar, he comes across as ‘one of the people’, simplifying Islam, and simultaneously preaching a very conservative interpretation of it. Videos on the aforementioned website were particularly popular since they explained certain aspects of Islam in a simple manner. According to Asiye,

“The videos were easy to understand and not boring. It is interesting to listen to, and very vivid.”

92 His teachings are in German, thus the linguistic aspect forms a great part of his popularity.
93 This is probably the main reason why he is so attractive for many, as they can relate to him.
94 Not all of his fans perceive Pierre Vogel as conservative. There are positive and negative aspects ascribed to his method of distributing dawah, i.e. inviting people to embrace Islam. For some people he is a hero, because he addresses Islamic principles in an easily understood manner, whereas for others he is an actor that one cannot take seriously when he promotes mass conversions at his lecturing events. Of course there are several other positive and negative reasons for liking or disliking Pierre Vogel. The above is only to describe that there are two groups who see this public figure from very opposite views.
95 Olaf, Asiye, CaMaTa, Liyana, Somayya, Touareg1801 and Imane frequently visited the website prior to their conversion. CaMaTa and her husband watched Pierre Vogel’s lectures regularly, nevertheless she mentioned: “Everything he said we would check and read up on (...) and you can do all of that online.” Although, the interest in watching these videos is declining, the internet continues to serve as a growing platform for the distribution of video and audio materials on Islam.
96 Liyana also attended several lectures given by Pierre Vogel, however, she was clear about having visited the lectures in order to be convinced by him but to continuously study and “to form an own opinion as well as meeting others in similar circumstances.”
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It should not be ignored that the demand and need for ‘authoritative’ guidance and leadership is increasing because it is specifically the desire for an organised lifestyle and specific moral and religious code of conduct that many converts have. All these aspects seem to be fulfilled if one adheres to the value system of in particular Salafi-oriented Muslim groups. A considerable number of German converts – in this study approximating nearly a quarter of all German participants, primarily women – are looking for specific guidance and leadership. To the Muslim convert, it can seem as if one has been sitting on a fence, not completely belonging to either side, leaving the need for an alternative sense of belonging unfulfilled. It is particularly noticeable in Germany that some converts are looking for attention, warmth and a replacement for their family and seem to find these attributes within the circles of Salafi-oriented Muslims. However, this only works well as long as the rules are being followed. Although Pierre Vogel’s reputation is deteriorating – other Muslim preachers have appeared adopting similar methods of religious propagation – he still functions as an apparent authoritative figure, especially for young converts since, he offers a literal, and for many easily understandable interpretation of Islam.

Nasir, on the other hand, looked at both pro-Islamic and Islam-critical websites. Afterwards, he developed a particular interest in Ahmadiyyah-Islam to which he officially converted in 2001. He also became politically active, studying articles and blogs by PI in order to expand his knowledge and deal with “not only pro-Islamic discussion but also negative representations of the faith made by its critics”.

Attention should also be drawn to the German participants’ interest in reading secondary literature. The above information on using internet sources could suggest that the majority of German converts use this of their primary source of knowledge on Islam however this is only half the picture. About half of the German converts who participated in the study mentioned investing their time in studying secondary literature:

97 Nasir’s intention to convert to Islam already became apparent in 2000, though his official conversion took place in 2001.
98 PI – Politically Incorrect – A German political blog in the German language that focuses on topics related to immigration, multiculturalism and Islam in Germany and Western societies.
99 Criticism, for example, involves the accuracy and reliability of data on the internet. It is not only about the overload but the content that matters. And the content may be irritating for some because it influences their knowledge and what they pass on to non-Muslims.
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Liyana had had an interest in Islam since childhood, though the attraction to Islam only became apparent after 9/11, encouraging her to intensify her religious interest. She studied Islam through books at her local library and classical texts on Islam by renowned authors such as Hans Küng until her conversion in 2006. Natascha also had an early interest in Islam, and borrowed books from her local library at age 13/14: “There was no internet at the time, and the only Muslims I knew were ‘Turks from the village.’” Karima, on the other hand, made use of the internet and ordered secondary literature:

“I bought anything and everything (...) even books that I don’t read anymore today. I remember books by Murad Wilfried Hofmann, and books about Sufism and Rumi.”

The majority of British participants have read beyond introductory Islamic literature. Most British and German participants used the internet as a direct source to collect information about Islam. The British participants had greater opportunities to search for the materials they needed and were interested in, whereas the disadvantage in Germany was that participants were limited by a language barrier, since there was only limited access to Islamic materials written in German. The British participants did not seem to follow one specific religious direction unless they had (mostly) understood that direction on a rational level. Most German participants, on the other hand, clearly stated the direction or school of thought they had converted to.

The British participants showed a greater interest in self-study and self-reflection, whereas several German participants placed an emphasis on the significance for an authoritative religious guidance. Thus, it seems as if British participants in this study tend to acquire knowledge in a more individualistic manner, whereas German participants prefer to – at least as a new Muslim – be led into a reflection that seems more organised and easily understood.

100 Liyana: “In my opinion, there is no God of terrorism nor is there a religion of terrorism.” She had already thought of converting in 2001, however, she feared the reactions of her immediate social environment “particularly during the aftermath of 9/11”.
4.6. Forming a convert’s Muslim identity

Young Muslims are in search of an individual identity, orientation and community. Their immersion in mainstream (Western) culture remains influential in their choice of lifestyle, even if the beliefs and background of their immediate family have become less important to them. By combining what they perceive as the essential, foundational aspects of their new religion with aspects of their originary culture (rather than taking on the social norms of another ‘Muslim’ country), they are creating a ‘home-grown’ version of Islam that aims at both living up to the faith’s demands, and removing the seeming foreignness of its practice. It is, in a sense naturalised to its British and German surroundings.

For many Muslims, there is no contradiction in professing devotion to the religion of Islam and to a sense of belonging to British or German society. Naturalisation of Islam is not equivalent to a restricting of Islam to the private sphere - indeed, on a social and local level, young Muslims in Britain and Germany are increasingly seeking to make an active contribution to the local community using their interests and abilities. As a consequence, the dynamics of the globalization process become perceptible when the question arises whether a Muslim identity would prevail over all of these challenges and if this would consequently mean opposing all attempts to implement a cultural uniformity as a Western European society. Whether a person who owns this Muslim identity is able to question his or her own lifestyle, value system, self-perception and perception of others as well as interpreting Islam through demonstrating more understanding and empathy towards a European perspective is dependable on the individual confronted with a possible clash of interests which either match or cannot be combined.

4.6.1. Overcoming misconceptions through a religious and national identity

According to the perception of large parts of mainstream society, Islam and Muslims are still associated with foreignness, as if they do not belong to the European society. Although there is the long interactive history between Islam and Europe, the
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perception of the religion remains being essentially ‘the other’. This is an attitude which has been waxed and waned over centuries.¹⁰¹ Hence, neither in Britain nor in Germany, is Islam perceived as an ‘indigenous’ religion. In this study, the question of Muslim identity, overtly or covertly, is specific to converts to Islam, who are challenged to combine their national and cultural backgrounds with their newly embraced religious identity. Consequently, a new identity evolves which precisely becomes that of a British or German Muslim convert.

How can Muslim converts develop an identity which makes them feel rooted both in Islam and respectively within British or German society? The answers to this question can perhaps only be found by looking at formation of a Muslim identity that is simultaneously also British or German respectively. The ability to compare and contrast the seemingly very similar British and German identities that this study provides is useful here, highlighting the complexity of identity formation and emphasising the individuality and contextuality of the convert experience. Is there such a phenomenon as a British or German Muslim identity or do these religious-national identities tend to complement or reject each other?

In To be a European Muslim, Tariq Ramadan calls for a new European-Muslim identity and demands “participation in society, to complement cultural projects with European culture and Muslim ethics” (Ramadan, 1999). The German convert Silvia Horsch believes that the most important feature of any Muslim identity is the reference to God.¹⁰² This should not be confused with a specific cultural affiliation, constructed as in the case of Pakistani and Indian culture in Britain, or Turkish and Arab culture in Germany, since these are largely based on a national rather than religious conception.

According to Horsch, it is the Muslims’ duty to form an individual religious identity which can be positively joined to a national identity (Alder, 2009). This section will look at what a British and a German Muslim identity seems to entail, which difficulties and challenges arise when forming such an identity, and how essential it is

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 3.
¹⁰² Ph.D. in Islamic Studies: “Figur des Märtyrers in frühen sunnitischen Schriften” (engl. Figure of the martyr in Early Sunni Writings).
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for the participants to form an individual Muslim identity. Is national identity more important than religious identity? Or is it possible for both identities to become one? For converts to Islam in either country, this is ultimately a matter of individual choice, depending on whether they see themselves first as Muslims or believe that their nationality of origin is their primary source of identity.

The British people generally seem not to volunteer or enquire after religion in their first introduction to others. The preoccupation with a religious identity is rather a feature of some immigrant communities in Britain. In essence, young Muslims and, nowadays, particularly Muslim converts, have intensified their religious identity, having gained a deeper understanding of Islam, and thus adapting to their social life and national identity. The frequently asked question “Can you be British and Muslim?” seems to predominantly be agreed with. Although, the older generations may have felt culturally displaced and missing their home countries (Bhaba, 1994), it is the younger second and third migrant generation who agree with the statement of being able to be “British and Muslim” at the same time.

Additionally, it is important to note that the second and third generation of Muslims, and with that also British converts to Islam, feel that Britain is their home. According to the Islamic Society of Britain, “Muslims can be British, just as Jews, Christians, Hindus and people of other faith or backgrounds” (http://www.isb.org.uk/, 2012). The study A Minority within a Minority reveals that converts to Islam feel that there is no conflict between their Muslim identity and their British identity (Brice, 2011). Hence, Islam is not a foreign religion to the British, as many have been drawn to it and continue to choose to join the Islamic faith despite negative representations in the media. Moreover, my interviews and questionnaires with British converts illustrate how they see the compatibility between the Muslim and British parts of their identity.

Constructing a unique German Muslim identity is quite different from forming a British Muslim identity. One has to however be careful in assuming that British identity

103 Some of the first generation of immigrants still feel displaced. Feeling displaced also means having more multiple and fragmented identities.

104 This is proof that a person can own several identities, particularly in the present time, as people live with multiple offers of different identities, and as such identity is is not a uniform measure.
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is straightforward in comparison to German identity. Britain, because it’s made up of several different countries, is constantly questioning itself about its identity. In fact, claiming to be ‘proudly British’ has until quite recently been seen as a mark of the Far Right, introducing obvious conflicts in constructing a Muslim British identity.

The German identity in itself is diverse and interlaced with a number of different characteristics which have particularly been influenced by recent history.105 Most profoundly, the Second World War has shaped German identity to be rather complex in many ways. One significant area of German history concerns the development of a prevailing ideology that certainly has shaped the German identity. Putting politics aside, it can in fact be said that religion seems to be one of the most influential factors in shaping the German identity, e.g. the impact of the Reformation, particularly of Lutheran Protestantism.

Although attitudes are slowly changing, some young(er) Germans are still less likely not to identify themselves with their nationality in a positive way in comparison to the older generations, who – perhaps ironically - are more likely to have vivid memories or to have had active involvement in the Nazi era. It thus seems as if the older generations tend to express more pride in being German. In contrast, some patriotic Germans seem to be more likely to think ethnocentrically and present signs of nationalism in form of militarism rather than benign nationalism.106 Therefore, a conflict of conscience evolves in the minds of several German converts to Islam. Yet, it is not as easy as it seems for British converts to identify themselves the way ‘proud Germans’ do. The statement ‘proud to be British (and Muslim)’ was emphasised by my sample more than I had perhaps anticipated.

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105 Both countries’ identities have been shaped by their history, just the way they deal with their history and the way they developed their national or religious identity. History can tell a lot about how a nation has dealt with foreigners or any other group of people.

106 They cling to the past and its traditions, because they can identify themselves with them a lot more strongly as opposed to younger generations who have experienced a different story. If the older generation would teach the younger generation about their history, perhaps things would turn out differently. The younger generation now have a different orientation and are subjected to other influences than the older generation.
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83% (20) of the British sample stated that their Muslim identity is essential to them,\(^\text{107}\) whereas the remaining 17% (4) felt their Muslim identity to be less significant.\(^\text{108}\) Two male participants deemed their Muslim identity not to be overly significant, whereas in contrast no female participant perceived their Muslim identity to be insignificant. It seems to indicate that female converts tend to place more emphasis on overtly displaying their Muslim identity, perhaps indicating that they want to be identified as such at first glance. At the same time several of those female converts who do overtly display their Muslim identity also attempt to fight stereotypes and set good examples through themselves. Five participants withheld their responses on their Muslim identity. It is unclear whether the participants who withheld their responses felt ashamed of displaying their religious affiliation or whether they felt it more important to practise their religion in private without the influence of others of the same faith surrounding them. It may be that these responses show that religion can be a ‘private matter’. It also may show how much society and Muslims let themselves get influenced by the media.

Using the same scale of responses for British and German questioning, I used the same terms to enable comparisons. The scale I used included the following: very significant, significant, less significant, not significant. 53% (27) of the German sample stated their Muslim identity to be very significant,\(^\text{109}\) whereas 39% (20) agreed that their Muslim identity is of significant relevance.\(^\text{110}\) Five female participants regarded their Muslim identity to be less significant, and one female participant explained that her Muslim identity was not overly significant. One male participant withheld his response.\(^\text{111}\)

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\(^{107}\) Nine male and eleven female participants.

\(^{108}\) Three male participants and one female participant.

\(^{109}\) Eight male participants and nineteen female participants.

\(^{110}\) Five male participants and fifteen female participants.

\(^{111}\) See Appendix I, Table 3: Importance of Muslim Identity among Converts.
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4.6.2. Pride and the role of public display

This study has has been able to show that the significance of perceiving themselves as British over Muslim is not an apparent priority among the British participants. Although there is a tendency to view national identity as performing a necessary function, maintaining a Muslim identity seems to take priority. Nonetheless,

“It is possible to be an ambitious, educated British woman and a practising Muslim at the same time.” (Souhayla)

Moreover, this study also shows that the wide-spread misconception of Muslims as being only Arab, Turkish or Asian are not correct, and that the participating Muslim converts themselves often feel an obligation to reflect their religion through their British Muslim lifestyle, in order to help break these misconceptions.

According to Imaan Yousef,

“The confusion of culture and religion leads to mass stereotyping,” a barrier many converts to Islam try to overcome.\footnote{Imaan-Yousef believes that her identity as a Muslim means that she is “part of a wider community in which everyone is working together towards a common goal.”}

It follows that there is a mixture of identity issues and developments among British converts to Islam: several participants demonstrate their Muslim identity to the public with their appearance since they want to be identified as Muslims, and to remind themselves of their new chosen lifestyle, and perhaps fight back against the stereotypes.\footnote{Iman thinks that Islam should not only be carried inside the believer. She wears the hejab and enjoys being recognised as a Muslim.} Dawoud agrees that being Muslim is more essential than the identification with one’s nationality however he observes that

“Being a Muslim only by appearance is wrong.”

Since the subject seems to be more important to women, i.e. female converts, it is interesting to have this male participant voice his opinion “that it is wrong to be

112 Imaan-Yousef believes that her identity as a Muslim means that she is “part of a wider community in which everyone is working together towards a common goal.”
113 Iman thinks that Islam should not only be carried inside the believer. She wears the hejab and enjoys being recognised as a Muslim.
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Muslim only on appearance”. This statement actually underlines the necessary balance between religious theory and practice. There is more to Islam than the clothing, as one has to match with Muslim identity with one’s deeds and behaviour: all these things together need to be considered in order to say “I am a Muslim”. It is also important to remember that many born-Muslims expect one also to be able to speak Arabic in order to count as a real Muslim which also shows how diverse the expectations towards other Muslims are.

As a consequence, having a Muslim identity serves as an important factor in the participants’ lives. 71% (8) of British female participants have chosen to wear the Muslim headscarf in order to present themselves as Muslims in public. For most of them it specifically demonstrates a prioritisation of wanting first to be recognised as a Muslim, and secondly as British. At the same time, nearly all hejab-wearing British female participants acknowledged that the society has different views and understandings of women, and in particular Muslim converts who publicly display their religious affiliation. Layali believes that

“Non-Muslims often confusingly identify the headscarf as a cultural tradition rather than religious obligation because it’s that idea of Asian people wearing the headscarf (...) I want them to understand that it’s because I’m Muslim (...) and it’s not a cultural thing.”

The remaining non-hejab wearing British female converts have different reasons for deciding against the covering. Although, this item of clothing is part of overtly presenting a Muslim identity, Azadeh regards it as a “uniform”:

“When I first converted, it was important ‘to label myself’ and to wear a uniform (i.e. hejab) (...) then I found out that the Qur’an asks to cover the bosom, not the hair. (Qur’an 24:31)”

114 Nine out of eleven British female participants have chosen to wear the headscarf after their conversion.

115 Layali’s thoughts on teaching RE in preparatory school: “I’m a teacher and when I spoke to my kids before about religion, asking them what religions they knew, they missed out Islam so I prompted them and said ‘Do you know what I am?’ ‘Yeah, Pakistani (...).’ Layali wants to create clarity and order in society by showing what she wears is a religious duty to her, and which covers one of the aspects that identify her as being a Muslim. Nevertheless, the headscarf is known to be one of the strongest symbols of Muslim identity.
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This is a very interesting thought, since most people will think it is always the others who try to label Muslims. Azadeh however initiates things herself which is a testimonial to the extent a Muslim woman may go to in order to free herself from the misconceptions and prejudices of the majority society. It is a strategy to use this label, but simultaneously not taking over other people’s labels, thus designing the lifestyle suitable for herself.

A minority of British, in particular male, participants disagree with publicly displaying their religious affiliation. Instead they prefer to interpret their religious identity as something one carries only within oneself. According to Abd al-Ala, for example, “faith is a personal and internal issue.” Michael says that he has no Muslim identity but rather a personal and British identity:

“Religion is a private matter for me, between me and God (...) is that an identity?”

Raif on the other hand, does not keep it a secret that he is Muslim however he does not display it:

“Being a convert, people already judge you as being English and European once they see you and therefore you must be Christian, and so it often comes as a shock (...) when I tell them that I’m Muslim. I would not walk around saying that I am Muslim but I am happy to talk about it if people ask me.”

Not every British convert to Islam publicly displays his or her Muslim identity, however this sample shows that the majority of converts believe that a Muslim identity should be prioritised over other forms of identity.

The problematic relationship between German converts and their national identity was reflected during the interviews with German participants as well as after reading their completed questionnaires. In several instances, participants had difficulties defining for themselves what a German identity actually means to them. Being born into

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116 After several bad experiences after his conversion, Michael was left “alienated “by the immigrant Muslim communities and converts who have gone “native, e.g. with foreign clothes and hardline, puritan attitudes.”

117 Raif prefers to be asked about his identity/religion rather than being stereotyped or stigmatized a certain way, but he does not take the initiative, the others have to take the first step which can make it more difficult.
an ‘era of guilt,’ concerning the events of World War II apparently presents a challenge for German Muslim converts in developing a satisfying identity that can accommodate both religious and national pride. Subsequently, it has to be acknowledged that none of the German participants felt that their national identity is a priority. If anything, their German identity was regarded as one of several identities. Therefore, the priority was overwhelmingly placed on displaying one’s Muslim identity, since it highlight one’s pride and personal choice of lifestyle. This obvious display of Muslim identity – in comparison to the British sample – can be interpreted as compensating for a lack of nationalistic pride, leading to a different type of Muslim convert identity to that found among the British sample.

**Amina** believes that the Muslim identity grows within the individual after having converted. Having experienced negative attitudes from her non-Muslim environment, she disliked having a Muslim identity shortly after her conversion. Since then, however, she gone through a change by publicly demonstrating her Muslim identity by wearing the headscarf, loose clothing and radiating an attitude which presents her as a “happy Muslim woman.” 62.5 % (24) of German female participants wore the headscarf as a demonstration of their faith and personal conviction. 118 Several female participants emphasized that

“The external appearance does not work without the internal mode, and that this is only supported and completed through the external (religious) appearance”.

118 Since the completion of the interview period, a number of female participants have changed their opinion on wearing the headscarf and have thus changed their appearance accordingly.

119 Nina: “Externally, as the Qur’an rightfully says, in order to be noticed as a believer and not to be molested by others (through looks and flirtations), and this is internally very important, otherwise I’d be no Muslim.”

Moreover, even though – in comparison to their British counterpart – fewer German female converts seem to overtly demonstrate their Muslim identity, thus their attitude towards this particular characteristic trait remains stricter. The reasons differ as to why they are stricter, as this may be influenced by the observance of the majority society, but also being influenced through specific Muslim groups and directions.

Denial of a Muslim identity seems to be rare among Muslim converts, since pride in being a Muslim often has to be demonstrated towards other people.
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Consequently, most participants in this sample place more importance on their Muslim identity than on any other identity elements. However, how this is demonstrated depends a lot on the individual. Karim says: “I never deny that I’m Muslim, however, I do not force my religious identity upon people.” Muslim identity may be shown through other means than the outer appearance of the individual, such as following the basic religious regulations, for example by prayer or fasting.

SteinbA confirms this attitude in a somewhat ironic way when she says:

“One does not need to walk around with a post-it on the forehead declaring one is Muslim.”

Despite the negative image of Islam that affects not only German identity but also many German converts to Islam, there are a few German participants who emphasize the significance and of both their national identity and being a Muslim. While the two are not seen as contradictory, for some it is a challenge to unite both sides. Iman-2 perceives herself as a “German and Western Muslim woman”:

“Although, I have embraced a different faith, I have not accepted a different culture. My culture is European, German, Western, and stays the same no matter how important the religion is to me.”

Amina-2 on the other hand does not perceive the distinction between culture and religion as Iman-2 does because accessing non-Western traditions enrich her:

“Cultural and religious variety is the key to success. it would bring success for the individual or for society as a whole.”

As previous research has failed to address the challenging issue of forming a British Muslim convert identity and respectively a German Muslim convert identity, this section has tried to analyse some aspects of the conflict between religious and national identity as a result of conversion. Accommodating both identities seems to be

120 SteinbA has not officially changed her religious affiliation and remains Catholic on paper for job-related reasons: “Most hospitals are connected to the Church. Even if I would officially leave the Church and NOT be Muslim, I’d have difficulties to be employed in such facilities (since it often is a prerequisite for employment) (...) for me being ‘Catholic on paper’ means two letters, and it guarantees my income (...).”

121 Iman-2 emphasises that it is important “to repudiate stereotypes concerning Islamic issues, to prove to people that Muslims are not inevitably terrorists or just a poor woman from Saudi Arabia who cannot write or is not permitted to drive, etc. (...).”
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easier for this study’s British sample than the German sample. This may be related to the surrounding cultural standards concerning personal pride of one’s own nationality. British participants are more involved in national traditions than their German counterpart. According to the results of this study, German nationality/nationalism is rather neglected, or even ignored, whereas the newly embraced faith seems to fill that gap, perhaps compensating for an otherwise incomplete identity.

The development of a Muslim converts’ identity in Britain and Germany may continue to follow different paths in the future. In Britain, Muslim identity is largely complementary to national identity. Therefore, British pride obviously does not interfere or is not neglected when a conversion to Islam takes place. In Germany, however, Muslim identity among converts is often perceived as being separated from national identity, meaning it receives greater attention from the participants than the feeling of national belonging. As a result, British converts tend to integrate Islam much more easily into the spectrum of their multiple identities, whereas German converts seem to struggle with combining all of their multiple identities into one. In terms of religious identity, there are different approaches as to how British and German converts to Islam perceive Islam. This can be understood as part of the process of constructing their individual Muslim identities.

To move from Christianity to Islam might not be the giant leap that outsiders might assume, since conversion to Islam need not be a rejection of European civilisation but rather a development in one’s spiritual search and an individual, alternative choice of lifestyle. Each convert has to make decisions about where they stand in relation to the mainstream culture and the customs of their new faith, so that Muslim British and Muslim German identity is not a uniform idea, but one constructed from the circumstances and perceptions of each individual. This central aspect will be further analysed in the next chapters, beginning with the views and opinions on the practice of the five pillars of Islam, and then describing the individual interpretations and opinions related to the controversial debates about the prohibitions of pork and alcohol.
Chapter 5 Islamic Obligations and Dietary Laws

5.1. Introduction

The spectrum of religious orientations among Muslim converts ranges from following a traditional lifestyle to emulate thoughts and actions of the Prophet Muhammad* and the early Islamic community, to mysticism-oriented practices whereby internal encounters with God take priority over externally expressed religiosity. Contrary to the apparently common idea of religious conversion as a kind of sudden (spiritual) enlightenment, with an abrupt change of lifestyle and identity, conversion is actually described by participants of this study as an ongoing, gradual process. It may begin with the recitation of the creed (šahādah), the marking acceptance of the new faith, but it may have its roots in earlier practices, and certainly is not completed at that point – and may never be completed. Religious obligations and practices are not adopted all at once but gradually over time, since the convert needs to learn to understand the different obligations and practices which he subsequently adds to his life according to his own choice and interpretation.122

The obligatory practices in Islam can be very diverse, but there are certain regulations to which almost all Muslims adhere, since they form some of the basics of an affiliation to the Islamic faith. In addition to the šahādah, the five pillars of Islam include the daily prayer (ṣalāh), fasting in Ramadān (sawm), giving charity (zakāt), and the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj). Of these, the pillar that seems most to shape the external image of the Islamic world is the obligatory daily prayer, since it is a regular and sometimes public act. To most Muslims, these key ‘set of rules’ distinguishes a person as a Muslim. Men and women are called equally to meet these obligations. Nonetheless, they are also aware of a variety of other duties, obligations and prohibitions. In addition to analysing the opinions given by the study’s participants regarding the impact of the five pillars of Islam on their individual lifestyles, this chapter will also address the participants’ individual adoption of Islamic dietary laws, such as the prohibition of pork and alcohol consumption, as well as their views on the challenge of keeping to ḥalāl foods.

122 Every person has their own development process, he or she needs to go through, and thus each person needs their own time. Some take longer than others, and vice versa.
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The adoption of certain religious obligatory practices and requirements is by no means the same for each Muslim convert. It thoroughly depends on the individual’s immediate environment, personal character, religious and worldly understanding. Furthermore, differences are made, as to how converts adapt and include Islamic obligations in their respective national and cultural environment, since only after more intense study can small but important differences in the adherence to specific religious duties be detected.

5.2. The five pillars of Islam

5.2.1. Šahādah

Uttering the Islamic creed of faith has an important legal consequence. According to mainstream Islamic understanding, this process is irreversible. Once a person has recited the šahādah, he or she becomes Muslim. There are no detailed provisions as to how the profession of the Islamic creed of faith should take place. It may therefore be either a completely private setting with God as the only witness, or it may take place in front of Muslim witnesses, regardless of the location. It is however normative to have at least two Muslim witnesses when a conversion to Islam is taking place.

None of the British participants stated their feelings on pronouncing the šahādah since most of them believed it to be an integral part of their having become Muslim, which made it apparently self-explanatory. Several German participants, however, were able to express their memories of reciting the Islamic creed of faith. All those who spoke of their experiences differ, however, since the recitation and entrance into Islam is as diverse and unique as the individual him- or herself. Nina remembers her conversion when she spoke the šahādah in front of an imam and her husband-to-be:

“Something dawned on me (...) if you think that Muhammad* has not been able to discover the Qur’an and the future prophecies on his own but with the help of an all-knowing power, then you already are a Muslim (...).”
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Mounir stated that he had already been Muslim for five years before he spoke the šahādah in front of witnesses:

“I was able to fluently speak the šahādah on my own (but) I made many mistakes in front of the people in the mosque (...) it was probably a sign from Allah that I was not supposed to say the šahādah in a mosque where the Jamaat of the Messiahs is being denounced.”

Nasir on the other hand first spoke the šahādah on his own during his first prayer. Although, he also had his šahādah witnessed, it had no “wow”-effect on him but became a realisation which marked a new chapter in his life. Amro shares Nasir’s assessment that there is a difference between privately or publicly declaring one is Muslim since the latter intensifies the conversion, giving it an official and public character.

Several female German participants stated emotional reasons for their proclamation of the šahādah. Mahbubah felt at ease, as if a burden had been taken off her shoulder:

“I felt like a small child, so pure and well as I hadn’t done before (...) with each step I was taking I was floating.”

Although she mentioned that reciting the šahādah during prayer gives her a “nice feeling,” it felt more overwhelming to recite it in the presence of witnesses in the mosque. Amina spoke her šahādah on the telephone, her conversational partner being a close friend and Muslim scholar. She was excited and nervous and stated that her real feelings about the conversion only appeared much later: “It was a mixture of fear, happiness, trust, panic, doubts and expectations.” Amina-2, on the other hand, felt the

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123 'Jamaat of the Messiahs’ is another description for the Ahmadiyyah Muslim community.
124 The Ahmadiyyah group is often denounced on the grounds of praising their founder rather than the Prophet Muhammad*. Opinions about this particular group vary from them being declared a non-Muslim sect to an acceptable group within the Muslim community. Whether or not Mounir seems to be critical of mosques outside the Ahmadiyyah is speculative, however it seems as if his understanding of Islam has led him to the Ahmadiyyah, since they come closest to his theological preference.
125 Nasir believes that a public proclamation of the šahādah could be taken the wrong way, and may not be seen as righteously and spiritually intended, compared to making this proclamation in private.
126 Amro: “My conversion was special, like a step onto a different level which ends one chapter in life but also begins another.”
need to become Muslima after regularly visiting a Muslim acquaintance in psychiatric care:

“The visits were very depressing but showed me how well I actually am, and how important it is to look for that meaning of life. Therefore, I pushed myself in saying the šahādah since I had the wish to become Muslim.”

Not every Muslim convert speaks the šahādah in front of witnesses or a congregation in a mosque. However, among those who embrace Islam in such a way do not automatically trigger any emotions but rather often seems to only be an official formality. It seems as if many Muslim converts prefer to pronounce the šahādah either on their own – with God being their only witness – or in private in the presence of close Muslim friends. Thus, the research cannot record one exact same statement since each participant experienced speaking out the šahādah in an individual manner.

5.2.2. Prayers

The second pillar is the obligatory prayer (ṣalāh) which is mainly understood as a constitutive part of being a Muslim. Five times a day, a Muslim is to perform his prayers at the prescribed times in a state of ritual purity, by reciting established formulas and taking up certain postures. The Qur’an emphasizes the importance of prayer: “(…) verily, for all believers prayer is indeed a sacred duty linked to particular times (of day)” (Qur’an 4:103). The daily prayers are prayers that anyone can complete on their own. Nonetheless, the Sunna describes communal prayer as favourable where possible. In pre-modern societies, where the time factor played a different role within the labour force than it does under modern economic conditions, it was possible to perform all prayers within the required time frames. Today, this is not always so, depending on which profession a person follows -something noted by the participants in this study. In

127 After becoming Muslim, Amina-2 mentioned that all the problems, difficulties and changes minimized themselves, and the positives took over the initial fear.
128 Although there is a certain structure of how the ritual prayer is performed, and what has to be recited, it is the individual who can choose different Qur’anic verses after having recited the Al-Fatiha (First Surah of the Qur’an). After completion of the ritual prayer, individual bidding prayers can be performed to ask God about personal concerns and circumstances.
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response to this problem, several Muslim scholars developed fatāwā which permit the merging of two prayer units into one, or catching up on missed prayers at a later time.\textsuperscript{129}

There seems to be an overwhelming assumption by Muslims and non-Muslims alike that Muslim converts regularly perform their daily obligatory prayers. However, this is not reflected in reality, since the adjustment to adhering to new obligatory duties poses challenges even for the most eager convert. The majority of participants agreed that the daily prayer is a Muslim’s obligation to fulfill, emphasizing the significance of connecting with God through this ritual. However, there are differences in the regularity of daily implementation, how the participants perceive the significance of the regular fulfilment of the prayers, and to what extent they view the prayer as either an act of devotion or a good (Muslim) habit.\textsuperscript{130} According to Raif, a prayer

“(...) works like a communication channel. It is very centring, reinforces the rule in the Qur’an, and (gives) an understanding from a meditative point of view and revelation you might receive.”

Furthermore, prayers are to be understood as connecting with God, intensifying the relationship with God, and a matter of “personal purification” (\textit{Anwaar}). It should, however, not be assumed that all Muslim converts strictly adhere to performing all five daily prayers each and every day.\textsuperscript{131}

\textit{Michael} revealed:

“I know I should do it but I do not out of laziness and lack of self-discipline. I know I will have to get my act together for the benefit of my children, to set a good example for them.”

\textsuperscript{129} Islam Q&A: Fatāwā on different situations concerning the prayers that one missed and has to redo. Retrieved from http://islamqa.info/en/cat/277.

\textsuperscript{130} “Prayer is a must, as it is the second pillar of Islam,” says Abdullah. “It is expected by Allah (...) and the key to maintaining the faith and God-consciousness” is Idris’s opinion, and Layali believes that it is “fundamentally important since they are the basic points you have to follow as a Muslim”.

\textsuperscript{131} Layali believes that the daily prayers are „fundamentally important,” however, she makes a differentiation when she says that not every Muslim man or woman will interpret the significance, regularity and reason of its performance as the next fellow Muslim man or woman.
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Emphasis was not only placed on obligatory fulfilment but also the human ability to comply with this duty. Abraham Asad admitted that he did not always perform all prayers; he would, however, go through certain phases in his life during which prayers would help and motivate him. Azadeh and Jameela agree that the daily prayers are important to them; nonetheless both of them state that they may not pray regularly due to their individual work and lifestyle conditions. Zaynab, a university student, says she would pray on time if the prayer times concurred with her lectures and seminars:

“It must even be difficult for religious people to pray regularly unless they are housewives.”

Here it can be noticed that the importance and necessity of prayer is recognised, but its practice depends on the individual’s time management.

The majority of German participants emphasized the importance of the ritual prayer as the second pillar of Islam, which “is not mentioned without reason, since it has an essential meaning for the positive and spiritual development of the human-being” (Aziz). It is described as “a guideline which draws across one’s entire life to remain in contact with one’s protector” (Amro) and offers “time-out from the daily routine” (Amina). Apparently, the performance of the ritual prayers have a psychologically positive impact on the participants, since several of them mentioned when they regularly perform their prayers, they feel calmer, more content and have a positive attitude. Natascha feels more at peace when she regularly prays:

“I once heard that prayer is like a ‘rendezvous with Allah.’ I thought this was sweet and noticed these are moments when I am at peace. When I pray regularly, I feel better, and I am balanced.”

132 It is, however, also Zaynab’s opinion that a Muslim should try to perform their prayers when possible rather than to completely neglect this religious duty.

133 SteinbA: “It is important if one manages to fulfil them on time. It offers a moment of peace and calmness, and it makes me very peaceful. I see a difference in how I am when I do not and when I do pray. Unfortunately, the former occurs too often. But even other people notice my behaviour during the phases of praying regularly and those phases when I do not pray. My boyfriend especially notices that I am a lot more at peace when I pray.”
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She does not, however, organise her activities to meet prayer times. It seems to be an individual condition and matter of choice as to how this pillar is incorporated into one’s daily life. Another probable aspect is that it depends on the individual’s interpretation and need of prayer. There are different reasons for fulfilling or neglecting the performance of prayer. **Naima** states that she has phases when she does not pray for days or weeks due to her feeling “no connection” and that she has “nothing to say.” **Safiyyah** believes that it is a sin to miss the prayers, and several German participants confirmed their arguments with the already mentioned hadith that

> Prayer “is the key that separates Muslims from non-Muslims” (Azizah, Jenna, Touareg1801).

**Nina** compares prayers with food:

> “Without prayer, something is missing. It is similar to eating and drinking: a necessity.”

The different reasons for performing or neglecting prayers emphasize that some participants have no difficulties completing this pillar regularly and on time, whereas others experience challenges caused by lack of time or time management, lack of appropriate location, lack of knowledge, insufficient discipline, and several other reasons.

It is observed that there are no significant differences between British and German participants in their exercise of prayer. The majority of the participants agree that performance of prayer is an obligation; nonetheless there are exceptions in both the British and German sample, who explain their irregular practice as being due to personal circumstances. Thus, it can only be concluded that the ritual prayer is of significant value and priority to most participants, but is diversely understood and practiced.

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134 **Natascha** likes to go hiking, and although she says that there may be times when she could pray ‘on time,’ she would not complete them during her hike: “Prayers are important, however, only if I have an intuition and an urge to do so. I have phases when I do stand up and pray because I feel like it but I also have phases when I have to say: no, it is not working now.”

135 **Touareg1801** stated that “according to some Muslim scholars and schools of thought the neglect of prayer equals kufr/ shirk and leads to leaving Islam”.

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5.2.3. Giving charity

Islam’s third pillar is giving charity, also known as zakāt. It is neither a typical tax nor a voluntary giving but rather a religious duty to fulfill if one is able to do so. Yet, it is no less essential than the obligatory prayer, and involves several functions. Every Muslim possessing the designated minimal amount of wealth (called *nisab*) for the full cycle of a lunar year must, as a matter of worship, satisfy the duty of zakāt charity. The calculation of zakāt includes a specific percentage, such as 2.5% of the annual net income, which is donated to a person, a charity, aid organisation or mosque. Reflecting the complexities of modern life, the exact amount this might mean has become unclear to many Muslims, leading to guessing the amount of charity payment. Those who own less than the minimal amount of wealth are exempt from giving charity and may even be entitled to receive zakāt from others.

Is there a difference between the zakāt and taxes? To best explain the opinions and practices of the participants, it is important to consider the existence of an obligatory ‘church tax’ in Germany, which does not as such exist in Britain. Those who are official members of one of the major churches in Germany are required by law to pay a tithe (literally a tenth) of their overall annual income (the actual percentage amounts to approx. 8%). Church tax is a tax imposed by the Christian communities upon its members to finance the expenses of the community.\(^\text{136}\) Only if a person officially resigns from the religious community do church taxes no longer have to be paid. Thus, those who convert to a different religion but forget to resign their membership will have to continue to pay their share.\(^\text{137}\)

Muslims do not have to pay any institutionally bound tax, as Islam follows no institutionalised order. Nevertheless, the zakāt is regarded as a cornerstone of Islam. Confusion about the relationship between zakāt and the faith often arises based on the

\(^{136}\) In Germany, the church payroll tax is collected by the tax authorities of those federal states that receive an allowance. Religious communities that are constitutionally accepted as statutory bodies are authorized through Article 140 of the Basic Law (GG) in conjunction with Article 137 of the Weimar Constitution to levy taxes. In Germany, these include the two major Christian churches (Protestant and Roman Catholic) as well as some smaller Christian communities and Jewish communities.

\(^{137}\) Once the religious affiliation is off the income tax card, no further church tax is deducted from the gross wage. Changing the contents of the income tax card is performed by the relevant tax office.
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misconception that the zakāt is comparable to a tax. Yet, unlike tax, zakāt is an obligatory act of worship, the performance of which – if one is able – qualifies one for a divine reward. It can be viewed as the minimal obligation imposed upon the wealthy to pay in full to the needy according to their rightful claim.

The experience shows that German Muslim converts seem to have fewer challenges and difficulties in fulfilling this duty, since it is nothing new to them but reminds them of the church tax which is automatically deducted from annual gross salary. The British participants are, however, not familiar with this ‘compulsory’ contribution, consequently the acceptance and implementation differs from their German counterparts.

The British participants prefer to give their zakāt to British Muslims or an international aid organisation, such as Islamic Relief, Umrah Welfare or UNICEF, however, a minority of German participants stated that they paid their zakāt to Muslim organisations, such as Muslime helfen e.V. or Islamic Relief. Jameela rotates her payment among the different aid organisations: “I look at what projects they have going on, and choose accordingly.” Raif supported UNICEF until he became a student:

“Charity is crucial; however, if you do not have the means, you do not have to pay.”

Asiyе does not give charity to every beggar but feels her husband does. She says she does not want to support drug habits or alcoholism, and thus prefers to give vouchers: “Unfortunately, beggars are not always thankful if you give them food instead of money since they usually expect the latter rather than the former.” Nurjan agrees that homeless people have to be helped, however, not through financial but food and educational means:

“If one has wealth, one should see it as a blessing, however at the same time, one has the responsibility over this wealth to distribute it equally among the poor.”

138 The Microsoft Word dictionary, for example, defines zakāt as a “tax that goes to charity.”
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Additionally, Nurjan perceives having wealth as a blessing. Nyndell, on the other hand, believes that giving a blessing is worth more than money:

It is best to give a token amount if you are asked by a beggar. Even if you give nothing, avoid saying no, which is very rude. Instead say ‘Allah ya’teeek’ (God gives you) since at least you have given the person a blessing. (Nyndell, 2006)

The majority of British and German participants stated that the zakāt is one of the five pillars of Islam, and thus for them a religious obligation and “command from God” (Gibril) which is mentioned at least 82 times – in connection with the ritual prayer - in the Qur’ān as well as in the aḥadīth which underline the significance of charity (Zakat Foundation of America, 2007:2). However, there are differences as to how individual participants perceive the zakāt. Some interpret it as a religious obligation which could be viewed as a charity tax to be paid if one has a regular income. Others elaborate on the psychological, emotional and spiritual reasons, which include that it “cleanses the ego” (Mariuma), “promotes sacrifice” (Aziz), and “holds the community together” (Iman-2). Several participants also mentioned that giving charity does not only consist of financial help, but also other gestures, such as giving blessings.

Abraham Asad extends this thought:

“There is a saying that ‘charity begins at home.’ This means we should be fussed about what happens elsewhere, whether a Muslim or a non-Muslim is in need.”

Zaynab felt particularly attracted to the charitable element of Islam. According to her, it “encourages to think of others, not just ourselves”. Although charity is encouraged in all religions, Zaynab likes the fact that “it is required in Islam”.

Instead of focusing on the communitarian aspect of zakāt, Raif prefers to be cautious with the amount of charity that is given when he states that “Charity is crucial within Islam”, but nonetheless emphasizes:

139 The sample demonstrates that several converts have chosen to give their zakāt not only to Muslims, but also to non-Muslims. It shows a an acceptance and understanding towards any needy person regardless of which religion they belong to, as the zakāt should be used for all the needy, and is seen as a means to avoid social injustice and inequality, as well as avoiding personal egoism.
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“Being conscious of the percentage calculations making sure to give the right amount because in Islam it is equally important not to give too much, which could make one dependent on others.” 140

Although Amina felt uncomfortable speaking about the zakāt, she felt reserved to share the following:

“I never thought about zakāt, as I am not rich anyway, and I only speak now as I am being asked about it, but a sister told me it is not done to talk about charity and amounts but I decided to give €10 a month to charity. I don’t have more but it is at least something.”

SteinbA feels challenged in her payment of zakāt:

“I would not give my money to a mosque since there are always issues with money embezzlement where it isn’t clear how the money is really used.” 141

Leyli, on the other hand, feels the exact opposite, giving her zakāt to the mosque:

“I feel more secure knowing where the money is going.” 142

The trust put into the aid and religious organisations seems to vary markedly, and this particular skepticism can be found among the German participants, mostly by those who previously had to pay church tax and may therefore have projected their previous negative experiences.

The particularities of how and where their charity is used, seems to be more of greater significance for the German participants than for the British participants who

140 According to Michael and Imaan-Yousef, not every Muslim whether born or converted knows how to calculate the correct zakāt amount which results in giving too little or too much.

141 SteinbA compares the zakāt with the church tax, but she feels free in her choice of where the zakāt can be given. This choice is not given to church tax payers. A zakāt payer has the choice to invest religious charity in whatever and wherever she or he wants. Her mistrust has led her to prefer to invest her zakāt into a Muslim aid organisation: “You can choose such an organisation if you know exactly what they do. I give money to Muslime helfen e.V., although I still prefer to give it to someone needy I personally know.”

142 Leyli also stated that she gives charity only to Muslim organisations since she trusts them more than non-Muslim organisations.
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have not experienced the obligatory payment of church tax. Thus, the majority of German participants were very clear about wanting to know how their obligatory charity is being used. This specific aspect was not found among British participants. As a result, British participants were more likely to invest their zakāt into Muslim aid organisations, whereas German participants preferred to give charity to people they know who are in need, sponsor particular projects of their own choice, and often prefer to give zakāt in materialistic goods rather than in monetary form.

5.2.4. Ramaḍān

Almost every religion and culture acknowledges fasting as a part of life. In Islam, the month of Ramaḍān is used for Muslims to comply to the obligatory fasting, because it is the month in which the Qur’an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad*, and thus compels Muslims to follow this fourth pillar (Qur’an 2:185). The Qur’an also mentions the start of fasting, and thus marks the beginning of Ramaḍān. However, it does not define the exact number of days to fast, though these are to be found in several aḥādīth. The purpose of fasting is to experience three situations: 1. to commemorate the beginning of the Qur’anic revelation which took place in the month of Ramaḍān about thirteen years before the Prophet’s* hijra to Medina; 2. to provide a sophisticated exercise of self-discipline; 3. to make everyone realise through his or her own experience how it feels to be hungry and thirsty, and thus to gain a true appreciation of the needs of the poor (Asad, 2003:49). Fasting in Islam should therefore not be treated as a weight-loss-programme for the individual but as an opportunity for repentance, reflection, purification and thanks-giving. It is meant to strengthen the bond between God and His people, to train the individual’s willpower and concentration, and last but not least to fulfill a religious duty (Kaddor et al., 2006:183).

\[143\] Qur’an 2:184 only mentions “(fasting) during a certain number of days (…)”

\[144\] Narrated by Ibn Umar: “I heard Allah’s Apostle saying, ‘When you see the crescent (of the month of Ramadān), start fasting, and when you see the crescent (of the month of Shawwal), stop fasting; and if the sky is overcast (and you can’t see it) then regard the crescent (month) of Ramaḍān (as of 30 days).’” (Sahih al-Bukhary Hadith, Book 31 No. 124)
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According to Abdullah, fasting focuses on raising one’s level of empathy because he says that

“It prevents an individual from being obsessed with food and helps prevent gluttony. It also allows an insight into life for those people who do not have access to food and who cannot eat when and what they want.”

Akeem believes that “the real challenge of fasting is to abstain from negative behaviour as opposed to food and drink.” The study does not reveal how many participants follow this religious obligation, nonetheless it offers some personal opinions in regards to the participants’ challenges following the rules of fasting. On the one hand, it seems beneficial and a heightening, beautiful and spiritual experience (Gibril, Idris, Akeem), yet on the other hand, participants have also discovered that fasting is a challenge and a struggle for the individual.\footnote{145 Michael: “I really, really struggle with this. So thirsty.”}

Raif stated that

Fasting is “probably one of the most difficult things to do when you’re a new convert”,

nonetheless not only he but other participants emphasized the significance of Ramaḍān and the consequences of fasting, such as “the appreciation of food and drink” (Anwaar)\footnote{146 Anwaar: “When it did come to breaking fast, I had a glass of water and I just drank this water and it was like the best thing in the world, it’s like I never appreciated water so much, you know. Something so simple but it’s in everything, isn’t it? Water’s everywhere. You just don’t think about it, you just appreciate things a lot more.”} the learning of “empathy and charity” (Raif), “alertness of a conscious mind” (Iman), “self-discipline and reflection upon the past year” (Abraham Asad), and “controlling one’s anger and avoiding involvement in gossiping or back-biting” (Imaan-Yousef).

Not every Muslim convert will start to practice Ramaḍān as the next step after conversion since each individual will develop different priorities and has to overcome different challenges and obstacles. Choices of refrainment are made, soul-searching is carried out, and character-cleansing is embarked on during fasting.
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*Abraham Asad* uses Ramaḍān to question himself about whether he “could have made more effort” in certain situations “where he needs to improve”, and reflect on what “good things he has done”. *Imaan-Yousef* goes a step further by reconnecting with Islamic sources and reminding herself of God’s presence during Ramaḍān;

she stops “watching TV, reading glossy magazines, listening to the radio or music” and concentrates on “reading about Islam, reading the Qur’an, praying, and being outside with nature”.

There are different ways to approach and commence Ramaḍān, and often those who have just converted to Islam struggle with completing the fast at the first go. Due to the fact that God does not want His followers to struggle with hardship, leniency is given to those who have difficulties (Qur’an 2:187/ 5:6). Muslim converts tend to slowly ease into the fasting by searching for their own limits and trying to overcome them. If the struggle becomes too much, the fasting is either interrupted or stopped. Particular reference was given to the fact that the first Muslims had twenty-three years to adapt to Muslim life, and this is reflected in the majority of the participants’ opinion that it is not necessary to be fasting perfectly the very first time one fasts. The challenges of Ramaḍān are not only of a physical but also psychological nature.

Although non-Muslims often ask born and converted Muslims how they can adhere to the religious fasting rules, particularly when it comes to the refrainment of water, it being a matter of priority to the human body’s needs, Muslims often ask themselves the same questions about how they can pursue such a challenge. *Zaynab*, for example, stated during the interview stage that she had not yet completed a full Ramaḍān as she had felt uncomfortable fasting in the presence of her relatives. However, she did mention that it was her intention to fulfill this duty once she had moved out of her parents’ home.148

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147 The Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad* between 610 CE and 632 CE.

148 Zaynab: “It is important as it teaches us to appreciate what we have to face, that some people don’t have as much as us. At Ramaḍān, the way I will feel towards the end of the day is the way that millions of people across the world feel constantly. And I can be “oh, fasting over” and I can go to my fridge and have whatever I want. Most people who feel that way can’t do that, don’t have that choice.”
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Most German participants agreed that fasting in Ramaḍān represents an obligation for all Muslims. Nonetheless, differences were expressed by adopting the fasting rituals and adapting them to their individual understanding and lifestyle. Completing Ramaḍān seems to be no more difficult or easy for converts to Islam than born Muslims, since everyone who fasts is challenged by the same or similar symptoms. Kulthum feels that Ramaḍān is one of the “most wonderful” months: “During this month I experience my religion in a very intensive way.” Ramaḍān includes “bodily and spiritual cleansing” (Touareg1801, Kulthum, Jesseniah), intensively dealing with the hardship of others (Fatima), “teaching oneself self-discipline” (Jesseniah), “rethinking wastage” (Liyana), “connecting with God and sharpening one’s senses” (Ibrahim), and “recharging the batteries of one’s Iman” (Jenna).

Beginning the month of Ramaḍān seems to be a challenge for all Muslims who decide to fast. Abdou says that “the first two, three days of fasting are the hardest” since the body has to adjust to the change of meal and sleep times. However, he advises the following:

“If you eat proper foods, nothing salted, you will feel less thirsty, and you’ll be more disciplined.”

Nina believes that fasting encourages the person “to become calmer and more humble:

“Fasting allows you to develop thankfulness towards the things you have. And the food tastes even better.”

Iman-2, on the other hand, had discussions with co-workers who criticized Islamic fasting as unhealthy but according to her,
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“The image of Islam divides the human into a body and a soul,” and thus “fasting is food for the soul.”

Although, the German participants appeared to be stricter with themselves than their British counterpart in commencing Ramaḍān and trying their best to follow it through, it also seems as if they were more open towards possible downfalls and failures in keeping to the fasting rules. Karim admitted to “often have started and stopped the fasting,” however, he proudly also mentioned that he completed his first full Ramaḍān in 2008. Other participants, such as Soraya and Ghariba believe that Ramaḍān is essential, nonetheless not always compatible with employment or personal constrictions, or stated that they did not adhere to the fasting at all. Furthermore, it becomes obvious that converts in both countries face the same challenges, personally within their specific environment and deal with them in a very personal fashion. Most of them mentioned their intention to fast and their desire to complete it, however, some have difficulties to complete Ramaḍān; and again others do not fast at all. The latter is often replaced by giving charity to the poor or sadaqa within the family. The open-mindedness in regards to the possible challenges and deficits that can occur once one starts to fast during Ramaḍān was primarily noticeable among German participants, whereas the British participants stated more collectively the significance of maintaining this religious obligation.

5.2.5. Pilgrimage

Among the most significant religio-symbolic actions is that of the widespread practice of pilgrimage, which can be found in almost any religion known to mankind. In Islam, the Hajj is the peak of religious experience for most Muslims. It commemorates

153 Iman-2: “Ramadān is a month where we reduce the body’s needs to absolute basic needs and concentrate on the soul. And if in fact, the soul is being nurtured then this cannot consequently be bad for the body but the exact opposite happens.”
154 Karim: “It is a pillar and very important. If one can manage it then you feel so good afterwards. I can only recommend it to every Muslim and non-Muslim.”
155 Ghariba: “This year (2009) was my first Ramadān. It is important to me, however, I could not do Ramaḍān this year because I just recently moved and started a new job. I did not want my new colleagues to meet me as a Muslim during Ramadān – with all the known misconceptions there are about it – but as a human-being, not to be reduced to my religion. Hence, I did not do Ramadān back than.”
156 Kathira: “I don’t fast but I know that I have to do it at a later date.”
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the life of the patriarch Ibrahim (Abraham) and includes four important elements for the pilgrim: 1. departure from one’s familiar environment, 2. passage through a foreign environment, 3. arriving and staying at the holy places, and 4. return to familiar surroundings but with an inward change.

The German theologian Tworuschka characterises the pilgrimage as “the journey to God” and describes his personal journey during the pilgrimage more closely:

“During this trip (...), it is both the geographical distance and time difference between the home and the place of worship that is of significant importance. On the one hand, experience will include everyday occurrences, routines and particular duties, whereas on the other hand, extraordinary occurrences, such as festivities and voluntary actions will complement the routine aspects. The outbound journey is mostly characterised with silence and seriousness. In turn, happiness and joy will complement the final return.” (Tworuschka, 2004:210)

The social dimension of the Hajj seems very clear, particularly to Muslims who either have already completed the pilgrimage or those who are preparing to embark on Hajj. Like no other religious act, it allows the pilgrims to feel the global community and solidarity of all Muslims (Tworuschka, 2004:212). Most participants within this study felt that the Hajj represents a significant religious requirement, however, it appeared to be less immediately important than prayer, giving charity or fasting. Nonetheless, almost all participants agreed that they aimed to fulfil the obligation of Hajj once in their life, if the opportunity arises.

Several participants mentioned Qur’an 3:97 which according to them obligates Muslims to perform Hajj if they have the financial means and are physically able. Abdullah emphasized that

“Hej is highly recommended but not a must. If you can financially afford it then you should go because Allah forgives all previous sins of the one who completes the Haji.”
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One British participant and three German participants had completed the Hajj at different times, reporting different experiences and memories. *Michael* completed the Hajj in 2003, remembering the pilgrimage as

“very spiritually beneficial at the time,” though he admitted to being “glad to have fulfilled this duty, otherwise it would be weighing” on him.

*Abdou* went on Hajj in 2002, experiencing “a strict daily schedule,” writing a diary, and “looking for solutions to theological and spiritual questions.” Although during the interview he stressed that every Muslim should complete the Hajj if he or she has the opportunity, he also demonstrated disappointment in the Saudi system and politics, and thus felt his Hajj has not been as fulfilling as expected. *Saliha* believes that Hajj is not only a religious duty mentioned in the Qur’an but feels that “the pilgrim must feel the Hajj, not only complete it.” During her Hajj in 2009, she felt “a little closer to God” than in Germany.

*Karima* completed Hajj in 2005, and remembers an overwhelming experience:

“It was amazing. However, once you have completed it and returned home, you feel like a zombie. My initial feeling was of being spiritually hugged, but when I returned home, I very quickly adapted to this fast, cold, and materialistic daily routine. It feels like being a sort of un-dead person.”

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157 *Abdou:* “I believe that the Saudis are marionettes of the Zionists, originating from the USA. The Saudis seem to think they can do as they please but it is not as easy as it seems. They are not permitted to do everything (...).” *Abdou’s* disappointment mixes Saudi Arabian politics with international politics and conspiracy theories. He felt that this has also influenced the atmosphere of the holy place of Mecca, and thus not letting him enjoy Hajj as much as he had wished.

158 *Saliha:* “It is the centre for all Muslims. You meet Muslims from all over the world, and you don’t immediately see who is rich and who is poor. Everything superficial is not important. It is not important where you are from, who you are or what you have got. It is trivial (...).”

159 There is a strong ambivalence between this euphoric high point in *Karima’s* life and then turning to the everyday sluggishness. The comparison between the feelings of being alive and ‘dead’ reflects the discrepancy that is happening inside her (this could remind the reader about the comparison between praying and not praying). One could conclude that *Karima* felt most alive when she was in Mecca, although it also has to be noted that she more noticeably reflected on her on life becoming aware of every day life which does not change much after the Hajj, even though most seem to expect particular changes, for example, more regular religious practice, doing more good deeds, becoming a positive role model for others, etc.
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She summarizes her experience as “an energy which cannot be described, as Hajj involves so many components. This mixture of belonging to a community but also alone before God is fascinating.” 160

The participants who have experienced Hajj differ in their reflections in comparison to those who anticipate going on Hajj. Perceptions and expectations seem to vary, and not every participant seems to be positively inclined; some criticize the changes that have occurred in the Holy Places in recent years, or the ways of travelling to them. The attitude, behaviour and knowledge of a Muslim going on Hajj apparently is particularly significant for the British participants. Anwaar, for example, believes that the pilgrim “has to be in the right frame of mind.” According to him and Imaan-Yousef, a pilgrim should “have knowledge and be prepared, and not just go there and think ‘It’s just Hajj, it is part of the religion’”. Both emphasize the significance of individually studying Islam, visiting seminars which prepare the Muslim for Hajj, and understanding the possible impact that the pilgrimage may have on a person. 161

Several German participants, on the other hand, criticize the exterior changes of the Hajj, including the travel possibilities as well as the “consumerism and materialism that has taken over Mecca”. 162 Travel possibilities to Mecca and Medina have drastically changed through means of technology. Flights to Jeddah, the city with the closest international airport to Mecca, and ferries from neighbouring states have eased the Hajj journey, and thus making the trip more comfortable than it was before the existence of airplanes. Such comfort is, however, not the objective of some German participants, who believe that going on Hajj should include certain valuable hardships, rather than pilgrims taking the easiest route.

160 Karima: “There are many people who pray together and go around the Ka’aba together (...) everything is done in unity (...). All these people and you together but simultaneously it is only between the individual and God. There are three million others performing the same rituals but everyone is consumed and busy with themselves.”
161 Anwaar: “You need to be mentally prepared, understanding completely what you are doing. Your heart has to be open. You have just got to excel yourself to the best you can and study about the Hajj, do all your prayers, go to the mosque (...) everything will fall into place, you will be prepared for yourself.” Imaan-Yousef believes that she is not ready to embark on going to Hajj until she has acquired “more knowledge in Islam,” is “really practising,” and “saying all the necessary parts of prayers in Arabic.”
162 Amro: “Today it is mass tourism, I.e. there is a hotel five minutes away from the Ka’aba.”; Nasir: “The Hajj is important, however, not a daily challenge to think about. Nevertheless, it is my duty to visit the most sacred place on earth and feel the atmosphere (...) even though I believe this has changed due to Saudi governmental reasons, I.e. tourism, rip-offs, skyscrapers etc.”
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Jesseniah would like to literally walk to Mecca to commence her Hajj with a fellow German convert:

“...I think it is too easy to take a flight, and I believe that the travelling to the place is part of the Hajj. There is no point in just being there. Insha Allah, I will do it at some point (...) it is a great task to undertake.”

Ibrahim also feels a deep aversion against taking a flight to Mecca since he believes that

“...Flying takes away from the stresses, strains and experiences of a real pilgrimage.”

SteinbA on the other hand mentioned having difficulties with “the masses of people and no organisation,” placing the emphasis on the masses of pilgrims being in Mecca on Hajj which seems to increase uncomfortableness and anxiety that she feels overwhelmed with:

“I am too German, I think (she smiles). I have to say this a little heretically: this Arabic crushing and disorganised chaos – well, it’s not your annual holiday you are paying for (...) hence, my difficulties with the Hajj. But it’s not to say that I don’t want to do it because I do.”

Iman-2 also had mixed feelings regarding the Hajj but focuses on it as embodying a potential positive and negative life decision, rather than on its inner and outer dynamics:

“...Deciding to go on Hajj could probably be compared with deciding to have children. It is a life-changing situation, including the good, i.e. spirituality, being among other pilgrims – and the bad, i.e. dirt, rubbish and McDonald’s. Performing

163 These participants’ statements are unusual and exciting, since they offer a different outlook on how Hajj ‘should be’ embarked upon. According to Jesseniah and Ibrahim, it seems as if by placing a greater stress capacity on oneself as a pilgrim, the journey to Mecca and the Hajj are made more worthwhile than if comfortably travelling by modern means. They would like to intensify the experience without too many capitalistic influences. Thus this should not only be a spiritual but also, in the true sense of the word, a physical experience.

164 SteinbA feels seems to feel like a stranger, as the masses of people she would encounter during Hajj may be too chaotic for her organised lifestyle. It is interesting that she admits these feelings in an interview, showing that for her the external influences of the Hajj are too overwhelming for her at the moment to commit to such an experience. Nonetheless, she stated that she would like to go on Hajj one day.
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Umrah before Hajj is wise, to familiarise oneself with the holiest place for Muslims.  

In summary, the majority of British and German participants believe that the Hajj is a religious obligation to be fulfilled at least once in a lifetime if one can afford it financially and is able to do it health wise. Yet, minor but also unique differences occurred which are reflected in that the German participants tended to emphasize their criticisms of modern changes concerning the Holy cities of Mecca and Medina, as well as travel arrangements and changes of consumer behaviourism in much more detail. British participants, on the other hand, concentrated on the spiritual means and preparations needed for the Hajj. Most of the participants agreed that this pillar should only be completed if the person has the ability to do so, and some added that time needs to be considered in order to develop a strong Iman and acquire the religious understanding of the meaning of going on Hajj.

5.3. Islamic dietary laws

Religion as a way of life includes not only the above required ritual practices or rites of passage, but also more domestic and corporeal activities with religious significance. There are Muslim customs that are either required by Islamic law, such as permitted and prohibited foods, or have been passed on by tradition. This section will look at the diverse challenges faced and attitudes taken by the British and German participants regarding consumption of pork and alcohol, as well as their thoughts about whether to keep to ḥalāl-certified foods and to what extent the ḥalāl-certificates can be trusted. Although, statistics may not be of crucial importance, this section will identify how essential and difficult it is for the participants to keep to Islamic dietary laws. Most foods are allowed, however, there are three major limitations which are mentioned in the following verse of the Qur’an:

165 In contrast to SteinbA’s description of chaos, Iman-2 seems to encourage engaging with the unknown and new location, thus her approach is different, e.g. more open for a challenge. She sees the ‘strangeness and unknown’ not as fearful and chaotic but rather an enrichment.

166 See Appendix II, Table 4: Completion of the Hajj.
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“Forbidden to you is carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that over which any name other than God’s has been invoked, and the animal has been strangled, or beaten to death, or killed by a fall, or gored to death, or savaged by a beat of prey, save that which you (yourselves) may have slaughtered while it was still alive; and forbidden to you is all that has been slaughtered on idolatrous altars.” (Qur’an 5:3)\textsuperscript{167}

Comparing these restrictions with the dietary norms of other monotheistic religion’s food regulations, Judaism makes similar demands, but unlike the Jews, Muslims are allowed to eat shellfish. Christianity is not as strict, nonetheless different groups have similar regulations, e.g. many Catholics eat no meat on Friday, and many Methodists drink no alcohol. The key (scriptual) difference in the Bible is, when Peter has a vision that essentially says it is permissible to eat everything, as before that early Christians basically lived to Jewish laws (Acts 10:10-16).

Muslim, Jewish and other scholars have tried to present a logical case for the avoidance of pork, such as the health dangers incurred by inadequately cooked pork, its unhealthy fats and bacteria. Reasons may also be of religious nature, implying it to be a matter of purity but there are also social boundaries that are influenced by the taboos of the given culture. Many cultures have food taboos. In the West, meats coming from dogs, cats, and often horses are considered taboo. In this case, Muslims, as descendants of Abraham, took over the prohibition of pork from Jewish law. However, there is one exception to the rule: since the Qur’an strives for the protection of human life, it allows the consumption of pork if a person is close to starvation and there is nothing else to eat (Qur’an 2:173).

Alcohol, drugs and gambling are prohibited in Islam. These activities cause greed and inhibit peoples’ mental abilities. According to most Muslims, consuming alcohol is prohibited by the Qur’an because it intoxicates and numbs the mind and prevents the believers’ constantly required awareness of God. Alcohol and drugs may also lead to unhealthy dependence on one’s lower needs. The Qur’an also warns that the consumption of alcohol incites people to hostility and may lead to other unintended reactions:

\textsuperscript{167} Raif and Karima mentioned Qur’an 5:3 as proof of the prohibition of pork. See also Qur’an 2:173, 6:145 and 16:115.
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“Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks), and games of chance, and idolatrous practices, and the divining of the future are but a loathsome evil of Satan’s doing: shun it, then, so that you might attain to a happy state. By means of intoxicants (alcoholic drinks) and games of chance Satan seeks only to sow enmity and hatred among you, and to turn you away from the remembrance of God and from prayer. Will you not, then, resist?” (Qur’an 5:90-91)

In this passage the specific drink at stake is date wine. Although, some scholars have argued that if the verse is interpreted in a literal sense only date wine is forbidden, the overwhelming majority interpret this passage in comprehensively banning all substances that induce an altered state of consciousness. Again, there is one exception: although alcohol is strictly forbidden, it is permitted for consumption if there is a medical necessity, and thus a human life can be saved.

Natascha was the only participant in the study who agreed with the latter necessity:

“I sometimes take medication containing alcohol but here the medication is more important than the alcohol.”

The meat of animals that are not slaughtered islamically is also prohibited to Muslims. The slaughtering is, however, identical with Jewish rituals. Accordingly, Muslims can eat kosher foods since it is considered ḥalāl. The Islamic slaughtering ritual includes the quick cutting of the throat, the windpipe and the neck during which God’s name is pronounced so that the blood can rapidly leave the animal’s body. For Muslims in non-Muslim countries, such as Britain and Germany, it is difficult to determine whether some pre-fabricated foods are contaminated with by-products of pork or alcohol. Furthermore, Muslims are challenged to buy Islam-compliant food products. There are a growing number of websites for Muslims now that provide detailed information on the ingredients of various products, including foods that are offered in fast food chains. Nonetheless, complying with all Islamic dietary laws in a non-Muslim environment apparently presents an on-going challenge which is only slowly being made easier.

168 Food examples include the sale of bread, cold meats, certain desserts and cakes, sauces, yoghurts, and more.
Islamic Obligations and Dietary Laws

5.3.1. Prohibition of pork

Some Muslims feel unsure about accepting dinner invitations in non-Muslim homes because they worry about unknowingly being served pork products. Further problems include the wide use of pork products or those which contain some elements of the pig (i.e. gelatine). Lard is often used for frying and baking, hence it could be hidden in seemingly innocuous foods, such as biscuits and crisps. Some Muslims and especially converts will study each label carefully in order to make sure no pork products are contained in the ingredients. Other Muslims, however, believe that excessive attention is unnecessary. Another challenge is whether Muslims are allowed to eat in restaurants where fried food is served since the consumer will not know which fats and oils are used in the respective kitchens (unless it is from a ḥalāl-certified location).

The participants expressed mixed views on this particular issue: some only visit ḥalāl-certified restaurants, whereas others also visit non-ḥalāl certified locations, and choose dishes which most likely will not contain pork, according to their conscience. In addition to the religious reasons, pork is also perceived as an omnivore, unclean, wallowing in filth, and its own excrements. Furthermore, Muslims refer to pork being more easily tainted in warm weather conditions, unlike beef which can be dried. In religious terms, pork is also seen as a nasāja (pollution). 169

*Layali* argues this point and declares that

"Pork is an unclean meat due to the digestive system of the pig. It’s so quick that it can’t process or remove all the toxins of the things it eats."

169 “The pig is viewed as a serious nasāja, also known as nasāja mughallaza. When discussing pork, all types of domestic pig and wild boar are meant. All its body parts, body fluids and excretions are seen as great nasājas; furthermore its hair (bristles) as well as its skin (leather) is classified as great nasājas. Nonetheless, different opinions exist about the use of pig skin, saying that it can no longer be forbidden if it has been handled by proper tanning. This view is, however, rare since most Muslims would not voluntarily wear clothes made from pig skin because for Muslims, the pig is already perceived as the biggest nasāja, or at least it is interpreted as reprehensible (makrouh) to touch or wear things which result from this nasāja.” (Reidegeld 2008:158).
Islamic Obligations and Dietary Laws

Using scientific methods, results demonstrate that consumption of pork may be unhealthy since it has been proven that pigs carry bacteria and disease in the seedlings, particularly trichina, which is also a known parasite (Reckeweg, 1978).

All participants without exception stated that they refrain from pork consumption. Participants who classify themselves as liberally practicing mentioned the refrainment from pork is the lowest common denominator that all Muslims are able to agree upon. However, the participants do offer different reasons for rejecting the consumption of pork:

Nina believes that

“Eating pork has a negative effect on spirituality: The founder of our congregation says in his book that ‘everything eaten has an influence upon the body.’ (Ghulam Ahmad, 1996)”

According to Mounir,

It is “necessary to abstain from it if one wants to purify one’s own character.”

Not only one’s character is affected by the Islamic purification but there is also Mounir’s view of the refrainment from pork as a purification of body and soul.

The following two statements are to be understood within the principle of sacrifice versus acceptance: Michael “abides” the prohibition, but admits,

“It was a big sacrifice since I love bacon, pork, salami etc.”

Souhayla shows fewer problems with temptation when she says that although she refrains from pork she has no problem eating alongside someone who does. As a

170 According to two German female participants, pork has too much testosterone: “If a male eats a lot of meat, and he gets all heated seeing a female, I believe it has something to do with the meat,” says Amina. Nina adds: “If you compare animals, you find predators being carnivores that are more aggressive than prey that are rather shy. In a figurative sense, it would mean that humans who eat a lot of meat are more aggressive and short-tempered than their vegetarian counterparts who shy away from problems. I know some people like that therefore it confirms my theory.”
Islamic Obligations and Dietary Laws

consequence, there are diverse reasons why Muslim converts choose not to eat pork, ranging from religious reasons based on the Qur’an to a scientific understanding and necessity.

A particular problem of eating pork-free in Europe is the use of gelatine. The majority of participants do not eat products with gelatine, unless they know it is ḥalāl-gelatine, fish or vegetarian gelatine. Several participants felt challenged when they go grocery shopping because they feel they have to read every product’s ingredients first in order to make sure it does not contain gelatine. As producers are generally vague in their explanations what type of gelatine is used, it is mostly assumed to be pork gelatine. Supermarkets and food stores in Britain are currently better at offering products with different types of gelatine;\(^1\) in Germany these may be found in Turkish or Arab food stores rather than general supermarkets.

Two German female participants responded more liberally on the consumption of food products containing gelatine. Amina-2 states that she is not too careful about products with gelatine: “Sometimes the Haribo gummy bears are just too tempting.” Iman-2 also grew up with gummy bears and even admits its temptation being her weakness when she states:

“I cannot go without. There are scholars who say that it has nothing to do with pork since it is chemically altered, and others who say the complete opposite. I do watch that I try not to eat anything with gelatine, (but) I have to confess that if there is a box at work, I will eat them. I wouldn’t recommend it to anyone but it’s my personal weakness.”

Abraham Asad on the other hand ate sweets, such as Percy Pigs which he thought were free of pork gelatine:

“They never used to have pork gelatine (…) we wanted to write to M&S and say ‘what’s with this obsession with pork?’”\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Beef-, fish- and vegetarian gelatine is often bought by Muslim consumers, however, the products containing beef gelatine may be purchased less if the product does not offer a ḥalāl-certificate.

\(^2\) Percy Pigs by Marks & Spencer contains pork gelatine. There has been a vegetarian Percy Pigs option since August 2011.
Islamic Obligations and Dietary Laws

As **Iman-2** already mentioned, Muslim scholars differ on the usage of gelatine. The German Muslim scholar Ahmad A. Reidegeld determined that the pig, including all its components, is prohibited to Muslims (Schrode, 2010:145).

Although, there are different levels of compliance between the participants, all of them are aware of the issue, and make what they consider to be appropriate steps to meet the demands of the prohibition. There was no perceptible difference between British and German participants’s responses. Overall, most participants agreed on the Qur’anic prohibition as an absolute rule which cannot be changed, amended, ignored or discarded.

5.3.2. Prohibition of Alcohol

Muslim converts are particularly challenged by this regulation, since they have grown up in the Western culture of alcohol consumption, and must try to either remove or stay away from situations where alcohol is served. The majority of participants refrain from alcohol, three however stated they had consumed alcohol after their conversion. The majority of participants were strictly against alcohol consumption. A minority of the participants did not perceive alcohol consumption as a strict Islamic prohibition, and underlined their personal reasoning by citing the Qur’an. Nonetheless, they also draw limits and feel that consumption should – if at all – occur in moderation. Those who occasionally drink alcohol avoid doing so in the presence of other Muslims, particularly those who are viewed as particularly observant practitioners.

A gradual approach has commonly been adopted by new converts to Islam, who are not necessarily expected to accept all religious practices and prohibitions immediately after conversion; Lord Headley, for example, took several years to give up

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173 Several Muslim converts see Qur’an 5:90 as a strong recommendation to refrain from alcohol, rather than a strict prohibition.
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alcohol after his conversion. Abraham Asad mentioned that he had “had a tipple here and there in the past” but gave up alcohol when he converted. Ruqayyah admitted to having had

“The occasional drink: I don’t drink now but I did have the occasional drink in the past when I was Muslim but when I was still very much in the European culture (...) whatever that means.”

Many participants have retained some of their former friends; but have become more selective, choosing those friends who are prepared to make some effort to accommodate the new faith, for example, abstaining from alcohol in the presence of their converted friends or being prepared to socialize in an alcohol-free environment. Still, not every Muslim convert is prepared to compromise with existing friends’ habits which they see as incorrect and contradictory to their newly found faith, and thus there are also participants who decided to proceed with an absolute cut-off from friends who socialize in environments and places where alcohol is served.

British participants have mixed views on their participation in activities where alcohol is involved. This includes meeting friends and co-workers in a public house, in restaurants or during home invitations. Some participants continue going to the public house, but refrain themselves from alcohol, instead enjoying a soft drink. Jameela and Zaynab continue to socialise with friends at places where alcohol is served. Zaynab says:

“A drink changes who you are so much that you can’t care as much about God as a sober person. With alcohol it can have bad effects; hence I stay clear of it.”

174 However, it is the researcher’s opinion that such leniency has become less common since the beginning of the 20th century, because today the adherence to expected standards seems to be controlled and checked in a much stricter manner than previously. (Zebiri, 2008:35)

175 Ruqayyah: “I see all the consequences of alcohol (...) I know that on a balance, the bad things about alcohol outweigh the positive ones there might be for any healthy person.”

176 Zaynab stated that she had drunk from a very young age: “The first time I was drunk I was 3. Only because I took a bit of my Dad’s! The first time I was properly drunk was at the age of 12, I drank when I was 13, drank heavily till I gave up at 17.”
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*Layali* also believes that there is no benefit in drinking alcohol:

“It might make you feel good for a bit, but the harm really outweighs the benefits. You know if they say that wine is healthy every now and then so is grape juice. It isn’t the wine that does it, it’s the grapes (...) the alcohol itself has no benefit.”

Several British participants stated they had stopped consuming alcohol already prior to their conversion, whereas one participant felt that alcohol consumption “in moderation” seems permissible:

“I would say that I wouldn’t pray if I had a glass or two of wine but I know from personal experience that God still listens and still answers!” (*Azadeh*)

Most British participants however clearly stated the prohibition of alcohol, referring to the Qur’an and health risks but also other reasons, such as “the prohibition sets Muslims apart from others, stressing the need for clarity and consciousness” (*Iman*), not being able to “claim to still be a good Muslim when drinking high volumes of alcohol and eating pork” (*Raif*), or “refraining from going to places where alcohol is being served” (*Abdul-Mannan*).

The German participants are also very selective and diverse in their attitudes towards the prohibition of alcohol. There are, as with their British counterparts, individual challenges and interpretations concerning the consumption of alcohol, and different backgrounds as well as experiences with alcohol demonstrate a variety of motives as to why the alcohol ban makes sense to them. It depends on personal experiences, or watching friends or family members coping with alcohol addiction, which can influence the individual’s thoughts a great deal. *Nasir* states:

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177 *Layali* used to work in a bar and explained the experiences she encountered working in this environment. She mentioned her ex-boyfriend, the owner of the bar, who was an alcoholic. According to her, several guests who regularly visited the bar had the same or similar problems with alcohol addiction.

178 *Khadija-Maryam*: “I gave up alcohol whilst I was still learning about Islam and haven’t touched it since. A priority I feel.”

179 *Abdul-Mannan*: “I wouldn’t even eat in a place where it is served.”
Islamic Obligations and Dietary Laws

“The prohibition is very important as it is the number one drug in society. The consequences (...) can be clearly recognised in individuals but also by looking at the society as a whole.”

Jenna also points out that the prohibition is embedded in the Qur’an, which for her includes avoiding alcoholic flavours in any dishes. However, she emphasizes: “I don’t go as far as identifying e-numbers or not eating vinegar.” Accordingly, it appears that Muslim converts pay particular attention during a food shop that foods do not contain alcohol but are, exceptions counted, less particular about chemical additives.  

Several German participants related bad experiences with alcohol within their immediate environment. Prior to conversion, most of them had personally consumed alcohol, however once becoming acquainted with the Islamic prohibition against it most of them chose to abstain, particularly when personal experiences had been negative.

CaMaTa, for example, approves of the alcohol ban:

“Many family members died because of alcoholism. I can identify myself with that very well and check that foods contain no alcohol.”

Nina takes and even stronger line on this issue, stating that people destroy themselves through alcohol consumption, condemning it because

“It numbs a person’s reactions and changes their behaviour. They pretend to be happy where there is no happiness. They just drug themselves.”

Although, the majority of German participants agree with the Islamic prohibition of alcohol, the reasons for adherence differ widely from one another. Mahbubah states that drinking alcohol is “not an Islamic but a Western lifestyle.” Although, she grew up as a Western European woman, she does not associate herself with the non-Muslim

180 Sandra in particular stated the significance of checking ingredients: “I don’t buy pizza dough if it contains alcohol. Most buns even contain alcohol. It is important that it doesn’t exist, not even in the smallest quantities. I don’t take e-numbers apart but if the pack says – alcohol – it is out of the question.”
Islamic Obligations and Dietary Laws

socialising lifestyle in Europe. Her statement seems to reflect a more personal than cultural reason in regards to alcohol consumption. Kathira, on the other hand, stated:

“I cannot promise that I abstain from a sparkling glass of wine, but so far I have been good.”\(^{181}\)

She disagrees with the prohibition but adjusts to the regulation since her surroundings primarily include Muslim relatives and friends. Varisha on the other hand states that

“The prohibition on alcohol is not important. It is important to control oneself and show remorse for one’s sins.”\(^{182}\)

Although, there is a general consensus on the prohibition of alcohol in Islam, according to this study’s sample, not all Muslim converts are consistent in adhering to this prohibition. The majority of British and German participants agree with the religiously legitimated ban on alcohol, and thus refrain from its consumption. A small minority – one British participant and three German participants – feel that this prohibition has no absolute influence and consequence for them.

5.3.3. Ḥalāl foods

Islam has laws about which foods can and cannot be eaten and also for proper method of slaughtering an animal for consumption, known as *dhāhibah*. However, if there are no other foods available, then a Muslim is allowed to eat non-ḥalāl food (Qur’an 2:173). In non-Muslim countries it seems to be difficult for Muslims to adhere to the consumption of only *dhāhibah* ḥalāl foods, since the ḥalāl-food market is only growing slowly. Although there are a growing number of mainstream manufacturers

\(^{181}\) Kathira particularly points out that when posting photographs which show her and friends holding up drinks in wine or champagne glasses, the contents are non-alcoholic. She wants to make sure that any reader/viewer will not misunderstand, but know that the contents of the drinks are without alcohol.

\(^{182}\) By this, the researcher believes that Varisha understands “showing remorse” as necessary after having drunk alcohol even though one may be in the knowledge that under mainstream Islam it is prohibited. The interview material does not, however, reveal any further details as to whether Varisha herself does or does not consume alcohol. Her opinion however seems not to agree with mainstream scholarly opinion.
Islamic Obligations and Dietary Laws

who have pursued the ḥalāl-market, it often seems difficult for them: 1. to adhere to the complete process ensuring that the product is 100% ḥalāl, and 2. to distribute the products to all accessible places where Muslims live. Furthermore, the ritual method of slaughtering as practiced according to Islamic requirements has been criticised as being inhumane by animal welfare organisations in the UK (Blackstock, 2003; unstunnedhalal, 2012) but also in Germany (DW Staff, 2008).

The regulations not only encompass the restriction on a religiously appropriate method of slaughtering animals but also concerning the ingredients of food products. Muslims are challenged even when purchasing ‘apparently vegetarian’ dishes since many vegetarian dishes and desserts can contain pork gelatine, or other non-conforming substances. Often additives are used which are not declared in the product’s ingredients, in response to which Muslim organisations in both Britain and Germany have produced “A Muslim’s buyer’s guide” in order to support Muslims in purchasing ḥalāl products.¹⁸³ Although it may be surprising, the German sample stated finding it more challenging to find and purchase ḥalāl products whereas the British sample stated the variety of choice they have in their ability to purchase such products. While these products are readily available in most large British cities, as well as cities with large Muslim populations, it is still a small but growing market in Germany, mainly available in small Muslim shops and butchers.

Alcohol, especially wine, is also frequently used in cooking, sauces and cakes. There are different scholarly opinions when it comes to the usage of alcohol in food products. Some say that food cooked with wine, although it may have evaporated and not contain alcoholic content any longer, is forbidden. Others do not consider food ḥalāl even if it is made with all the correct ingredients but contains food flavouring in which ethyl alcohol was used as a solvent. Other scholars again recommend food products made with all the ḥalāl ingredients even if the food flavourings contained ethyl alcohol.¹⁸⁴

Verbraucherzentrale Berlin, retrieved from http://www.verbraucherzentrale-berlin.de/download/EFKOMPL.pdf (Germany). This is an old online version from 2003 however an updated version from 2012 is available at Verbraucherzentrale Bremen, Altenweg 4, or Beratungsstelle Bremerhaven, Hafenstr. 117, in Bremen. Price: €4,90).
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Europe is perceived as a significant market for ḥalāl products on the basis of higher purchase power rather than population size. The majority of migrant Muslims in Britain originate come from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, whereas the majority of Germany’s migrant population originates from Turkey. This can already be recognised in the distribution and offers of ḥalāl products to Muslims living in different countries. With the production and sale of ḥalāl foods comes the ḥalāl-certification, which counts as a prerequisite for entering the ḥalāl-market. This certificate is issued by an Islamic organisation certifying that the products listed on it meet Islamic dietary guidelines. Problems have arisen considering matters of trust in the ḥalāl-certificates and this varies among Muslim consumers because apparently not every certification offers the necessary standards and qualities. Thus, also Muslim converts, searching for ḥalāl-approved foods are challenged and often find themselves not being able to buy ḥalāl food products.

Some participants do not differentiate between Muslim and non-Muslim supermarkets and buy their meat wherever it suits them best on the occasion, whereas others pay great attention to the details, only buying ḥalāl-certified products. Muslims in neither Britain nor Germany can determine on their own which ḥalāl-certificate they can trust. The various Muslim vendors are in fierce competition with each other, and question each other’s respectability. Moreover, it appears that no single certificate can claim to meet the expectations of the entire spectrum of requirements that effectively designate food to be ḥalāl. According to the participants, the availability of ḥalāl-certified foods, as well as easy access to them, is much greater in Britain than in Germany, though there are European Muslim organisations, such as the European Halal-Certification Institute, which offer Muslims across Europe information on ḥalāl-certified products.¹⁸⁵

British supermarkets offer greater availability of ḥalāl food products than German foodstores. ASDA and Tesco are leading supermarket chains in Britain, which offer ḥalāl food products in nearly every store, whereas in Germany a smaller number of

¹⁸⁵ This relies on a comparison of ḥalāl food availability through participants’ opinions and the researcher’s personal experience living in both Britain and Germany. The problem is that the more ḥalāl-certification institutes arise, the less faith one can put in any given certificate, and thus the participants varied in their opinions and the significance they attributed to the purchase of ḥalāl (-certified) products.
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selected stores of the supermarket chains *REAL* and *Edeka* have started to offer a small range ḥalāl-certified foods (Schaaf: 2010) According to the German participants, ḥalāl-certified products, or those which seem to be ḥalāl are generally purchased in Muslim-owned supermarkets or at Muslim butchers. The majority of participants stated that although they agreed with the significance of keeping to ḥalāl foods, it is primarily essential to stick to products which are free of pork, pork gelatine and alcohol, hence participants’ attitude towards the compliance of eating ḥalāl seem to depend on the individual’s understanding and interpretation.\(^{186}\)

The majority of British participants stated that they did not always consume ḥalāl-certified food products. Their reason for this primarily included difficulty of availability. Nonetheless, *Abdullah*, *Imaan-Yousef*, and *Layali* stated that they would not eat meat unless it had been islamically slaughtered. *Anwaar* compared ḥalāl-meat with a particular standard:

> “Ḥalāl meat is ḥalāl for a reason; ḥalāl meat is a golden standard for me. So any meat that isn’t ḥalāl, doesn’t have this standard. But it is only ḥalāl meat when you know that the animals have been fed vegetarian grain, they’ve been treated properly, and slaughtered in a way that the blood is able to drain.”

More than half of the British participants agreed that eating ḥalāl was essential to them, however, due to practicality and availability of ḥalāl food products they would also consume non-ḥalāl-certified foods. *Michael* and *Iman* also refer to the Qur’an 5:5 which according to them permits Muslims to eat meat slaughtered by the People of the Books (Jews and Christians). *Azadeh* agrees:

> “In my opinion I ate ḥalāl meat when I was a Christian as the name of God was pronounced before eating. The Qur’an says not to eat meat that has not had the name of God mentioned over it.”

According to her, “ḥalāl in today’s form or ritual (...) is not necessary”. Several participants are in contact with Muslim butchers and feel safe purchasing their meat at

\(^{186}\) See Appendix II, Table 5: Importance of ḥalāl food consumption.
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their stores. It gives them a safety that a supermarket with ḥalāl-certified food products apparently often cannot provide. Abraham Asad advocates ḥalāl meat from his fiancée’s father’s butcher:

“The ḥalāl mince I get from my fiancée’s father is different (...) you fry it up and there is virtually no fat. I fry up normal meat, I can drain it.”

Layali on the other hand, buys ḥalāl-certified foods at ASDA, although she is not entirely sure whether the foods are strictly controlled. Yet, she prefers going to the supermarket rather than to a Muslim butcher:

“I would stay clear of halāl shops (...) not because I doubt the meat is ḥalāl (...) some of them do not quite have the stringent health and safety protocols (...) and sometimes you look at things and think ‘Oh God! Really?’ It is mass production, and unless you have seen that the animal has been slaughtered correctly you have to put the trust in the people who put the ḥalāl stamp on their products and say ‘yeah, fine.’”

Several participants added that the effort is made to purchase ḥalāl-certified products, if they are easily available. In situations where ḥalāl options are less easily found it seems as if a source has been discovered, it is a ‘finder’s keeper’ to stick to.

Several German participants also mentioned the permission apparently granted to Muslims to eat meat slaughtered by the People of the Book, while also referring to Qur’an 5:5 as some British participants did (AbdulSamed, Amro, Nurjan, SteinbA).

AbdulSamed argued that:

“(…) they say you shall eat no meat that has been slaughtered in the name of an idol. Today no animal is slaughtered in the name of an idol but the animal is mechanically, rationally and unemotionally killed. It has nothing to do with religion. Therefore, it is generally no problem to eat meat here.”

187 Khadijah-Maryam, Eileen, Liyana and Sandra.
188 Amro agrees with AbdulSamed but places the emphasis on the significance of also reading in the Qur’an what is permitted and prohibited in Islam.
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Nurjan on the other hand has limited trust in the consumption of non-ḥalāl meat. During the interview, she indicated that she understands that she is permitted to consume meat slaughtered by Christians, however, she feels it necessary that:

“A person who slaughters has to calm the animal, say a prayer and thank God for this animal.”

Only in exceptional circumstances, when Nurjan personally knows Christians, she will accept their meat; nonetheless she primarily purchases her meat from a Muslim butcher.\(^{189}\)

It was particularly noticed among the German participants that according to several of them, the ‘ḥalāl’-status does not begin with the event of slaughtering the animal. Nearly a quarter of female German participants emphasized the significance of organic meat from organically raised animals, which have been fed organic grain and which have not been held in stables of mass production. Animals should live a respected life until slaughter.\(^{190}\) Thus, the rearing of the animals obviously is as essential as the act of slaughter. According to Mariuma, animals should be kept in an organic way:

“A tortured cow that grows to live to die on a mass factory farm is not ḥalāl.”

Safiyyah stated that she would not buy her meat from ḥalāl shops but from the market due to the possibility of inhumane treatment:

“I don’t want to offend other Muslims with my opinion, but chickens in halāl shops have way too much fat. These animals could never have been raised in a humane way.”

Ghariba on the other hand does eat islamically slaughtered meat, but said she felt unhappy about the process of Islamic slaughter: “I feel very sorry for the animals.

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\(^{189}\) Nurjan: “I teach within a family who is Christian. They are recognisable as Christians, and in this case I would be sure that if they would slaughter an animal that they would do so in the name of God, and continue to do so. Meat is something special. A luxury (...) if I am on a lawn and a cute cow is looking at me, you would have to think whether you would be able to kill that cow. And thinking this way increases the value of meat.”

\(^{190}\) Naima, Mariuma, Liyana, Natascha, Selma, Simone, Arwa, Karima and Nina.
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My partner buys the meat in town. I can eat it (...) but I can’t buy it.” It therefore seems to be a developing trend in Germany that organic and islamically slaughtered meat is growing popular among female participants. Organic foods are more expensive, and thus organic ḥalāl shops are only slowly on the rise, as most Muslims cannot afford these kinds of products. Consequently, particularly German female participants have started to find a solution in buying organic foods from the supermarkets, which are claimed to be in some ways more ḥalāl than ḥalāl-certified products.

Regardless of how much was known about the actual slaughtering process, the majority of British and German participants stressed the need for islamically correctly slaughtered meat and ḥalāl food products. Approximately a third of British and German participants stated to consume non-ḥalāl meat, primarily referring to Qur’an 5:5 which (according to the participants) permits in principle the consumption of food slaughtered and prepared by the People of the Book. SteinbA frankly stated she did not care about ḥalāl:

“Can I actually say that aloud? I am not bothered at all (...) I do not make my religion dependable on the meat I eat.”

One British participant and four German participants did not respond to the question of how essential ḥalāl foods are for them since they are vegetarians. Thus, the only great difference between British and German participants here is that a great number of German female participants believe in the significance of organic meat, or the appropriate process of Islamic slaughter for meat to become ḥalāl.

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191 Three female German participants mentioned an organic ḥalāl shop in Munich. Due to inaffordability it had to close down. This shop used to deliver nationwide, but it became too costly for its customers.

192 SteinbA: “One is permitted to eat the meat that has been slaughtered by Christians (...) I will not drive across the other side of town to buy five kilos of meat nor do I like Turkish cold meats. I watch out that nothing contains pork but whether it is ḥalāl or not, I am not bothered.”
Islamic Obligations and Dietary Laws

5.4. The challenge of religious compliance

The British and German samples clearly indicate that dietary habits and regulations constitute a significant part of what it means to be a Muslim. First of all, this can be confirmed by the absolute adherence to the ban on pork; secondly, the abstinence from alcohol; and thirdly, the adherence of predominantly consuming ḥalāl products. The observance of Islamic dietary laws represents one of the few features if not the only practice to visibly mark and shape the Muslim identity, and in particular, so it seems, Muslim converts who often offer a broader overt religious observance, a specific part of an Islamic lifestyle.

The study shows distinct, non-homogenous trends. On the one hand the interviewed converts demonstrate progressive outlooks and interpretations, placing less importance on islamically approved food consumption, i.e. ḥalāl food and refrainment from pork and alcohol. On the other hand they highlight traditional religious understandings that strongly emphasise the significance of observing ‘God-given’ rules. Participants who follow the former view feel the need to research beyond the religious basics, and whilst respecting their religious obligations and dietary means, room is given for a wider interpretation and understanding which passes official Muslim scholarly opinion and simultaneously adopts a request for a rather independent understanding of belief and practice. The participants feeling obligated to follow the prescribed religious rules base their reasons primarily on the original sources, the Qur’an and the Sunna, as well as following scholarly opinion. In instances where Islam forms the sole or dominant point of reference for appropriate behaviour, limits on permitted modes and phrasings of expression may be enforced.

The participants have found a variety of solutions as to how far they follow the Islamic obligations and dietary laws and to what extent they incorporate them into their immediate social environment. It appears to be less challenging to follow the five pillars of Islam because they are not as openly implemented as the adherence to the Islamic dietary norms, which seem to present a greater hurdle to overcome. The prohibition on pork and alcohol is accepted by the majority of participants, however solely complying to ḥalāl-certified foods seems to be impossible for many participants. This is one of the
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main reasons why they end up devising an acceptable solution for their individual circumstances, making their diet both compatible with the religion and in accordance with personal reasoning.
Chapter 6 Family and Friends - Reactions, Changes and Adaptations

6.1. Introduction

Religious conversion can have different effects on family relations and friendships: My research has shown that relations with parents and close relatives as well as friendships – even those which have lasted over years, perhaps even decades – can dissolve or fizzle out. Some converts decide on a complete change of lifestyle after embracing Islam, which includes ending friendships, They think may hinder them in practising their new religion or may negatively influence their life and behaviour. Others look for a compromise, depending on how valuable a certain friendship is to the individual convert. This chapter will elaborate on the differences in how the various participants perceive and deal with their relatives’ reactions, and afterwards demonstrate some of the consequences of this, drawing comparisons and contrasts with how individual converts view and amend their behaviour in relation to their circle of friends.

Most participants stated that one of the most difficult situations they faced was telling their family and friends about their conversion to Islam, since the majority felt unsure about the reactions they would receive from the people closest to them. Efforts to maintain good family relations seem to be given priority over upholding friendships with non-Muslim friends, if the latter no longer share similar perceptions or interests.

Whether or not converts continue their relationships with the non-Muslim family they have been born into, and/ or their non-Muslim friendships, can reflect on and deepen understanding of the individual’s attitude towards non-Muslims in general, but also possibly towards the non-Muslim society as a whole, in which they live. Naturally, there is no intent to present a uniform model of convert’s relations with their family and friends, or theorise that these experiences are scaled up to include the broader society. However, by examining the patterns and commonalities between the participants’ experiences, it may become clear the sorts of factors and concerns that are at play in these situations, and the development of convert’s views. Zebiri argues that “converts often go to some length to maintain family ties...” whereas “conversion had a different effect on friendships with non-Muslims...with many interviewees drifting away from most, if not allm of their friends from pre-conversion days” (Zebiri, 2008:71).
In practice, most converts seem to go to great lengths in order to maintain family ties despite the difficulties of explaining their conversion to Islam to the people closest to them, and accepting the tensions that may result, particularly where family members may not be positively inclined towards Islam or Muslims. However, this chapter is not simply a story of difficult hurdles faced or overcome; several participants stated that the relationship with their parents has improved after their conversion, with some of them referring to the Qur’an and Sunna on the good treatment of parents.\textsuperscript{193}

Zebiri notes that family reactions to conversion fall into three categories (Zebiri, 2008:71):

1. “A negative reaction is followed by a period of difficulty which gives way to gradual coming-to-terms and an eventual, if not always wholeheartedly, acceptance by the family;”
2. “Instances in which time does not seem to heal;”
3. “Parents are supportive from the outset or soon after.”

Although I broadly agree with the above categories, in order to cover the greater range and variety exhibited by participants in this study, I have slightly altered and modified the categories as follows:

1. Positive reactions,
2. Negative reactions,
3. Mixed reactions,

This simplification will not lose the complexity of the phenomenon of religious conversion, as the distinction will rather allow the reader to find an overview of differences in how the participants have been challenged by their relationships with their relatives and friends after their conversion. These results will prove that there is a

\textsuperscript{193} The following Qur’anic verses regarding the treatment of parents had been mentioned during the interviews: 31:14; 17:23; and 4:36. Hadith Ṣaḥīḥ by Muslim also refers to the behaviour towards parents: It was reported by Abu Anas that the Prophet Muhammad\textsuperscript{*} had spoken about major sins. He observed: “Associating anyone with God, disobedience to one’s parents, killing a person and false utterance”.

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profound diversity regarding their emotions and reactions, which will demonstrate some of the different psychological consequences converts, their families and friends may have to deal with.

Differences will be particularly perceptible when it comes to the upholding or dissolving of friendships with non-Muslims after conversion, since the conversion seems to have different effects on friendships than on family relations. While converts seemingly try to uphold family ties in a positive manner, many friendships with non-Muslims tend to dissolve or fizzle out. One of the reasons for these tendencies is that the value of family has a higher status in Islam than the upholding of friendships, where interests and views may not complement each other.

6.2. The family

What makes Islam attractive to many people appears to be the significance that the religion places on community and family values. These close connections are an inviting alternative to the individualistic way of life that dominates much of Western public culture. However, there may also be a downside to it: if a person is not used to their individual freedom being restricted then the integration into a religious community or particular religious group may pose certain challenges. Ultimately, the way this plays out is a matter for the individual, and can reveal a lot about their own attitudes, needs and previous experience.

The reactions converts tend to receive from their family often seem to reflect the current attitude of the society the individuals live in. There seems, however, to be a strong difference in reactions and consequences between the relatives and the friends of a convert. On the one hand, parents in particular will try to find a modus Vivendi and to retain affectionate family ties, whereas friends may find it less emotionally difficult to

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194 With restrictions I mean the adherence to certain religious and religio-social rules and regulations, which may not have been part of a person’s life prior to his or her conversion. These include the adoption of particular code of behaviour and adaption to conditions which may have not previously been important.
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detach themselves from their converted friend, since the convert is not part of their family.\textsuperscript{195} On the other hand, it may be that negative reactions arise from the parent(s) which may be the result of a fear that their child would encounter discrimination, hostility or ridicule.\textsuperscript{196}

Negative media coverage heavily influences society’s view on any topic and Islam is certainly portrayed negatively by the majority of media outlets. Muslims have found it extremely difficult to overcome these obstacles, having to prove that they are different than their stereotyped portrayal. Parents of converts to Islam can find themselves in unknown territory, torn between their received opinions and their love for their child.

\textit{Zaynab’s} stepfather called her “a terrorist” when she informed him of her conversion. \textit{Liyana’s} father described her as a “Turkish woman,” no longer accepting her German identity. Zebiri notes that parents of female converts to Islam in particular tend to fear that their daughter(s) will not only change, but move abroad and consequently be out of reach (Zebiri, 2008:76; \textit{SteinbA}). Furthermore, conversion to another religion seems to often be seen as an act of betrayal towards the culture and the religion (where applicable) of origin.

Nearly 71\% (17) of British participants and 75\% (39) of German participants directly informed their parents and relatives about their conversion to Islam. A minority of each sample indirectly informed their families, which indicates that the religious practice was noticed rather than spoken about.\textsuperscript{197} No British participant, but 11\% of German participants stated they had not informed their relatives about their conversion although two British participants delayed the timing of informing their parents.\textsuperscript{198}

\textsuperscript{195} This proverb comes to mind: “Blood is thicker than water”.
\textsuperscript{196} This may not always be the case, as there are other reasons, such as perhaps having a negative picture about the religion. Perhaps they have prejudices which are stronger than they would think. This in turn influences the communication with the converted “child”.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Selma} did not directly inform her family: “They just noticed that I had become Muslim.” \textit{Mariyah} shares similar experiences: “They noticed it when I had started praying at an early stage, and they noticed during my first Ramadan that I am fasting. There was no sort of announcement of the conversion.”
\textsuperscript{198} \textit{Gibril} stated that everyone in his family knew about his conversion, except his stepfather. \textit{Khadija-Maryam}, on the other hand, informed her family a year after her conversion to Islam.


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*Abdou* stated that he had not told his parents “but informed them of the facts,” whereas *Somayyah* was too afraid to inform her family:

“I was afraid of their reaction, however, one day I will inshaAllah be able to explain to them how true Islam is.”

The only difference among British and German participants informing their relatives about their conversion is that the tendency not to inform the parents is slightly higher among German than British participants.¹⁹⁹

6.2.1. Positive reactions

Overall, 30% (4) of male and 20% (2) of female British participants mentioned positive reactions by their families. It can be assumed that the comparatively low percentage of positive reactions by parents of British female converts could derive more from exterior changes than among British male participants, if one considers that conversion to Islam for a woman may involve greater adaptations, depending on the Islamic direction she chooses to practise, i.e. change of clothing, marrying a practicing Muslim partner. All of these factors can add to the confusion and fear of parents.

*Akeem* informed his family about his conversion when he felt comfortable with his Muslim identity, which in his opinion “took years to develop”.²⁰⁰ When he finally told his parents, they accepted the conversion positively. *Abraham Asad’s* mother voiced concerns in the beginning as “she had read different aspects on Islam”.²⁰¹

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¹⁹⁹ See Appendix III, Table 6: Informing the family about the conversion; Table 7: Parents’ and relatives’ reactions towards the conversion.

²⁰⁰ *Akeem*: “It felt surreal to say ‘I am a Muslim’ when I had never defined myself by religion in my adult life but rather through creativity. My mother said that my becoming a Muslim came as no surprise to her due to my tendencies in my pre-Islamic days (...) Alhamdulilah [‘thanks to God’], my family is fine with my conversion and inshaAllah, I hope that they can see that it has made me a better person.”

²⁰¹ *Abraham Asad*: “She wanted to make sure that I was not getting myself into anything that I hadn’t really thought about or had not read or studied (…)”. According to *Abraham Asad*, his mother started reading books on Islam and looking into the Qur’an, turning to her son for questions: “I remember she would say ‘Oh yeah, I was reading one of your books you left here’ and then ‘I just wanted to talk to you about this’, and ‘Oh, I didn’t know that’ and ‘We were taught something different at school.’ I think it has
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Nevertheless, he asked his parents to accompany him to the mosque to attend his conversion, which is quite rare among converts to Islam:\textsuperscript{202}

\begin{quote}
“It took a bit of persuasion for my mum to come to my šahādah but after she thought about it and I had given her a bit of time (…) they came along, everything was brilliant.”
\end{quote}

\textit{Jameela} also experienced a positive reaction, gaining practical input from her parents:

\begin{quote}
“My mum cooks for me in Ramadan and says: ‘I think it is really amazing how you fast during the day.’ ” On the downside, \textit{Jameela} wishes her parents were a bit more curious:

\begin{quote}
“They haven’t asked me questions which I found really frustrating in the beginning when I wanted to tell them about it (…) but they say: ‘As long as we can still see YOU and our relationship with you is the same, if it makes you happy then that’s fine’.”\textsuperscript{203}
\end{quote}

In comparison, 24\% (3) of male and 25\% (9) of female German participants mentioned positive reactions by their families. \textit{Aziz} stated that his Christian wife in particular felt that the conversion had a positive impact. \textit{Kazim} also felt that his family was “surprisingly open” about his conversion. Although, there had been disagreements on topics, such as fasting in Ramadan, it did not change their relationship.\textsuperscript{204} Among the German female participants, ‘tolerance’ was often used to describe the reaction by their parents. The boundaries of tolerance are very different, depending on the individual parents. Thus there are different outcomes for the converts when informing their relatives about their conversion.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{202} Abraham Asad and \textit{Havva-Maryam} are the only participants in this study whose parents had attended their conversion. In \textit{Havva-Maryam}’s situation, her mother her mother had already converted to Islam and married a Muslim man, \textit{Havva-Maryam}’s stepfather. \\
\textsuperscript{203} \textit{Azadeh} confirmed that her own family was “fully aware” of her conversion and accepted this decision as something she “had to do.” “They have always been supportive of my decision.”
\textsuperscript{204} \textit{Kazim}: “My parents even gave me a prayer rug as a Christmas gift in 2007 (…)”, jokingly adding: “And I have not been disinherited yet.”
\end{footnotesize}
**Family and Friends - Reactions, Changes and Adaptations**

*Arwa* and *Jesseniah* described their parents as “tolerant people”. *Arwa’s* family adjusted to different cooking rituals after her conversion, showing an interest in their son-in-law’s religion and culture, whereas *Jesseniah’s* family noticed her interest in Islam when she was finding books on Islam and reading about prayer instructions, and as a result she started talking about this interest:

“I have always had books in my room, even prayer instructions, and they just had to add things together. I knew that they knew it but I told them half a year later. And my parents said: ‘If it fulfils you, good!’ I don’t know why but my parents are the most tolerant people I know.” Her father, however, mentioned that as long as she did not wear the headscarf “everything would be fine.”

Several families reacted positively with an interest in the religion (*Havva-Maryam, Iman-2*) whereas others were initially sceptical but eventually accepted the conversion.

6.2.2. Negative reactions

20% (3) of male and 45% (5) of female British participants reported negative reactions by their families. It is noticeable that great significance tends to be placed on receiving acceptance from the parent of one’s own gender (i.e. fathers among males, mothers among females), and that, equally, negative reactions occur more often from parents of the same gender. Several families not only voiced concerns but set ultimatums or reacted with verbal slander. *Abdul-Mannan* who had converted from Hinduism to Islam was given an ultimatum by his family:

“They said ‘either I give up what I am doing, i.e. Islam, or get out of the house.’”

205 *Saliha*: “My mother just asked me ,‘Are you feeling okay with this?’ and I said ‘Yes.’ This was the first reaction. I am not sure but my grandparents automatically noticed this at a later stage. I always wore the headscarf and then my grandmother asked me and I told them why I am wearing the headscarf tied around the neck. I think that was the time when they really knew that I am a Muslim. I never directly spoke about it, and it was not something that I initiated when seeing my grandparents (...).”

206 *Abdul-Mannan* also mentioned that he had to “suffer beatings, belittling (…) and emotional blackmail.”
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*Zaid* was also confronted by his father’s negative reaction:

“My father in particular said that he felt like I had spat in his face.”

His relatives reacted with tears, and “notions of betrayal”. As a consequence, *Zaid* was not welcome at the parental home on several occasions. *Azizah* had similar experiences as *Zaid*, since her parents “see conversion as a betrayal of heritage.” According to *Azizah*, her parents cannot understand her decision, although she confirms that the decision has made her “happy.” *Zaid* mentioned that five years after his conversion “things are much friendlier and warmer, alhamdulillah” which could suggest that with time on their side, families are coming to terms with a conversion and adapt to changes if they are able and willing to do so. My thought is that it seems as if it is a family adjustment willingly done on both sides.

Parents of female Muslim converts, seemed to be particularly challenged by their daughters’ decision to embrace a religion which they often know little about. This lack of interest to know more about Islam, particularly if they have been influenced by negative media coverage on Islam and Muslims, may result in misunderstanding or incomplete knowledge, which in turn is then used when such situations as the revelation of a conversion may occur. *Souhayla*, for example, believes that her parents think she had only converted for her Muslim husband. Although, there had initially been positive reactions, they had turned into negative circumstances, i.e. her stepfather and brothers had voiced “very islamophobic comments.”

54% (7) of male and 30% (12) of female German participants reported negative reactions by their families. Surprisingly, more male than female participants testify to negative responses from their families. This undermines the assumption that primarily parents of female Muslim converts show negative reactions.

*Zaynab* mentioned similar experiences as *Souhayla* however it was not her biological father who had negatively reacted towards her conversion. Her mother and stepfather were rather in disbelief: “They were saying things like: ‘I cannot believe that you are doing this. You will have a terrible life!’, ‘You will marry an idiot’ and so on (...). I was even called a terrorist by my stepdad.” One particular situation upset *Zaynab* the most: “I got a lot of: ‘So now you think that we are all going to hell, you want us to go to hell, you want us to burn in hell.’” She felt that she received a lot of verbal abuse from her family. She told her mother: “You may not like Islam but you cannot deny that you have a daughter who doesn’t drink, do drugs, and doesn’t sleep around. It has made me a better person than before. She doesn’t really have an answer for that one.”
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towards their daughters’ conversion. Some of these family relations have improved over the years, but some of the initial negative reactions still have an impact on the convert and the family today. Parents of male German participants felt “disbelief” (Kazim), “enacted emotionally” (Aziz), expressed “worry and fear” (Amro), “aversion and incomprehensibility” (Nasir), and seem to have reacted with misunderstanding, confusion, and often with ‘stereotypical thoughts against Islam’ which revealed misconceptions and could lead to more discriminations and misunderstandings. Amro’s family believed “it is improper that a German becomes a Muslim.” He says:

“They do not understand it. For them a German is a Christian. End of the story.”

Nasir’s father felt overwhelmed with his son’s conversion:

“He was very distant (...) he often laughed at me, used abusive words and wanted to shame me.”

It was noticeable among female German participants that priority was given to their mothers’ reactions in comparison to their father’s reactions, although two females mentioned significant challenging situations with their respective fathers. Mahbubah’s father “cannot and will not accept” her conversion, even though he is married to Mahbubah’s mother who is a born Muslim woman. Mahbubah believes that her mother is “secretly happy but doesn’t outwardly express this happiness”.

Liyana’s father went a step further, making the following statement:

“Soon you will stand in front of our house and throw bombs which you have tied to your belt.”

208 Nasir mentioned that he suffered a lot in the beginning. Over time, discussions apparently have not improved but Nasir stated that the situation between him and his father has improved since then. This can be seen as forming a distance, and from Nasir’s point of view as cold-hearted, emotional abuse. Aziz also experienced similar ‘abuse’, as his father “poked fun” at him, “ridiculing” his conversion and not taking him seriously. Aziz however also made an exceptional point about his family: “The relationship towards my family has become stronger and better through my behaviour and positive development.”

209 Mahbubah: “He still tries to pull me to his side, and has done so for years. He cannot accept my decision and tries to find the fault with my partner.”

210 According to Liyana, her father did not like persons of Turkish origin, thus she had become “the Turkish woman” for him. Liyana believes that her mother “actually only copies and repeats” what Liyana’s father said: “She is too afraid to speak her own
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Liyana believes that her father was “a racist” and her mother is too afraid to speak her own mind. When Liyana moved out of the parental home afterwards, she “did not exist” for her father any more.211

Several mothers of female German participants reacted with incomprehensibility and shock, some periodically estranged themselves from their daughters, (Touareg1801, Kulthum, and Eileen) others “plainly ignored” that their daughter had converted, (Soraya) and again others “still cannot cope with it today” (Malika). It becomes even more challenging for parents if their child not only changes his or her religion but also changes externally: Mariuma, Mariyah and Amina had difficulties justifying their reasons for wearing the headscarf, particularly to their mothers, since some of them had grown up as a generation of women who had fought for emancipation and freedom.212

Mariuma mentioned that her mother

“(...) was very shocked and frustrated since she belongs to the generation of women who are happy to have gained more freedom and the dissolution of organised structures.”213

It seems as if the influences of the immediate environment, the individual character of the convert but also parents, the media, literature and communication are far greater than one may anticipate. Each parent’s personal history and experience will have an impact on how they react to their child’s religious conversion.

211 Although this hurt Liyana, she decided to no longer enter her parental home in order to avoid possible conflicts. Sadly, her father passed away in May 2011 before she was able to solve some open questions. Reactions about his death have not been documented since the interview took place prior to his passing.

212 For a discussion of concepts of Islamic emancipation, in comparison with the Western experience in the 20th century, several authors have written on Islam from a feministic and emancipated perspective, (Mernissi, 1992).

213 Mariuma: “It was particularly awful for my mother that I wanted to wear the headscarf straight away. According to her profile of Islam, it (the headscarf) is the ultimate sign for the oppression of women, and she feared that I would have no employment perspectives, and making this difficult for myself.”
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There are parents who are in hope that their child’s conversion is “only a phase” (Amina). There are relatives who are not racists but negatively inclined towards foreigners, in particular Muslims (Amina’s brother), and there are parents who used to believe in a religion or have looked into alternative religious rituals, regularly attending religious classes but have lost faith with time or due to negative personal experiences, and thus developing negative associations with Islam (Naima’s father, for example, looked into different religions, however, he has distanced himself from religion, and cannot understand “why someone voluntarily converts to or embraces a religion”). There are parents who are practicing Christians or Hindus (Abdul-Mannan) who believe that their child will go to hell if they accept Islam (Nour’s mother), and there are parents who attend seminars to learn more about religions (Eileen’s mother) who seem to be misled or feel more misunderstood than prior to the seminars.

6.2.3. Mixed reactions

20% (3) of male and 36% (4) of female British participants reported mixed reactions by their families. Concerns and insecurity dominated the participants’ parents’ reactions when they were informed of their child’s conversion. This section demonstrates great variety of responses, reflecting the relationship that the convert has with his or her family, and the generational, gender and cultural aspects that play a role in their reactions. Raif comes from a practising Christian family, thus it was a surprise for his parents when he converted to Islam. Nonetheless, he said:

“It is slightly easier to explain to a religious family, since a lot of the concepts are similar. They understand the conversion better because they are religious themselves but they also have a greater issue with it because they are Christian. So, although they can easily take on board things like prayer and charity, they have issues with monotheism and other things that clash with the Christian belief.”

214 Hostility, contemptuousness and fear towards foreigner and/ or strangers is also known as xenophobia.

215 Raif’s Christian family includes relatives who are teachers who have visited religious sites with their students, including mosques and who “have understood more of what Islam is about, have met other Muslims and are generally less fearful (...) and more positive about the different lifestyle.” Michael received a complete opposite reaction from his family: “They are practicing
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Layali’s father, on the other hand, grew up strictly Catholic only to reject religion later on in life:

“I think he was disappointed that I had found God at all, never mind that I had found it in Islam. He was fine about it. He just did not see the point of an organised religion.”

8% (1) of male and 33% (13) of female German participants reported mixed reactions by their families. The parents do not always share the same reaction. This was noticed when Ibrahim informed his parents that he converted to Islam:

“My mother was very angry with me but my father was cool with it.”

Mariuma and Susanne were advised to consult Christian ministers, who confronted her with the question: “Why Islam, not Christianity?”

Susanne’s parents took her to their Christian minister who said:

“If your daughter does not believe that Jesus is God, then she is no Christian anymore. But no worry, she is baptised and will stay as such all her life.”

Around half of the participants’ parents in this survey responded to the news of their conversion to Islam with mixed emotions. There is confusion, concern and scepticism on the one hand, and curiosity about the decision, and its often unsuspected cultural implications, on the other hand. Some parents are sceptical of where the conversion may lead, others are curious about the changes, and again others keep a

Catholic who did not like my conversion.” Obviously, the conversion from one faith to another is often perceived as an act of betrayal not only towards the faith of origin but also towards the family. In the meantime, Michael’s family has come to accept his decision, though mixed feelings still exist.

Layali’s paternal grandparents are practicing Catholics and “weren’t so thrilled.” She said: “They were very upset that I’d become part of this foreign religion although I tried to point out that ‘well, Jesus isn’t British (...)’ My grandmother said at some point that we really need to talk about this. This has not happened so far.”

Abdullah shares the experience that Ibrahim had since his mother demonstrated concerns and described her son’s conversion as “strange at first,” whereas his father and siblings “did not mind” his decision.

Mariuma’s grandparents asked her why she did not want to consult a Protestant minister. However, she rejected the offer since she was sure about her decision.

According to Susanne, the meeting with the Christian minister was an initial reaction of her parents towards her conversion to Islam: “You see it did not work out but it was some sort of reaction.”
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distance. Most converts, however, continue to maintain and improve the relationship with their parents.

6.2.4. Neutral reactions

Expecting parents or relatives to react neutrally when being informed that their child or a close relative has chosen to convert to Islam is currently a rare phenomenon; nonetheless it does exist. 9% (1) of male (no female) British participants as well as 16% (2) of male and 20% (8) of female German participants reported neutral reactions by their families. AbdulSamed’s sister said to him: “I couldn’t do what you do” which made him detect a certain attitude of respect. His lifestyle prior to conversion was “chaotic” and getting him “into trouble.” Regarding his parents, he concludes:

“I have changed and they are okay with it. They aren’t interested in religion and I am not trying to talk them into it.” I only indirectly pass on morals and virtues even if they have no direct relation with religion. The thing is that we talked about certain converts who live their lives strictly and follow Wahhabism – THIS actually leads to conflict within the family you have been born into.”

Eileen’s sister, on the other hand, reacted indifferently towards Eileen becoming Muslim. According to Eileen,

her sister “is a very spiritual person who was always searching.” “Whether or not she is still searching, I don’t know,” she says “but my sister said to me ‘If you feel comfortable with it, it’s okay.’”

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220 Eileen: “I had nice conversations with her about religion but generally speaking her attitude is indifferent.”
6.3. The friends

The situation of relationships with friends is rather different than that with the convert’s family since there is no Islamic duty to maintain relations as opposed to maintaining the family ties. The lack of correlation between family relations as opposed to friendships with people outside of family could be explained by the fact that Muslim converts tend to make more effort in maintaining good relations with the family they have been born into. This may originate from the Islamic duty to honour one’s parents no matter what background or religion they may have (Qur’an 25:52). Some Muslim converts feel the necessity to dissociate themselves from particular friends who may not support their new religious choice and lifestyle in order to consolidate their own Muslim identity. In most cases it appears that friendships do not suddenly end but dissolve over time. Common reasons include changes of circumstances, such as moving away, leaving a job, finishing university or getting married. Zebiri notes that non-Muslim friends are often lost through the previously mentioned circumstances and have been replaced with Muslim friends (Zebiri 2008:80).

Participants who already maintain existing friendships seemed to be selective in their choice of friends, keeping those friends who were prepared to accommodate themselves to their new faith. This was particularly perceptible during the interviews when participants referred to the change of socialising in an alcohol-free environment, since many friendships dissolved when they were focused on spending time in locations where alcohol is served. The most prominent factors regarding the loss of friendships included differing interests and changes in lifestyle. The primary reason indicated was that socialising in places where alcohol is served declined. Another reason cited is that converts often give up elements of their former lifestyle which had connected them with certain friends.

221 AbdulSamed mentioned hitherto a hadith: “The Prophet* had an uncle named Talib. He did not embrace Islam, however, supported Muhammad* and his efforts, hence the Prophet* made it clear to respect and honour family members when they offer no harm but support.”

222 AbdulSamed had a “wild time” when he talks about using drugs and alcohol, for about a year before he converted to Islam. He decided to “completely cut” the connection with his “scenic” friends since he believed that “these friends would not improve” his Muslim lifestyle. Accordingly, AbdulSamed did not mention whether this decision had come from within himself or whether he was advised to stay away from his friends.
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Although, in some participants’ cases there was a correlation between the individual maintaining close relations with non-Muslims which also influenced their attitude towards the non-Muslim society they live in, it was also noticeable that most participants tended not to bring their Muslim and non-Muslim friends together socially. Thus, it seems to be a rare occasion for converts to organise meetings with mixed-religious friends.

The participants had different points of view regarding their level of acceptance by their non-Muslim friends. Similar questions about acceptance emerge in relation to their (largely non-Muslim) local community and the society in general. Conversion to Islam has different effects on non-Muslim friendships, with some – if not most – drifting apart, whereas others have been strengthened either because or in spite of the conversion. Approximately, two-thirds of the British participants and about half of the German participants have remained in contact with at least some of their non-Muslim friends from the time prior to their conversion.

6.3.1. Positive reactions

20% (3) of male and 45% (5) of female British participants reported positive reactions by their non-Muslim friends when they informed them of their conversion to Islam. Overall, one in three British participants had received positive feedback by their non-Muslim friends. It seems that most already existing friendships have been maintained and that the friends did not mind the change of religious affiliation. Several friends seemed to have been “supportive and genuinely interested” while others were pleased about the positive change in the participant’s life, and others again also converted to Islam as a result of knowing a participant who had previously converted.

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223 See Appendix III, Table 8: Friends’ reactions towards the conversion.
224 Three British participants mentioned positive reactions without revealing the reasons in-depth.
225 *Idris:* “One or two were not surprised that I had searched and found a religion. Others were humorously surprised (possibly shocked) that I had managed to give up alcohol but nonetheless pleased and interested.”
226 *Anwar:* “Just before my conversion, I met Paul (a friend), and he was very positive. I had a guy called Adam whom I have known since I was 5 or 6, and he was really positive and proud of me in the way that I had changed things in my life (...).”
227 *Atadeh:* “My oldest friend has also converted now.”
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Abraham Asad’s friends were “quite taken aback”:

“They were quite shocked because the life I used to lead was not necessarily that in tune with Islam.”

His friends were used to the “old” Abraham Asad who used to go clubbing and wanted ‘to get high.’ “I was always seen as a bit of an instigator (...) to have a good time.” Confusion arose when he “in their eyes went all ‘godly,’…kind of strictly following the religion,” plus “the fact that it was Islam (!)” Nonetheless, most friends were interested and asked many questions about his change of lifestyle. His best friend, whom he has known for more than 25 years, has supported him from the time prior to his conversion.

Ruqayyah, on the other hand, struggled to inform her friends about her conversion. Her first husband was “very careful” about whom he told he was a Muslim, as he felt that it was dangerous and “people could suspect” him “of things” only because he is a Muslim. Thus, Ruqayyah and her first husband were not “very public” about their Muslim identity. Nonetheless, Ruqayyah mentioned two supportive friends, one of which she has known since prior to her conversion:

“The conversion was 20 years ago, and she and I still meet once a year. It’s like a ‘big sister – little sister’-thing because we have known each other since we were 17.”

Most positive reactions seemed to have occurred within individual friendships, and thus this cannot be extrapolated to general friends’ reactions to conversion. Some participants felt that specific friendships remained as strong as they did because both let

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228 Abraham Asad about his best friend: “He was brilliant. We used to talk and discuss things, and he is always right there by my side. We both have the same sense of humour, and have a laugh and a joke (...) but never in a disrespectful way towards the religion or any kind of principle. He said to me: ‘Given your due, Abraham Asad, whatever you do, you always do your best. You always give it your best shot, so you have tried this, you have done that, you know (...) nobody can take away from you when you set your mind on something. You really get a bee in your bonnet and you, like, go for it.’ He was sort of there with me during this journey (...) he has been very supportive.” It seems as if those friends who accompany the convert through this conversion process could be the most tolerant among those closest to a convert.

229 Ruqayyah: “It is like you are ’coming out.’ Some are very accepting, curious and open-minded (...) and others quite aggressive.”
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the other person act and think as they please, without causing disturbances to their individual development.

8% (1) of male and 13% (5) of female German participants reported positive reactions by their non-Muslim friends when they informed them of their conversion to Islam. Overall, one in six German participants had received positive feedback by their non-Muslim friends. In comparison to the British participants, only a minority of German participants reported positive outcomes when questioned on their friends’ reactions to their conversion.

Liyana’s experience with her “best friend” stands out: “I actually only met my best friend properly after my conversion but we had met twice prior to it.” Liyana did not wear the headscarf at these meetings; however, her wardrobe had completely changed at the third meeting, wearing a headscarf and modest clothing. Her friend asked her: “What’s up with you now?”, and Liyana thought then that this was the end of their relationship and that this woman would not want to be her friend anymore. Instead she said: “I was taught a lesson!” Liyana had not expected this acquaintance to become her best friend, and her other non-Muslim friends to react as positively as they did.230

Since there is still the stereotype of Western non-Muslim women converting to Islam when they meet (and marry) a Muslim man, it is consequently a surprise for many friends if this reason is not part of the decision-making process.

Fatima’s friends were amazed:

“You convert to Islam, but you don’t have a Turkish boyfriend or anything (...) amazing (...) well, you must completely agree with it, and you like it [Islam]. Then I don’t have a problem with it.”

230 Liyana: “I must admit that I haven’t met anyone in my environment – apart from my parents – who have reacted in a harsh way. Not one. All were curious, like ‘Why did you do that now?’ and ‘What exactly is it with this religion that fascinates you so much?’ This is a perfect example of an expectation not taking place. It can however be the exact opposite that the convert may be positively surprised by his relatives and friends.
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Most female converts will be questioned throughout their lives whether they found Islam through meeting or being married to a Muslim man. Thus, it will remain a surprising aspect since there is a growing number of female converts who have embraced Islam through other means and influences than a partner or husband.

6.3.2. Negative reactions

According to the study, 25% (3) of male (no female) British participants reported negative reactions by their non-Muslim friends when they informed them of their conversion to Islam. It is not only families with strong religious ties who find it difficult to come to terms with a relative’s conversion to another religion, since the act can be perceived as a cultural or social betrayal, as well as a religious one. On occasion, the same issues arise in relation to the convert’s friends. Yet, it is less common for it to become an ongoing conflict or a search for mutual understanding, since the roots of friendship do not usually go as deep as family. If it turns out to be the best solution, ending a friendship is always possible.

Abdul-Mannan converted from Hinduism to Islam. His social circle included Hindu friends who did not agree with his conversion: “How can you become a Muslim?”, “A leopard can’t change its spots”, and “You will always have Hindu blood in you” were some of the reactions Abdul-Mannan had to face from his friends.

Akeem, on the other hand, worked as a DJ before converting to Islam. He left the music industry quite suddenly, afterwards noticing his friends drifting away:

“Their turning away was that I had nothing to offer them anymore to help the progression of their careers or in the pursuit of employment. I soon came to realise who my real friends were, Alhamdulillah.”

231 AbdulSamed also noticed quickly who his “real friends” were: “Those who were superficial were superficial for a reason.” He ended his partying-period with his conversion, reasoning that: “one always wanted to aim for the same goal, such as partying and drug usage (...) these kinds of friendships drifted apart very quickly.” AbdulSamed said that he had to “completely isolate” himself from these friends in order to practice Islam according to his understanding.
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31% (4) of male and 15% (6) of female German participants reported negative reactions by their non-Muslim friends when they informed them of their conversion to Islam. The marginal difference between British and German participants show that the negative reactions of their friends barely offer a useful statistic, however, it differs regarding the context in which the reasons for a negative reaction are reflected, i.e. conflict of interest, different lifestyle, misunderstandings based on little knowledge about Islam, not gaining from the participant after his or her conversion, leaving the nightlife, e.g. alcohol/drugs, or betrayal of the prior religion.

Amina was born into a practicing Christian family and had Christian friends. One female friend did not want to see her again after her conversion asking her “point blank: ‘How can you betray Jesus?’” Amina answered that her conversion had nothing to do with Jesus, however she “did not want to celebrate somebody having been nailed to the cross, no matter what reasons there are.”

Jesseniah, however, believes that the exact opposite response from a non-religious friend, an atheist, has kept this one from accepting her decision:

“She doesn’t have any attachment to God, thinks extremely rationally and has studied psychology, and lives according to that. Everything has to be explained, and as soon as she doesn’t see things, she doesn’t believe in them. It is still difficult for me as I don’t seem to get through to her and I am not sure how to explain things which she can’t understand or follow herself.”

Ibrahim said that many of his friends were afraid of him becoming a terrorist if he converted to Islam:

“Most don’t like my conversion and there is a lot of talking (...) well, what would the Christians say now? Somebody has to carry that cross.”

232 Amina: “I don’t want 2000 years of celebration to happen if I’d be shot in Afghanistan, only because I tried to kick out the Taliban (...) and this scenario is demonstrated on an annual basis (i.e. the putting up of the cross – author’s insertion). Okay, in all honesty, I would do it – get shot in Afghanistan – if I had no children but as a mother definitely not. That would be irresponsible.”

233 It seems as if Jesseniah felt rather helpless when trying to explain her decision to her friend, as she had already made up her mind what she thought of it.
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SteinbA experienced the loss of her best friend through converting to Islam:

“She only had stupid comments and stereotypes on her mind, and never accepted my decision. When she looked down at me, it was the turning point where I had to end the friendship.”

Mahbubah seemed to feel bitter about her losses of friendship but decided that she could “compensate” by meeting new people:

“They weren’t real friends. What can I say to that? I now have Muslim friends and I am happy about that.”

6.3.3. Mixed reactions

According to the study, 9% (1) of male and 36% (14) of the female British participants reported mixed reactions by their non-Muslim friends when they informed them of their conversion to Islam. The study’s statistics demonstrate a significant number of participants who believed that their friends were uncertain and insecure about revealing their opinions about their conversion, and thus offered mixed reactions. Another aspect emerges in that the participants as Muslim converts were not only cautious about choosing their friends, in the same way, their non-Muslim friends seem to be just as cautious about whom they mix with, often wondering where the process of conversion is leading them, and sometimes influencing existing friendships.

Abdullah and Souhayla stated that their friends were “surprised” about the conversion. Abdullah’s friends wondered how he “could go out clubbing and pubbing one minute, and the next be abstinent and following the path of Islam.” The abstention

234 SteinbA was disappointed that her friend did not change her attitude the way she had hoped. Arwa had a similar experience as SteinbA. According to her, her conversion was not the trigger of her friend’s negative reaction: “This friend was really anti-Turkish. I liked her as a person; however she upset me with her frequent negative comments, particularly in reference to my husband. Back then, he was still my boyfriend, and she found it strange for me to have a Turkish boyfriend. In my opinion, she could have been more respectful and polite. I was in shock every time she said something. The friendship ended because it went into extremes.” Arwa continued to express her worries during the interview what her friend would have thought if she had told her that she had married her Turkish boyfriend AND converted to Islam.
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of alcohol also seems to be a major factor leading to the distancing and dissolving of friendships. **Souhayla** said:

> “Essentially my converting put our lives on very different paths and they could not reconcile the ‘party-loving’ **Souhayla** with the ‘quiet night in’-**Souhayla** of now.”

**Raif** felt that he seemed to understand why friends of Muslim converts tend to be confused, and thus not understanding the conversion to Islam:

> “Most Europeans have no attachment to religion, and to Islam in particular, hence a conversion is perceived as ‘exotic.’ These are guys going down to the pub all the time and who are sort of real lads, so they are probably not hostile. They just have a lack of understanding.”

In his opinion, this “lack of understanding” embodies the greatest problem in the British society when it comes to broadening one’s horizon,

> “that one will not find people questioning anything until someone starts something others may not have any knowledge about but are influenced by negative publicity [in their opinions of it].”

16% (2) of male and 25% (9) of female German participants reported mixed reactions by their non-Muslim friends when they informed them of their conversion to Islam. Since not every Muslim convert dresses to appear as a Muslim to others, many friends had more difficulties to place their converted friend into a certain stereotype. The drifting apart is often connected with changes invisible to the eye but noticeable with time and the changing behaviour of the converts, and thus of the friend. A friendship existing prior to the conversion of one of the friends will face a challenge to ‘survive’ this change. This depends on how adaptable, tolerant and open-minded the

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235 Refraining from going to locations where alcohol is served, **Layali** became selective with the friends she chose (to keep) after her conversion: “I don’t want to sit with friends to hear how drunk they had become the weekend before, nor do I want to hear about their latest sexual escapades. I think that we kind of naturally separated from each other.” **Amro** said that it “did not bother” his friends that he converted to Islam. He did, however, mention one particular friend: “This one friend was not bothered as long as I was drinking alcohol. When I did not drink any alcohol anymore, the friendship came to an end.” **Amro** emphasized that this was an exception since most of his friends had accepted his conversion and its consequences.
non-converted friend is towards this new situation, as well as whether both can make compromises, depending on how strong the friendship is at the time of conversion.

**Eileen**’s friends noticed that she continued to skip more and more meetings with her friends outside the home after she had converted. **Eileen** said that one friend, in particular was upset and disappointed with her changing behaviour:

“She said ‘It is becoming increasingly difficult with you that we can only meet up at your or my place since you don’t go to the cafés anymore.’ She was also upset about not being able to celebrate together anymore. Another friend was even more clear about it and worried: ‘I hope that we don’t distance ourselves from one another too much,’ implying my conversion and changed lifestyle.”

**Fairouz** faced any conflicts with a sense of humour. During the interview, she stated that a friend had told her: “Just because you like the music and the food you don’t need to convert.” **Fairouz** answered her:

“Well, I didn’t convert for the music and the food! It was the only way to catch an Arab man in the long term, so I had to convert!”

When Fairouz was questioned why she married her first husband, she replied: “Well, you know, his parents transfer money every month to my account, hence I thought it would be a good side income, and I could marry him.” **Fairouz** described the surprised looks she received for giving such answers:

“It was like a light bulb was coming on (…) eventually I said that it was a joke. After that most of them did not argue any further since I have held a mirror in front of them.”

Considering the mixed reactions by many of her friends, **Fairouz** believed that “shock therapy is the only way to convey the message” when being confronted with her conversion to Islam. It seems as if converts only learn with time how to react towards “strange” questions. Beginners are usually not well prepared and try to explain everything, even though they are in the development process themselves. With time,
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Converts seem to develop personal strategies in order to answer curious questions about their conversion and change of lifestyle.

6.3.4. Neutral reactions

20% (3) of male and 10% (1) of the female British participants reported neutral reactions by their non-Muslim friends when they informed them of their conversion to Islam. According to several participants, some of their individual friends seemed to have felt that the conversion had not changed their friendship. Although, some friends may not have understood the conversion at the time, it seemed as if individual friendships did not suffer because of it. Gibril felt that honesty was his best option when talking to his friends about his conversion, whereas Dawoud and Iman stated that ‘there was never an issue’ with their friends in regard to their conversion to Islam. The reactions depend on what kind of lifestyle the friend and the convert are leading because this is what consequently influences how the friendship will carry on after the conversion. If the lifestyle is similar to prior the conversion, some friends may notice less obvious changes over time and not feel intimidated about the conversion as such.

16% (2) of male and 13% (5) of female German participants reported neutral reactions by their non-Muslim friends when they informed them of their conversion to Islam. Sandra mentioned that nobody had noticed her conversion, except during Ramaḍān:

“It was acknowledged that I am fasting but I am not making an issue out of my religion.”

6.4. Retaining or ending friendships

Although the participants differed in their efforts, the majority agreed that their priority lay in maintaining family relations rather than friendships. Most participants

236 Ghariba also stated that her friends’ reactions tended to be neutral: “They accepted my conversion because I have not changed.”
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stated that strong existing friendships continued to last after the conversion, whereas loose friendships or acquaintanceships had dissolved over time. Also some participants’ priorities in regards to the selection of their friendships had changed, and thus subsequently the friendships, having altogether different people as friends. Lasting friendships have continued just as selected friendships have ended for different reasons, and a change of priorities or circumstances apparently have also influenced the decision-making process. The next three subsections will offer a brief overview in the changes of friendships.

6.4.1. Lasting friendships

One British participant and 18 German participants (mostly female) stated their communication and interaction with friends had not changed, and had survived their conversion to Islam. The expectation going into this study had been that British participants might offer a greater list of lasting and unchanging friendships, since the religion and culture of Islam is more deeply embedded into British society than it seems to be in Germany. The interviews, however, reveal opposite results. Islam remains a religion associated with migration in most parts of Britain. Close contact across the different ethnicities in either country however remains to be low (Platt, 2010:24f.)

*Idris* stated that although he had gained Muslim friends after his conversion while living in the Maldives, he retained his pre-conversion friendships in Britain because he felt “closer” to them than to his Muslim friends, despite feeling “great warmth” towards several of them:

“Most Muslims I know in my local area are from Bangladesh or Pakistan. They have large families in which they like to remain except for times of going to the mosque. It is hard to get close on a personal level to most of these friends, which I regret.”

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237 Due to the possible lack of alternatives for convert, *Idris* seems to have chosen to stay close to his existing friends, who may offer greater common interests than Muslim friends with a foreign cultural background and a strongly community focused lifestyle.

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Among the German participants, the levels and depths of continuing friendships seemed to differ on an individual basis. Aziz’s friendships “all remained,” however, some became weaker and more “low key.” Ibrahim agreed:

“I cannot recall any friendships dissolving. Perhaps a little less contact but no complete turning away.” According to him, “most of those people who have already been good friends have remained good friends,” regardless of the frequency of meeting up with them.238

There are different reasons as to why friendships remain intact even if great changes and challenges occur in a friendship over the course of time. Jenna’s friendships remained, though she emphasised:

“I would wonder what kind of friendships they’d be if they had dissolved due to the conversion.”239

Mariuma cannot recall any broken friendships because her friends had been in touch with Islam prior to her conversion “in some way or another,” hence “they did not pre-judge.” Havva-Maryam, on the other hand, stated that she “only had a handful but intense friendships” at the time of conversion, believing that the conversion “cannot destroy such friendships.” She did, however, also say that although the conversion did not influence the intensity of her friendships; some friendships became less active since interests and social activities had changed.

6.4.2. Ending friendships

Two British participants and twelve German participants related having friendships that ended after their conversion to Islam. The continuance or termination of a friendship depends on several different factors which, excluding any individual change in circumstances, can be loosely categorised as either: 1. willingness of the

238 Ibrahim: “It isn’t important to see friends on a daily basis. What is important is the communication with wisdom, and love is the key principle.”
239 Eileen also stated that all her friendships – in comparison to the relations with her family – have remained: “It cannot become stronger if you have known each other for 20 years.”
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Muslim convert to adapt or compromise on particular aspects to continue the friendship, 2. willingness of the non-Muslim friend to adapt or compromise on particular aspects to continue the friendship. As a consequence, it depends a lot on the non-Muslim friend’s inclination and attitude towards the religion chosen by the convert, as well as on the individual religious progress of the convert. Several participants noticed a shift in thoughts and interests between the two parties, which may no longer be compatible for a continuing friendship, and thus such friendships tend to drift apart.

Zaynab used to have a childhood friend whose family, according to her, had a racist and anti-Islamic attitude. She compared this friend’s family with the British National Party:

“They would always say things like ‘Look what that Muslim did,’ and she would send me regular chain mails from her family.”

Approximately a quarter of German female participants stated that some of their friendships dissolved after their conversion. Several of them mentioned different reasons for ending friendships, including more devotion towards the religion, non-religious academic studies, relocation, and diverging interests. Safiyyah, for example, became “stricter on Islam” after her conversion, which led to distancing herself from certain friends “who may not have positively contributed” to her changing lifestyle. Kathira also pointed out that she had become selective regarding her friendships since she had suffered mocking and disrespect towards her conversion to Islam:

“It is a no-go if someone sees me differently only because of my religion.”

240 After one particular e-mail, Zaynab composed a reply, since she believed she had to demonstrate her disagreement considering these accusations. There was neither an answer to Zaynab’s message, nor has this friend contacted her since her conversion. The contents of this particular e-mail were not discussed within the interview; however, it became clear that anti-Islamic materials were a part of the discussion. Zaynab mentioned a different e-mail example when her friend sent her a video about a boy whose arm was crushed by a car. According to the sender, this incident is supposed to have taken place in Iran. Zaynab believes that this e-mail had no relevance to Islam: “If the boy had stolen something (several times), the punishment may have been the removal of his right hand in the worst possible circumstance. Someone must have taken pictures and tried to make it look like as if the boy is being punished for stealing some bread.”

241 Safiyyah also mentioned she had to develop herself within the faith (taking her time) and has formed close friendships with non-Muslims since her conversion.
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**Amina-2** used to have a strong friendship with a Catholic woman; but it dissolved when she relocated and converted to Islam:

“As teenagers we did a lot together within the church. Both of us were altar servers, and we discussed a lot of religiously motivated morals and values. Moving towards adulthood, she became less and less religious, whereas my religiosity had intensified and changed.”

The termination of certain friendships seems to represent a significant factor in the convert’s development process, searching for an individual but Muslim identity. Some participants felt that certain common interests have to exist in order for a friendship to work out – even when friends do not share the same faith – whereby some will compromise on certain aspects, others may not. The interviews seem to indicate that many friends did not share the participant’s newly found religious lifestyle, and thus either turned against the participant or let the friendship deteriorate over time, resulting in termination.

6.4.3. Priority change in friendships

Conversion to Islam entails a change in lifestyle, in communication with the immediate social environment and society as a whole, as well as changes in regards to the prioritising of friendships. The greatest change in maintaining or ending friendships obviously depends on personal priorities which may shift after conversion. These priorities are influenced by the individual’s personal understanding and wish for development, as to whether or not he or she prospers from an existing friendship. Accordingly, a friendship may be intensified, weakened or terminated. The majority of participants stated that their priorities had changed with their conversion to Islam, and thus it may not come as a surprise that 20% of British participants mentioned that they now spent the majority of their leisure time with Muslim rather than non-Muslim friends.

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242 Changes in personal interests and ways of life can prove as fundamental reasons for a split. It was important for Kathira to make her boundaries clear, in order “not to be hurt”.

243 See Chapter 4.
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Khadija-Maryam continues her friendships with non-Muslims established prior to her conversion, though she stated that she preferred to spend time with her Muslim friends:

“They understand how I think, whereas my non-Muslim friends still like to go out drinking and socialising with men.”

Anwaar used to be in the music industry, stating that “95%” of his friends had left him after announcing his conversion and leaving the business: His conclusion is:

“All the things I have given up, there were better things given to me: I have gained better friends, real ones”, and thus expressing his disappointment about the “superficiality of friendships” prior to his conversion.

41% (21) of the German participants – primarily females and in comparison to their British counterpart twice as many participants – have felt the need to be selective about friendships because of the priorities they have chosen. However, not all of the priority changes are related to conversion to Islam; instead these may involve alternative interests or non-religious life-changing situations, such as starting a new employment, a new course of study or entering into marriage. AbdulSamed, for example, stated that his childhood and teenage friendships did not end because of his conversion, but because of relocation. Nonetheless, he emphasized that he “had to distance” himself “from some friends since it was this world of parties and taking drugs.” After his conversion, AbdulSamed felt the need to end some friendships since he wanted “a new lifestyle”:

“If I had stayed with these people then it would have been much more difficult to stop [taking drugs].”

Khadija-Maryam’s preference is now for a female-only and alcohol-free environment where similar interests are shared and exchanged. Abdullah shares Khadija-Maryam’s attitude from a male perspective: “I was still friends with some non-Muslims but our social activities separated into different directions because I was no longer interested in their drinking and clubbing. It was somehow inevitable to make Muslim friends, and now 99% of my friends are Muslims”.

Gharib did not inform his friends about his conversion, however, he mentioned that certain friendships disappeared when he left home and went to the university.
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German female participants in particular stated that the change of priorities derived from non-religious factors, such as academia (Naima), marriage and/ or building a family (CaMaTa). These aspects seemed to have primarily encouraged a change or cut in regards to their friendships with non-Muslims. Naima, for example, moved away but remained part of a social group which organises events and attends mutual birthday parties. She does, however, find the meetings exhausting since “Islam seems to be the dominating subject”:

“I prefer to spend my free time with Muslim women since you can have fun without explaining everything. I mean, I don’t wear a headscarf, and I don’t scream that I am a Muslim but there are always discussions [at the parties] and it’s exhausting.”

The importance of sister- and brotherhood seems to take priority over mixed-gendered friendships. Several German female participants mentioned that their friendships with men had either been cut abruptly or dissolved over time. Although, Sandra stated that she did not use to be the “female friends”-type, preferring friendships with males, after her conversion it was a challenge to start friendships with females. Nour on the other hand, prioritised her marriage over her friendships with men, hence these friendships slowly dissolved after her conversion. By taking this step, she placed the emphasis on family rather than mixed-gendered socialising.

As a result, it appears that the German participants pursue a greater change in lifestyle and interest priorities than British participants may do. Priorities may include a change in religious and social routine, prioritising religion over social activities, family and children. All of which may become more significant than maintaining friendships which may not be a gain for the individual.

246 Naima: “With my non-Muslim friends there always tend to be discussions, hence the time with them can be very exhausting. Sure, a few times a year it is okay but I wouldn’t want it more often. You would think that there is more knowledge since they all have studied, and that it might not be as influenced as much by the media but it isn’t like that at all.”
6.5. Changing the circle of friends

42% (10) of British participants and 58% (30) of German participants stated that their circle of friends had changed in some form or another after their conversion to Islam. The conversion focuses on a shift in the person's attachments to others, and it conceptualizes conversion as simply the joining of a new religious fellowship. How much the person actually changes depends on the nature of the social influences after joining a new religion and on the degree of difference between the person's old affiliations and the new ones. If there are individual, so-called isolated conversions, then converts tend to call for help from the new religious community they have entered. Thus it may occur that converts feel the need to change their circle of friends who were in their lives prior to conversion and to re-connect with those with a similar interest or point of view. This may not always happen since most converts seem to be selective in their choice of friends, retaining those friendships important to them, loosening friendships if they are not worth the investment, or completely disconnecting from pre-conversion friendships.

6.5.1. Complete change of friends

According to the study, 9% (2) of the British participants stated that they had completely changed their circle of friends after their conversion to Islam. Three male participants, though no female participants, mentioned that their circle of friends had changed due to diverging interests and having chosen an alternative lifestyle. There are different reasons why friendships are changed, and religious conversion may not always be the primary reason for changing the circle of people a person surrounds themselves with. *Michael* wanted to deliberately distance himself from his friends, stating that he had had a number of career setbacks in the past. He did not want to be asked about the setbacks; so he chose a different circle of friends:

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247 See Appendix III, Table 9: Changing the circle of friends.

248 This is linked to identity formation. A person has more than one identity characteristic. Hence a conversion can also be seen as a new identity and specific role in society.
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“Changing my circle of friends had nothing to do with me becoming Muslim.”

12% (6) of the German participants had completely changed their circle of friends since their conversion. Again, conversion to Islam was not the sole the reason for a change in friendships, with external circumstances, such as relocation, change of employment, family relations and marriage also being important factors. Arwa felt her circle of friends had changed through her marriage and meeting her husband’s friends:

“Perhaps this change accords more to the marriage since it could have amounted to the same result had I remained a Christian.”

Amina, on the other hand, felt the need to distance herself from previous friends who, according to her were “too worldly” in their lifestyle and perspective on life. As previously mentioned, Amina had negative experiences with Christian friends because “they could not accept the conversion”:

“I think one should rather keep the friends who are accepting, rather than those who are gritting their teeth over it [the decision to convert to Islam].”

Five female German participants mentioned having retained sporadic friendships with non-Muslims, though emphasized that their current circle of friends consisted exclusively of Muslim women, but no Muslim men (Kulthum, Touareg1801, Mariyah, Mahbubah, and Sumayra).

6.5.2. Partial change of friends

25% (6) of British participants stated that they had partially changed their circle of friends after their conversion to Islam. Although, changes after embracing Islam took place, and are continuing to do so, most of them felt the need to continue their long term friendships, regardless of whether the friends were affiliated to a different faith or were not religious at all. Short-term friendships seemed to have been more quickly dissolved
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than long term friendships. Raif believes that the partial change of friends has “only been a matter of geography rather than any deliberate change of friendship.”

Particularly noticeable was the female participants’ preference for spending their leisure time with Muslim friends, though most of them have retained individual friendships with non-Muslims they will have known for a long time. Simultaneously, it was emphasized by a few female participants that their existing friendships with non-Muslims were as equally essential, but for diverse reasons, in the same way as their friendships with Muslims.

Imaan-Yousef has gained a new circle of friends through the mosque she frequently visits. She meets with Muslim and non-Muslim friends on different occasions, but she does feel as if she is “leading two separate lives”: “Sometimes, I will only do things with my new friends, and sometimes it is nice to do things together [with non-Muslim friends].” Imaan-Yousef’s situation symbolises the “sitting on the fence”, not owning a settled position, but a fragmented identity. There is a side effect of globalisation: If this same feeling is transferred upon a person who lives in two countries, this would be called transnational identity. The preference of some participants for spending time with Muslim friends seems to be linked to their common interest and mutual understanding in matters of faith. Although most participants within this study have chosen to keep certain friendships with non-Muslims, it seems as if some feel more comfortable among those who share a similar world- and religious view. Layali also keeps a mixed-religious circle of friends, relating her choice to age not religion. In her opinion, most of her non-Muslim friends are single, and do not have children, whereas most of her Muslim friends of the same age are married, have children, and “are more in that grown-up world, whereas others are still out partying.”

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249 Nasir offered the same explanation for a change in his circle of friends.

250 Layali: “My circle of friends has probably become more Muslim-centric or mixed with people who are on the same wave length as me. I have a Buddhist friend, a girl who is really nice. Not a Muslim but we have kind of got a probably closer outlook on life (than with other friends) (...). I probably have more time for religious people now, whereas before, it is like Christianity or religion in general is not cool in Britain. I now go to inter-faith groups and so on, so I have more time for people who share similar values as me, whatever their religion is.” Mariuma shares Layali’s opinion: “It is actually true, that same and same attract each other. Some of my fellow students who are close to me are Buddhist or Christian-oriented but definitely spiritually interested which brings us together.”
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23% (12) of German participants stated that they had partially changed their circle of friends after their conversion to Islam. The majority of female participants mentioned that their circle of friends changed to include born and converted Muslims. At the same time, it was emphasized that many friendships with non-Muslims are maintained and still active. Nour’s circle of friends has been expanded by “many loving sisters,” nonetheless it is important for her to place the emphasis on her non-Muslim friends:

“My three best non-Muslim friends are still there.”

The German participants offered different reasons for their partial change in maintaining or selecting their friends. Depending on the socialibility of the individual and whether the conversion had taken place shortly before the interviews for this study, this is an aspect which influences the input of the circle of friends. AbdulSamed’s circle of friends expanded internationally, whereas SteinbA remembers “only adding two sisters” to her existing circle of friends. Somayyah and Khalid had converted to Islam shortly prior to the interviews, and perhaps understandably, their circle of friends had not changed much. Nonetheless, other differences were noticed: Somayyah was sincerely looking for new Muslim contacts: “I am urgently looking for other sisters, who are very difficult to find,” whereas Khalid decided not to pursue new Muslim contacts but “try to build on existing friendships.” Noticeable is that the impact of gender on friendship circles increased with most participants’ conversions, as the contact of friendships seems to develop more intensively within one’s own gender.

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251 Some participants stated their preference for spending time with Muslim friends to discuss similar views, philosophise about life, religious topics and events, and whereas others spend time with their Muslim friends in public, going to the cinema, to restaurants as well as dancing. Natascha, for example, knows “many modern Muslim women”. She goes dancing with one, and with another who wears the headscarf, she goes to the cinema.

252 AbdulSamed: “It covers the whole of Germany, and partially Europe as well. I used to only have my circle of friends around me in my immediate environment, and now I have acquaintances everywhere, and I can go to any city and know that I have somewhere to stay.”

253 SteinbA: “I have a small Muslim circle of friends and acquaintances since I neither have a Muslim family, nor contact to other Muslims.”
6.5.3. No change of friends

25% (6) of the British participants reported not having changed their circle of friends after their conversion to Islam. Several participants felt no reason to change their friends, and some were thankful that their conversion did not influence their existing friendships with non-Muslims. Idris stated that his emotions remained closer to his non-Muslim friends, as “one prefers to remain within the safety of one’s own cultural habitat”: “It is hard for me to get close to those friends [culturally and traditionally] different to me on a personal level.” Azadeh, on the other hand, experienced difficulties of acceptance within the Muslim community, and thus had not established friendships with Muslims, but remained with the already existing circle of friends:

“(…) I think I was not ‘accepted’ in their version of Islam because I still have my own mind and can’t believe for the sake of believing what they say I should. If it doesn’t feel right, then to me it isn’t right.”

23% (12) of German participants also reported not having changed their circle of friends after their conversion to Islam. Disappointment in some Muslim friends has led to minimal changes in the circle of friends or has influenced some participants to return to their friends from prior to their conversion. Karim felt particularly “let down”:

“Many of those so-called brothers were only happy about my conversion but then I don’t belong to their circle. First everyone wanted my number but then nearly no one contacted me.”

Other participants argued that when they gained new friendships after their conversion; these were generally not influenced by their conversion but non-religious life changes. Furthermore, bi-religiosity within one family may have influenced no change of friendships among participants. Susanne believes that “people are brought together if they have a common interest or common ideas.”
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It seems that a minority of British participants prefer to remain among their British peers and pre-conversion friends, not willing to change their cultural characteristics on account of their conversion to Islam. Similarities in character changes can be found among the German participants, though their reasons differed from their British counterparts: the choice of friends at the time of conversion was limited due to difficulties in connecting with the Muslim communities or mosques nearby, and tended to revolve around friendships with Muslims established prior to conversion through other common interests or similar life circumstances.

6.6. The influence of religious conversion on family and friends.

According to my analysis, not all participants demonstrated difficulties and challenges when informing their families about their conversion to Islam. Several participants had supportive and understanding parents, though it has to be acknowledged that more than half the sample of participants mentioned either mixed or negative reactions from their parents and other family members. It is particularly the parent-child relationship that is being tested during such emotional encounters and personal changes. In the light of this change, the convert and the people close to him or her have to re-think their relationship with each other.254 Therefore, it is crucial for both ‘sides’ to reinforce a sense of continuity with their past and adopt a new sensitive approach to each other in order for this relationship to continue in a positive way.

It should be remembered that the preceding responses were given by the participants, and therefore have been influenced by their own perceptions and impressions of how their families and friends have reacted; the reports do not relate the direct views of the families and friends themselves. As such, the information should be regarded as revealing about the expectations, responses and evaluations of the converts, rather than as providing an objective account of what transpired in each case. Nonetheless, since any relationship depends on the involvement of both parties, the views expressed by participants may be taken to represent the variety of experiences

254 The identity of both is being questioned, and depending on the reactions, they either get closer together or a distance will arise. This always depends on both parties.
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that families may go through when one member commits to a new religion. Differences have been revealed in the reactions of immediate family and relatives between British and German participants, which are further demonstrated in the reactions of individual non-Muslim friends and the choices converts make subsequently.

The majority of British and German participants reported negative or mixed reactions by their immediate and/ or wider family. Noticeable differences appear in terms of positive reactions, since nearly a third of German female participants reported this being the case, compared to one sixth of their British female counterparts. When looking at the negative reactions, great differences were found among male participants, since more than half of the German male participants reported them, compared to less than one fifth of the British male participants. Specific differences were also perceptible in terms of neutral reactions by the family, as no British female participant reported a neutral reaction by her family, though one fifth of the German female participants did.

Analysing the responses of participants in relation to their non-Muslim friends’ reactions to conversion was considerably more complex than dealing with the same issue in respect of parents and family. Categorising responses was complicated by their variety, especially concerning the distinction often drawn by converts between general attitudes and decision, and individual friendships and circumstances. Few participants had an all-encompassing answer to the question of friendships, making the provision of statistical analysis difficult.

Responses of the British participants reportedly concluded that most have experienced some changes in their friendships and a shift in their circle of friends, whereas nearly two-thirds of the German sample had reported a change in their friendships after their conversion. Only a negligible number of British and German participants reported having completely changed their circle of friends and acquaintances; while 46% (35) of the overall sample have changed their circle of friends only partially or not at all.
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Converts tend to draw a distinction between their efforts to maintain friendships and ties to their family which seems to be the result of the questions given to them during the interview and completion of the questionnaire. This generally includes greater efforts to foster a peaceful and friendly relationship with parents and other relatives, since the family cannot be chosen, whereas friendships may change subtly and over time after conversion to Islam. Some friendships ended. The reasons for this varied and were not always religious; often they related to common interests and perspectives. Most participants drew a distinction between their general friendship groups and particular friendships with individuals, and some participants noted no great change. In most cases where friends do not share the convert’s interests, or understand the change of lifestyle, these friendships fizzle out, either through lack of common ground, or occasionally by deliberate choice.

The above summary demonstrates small but significant differences between the British and German samples in the reactions towards their conversion from family and friends. These may be related to the different cultural backgrounds of each country. Islam involves different criteria and characteristics in each country which enables a corresponding influence on the non-Muslim majority society. It can be assumed that Islam has been integrated into the British society to a much richer and far-reaching extent than in Germany, and has thus become more part of the British than the German society. Hence, the reactions towards persons who convert to Islam become adapted and influenced by the current understanding of the religion in each country.²⁵⁵

According to Bainbridge, there are different sociological theories which explain religious conversion, i.e. the strain theory, and the social influence theory (Bainbridge, 1992: 178-191). The strain theory states that “persons join a religion in order to satisfy conventional desires that unusual personal or collective deprivations have frustrated,” whereas the social influence theory agrees with the explanations providing details about the reasons a person uses when choosing a new religious affiliation: “persons join a religion because they have formed social attachments with persons who are already members and because their attachments to non-members are weak.” The latter theory

²⁵⁵ This can already be recognised with the question of Muslim identity (see Chapter 4).
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agrees with what the participants tend to say as the reason for their conversion, whereas the former does not.

Each individual is under the influence of competing cultural patterns, and that the individual's behaviour will tend to follow the culture from which he receives the most numerous, most powerful, earliest, and most enduring communications (Sutherland, 1973). This pattern can be related to the maintaining or ending of family relations or friendships of this study’s participants since social norms will also influence their decision-making and development process as Muslim converts. Existing social bonds weaken when a religious conversion takes place, hence the convert will bridge existing social values with new added religious norms and values. However, this results in a change of social patterns, which both the convert and those around him or her have to adapt.

Religious conversion is rarely a sudden moment of insight or inspiration but rather a change of individual consciousness, social belonging, mental attitude and physical attributes, which all depend on the cultural setting the convert is surrounded by. It is also a change of self-perception and the perception of oneself by others. The conversion is mostly an acceptance of a particular social role advocated by religious groups. Most converts have been previously exposed to some religious influences whether directly or indirectly through certain social norms, and thus the conversion is only one part of a larger and complex socialisation process involving personal, social, cultural and spiritual factors. Therefore, one can assume that religious conversion will eventually lead to a social conversion for the individual convert as well as the immediate environment, regardless of the religion. If a person decides to change his or her religious affiliation, the conversion will automatically influence their social realm, resulting in a challenging social conversion for all persons involved.

The concept of social conversion is not new, however little research has been undertaken regarding social conversion within the environment of converts to Islam. According to Buckser, religion conversion is not merely an internal act of the individual, but also focuses on it as “an irreducibly social act” (Buckser, 2003:69). This results in that religious conversion not only changes the individual who has decided to
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correct “but also the groups that must assimilate or give up the convert” (Buckser, 2003:69). In relation to the immediate environment of the Muslim converts, it can thus be said that family members, friends, and anyone who is in direct or indirect contact with the converted individual, will in turn automatically undergo a social conversion. Therefore, the religious conversion of one person results in the social conversion of those around him.

It is thus a logical consequence that the conversion to Islam affects not only the convert him-/ or herself, but influences the subsequent behaviour of the convert’s family and friends (even former friends), even if this behaviour is not in directed at the convert him-/ or herself. Buckser, however, also stated that the religious groups the convert may join will in effect adapt to the new member of their community. The convert’s religious and social attitude will influence the religious community in the long-run which in turn could equal to a social conversion of religious community. It could be that it is the convert’s influence of how the social conversion develops among those who may have to adapt (I prefer this over assimilation) from a non-religious yet personal backdrop and among those who become a religious and social addition to the converted person’s life.
Chapter 7 Courtship and Marriage

7.1. Introduction

This chapter reveals the complexity and variety of individual cases. The fact that other conditions than religious ones need to be met, forms part of the complex process of the changes people make to convert to Islam than the simplistic “I’m in a new religion and nothing else matters” view, which is often associated with religious conversion. Accordingly, it is often underestimated that religious conversion triggers profound questions of the self, heightens awareness and reflection on who one is, who one was and who one may become in the future. It captures both social and scholarly interest since it raises critical, challenging and reflective questions on the meaning of a convert’s life; how it affects their human interaction after making such a life-changing choice, and the social structures that influence the behaviour between groups of people, particularly in terms of gendered traditions and as such towards the opposite sex. A discussion of these aspects will address the views of participants about how behaviour towards different genders (their own or the opposite) differs between their original and adopted culture and religion. This is significant because it reveals the difficulties they have encountered, the benefits they have gained, and how they have accommodated the prescriptions of Islam into their own circumstances.

Both Western and Islamic societies have long traditions of gender differentiation in which social roles, employment, characteristics, skills and values are either divided between the sexes or generally attributed to them. Differences in how these divisions are made and their development are however only socially contructed to appear as being ‘natural’ though (without intending to engage in notions of gender theory that are beyond the empirical scope of this study here) it is clear that these societies contain various genders as most societies do. Islam upholds particular ethical and moral values, and regards anything in relation to sexuality as a private matter. For a convert to Islam who has been raised in Western-European Western society, dealing with the issue of sexuality within the Islamic realm can pose a complex challenge of personal adjustment, to accustom to what is second nature to a person born and raised in a family or society with such moral codes. It should however not be undermined that there is considerable soul-searching and individual reflection in the European Muslim communities and the existence of examination of parental norms.
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According to Zebiri (2008:161),

a Muslim living in Britain can scarcely leave his or her house without seeing evidence of a very different approach to sexuality.\(^{256}\)

Taking this statement into consideration, the British and German participants of this study can simultaneously be viewed as being confronted with the issue of sexuality on a daily basis since it is not much of a private matter in either country despite the desire of the individual to keep it private. It appears as if they are caught between two worlds: facing openly sexual behaviour in their daily lives, while trying to acclimatise themselves to the more modest traditional means of the new faith. How is it possible to balance both sides on a daily basis, and how can this be adhered to?

This chapter introduces the participants’ opinions and changes in their behavioural patterns in terms of gender and sexuality. The focus is on how the conversion has changed particular social patterns. An insight is offered into the challenges for Muslim converts in giving up on certain lifestyle aspects and/ or implementing practices (more) in accordance with the faith. The first section on behavioural changes towards the opposite already demonstrates different attitudes. It is particularly noticeable that male participants tended to report that they had developed a more respectful behaviour towards women, whereas female participants described their behaviour toward men as more reserved than prior to their conversion.

The second section reveals participants’ opinions regarding pre-marital sexual or platonic relationships, as to whether they would enter into either the former or the latter, and how they regard others who have entered into a pre-marital relationship.

The second half of the chapter introduces the reader to the matters regarding courtship and marriage in Islam. Traditional Islamic teaching does not permit premarital relationships between men and women, and thus the Western tradition of “dating” is

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\(^{256}\) Zebiri’s interviewees were “subjected on a daily basis to billboards, pornographic materials in shops, and women in revealing clothes” which in turn made them concerned about “the effects on their lives and the difficulty of how to protect their children’s innocence” (Zebiri, 2008:161). This can also mean that it is much harder for Muslim parents to control their children within a non-Muslim environment, which also appears to seemingly be a universal problem of this generation gap.
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largely frowned upon among Muslims. Possibilities to meet with available marriage partners could be explained as “Islamic courtship”. It is dependent on the individual Muslim culture in regard to the provisions which have to be fulfilled or adhered to in order to follow courtship according to religious conduct: One example would be that potential marital partners may meet up in the presence of friends and/ or family to find out more about each other prior to marriage, while still operating within Islamic moral guidelines. This section gives an insight into British and German converts courting, according to Islam and their own conscience. It will look at what the participants’ dating habits entail, whether there are any differences between British and German Muslim converts’ ideas of dating, and how they compromise their dating style with their human desire to attract the attention of the opposite sex and their individual religious practices.

Marriage is, according to the Prophet Muhammad*, “half of the deen.” Since marriage plays a significant role among Muslims, and some participants did not agree with marriage prior to their conversion, it was post-conversion when many changed their attitudes on this particular issue. This section describes the challenges and advantages of marriage from an Islamic perspective complemented with the participants’ views on the subject matter.

The last section will portray the choices of a marital partner for a Muslim convert. Many people seem to assume that a convert to Islam will automatically decide for him- or herself that any potential marital partner should be Muslim. However, perhaps surprisingly, although a Muslim husband or Muslim wife seems to clearly be preferred among the participants, and in most instances, married participants have followed this pattern, there are exceptions in which German male participants have married Christian women, and 25% of German female participants clearly stated that a non-Muslim husband would be considered if certain conditions are met. None of the female participants in either the British or German sample were married to a non-Muslim partner. Nonetheless it has to briefly be considered what may occur as a consequence of the female converting to Islam: according to traditional Islamic thought, the woman would be advised to divorce her non-Muslim husband, however there no

257 Al-Tirmidhi Hadith No. 3096, Narrated by Anas Ibn Malik.
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consensus, thus there are instances in which the couple remains married and accommodates itself to the new situation (Sina’at al-Fatwa). It seems inevitable that there are great changes involved in becoming a Muslim convert which not only affect them as individuals but also has an impact on the lives of people around them. Prior to conversion most participants led a lifestyle influenced by their culture and the people surrounding them, and are now trying to implement certain religious guidelines which underline their individual understanding and practice of the faith.

7.2. Behavioural change towards the opposite sex

Traditional Muslim thought considers biological differences between men and women to have assigned them different social roles which in turn have shaped their attitudes and behaviour. Present in both Muslim majority countries but also in Western societies, it is a cultural value that has started to have been challenged in the 20th century, particularly in Western-European and North American cultures as well as in some parts of Northern Africa, e.g. Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. Inglehart speaks of societies following a similar pattern of development, i.e. changing from a preindustrial to a postmodern society, undergoing “cultural changes in politics, economics, sex and gender norms, and religion” (Inglehart, 1997:49). According to physicians and psychologists, physical factors have always been associated with complex psychological characteristics. It has been discovered that most known cultures appear to be male-dominated: the male has to appear masculine, and the female has to appear feminine. Natural gender differences seem to define social distinctions, and thus boys are taught from the beginning of childhood to assume a masculine role, whereas girls often learn to take on a subordinate role.

As much as there seems to be a public longing for equality among the sexes, there will always be certain distinctions between men and women that will not allow for the existence of ‘complete’ gender equality. Most of the participants’ once open behaviour towards the opposite sex has given way to more reserved behaviour which

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may seem to be largely influenced by their conversion and with that a change of lifestyle. Islamic moral etiquette suggests and supports more distant but respectful behaviour between the sexes which is in many instances precisely defined, and after conversion, often added to the already differing social and cultural attitudes in the behaviour of men and women.

There are certain behavioural norms which are individually considered as socially appropriate for men and women in the context of a specific social and cultural setting. These can widely differ between the cultures as well as over time, depending where and during which epoch particular manners were deemed appropriate or inappropriate. Looking at behavioural patterns within the British context and comparing them to those within the German context, differences may appear in the assigned or assumed gender roles. British society seems to think that today’s values, manners and ethics cannot be attributed to the practice of one particular gender. Nonetheless, men and women seem to perceive themselves as different in their behavioural norms towards one another. The following areas, particularly offer differing behavioural attitudes of men and women, not only concerning themselves but also in relation with the opposite sex: the employment sector, matters of sexuality, within love relationships, fields of interest, in children’s education, school, university studies as well as in politics.

The participants were asked whether their behaviour towards the opposite sex had changed after conversion. An overall result suggests that more obvious behavioural changes were observed among male rather than female participants. Several male participants reported “less staring at women” (Gharib, Kazim, Karim) and “more respectful behaviour towards women” (Abdullah) whereas female participants mentioned more subtle behavioural changes, such as “less mixed socialising” (Zaynab-Ablah, Layali, Naima), and primarily German female participants stated “more reserved behaviour towards men” (CaMaTa, Eileen, Leyli, Mariuma, Nour, Natascha). A British survey concluded that British men and women insisted on two particular values relevant to their cultural habitat: humour and independence (Karsen, 2011). While looking at this survey and relating it to my study, it is my impression that the British participants tended to act more independently in answering particular questions than their German counterpart.
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Did the participants feel as if their manners and thoughts towards the opposite sex are distinctively different to prior to their conversion? By addressing the behavioural changes, a better understanding can be developed in regards to whether distinct changes could be found that had been influenced by adopting certain religious values which consequently constitute a possible change in behaviour that perhaps previously had not (explicitly) existed. These changes can be divided into two kinds, namely emotional and character or personality changes. It is a noticeable aspect that certain common behaviour suggests a correlation with the individual’s gender.

Not only physical touch towards the opposite sex is reduced or completely refrained from since emotional and social conducts seem to be adapted in accordance with the religion. Several male participants referred to Qur’an 24:30 when stating they had stopped “staring at women” but respectfully lower their gaze when either seeing or communicating with the opposite sex. Dawoud stated that he has not changed much; however, he “lowers his gaze in the summer” which indicates the dependency of his Islamic behaviour on the weather conditions. Kazim on the other hand demonstrates that his change of actions is rather related to the time period of his conversion when he says that he “can now refrain” from looking at women:

“I do not look directly at women anymore.”

Although friendships with women seemed to be acceptable, most male participants felt that it was more Islamic to keep a physically and emotionally reserved distance towards women who are only acquaintances or strangers. Zaid, Gharib and Mounir emphasized the significance of avoiding unnecessary (physical) contact with

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259 Gharib: “I try not to stare at women anymore (...).” Karim: “I don’t stare at women (...).” Khalid: “When I wasn’t a Muslim, I didn’t lower my gaze. I was allowed to take this glance. Nonetheless, when I am talking to you, I am looking into your face and your eyes. If I look at you now, I look in your face and nowhere else (...), you are covered anyway.” The interview with Khalid was conducted in a mosque, and thus I had worn a headscarf for the duration of my stay.

260 Dawoud, Abdul-Manan, Kazim, Gharib, Karim, Olaf; and Khalid.

261 Gharib offered a similar attitude to Kazim: “(...) I try to refrain from looking at women who try to underline their beauty. Flirtations are immediately stopped if I notice them; in that I clearly state that I am not interested in such conversations and change the subject. I also try to avoid any physical contact with women. Other than that I am polite – apart from the usual cheekiness among friends ;-) – and I appreciate many characteristics that particularly women embody.”
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females outside the family without seeming to be rude.\textsuperscript{262} Handshakes with the opposite sex seem to depend on the context, whereby it was most notable with the interviews that the male participants felt less uneasy about a handshake than their female counterparts. Communication with women, e.g. conversations, discussions, etc. seem to have changed for many, being kept objective and factual, though at times it was admitted that communication with non-Muslim women tends to be less reserved than with Muslim women. Ibrahim stated:

“I have more open contact with non-Muslim than Muslim women. This may have something to do with the rules of chastity in Islam which tell men and women to lower their gaze when they see the opposite sex.”\textsuperscript{263}

As a result of these changes in behaviour towards the opposite sex, most male participants stated that since their conversion they have begun “to show women more respect and honour” (Abdullah, Gibril, Aziz, Ibrahim, Nasir) as well as “placing greater value on female opinions.” (Abdullah) This suggests that with the conversion a new awareness towards the opposite sex has evolved, and with that new behaviour characteristics have developed. Furthermore, there seems to be a greater sensitivity to conversational content, in particular with Muslim women (Idris). Another aspect that was mentioned concerns “greater politeness in conversations with women” (Abraham Asad, AbdulSamed) and “appreciation of particular female behavioural characteristics” (Gharib).\textsuperscript{264}

Female participants share certain behavioural changes with their male counterparts; however, they also revealed certain changes in their behaviour toward the

\textsuperscript{262} Zaid believes that “certainly from a man’s point of view, thoughts always lead to sex, it is rather inevitable. Exceptions are the elderly and a few people with particular personality types, though this is a minority.”

\textsuperscript{263} Idris has both non-Muslim and Muslim female friends, yet, he stated that his behaviour slightly alters depending with whom he communicates: “I don’t feel segregated or apart from the opposite sex in any way, though I am more careful about how I look at them. With Muslim women (...) I am more sensitive in that they might find it uncomfortable to be alone with me or for me to be too prying or personal in the conversation. I am aware that some of them may not want direct eye contact or to shake my hand for example (...).”

\textsuperscript{264} AbdulSamed: “During my pre-Islamic days I was somehow a so-called something of a Casanova. A womanizer. Every weekend I had new girlfriends (...) all the time. My mother said to me at some point that I am changing my girlfriends like my underwear (...). I stopped that kind of thing (...) through Islam. I think now I behave towards women better, more like a gentleman-like.”
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opposite sex post conversion in regards to the associations with their femininity. Their more reserved behaviour towards the opposite sex seems to not only include male strangers but in several instances male friends. Fewer changes were recorded in terms of physical contact with male relatives.265

*Jameela* decided to be more reserved towards males post-conversion:

“I am not that touchy-feely anymore. When it comes to non-related men in general, whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim, I wouldn’t initiate a kiss or a hug or something.”

Physicality among the sexes is partially regarded and treated as a cultural norm in a non-Muslim society. Shaking hands with the opposite sex, similarly to the male participants, and to a greater extent seems to be determined by individual choice and comfort level.266 *Asiye*, for example, believes it is rude not to shake hands:

“I behave as usual with those men who don’t know about the religion. I do that because they might not understand the reason behind it. I offer my hand to men of other religions since I don’t want to be rude and because it is polite in Germany to shake hands.”

Nevertheless, there are a number of female participants who have chosen to completely refrain from shaking a male stranger’s hand.267 There are other ways of dealing with such situations, such as *Malika* who does not offer her hand “but greets in the name of Allah”.

265 *Imaan-Yousef, Jameela, Ruqayyah, Soraya, Amina, Amina-2, Leyli, Nour, Mariuma, Natascha, CaMaTa, Kulthum* and *Naima.*
266 *Jameela, Asiye, Eileen, Samra, Karima and Fatima.*
267 *Touareg1801: “I limit contact to non-mahram (not family-related) men to a minimum. I don’t shake hands with men. I try not to look at men and not to laugh but to stay serious.”* *Imane: “I don’t shake hands anymore, and I don’t talk about intimate topics.”* *Eileen, Mahbubah and Somayya* have also decided to avoid unnecessary physical contact with the opposite sex. *Sumayra* also states that she does not shake hands with strange men, and even adds: “One look by mistake at a strange man is enough but the second look is already that of Satan.”

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Several other German female participants agreed that lowering the gaze and avoiding eye contact with men are among the behavioural changes they have noted since conversion. The majority of female participants adopted more reserved and distant approaches towards the opposite sex which included refraining from talking to male strangers unless absolutely necessary and being less initiating and more cautious towards the opposite sex. A few German female participants ended friendships with men who had more than a platonic interest in the participant.

SteinbA, for example, limited her contact to men:

“I ended contacts with men where I knew that this wasn’t only friendship. I try to flirt a little less which doesn’t always work out. I am a fun flirtier; and like to joke around, so I don’t quite have that sorted yet.”

Although most females have changed parts of their behaviour towards the opposite sex, some admitted finding it a challenge not to flirt with men or to avoid inviting gestures and/ or topics (SteinbA, Safiyyah, Havva-Maryam). Jesseniah stated that she has “the tendency to be a little ‘flirty’”:

“It is not intentionally, it just happens that I get buddy-buddy very quickly with men. I have become a bit more careful. I am not that open anymore, and if I notice that men are heading in that direction, I try to immediately block it off.”

The male and female participants mentioned that the change to now more reserved behaviour towards the opposite sex has led to intensified friendships with people of one’s own gender. Idris confirmed that he felt an improved and intensified friendship with Muslim men after his conversion when he says “There is a feeling of solidarity, shared belief and a common understanding.”

Safiyyah: “I have become more distanced towards men. I used to like to flirt. I think I was able to do that quite well, and I don’t do that anymore. Although, I do think that I am sometimes a bit too initiating. Well, I am somehow quite open and I like contact (...). Some people don’t like that (...) some are even of the opinion that one should not greet the opposite sex. Well, I am of the opinion that I can communicate with men, for example, within the context that we do communal Islamic work etc. Those who I know are generally easy-going. I talk to men, and men talk to me. I mean, I just check that I am not alone with a man anywhere. That’s all.” Havva-Maryam: “I don’t think I behave now differently towards men than prior to the conversion. I avoid being alone with a man/ or men, and I avoid inviting gestures or topics but other than that I have not changed in this regard.”
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British and German male participants demonstrated a greater visible behavioural change towards women than vice versa, e.g. “No flirting” (Gharib), “showing more respect” (Abdullah), “lowering one’s gaze” (Dawoud, Mikail, Ibrahim). Most of them, though not all, have continued with their existing friendships with women, yet, those friendships are largely with non-Muslim women. Friendships with Muslim women exist but a greater distance seems to be maintained towards them than non-Muslim female friends.

British female participants confirmed having fewer challenges in keeping up friendships with men than their German female counterparts. Although, physical contact was notably reduced, most of the British female participants were more inclined to maintain mixed-gendered friendships. The German female participants, on the other hand, distinctively demonstrated preserving a more reserved behaviour towards the opposite sex post-conversion. Furthermore, several German female participants stated they would avoid being alone in a room with a man (Nurjan, Safiyyah, Nour, Havva-Maryam, Karima). In comparison, no British female participant mentioned this kind of behavioural change.

7.3. Premarital relationships: A sin or a blessing?

As marriage in Islam is largely perceived as the chief regulator of an ‘orderly sexual existence’, it can also be seen as the dividing line between permissible and prohibited sexuality. Thus, any sexual activities outside the realms of marriage are considered by many Muslims as fornication which includes pre-marital and extramarital sex, sex with prostitutes, and homosexual acts. A covetous glance may often be viewed as wrong, even though not everyone may interpret this as such. The analysis of the gaze can be very instructive for its recipient (Akashe-Böhme, 2006:53).

Although the religious sources seem to be unambiguous on the permissibility or impermissibility of particular issues within the realms of sexuality, diverse interpretations and practices suggest that these religious regulations may be applied differently to both sexes. Muslim converts who have perhaps lived a more sexually
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open lifestyle prior to conversion may find themselves caught in seemingly unsolvable difficulties in the matter of sexual activity. Most of them will have had sexual experiences prior to conversion which in turn may make leading a life of chastity, unless they are married, quite a challenge. Having gained some form of sexual experience or being engaged in a premarital sexual relationship at the time of conversion has made it challenging for some participants to maintain that relationship.

Religion and laws influence social and sexual behaviour in any culture and society. The prevailing opinion in Western industrialised society was that premarital sexual relations would result in permanent remorse and spiritual damage (Foucault, 1990: 90-91). In 1948, the Kinsey-Report, a survey of 12,000 men in the United States, however, revealed that around 86% of male interviewees (not converts to a religion) had experienced premarital sexual activities (Kinsey, 1948/1998). A similar study which was dubbed “The Little Kinsey” was Britain’s first nationwide sex survey. It was conducted in 1949 but the findings were so ‘outrageous’ that they were suppressed and kept hidden, to be published only half a century later, in 2005 (Duffy, 2005). Until 1969, Germany’s Civil Law Code (German: BGB-Bundesgesetzbuch) had a paragraph in which premarital sexual relations, including homosexual activities were perceived as acts of fornication, and therefore subject to prosecution. Nowadays, premarital sexual relations have largely become the norm in Western industrialised countries, and are no longer legislated against. In 2007, The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine published the study “Sexual behaviour in context: A global perspective” which provided the following conclusions (Wellings et al., 2007):

- a) Sexual activity begins for most men and women in the late teenage years (15-19),
- b) There is no universal trend towards sex at a young age,
- c) In societies in which first intercourse still occurs mainly within marriage, the trend towards later marriage is now accompanied by a trend towards later sex in young women,

270 Alfred Kinsey’s report also revealed that 77% of women who had engaged in premarital sex did not regret their experiences. In another survey, questions on extramarital sex were asked, and came up with surprising results: 25% of women up to the age of 40 admitted in engaging in extramarital sexual activities (Kinsey, 1953/1998). The Kinsey Report of 1948 famously lifted the lid on American sexual behaviour.
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d) In some industrialised countries, sexual activity prior to the age of 15 has become more common in recent years, e.g. Britain, and most relevant to this study now

e) The trend towards later marriage has led to an increase in the prevalence of premarital sexual relationships.

Among born Muslims the attitude towards pre-marital relations contains differing thoughts. Approximately 50% of the control group stated that pre-marital relations were acceptable, as long as they included particular provisions, such as a limited time frame to get to know each other and no sexual contact prior to marriage.\textsuperscript{271} Sarah Bauer and Nina understood pre-marital relationships to be “normal and natural”, however “only acceptable, when both are happy and honest with one another within that relationship”, whereas Nisreen and Umazoubeir believed pre-marital relationships to be “haram and damaging”, and “not acceptable”. Diana also mentioned punishments:

“Allah does not permit pre- and extra-marital sexual relations. The Qur’an states that men and women are only loved by Allah if they guard their chastity. There are also punishments for for adultery or extra-marital sex if four witnesses have seen the act (although the conditions for it should be discussed elsewhere). There is no thing that Allah does not prohibit without reason”.

A general attitude among most participants included that entering into a premarital (sexual or platonic) relationship has to include consent between the parties involved. Attitudes ranged from impermissibility of premarital sexual contact to respecting the sexual boundaries and privacy of the individual involved in such a relationship. The participants in the current study were asked whether their attitudes towards premarital sexual relationships - whether leading to marriage or not - and premarital sexual contacts, including casual sexual encounters had changed since conversion. The study found distinct changes among the participants’ attitudes which were influenced by newly adopted religious values. Thus, it initiated diverse opinions ranging from “full agreement,” “agreement with certain conditions” to “disagreement” with the licit engagement with premarital sexual contacts.

\textsuperscript{271} Rufeida, Elif Er, Sonja Bint Jeradi, Yasin.
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44% (33) of all participants were comfortable with premarital relationships if they were conceptualised under certain conditions. Some would countenance relationships between men and women if non-sexual or under the supervision of family members or members of the Muslim community. However, not all of them agreed that premarital relationships should involve sexual aspects, though a number of participants agreed that sexuality seems to be a significant part of a premarital relationship, for the parties involved to get to know each other and to find out how compatible they are with each other (Michael, Souhayla, Kazim, and Soraya). Michael made the following statement:

“If a woman is a virgin, I would respect that but if she is not then I would find it insulting if she were to withhold sex from me when she has given it to other men.”

56% (43) of all participants disagreed with premarital sexual contact, basing their reasons primarily on religious sources and morals as well as personal experience. Accordingly, 60% (8) of male and 50% (5) of female British participants do not condone premarital sexual experiences. Gibril, Aimen and Abdul-Mannan agreed that “It is haram to have premarital sexual contacts or relationships.”

Zaid feels that premarital sexual contacts “are damaging” to the individual; Khadija-Maryam expects premarital sexual contacts “to cause problems, pains, and social disruption.” Several British female participants also emphasized that engaging in premarital sexual contacts could lead to “unwanted and teenage pregnancies” (Imaan-Yousef), “abortions” (Jameela, Zaynab) and “STD - sexually transmitted diseases” (Layali). Among German male and female participants, it was particularly noticeable that although the individual would perhaps not engage in, or would not have engaged in premarital sexual relations, leniency seemed to be greater than among the British participants. The majority of participants agreed that if and when such relationships

272 Michael also finds the Shi’a practice of Mutah (temporary marriage) “appealing”, however, he would feel less inclined to marry a woman “who is more open with her sexual favours.”
273 It was stated, particularly among male and female German participants that although they felt unwilling to personally enter premarital sexual relationships, judging others on their sexual behaviour would not be a priority issue and was seldom addressed – “each to their own” (CaMaTa). Nonetheless it has to be noted that a difference would be considered if a close friend or relation
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occur, they should be fostered within a safe environment as it is reflected in Idris’s statement:

“Relationships should be supported by older relatives and encouraged within Islamic parameters. Young Muslims should be made aware of the expectations on them.”

It seems that most of the participants felt that premarital sexual relationships are a reality in Western industrialised societies. Yet, they are acceptable as long as certain boundaries are not overstepped and taken with responsibility. Nonetheless, it is essential to keep in mind that among the participants of this study, premarital sexual relationships in a casual and informal manner seem to be not accepted. Although, many agreed that a premarital platonic relationship should be fostered in preference to a premarital sexual relationship. An understanding for people becoming sexually involved prior to marriage was expressed with a greater degree of acceptance than I had anticipated. Having knowledge of existing premarital sexual contacts and relationships within the individual’s immediate environment seems to be differently understood. In general, however, participants of this study would probably not enter a premarital sexual relationship but respect the involved person’s privacy of their relationship. As a consequence, long-term relationships leading to marriage are supported to a greater extent than those without the intention to marry.

The participants of this study were more accepting of premarital sexual contacts than I had anticipated during the preparation of this survey since existing thoughts may have fostered the idea that almost all Muslim converts would disagree with the concept of premarital sexual relationships. Furthermore, it is significant to note that the

274 Zaynah: “I think it is down to the person; you have to keep God in mind (...) I realise where the whole ‘no sex before marriage’ is coming from. Because I know a lot of girls, my friends are all English; I don’t mean that they’re sluts! They have done the boyfriends, slept with them, got really hurt, more boyfriends, slept with them, got hurt again and again. Therefore, I can see where Islam is coming from. When you are married, it is stable. You know the person isn’t just going to go ‘Bye, thank you for the sex!’ because you are married.”
275 SteinbA: “There is no point in doing a blind bargain, and thus things should be tested before a ‘purchase.’”
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participants tended to accept that people tend to have these relationships but they did not expect to take part in them themselves.

7.4. Courtship: “Islamic dating”

Dating as it is currently practised in much of the world is not part of traditional Muslim culture. Today, young men and women are still often expected to not enter into premarital relationships, not to spend time alone with a member of the opposite sex, or to get to know each other intimately prior to marriage. Instead of dating, Muslim couples seem to ‘court’ with the intention of finding a suitable husband or wife. The interaction between Muslim men and women is often but not exclusively orchestrated with a future marriage in mind. Muslims who are able to marry are often encouraged to do so, and to follow the particular cultural norms of ‘Islamic courtship.’

In relation to this study the dating forms known in Britain and Germany largely stand in conflict with the religious norms of courtship in Islam, particularly in regards to the question of procreational activities. Strictly speaking, courting within islamically permitted boundaries allows a couple to meet, however not alone: if possible, this would only in public or in the presence of family and/ or friends. In comparison to casual dating, Islamic courtship organises itself slightly differently. Although, many Muslim men and women search on their own for a potential marital partner, families and friends are often involved and even enquire about potential candidates on behalf of their relatives and friends. Meetings are often accompanied by another person or the couple meets in public.

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276 If this is questioned, Muslims tend to support this view with sources from the religious texts, such as this hadith: “Umar related that the Prophet Muhammad said: ‘Not one of you should meet a woman alone unless she is accompanied by a relative (mahram)” (Sahih Muslim Hadith).

277 The notion of romance within a growing relationship within the Muslim culture seems to have only recently increased due to the influence of a globalising society. Traditionally, it plays less of a significant role during Islamic-oriented courtship than within non-religious dating.
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Islamic courtship is, in comparison to dating in Britain and Germany, relatively short-term. If a couple has decided to get married, they often make their match quickly official through an engagement or a wedding. If they get engaged, this period is usually quite short, so that couples can resist sexual temptations and organise their wedding. It is, however, essential to note that Islamic dating has loosened its rules, particularly when it is practised within non-Muslim societies. Young Muslim men and women have found diverse ways of getting past restrictions, choosing alternatives that they find are suitable for them. Muslim converts who are looking for a marital partner but who are used to the dating prior to their conversion are challenged and may find it hard to adapt their previous dating norms to the newly adopted religious restrictions of such a courtship. Thus, it depends on the individual’s character and religious practice as to how he or she approaches a potential spouse. The internet has particularly become popular with Muslim youth looking for a relationship or potential Muslim partner. The use of Muslim dating agencies has risen within the last decade, and popular websites such as www.muslima.com and www.quiran.com are frequented on a regular basis.

A small number of participants had little contact with the opposite sex prior to conversion, and if they were single at the time they had embraced Islam, looking for a potential partner has often been delegated to Muslim friends (Imaan-Yousef, Amina, and Sumayra). Participants who were already married felt relieved that they did not need to search for a partner (Fairouz). Others who had a mixed-gendered circle of friends, on the other hand, felt more at ease with directly approaching the person of interest than receiving information about the person through third parties (Ibrahim). The approach when dating post-conversion depends not least on which religious views the individual develops, and whether he or she will follow a particular religious route. There seems to be three different ways of Muslim dating: Group 1 practises halal dating, which is in agreement with Islamic rulings. Group 2 are so-called Eid-Muslims who practise their faith on religious holidays, and follow certain but not all rulings; hence the laws of Muslim dating are less strictly followed. The members of this group do, however, stay away from sexual activities prior to marriage. Group 3 are Muslims who rarely or not at all follow Islamic regulations, including those of Islamic courtship or refraining from premarital sexual activities. These routes or direction can be progressive, conservative, liberal, traditional, or even a bit of all directions, depending on how comfortable the convert feels within the religious regulations and his own consciousness. That is how he decides which direction within the faith to take.
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30% (7) of the British participants claimed that if there would be any notable interest in a person of the opposite sex they would pursue this interest through a third party. This insight indicates that information on the person of interest is asked from family members, friends or an appointed *wali* of the person.

*Imaan-Yousef* stated that she thinks she “would never pursue an interest” since she prefers the opposite sex to take the initiative:

“It’s possibly just my personality; even before converting I would never ask somebody out or make the first step, so I would wait for someone to contact my teacher in the same way, before I would always wait for someone to call me.”

Some male participants decided to approach family members requesting permission to be introduced to the woman of their interest. *Zaid* believes in taking the initiative and considering an intermediary when he makes the following statement:

“It is most appropriate to go through the family (...) or another respected intermediary. Before being Muslim, the idea of an intermediary was getting my mate to tell her mate that I fancied her.”

Physical attractiveness remains a significant factor when searching for a potential marital partner; however it does not seem to be of primary significance. Male converts in particular have a noticeable interest in the intellect of a suitable spouse which demonstrates their searching for compatibility in thought, practice, and lifestyle. *Raif* believes in a “good” common base between him and a potential spouse when he describes the following conditions:

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280 *Imaan-Yousef*: “I don’t think there is anything wrong with either sex making the first move but personally I would be too shy. Everyone knows my teacher in the Muslim community; I would expect anyone who is interested in marriage to know to approach my teacher, to ask to meet me or to even ask her if I am already married etc. Myself and quite a few of my convert friends have had bad experiences with Muslim boys who approach you personally, it doesn’t work out well and I think that if a Muslim boy has respect he will go to someone else to ask about marriage and his family will already know about his intentions. I wouldn’t trust someone if they asked me themselves and didn’t want to go through a mahram, friend or teacher and their family didn’t know about it, unless it was someone who I already knew for a long time and I already knew their family really well.”
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“It would certainly have to start with a friendship (...) you don’t just get involved. Keeping an eye on good values and conducting yourself with the decorum of a good Muslim, I suppose.”

Anwaar is also a believer in intellectual contact prior to physical contact but at the same time appreciates the protection that Islam provides among the sexes:

“What happens with young people is that they look at each other, like each other and they do all the unnecessaries first (...) and only then after a month or two they begin to talk. With Islam, it kind of protects you from this happening (...) you get to know each other for the core things (...) that are important first and then that will come later on.”

A number of British participants preferred the direct pursuit of the person of interest, either in the form of directly approaching the person (Abraham Asad), entering a temporary marriage (Zaynah), or by using Muslim matrimonial websites on the internet (Ruqayyah and Layali). The majority of German male participants preferred to directly approach the person of interest. Less than 25% (3) felt the necessity to initially approach the family or friends of the person who comes into question. It is noteworthy that some of the German male participants differentiated between approaching a born Muslim woman and a female Muslim convert. No British male participant gave an equal or similar statement in terms of this distinction. According to most German male participants, the differentiation seems to be clear: when approaching a born Muslim woman, they would generally contact a third party (family member or friend), whereas approaching a female Muslim convert would be pursued directly.281

The study attempts to discover whether female Muslim converts are more reserved in their behaviour towards the opposite sex than prior to their conversion. It is looked at whether this behavioural change is influenced by social or religious expectations, and whether or not female Muslim converts tend to enter the above mentioned female role as understood in traditional Islamic thought. Perhaps it may be neither but rather a psychological reason, such as fear of rejection that females tend to

281 Possibilities of a direct pursuit: form of speech, writing and the initiation of interested looks. Such direct approach would remain respectful; making sure the interest is of a serious nature. (AbdulSamed, Amro, Karim).
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apply a reserved attitude towards the opposite sex. Among the German female participants, common traits seem to include aloofness. Reserved behaviour towards the opposite sex seems to also be the acceptable approach for most female participants.

According to Leyli,

“It is a challenge to follow one’s own interest without being looked at in a strange way.”

In summary, the majority of British male participants would directly approach a woman of their interest as long as the “dating” is kept within Islamic boundaries. Approximately a third of British male participants would enquire about a person of their interest through a third party. The trend among the British female participants generally follows the indirect approach, e.g. observing the person of interest and following up information through a third party before direct contact is initiated. A minority of British female participants choose the direct approach, and an even smaller number have chosen to use Muslim matrimonial websites in order to initiate Islamic courtship.

The majority of German male participants also prefer the direct pursuit of the person of interest, e.g. through conversation, writing and eye contact, whereas less than 25% agreed with approaching a woman of interest through a third party. Thus, there is a small difference in that within this study, German male converts tend to be more initiating in their approach than their British counterparts. The trend among German female participants was mixed: A third of them preferred the indirect approach via a third party to let the person of interest know of their intentions, while another third preferred the direct approach which depended on the environment and community they lived in. Yet, the majority of the German female participants believed in the significance of reserved non-inviting behaviour towards the opposite sex and the expectation being on the man to make the first move.
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7.5. Marriage: “Half of the deen”?

An Islamic marriage is primarily seen as a contractual relationship between a husband and a wife. It is a contract in which the coexistence as well as the organisation of domestic matters are determined and regulated. Although attraction and affection are essential, they may not always initially be part of the marital agreement. Nonetheless, time is used for that affection to develop as a couple which consequently consolidates their connection. One factor in particular, the dowry given to the wife for her own provision, makes the Islamic marriage different to other religious marriages. The reason for the existence of the dowry is that, in case of a divorce – although this is often frowned upon it is permitted within Islamic family law – the wife will be financially secured until she either re-marries or returns to her family. Nowadays, there are diverse interpretations of the dowry, and the bride does not always receive a great sum but rather symbolic objects, such as gold, jewellery, or beautiful Qur’an verses etc. Marriages involving Muslim converts seem to follow the latter trend of giving dowry.

Although Muslim men and women are encouraged to marry, there are rules that prohibit connections between certain men or women (Qur’an 4:23), including close relations and disagreements over certain beliefs. As religious customs require, there are a number of provisions for a marriage to be valid: there has to be a formal marriage proposal, a dowry, a wedding ceremony, a change in marital status, and last but not least, the proof of consummation of the marriage. Most of the rules go back to the Qur’an and the Sunna. According to the Prophet Muhammad*, the commitment to marriage fulfils half of the deen: “When a man marries, he has fulfilled half of his religion, so let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half.”

Celibacy is discouraged in Islam, whereas marriage is encouraged. Chastity vows are regarded as reprehensible and unnatural. Since sexual activity is a natural human need, the absence of marital possibilities can result in illicit sexual acts. Thus marriage – even if no dowry can be offered – seems to be recommended as the best solution. The appreciation of marriage is not solely a divine commandment but is also justified by its usefulness: its primary purpose is to facilitate an orderly, social

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282 Al-Tirmidhi Hadith 3096, narrated by Anas ibn Malik.
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interaction, and thereby the channelling of sexual behaviour. Polygamy has also become widely unpopular in many Muslim majority countries, and thus monogamy seems to be recognised as the desirable form of Islamic marriage. According to the Sunna, it is advised to get married which is often referred to by the following hadīth:

It was narrated by Ibn Abbas that the Prophet* said: ‘Who is against my Sunna, does not belong to me. It is my Sunna to get married. The one who loves me will follow my Sunna.’

The control group completely agreed that marriage is an important and fundamental part of Muslim life. Four participants stated “marriage involves half of the deen”. *Yasin* believes that

“Marriage can only work if it is based on love and equality. Forced marriage is not permitted, as the act does not coincide with the appropriate intent and would be hypocritical. Sex in a forced marriage is fornication”.

Marriage is important, as it is the foundation upon which a family is grounded (*Sarah Bauer*). According to *Nina*, people should however not haste into a marriage,

“The illusion in my home country to have to be married by the mid-twenties cannot be understood in this day and age”.

Important aspects within a marriage included the desire for children, which according to most participants within the control group would have to occur within, not outside a

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283 The status of unmarried persons is often not seen as desirable but as an emergency situation in which the male sexual drive, if not satisfied, should be subdued. According to basic Islamic knowledge, marriage is there to prevent people from encountering sexual activities outside the realms of marriage but also in order to benefit society and the personal relationship of the two people involved.

284 In Chapter 8, the participants will discuss the issue of polygamy in the 21st century, and demonstrate their opinions on whether or not they would enter a polygamous marriage themselves. On a personal note, it seems however that among converted women, the topic of polygamy is nowadays more openly spoken about, and as thus more openly practised than a decade ago. It is only my impression I receive from conversations and internet research that particularly converted Muslim women openly search for a second wife for their husband, offering different reasons for their choice of search, e.g. they might not be able to bear children, or they are terminally ill.

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marriage. The acceptance of pre-marital relationships is present however family lifestyle seems to be preferred within the realms of marriage.

Marriage is still a significant part of life in Britain and Germany. Nevertheless, social norms have changed and now permit contemporary alternatives to the traditional marriage model, such as premarital relationships or ‘common-law’ marriages. People in either country can decide if they want to marry at all, or to accomplish this at a later stage in their lives. Due to more people having longer education and feeling at greater ease living a single life, the traditions of marriage have been affected and altered. Motives for marriage seem to carry different reasons, whether it commits the individual to regulations and responsibilities relevant to marriage, or includes institutional and relational aspects. Depending on the cultural and possibly religious background there will be differences in entering a marriage according to class, religion, education and other influencing factors, such as gender identity (Morgan, 1991:103).

Religious reasons include that marriage is considered the completion of half the faith, an act of religious worship” (Imaan-Yousef, AbdulSamed) and “prevents fornication” (Abdullah), as “sex is only halal within marriage” (Dawoud).

Layali believes that

“Marriage is important because contrary to the beliefs of other religions (...) sex is important as well, and you can’t have that without marriage. As human beings we are social animals and we all crave physical intimacy whether it’s a hug or else, so (...) marriage gives you a way to have all that in a permissible fashion.”

Layali’s statement is true with regard to all religions however it is significant to know that Muslims seem to feel unique in that regard. It points to the importance of sexual fulfilment as one of the main rights and duties within a marriage, an aspect highly valued in Islam, however to a lesser extent regarded in other religions. Other reasons included “the serious commitment to another person” (Zaynab-Ablah), and the “traditional approach perhaps in Britain but a very normal approach in Islam” (Raif).

286 Abdullah, Akeem, Azizah, Ruqayyah, Jameela, AbdulSamed, Nasir, Mounir, Nina, Safiyyah, Iman-2, Mariuma, Somayya.
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Several British participants felt that marriage was less important to them than it appeared to be for other participants within the study. Some participants had previous bad experiences with marriage. Michael’s first marriage ended in divorce. At the time of the interview he stated that his current (second) marriage “is probably doomed as well.” Nonetheless, he was adamant that he would “marry again in principle” since this would “encourage emotional support and to have children”.

Abraham Asad called himself a “romantic” and made the following statement:

“Sometimes I think in Islam (...) it can be very clinical, a bit like, well you know, you’ll learn from each other (...) and get married for that purpose,’ and it takes away the feeling of it.”

The majority of German participants felt that marriage seems to be the requirement for a religiously accepted sexuality. Thus, it seems that among German participants, a relationship that is founded on marriage is held with higher appreciation between the persons involved and simultaneously carries an obligation of one individual to the other.

Nasir felt that

“In a marriage one is forced to sacrifice oneself for each other, even to hold back one’s own egoistic motives, to respond positively to each other and also to accept advice from the partner.”

Kulthum agreed by stating that “marriage leads to a growing family. And family is the laying foundation of society.” Some participants differentiated between the Islamic marriage and the civil law marriage. Not all participants voted for an Islamic marriage but seemed to primarily concentrate on the civil law marriage. This was particularly

287 Azadeh thinks alike: “Marriage is not so important to me. What I mean is I don’t feel I need to be part of a couple to feel ‘worthy’ or a complete person. Marriage is the commitment I have made to my husband and that IS important to me but if I wasn’t married I wouldn’t feel I ‘needed’ to be (...) but that’s just me.”

288 Gharib: “The marriage as a social institution is so important to me since it provides security, teaches responsibility and creates accountability. Since marriage is a condition of accepted Islamic sexuality, I want no society without marriage.” Aziz: “Very important. A relationship between husband and wife should only take place on this basis. A relationship which is based on the marriage is more greatly appreciated and a commitment to the people involved.”
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noticed among some of the German female participants (Asiye, SteinbA, and Naima). Asiye, for example, only married in a civil ceremony. She did not marry islamically in a mosque since the former ceremony had priority for her and her husband. Several other participants were in a relationship with their partners at the time of conversion. With the conversion, the attitude towards marriage had changed and the wish was stronger to go ahead with the marriage. Some continued their premarital relationship with the wedding still to come, whereas others put their relationship on a ‘sexual hold’ until they had figured out whether or not to get married.289

Other participants emphasized the importance and contents of an Islamic marriage which carries advantages for some Muslim converts in comparison to a Christian wedding ceremony. Most German participants grew up with a nominal Christian background and the knowledge that marriage “was an institution of the church that incorporates a disagreeable rule”: If people enter a Christian marriage, it lasts until death parts the marital partners. If they divorce under civil law, they can marry under the civil law again, however, there is no divorce in Christianity, and thus people who married once in church cannot get married within it a second time. Susanne admits that this kind of difficulty with the institutional regulations of marriages exists but simultaneously expresses gratitude towards the open Islamic mindset and procedure:

“Under these premises, I would have never gotten involved in a marriage (...) the Islamic thought is actually that one takes it seriously but also that it doesn’t cause a serious problem if it doesn’t work out.”

In summary, most participants, however, particularly among the German participants, stressed the significance of having and raising children within the realms of marriage. Marriage for most German participants seems to involve building a family, whereas many British participants emphasized the significance of marriage in order to fulfil their sexual needs within the permitted religious boundaries. Whereas, some British participants felt that marriage was not meant to be the most significant influencing factor of their religious life, several German participants emphasized the

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289 SteinbA was in a relationship with a non-Muslim at the time of the interview. Wedding plans had been made, and there was also a discussion about possibly conducting an Islamic wedding ceremony. After differences between the families emerged, the intentions of marriage were terminated and the relationship dissolved.
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preference of an Islamic marriage in comparison to a Christian marriage. For most of the participants the status of marriage, whether in civil or religious terms, remains to be important, and increases as such particularly post-conversion:

“Nine months ago I would have said that marriage is old-fashioned. Today, since I have my ‘husband,’ I am looking forward to nothing more than getting married to him (...). I call him my husband but we are not married.” (Ghariba)

7.6. The choice of marital partner: Muslim or non-Muslim?

Most religions consider inter-faith couples and subsequent marriages as problematic to some degree. A distinction has to be made in terms of the spiritual view of the religious doctrine which derives from the religious law of the faith, and the practical impact it has on how societies individually deal with interfaith couples. According to Article 16 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, religious laws that restrict the choice of marital partner are in violation of the human right to freely choose one’s spouse. British and German civil law is in accordance with the UDHR, and thus there are no laws for or against inter-faith marriages.

There are, however, rules within individual religions that regulate how interfaith marriages are dealt with. Among some Christian denominations certain regulations have to be followed if a Christian wedding ceremony is to take place when both partners are Christians but belong to different denominations within the faith, e.g. Catholicism and Protestantism. The most significant crucial factor of inter-faith or inter-confessional marriages seems to concern the matter of which faith or denomination will be dominant when it comes to raising and educating the children.

In Islam, Shari’ah law treats men and women asymmetrically; according to traditional fiqh, Muslim men are permitted to marry Muslim, Christian and Jewish women, however, they are prohibited from marrying women who are atheists or follow

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290 The status of marriage differs in Christianity and in Islam; in Christianity marriage is understood as a sacrament between two people before God, whereas in Islam marriage is based on a contract between two people. This leads to a different understanding of marriage breakup: In Christianity, divorce is seldomly permitted, whereas Islam permits divorce, and the dissolution of marriage.
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polytheistic religions. Muslim women, on the other hand, are only permitted to marry Muslim men. If, however, a marriage exists with an unsuitable partner then according to traditional Islamic teachings, the marriage is seen as invalid and may, depending on the circumstances, be dissolved. Nonetheless, it should be noted that such restrictions depend a great deal on the religious understandings and interpretations of those countries with a Muslim-majority society where traditional Shari’ah law is practised, while countries that contain a non-Muslim majority society where Shari’ah law is not embedded in the national civil law, individual interpretations remain open, e.g. Turkey.

The Qur’an lays out clear guidelines for marriage which can be interpreted according to the following: it is generally advisable to look for a potential spouse who shares one’s religious outlook and practise. Although, compatibility should not be reduced to religious views alone because other components are equally essential as well, it seems to be recommended to marry within the same faith that one Muslim marries another Muslim, for example. Qur’an 2:221 seems to be clear on this recommendation:

“And do not marry women who ascribe divinity to aught beside God they attain to (true) belief: for any believing bondwoman (of God) is certainly better than a woman who ascribes divinity to aught beside God, even though she pleases you greatly (...).”

There are, as mentioned above, circumstances in which it is permissible for a Muslim to marry a non-Muslim, i.e. people among those referred to as “the people of the Book” who include members of all three monotheistic religions due to the understanding that they share similar religious views, and the traditional Islamic understanding that the offspring from these unions are raised as Muslims. Qur’an 5:5 reveals that such a combination is permissible as stated in the following:

“(...) and lawful to you are in wedlock, women from among those who believe (in this divine writ), and women from among those who have been vousafed revelation before your time (...).”
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The reason regarding the prohibition of Muslim women marrying outside their faith within the traditional Islamic fiqh seems to be the fear that a non-Muslim husband could influence his Muslim wife to go astray from the path of her faith.²⁹¹

What do born Muslims think about marrying a Muslim or non-Muslim partner? The control group’s majority stated the preference of a Muslim marital partner. Reasons involved leading a religious lifestyle which would only be enhanced by a marital partner practising the same faith. If children would be part of a marriage, it was important to most that these were brought up as Muslims. According to Sonja,

“My future partner would have to be Muslim insha Allah, as I would like to spend time with him in this life (dunya) and in the next (achira) inshaAllah. Life is easier, praying together, fasting together, and going to the mosque together. A non-Muslim partner and I would either not have these commonalities, or he would neglect them. It would upset me and I’d miss it.”

Three born Muslims did not feel the necessity of marrying a Muslim partner. Sarah Bauer is married to a Christian. Although it was important to her to marry a Muslim, she said,

“Falling in love with him happened and I did not think about it whether or not he was a Muslim. He still is a good person. The problem is that it is always articulated as if non-Muslim partners are disgusting. That’s not true. A human being is a human being. As long as he is good to me, it is his personality that comes first, and religion and attitude only second”.

Khaleel Mohammed claims several scholarly statements regarding this limitation as problematic since the Qur’an – in his view – was directed to men, not women. This relevant factor was customary at the time of its dissemination. According to his

²⁹¹ Traditional Muslim scholars often refer to Qur’an 2:221 when justifying this prohibition. According to the majority of traditional Muslim scholars, the Muslim man seems to be less likely to be influenced in his believing views and practices than a Muslim woman who on the contrary apparently is more easily influenced and lead astray. Hence, they also refer to the Qur’anic permission for Muslim men to marry women outside their faith which presents the most distinct proof for them. Nonetheless, it is essential to note that a Muslim man who marries either a Christian or Jewish woman, must respect his wife’s religious belief and allow her to practise her faith. She must neither be prevented from performing her religious duties nor from reading the religious scriptures. (Saeed, 2004).
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reasoning, this derives from the Qur’an’s directly addressing the men, e.g. “when you intend to divorce women (...)” or “it is lawful for you to go in unto your wives during the night preceding the fast (...)” (Mohammed, 2006). These are only two examples Mohammed uses in order to explain that the addressing of men has to be interpreted in the context of the tribal organized lifestyle of that given time period, when women became subordinate to men after they married. According to this view, Muslim women today have more equal standing than they did when the Qur’an was revealed. Traditional scholars are unlikely to agree with this relativist interpretation of the Qur’an even though progressive scholars might agree that the Qur’an may be predominantly addressing men. The normative view is that the Qur’an addresses both men and women.

There is a growing number of progressive Muslims who are sympathetic to or accepting of marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men, who believe that the Qur’an is to be interpreted not only literally but also with a more contemporary approach. Many understand that the Qur’an does not accuse the non-Muslim for being a Christian or a Jew but differentiates between those who believe in Jesus as being the son of God or a prophet of God. This relates to the distinction between kufr and shirk, significant for Muslim women who want to marry a non-Muslim man. There is another verse in the Qur’an that explains how Christians and Jews who accomplish good deeds have the right to enter paradise (Qur’an 2:111-112). Therefore, Mohammed emphasizes that Christianity and Judaism applies equally to men and women but asks how the Qur’an can permit a marriage with a Christian woman but not with a Christian man. KM argues that inter-faith marriage as such can take place if neither of the spouses will become forced to adopt the other partner’s faith (Mohammed, 2006).

The concern of some Muslim scholars is that inter-faith couples, by the nature of their relationship, often do not practise a 'textbook' version of their religion. Instead they choose to take a little from the one faith and a little from the other. A very significant piece of advice can be given to inter-faith couples is that if they are considering marriage, open communication can avoid many problems. In comparison to inter-confessional marriages, there will be more challenges across religious boundaries in an inter-faith marriage to find common beliefs that go beyond moral values. In this
context, this study’s participants were asked whom they would prefer as a spouse: a Muslim or a non-Muslim?

Seven British male participants stated that their marital partner would not have to be a Muslim. However, most of those who made this statement added that they have a preference for a woman adhering to Islam. Some mentioned that their partner could be a “righteous Jew or Christian,” (Abdullah) however, Michael would accept:

“A Christian or member of the Church of England who never practised the religion and would allow him to raise his children as Muslims.”

Due to previous negative experiences with born Muslim women, Michael's ideal marital partner would, however, have to be “a theologically committed, socially liberal convert to Islam.” Abraham Asad would prefer to share a marital life with a woman who has similar beliefs and with whom he can share a common ground. Nonetheless, he clearly stated that “she would not have to be a Muslim:

“If I met someone, I would meet them for who they are and not because they are Muslim or not. It would be more about the person.”

Although, to several participants sharing the same religion was not of the utmost significance, it was emphasized that similar interests and beliefs had to exist in order for them to be a compatible match. For most participants, the smallest common denominator had to be that their marital partner should “at least believe in God.” None of the participants mentioned that their marital partner could be an atheist or agnostic.

Four British male participants stated that they would only marry a Muslim woman. Michael and Abdul-Mannan specified their choice in preferring to marry a Muslim convert rather than a born Muslim woman. The primary reason for this choice seemed to be the personal desire for their children deriving from such a union to

292 Michael also stated that he would not go as far as marrying someone “who actively believed in another religion, e.g. a born-again Christian”.

293 Abdul-Mannan: “Yes, it would have to be a Muslim, but looking back at things, I would prefer a convert.”
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be brought up as Muslims (Idris).\textsuperscript{294} According to Akeem, “marriage needs a shared objective in life: “A Muslim acquaintance of mine married a Christian lady and by his own admissions he said that it is a fitnah”. Although he did not go into further detail, his impression of inter-faith marriages suggests that marrying outside the faith could cause disruption and would not follow a shared goal.

Two British female participants stated that their marital partner would not have to be a Muslim. Azadeh disagrees with the norm that “a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man”:

“This is not in the Qur’an. What is in the Qur’an is that one must marry a believer which includes Christians and Jews. This applies to both men and women not just men.”\textsuperscript{295}

Zaynab, on the other hand, limits this choice in that she "technically would not mind marrying a non-Muslim man” but “practically” prefers a Muslim man:

“Technically, I would not have a problem in marrying someone like that [i.e. a staunch atheist] but I don’t think it would work when we have children. How would we bring them up? It would just be too much like a fight, like a competition. One of them wants to be a Muslim, 1-0 for me! He is going to be an atheist, 1-0 for him (...).”

The remaining British female participants preferred the option of marrying a Muslim man. Their choice seems to reflect the wish for continuous religious practise, not only to support but also to avoid intercultural or inter-faith conflicts. According to Souhayla,

\textsuperscript{294} Idris: “To bring up children as Muslims and live as good, practising Muslims – as opposed to effectively private practice – needs two people working together.” Anwaar also feels passionate about marrying a Muslim woman: “I’d want someone that I could push to be the best they can and they can push me to the best I can islamically, you know, and we can learn from each other (...) it comes down to the children. You’d want good Muslim children, so you want the mother to be a teacher (...) you wouldn’t want them teaching two different religions (...) otherwise you’re just going to confuse the child.”

\textsuperscript{295} The claim that children are the reason why this is not being applied to women since a child takes the father’s faith, seems to be disagreeable to Azadeh: “For one point, what if there can be no children for whatever reason?”
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“There is less explanation needed as to why you hold firm in belief about certain issues. (...) Islam provides guidance on how to live together and your roles; it gives something to refer to if problems arise and can unite you. Being able to pray together is a way to ease tension.”

Khadija-Maryam stated she would not want anyone to interfere with her beliefs, and prefers a Muslim man to support her. Imaan-Yousef goes a step further, explaining that she “would not feel protected in a marriage with a non-Muslim man”:

“Although we can have nuptials I would still be afraid that a non-Muslim husband would not take it seriously (...) in a Muslim marriage the contract is very important (...) I would feel safer and more protected marrying a Muslim because of the contract.”

Nine German male participants stated that their marital partner would not have to be a Muslim. Just as their British male counterparts, most of those stating the above also mentioned the necessity for the woman to “at least be a believer in God” or a member of one of the monotheistic religions (Mounir, Aziz, and Abdulsamed). Amro married a Christian woman and says his children are brought up with both religions, e.g. Islam and Christianity. Moreover, he believes, that

“It is wrong to educate a child into one particular direction. A child should be brought up to be able to judge himself, to find out who he/ she is. My children are also educated about what Buddhism is. I would never say to my child ‘You are my son and you will become Muslim.’ I find that silly.”

AbdulSamed believes that although love and affection is part of marriage, “romantic love has little commonality with adherence to religious regulations.” He adds:

“I will only invest my emotions into a Muslim woman, or (...) when I can see that she could really become a Muslim.”

296 Aziz, married to a Christian woman, believes that his choice of marital partner did not primarily depend on religious attitudes, nonetheless, his ‘condition’ was that his wife had to be either a Christian, Jew, or “at least believe in the one God.”
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Similar to AbdulSamed, other German male participants pronounced the significance of wanting to share prayers with their wife and to bring up children as Muslims. The issue of children’s religious upbringing, in particular seemed to be of most significant value to this study’s participants. Khalid felt strongly about marrying an Arab Muslim woman rather than a Muslim convert due to the reason that

“Arab societies seem to accept converts more easily than other Muslim societies (...) and I want my children to have an Islamic upbringing, and learn about German and Arab culture.”

Amina also emphasized that her children should be raised as born Muslims, and "this is not possible if they have two religions", thus feeling strongly about marrying a Muslim man, in order to fulfil the conditions for ‘appropriate upbringing’. Nine German female participants stated that their marital partner would not have to be Muslim. There are, however, essential conditions a potential non-Muslim marital partner would have to meet, such as a) to believe in the One God, b) to believe that Muhammad* is a prophet, and c) not to believe in Jesus as the son of God. SteinbA’s choice of a potential marital partner does not depend on the man’s religious affiliation; nonetheless, she deeply feels that her partner has to believe in God:

“Whether he prays or actively practises Islam, it is something private the individual has to decide for himself. He just has to accept my faith and support me.”

Natascha also supports the idea of avoiding the additional intercultural conflict, however described her conditions in greater detail if she were hypothetically to marry a non-Muslim man:

“I am not interested in long arguments, why I do this or that. I would need a man, if he was no Muslim who could accept without the thought that if I come home one day and decide from now on to wear the headscarf that he would not get into

297 Asiye agrees with Amina, that if she were to divorce her Muslim husband, and look for a new partner, she would concentrate on choosing a Muslim man: “Only a Muslim can understand why a Muslim lives and practises his faith as he does.”
an argument with me. I doubt very much that there are men like that (...) I haven’t
met one but that would be one of my conditions.”

Although not a requirement for everyone, the trend is towards a preference to
have a Muslim partner. As such, the remaining 30 German female participants strongly
prefer a Muslim man as a desired spouse. Some claimed that this condition is “non-
negotiable” (Mahubah, Imane, Touareg1801, Nina, and Jenna). Twelve of them
reacted in diverse ways but still shared the same perception that a Muslim woman is not
permitted to marry a non-Muslim man, while referring to the Qur’an and Sunna as
religious sources.

Naima, on the other hand, believes that neither Muslim men nor women should marry
outside their faith. The arguments pro inter-faith marriages do not convince her,

“It only works out, if one of the partners practises the faith minimally or not at all.
There will be difficulties in the long run if a strongly believing Christian or Jew
enters a marriage with a practising Muslim. The reason goes back to the issue of
how children in such unions can be raised without one faith being neglected in
favour of the other.”

Mahubah stated that she could not “even imagine being married to a non-Muslim”:

“It just doesn’t fit into my idea of a married Muslim woman. The thought of being
married to a non-Muslim, it would disgust me. It’s just not possible.”

Safiyyah on the other hand argues her preference of a Muslim husband by referring to
what is mentioned in the Qur’an:

298 Natascha also stated that she would explain what her daily religious routines would involve, and if a family was to be
established, then it would have to be discussed how children were to be raised. Mariuma also offered an interesting definition: “He
would at least have to be a Muslim in the definition I have given earlier: someone who submits to God’s will. That would have to be
the minimum I’d expect. If he additionally was Muslim who would know all rituals, accept and possibly practise them as best as he
can, then this would certainly be a bonus.” She would prefer to choose a “Muslim-Muslim rather than a Christian-Muslim or
Buddhist-Muslim” since it eases the relationship and understanding, particularly in regards to religious matters and the raising of
children. The most important condition if the choice of marrying a non-Muslim partner becomes reality is the freedom for the
Muslim wife to practise her faith without inhibitions, though if necessary with certain compromises. Furthermore, all participants
stated that a non-Muslim partner would have to believe in God or at least be spiritually inclined.
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“Marriage is like an advisory body. The Qur’an states that the man is presiding over the woman, but it’s meant in the sense of caring, not that he declares her to be immature.”

Apart from the – for many participants binding – requirement that a Muslim woman is only permitted to marry a Muslim man, it seems as if most of the female participants cannot imagine a long-term emotional, deep and intimate relationship with a non-Muslim man. Nonetheless, there are several exceptions among the female participants if the non-Muslim man fulfils certain criteria that are of great significant value to the participant. The preference for entering a marriage with a Muslim man seems to provide a clear advantage for subsequently being able to practise the faith, and to ensure the Islamic upbringing of children. Only a small minority agrees that a marriage to a non-Muslim can work out if certain conditions are met, such as the free exercise of the faith, observance of religious holidays, and finding a compromise in the religious upbringing of the children.

Most female participants feel that inter-faith couples have too little shared interests and beliefs. Liyana expressed mental restrictions about their everyday self-imposed religious duties: “I would always have to think about whether the man can really understand, respect and support my self-imposed duties (prayer, fasting, clothing, etc.).” Liyana makes an exception when it comes to the celebration of Christmas, though not without a mental restriction: “I cannot imagine a devout Muslim who marries a devout Christian to join in the celebrations (...) but as I said before (...) this may be as long as no children are involved (...).”

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Chapter 8 Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues

8.1. Introduction

There are several topics in every culture which people are uncomfortable discussing, particularly when their privacy may be interrupted, disturbed or not respected. Each culture has individual social, religious and political influences which in turn shape the individual’s habitat (Ford, 1967). Consequently, certain topics may seem too sensitive or too intimate to be publicly discussed. This chapter constructs a dialogue with the participants regarding several subtopics within the subject area of sexuality, while exploring their attitudes. It takes a sensitive but in some respects also desensitizing approach of certain taboo subjects within the area of sexuality. The themes raised include participants’ diverse thoughts on male circumcision, the values associated with virginity, attitudes towards masturbation, reflections on polygamy, and reactions to homosexuality. These topics will be examined in relation to the participants’ conversion process. All of these subtopics may be regarded as being intensely private matters which should not be discussed publicly. This means that interviewees have been treated with respect at all times and their willingness to discuss sometimes difficult topics was a great challenge. Nonetheless, further dialogue and analysis of these areas, as well as the values and traditions associated with them were encouraged.

Male circumcision remains a strong tradition among Muslims; however, attitudes are changing since nowadays several male converts to Islam do not feel obligated to have the circumcision carried out - either on themselves or their children. Virginity as a particular status symbol within Muslim communities is still of particular significance. Yet, the reasons for this happening have changed over time. Whereas, it is still regarded as vital that females should remain a virgin until marriage in order to have absolute knowledge of who the father is, and to follow the rule of chastity until marriage. Masturbation is a particularly sensitive and private topic in almost all societies, and this difficulty is not limited to the context of Islam. There are, however, notable changes in how converts thought about masturbation prior to conversion in comparison with what they think after conversion. Polygamy has become a heated subject of discussion, albeit not only among Muslims but also non-Muslims. It is still present today, although decreasingly practised. It is rarely found within non-Muslim cultures, however in some Christianity-influenced Sub-Saharan societies it remains to
Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues

be the norm, as some independent churches may refer to the Old Testament for its valid practice. The participants’ attitudes differed from saying that it was acceptable in certain conditions to complete disagreement with no exceptions whatsoever. Last but not least, the issue of homosexuality will be touched on. Here, the chapter offers insight into the participants’ views of homosexuality and homosexuals within British and German society.

Attitudes among the converts towards social and religious sensitive subjects are characteristically diverse: they are in some ways traditional and conservative and in others open and fairly liberal. The discussed areas involve different views and suggest tendencies to find ways to accommodate them according to current individual thinking, interpretation and practice. Hence, the results that might have been generally expected were not found. Moreover, the results give an idea of the current discourse of Muslim converts’ thought and practice which reflect how diverse they are. The participants’ thinking is not only subject to orthodox Islamic theology but is also a progressive, at times even a liberal mode of Muslim thought. Huntington argued that the central axis of conflict in the 21st century would be between cultures and civilisations (Huntington, 1996). The most well-known example referring back to his thesis is the conflict between the United States and Islamism. It could therefore be suggested that similar attitudes are found between Southern and Northern hemisphere Christians, since although sharing religious views, the basis of civilisation in each society may be differing greatly from one another.

All the discussed topics within this chapter have certain sensitivity to them in their own right. They have not only been subjects of debate within the different religious discourses but also within social, cultural and national contexts. None of them have been limited to religious discussion or arguments, nor limited to discussions within the Islamic discourse. All of these issues have frequented the moral and social discourses of society, whereby society has developed itself in different directions due to its own dynamics. It should not be ignored that there are fundamental differences in the British and German attitudes towards certain taboo subjects, and that these differences are revealed in several instances throughout the study.
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8.2. Male circumcision: An Islamic obligation or a cultural-religious tradition?

The historical development of circumcision as a custom can be traced back to the Neolithic period. Proof of early male circumcision was found in the discovery of a male body from the Bronze and Iron Age in North-western Germany (Schneider, 2008:13). Furthermore, there is proof of circumcision in Upper Egypt, Nubia and Northern Syria, dating back to the early 3rd Millennium BC (Blaschke 1998:6). The advanced age of circumcision speaks for itself, since according to the Bible, its performance was first conducted with a pebble which was already in the shape of a stone knife (Joshua 5:3) Circumcision was originally an apotropaic300 rite which was performed when a man reached sexual maturity (Fleishmann, 2001). Egyptians and Phoenicians were known for this rite of initiating sexual maturity (Schneider, 2008:14). Circumcision was a distinctive feature of the Jews, and thus later in times of crisis it became a covenant of trust with God and the religious law.

Circumcision is practised in various forms and to various degrees nearly everywhere worldwide, however it is primarily limited to Jews and Muslims for religious reasons, whereas it is primarily performed for health reasons in the USA and Canada. Circumcision is also prevalent in some parts of Africa, but its practice is really found within Asian and South American societies. For example, circumcision in Judaism is perceived as a key character of Jewish identity and spirituality. Its significance is revealed in the fact that Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Ruler of the Seleucid Empire 175-164 B.C.) forbade the practice with the intention of destroying traditional Judaism. The meaning of circumcision was originally seen as a bond between God and the believer.

In early Judaism, circumcision served as a differentiation from unbelievers, and was therefore an important religious characteristic. Orthodox Judaism refers to circumcision as a religious duty, whereas if a man embraces Judaism today, only a bath is necessary – presumably this may be less of a duty among moderate Jews since very Orthodox Judaism likes to make it as hard as possible for converts (Decision of the Central Conference of American Rabbis 1892 in New York). The former president of

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300 Apotropaic – deflecting misfortune, keeping away evil.
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the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Paul Spiegel, however considers circumcision to be necessary to establish a connection with God (Spiegel, 2005).

Circumcision in Christianity is not as uncommon as perhaps currently assumed. In the Bible it is mainly described as a tradition inherited from Judaism, though it is not deemed essential. Reference to circumcision can be found in the Bible and in the letters of Paul, indicating that Christ seems to have been circumcised himself (NT of the Bible, The Letter of St. Paul to the Galatians, Conclusion). In general, however, it is stated that neither retaining the foreskin nor circumcision is of crucial value.

In addition to being almost universally recognised and practised as a medical treatment for phimosis, there seems to be no place without some group practising religious circumcision – whether the practice is propagated by the state or performed (perhaps illegally) by specific subgroups. Circumcision traditions or practices all have different origins, attitudes and justifications, but often distinctions between them can be difficult to establish. Schneider articulates it is the unanimous opinion that there are different reasons in terms of the circumcision practices which cannot always be clearly distinguished from each other (Schneider, 2008:11-12). Reasons can be based on four factors: religion, medicine, social issues and sexuality.

If circumcision is performed for medical reasons it is further necessary to distinguish between medical treatments and preventive measures. A medical intervention can be in response to the existence of a phimosis or permanent urinary tract infection. A preventive measure may involve circumcision to avoid penile cancer in men and cervical cancer in women (Pschyrembel, 2007:1719). Circumcision as a medical treatment has not constituted a juristic problem in Britain or in Germany (Schneider, 2008:10). In Germany, it is even paid for by the individual’s health insurance provider.301 After a German District Court Judge partially banned paediatric circumcisions in Germany in July 2012 — a young Muslim boy was in severe pain after a failed botched circumcision - Muslims, Jews, Christians, religious rights advocates, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel erupted in condemnation.

301 Sozialgesetzbuch (SGB) Fünftes Buch (V) Gesetzliche Krankenversicherung (Code of Social Law, Book V, statutory health insurance) § 27 SGB V (not available in English).
Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues

Conternation and apologies respectively followed. The circumcision debate is ongoing in Germany however as things stand an ethics committee has permitted circumcisions under the condition that it is carried out under medical supervision, including anaesthesia (Kiesel, 2012).

According to the born Muslim control group, it seems as if circumcision plays a major role within the Muslim community. It is seen as a religious obligation which has to be fulfilled. There are different opinions as to how circumcision is to be understood and to what reason the act should be carried out. 40% (5) of born Muslims stated that circumcision is a religious ritual whereas 25% (3) understand circumcision to be a hygienic precautionary measure rather than a religious obligation. 25% (3) withheld their opinion, and one female participant believes circumcision not to be an obligation, stating:

“I can accept it, when a Muslim family decides not to have their son circumcised. I can also accept the decision when a Muslim family decides to have their son circumcised. There are also families that say they will wait until the child can decide for himself whether or not he wants to be circumcised, thus the child decides, not the parents.” (Elif Er)

Circumcision is not mentioned in the Qur’an, but is found in the Sunna. It could therefore be suggested that circumcision is more a practice of Muslims, rather than a practice of Islam. Some Muslim scholars however refer to the Qur’an, stating that “to follow Abraham’s path” can be related to the duty of male circumcision:

“And lastly, We have inspired thee (Oh Muhammad*, with this message) “Follow the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false, and was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God.” (Qur’an 16:123)

Whether or not male circumcision is a religious duty for Muslims is differently interpreted by the four existing Sunni fiqh schools. Thus, two – Hanafī and Maliki – agree that circumcision is a duty, omission of which would be seen as “improper”, whereas the other two – Shafī’i and Hanbali – recommend circumcision as an “honourable” action (Elyas, 2012).
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Several ahādīth from the Sunna suggest that there is a strong recommendation, if not duty, regarding circumcision, which in turn is understood as following prophetic tradition. The following hadīth can be seen as one of the most influential of ahādīth relating to circumcision:

The Prophet Muhammad* said: “Five are the acts quite akin to fitrah: Circumcision, clipping or shaving the pubic hair, cutting the nails, plucking or shaving the hair under the armpits and clipping (or shaving) the moustache.”

There are more persistent reasons for circumcising young boys or male babies, such as the belief that Muhammad* was apparently born circumcised, therefore every male must also be circumcised. Opponents to circumcision easily refute this with the following reason: if Muhammad* had been born without a foreskin, he was not circumcised, and as thus it should be as it was with him. There are further Muslim counter-arguments which are based on religious sources. Some believe that God neither mutilates nor commands or permits circumcision. One argument taken from the Qur’an is that modification of the creation is prohibited. Opponents of circumcision argue with Qur’anic verses, such as the following to emphasize that a man of God has been created by Him in his best form: “Verily, We create man in the best conformation” (Qur’an 96:4).

Although male circumcision is universal among Muslims and seems to be regarded as a duty rather than a strong recommendation that needs to be fulfilled, there are ongoing scholarly debates as to whether it is theologically correct to circumcise a child or oneself when converting to Islam at an adult age. Some male Muslim converts view the male circumcision as an initiation rite to Islam, however, it has to be repeated that circumcision is merely recommended but not obligatory for male Muslim converts. Whether or not it is obligatory for born male Muslims is open to interpretation since differences clearly exist as mentioned above. Similarities appear between Köse’s study Conversion to Islam, in which 80% of his participants were uncircumcised at the time of conversion, and half of his sample decided to remain uncircumcised, and this study

302 Ḥadīth Sahih Bukhary No. 1216, narrated by Abu Hureira.
303 Further relevant Qur’anic verses include 3:191, 25:2, 40:64, and 64:3.
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where also 80% of all male participants stated that they were not circumcised (Köse, 1996:131) at the time of conversion. According to Eurocirc, a pro-circumcision organisation based in Germany, approximately 15% of males in Germany are circumcised. Tendencies have however been rising within the last decade (Tholl, 2007). The 2000 British National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyle offers the following statistics on circumcised British males: 16% between 16 and 44 years old (Dave et al., 2003).

The British male participants demonstrated a more reserved attitude towards the topic of circumcision and its physical facts than their German counterpart. Although the majority of the British male participants felt male circumcision to be an important procedure, it was not seen as an absolute obligation. Many male participants agreed that circumcision for a Muslim convert could be understood as “highly recommendable” and “very important” (Abdullah, Abdul-Mannan, Idris, and Dawoud), yet “not compulsory” but “optional” (Gibril, Abraham Asad). Abraham Asad would disagree on the issue of hygiene and cleanliness. He believes that male circumcision is not essential, placing the significance of male circumcision as highly valued in the sense of being an Islamic tradition however not seeing any compulsion in its fulfilment:

“There are traditions that say that of the companions of the Prophet, one in particular, who used to wash himself after using the bathroom, and that circumcision is not necessary but because of his actions (the cleaning), it secured him a place in paradise (…) so it does not take much to cleanse oneself with water (…) I quite like the idea of remaining uncircumcised (…) you have got some protection there if you need it. If it weren’t there, I’d probably argue against it being more hygienic, too (…) I have spoken with my fiancée about it, and she is not adamant about it (…) it makes no difference, you know, I wouldn’t bother.”

Michael stated that he was going to get himself circumcised:

“It is desirable, I am getting round to have this done to myself after being too squeamish about it for years.”

304 In contrast, it was important for Michael to have his sons circumcised at a young age: “My sons were both circumcised when about one week old.”
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According to Abdullah,

“Circumcision helps promote cleanliness, and in Islam cleanliness is extremely important.”

Idris on the other hand feels that if male converts did not have themselves circumcised, he would not regard it as an “immediate priority:

“I would not question anyone’s faith who hadn’t been circumcised.”

Moreover, 46% (6) of German male participants stated that they had been circumcised at the time of their conversion. In comparison to their British counterpart, the German male participants agreed that circumcision seems to not be obligatory but an optional tradition, however most of them seemed to prefer the circumcision to be carried out. Primary reasons included hygiene and cleanliness, fulfilling a religious tradition but also for aesthetic purposes (Ibrahim). There seems to be uncertainty about the necessity of circumcision, such as Mikail who proclaimed that his ex-wife had their son circumcised without his knowledge, and as a result he could not understand the reason for a procedure on a small child. It could be suggested that male Muslim converts are challenged to make an adequate decision which in turn is compatible with their individual but also scholarly thought.

Gharib also felt torn:

“Due to differing opinions as to whether or not it is a duty, I have not done it yet (...).”

305 Raif’s understanding is similar to Idris: “It is not an entire necessity (...) particularly in this day and age. I’m not from a traditional Muslim society, so maybe my outlook is slightly different but I don’t see it as a big issue.” When I asked him whether he would have his son circumcised he said: “I don’t think so. I don’t think it is important to me as if I was from a traditional Islamic society (...) I don’t think it says in the Qur’an you absolutely have to do that. I can’t figure out the importance (...) other than from a historic or traditional perspective (...) but for now (...) from what I understand, I don’t think it’s crucial.” Accordingly, he agreed that circumcision seems to be a touchy subject in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

306 The male participants were questioned as to whether they would have their sons (if they had any) circumcised. The majority of German male participants stated that they would have their sons circumcised. Most male participants did not have children at the time of the research; hence some stated that they had not thought about the circumcision of potential children.
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**Amro** in particular seemed to be critical about the status of circumcision among Muslims:

“It is completely irrelevant for me. I would probably even go as far to say that circumcision is indirectly contrary to the Qur’an. The Qur’an (96:4) says that man is perfectly created...why should I cut anything off?”

Although male circumcision may only be a significant issue for male converts, the female participants were also questioned on their attitudes towards male circumcision, as to whether or not they would have male offspring undergo the procedure. It seems as if the cohort of Muslim converts is seeing Islam as a revelatory religion, and circumcision is understood to be a continuation of Abrahamic monotheism. Regarding not only aspects from the Sunna, but also rules from the holy scriptures of Judaism and Christianity, it seems as if this obligation has to be obeyed rather than rationally understood, discussed or even negotiated.

42% (4) of the British female participants seemed to place more emphasis on the religious than the hygienic aspects, unlike their British male counterparts who rather placed the significance on the hygienic than the religious implications of circumcision. **Iman** stated that she “would expect a man to be circumcised by default”, whereas **Jameela** restricts this expectation only to born male Muslims:

“If I met a Muslim convert, I would not expect him to get himself circumcised. I think it would have to be completely down to him. I would not want to judge anyone on that, or make a decision for anyone...because I think that’s quite a personal thing/ quite a personal choice to make.”

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307 **Amro**’s experiences with circumcision include conversations in which he was told that if a Muslim was not circumcised, he would not be a Muslim. He disagrees with the curiosity of people who ask others about their intimate body parts: “It is personal, and what is gained from it?!” **Amro** would not have his son circumcised: “Circumcision is nothing serious, however he has to decide for himself, when he has attained the age of religious maturity. I think you should not force anyone into something that you are not entirely convinced of yourself.” **Khalid**, on the other hand, believes that his own circumcision will only become important, when he is married. On the question of whether he would have a son circumcised, he answered: “It will be his decision, and I don’t want to intrude. I don’t want his life to be traumatised through that. I believe it is an obligation, it should be done, but he has to decide himself.”

308 **Souhayla**, on the other hand, mentioned that although her husband is circumcised and if they were to “be blessed with children” their son would be circumcised. At the same time, she made it clear that it was not essential to her whether the son underwent the procedure or not. Yet, she did not talk about her reason for having her son circumcised.
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*Layali* also believes that male circumcision is also an advantage for the woman with whom the circumcised man has sexual intercourse:

> “In terms of cervical cancer, there is greater prevention if the man is circumcised. Also…it apparently makes a difference in sensation as well. I think for hygiene and apparently sensation as well…so there you go: positives for circumcision.”

27.5% (11) of the German female participants stated that male circumcision is not important to them. Several argued that circumcision had been used in early Islam for hygienic reasons which, according to *SteinbA*, seemed then “appropriate considering the standards of cleanliness in comparison to today”.

*Natascha* believes that

> “It has to be the man’s decision whether or not he wants to be circumcised”: “I am neither for or against it, as it is something too personal.”*309*

The message that *Mariuma* brought across in her interview is particularly remarkable:

> “I know that there is a commandment in Islam that men should be circumcised. It is most definitely in the Bible, in the Old Testament. But as a midwife, I also have medical issues with circumcision.”*310*

*Mariuma* obviously questions whether male circumcision can have a solid religious foundation or whether it is only a tradition. At the time of the interview, she was unsure as to whether she would have her child circumcised.

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*309 Natascha* mentioned that she and her husband had several discussions since “it was clear to him that circumcision is obligatory” but although she was initially neutral on the procedure of circumcision she was completely against the idea of her son (if she had one) being circumcised against his will which resulted in agreement that it would be the son’s decision whether or not to be circumcised.

*310 Mariuma* watched a documentary on male circumcision which ended with a plea against circumcision on boys. “Those who made the movie were of the opinion that it would not be healthy for a young child’s genitals to be snipped off and simultaneously be able to build a healthy confidence within his immediate environment. After this film I had many questions. Many things suddenly seemed contradictory to me: On the one hand there was the hādīth that women are not allowed to pluck their eyebrows. And then on the other hand it should never be justified to destroy and change God’s creation...shouldn’t we be satisfied with what we have got? The question arises: Why is this issue differently treated with regards to the penis of a boy?”
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Two-thirds of German female participants stated the significance of circumcision as a religious practise, with hygiene being the most mentioned reason. Although stated to a lesser extent, religious reasons were not overlooked since several German female participants claimed circumcision to be a religious tradition which is originally based on the Old Testament. According to many Muslims, this procedure has been incorporated into the Sunna as a religious tradition, and has become a strong recommendation to be followed.

8.3. Virginity: Important for both sexes?

Virginity, in Arabic ‘uqdat al-nikah, is known as the “knot of sexual intercourse”, or “Ring of Love” (Chebel, 1997:217). According to Islamic teachings, Aisha, the youngest wife of the Prophet Muhammad*, and the only one of nine women who entered into marriage with the Prophet as a virgin said to him:

“...I said, ‘Messenger of Allah, if you were to alight in a valley that had a tree which had been eaten from and a tree which had not been eaten from, on which one of them would you graze your camel?’ He replied, ‘The one which had not been grazed on before.’”311

Some Islamic teachings have dogmatised the premarital physical integrity of a woman. Ahādīth are often used to justify certain regulations and moral behaviours. The following hādīth – often read quoted by al-Ġazālī (1058-1111) and Ibn ʿArabī (1165-1240) - is also often referred to explain the possible necessity of a (female) virgin, although it should be noted that this quote can be more interpreted regarding sexual energy levels rather than virginity itself:

“Jabir b. 'Abdullah who wanted to marry an older woman who has been married once before was asked by the Prophet (pbuh): 'Why did you not marry a young girl, so that you might sport with her and she might sport with you?''”312

311 Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Hādīth No. 4789.
312 Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Hādīth No. 3459.
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The concept of virginity is applied on three levels: physical, abstract, and allegorical. The physical level concerns the virginity of a woman who has not had sexual contact and has kept her hymen. The abstract level considers the virginity of a woman’s chastity, leading a life of solitude and retreat. The third, much less frequently used allegorical level refers to the secretive virginity of the houri of Paradise who after each sexual contact will be a virgin again. The physical and abstract level of virginity can be found in the Qur’an, when angels proclaim to Maryam, the mother of Isa, the good news:

“She said: ‘How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?
– for never have I been a loose woman!’” (Qur’an 19:20)

Although premarital sexual contact is not permitted by either gender, less focus is emphasized on the sexual behaviour of men than women. This may be referred to the status of virginity that has always been a primary focus on the female rather than the male since the attention is given to the intactness of the hymen. The three above mentioned levels, however, can equally be applied to the male gender as well since Islamic teachings provide the same rights as duties to men to remain ‘untouched’ prior to marriage as accorded to women. The social double-standards, particularly within religious communities, in the case of virginity mean that the consequences – if the loss of virginity or possible sexual promiscuity becomes known - for women are worse than for men even when in legal terms the issues are the same. The value of virginity in different societies is not always exposed to the same standard, regulations, and if not taken care of, at worst case punished.

The control group’s majority agreed that virginity is in so far important, only when both enter their (first) marriage. It is preferred that the bride and groom are sexually inexperienced to enjoy their marital intimacy without possible negative precepts such as jealousy or other emotional irritations. According to Yasin, there are double moral standards “especially among men. They claim sexual privileges for themselves which they forbid women who have to remain virgin until they get married.” Diana feels virginity to be an obligation:
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“It is in the Qur’an and in the Sunna. Why it should be adhered to? Allah commands it. More knowledge on this is not needed. Nonetheless it is important: Only a virgin is permitted to ask for a virgin in marriage. Someone who is no longer a virgin is not permitted to ask for an untouched marital candidate.”

The participants felt that their situation seems to be easier than for those living in more rigid traditional Muslim societies where communal life is already gender-segregated in many areas. According to some, such separation only fosters the idea of looking for sexual experiences rather than keeping one’s virginity despite the consequences, if found out being perceived as much worse than in a non-Muslim society. Nowadays, knowledge about sexual practices is much broader among young Muslims: knowledge about sex is not limited to the teachings of the family since most young people will have access to other sources of information, such as the media and friends. Furthermore, sex education is provided in most schools within European society, mostly from the age of eleven or twelve. Hence, the participants have had accessed learning possibilities which is generally not provided for in majority Muslim societies. Although, virginity still seems to be a significant part of Muslim life, habits and opinions, and the perceptions regarding virginity also among Muslim converts have changed.

Interpretations and thoughts on the subject of virginity have already changed within Islamic theology. The Grand Mufti of Egypt, Ali Goma’a justified a fatwā by his colleague Soad Saleh in 2006, stating that “a surgical reconstruction of the female hymen, if her innocence has been lost prior to marriage is religiously permitted.” He further stated that “Muslim women have no obligation to prove their virginity to prospective husbands.” Furthermore, Saleh – making the claim for female reconstruction being permissible - was backed up by another Muslim scholar of the Al-Azhar, Sheikh Khaled El Gindy who proclaimed that:

313 Elif Er also stated that it was important to her that when she wanted to get married, she refused men who had already been sexually active: It was very important to me that him and I were virgins”.
314 Penalties for illicit sexual intercourse in traditional Muslim societies can range from social ostracism to corporal punishment. See Appendix IV: Punishment as a deterrent to premarital sexuality.
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“Islam never differentiates between men and women, so it is not rational for us to think that God has placed a sign to indicate the virginity of women without having a similar sign to indicate the virginity of men. Every man who was worried about the innocence of his wife should first bring proof of his own virginity.” (Islam Pedia Online 316)

Individual Muslim converts have changed their ideas on sexual morality due to and since their conversion. Nonetheless, it also seems that Muslim converts’ opinions are generally following different trends from those born and raised within Islam. In this section the participants were asked how significant the status of virginity meant to them. Most participants mentioned that at the time of their conversion they were no longer a virgin. It is also of great significance to highlight that most do not seem proud of their previous sexual experiences, some even having a troubled conscience because of it. For some, the aspect of virginity is not as significant as for others. Dawoud stated:

“When you are a revert you generally have a sexual past.”

According to Akeem, however, repentance for previous un-Islamic sexual experiences seems to be a way for many Muslim converts to make amends for the deeds done prior to conversion:

“If one is not a virgin anymore, but has made tawbah for your deeds, there is always a way back to Allah.”

Abraham Asad felt similar to Akeem, however, he also reflected on his upbringing and lifestyle prior to conversion:

“I think it is really important in that if I could turn back the clock, I think of nothing better than to fall in love, to meet a woman to promise to marry each other, to get married, and then to kind of consummate the marriage both being virgins, you know (…).” According to him, he was not subject to social pressure

316 Dar Al-Ifta and Controversial Edicts, Hymen Reconstruction Fatwa:
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to gain sexual experiences: “It was just the way I am. Kind of like (…) fancying
girls, having a high sex drive, just being human, being young.”

Another aspect was noticeable among the participants, most spoke about female
virginity rather than male virginity. This is not surprising since the issue of a young
woman remaining a virgin until her wedding night has become accustomed tradition
over centuries in many societies. Whereas, the virginity of men – as mentioned above -
seems to be a lesser concern for Muslim families. It seems to be undoubtedly more
significant for a Muslim woman to remain a virgin than a Muslim man. Raif believes
that there should not be a distinction made between men and women:

“Whatever applies to one must apply to the other because otherwise it would
breach the concept of equity and equilibrium.”

Michael, on the other hand disagrees with the idea of both sexes having to be virgins
when entering a marriage:

“I would say that a Muslim woman should be a virgin on her wedding night. A
man should have experience as he is the amir of the family….he should know what
to do sexually – how to gently arouse and please his wife – and not to be fumbling
around incompetently.”

Most participants within this study believe that the actual existence of virginity
is not the most important aspect, but “the individual’s chastity prior to and outside
marriage” (Layali). Nonetheless several female participants challenged an important
issue: outside Islam as well as among Muslims the stereotype prospers that Muslim men
insist on marrying a virgin woman:

317 The experiences Abraham Asad had made him the way he is today: “It’s about making choices (…) or for me to have the
courage and strength now to repel the desires and the draw of the carnal soul.” He further explains the difficulties he encountered as
a man refraining from sexual activities, wishing sometimes he was a virgin but says: “In Islam we can always make amends and
redeem ourselves (…) I know I make mistakes and I do my best to learn by them.”

318 Layali however, also believes that remaining a virgin until marriage adds a special element to marriage: “If you live together for
years and get married, it is just another day. Whereas, when D. and I got married, it was ‘well, now we can live together and sleep in
the same bed (…)’. It was a step further than just getting married because it might be better for tax purposes or something.” Zaynab
met a man shortly after her conversion to Islam and entered a temporary marriage, during which she had her first sexual
experiences: “I am glad I saved my virginity till I converted…if I had converted later, it may not have been that way. I was not
bothered that he was not a virgin but it would have been nice, as I saved myself.”
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“I think there is too much emphasis placed on Muslim men marrying a virgin which is why women who are divorced have problems (...) but if everything is within marriage...what is the problem?” (Ruqayyah)

Iman also disagrees with the “one-sided” status of virginity:

“I do not always understand why Muslim men from certain cultures are so insistent on marrying a virgin as opposed to an equally qualified marital partner who is divorced. The Prophet Muhammad* only had one virgin bride. All others were widows or divorcees.”

The majority of German male participants stated that it is equally important for both men and women to remain a virgin – if possible – prior to one’s first marriage. Four German male participants stated that it was not essential to them to marry a virgin (Olaf, Karim, Amro, and Aziz). Considering that the stereotype primarily covers the significance of a woman remaining a virgin, wherein less attention is given to a man’s virginity, it shows that converts seem to be less influenced by traditions, though tend to reflect Islamic rules within the context of the holy scriptures, such as the Qur’an and the Sunna, adhering to and interpreting it literally rather than being solely influenced by cultural traditions.

Amro thinks that

“It is nothing more than an over-valuation of female virginity, and product of patriarchal culture. Male virginity is equally valuable and important however it doesn’t interest people as much, as the male virginity cannot be verified. It is incomprehensible to me that there are people in Muslim-majority countries who put so much emphasis on it...virginity is completely irrelevant to me.”

According to AbdulSamed

“It is nice if one keeps it [one’s virginity] until marriage, but if I were to meet a woman who was no longer a virgin, I would not reject her. I am not a virgin myself. It would be a double-standard to me... People have needs, and I do not want to know where this is leading to. God has created us the way we are. We individually have to sort this out with God. Nobody should interfere. I would never get the idea to blame
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an 18-year-old for his sexual weaknesses. His hormones are overflowing. He is going to clubs and seeing half-naked women...no surprise that something might happen...”

Nasir on the other hand believes that,

“If both marital partners enter marriage as virgins, then this can be a common experience sharing the first sex and stabilising one’s marriage with this experience.” Virginity should not, however, be overstated, “as there are widows as well, and the Prophet Muhammad* fought strongly against the poor thoughts of a woman’s reputation to be bad if she no longer was a virgin...this has no place in Islam... The virginity of both the woman AND man is important, so that both can share this experience....I once watched a documentary about the skin: It was said that the skin has some kind of memory, and memorises touches. There might be unconscious comparisons of the current partner with previous partners.”

20% (8) of the German female participants think that many Muslims overrate the issue of virginity, in particular that of women. Jenna believes that many Muslims seem

“Not to remember that it is not the missing virginity that is haram (forbidden) but the sexual contact prior to and outside marriage.”

Arwa (like Nasir) also feels passionately about this issue and disagrees with the tradition of showing the blood on the blanket:

“Who checks out the man as to whether he is a virgin? Islamically seen, he is also not permitted to have premarital sex!”

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319 At the same time Nasir is disgusted by the practice of displaying the bride’s virginal blood after the wedding night: “This is terrible and totally un-islamic...these people probably don’t even know that it is important for BOTH partners to enter the marriage as virgins.” Mounir also believes that virginity is not required, but states that virginity “supports the uniqueness of the relationship”.

320 Naima, Jenna, Safiyah, Amina-2, Susanne, Ghariba, Karima, Salha and Arwa.

321 Amina-2 also assumes that certain cultures mix up the value of virginity with the social reputation of the girl in question; it seems “as if a woman’s value is only measured by her virginity.”

322 Karima mentioned during the interview that she has met many women who have been victims of men, e.g. women who had been rejected for marriage as they were no longer a virgin, wishing to marry a virgin: “It is such a double-standard which is also found among many Muslims.” Karima met a woman at the university who frequently asked her about Islam because she had a Muslim boyfriend. This man, she told Karima, always said to her: ‘I will never marry someone like you (…) you seem to be doing it with everyone.’ Karima did not understand why this woman continued to be with this man since she (the woman in the relationship) was unhappy: “This man told her on a regular basis that he would marry a virgin (…) at some point I stopped
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The majority of German female participants mentioned in their interviews having had sexual experiences prior to their conversion, with Kulthum being the only German female participant who said she entered her marriage as a virgin. Only a minority either withheld their comments on this question or stated that they had not thought intensively (or at all) about virginity. Several German females were disappointed in the double-standards of Muslim men towards this issue. Amina clearly stated her disappointment:

“They can screw everyone here, and then marry a virgin from their village? Sorry, no, I cannot respect that at all.”

According to a number of German female participants, it is not about the physical integrity, but about the fact that if one is a virgin, one has not been emotionally or sexually involved with someone. It thus seems, particularly among the female participants, more important to remain chaste prior to marriage than to fetishise an intact hymen. As Mariyah mentioned, the hymen of the woman can be damaged through other means than sexual activities. Hence the status of virginity as such seems not to be a priority, according to the participants, but emphasis is put particularly upon chastity prior to and outside marriage. This aspect, many feel, should be taught to children and others. Most participants feel negatively about the cult of virginity that a number of Muslims and similar traditional cultures try to continue to enforce. According to most many German participants, the over-valuation of virginity is a product of a patriarchy that is not compatible with Islam.

323 Naima also disagrees with existing double standards in term of virginity: “Men, who have let off steam find it wonderful to marry a virgin. That woman will never enjoy her sexuality to the fullest aince she will never be equal to her husband (who already has sexual experience).”
324 Anwaar believes that virgin men and women should gain their sexual experiences in a safe, positive and controlled environment.
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8.4. Masturbation: Permitted or prohibited?

Masturbation is also known as onanism which stands in reference to the biblical figure of Onan who refused to consummate his marriage to his deceased brother’s wife, although this was commanded by his father Judah, and was the usual practice under the applicable Levirate law at the time. Instead he made his sperm “fall on the ground.” His sin lay not so much in not giving pleasure to her but in the fact that he refused to beget offspring (Genesis, 38:9).

According to Islamic law, masturbation, like any form of auto-eroticism, is an unnatural aversion from the act of procreation. Thus, according to mainstream Islamic interpretation, all who do not seek approved satisfaction are guilty of fornication. Some fiqh-schools interpret masturbation as a ‘pardonable sin’, one which is theoretically punishable. However, the punishment remains undetermined and seems to be at the discretion of a judge. According to Malik Ibn Anas325, whose school of thought particularly influences the Maghreb and Egypt, ‘Allah will ignore the masturbators on the Day of Judgment’; i.e. they will be the first to go to hell.326 The Muslim scholar Al-Ghazali however is of the opinion that masturbation, like fornication, is a weakness which has to be treated. Thus he advises in his Book of Marriage for bachelors to marry at a young age, so that they no longer have the need to masturbate. Al-Ghazali notes three degrees of this weakness:

   It is the lesser evil to marry a slave, masturbation is worse, but fornication is the worst. (Ghazali, 1998: 75)

From early Arab history, masturbation seems to have been a habit amongst the warriors of Islam on their crusades; they indulged in it entirely without the guilty feelings that religious scholars subsequently assumed. Even the Prophet Muhammad* seems to not have expressed himself critically on the subject matter. Also al-Hasan al-Basri remarked:

325 Founder of the Maliki School of Islamic jurisprudence.
326 The opinion is based on Qur’an 23:5-7, nonetheless it is clear that this Qur’anic verse does not specifically refer to masturbation, but that it is also not clear whether it includes masturbation in the transgression it describes.
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‘They [the Sahabah] used to practise masturbation during battles.’
(Sheikh Muhammad Bin Ameen)

Thus, two distinctly different positions arise. The Prophet’s* companions and early religious scholars take a more understanding attitude towards the question of masturbation, whereas the moralists among the Muslim clergy in subsequent centuries judged giving in to the temptation of one’s own flesh more severely. The fact is that masturbation used to be and still is a common, everyday practise among people of all classes, nations, religious affiliations (Laqueur, 2008). Although masturbation seems to be rejected by mainstream Islam, it is not clear as to whether the Qur’an is specific on this matter. The religious texts are almost exclusively interpreted in terms of male rather than female masturbation. The Hanbali School allows masturbation to avoid fornication or adultery, if the man cannot marry (Sabiq, 1987/ 1991:581-583).

The 1712 publication of The Onania by John Marten marks the beginnings of a cultural history of masturbation in Europe (Laqueur, 2008:13). Masturbation of course existed long before theologians have spoken of it, painters have depicted it, writers have written about it, and physicians have also sporadically dealt with it. Nonetheless, the cultural history of masturbation, and the changing views of it in Europe, has an impact on how masturbation is perceived today. The “problem of onanism” began in Britain around 1712. The Onania is the original text of the literature on masturbation and includes warnings about the ‘moral and physical dangers of this disgusting habit of self-abuse.’ The Onania did not come out of nowhere but was based on a medical tradition which maintained the view that excess of any kind was damaging.

Physicians and psychiatrists at the time created a reference, debating as to whether masturbation was the habit of ‘foolish’ people. In some Jewish and many

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327 The author, a puritan minister from London claimed to have been the first person to draw the world’s attention towards the habit of masturbation (Laqueur, 2008).
328 The Onania was made available through pharmacies, sometimes for sale and sometimes distributed free of charge. In addition, remedies were sold to help ‘reduce the suffering.’ Thus, there was a market for the booklet and a separate, albeit closely related market for related medical products (which was primarily unaffordable). The commercial success of The Onania was outstanding since many people bought a copy, and coffee houses made the booklet available to customers where remedies could also be purchased and picked up (letterboxes did not exist at that time). It became a long seller, though the sale of the respective remedies was less successful.
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Christian texts, connections were made to sodomy and unnatural vices, and masturbation was solidly placed in the long tradition of suspicion of the flesh and carnal pleasures. The Church only slowly developed an interest in the issue of masturbation, and was wary of pointing towards customs that young people may not have even thought about, and viewed masturbation from a traditional theological perspective as not being a particularly dangerous custom. Although, masturbation did not occupy a dominant space in moral theology and pastoral practice as some had hoped for, it seems that the issue was nevertheless ever-present (Laqueur, 2008:66).

Masturbation as a solitary custom achieved under Immanuel Kant and his contemporaries, a new level of ethical relevance. Kant’s theory was that masturbation was “the desecration of the self, believing that it was worse than suicide and violating the higher law of reason.” (Laqueur, 2008:62) This theory originates from his transcendental idealism and conceptions of individual duty and morality:

Suicide only breaks the law of individual conservation, whereas self-gratification seems to mock the higher law, i.e. the conservation of species (Laqueur, 2008:62).

At the turn of the 20th Century, psychiatrists and physicians had gradually begun to consider the physiological dangers of self-abuse as the fears of a prior era, and as a popular superstition of the ignorant. The subject matter made its entrance through three very different ideas into the modern thinking of the last century. The initiative was taken by a great amount of research in anthropology, animal behaviour, sexology and other areas which all discovered that masturbation was not only practised amongst youths and adolescents but was common among all ages and both sexes. The Nobel Prize winner Ilya Metschinov believed that “before there is a possibility of procreation, there is another form of sexual relief which is not only natural but also necessary” (Laqueur, 2008:72).

According to the control group, there are mixed emotions and thoughts associated with masturbation. Sonja Bint Jeradi, Rokaya Chikhi and Rukaija described masturbation as “disgusting”, whereas Yasin stated that masturbation is “a matter of
taste” and Rufeida differentiates between the permission to masturbate between the unmarried and married:

“It is okay for the unmarried. Married people should not masturbate, since lust could decline to have sex with the partner when (s) he wants. The latter could have negative outcomes”.

The remainder of the control group demonstrated mixed opinions:

1. “It is an important process in order to get to know one’s own body.” (Sarah Bauer)
2. “Allah prohibits masturbation, however I think that it is only human that it can occur from time to time” (Nisreen)
3. Forbidden according to Qur’an and Sunna -> In the Qur’an, see 23:1-6. Violations include all violations except marital love and are thus seen as sins.” (Diana)

The Muslim converts were also questioned on their knowledge of ‘masturbation in Islam,’ whether they felt masturbation was part of human sexual needs and/ or permitted or prohibited by Islamic reason. The participants were not asked whether or not they practised masturbation, however, differentiating answers have concluded that some participants follow this practice, whereas others have either never practised or stopped it when converting to Islam.

Several British male participants believe that masturbation is not permitted in Islam. Masturbation’s illicitness was confirmed by some who mentioned ahādīth seeming to prove such a prohibition. Thus, some of those who admitted to having continued masturbatory practices perhaps have felt guilt and demonstrated a more reserved behaviour in speaking about this intimate issue. There are mixed opinions on the permissibility or prohibition of masturbation, as some view masturbation to be prohibited, however, if masturbation is exercised, it is seen by Abdul-Mannan as “The lesser of two evils...if one feels that they are about to commit zina.”

Idris also mentioned that “It stops the likelihood or possibility of a greater sin”. Anwaar goes a step further and mentioned that he researched on the internet about masturbation in Islam, finding his answer on a website called Islam Q&A: “Basically it says that you are doing zina on yourself (...) people ask questions on all sorts of things on this website, and it basically says that it is haram, you’ve got to guard your private parts.” Anwaar did however also say that he did not think that Islam per se says what he reads but that some scholars offer these opinions, not all.
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also stated that if the urge to masturbate arises, fasting seems to “reduce the sexual energy” and with that the desire of masturbation (Akeem, Abdullah, Raif).

Raif believes that masturbation is about

“Energy used the wrong way...it’s better to use it constructively, It is better to focus your attention on Allah and follow the five pillars than to be obsessed with your desires”.

Another perspective on the issue is demonstrated with Michael who thinks that masturbation

“Is a waste of good semen and reduces one’s sex-drive.”

Dawoud, on the other hand believes that masturbation is permissible:

“It stops the person committing haram. No problem with it.”

With regard to female masturbation, one British male participant stated that he is not aware of any Islamic teachings on it (Idris). Among British female participants, opinions about masturbation being permissible or prohibited varied. No British female participant explicitly condemned masturbation however two equated the practice of masturbation primarily with men rather than women (Jameela, Ruqayyah).

Zaynab-Ablah stated:

“Islam says we shouldn’t (masturbate), but I don’t think it is impossible for the unmarried.”

Iman on the contrary believes that masturbation

“is permitted to release sexual tension that may otherwise cause someone to commit a sin.”

330 Michael did however also say that he did not know what Islam’s view on masturbation is.

331 Azadeh agrees: “Obviously it is better not to be at it all the time but it can release tension and is better than going and finding a one night stand OR better than marrying someone just to have sex...marriage should be much more than that and not based on sex.
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Significantly, there are similar views with their British male counterparts in that it seems that (1) masturbation is “a preferred option to zina, however not recommended” (Azizah), (2) that it is “better to masturbate than to go out and have sex” (Jameela), and (3) “with Islam (in mind) acceptable...if you are not married or not able to get married and really struggling then if your two options are to have extra-marital sex or...before marriage, then masturbation is the preferred route, but more preferred than that is fasting to diminish your physical need” (Layali).

Imaan-Yousef also believes that Islamic teachings hardly include any rules on female masturbation:

“If there is a rule about it in Islam, it must be from ahādīth, and it’s possibly not a very important rule or not from one of the authentic ahādīth. Masturbation is normal for women, although it may be more common for men to practise.”

She further emphasizes the need to be careful with Islamic rulings by current scholars:

“I don’t like the way men in Egypt are twisting ahādīth to support their own personal opinions on female circumcision, so I’d be very dubious when reading anything about women and masturbation. I haven’t read anything about it in the Qur’an so I think it can’t be anything that important.”

The divide in attitudes continues to be evident among the German participants. Some German male participants describe masturbation as a natural human need, while others believe that as long as it is not mentioned directly, masturbation can be practised in order to avoid adultery or illicit sexual activities. Nasir says he used to be more “relaxed” about masturbation, but since his conversion his views have changed:

Sadly in Muslim countries sex is such a taboo that most men just want to marry to relieve their tension and women need a provider!”

Souhayla, on the other hand, believes that there is “nothing wrong with masturbation”, but criticises the use of pornography for masturbation: “It angers me from a feminist stance not a religious one. I do not believe that when the Qur’an states to ‘guard’ chastity this is referring to masturbation.”
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“Today I see it differently. This however is mainly in terms of incitement through images, because these degrade women – even if they want to be degraded – as being objects and not people. A man again follows his instinct – which mustn’t be easy to resist.”

AbdulSamed and Abdou believe that masturbation is an activity most humans indulge in, although they limit active engagement to the young, the unmarried or those who are married but not always with their marital partners. AbdulSamed offers the following hadīth as a valid explanation:

“'The Prophet (saw) had advised those who cannot afford marriage to fast, saying: ‘Oh youth, whoever of you is able to marry, let him marry..., if he cannot marry, let him observe fasting, for it is a shield against evil.’ However if fasting is not possible, it is the lesser evil and permitted.”

Abdou also stated:

“If you are on your own without your wife, then fair enough... If you cannot suppress it, then you have to make it happen. It is part of nature. To let it all be as it is might not be so favourable and good for the man. It [masturbation] also sensitizes you and this can be seen by your outward demeanour.”

Some participants consider masturbation as a taboo, if not prohibited altogether (Khalid, Akeem, Abdullah). Others again stated that they do not need masturbation, or only practise it when they can no longer resist the urge (Khalid, Kazim). Karim was the only male participant who stated that he has refrained from masturbation since he became Muslim. Aziz, on the other hand considered masturbation to be “bad for people and their mental development”.

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333 Nasir is aware that sexual excitement can occur involuntarily. He sees however the issue of masturbation as being more critical now than ever since now he determines the practice of masturbation from a religious perspective not as prior to his conversion from a physical needs perspective. Olaf, on the other hand, believes that masturbation is a “good thing”, however, states that since his conversion he is often plagued by a guilty conscience “since it is probably not desirable.”

334 Both participants believe it is better to relieve tension instead of committing adultery or religiously illicit sex.

335 AbdulSamed: “It is the best to achieve a balance (…. ). It’s the same with hunger. In Ramadan you don’t have this drive or urge at all. It is all gone but you cannot do ascetic fasting all day, hence you just have to do it (i.e. masturbate)...it is part of human nature.”

336 One German male participant asked not to participate in answering the question on masturbation. This participant remains anonymous – It was agreed via email that this question would not be answered.
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The majority of German female participants stated that masturbation is a normal function and natural sexual need of an either young or unmarried individual which should be practised without restrictions. If guilt arises, the individual should repent and deal only with God on this subject matter. The same majority stated that masturbation should have no place in a marriage. A minority of German female participants also stated that they could not think of masturbation being a positive influence since the belief is that sexual activity should be shared with a partner, and not with oneself. Another minority also stated that masturbation was permissible within a marriage/relationship, should there either be periods of distance between partners, or sexual dissatisfaction. It was spoken of as a lesser evil: “Masturbation is better than being unfaithful” (Iman-2).

Amina felt that shortly after her conversion

“There were weak moments, but they were rare. Sometimes I felt lust, but I tried to think about something else. If the lust gets the better of me, I try to think about my ticket to heaven – perhaps it’s in the mail tomorrow. I somehow have kept a cool head.”

SteinbA struggled with the idea that masturbation could be prohibited:

“Especially when you are single, such feelings will come up at some point. I tried through prayer to reduce the urge, or in Ramadan not to have sex, but it didn’t work. Nature and God arranged it to happen, even though it has no good moral reputation. The sex drive is desired and therefore it is better to masturbate than to rape someone or to be unfaithful.”

The majority opinion is that many people believe that masturbation is limited to the male sex not only in religious but also in social terms. Religious rules regarding masturbation were introduced, e.g. to fast or to marry because everyone thought it was a

337 Fatima has a similar view to SteinbA: “When I was younger, I did it a lot (masturbate). My girlfriends and I talked about it. When I started having sex, it no longer interested me.” She talked with her Pakistani-born partner H. about masturbation, and mentioned that he disapproved it: “He said that it is haram; not to do it, and that it would even encourage promiscuous sex (...) but that is something he learnt. I still tend to think that masturbation is not so bad (...) although I’ve read otherwise on the internet (...) then again, there are so many sources on the internet.”
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male-only activity. Jenna does not remember having read about masturbation in relevant Qur’anic verses or ahādīth but turned to the internet and books that have published sources on the prohibition of masturbation:

“I always thought their reasoning was pretty adventurous and most importantly, it was always only in reference to men. So far I have not read anything on female masturbation.”

Masturbation has also been completely separated by some participants from the topic of “sex with your partner”, the former defining the sexual exploration of one’s own body, while the latter concerns sexual exploration with another person (Sandra). Amina-2 was a Catholic before she converted to Islam and regards another negative side-effect of masturbation besides unfaithfulness:

“Masturbation is a moral sin in Catholicism. I have freed myself from that idea. Now it is perfectly natural to satisfy sexual needs through masturbation, in order to prevent a long-term sexual imbalance which can even lead to mood swings and aggression...”

According to some German female participants, masturbation should be treated as a private sexual matter which should not be judged by others. While, on the other hand, masturbation should only be practised if certain conditions are created.338 Havva-Maryam sees masturbation

“as a natural part of sexuality, both in solitude and with a partner. I acknowledge the Islamic prohibition of masturbation and try to adhere to it, however I feel this to be difficult if someone is a long time without partner. I have heard from several imams that masturbation seems indeed to be reprehensible, but still better than illicit sex, and hence to be preferred (...)

In comparison the British participants were more cautious about airing their opinions on masturbation than the German participants, particularly the females, who expressed their opinions more openly and in a concrete and direct manner. It also appears that the

338 Whilst some participants strictly follow the prohibition of masturbation, accepting fatawā from religious scholars on its prohibition, others reject the same fatawā if they are not in line with the Qur’an or the Sunnah. -Mariyah, Kulthum.
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issue of masturbation is less of a taboo subject amongst German than British participants. This may be the result of different cultural backgrounds and social inhibitions regarding their own sexuality. British participants felt more inhibited speaking about intimate issues than their German counterparts.

8.5. Polygamy: Is this practice permissible today?

Perhaps the most religiously significant case of a polygamous marriage dates back to the Prophet Abraham who married Hagar because his first wife Sarah was too old to have children. Polygamy was common during the first centuries of Islam, since the rapid spread of Islam permitted political leaders of great Muslim dynasties to marry more than one woman. It was legal to have four official wives and numerous concubines. Polygamy was also highly praised by lawyers as well as religious scholars. It has to be noted that polygamy was common in many pre-Islamic societies (including those later converted to or conquered by Islam), and not introduced by Islam. Its permissibility was in fact limited by the Qur’an, introducing specific conditions for entering a polygamous marriage:

“And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among (other) women such as are lawful to you – (even) two, or three, or four; but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then (only) one (…).” (Qur’an 4:3)

In the context of complete equality, polygamy requires the man to house all the women concerned in separate houses or apartments, all of which have to be equally maintained at the costs of the husband in question. This verse imposes the condition that the husband treats his lawful wives fairly, or the marriages will not be valid according to Shari’ah law. Polygamy is officially prohibited in many countries, and has been actively

339 Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ahādīth No. 5363 and 0676.
340 The revelation of Qur’an 4:3 should be understood within a historical context: After the Battle of Uhud, the Muslim community was faced with the problem of many widows and orphans whose interests needed to be safeguarded by marriage, for them to become integrated family members. If one considers the marriages of the Prophet Muhammad, most of his wives were either elderly widows or divorced women.
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restricted in others.\textsuperscript{341} In countries where there are no objections to polygamy, the husband has a duty to consult his first wife before he takes another. A hadith underlines the importance of consulting the first wife:

Ali (R) was prevented from marrying a second wife by the Prophet* himself, because Fatima (Ali’s first and only wife) was not comfortable with it: “I heard Allah’s Apostle who was on the pulpit, saying, ”Banu Hisham bin Al-Mughira have requested me to allow them to marry their daughter to Ali bin Abu Talib, but I don’t give permission, and will not give permission unless ‘Ali bin Abi Talib divorces my daughter in order to marry their daughter, because Fatima is a part of my body, and I hate what she hates to see, and what hurts her, hurts me.”\textsuperscript{342}

Several female participants stated that they know of a few Muslim wives who search for a second wife for their husbands by following a mutual consent. If a suitable woman is found, the husband enters into marriage with a second wife. It is of significance to note that the first wife can specify in her marriage contract that her husband may not marry another woman as long as they are married. Simultaneously, the Qur’an establishes the following in connection with polygamy:

“And it will not be in your power to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you desire it; and so, do not allow yourselves to incline towards one to the exclusion of the other, leaving her in a state, as it were, of having or not having a husband. (…)” (Qur’an 4:129)

Most current commentators agree that polygamy is only permitted in order to prevent greater social obstacles. Besides infertility and the war-related outnumbering of men by women, there are other permissible reasons for polygamy. If a woman is chronically ill, needs care, and cannot carry on a normal marriage and family life due to her illness, some scholars and Muslims consider a second wife acceptable in such a situation. Only a minority of Muslims are open to polygamous marriage since the majority of Muslims seem to prefer monogamy. Many Qur’an commentators believe that monogamy is depicted as the ideal and to be preferred, as can be seen from the

\textsuperscript{341} Tunisia became the first Muslim majority country to abolish polygamy in 1956. Penal sanctions against polygamous husbands and wives who knowingly enter a polygamous marriage face imprisonment and/or a fine.

\textsuperscript{342} Hadith - Sahih Bukhari, No. 7157, narrated by Al Miswar bin Makhrama.
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testimony of the Qur’an that achieving complete equality and justice in both material and immaterial things among two or more women is never possible (Al-Qaradawi, 1999:163ff.). In a hadīth, the Prophet Muhammad* stated in a matter regarding unjust husbands who turned to only one of their wives:

‘If a man has two wives and only turns to one of them, he will come with a paralyzed body on the day of resurrection.’

Several female Muslim scholars have enquired and analysed the issue of polygamy, and how it should be understood in the context of the 21st Century. In Sexual Ethics & Islam, Kecia Ali states:

If someone insists that polygamy is valid for all times and in all places because the Qur’an authorizes it, one can inquire whether the same holds true for slavery…

(Ali, 2006:156)

According to Fatima Mernissi, the Prophet Muhammad* brought a unique social change:

He was a religious reformer who was principally interested in preaching a belief in the One God – a revolutionary belief principle in pagan society – the Prophet Muhammad did not go so far as to seek a complete change in the social system. The Prophet felt that advocating radical change might adversely affect the spread of his religious teachings; therefore he sought to effect gradual change in the law.

(Mernissi, 1992:139)

Polygamy constitutes a criminal offence in most European countries, including the United Kingdom and Germany. It is prohibited by civil law to enter more than one marriage at the same time. The submission of false documents in order to enter a second, third or fourth marriage is illegal and punishable by law. This not only occurs within the Muslim religious communities but also takes place in other religious cultures, such as with the Mormons, although this religious group officially renounced this

343 Hādīth - Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī No. 5230, narrated by At-Tirmidhi.
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practice after a long battle with US authorities. People in secret polygamous partnerships may experience difficulties with their double- or even multiple lives, if maintaining such a lifestyle in a non-polygamous society. Even if polygamy is lived publicly, and accepted by affected spouses, social hurdles can arise. Polygamy is not generally accepted (legally or socially) within Europe, and is rarely practised. Even within Muslim communities in non-Muslim society, polygamous marriage is an exception. Monogamy seems to rather be the rule.

According to the German Civil Code, §1306 which prohibits bigamy – the entering into multiple marriages – it is thus punishable by imprisonment for up to three years or a fine, pursuant to §172 of the German Criminal Code. It is, however, not an offence if a person cohabitates with several women or men in a sexual union. It is only possible to enter a single state-recognized marriage at the same time, though a subsequent (second) marriage is treated as legally valid, unless it has been revoked by a judgment of the family court, pursuant to §§1313/1314 of the German Civil Code.

In Germany, polygamous marriages are protected if they have legitimately been entered into abroad. This decision was rendered by the Supreme Administrative Court of Rheinland-Pfalz in 2004, when it instructed the immigration office of Ludwigshafen to grant the second wife of an Iraqi citizen living in Germany since 1996 a residence permit, though she could not thereby invoke spousal privileges. This effectively means if a man marries more than one woman in a country where polygamy is legally permitted, and enters Germany with his wives, protective measures are taken in these exceptional circumstances, and the arrangement tolerated. Nonetheless, and this is a pivotal point, the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, states:

“It is clear from Islamic jurisprudence that Muslims who live in a non-Muslim country have to abide by the rules of the country, unless they conflict with Islam.”

Thus, it is not possible in Germany to marry more than one woman in a civil ceremony. Most scholars are of the opinion that one must abide by the social order of one’s whereabouts, if these do not oppose the principles of the faith and prevent

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344 Officials even claimed that polygamy was never acceptable within their Church. Retrieved from http://mormon-polygamy.org.
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important necessities of life. The Muslim effective makes an agreement with the (in the case of Germany and Britain) non-Muslim country not to break its social order. Consequently, the marriage to a second, third or fourth wife is not an Islamic duty (ZMD, Germany).

Bigamy is also a statutory offence in Britain. This means that if a person is already legally married and marries another person, they commit bigamy and the second marriage is considered to be void. The offence is created by Section 57 of the Offences against the Person Act 1861. Additionally, bigamy is triable in two ways: a person guilty of bigamy in Britain is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding seven years, or to a fine not exceeding the prescribed sum, or to both. Polygamous marriages performed in another country where civil law permits such marital unions may not be recognized or validated in Britain regarding pension, immigration or citizenship rights. They will, however, be recognized if those involved apply for welfare benefits. When it comes to the estimated number of legally recognised polygamous marriages in the United Kingdom, the Minister for Women and Equality, Barbara Follett, stated in 2008:

A formal estimate has not been made, although it is generally thought there are fewer than 1,000 legally recognised polygamous marriages within the UK.
(May, 2007)

There are different definitions as to what constitutes marriage, as there are civil law marriages, religious marriages, civil partnerships, as well as illegal marriages and partnerships. Some marriages are accepted in civil but not religious law, whereas others have no legal standing in neither civil nor religious law. For example, mosque (Islamic) marriages that are accepted in Islamic law are not accepted in British and German civil law, with the exception in Britain, when the Imam simultaneously acts as a registrar.346

345 Relevant case law can be found in R v Smith 1994 15 CR App R(S) and R v Cairns 1997 1 Cr App R (S). A prescribed sum entails the maximum fine that may be imposed on a summary conviction.
346 The option for the Imam to simultaneously act as a registrar is in Germany not yet available.
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The control group of twelve questioned born Muslims is small however an overwhelming majority of 85% (10) stated their disagreement on polygamous marriage. Similar to the main two samples of Muslim converts, the control group primarily agreed on its permission through the Qur’an. Most participants here pointed out that polygamy could not be practised today for the same reasons when the permission of polygamous marriage was revealed by the Qur’an. According to Yasin,

“The Qur’an permits polygamy, so this can’t be wrong. Polygamy should however not be understood as a love match – only monogamy is able to offer this – but as personal insurance. Particular prerequisites have to be fulfilled in order to enter a polygamous marriage: If the woman did not find an unmarried man, if the woman needs benefits, and that the man can equally share his finances between his wives. Today we do not need polygamy, since monogamy is preferred by Islam, social benefits can be acquired by the state, and there are plenty of unmarried men.”

Muslim converts seem to be more inclined to enter polygamous marriages than born Muslims. This claim does not result from questioning the participants of this study on their views of polygamy, but from meeting several converts, in particular females, discussing the subject at hand. This however also depends on the culture of origin for born Muslims who have been met by Muslim converts, as not every country with a Muslim majority society is in favour of polygamous marriages. More than half of British and German male and female participants do not interpret Qur’an 4:3 as a ‘free pass’ to practise polygamy. The acceptable reasons for polygamy are first and foremost to secure orphans’ futures, or to take in widows or divorcees; this does not extend to new wives, and certainly not simply to satisfy the sexual needs of men, except in very exceptional circumstances.347 The majority of participants spoke in favour of monogamy, referring to the Qur’an: “...then (marry) only one”.

The views on polygamy differed among British male participants: While the majority viewed polygamy in a historical context and explained it as transient, 31% (4) of British male participants stated they would enter a polygamous marriage.348 Michael states that he

347 The fact that an already married man has merely fallen in love with another woman is not enough.
348 Two abstentions by British male participants.
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fervently believes in polygamous marriage: “It was one element in my conversion to Islam as I was romantically interested in two Muslim women at the time…polygamy has much to recommend it. A man - or at least this man - is not naturally monogamous.”

Akeem also agrees with polygamy, however feels that

“The reality is that polygamy is very difficult to practise in this country due to the high cost of living.”

He also quoted Timothy Winter (Jawad, 2012:115ff.): ‘Most men, if they are truly honest, would love to practise polygamy as it is part of their fitrah to desire a ‘plurality of women’. The remaining British male participants all agreed that polygamy should be looked at in a historical context, and claim that most men today would not be able to treat more than one woman equally within a marriage. Idris believes that polygamy is actually an unrealistic lifestyle since he states “a man would always favour one (wife) at any given time” and does not believe that

“A man would always favour one (wife) at any given time” and does not believe that “a man (aside from the Prophet, saw) can truly treat more than one woman equally…the perceptions of the wives would always be likely to be different, reinforcing the impossibility of treating (them) equally, mentioned as required in the Qur’an.”

Several British male participants stated that men should not enter into polygamous marriages just because they have the financial possibilities,

“It should not be done purely for greed, but for charity…not for pleasure.” (Anwaar)

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349 According to Michael, both women agreed to polygamy, however one of them did not agree with it any longer after marriage: “This led to much friction and eventually to divorce. I then married the second one and now she too insists on monogamy.” He feels however that many Muslims seem to be “utterly selfish” about polygamy, in only wanting to choose “a la carte Muslimas.”

Abdul-Mannan also agrees with polygamy, as “there is a shortage of brothers in the UK.”

350 Idris respects Muslim women “who say they would be a second wife or in certain circumstances would encourage or allow their husbands to take a second wife” but: “I cannot get rid of the feeling that men who want more than one wife may be doing so for sexual, financial, property reasons and such. I am aware that I may be wrong and cultural or specific individual factors may poke holes in my thinking at this time”.

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*Raif* feels that polygamy today is used

“As a way of controlling people, particularly males controlling females in a very close environment, which often involves very strange religious ideas (…) there is a lot of confusion.”

The majority of German male participants stated that they would not enter a polygamous marriage. Reasons differed for being in disagreement with the practise of polygamy, though most were in agreement that the practice of polygamy had been legitimate during the early years of Islam. A number of German male participants believe that nowadays monogamy is preferred over polygamy, “as already stated in the Qur’an” (*AbdulSamed, Aziz, Khalid*). According to *AbdulSamed* refers to the aspect of having pure intentions when he states the following:

“Generally, it should not be intentional. I don’t think it’s reasonable. And it would be too exhausting. The ideal is monogamy, and I wouldn’t handle it any other way.”

*Abdou* expressed his gratitude with one wife when he mentioned that one wife would be

“More than enough… I don’t even manage one, how would I be able to manage four of them? The Qur’an says that you are allowed to marry the women…and then, a little bit later…you have to read to the end: You will not manage it. BOOM!”

Most German male participants agree that polygamy is permitted under specific circumstances. Most do not disapprove of polygamous marriage per se, but do state that circumstances vary, and few participants view this option of marriage as suitable for themselves.\(^{351}\) *Aziz* felt that he could only enter a polygamous marriage if certain requirements were met:

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\(^{351}\) *Gharib* does not currently believe that he is able to be married to more than one woman but stated: “One should be careful, whether you can take such responsibility as a man, and as a woman, whether you can accept your position to be one of at least two.”
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“I personally would only act with consideration to the feelings of my wife, and her consent. If these conditions are met, and there is a necessity, I would enter a polygamous marriage.”

Most British female participants have mixed feelings about polygamy. The negative aspects regarded behaviour, such as being outdated and unfair towards women, only fulfilling male sexual desires, and offering unequal treatment. While, positive attitudes such as being a form of charity towards widows, divorcees and less fortunate women, and being beneficial in times of war appeared in their responses as well. The majority accepted that polygamy exists but think that it should only be entered into under specific conditions which several participants think cannot be fulfilled. Iman respects those who enter polygamous marriages, but finds it

“Beneficial in this society for there to be only one man and one woman in each marriage.”

Azadeh disagrees strongly with polygamy and would never accept sharing her husband which can be perceptible with her statement:

“The verses that ‘allow’ it are misused. Allah is quite clear that He accepts this
If you can treat them fairly but then later says He KNOWS you cannot no matter how hard you try…to me this is saying one only.”

Ruqayyah was the only British female participant who lived in a polygamous marriage at the time of the interview. Being previously married, both her marriages have been polygamous. From her own experience she felt that polygamous marriage can be good

“if it is managed well. It is learning by doing. My first polygamous marriage was in my early twenties and not well managed. Living together with the second wife did not work out well. My current marriage works out well…I live here, and his first wife lives in Turkey, and he commutes on a monthly, quarterly basis.”

352. Imaan-Yousef also believes that “in our society there is no need for polygamous marriage,” and thinks that “many Muslims do not adhere to the rules for polygamy and marry more than once simply to fulfill their own desires which is forbidden”.

353. Ruqayyah receives different reactions when she talks about polygamy, however firmly believes in continuing to advocate polygamy if it is practiced correctly: “It’s been right for me and it’s within Islam, it’s got rules…”
 Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues

In comparison, no German female participant lived in a polygamous marriage during the period of interviews, though one German female participant has subsequently entered into a polygamous marriage as a second wife. 354 75% of German female participants stated they would not enter a polygamous marriage, 12.5% mentioned that they would only enter a polygamous marriage if it was either necessary or beneficial to them. 355 6% had not heard of the word ‘polygamy,’ which was then explained during the interview or in writing (Kathira, Saliha, Malika). No German female participant stated that they would unquestioningly enter a polygamous marriage. Amina was rather neutral since she could neither agree nor disagree with polygamy. She stated that she would not accept polygamy with her future husband, however believed that she could possibly enter a polygamous marriage with another man whom she met during her conversion who explained the faith to her:

“I don’t think it would bother me that Muhammad* has three wives. He is a nice man who is good to all his women. Maybe it’s because I know him. Sure, I’d be jealous if he was with another woman, but I could live with it.” 356

Nina would only agree to polygamy if the necessity should arise:

“I would only agree to it after a disaster or war, where there is a significant surplus of women. And rather, if I make the proposal, and not my husband…there would always be the danger that he would propose this for un-Islamic reasons – such as sexual – Islam teaches to control urges through fasting and that any kind of interference is un-Islamic.” 357

354 This German female participant requested to remain anonymous.
355 Jesseniah agrees that “it used to make sense but in today’s society, and if I take the country I am living in, it seems impossible for a man who has three wives to treat them all equally (…) it is not necessary today (…).” The Holy Qur’an permits polygamy in specific circumstances, and most female participants agree that this form of marriage should only be practised if such specific circumstances arise.
356 Prior to her conversion to Islam, Amina had thought about becoming a Mormon: “I thought about joining that particular group of Mormons where a man could have more than one wife…then I wouldn’t need to bear the stress of one man alone.”
357 Kulthum accepts the possibility of polygamy, “but only if a woman could be helped with it. I can see the wisdom behind it, if a woman can be helped with that, such as at the time of the Prophet (saw). But if everything is good within the relationship, then in all honesty don’t understand the necessity and ask myself why men so easily put their marriage at risk.”
Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues

Touareg1801 on the other hand prefers monogamy to polygamy, but clearly states:

“I could not forbid my husband to take a second wife (if I, for example, were infertile).”

The majority of German female participants disagreed with polygamy being used in today’s society. Most felt that there seems to be no necessity for polygamy but the most significant reason against polygamy was that most of them were against sharing their husband with another woman or other women; jealousy being the primary obstacle. Furthermore, a few female participants argued on the basis of the Qur’an that monogamy is preferred over polygamy, and polygamy should only be used if absolutely necessary, and not as a pleasure. Havva-Maryam believes that

“There is no necessity for polygamy in today’s society and therefore it is also islamically prohibited. Allah has (according to my understanding) only permitted polygamy in exceptional circumstances, however does not recommend it (“marry them if you treat them equally...but you can’t ‘t’”). The current interpretation and practice of some men to marry without any need two or more women is repugnant to me and I would not enter one.”

Most German female participants felt that polygamy was not possible on an emotional level. Some agreed that its necessity would be understandable if a woman needed financial support. However, to emotionally and sexually share a husband with another woman seems to most female participants unacceptable, even impossible. Nevertheless, it seems as if the participants are not against traditional roles, as many of them accept polygamy to be a part of Islam. Accordingly, it seems that the opinions are predominantly characterised by a preference for one marital partner instead of several. Particularly female participants stated that they wished not to share sexual activities with their husband with other wives/ women. Only a handful of German female participants declared they would tolerate another wife, and then only if certain conditions were met. The majority of participants do not reject the existence of polygamy but hardly any of them would willingly enter into a polygamous marriage.

358 Saliha: “I think I'd be a bit egoistic. I can't share very well.”; Imane: “I would not be able to do this…my jealousy would explode….”; Mariyah: “I could not imagine sharing my husband, because I would be plagued by jealousy“.

359 Fairouz stated that a man would never be able to achieve an equal emotional balance among two or more wives, as there would always seem to be a favourite.
8.6. Homosexuality: Religious abandonment or social acceptance?

Homosexuality has been a part of Muslim culture for a long time, as homosexuality is often not accepted as homosexuality if it is two heterosexual males having sex or intimate relations with each other prior to marriage. We should, however, not compare or even equate it with the Western idea of homosexual activities. Relationships between men do not automatically exclude relationships with women, marriage and family. This is also no different when it comes to lesbianism. No individual, or only in the rarest of circumstances, would publicly describe him- or herself as a homosexual or come out as such. Europeans who travelled to the Middle East in the 17th, 18th and 19th century reported some same-sex sexual practices, to the extent that the assumption developed that all Muslims had to be bisexual by nature (Chebel, 1997:193). In the Ottoman Empire, young handsome boys were taken as taxes, and in the baths of Istanbul the visits were not always only about cleanliness since salaried assistants also worked as male prostitutes (Toledano, 2003:242). Furthermore, from the mid-18th century, jealous feuds about the youths in the bath houses became publicly known.

Nevertheless, homosexuality is now a criminal offence in many countries with a society consisting of a Muslim majority. In several countries the accused are often threatened with the death penalty. It is, however, applied in the rarest of instances, and instead the authorities resort to alternative punishments, such as fines, flogging or imprisonment. In some countries, such as Turkey, Jordan, Indonesia or Egypt, same sex intercourse is not prohibited but it can fall under the violation of public.360

Homosexuality is not mentioned once in the Qur’an, and thus only indirectly spoken about. Many Muslim scholars understand the story of the Prophet Lot in the Qur’an as an explanation for the divine prohibition of homosexuality. There are five passages in the Qur’an which are repeatedly cited in relation to homosexuality, of which

360 In Egypt, homosexuals are frequently persecuted by the police. In May 2001; in a case famously known as “Cairo 52”, 52 men, enjoying a boat party, were arrested on suspicion of homosexual activities and brought to justice, which is to say that 23 of them received prison sentences of one to three years. Retrieved from http://www.iglhrc.org/cgi-bin/iowa/article/takeaction/partners/692.html.
Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues

Qur’an 7:80-81 and Qur’an 26:165 are used the most. The ahādīth are also often referred to in reference to homosexual activities. The Prophet Muhammad* was heard to have said the following about homosexuality:

“Narrated by Abu Sa’id al-Khudri: The Prophet (pbuh) said: A man should not look at the private parts of another man, and a woman should not look at the private parts of another woman. A man should not lie with another man without wearing lower garment under one cover; and a woman should not lie with another woman without wearing lower garment under one cover.”

An exact penalty is not defined in the Qur'an, only that such behavior is punished. If one were to assume, for example, the penalty for adultery for it, then it would be 100 lashes (Qur’an 24:2). However, the ahādīth are the basis of punishment. The legal implementation of what is in the Qur'an and in the ahādīth is differently approached in countries with an Islamic majority society which can imply being sentenced to death penalty to receiving impunity. This is partially due to the different schools of fiqh, and partially to national developments. These differences clearly demonstrate how ambivalent supposedly immutable religious principles can be.

According to Asım Uysal, female homosexuality is prohibited in Islam as well (Uysal, 2007:617). He states that lesbianism results from women a) being single and always together; b) assuming masculinity in clothing, speech and behaviour; c) presenting themselves naked in the presence of other women; and d) sharing a bed with other women (Uysal, 2007:617). For many Muslims, a licit same-sex relationship seems to be an impossibility, nonetheless Kecia Ali believes it is:

“the desire on the part of some self-identified gay and lesbian Muslims to have exclusive and publicly recognised same-sex relationships, and to do so in a way that falls within an “Islamic” framework, is without precedent in Muslim history.”

(Ali, 2006:78)

Although most Muslims will acknowledge that sexual activities between persons of the same sex exist in Muslim-majority societies, this concession is frequently

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361 Sahih Bukhary Hādīth No. 4007, narrated by Abu Dawoud.
Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues

accompanied by an insistence that homosexuality is “Western” or “modern”, “an illness”, and “un-Islamic”.

85% (10) of the control group of born Muslims disagreed with homosexuality, describing it as “unnatural and unacceptable”\textsuperscript{362}, “an illness”\textsuperscript{363}, and “haram/forbidden”\textsuperscript{364}, including the proposition of “those people should go and see a psychiatrist, to find out what the trigger to this illness is” \textit{(Rokaya)}. Yasin believes that

\begin{quote}
“Homosexuality is not a sin. Muslims, especially men, have double standards: homosexual men are ostracized, however lesbians are not. It is about time to stick to one opinion. It is one’s own choice for whom to have and develop feelings. You cannot switch them on and off. Once they are there, they exist. Hence scholars should not judge so quickly”.
\end{quote}

\textit{Nina} stated having gays and lesbians within her circle of friends. In her opinion, homosexuality does not conflict with her understanding of the Qur’an:

\begin{quote}
“I believe that people discriminating against homosexuals act against the spirit of the Qur’an!”
\end{quote}

Most of the control group’s sample however felt little sympathy for homosexuals, arguing that this particular sexual orientation is not acceptable in Islam, and according to some, it should be punished \textit{(Umazoubeir)}. \textit{Elif Er} disagrees with discrimination of homosexuals, however states that if mankind would grow to become increasingly homosexual, “we would eradicate ourselves”.

British and German participants had different views on homosexuality, also making distinctions between homosexuality and lesbianism. I suggest on the basis of their responses that most participants have little knowledge that homosexuality historically used to be tolerated in Muslim societies. Furthermore, in early Islamic

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{362} Sarah Bauer, Nisreen, Diana
\textsuperscript{363} Rokaya Chikhi, Sonja Bint Jeradi
\textsuperscript{364} Umazoubeir, Rokaya Chikhi, Diana, Rukaija
\end{flushright}
Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues

literature, homo-erotic desires were celebrated in poems, songs and other literature. “The tolerance was, however, conditional on the discretion of the parties concerned, with a prevailing attitude of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’” (Zebiri, 2008:164). In other words, homosexuality seems to have been accepted, as long as it did not endanger the foundations of society, and thereby Islamic moral values and ideas.

Like Zebiri, I expected most of the participants to disagree with homosexuality, defining it as a “sin”, as an “illness” or as “plainly wrong”, wondering how Muslim converts thought about homosexuality and whether they had gay or lesbian friends, or knew homosexuals at all. How much did they know about the Islamic teachings on homosexuality? How did they feel about displays of homosexuality in public? Do they feel that a line has to be drawn in terms of how sexual preferences should be lived? The immediate difference I found was that British male participants were more adamant about homosexuality being a sin than their German male participants.

The legalisation and decriminalisation of homosexuality occurred in different European states at very different times: France was the first, in 1791, resulting in many other states abolishing laws against “unnatural sex”. Nowadays nearly all European states prohibit discrimination against people because of their sexual orientation.\textsuperscript{365} It is not precisely a separate gender homosexuality that is the issue but the male recourse to premarital sex in the absence of women in Muslim-majority societies. The understanding of homosexuality as a religious sin but simultaneously seem as an accepted loophole in Muslim society makes it very difficult to categorize homosexuality, since it may be differently understood in a Western European context.

In 2001, Germany passed the law on registered partnership which established civil partnerships between two people of the same sex.\textsuperscript{366} Subsequently, the legal requirements of a civil partnership have for the most part been reproduced according to the legal consequences of a civil law marriage. Legal differences may primarily occur

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{365} This prohibition, however, occurred often only under the pressure from the European Union which decided in 2000 on a ‘directive on equal treatment and occupation’- 2000/78. In 2009, the directive was supplemented by a new anti-discrimination directive which aims to ensure equal treatment outside the labour market, in areas such as social protection, education, transport and access to services.
\item \textsuperscript{366} Lebenspartnerschaftsgesetz, LPartG = Civil Partnership Act
\end{itemize}
Converst on sensitive (Islamic) issues

within the tax law. However it remains at best a second-class marriage, as it does not confer all the same rights and duties as a heterosexual civil law marriage (Prantl, 2009). The outing of Klaus Wowereit, a politician and the current mayor of Berlin who combined his homosexuality with a strong and positive message, still has national and international influence. The social scientist Andreas Heilmann speaks here about a “normalcy on probation” (Heilmann, 2011). These politicians have to compensate for their homosexuality through clearly presented male behaviour, such as Wowereit by offering a “macho style” behaviour within politics.

Britain on the other hand provides the possibility of a same-sex civil partnership, also known as civil union, legalised in 2005 by the Civil Partnership Act 2004. Compared to the German legislation in regard to civil partnership, Britain offers a higher degree of equality for such unions. Homosexual couples also have the same rights and obligations which come with a marriage, including the possibility of adopting children (Bauer, 2009). The greater acceptance and visibility of homosexuality may be witnessed in Western European culture in the thousands who take part in the gay pride parades in Berlin, London and elsewhere each year. However, the very fact that such a celebration is considered worthwhile also reveals that there remain tensions with this issue and challenges to being openly homosexual within these societies. There are individual churches however, such as the United Reform Church who permits gay partnerships and marriages (Zaimov, 2012).

Homosexuality is accepted in Britain by society at large. Since 2003 an anti-discrimination law has been in place that protects the rights of homosexuals.

367 The criminality of male homosexuality in Germany was abolished in 1969. Since then much has been achieved. Female homosexuality was not mentioned in the law, as women were not granted possession of a self-determined sexuality. Thus, a lesbian couple with children will not benefit from tax-benefits, whereas childless hetero-couples do. The Christian Democrat and Christian Socialist parties in particular insist that children need a mother and a father. A study on behalf of the German Federal Ministry of Justice however showed, for instance, that children grow up in rainbow/patchwork families the same as in other family situations.

368 Klaus Wowereit’s homosexuality was known within the homosexual community. He did however publicly declare his homosexuality in 2001, prior to the mayoral elections. His most famous phrase “I’m gay and that’s absolutely fine” has become a status symbol for others to come out. In German politics the leading openly gay representatives are: Klaus Wowereit, Guido Westerwelle, and Volker Beck.

369 Book title: Normalität auf Bewährung – Outings in der Politik und die Konstruktion der homosexuellen Männlichkeit (transl. Normalcy on probation – Outings in politics and the contraction of homosexual masculinity)
**Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues**

Furthermore, a Eurobarometer survey in 2006 found out that 46% of Britons agreed with allowing marriage to same-sex partners. Homosexuality used not to be a part of British politics, however, when homosexual acts were decriminalised in 1967, those in political office were often, and in growing numbers, either exposed (‘outed’) or chose to make their lifestyle public, although gay politicians such as Labour MP Tom Driberg and Tory peer Lord Boothby – their sexual orientation being known to colleagues and political journalists - were able to keep their private life separate from their life in office. Open homosexuality is lived out by actors, musicians and artists, like Stephen Fry (actor, comedian, TV presenter) or Sir Ian McKellen (Gandalf in LOTR). These two are generally regarded as “national treasures” in Britain and often used as positive examples of homosexuality being acceptable.

Among British male participants, not one participant stated a positive attitude towards homosexuality. Although there are varying degrees in how the individual male participants dealt with the question of homosexuality, it seems that all British male participants disagreed with homosexuality, as being “against nature” and “against God”. Dawoud clearly states that homosexuality to him is “100% forbidden” and “a crime against Allah.”

Although there seems to be a predominantly negative attitude towards homosexuality, several British male participants also mentioned their support, possibly with the hope for change. Idris for example feels

“A slight distaste in theory,” but stated that he would be “supportive and civil to any friend or colleague” if he learned that they were homosexual. I guess that I ideally hope that my behaviour or example as a Muslim might provide a model for them to come forward, thereby possibly changing their behaviour; though I am aware that this might be something of a cop-out, as it were.”

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370 Teen Sex Survey 2008. Retrieved from http://sexexperienceuk.channel4/teen-sex-survey-. 33% of Britons had no objections to same-sex couples adopting children. This is roughly in line with EU mean values of 44% and 33 %, respectively.

371 Abdullah feels that homosexuality is “unnatural and wrong,” and Michael describes it as “vile, disgusting, an abomination.”

372 Gibril states that he does not “have an issue with the people”, i.e. homosexuals, but he has an issue “with their lifestyle.”

373 Idris is however of the opinion that homosexual behaviour is wrong in Islamic terms. This does not, however, mean that he would criticize them “to their face or behind their back.”
Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues

It seems that some British male participants hope for Islamic advice to be given to homosexuals rather than themselves seeking advice on how to approach the subject. Several British male participants believe that homosexual practice should be kept private. This means that tolerance of existing homosexuality should not exceed the private sphere. According to Michael, it is a person’s personal choice:

“What people do in private is one thing. They will have to answer to God for that on the Day of Judgment.”

He does however very clearly believe that “portraying homosexuality as a normal part of society, and corrupting children into believing that, is evil and must be stopped.” Abraham Asad, on the other hand, even though he disagrees with homosexuality, understands where homosexuality (also among Muslims) is coming from. According to him, a visit to the hamam already makes it difficult for men to suppress natural desires, particularly when living in a segregated society:

“You’ve got a lot of men, they are together in the hamam, it’s all a bit hot…a bit steamy, surely, you know, a handful of those men are going to feel a bit that way inclined.”374

Abraham Asad believes that homosexuality is produced through cultural and social means and limitations. In his opinion gender segregation fosters homosexuality, as people seem to have little choice but to be close to their own sex unless they get married.375

German male participants offered diverse opinions on the issue of homosexuality. Particularly AbdulSamed feels strongly about homosexual lifestyles. He is the only one who explained in great detail his aversion of homosexuality:

374 Ruqayyah mentions a similar situation of women visiting a hamam. “I suppose also what sexuality is; if you are talking about sensuality. I think Muslim women, they can be sensuous together, and they enjoy massages...is that sexuality? I don’t know…but it’s sort of in there as well. I think it is the massages, its touch, its contact...it is not about sex...”

375 Abraham Asad does however say that this is not an excuse for homosexuality in Western society where gender segregation is less prevalent (and usually voluntary), although not forgetting single-sex schools which are still common in Britain (though these are nearly non-existent in Germany these days).
Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues

“Every person knows that if he is truly honest with himself that morally this isn’t good. God created sexual morals between man and woman, therefore this is immoral. It is a moral abnormality! It isn’t a will from God.”

55% (7) of German male participants tolerate homosexuality as part of society, while nonetheless stressing that in Islamic teaching homosexuality is prohibited. Mikail and Amro believe that individuals should decide for themselves how they are sexually inclined. Amro also questions whether homosexuality is intended by God. He does not believe that homosexuality is not God’s intention however he would also not state it to be un-normal:

“Normality is what the majority does…I don’t make great differences between homosexual and heterosexual relationships…in my opinion they should all stay home.”

The tendency among German male participants is that most of them tolerate and respect homosexuals, however, do not agree with their lifestyle. It seems that homosexuality can be lived in the privacy of the home but should not be displayed in public. Some believe that a person becomes homosexual due to social and/or natural influences, therefore the primary thought remains that the individual is responsible for his own actions and “God will judge the person according to his/her niyyah” (Nasir).

Thus Aziz believes:

“If these people [homosexuals]… have bad intentions and only indulge in their [sexual] appetite, then I believe it is a sin.”

376 AbdulSamed continued: “Man can spiritually rise above the animal…and animals don’t do something like that, except perhaps in captivity. Man has his ego, the freedom to decide. The human ego can develop into evil which leads him to arrogance, hatred and greed. Man can by his own free use his instincts for the worse and this can lead to homosexuality amongst other things. It is morally reprehensible to allow one’s instincts to “become God”; to follow this sexual drive and to do it in such a perverting way not even animals do.”

377 Amro believes that sexual activities, no matter whether they are of a homosexual or heterosexual nature, should be kept within the privacy of the home.

378 Ibrahim offered similar views to Aziz, and believes that there are different forms of homosexuality: controlled and uncontrolled “I try to understand people in their individual situations however I go with God’s message. I personally abhor homosexuality.” He praises close feelings of brotherhood among men, but disagrees with lived sexuality between men.
Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues

According to Mounir, communicating with homosexuals and questioning their situation in a respectful, impersonal manner may change the individual’s lifestyle. He has personally encountered “positive experiences” in this regard:

“I know of people who were homosexual and were freed from it through Islam or who have found alternative possibilities to deal with it, without hurting themselves.”

Among British female participants, opinions on homosexuality seem to be more open than their British male counterparts. Although, concrete wording, such as “dirty” and “un-islamic” were part of the female opinions, the majority address the issue from a more emotional point of view than their male counterparts: homosexuality should not be encouraged; and if existent it should be practised in a discreet manner.

Imaan-Yousef believes that:

“People should feel safe expressing themselves…they should feel safe with their sexuality and should be able to show this openly without fear of attack from anyone or fear of being judged or discriminated against.”

Souhayla also thinks that

“People cannot choose which sex to be attracted to and by trying to conform, people end up hurting themselves…if a homosexual person is in a monogamous relationship, it does not make them less of a Muslim.”

The British female participants seem inclined to think that homosexuality should be dealt with as follows although not accepted in Islam: although not accepted in Islam, homosexual behaviour can be accommodated if it is discreet and kept under control and lived within the privacy of the individual’s life. For most it is felt not to be appropriate to “spread the message of being gay” or to “talk with someone about the sexual act and its implications”. Khadijah-Maryam feels that,

“It is their responsibility to behave in a decent manner as much as anyone else.”
Converting on sensitive (Islamic) issues

The preferred option for dealing with homosexuality is according to most participants: ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’. Zaynab takes the view,

“that the Qur’an says a lot about not judging other people. Only Allah can do that. Live and let live. That is what I choose, rather than judging. With my gay friend I take the view: ‘I am not gay, I would never be gay but that is your decision.’ Same with my friends who drink or sleep around.”

The British female participants were more open to talking about homosexuality than their male counterparts, whereas the German female participants seem much more motivated to discuss this delicate subject. Generally speaking, the German participants of this study seem to have dealt with the subject of homosexuality in more depth than the British participants. Two British female participants had spoken about friends with whose homosexuality they did not seem to have an issue with (Jameela, Zaynab).

There are however differing views among the German female participants: 42% (16) described themselves as tolerant and open towards homosexuality; 30% (11) spoke against homosexuality, using the Qur’an and Muslim scholars as religious authorities; and 20% (8) cited difficulties in clearly positioning themselves on the subject of homosexuality. The remaining four German females withheld their opinion.

Jenna is not interested in a person’s sexuality when she first meets them:

“I am not really interested whether someone is gay or lesbian, or not. I don’t have to imagine every detail, but then there is hardly any difference to wanting to know anything about my non-homosexual neighbours...”

Most participants of this study believe that the privacy of others is ‘none of their business.’ It seems there is little prejudice towards homosexuals. Many participants have not thought much about homosexuality since it may have not touched their personal lives, e.g. having a close relation to homosexuality or homosexuals. Most

379 Asiye also believes that it is an individual’s choice: “If they are happy with their choices, so be it. I have a gay work colleague. He is fun and a nice guy. I would never tell him that I would not want anything to do with him, because he is gay and I am now a Muslim. I like him, and it is his personal choice.”
Converts on sensitive (Islamic) issues

believe that the privacy of others is ‘none of their business’. It seems there is little prejudice towards private homosexuality. Many participants have not thought much about homosexuality, as it has not touched their personal lives. If it has touched their personal lives, as in SteinbA’s case, the attitude may have changed in another way:

“I have a very good friend whom I have known since school. It took him a long time to realise that he is gay. He was absolutely miserable for years. We all knew that he was gay, but he didn’t. He had a girlfriend, but suffered like a dog, because he wasn’t happy with himself or his life. Since the day he recognised for himself that he is gay, he is finally happy. If you’re experiencing something like this, it is difficult to say: this isn’t wanted by God. This is one of the very few point in Islam I really quarrel with. It is impossible to be negative. Even though I know from Islam that this is the way it is, and God must have surely thought something when deciding on this...I am not questioning it...”

Nearly a third of German female participants spoke against homosexuality and described it as a religious but also a physical sin. CaMaTa believes that female same-sex relationships are a lesser evil than the male equivalent. If a Muslim was homosexual, difficulties would arise not only for him or her, but also for the religious community, and also the homosexual community:

“[If I were homosexual] I would have to ask myself everyday: Am I a Muslim?”

This clearly demonstrates how crucial it is and that it questions one’s Muslim identity.

Eileen on the other hand believes that

“Homosexuals are bad role models...for our children... Homosexuals have no orientation. This is an obstacle for the development of society. Social freedom should have boundaries. There are no boundaries. Everyone has to be tolerant about it. Same-sex couple are getting married. It is going that direction, but it’s not the direction of Islam.”

380 CaMaTa believes that it is too difficult for someone to be a Muslim and a homosexual for the public to know about and deal with it: “In public I sometimes had this feeling...my sister used to be a lesbian. Most found it better than me running around with a headscarf now. So, I feel, it is more accepted (than the headscarf).”
Several German female participants mentioned that the Qur’an offers views on homosexuality (Fairouz, Mariuma, Nurjan, Safiyyah). Referring to the Prophet Lot and his society, punishing homosexuality was one of the options of reducing it. Others felt strongly against homosexuality, referring to it as an “illness which does not belong to Islam” (Mahbubah). Fairouz also puts her opinion straight to the point:

“As a practising Muslim you just cannot be gay! It may seem chic to be all pro-homosexuality however the idea is to lead your sexuality into regulated boundaries. In my opinion it seems as if being gay is like a trend.”

A few participants felt that practising homosexuality is wrong, but the person behind the sexual orientation may not be. Primarily female participants spoke about their feelings on homosexuality in relation to the story of Lot in the Qur’an: “…I would never reject or treat homosexuals badly, however it is forbidden, as Allah has forbidden it” (Safiyyah).

This study does not seek to show a uniform or generalised view of participants towards homosexuality, as indeed the responses indicate that there is a great deal of variety in the experiences participants have had with homosexual or lesbian individuals and culture, and the opinions developed are correspondingly diverse. Some converts have not deeply thought about the issue or had to face the situation in life, while others have given it greater consideration. This has led them to develop positions in relation to homosexuality which are markedly at odds with general Muslim teaching; indeed, some of the reported attitudes may be unusual or surprising. Although most converts seem not to have been confronted with the issue of homosexuality, the study shows that most have formed their opinion on it through personal experience, reading the Islamic texts and/or forming their own theological but also personal and emotional stance.

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381 Selma also disagrees with same-sex marriages: “I don’t like it. They can do as they please, just don’t make a big thing out of it. When my children ask me ‘mum, can men marry men…?’”, then I answer them: Yes, they can, but I don’t think it is right. I don’t think it is right, that same-sex couples can marry!”

382 Fairouz led the discussion back to the comparison of sexuality of mankind and of animals: “It is unnatural. We should differentiate ourselves from the animals, that we do not follow our inclinations. Even a cat would not f**k another cat.” She does not want to accept homosexuality, just because society tries to “impose” it on her.
Chapter 9 The logic of an ‘illogical’ option

9.1. Introduction

Each year in Britain and Germany, hundreds of people convert to Islam, but there is no known connecting factor that could of itself explain that decision. This relates in part to the paucity of data available and partly to the great diversity of converts, who come from a very wide range of social, economic, political and career backgrounds.\textsuperscript{383} Prior to their conversion to Islam most will have been Catholics, Protestants, Jewish, Hindus, atheists or agnostics. The majority of Muslim converts is in search of something in particular to motivate such a major decision, whether this is the need for an answer to the meaning of life, dissatisfaction with ‘mainstream’ European culture, or the result of personal relationships. Most conversions are not the solution to practical or spiritual conflicts, but result in a gradual developing process which neither starts nor ends on the day of ‘officially’ embracing Islam. The conversion experience can primarily be seen as a conscious decision and adoption of a new set of beliefs and principles to reshape one’s life (Köse, 1996:189), it has however be noted that not every person initially converts out of personal conviction and for spiritual reasons, but adopt the faith to adapt to a personal given situation, e.g. marriage to a Muslim partner, pressure by other Muslims, having children with a Muslim partner, or living in a Muslim majority society.

This study consists of two samples of Muslim converts from Britain and Germany. A control group cohort was also included, in order to demonstrate in some respect the differences of similarly aged born Muslims in Britain and Germany who live in the same environment and are challenged with the same social, cultural, social and religious issues as Muslim converts. The intention of this study is to demonstrate the samples’ initial interest in Islam, their religious and social development after the conversion, and the adaption to Islamic regulations as well as moral conduct. Western Europeans converting to Islam in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century have become the centre of attention within the private but also the public sphere; families are challenged with their member’s new religion, and Muslim converts in the media issue concerns in the public’s understanding of Muslims and Islam as a whole.

\textsuperscript{383} See previous discussion about lack of official data.
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Different motifs to convert to Islam suggest that it is impossible to link the motivations of (potential) Muslim convert together, as no Muslim convert can be identical in his or her understanding and practice of the newly found faith as the next. Adopting similar religious views and practices surely lead to Muslim converts forming individual religious groups or attending already existing religious communal meetings, nonetheless the responses of the study’s participants and the historical development of conversion to Islam give the reader an insight of the individuality of the phenomenon of conversion to Islam. The participants’ initial interest in Islam included the love of adventure which led them to travel to Muslim majority countries, for others it was a fascination with the Middle East found in literature, film and the media. Others again had a desire for religiosity and spirituality in a secular and materialistic culture, or felt the need for rules in an otherwise chaotic world. Some sought a source of justice in an unjust world, while others cited anti-capitalism, the beauty of the Qur’an, the security of a religious community or the protection against sexism through the hejab as reasons for their conversion. Often there were also personal encounters, whether with a religious scholar or a sheikh, an Islamic preacher, or a Muslim partner, which inspired the individual participant. Disappointment in the institution of the Church made several participants leave Christianity, e.g. in Germany not only for religious reasons but also to avoid the obligatory church tax. There are different reasons why people in Western Europe convert to Islam. Their perceptions of motivations are every bit as varied as the people themselves.

Before reiterating the key arguments and findings, it should be acknowledged that this study is not without limitations. It is therefore neither representative of all Muslim converts in Britain and/ or in Germany, nor should it be understood as such, as it only demonstrates the status and development of two selected groups of Muslim converts within a certain period of time, thus the same study with different people at a different time may offer different results. The development of conversion to Islam has gone through different periods within the past century, which in turn have through temporal and spatial events influenced the people of their time. Current political, cultural and social events influence people to act and develop according to their time. A project such as this can therefore neither seek nor establish a definitive view on the subject, since all aspects involved (questions, answers, resources and situations) are time-specific, thus
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conditional, and should regarded as a snapshot, rather than settled. The results may also be to some extent influenced and limited by the presence and character of the researcher, e.g. the decisive influencing factor may be the researcher’s own conversion to Islam.

9.2. Synopsis of the country comparison

At the beginning of this comparison between conversion to Islam in the UK and Germany, I had the impression that the results would offer the reader minimal contrasts. One would have thought at a first superficial glance that the assessment of conversion to Islam and its development and influence upon people in either country involved would primarily encounter similarities, and few differences would be obvious. But during the research period, clear differences in the behavioural norms and developments within different religious, social and national settings or the discussion of particular sensitive issues appeared; these are summarized below in relation to each of the foregoing chapters:

9.2.1. Why Islam – Developing a Convert Muslim Identity

One of the most frequent questions a Muslim convert is asked seems to be “Why did you convert to Islam?” Sometimes this question is underlined with scepticism from the inquirer, other times curiosity forms part of the question, including the wish to understand the convert’s decision. One of the most common statements female Muslim converts experience on telling others they have become Muslim is: “Oh, you probably did that because of your husband.,” or “You married a Muslim man, right?” There is often the assumption that if a female has converted to Islam, she must be married to a Muslim man. Why else would she convert to Islam? Hence the next questions could be: “Where is your husband from?” Inquirers are often surprised to hear that conversions, although often influenced by a Muslim (partner), tend to take place for spiritual rather than practical reasons.
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The majority of the British and German participants agreed that their journey and decision to become Muslim has been of a primarily religious nature. Although there were only marginal differences between the British and German samples, the German participants seemed more inclined to highlight spiritual concerns which discussing their conversion than their British counterpart. This is not, however, a universal characteristic; it should also be noted that three female German participants – Nour, Selma and Kathira – converted for practical reasons, whereas none of the British female participants suggested the same.

Traditions are important in any culture and form part of the individual’s identity. Britain offers a rich culture of public houses, bars and meetings places, where alcohol is served. In Germany the ‘drinking’-culture is not as distinct as in Britain. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of the British participants showed a more mixed attitude on keeping or refraining from particular traditions. It seems that the British Muslim converts have greater (social) hurdles to overcome than German Muslim converts. The attitude towards celebrating birthdays and religious holidays such as Christmas also seems to change after the embracement of Islam. Islam commands keeping good family relations, therefore many participants spend the Christian holidays with their families, respecting their belief, but personally having formed a different definition and understanding of the Christian holiday, e.g. “Christmas is the day, when the Prophet Jesus was born, and can be remembered as such”\textsuperscript{384}. Defending their decision, this ultimately means, many Muslim converts make differentiations between the religious and cultural elements of Christian religious holidays to be able to spend time with their families and to simultaneously make their actions agreeable with their new faith.

In order to understand all the rights, rules and duties the faith demands the believer to understand and to fulfil, (s)he must acquire religious knowledge in order to form a religious understanding and an individual Muslim identity. Interest in literature on Islam influenced by Sufism was found among the British participants, whereas interest in classical texts and ‘Qur’an and Sunna’ literature was preferred by more than

\textsuperscript{384} Azadeh, Zaynah, Amina.
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50% of the study’ German sample. The amount of literature on Islam in Britain is much more extensive than in Germany, particularly when it comes to introductory literature, but also literature on specific schools of thoughts and branches in Islam. British participants acquired their religious knowledge in a more individualistic manner, according to their personal interests, whereas the German participants primarily had to rely on the limited amount of literature offered to them.

The significance of perceiving themselves as British before Muslim is not an apparent priority among the British participants. Although there is a tendency to view national identity as performing a necessary function, maintaining a Muslim identity seems to take priority. In particular, some of the British participants felt obliged to reflect their religion through their ‘British-Muslim’ lifestyle, in order not to be confused with the wide-spread misconception that Muslims could only originate from the Middle East, Turkish or Asian regions. The majority of the German sample of Muslim converts preferred to primarily be acknowledged as Muslims, whilst their nationality was neglected to a greater extent than found in the British sample.

9.2.2. Islamic obligations and dietary laws

For most Muslims, the recitation of the šahādah proclaims the entry into Islam, and if recited whole-heartedly (and thus accepted by God), the person will have become Muslim. None of the British participants described their feelings on reciting the šahādah on their conversion. It seems that the šahādah is commonly felt to be an integral part of becoming Muslim, and therefore self-explanatory. The German participants on the other hand were eager to express their memories of reciting the šahādah, and speak of the emotions they felt during that particular experience. It is often assumed that if a person

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385 Conversion to Islam through Sufism is found in Germany through the Naqshbandi tariqa of Turkish-Cypriot Sheikh Nazim in particular. This however could not be determined through this study’s German participants who primarily developed interest in Islam through Sunni-Muslim influence. Britain is more open about the role of Sufism in Muslim thought and practice. This may occur due to the fact that many Muslim majority countries regard Sufism as an integral part of Muslim tradition, and Muslim migrants to Britain may have continued to foster this attitude and understanding. According to Geaves, “if Sufism is part of the conversion process then ‘gradualism’ with respect to Islamic practice is acceptable. There are also scholars who argue that abrogation in the Qur’ān is to assist the convert in practice”.

386 The diversity included sources on Sunni and Shia Islam, Sufism and Ismāʿīlism.
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converts to a religion, he or she will adhere to all religious regulations in order to fulfil
the duties which are expected of them. This, however, overlooks the individual process
of the conversion experience, and is too simplistic to capture the true process of
adopting a new religion. Several participants did not regularly pray the obligatory five
daily prayers from the day of conversion, but it took time to learn the prayers in order to
be able to perform them correctly. It is my impression, that among the British
participants, there seems to exist a more relaxed attitude towards the fulfilment of this
religious duty than among the German participants. Nonetheless there are no
significant differences found in the performance of prayers among the British and
German sample.

The fascinating difference of how British and German participants deal with the
obligation of giving zakāt demonstrates that German participants were less likely to feel
‘burdened’ by this obligation, as most were registered Christians prior to conversion,
and therefore had a church income tax deducted from their monthly wages, being thus
already used to sharing some of their income with the Church. In Britain, the
compulsory giving of charity disagrees with some participants: most British participants
preferred to spend their zakāt on charity projects, giving to (Muslim) aid organisations
and to a lesser extent to private people in need. German participants offered a mixture of
spending outlets for their zakāt, primarily sending it to families in need abroad,
generally family members, giving to the local mosque for it to be distributed where it is
needed, and to a small extent supporting Muslim aid organisations.

Fulfilling the pillar of Ramadān German participants seemed to be stricter than
the British counterpart in commencing and completing this pillar of Islam. The German
participants were more open about accepting possible downfalls and failures in keeping
to the fasting rules, whereas the British participants stated more collectively the
importance of adhering to this religious obligation. A common trait among all of the
participants however was the knowledge that millions of Muslims all over the world
were doing the same at the same time, which provided them with a sense of ‘silent

387 Several German participants underlined their importance of the practice with the hadith:
“It was narrated that Bunaydah ibn al-Husayb said: ‘I heard the Messenger of Allah* say: ‘The covenant that distinguishes between
us and them is the prayer, and whoever neglects it has disbelieved.’ (Sahih Bukhary Hadith, narrated by Abu Dawoud, al-Tirmidhi,
al-Nisaa’i and Ibn Mādja)
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solidarity’. The final pillar of Islam, the Hajj, seems for most Muslim converts to be an obligation they wish to fulfil once in their lifetime. Most British and German participants agreed that the Hajj is an important religious requirement, however not as important as the other four. The religious attitude considering the preparation for the Hajj seemed for the British participant to be most important (it cannot however count as a sample), whereas the means of travel and the problem of increasing consumerism were issues mentioned by several German participants. The latter criticized the modern changes in the holy cities, some of them believing that the spirituality of the holy place has been lost due to invasive consumerism. The British sample however, concentrated on the spiritual means and preparations needed to embark on the Hajj.

All British and German participants without exception stated that they refrain from the consumption of pork. Participants who described themselves as liberally practising Islam mentioned that not consuming pork is the least common ground all Muslims can agree upon. Although all the participants agreed with the validity of pork consumption being prohibited through the Qur’an, and the majority of participants also refrained from products containing pork-gelatine, two German participants did admit to sporadically consuming sweets containing pork-gelatine (Amina-2, Iman-2). Regarding the prohibition of alcohol, the majority of British and German participants stated that they had refrained from alcohol since their conversion, though a minority mentioned having consumed alcohol after conversion. A tiny minority did not see the consumption of alcohol as strictly prohibited, and underlined their reason with proof from the Qur’an, interpreting Qur’an 5:90 as a strong recommendation to refrain from alcohol, but not an absolute ban, not being as explicit as the prohibition on the consumption of pork (see Qur’an 5:3).

Most participants preferred the consumption of halal-certified products. Nonetheless it was noticeable that it seemed to be easier for the British participants to purchase halal products in comparison to their German counterpart, who also voiced scepticism on the validity of the halal-certifications in some cases. As a result the German participants were more likely to purchase products which are not halal-

388 Sara, a female Muslim convert, also stated in Roberts’ From my sister’s lips: “…there were Muslims all over the world that were doing this: a silent solidarity.” (Roberts, 2005:123)
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certified, while still however making sure the products do not contain pork or alcohol as ingredients. The availability of halal products is greater for British than for German participants, as supermarkets and food stores in Britain cater a greater variety of food products for Muslims than in Germany. Thus several German participants agreed that adherence to consuming halal products depends on the availability, and if it is not existent, reciting “bismi Allah” prior to eating would suffice to make the product acceptable for consumption (Mounir).

9.2.3. Family and friends

The reactions towards a conversion to Islam by a relative or close friend will undoubtedly produce a variety of responses, which in turn result in different consequences. Some Muslim converts decide on a complete change of lifestyle, which may result in the alienation from family and/ or the dissolution of friendships if common interests disappear. The majority of participants felt that continuing relationships with their families was more important than upholding friendships with people who did not share their (new) outlook and practice. This may be due to the high value and respect accorded to parents and relatives within the Islamic moral system, meaning that greater efforts are made to maintain family than friendly relations. According to Zebiri, this depends on the individual convert whether or not (s)he decides their Muslim identity and practice to be a continuity of the values taught in childhood by their parents which often depends on the individual family background (Zebiri, 2008:250). Most converts found it important to continue their relations with their families positively, giving time for any adjustments needed, being open to questions, and respecting the virtues and closeness of family. Nearly half of the British female participants stated negative reactions from relatives, whereas a fifth of British males reported the same reactions from relatives. Among German participants, more than half of the male participants reported negative reactions, whereas less than a third of German females reported the same reactions. These results prove that the stereotype of primarily female converts being confronted with the negative reactions on their conversion may have to be re-examined. Not all participants experienced difficulties or negative reactions from their relatives when informing them on their conversion.
Several participants mentioned the Islamic duty of keeping family ties, whereas “friendships should be chosen according to personal perception and need”\textsuperscript{389}. Some participants felt the necessity to dissociate themselves from those friends who did not support them in their conversion process and changed lifestyle. Among the British participants, positive reactions from friends were a lot more common among the British than the German participants, which reflect Islam being more embedded in British culture generally than is the case in Germany.\textsuperscript{390} None of the British female participants reported negative reactions on their conversion by their friends, and only 15\% of the German female participants reported negative reactions. In comparison, more than a fifth of British male participants and nearly a third of German male participants reported negative reactions. It could be suggested that the difference between lifestyles before and after conversion was greater among males than females, prompting more negative reactions from friends. It was also noticed that many female participants who used to have mixed-gendered friendships had largely let these friendships ‘fizzle out’, preferring to maintain friendships with people of the same sex.\textsuperscript{391}

9.2.4. Courtship and Marriage

Muslim converts encounter with Islam a somewhat different moral conduct, religiously and socially inspired, which places great value on gender separation and associated etiquette towards the opposite sex, caused most participants to reconsider and re-evaluate their behaviour in mixed-gender circumstances. Most of the participants’ once open behaviour has given way to more reserved behaviour, which may seem to be largely influenced by their conversion. The increased social and physical distance between the sexes also appears to be accompanied by differences in manners and the

\textsuperscript{389} AbdulSamed; Eileen.
\textsuperscript{390} British males 18\%, British females 43\%; German males 8\%, German females 13\%.
\textsuperscript{391} Several of the male participants also commented on loosening their friendships with females, it was noticed that they had done this to a much smaller extent than their female counterparts, with the exception of behavioural changes towards female Muslim friends.
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relationship perceived between oneself and others. A distinction was often drawn between Muslim and non-Muslim women, in terms of how behaviour was modified in their presence with more respect and distance preserved with Muslim women; this seems to indicate that the moral code is understood in part as a specifically Islamic, contextual issue. The female participants largely reported no difference in their behaviour towards Muslim and non-Muslim men, stating that they had adopted reserved behaviour when communicating with the opposite sex. Nonetheless most female participants seemed to expect a distanced and respectful behaviour of men, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Premarital sexual relationships are the norm in Western European society; within Islam, however, such relationships are not permitted. The general attitude among the participants included that entering into a premarital relationship has to include the consent of both parties involved. Nearly half of all participants were comfortable with premarital relationships if they were conceptualised under certain conditions, e.g. non-sexual and under the supervision of the families involved and members of the Muslim community. More than half of the participants disagreed with sexual contact within these relationships. Although most participants would avoid such relationships themselves, particularly German participants stated that they respected other people’s decision to enter into one. Reflecting the participants’ convert position within mainstream and minority culture, it seems they do not feel that the dictates of Islam exceed the limit of its adherents, but that the liberal philosophy of Western European culture – and perhaps the fear of being labelled intolerant – has an influence on their thinking.

The dating forms known in Britain and in Germany largely seem to conflict with the religious norms of courtship in Islam, particularly when it comes to premarital sexual activities. Muslim converts who are used to the Western dating norms prior to their conversion may find it challenging to adhere to the religious rules for meeting a prospective marital partner. Married participants said they felt relief at not needing to search for a partner within the given religious boundaries. Several participants felt the

392 Most male participants have begun to treat the opposite sex with “more respect” (Abdullah, Gibril, Asim, Ibrahim, and Nasir) and “placing a greater value on their (i.e. women’s) opinions” (Abdullah, Idris).
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need for third parties to be involved in the search for a prospective partner, thus the search was often delegated to Muslim friends. Those participants with a still existing mixed-gender circle of friends stated their preference for directly approaching the person of interest rather than going via a third party. Whereas a third of British participants stated that they would pursue a person of their interest through a third party, less than a quarter of German participants felt the necessity to approach the family or friends of the person of interest. In fact, the majority of German participants preferred to directly approach a person of interest and to court him/ her within the personal yet also religious boundaries of moral conduct, whereas the trend among the British participants seems to be to observe the person of interest and obtain information through a third party before personally approaching that person.

The majority of German participants felt that (legal state and religious) marriage was required for any islamically acceptable sexual activity between two people. Yet, several German participants felt that Islamic marriage seemed to not be as important as a legal state marriage, whereas a small number emphasized the importance of religious marriage over legal state marriage. The British participants on the other hand emphasized the importance of marriage in order to fulfil their sexual needs within the permitted religious boundaries. Not all British participants however felt marriage to be the most important influencing factor within religious terms.

Islamic scholarly opinions generally seem to consider interfaith couples and marriages as problematic to some extent. According to traditional Islamic fiqh, Muslim men are permitted to marry women from one of the three monotheistic religions, but neither atheists nor polytheists. Muslim women on the other hand are only permitted to marry men within their faith. There are scholarly differences, however, the majority agrees that in terms of bringing up children and more importantly, upholding the faith, it is strongly suggested for both parents to be Muslim. There are a growing number of progressive Muslims who are sympathetic to or accepting of marriages between Muslim women and non-Muslim men, however these still remain a minority.

393 Zaynab, a Shi’ite Muslim convert also agrees that Shi’ite temporary marriage permits two people to be sexually active with one another.
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The majority of British male participants stated that they would marry a non-Muslim woman however most would prefer to marry a Muslim woman. Two British female participants explained by using the Qur’an that their marital partner would not have to be a Muslim man,\(^{394}\) whereas the remaining British female participants preferred the option of marrying a Muslim man. 75% (10) of the German male sample stated their partner would not have to be Muslim, nonetheless it was noticed that, like in the British male sample, marriage to a Muslim woman seems to be preferred. Nearly a quarter of German female participants stated that their marital partner would not have to be Muslim, however important conditions would have to apply for an interfaith marriage to function.\(^{395}\) Most female participants however felt that they could not imagine a long-term emotional relationship with a non-Muslim man without reducing their religious beliefs to a compromising minimal existence.

9.2.5. Converts on sensitive issues

There are subjects in every society which tend to be of a sensitive nature and may not be as openly discussed as others. This generally depends on the particular society and the cultural environment. Nonetheless there are sensitive issues which are subject to discussion, criticism but also change in every society, which have been subject within this study in terms of thought and understanding prior to and after conversion to Islam. Several male participants also understand male circumcision to be an initiation rite, though this related more to a personal commitment than an imposed condition. This is confirmed by Köse’s study (1996:131), in which almost 80% of all male participants were uncircumcised at the time of conversion. The majority of the British male participants agreed that male circumcision is part of Islamic religious practice, however did not understand it as an absolute obligation. 45% (5) of the British female participants felt male circumcision to be obligatory, placing more emphasis on its religious than hygienic aspects. Nearly half of the German male sample was circumcised, primarily for medical reasons, at the time of conversion. 28% (11) of German female participants stated that male circumcision is not important to them,

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\(^{394}\) Azadeh, Zaynab.

\(^{395}\) Belief in the One God, belief that Muhammad* is a prophet of God, and no belief in Jesus being the son of God.
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whereas the remaining majority felt that male circumcision is an important religious practice. As a result, although not an obligation, it seems that male circumcision is a strong recommendation as an initiation rite into Islam which should be followed.

The preservation of virginity has primarily been a demand placed on the female rather than the male, including the attention given to the intactness of the hymen. In terms of the specific teachings in Islam, both sexes are obliged to remain chaste until marriage. Most participants immediately spoke about female virginity, although some stressed that there should not be a distinction made between men and women when it comes to adhering to this (religious) obligation. Most participants also believe that the actual existence of virginity (the unbroken hymen) is not important, but the individual’s chastity prior to marriage. Particularly the female participants emphasized chastity to be more important than fetishising over an intact hymen.

Masturbation is another sensitive topic of discussion, as according to traditional Islamic thought, it is an ‘unnatural aversion’ from the act of procreation. There are however some scholars who interpret masturbation as a ‘pardonable sin’, one which is theoretically punishable, but in practice not executable. Others permit masturbation as a means of relief of tension if the man is not married and cannot otherwise sexually comfort himself. Several British male participants stated that masturbation is not permitted within Islam. If the urge arises, some stated, the person should turn to fasting in order to reduce the desire of masturbation. One British male participant clearly stated his acceptance of masturbation being permissible within Islamic teachings, whereas no British female participants explicitly condemned masturbation. Within the German sample, some male participants described masturbation as a ‘natural human need’, whereas others believed that as long as masturbation was not openly spoken about, it could be practised to avoid adultery or other illicit sexual activities. The majority of German female participants understood masturbation to be a normal bodily function and natural sexual need of an individual, which should be practised without restrictions. That same majority did however also explicitly state that masturbation should have no place within a marriage. Comparing both samples, it seems as if the British participants felt more inhibited speaking about masturbation and its effects than the German
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participants, who expressed their opinions more openly, directly approaching the subject at hand.

Polygamy is permitted but also limited by the Qur’an, as it introduces specific conditions for entering a polygamous marriage. Most participants stated that they would not enter a polygamous marriage, speaking in favour of monogamy, referring to the Qur’an (4:129). 31% (4) of British male participants however emphasized their openness to a polygamous marriage, should the necessity arise.\textsuperscript{396} The German male participants agreed that polygamy is permitted under specific circumstances, and do not disapprove of its practice (if correctly practised), most referred to the Qur’an, preferring monogamy over polygamy. The British female participants largely respect those who live in polygamous marriages, understand the advantages and disadvantages of polygamy but believe that a polygamous marriage should only be entered into when specific conditions are fulfilled. Most German female participants believe that in current times these conditions cannot be fulfilled, and thus polygamy should only be practised when absolutely necessary.\textsuperscript{397} The majority of both British and German participants do not reject the existence of polygamy and respect those who live polygamously, but would not willingly enter into such a marriage themselves.

Homosexuality is a fierce debate within Islam. According to mainstream-Islam, homosexuality is not only widely frowned upon but homosexual acts are forbidden and can, to this day, be punished.\textsuperscript{398} Punishment can include imprisonment and fines, but in extreme cases also the death penalty (e.g. in the Islamic Republic of Iran).

\textsuperscript{396}Michael stated that he is “not naturally monogamous”.

\textsuperscript{397}A minority of female participants stated that they could not forbid their husbands to marry another woman, if they could not fulfil their marital duties as a wife (Touareg1801).

\textsuperscript{398}Same-sex intercourse carries the death penalty in five officially Muslim nations: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Mauritania, Sudan, and Yemen. Muslim scholars establish their attitude towards homosexuality through their understanding of the Qur’an and Islamic law. Accordingly, most scholars will suggest the prohibition of homosexuality. The passages of the Qur’an 4:15-16, 7:80-82, 26:165-175, 27:55-58 and 29:28-29 seem to suggest to many Muslim scholars that homosexuality should be treated as a crime and should therefore be punished. The different legal schools also suggest different punishments -> The Hanafi school (Sunni) does not consider same-sex intercourse to constitute adultery, and therefore leaves punishment up to the judge's discretion. Most early scholars of this school specifically ruled out the death penalty, others allow it for a second offence. Imam Shafi'i (Sunni) considers same-sex intercourse as analogous to other zina; thus, a married person found to have done so is punished as an adulterer (by stoning to death), and an unmarried one, as a fornicator, is left to be flogged. The Maliki school (Sunni) says that anyone (married or unmarried) found to have committed same-sex intercourse should be punished as an adulterer. Within the Ja'fari schools (Shi’a),
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British and German participants had widely differing views, also making distinctions between homosexuality and lesbianism. All the British male participants disagreed with homosexuality, as being “against nature” and “against God”. Support was stated in only a few instances, including “the hope for change” (for homosexuals to change their sexual preference), and understanding that “men may find it difficult to suppress natural desires in a certain environment.”

50% (6) of German male participants seemed to tolerate homosexuality as being part of society, stressed however that homosexuality is forbidden according to Islamic teaching. Homosexuality can be lived in the privacy of the home, but such affections should not be publicly displayed. German male participants show greater tolerance towards homosexuals than their British male counterparts, though most still disagreed with the homosexual lifestyle. The British female participants seemed to be more accepting of homosexuality than their British male counterparts. Although homosexuality should not be encouraged, it should, if existent, be practised in a discreet manner.

About 50% (18) German female participants described themselves as tolerant toward homosexuals, nearly a third speaking out against homosexuals, referring to the Qur’an and Muslim scholars, whereas the remaining participants had difficulties positioning themselves

9.3. Muslim converts form a counter culture

Muslim converts embody a continuously developing Muslim sensibility and as well as a British or German sensibility which, once connected to each other, can make Muslim converts effective cultural and religious mediators, more commonly known as ‘bridge-builders’ (Moosavi, 2011). The participants’ answers were on the one hand surprisingly open in some cases, yet on the other standardized in accordance with

Sayyid al-Khoi says that anyone (married or unmarried) found to have committed same-sex intercourse should be punished as an adulterer. (Mumisa. M., Al Mahdi Institute, UK)

399 Idris.

400 Abraham Asad.

401 Amro

402 “It is their responsibility to behave in a decent manner as much as anyone else” (Khadija-Maryam).
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general Islamic thought. It appears that Muslim converts are often able to express themselves in ways which born Muslims may find difficult. Young born Muslims and converts are both British and German, and both are subject to complex influences from a number of different influences both Muslim and non-Muslim. It could be suggested that the reason for different approaches and answers to delicate questions may stem from the differing culture and social norms a Muslim convert and a born Muslim may have been brought up with.

British participants feel that they do not have to accommodate themselves to ‘foreign’ cultures, proudly presenting their identity as being both ‘British and Muslim’, whereas the German participants tend more often to accommodate themselves to a particular culture, which may have become part of their lifestyle due to meeting Muslims from a particular cultural background, marriage or personal interest, rather than maintaining a ‘German and Muslim’ identity. Nonetheless, with time, converts seem to include some of their original cultural elements in their present religious lifestyle, as the conversion continues to develop and becomes individualised. The nature of the interview questions confronted the participants with a vast range of questions, which included standard questions on their interest of Islam, their path to conversion, continuing with questions on the reactions of their families and friends regarding their conversion, the perception of themselves within Islam and the perception of others of them, general questions on the fundamental basics of Islam (the five pillars of Islam, prohibition of pork and alcohol, consumption of halal-products), but also more intimate and gender-based questions regarding relationships and marriage as well as acutely sensitive issues in Islam which are currently subject of diverse and critical discussion.

Muslim converts tend to often try practising the faith immediately after their conversion ‘by the book’ (and often beyond), eagerly learning about the rules they should submit to in order to fulfil the religious requirements expected of them. This however means that although religious practise may be strict in the beginning, it may ‘loosen’ over time, and converts may change their practice, adapting it to their personal religious needs. When it comes to the changes of individual religious practice, it is my impression that primarily the female participants will change their religious habits with time, whereas most of the male participants have, although having continuously
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developed in their religious knowledge, seem to come across as more settled and content in their religious practice from the outset of their conversion. According to Roald, it makes a great difference how people become attracted to Islam, as “the ‘notion’ of Islam as a logical religion” is one of the major reasons Islam is being embraced (Roald, 2004:343). Both extreme and liberal movements attract Muslim converts alike, and depending on towards which they feel more attracted to, that is the practising part they will initially step on. This may with time and the acquisition of religious knowledge and experience change, depending on the individual convert’s interests.

Whether Muslim converts tend to give personalised or depersonalised answers seemed to depend on the individual and the nature of the discussed subject. The British participants included their personal beliefs when they were questioned on Islamic basics whereas the German participants tended to de-personalise their answers to questions concerning the basics of Islam. Although culturally the German national population seems to be open-minded, it is also conservative in the adherence to rules and etiquettes. This cultural characteristic may have influenced the German participants to voice their acceptance of the Islamic moral and religious code of conduct and practice without passing individual opinions, whereas the British participants, although in acceptance of the basic rules in Islam, felt the necessity to include their personal viewpoints.

Questions on behavioural changes adopted towards the opposite sex, relationships, and various sensitive issues regarding sexuality, resulted in less of a gender difference in the nature of the participants’ replies but seemed to be more related to the national backgrounds of the participants. The British participants tended to be less outspoken, reserved, offering more standardized de-personalised answers than their German counterpart. Outspokenness is not generally attributed to typical British behaviour, as it is preferred to discuss sensitive issues in a reserved and impersonal manner, consequently the British participants reasoned with quotations from religious sources, basing ‘personal’ opinions on the knowledge gained from Islamic teaching rather than offering the interviewer personal viewpoints on delicate issues. The German sample on the other hand tended to be more outspoken and willingly offered their personal opinions on the diverse sensitive issues regarding sexuality, nonetheless
The logic of an ‘illogical’ option

bearing in mind what Islam has taught them, and depending on how developed their religious knowledge had been at the time of the interview. In comparison to the interviews with the British female participants, the tone and atmosphere of the interviews with most of the German female participants may have resulted from a commonality in national culture, faith and religious understanding between the interviewees and the interviewer, thus resulting in a greater comfort and leading to interviewees more firmly voicing their understanding and viewpoints on even delicate issues, supplying rich empirical data.

Muslim converts tend to form a counter culture, which somewhat separates them from the non-Muslim majority society, but also from the Muslim community. Their position has positive and negative side-effects, as on the one hand they feel the need and pressure to defend Islam and their decision to convert within their majoritatively non-Muslim environment as well as to prove their ‘loyalty’ to the Muslim community, and on the other hand, Muslim converts can act as mediators between Muslim migrants and the non-Muslim majority society. Todays Muslim converts seem to be in a similar position to second- and third generation Muslim migrants, as both groups will have gone through a similar educational process and have been socialised with similar sets of attitudes and cultural experiences. If Muslim converts do not want a counter culture to develop which separates them from the non-Muslim majority society and the Muslim migrant communities, the only suggestion could be an assimilation to one of the two aforementioned ‘worlds’, or if this counter culture should emerge and include structure, Muslim converts have to develop their own terms and conditions of how to life Islam as a convert in a non-Muslim majority society.

9.4. British and German Muslim converts: Bridge-builders or isolators?

Most Muslim converts seem to have something in common: It is their personal impression that their lives have improved following conversion. Whether they are truly happy about the life-changing decision they have made, Monika Wohlrarb-Sahr seems to disagree, and describes the conversion phenomenon and with that forthcoming changes as a ‘more stable’ lifestyle (Halser & Hampel, 2012). I agree to an extent,
The logic of an ‘illogical’ option

however believe that it depends on the individual and developmental nature of conversion, as not one Muslim convert is similar to the next. The religious stability is not always immediately noticed when meeting Muslim converts. It is however without a doubt that many Muslim converts will on the one hand continuously search for more knowledge and understanding within the faith, but on the other hand also determine for themselves which Islamic niche they feel comfortable in.

This study should function as a catalyst for more research into a phenomenon that could change the religious and cultural landscape of Britain and Germany. It should be a stimulus for the public to acknowledge the diversity of converts to Islam and to respond to challenges which this study may have opened to them. For many, Islam provides a religious alternative for people seeking answers to life’s eternal questions, an alternative that raises questions about the surrounding culture. The lifestyle of converts to Islam continues to shape the attitude and behaviour of society. The possibility of conversion to Islam often arrives through a specific person, group or public discourse, which in turn supports the choice with reason. Encountering a religion through someone from a different cultural background therefore often includes taking up their 'foreign' customs and worldview. The lifestyle of converts to Islam continues to shape the attitude and behaviour of society, and with that influences beyond borders.

It was interesting to observe how the participants on the one hand rejected many of their original religious, cultural and social traditions, and at the same time the challenge appeared to merge whole-heartedly with the new religious and perhaps foreign cultural traditions. Several participants felt completely absorbed in embracing their faith, but were not able to completely disembark from their cultural background, since its particular cultural and social environment has shaped their identity. Thus, one must assume that the Islam of Muslim converts is differently shaped than that of migrants in Britain and Germany respectively, both of which are also different from the Islam practiced in Muslim countries. This means that there is no “One and Only”- Islam but a variety of Islamic practices influenced by different cultural and traditional backgrounds.
The logic of an ‘illogical’ option

But how can British and German Muslim converts contribute to a reputative improvement within their respective environments and do they want to function as bridge-builders? Or is this notion only the wishful thinking of an outsider? Would they prefer to rather isolate themselves from their respective local environments and remain within the Muslim communities? A convert seems to be neither fish nor fowl, as on the one hand (s)he will always be connected to his or her culture and traditions of origin, and on the other will never be a fully integrated part of the Muslim community. It therefore depends on the convert whether or not (s)he endeavours to initiate a dialogue between the cultures and religions, or whether (s)he chooses to isolate him-/herself by either following a particular religious school of thought, or alternatively forms a religious alliance with other British or German Muslim converts. The state in which Muslim converts find themselves can be compared with the understanding of liminality: Individuals are “betwixt and between” when they do not belong to the society they had previously been part of and have not yet been reincorporated into that same society (Turner, 1987). This particular positioning can be linked to Muslim converts in the 21st century.

Like Roald, I found that the longer the participants had embraced Islam, the more flexible and lenient they had become in their religious practices, understandings of Islamic norms and incorporation of Muslim moral conduct in their daily routine (Roald, 2004:105). Some however, and this is also observed by Roald, some converts have retained inflexible attitudes, particularly towards the sensitive issues (see chapter 8), following a rigid pattern of dress code and behaviour towards the opposite sex (see chapter 4). “Converts often express a strong sense of multiple identities”, which allows some to “alternate between ways of life, making them highly proficient at relating with various groups” (Bush, 2012:285). This understanding speaks for several British and German participants whereby it has to be noted that it seems as if the British participants involve themselves to a greater extent in their non-Muslim majority society than their German counterpart.

The British participants tend to mix their Islamic values with the British traditions they have grown up with. They appreciate living in a pluralistic society which offers a democratic social and political system, but at the same time it is important to
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them to portray themselves as not only British, but Muslim. Their Muslim identity is shown in their understanding of religious teaching concerning personal matters, e.g. family and gender in general, but at the same time, their flexible behaviour (adapting to the respective environment, as they see fit and appropriate) with non-Muslims already separates them from many born British Muslims or migrant Muslims in Britain. As several British male participants stated the possibility of entering an polygamous marriage – none of the German male participants stated the same – it is astounding to see their behavioural pattern being so flexible: on the one hand accepting certain Islamic norms that can seem contradictory to or rejecting of 21st century British life, and on the other hand aligning themselves with the increasingly liberal, pluralistic and global outlook which keeps the British society – as mixed and diverse as it is – together as a whole.

It is my impression that British Muslim converts will not segregate themselves from non-Muslim British society, but instead take up a particular position within it, negotiating the varied and occasionally conflicting ideas, concerns and outlooks of their non-Muslim and born Muslim neighbours. They are thus empowered to view and evaluate British society from the position of (native) insider, but also as an outsider – as a Muslim convert. This simultaneous distance and connection offers new opportunities for communication and development, in term of both community and religious understanding.

The dynamics of the German participants are currently more static. Some trends can be foreseen, but considering the current development of Muslim converts in German society, there are few predictions that can be made with confidence. The encounters between born Muslims and (potential) Muslim converts are usually individual, most often where a native German strikes up a relationship (of whatever kind) with a migrant Muslim person or group. If this leads to conversion or marriage with a subsequent conversion, it may come to a break with the family of origin, but often also with mainstream society. It has however been found during the course of this research that not all Muslim converts adapt to the expectations of a Muslim life partner and the accompanying Muslim environment, even though it should not be neglected that such adaptions do take place.
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German Muslim converts seem to develop their religious and social practices individually for themselves and their immediate surroundings. Whilst British Muslim converts tend to portray a certain serenity and security during their individual conversion processes, German Muslim converts often start their conversion process by adjusting to the Muslim environment they feel most comfortable with, only to decrease this adjustment and let go of a particular Muslim environment once they feel they have understood the basis of the faith and feel secure enough to continue their search for religious knowledge on an individual basis. For many, it seems to be an unlogical decision to embrace Islam as an alternative choice to other religions and worldviews. However unlogical it may be for outsiders, Muslim converts will address the logic behind this ‘illogical option’. ④₀³

In future, this may result in an individual rather than collective development of a German Muslim convert identity. German Muslim converts tend to become more lenient and flexible with religious requirements and Islamic teachings as they develop. The more highly educated the German participants were, the more reflective and open-minded they were in their answers. The German participants with less education seemed more vivid in their adherence to all things Islamic, demonstrating less variety of perspective on certain issues than their more highly-educated compatriots. British Muslim converts’ engagement with their community tends to take the form of social, political (and to a lesser extent) economic activities, whereas German participants emphasised their religious, social and charity involvements. Although Muslim converts in both countries emphasize the importance of being active in social and communal issues, their modes of interpolating themselves into society differ widely. The interaction of British Muslim converts in British politics influences the plurality of the society, and several local constituencies have put forward Muslim converts as MPs to represent them in Parliament. George Galloway, elected MP for Bradford West, is a British Muslim convert. He emphasizes however that religion is a private matter, and should be separated from political activities (Pidd, 2012). In comparison, German

④₀³ Khalid: “I probably would say I have been searching for the meaning of life. My father passed away in 2003, and back then I was still a believing Christian. After that I felt that it did not go well together, Christianity, and why is God such a cruel God. That is the end of Christianity. Then there was Hinduism, Buddhism to have a look on how they function (particularly around the time of ‘The Da Vinci Code’), and after that it was Christianity again, in much more extreme form. From 2007 on, it was Islam, and that was the deciding factor. It is just much easier and much, much more logical than Christianity.”
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Muslim converts are currently little active in the country’s politics, and seem to prefer to actively participate in voluntary functions either within the local Muslim community, within Muslim organisations or forming individual Muslim groups and projects. Perhaps in reaction to (in most cases) having previously had to pay Germany's Church tax, it is important for many German Muslim converts to personally get involved in charity, firstly to support the cause of charity in Islam, and secondly to influence how much is spent and where exactly it is delivered.

Individual Muslim converts may isolate themselves from their (former and primarily) non-Muslim environment to be able to practise their chosen ideal of the religion. This isolation may also be apparent from the particular group in which the individual may feel comfortable in, as the unity within is demonstrated to outsiders, e.g. per se the immediate non-Muslim environment but also Muslims or other Muslim groups who own a different conception of the religion. This isolating behaviour is often found among traditionalist practitioners of religion whereas contemporary inclined religiosity is primarily found among those Muslim converts whose intention it is to communicate as bridge-builders between Western-European values and Islamic virtues to harmoniously connect them with one another. Although conversion to Islam may result in social isolation from the majority non-Muslim society, with religious conversion comes the inevitable social conversion of the Muslim convert’s cultural environment, thus making an individual’s isolation virtually impossible but rather an influencing participant of a continuously changing society.
Appendix I

Chapter 4

Table 1 - Visits to Muslim Countries prior to Conversion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British Male (13)</th>
<th>British Female (11)</th>
<th>German Male (13)</th>
<th>German Female (39)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visit – Yes</td>
<td>23% - (3)</td>
<td>72% - (8)</td>
<td>23% - (3)</td>
<td>66% - (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit – No</td>
<td>69% - (9)</td>
<td>27% - (3)</td>
<td>77% - (10)</td>
<td>30% - (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld</td>
<td>7% - (1)</td>
<td>9% - (1)</td>
<td>0% - (0)</td>
<td>4% - (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 - Spiritual/ Practical Reasons for Conversion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British converts (24)</th>
<th>German converts (52)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual &amp; Practical</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I

Chapter 4

Table 3 – Importance of Muslim Identity among Converts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British Male (13)</th>
<th>British Female (11)</th>
<th>German Male (13)</th>
<th>German Female (39)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Important</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix II

Chapter 5

Table 4 - Completion of the Hajj

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British Converts</th>
<th>German Converts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have not completed the Hajj</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have completed the Hajj</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wish to complete the Hajj</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No interest complete the Hajj</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 - Importance of ḥalāl food consumption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British Converts</th>
<th>German Converts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less important</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix III

Chapter 6

Table 6 - Informing the family about the conversion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British Converts</th>
<th>German Converts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirectly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 - Parents’ and relatives’ reactions towards the conversion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British Converts</th>
<th>German Converts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive reactions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative reactions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed reactions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral reactions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld response</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix III

Chapter 6

Table 8 - Friends’ reactions towards the conversion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British Converts</th>
<th>German Converts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive reactions</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative reactions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed reactions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld response</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 - Changing the circle of friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>British Converts</th>
<th>German Converts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withheld Responses</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix IV

Incorporation of Islamic rituals  (Text formerly in Chapter 4)

Throughout history, people have relied on rituals to define a day, a week, a year, and in particular, to honour certain situations, events and matters. Rituals help people to remember something or someone, and bring familiarity, comfort, routine, and even structure. A ritual may be seen as a physical, psychological or spiritual gesture which is generally performed for a particular reason and value. Rituals are often traditions, particularly owned by religious communities, performed on specific occasions, or at the discretion of the individual. Purposes vary as to whether they fulfil religious obligations, satisfy the needs of the practitioner, demonstrate respect or submission, or state one’s personal religious affiliation. It often depends on the individual as to how he or she wishes to incorporate rituals into daily life. Bearing all this in mind, it seems as if the frequency of rituals increases a person’s ability to cope with stress in a different way than those who have no rituals, to organise and to set certain standards themselves.

In Islam, there are many different rituals. Some are viewed as religious obligations which must be fulfilled. These include the daily service of worship, such as the ritual prayer, and the annual fasting in Ramadan as well as being charitable, paying the zakat once a year. There are, however, other rituals, which are not noticed at first sight, and often at the individual’s choice and development. These include:

a) To remember God’s name prior to a Muslim’s anticipation to do something, when (s)he starts or completes an action. Bismi-llâhi r-raḥmâni r-raḥîm is often said when commencing an action, and Al-ḥamdu li-llâh after terminating or completing it.\textsuperscript{404} If something is intended to occur or to be done in the future, many Muslims will end their wishes or sayings with Inshâ’allâh, in order to put their fate into God’s hands. Furthermore, glorifying God is an important ritual to many Muslims, thus one will find Muslims saying Subhan’Allâh, and in order to avert evil by mentioning that something is great and beautiful in the name of God, saying Mâšâ’Allâh seems also to be recommended.

b) Examples for using these recitations include the beginning and finishing of a meal, starting a car and arriving somewhere safely, or even when someone sneezes, Alhamdulillah is often said.

\textsuperscript{404} Examples for using these recitations include the beginning and finishing of a meal, starting a car and arriving somewhere safely, or even when someone sneezes, Alhamdulillah is often said.
Appendix IV

c) To greet as a Muslim another Muslim with *As-Salamu Alaykum* to which can be replied likewise or with *Wa-Alaykum As-Salam*. It is a respectful greeting, acknowledging that the other person is Muslim as well.

d) To follow particular rituals of the Prophet Muhammad*, such as commencing physical actions with the right side, such as dressing, eating, entering a building, or passing something to another person.

e) To read the Qur’an (or its translation) on a regular basis, in order to meditate over its contents with the intention of integrating them into one’s life.

Although often not noticed at first sight, many Muslims incorporate these rituals which seem to be their ‘second nature’. Muslim converts often seem to be particularly attracted to involving such rituals in order to give meaning to their thoughts and actions. Incorporating such rituals develops the feeling of a closer spiritual connection with God, reminding the individual of God’s existence, approaching situations in a less materialistic manner, building a stronger (Muslim) character and identity, and always giving thanks and praise to God for all the blessings in life. It has to be noted that not every participant in this study agreed that the above mentioned rituals always formed an integral part of their lives, nevertheless broad acceptance was given to most points.

Approximately two-thirds of the British participants stated the importance of incorporating certain religious rituals into their daily life, whereby performing prayers seemed to be the most important one. Nonetheless, the less visible but still personal rituals, such as those listed above, are used by many in this sample. According to *Abdullah*, “rituals are a constant reminder, like purifying oneself, keeping oneself constantly in remembrance no to do (wrong) things”, to concentrate on important matters and not to sway off-course. *Anwaar* incorporates “one or two new supplications a week”, introducing them to his daily religious routine. He does, however, state that it is a challenge keeping up with such study. *Abraham Asad* says: “I am very conscious of remembering God as much as I can...when I leave the house, when I drive my car...whatever I do, I always say a prayer to myself, like ‘Please God, protect me’ or ‘*wa lā hawla wa lā quwwata illā bi-llāhi*’^405_.”

^405_ It means “There is no power or might except with God”.

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Appendix IV

Imaan-Yousef emphasizes that practising Islamic rituals is not about “just saying or acting them out. The most important part is always having the intention in the heart, to try not to say Bismi-llâh without really remembering Allah, or to go through the motions of prayer without thought”. Most of the British participants mentioned the importance of these rituals, however restrictions are also made. In the company of non-Muslims, the participants tend to refrain from supplicating aloud.  

As society moves on with its hectic lifestyle, being regulated by the media, commercialism, self-indulgence, it seems as if religious rituals give many of this study’s participants a so called ‘time-out’ to reflect and to remind them of God. Particularly among the German participants, petitionary prayers – also known as duʿāʾ/ daʿawāt – had been mentioned as forms of supplications, which can also include the above listed recitations. Nurjan regularly uses these recitations, as “they are intended to keep reminding Muslims of God’s everlasting existence”. It is, however, noteworthy, that some German participants felt less comfortable in reciting specific Muslim sayings in front of non-Muslims. SteinbA mentioned that she feels uncomfortable speaking Arabic words within a German-speaking environment: “I don’t want people to think strange of me...the years don’t change that feeling if you continue to live and work in that same environment”. Other participants feel estranged from other Muslim converts who only and continuously use Arabic religious phrases. Here SteinbA asks herself: “You catch asking yourself whether you are communicating with an Arab Muslim or a German Muslim convert. It is too much, and this is difficult to deal with”. Considering these challenges and different views, it results in that not all Muslim converts agree using Arabic phrases, since they believe that it seems to clash with their mother tongue and culture.

---

406 Zaynab
407 NurjA: “The thought behind reciting these sayings is to know that all actions are blessed by God. Even if one does not believe in it straight away, as one cannot expect anything to immediately happen, it is nonetheless hoped for, hence one uses these sayings with a different conscience. One example is, if one sneezes...you say Alhamdulillah, but there is another better word called Yarhamukullah (May Allah be gracious towards you), as sneezing symbolizes that the heart stops for a second, and then you thank Allah, because you still live and have been given another chance.”
408 SteinbA: “I rather say ‘thank God’ than Alhamdulillah. I cannot feel God through the word of ‘Allah’ it has been God all my life. He still IS God for me. Whether I call Him Allah or God, it makes no difference to me”.
Appendix IV

The observance of Islamic rituals as a daily mark and remembrance of God is acted upon in very individual ways. Not every participant follows the listed rituals like the next. There are different levels of importance ascribed as to which rituals to incorporate the most, which to a lesser extent, and which not at all. The remembrance of God and His glorification include different rituals. Both British and German participants tend to use Arabic phrases among Muslims, however most refrain from them in a non-Muslim environment. During such latter situations, most supplications are recited quietly to oneself. If Islamic supplications are nonetheless used in non-Muslim company, they are mostly translated into English or German respectively. Although there is little difference in applying and incorporating the mentioned Islamic rituals, one distinction clearly stands out: While not seen within the British sample, it seems as if some German participants struggle with other Muslim converts who frequently use Arabic phrases and Arab behaviourisms which seem to estrange them from their original national and cultural background. Subsequently, there is little understanding if other converts with the same national background seem to “arabise themselves”\(^{409}\).

\(^{409}\) SteinbA, Arife, Selma (“I sometimes feel more Christian than Muslim, although I am a Muslim.”)
Appendix V

Punishment as a deterrent to premarital sexuality (Text formerly in Chapter 5)

A corporal punishment is a punishment that is physically tangible. It has been and is being used as a legal right consequence as well as in the education of children. The death penalty is not seen as corporal punishment nor is imprisonment. Furthermore, torture is also often not counted as corporal punishment.

The basic structures of Shiite and Sunni Criminal law are largely consistent, as both of them are based on the Qur’an and the Sunna. Nowadays Islamic Criminal Law is nearly nowhere consistently followed, with the exception of Saudi Arabia, Northern Nigeria, in part of Sudan and Iran. The Qur’an does not prescribe imprisonment but determines other punishments such as the already mentioned corporal punishments. The division within Islamic Criminal is as followed: Hadd-crimes, Qisas- and Ta’zir offences.

This section is exclusively about Hadd-offences in relation to sexual activities prior to and outside marriage. According to Islamic criminal law these are serious offences for which the penalty is set in the Qur’an. Their description derives from the fact that, according to Muslims, they do not violate human rights but the law of God. With that they are seen as particularly serious crimes. The penalties can include the following: stoning, crucifixion, beheading, amputation of the hand(s) and/ or foot/ feet, whipping and banishment (Schröter, 2007).

The Qur’anic perspective and traditional interpretation of the Sunna state that sexual intercourse prior to and outside marriage is a severe crime. Nonetheless inconsistencies have been found between those named punishments in the Qur’an and the recommendations of the Prophet Muhammad*. Many are barely aware of these differences and with subsequent inconsistencies, and accept the penalties as they know them.

The Qur’an clearly states in 24:2 that the crime of adultery should be one hundred lashes as the appropriate punishment. Furthermore, the Qur’an specifies in
4:15 that if a woman accused of adultery does not confess should be locked up in the house, until death claims her or God offers her another way out.

The penalty of stoning for adultery or premarital sexual intercourse is not mentioned in the Qur’an. Evidence as such is found in the Sunna, particularly among the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad*. In several hadith the Prophet is quoted having said that he called for the punishment of stoning. According to the Sunnah it seems that the Prophet* agreed with stoning to be a set punishment for adultery. Nonetheless, even hadith seem to partially be contradictory to one another. Thus one hadith says:

„There are only three cases in which the blood of a Muslim can legitimately be shed: If he is an older adulterer, as a punishment for murder and for those who apostatise themselves and leave their community.” (Schimmel, 1995:238)
(Bukhary/ Muslim)

Many Muslim and non-Muslim scientists have grappled with the issue as to whether the hadith are contrary to the Qur’an regarding the punishment of stoning and other corporal penalties or even contrary to each other. According to the Tunisian scholar Mohamed Charfi it seems that the so-called lost Qur’anic verse „If a man or a woman commit adultery, they are to be stoned to death” is in contradiction to the existing verse 24:3 which states that a Muslim is not permitted to marry a lewd woman. Only women and men who have committed fornication are permitted to marry each other. Considering this, it could also mean, that the lewd woman were to virtually be ejected from the Muslim community. If God would have really prescribed stoning for adultery, then the question of marriage would resolve itself.

One cannot compare the Islamic corporal punishments with non-Islamic punishments for the exact same crimes. Many Western Islamic scholars state that Muslim apologists will defend these corporal punishments due to their deterrent effects. Many Muslims will say these punishments offer sensible reason and logic which was and still is to be seen as a means of deterrence. Studies have analysed that not only Muslim scholars but non-academic Muslims and converts to Islam understand that the execution of such punishments is tried to be prevented until the last possible doubt has
been cleared. Penalties cannot be carried out without complete proof of facts and evidence. Certain requirements must be met: Either a confession or four Muslim male witnesses to the act in question.

The participants were asked to comment on punishments for premarital or extramarital sexual activities. A third of British participants and a quarter of German participants agreed with the punishments stated by the Qur’an. They did however restrict the punishments only to be legally admitted in a society which in their opinion appropriately applies the Shari’ah. Furthermore, all prerequisites for a punishment would have to be fulfilled. In most participants’ agreements, it seemed that it is rarely possible for all prerequisites to be fulfilled in order to carry out such draconic punishments. In most statement, participants stated that the punishment for illegal acts would be decided by God. Those punishments would be far worse than those carried out by Shari’ah law. Furthermore, alternatives to the hadd-punishments were offered particularly by German participants. The following pages will allow the reader to gain an insight to British and German converts to Islam on corporal punishments as a deterrent for pre- and extramarital sexual activities, their agreements and disagreements, as well as allowing for alternative methods as prevention and education measures.

*Current legal status and attitude on CP in Britain and Germany*

Western society used corporal punishments as legal punishments; they were mostly issued in form of flogging or in the form of lashes. The beatings usually took place on the back or on the buttocks of the delinquent. In the Middle East – also Muslim society – lashes were common as well. Today legal corporal punishments are abolished in most countries, however some particular within the African and Asian region as well as the Middle East still use them as a deterrent. According to a report by Amnesty International in 2001, the following countries still conduct judicial corporal punishments: Afghanistan, Iran, Malaysia, Brunei, Belize, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Singapore.
Appendix V

Corporal punishments are no speciality of Islamic criminal law, but also part of European legal history, practised from ancient until modern times. During the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times crimes were similarly sanctioned to Islamic criminal law. There was the death penalty on adultery, homosexual acts, and even blasphemy. Furthermore, the hands of thieves were amputated in extreme circumstances. In addition to deterrence and revenge the primary thought was always to restore the divine order. If one compares this to Islamic criminal law, one will find comparing similarities.⁴¹⁰

Corporal punishments only became part of the ongoing debate during the enlightenment era of the 18th century. Roughly speaking, there are two camps of thought today: The first initially believes that corporal punishment provides the deterrent effect; the second however believes that emphasis should be put on the counterclaim of integration of offenders into society, whereby corporal punishment would permanently stigmatise the offender which in the long run would not be helpful to the offender, and with that society.

Most West Europeans will lean towards the latter position: The purpose for the state is to teach the deliquent on his crime and to reintegrate him/her into society. Corporal punishments which can leave permanent disfigurement on the body and which may be carried out in public, only stigmatise the person which is not in agreement with current human rights. Whether corporal punishments really act as deterrent as intentioned seems questionable by many these days, particularly if one follows the crime statistics of individual countries worldwide. Its seems that within Europe the sanctioning of sexual activities by the state is widely rejected, and primarily seen as a private matter which like the practice of religion should not be a matter of the state and its legal system.

Corporal punishment is unlawful as a sentence for crime according to the British penal system. This sentencing method was abolished in England by the Criminal Justice Act 1967. Furthermore it is regarded as unlawful as a disciplinary measure in penal institutions, however there is no current explicit prohibition. Secure training centres still

⁴¹⁰ Compare van Dülmen (2010).
allow for the use of force in maintaining order and discipline, including the infliction of physical pain, ie. nose, rib and thumb distractions. The “Secure Training Centre Rules” were declared unlawful by the Court of Appeal in 2008, however they have yet to be repealed. Prohibition of corporal punishment in Britain is still to be achieved in several areas of society, publicly and privately. Allowances for corporal punishments are to be found within the private sector, e.g. the home, and the public sector, ie. penal institutions and alternative care settings such as residential care institutions and private foster care.

Corporal punishment is also unlawful as a sentence for crime according to the German penal system. The Juvenile Courts Act, the German Criminal Code as well as the Criminal Procedure Code strictly prohibit the use of corporal force as a penalty for a crime. It is not permitted as a disciplinary measure in penal institutions under the German administrative regulations on juvenile punishments. In comparison to the United Kingdom, Germany’s penal system has incorporated the prohibition of corporal punishment in both the private and the public sector. According to the Universal Periodic Review 2009, no recommendation was made concerning corporal punishments, as prohibition was achieved in all settings in 2000. A new examination is scheduled to be carried out in 2013.

Participants’ attitudes on corporal punishments

A multitude of opinions and reasons for and against corporal punishments were given during the interviews. The attitudes towards corporal punishments offered diversity from being in agreement with corporal punishments according to Islamic Criminal Law; others disagreed with corporal punishments, even if they were in accordance with Islamic law; and again others stated that alternative methods of

411 Secure training centres are usually privately run institutions for young offenders.
412 http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/reports/uk.html
413 Ibid
Appendix V

prevention should be introduced instead of carrying out “religiously sanctioned punishments in a rather non-religious social setting”.415

32.3% of British participants and 23.5% of German participants agreed with corporal punishments, providing certain requirements are met. According to most participants in agreement, corporal punishment serves as deterrent to refrain from engaging in crimes. Participants strongly emphasized the fact that corporal punishments, as stated in the Qur’an and Sunna, could not be implemented in non-Muslim society. Anwaar explained that an Islamic penal system cannot function alone: “You cannot have a punishment system without the economic system which does not work without the social system. All systems have to be implemented together, as they complement each other”. He further explains that combining the Islamic sources creates a legal and social system “working in harmony”. If the complete Islamic system is not applied in society, then Islamic penal law cannot individually be applied.416

A strong requirement for corporal punishments to be applied is the existence of four male witnesses to prove having seen the act of crime in question. Punishments, provided one lives within an Islamic legal system, could only be carried out if four witnesses could be produced to have witnessed the act of adultery or fornication. For several participants it is not so much the act of sexual behaviour that is in misdemeanour, but the fact that it has to be proven – “You would literally have to have been having sex in the street for people to have seen it...”, says Layali, “It also is not necessarily the institution of marriage either, but what impact such an act would have on society as a whole.”

According to Layali, the main deterrent is to keep sexual matters within the private sphere. According to Michael, punishment should only be given to women, when it comes to extramarital sexual encounters, “as a man may have up to four wives but a woman only one husband”. He did however also state: “Important: Under the shari’ah extramarial sex can only be proven in the unlikely event that there four

415 Khalid
416 “Secret lashing society? I think the BNP will be joining it! It’s very funny, with lots of middle-aged men converting.” (Anwaar)
Appendix V

witnesses to the sexual act.”, and “It is unislamic for people to pry in other people’s business, so in practice this means no proof means no punishment”.

It is clearly defined in the Qur’an what kind of punishments should be administered in which circumstances. The punishments should act as a deterrent and symbolization on the gravity of the crime, however only if the requirements for the punishments are given. This means “that certain morals have to be taught within society. ... If there is a society in which children are brought up among porno films, half-naked people, ongoing open and public sexual affection display, then punishments like this have no place.”

417 Touareg1801 agrees with corporal punishments, as she states: “I completely agree with Islam, from the corporal punishment to the stoning.”, however, “. This however can only occur in an Islamic state – no self-justice like honour killings in Germany – as there should be no sexual enticements such as pornographic films, billboards with naked women, half-naked women on the street...and only according to detailed proof as it is dictated in the shari’ah.”

According to most participants in agreement, the punishment should only be carried out if the crime occurs within an Islamic social and legal setting. “If a person endangers Islamic social structures (...), he should be held responsible for his actions and be punished” (Nour). The Islamic legal system is not primarily connected to the private parts of an individual’s life (-style) but “limited” to “decent” public behaviour. “The reason for such punishments is substantial: It is about the public” (Susanne).

26% of British participants and 51% of German participants stated that their attitudes on punishment disagreed with the corporal punishments for illicit sexual activities according to the Qur’an and Sunna. Most believe that premarital and

417 According to Hawwa-Maryam there have been only six cases in 400 years of Islamic rulership where a thief’s hand was amputated for punishment- “For prohibited sexual intercourse to be punished according to Shari’ah law, there have to be four male Muslim witnesses of sound mind who see the penetration of the penis of the man into the vagina of the woman. In reality this is impossible, which means that it emphasizes the meaning of this deterrent.”

418 Touareg1801: „The definition of Islamic state is not there, where the majority society is Muslim, but where the law is according to the shari’ah and the people will accordingly to it – possibly Saudi Arabia, although not everything is appropriately implemented, however shari’ah law is the state’s constitution.”

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extramarital sexual activity will already have enough negative consequences to be enough punishment, e.g. STD, the break up of marriages, teenage pregnancies. 419

Some participants stated that they abhored the existence particularly of extramarital relationships and did not put as much emphasis on the issue of premarital sexual relations. Differentiating between the two also states a difference in the gravity of the crime and the punishment. Iman states that there should be punishments for extramarital relationships as they directly affect the family, e.g. wife or husband, and children. Souhayla, however, states if an extramarital sexual affair occurs, “it is a matter for the husband and wife to settle between themselves”. Premarital relationships on the other hand seem to be weighed differently: “Although wrong and should not be conducted, there is nobody in particular who is directly affected”, therefore it seems that if there should be a punishment for premarital sexual relations at all, it would be a smaller penalty than for adultery.

Particular emphasis was also put upon the idea that “God punishes/rewards whom He pleases” (Iman). The interpretation goes as far as that “no one escapes punishment” (Iman), however the matter in question “is between the person and Allah” (Gibril, Fatima, Saliha). Jameela believes that punishment will be received after death, “as God knows best on these things really”. 420 Several participants agreed that people should not judge or carry out such punishments – “I don’t think that people are the best judges...I do not trust them, as there is much Falschheit and no knowledge” (Saliha) - but leave punishment to God in the hereafter. 421

Participants in disagreement with corporal punishments agreed however with many participants in agreement with corporal punishments when asked about the conditions in which such punishment could be carried out. Zaid believes that

419 Imaan-Yousef, Mounir: “People are already punished enough. If however relationships are lived and society is negatively influenced by it as a whole, preventive measures should be taken to keep society safe.”
420 Jameela continued: „Doesn’t say that your hands will speak for you, and your legs will speak for you because they know exactly what you have done? These are deterrents to make you more aware of your behaviour being monitored and that someone very close to you is monitoring it.”
421 Ola: „Punishment will be given by God inshaAllah. That should be enough as punishment.” SteinbA: “When it’s time, the punishment will be carried out by God.”
Appendix V

“punishments are appropriate when Islam as a religion is the basis of a society with a caliphate as its head”. He continues however to state: “At this moment this does not exist and so would be inappropriate”. The primary aspect that seems to be missing for most participants is the existence of an Islamic state. “If it is an Islamic society, things should be sanctioned...if people corpulate in public, it should be prohibited and punished”, says AbdulSamed. “Public nuisance is also punishable in Germany”. He believes that the punishment has to be appropriate to society, to its morals and ethical views. If it does not harmonise with the morals and the laws of society, it would be inappropriate to use as deterrent.

13% of British participants and 26% of German participants stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with corporal punishments according to the Qur’an and Sunnah. They either withheld their decision/ opinion, or offered alternative methods of prevention instead of agreeing to corporal punishmens as deterrents. Among British participants 0% withheld their opinions but congruently agreed that educating individuals and society on Islamic morality and virtues. The agreement on the punishments within an Islamic legal system seems to be conditional on the part that participants believe education to play an important role. According to Raif, “there needs to be a sort of necessary dissuasion from it...if morality was more greatly enforced people might think twice about breaking such moral codes if there were such punishments”. Zaynab on the other hand believes that premarital relationships should not be punished: “I think it is down to the individual...if you are going down that road, the only person you are hurting is yourself.”

As an alternative method to the corporal punishments, participants stated that people should be educated on how their acts and behaviour influences their own lifes as well as the lifes of others around them. A rigid differentiation is made between extramarital and premarital sexual behaviour. Whereas premarital sexuality within Islamic realms is not permitted, it is not as morally frowned upon as is extramarital sexuality. The participants stated that extramarital sexuality not only endangers the marriage but the morality of society as a whole. If someone engages in premarital sexual activities, it seems not to be condoned, however, the attitude among participants
Appendix V

seems that the person engaging in such activity rather inflicts problems on him-/herself than others which seems “to be punishment enough”.

Although the majority of participants are in disagreement with corporal punishments, it is also the majority who accept the existence of corporal punishments within the Qur’an and the Sunna. Acceptance of existence does not mean however, that corporal punishments should be carried out. If they are to be carried out, certain requirements must be fulfilled:

1. The punishment can only be executed within an Islamic state that fulfils all religious provisions, e.g. having a social, economic and penal system implemented that is according to the Qur’an and Sunnah.

2. The punishment can only be executed if the requirements of proof are met, e.g. four male witnesses to the crime in question or a confession.

Participants who agreed with corporal punishments emphasized the importance that such punishments could only be carried out under the conditions mentioned above. According to Khalid, rejecting the existence of punishments as stated in the Qur’an would mean disbelief “I believe in the Qur’an. If I do not believe in the Qur’an, I am not a Muslim anymore. If there are to be punishments, then this should only occur in an Islamic state. All rules have to be followed...not like Iran or Saudi Arabia”.

Among the German participants (and to a lesser extent British participants) emphasis was primarily place on punishments and consequences for extramarital activities. There was less focus on premarital activities, although the question primarily included what participants thought of punishments for premarital sexual relations. The primary focus fell on extramarital sexual relations as the majority felt it to be a worse “crime which ought to be punished as this would rather affect existing family and the close environment rather than premarital sexual relations which seemed not to be condoned but where the individual would already punish himself though his “wrongdoing”.

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Appendix V

32% of British participants and 24% of German participants agreed with corporal punishments, providing certain requirements are met. 26% of British participants and 51% of German participants stated that their attitudes on punishment disagreed with the corporal punishments for illicit sexual activities according to the Qur’an and Sunnah. 13% of British participants and 26% of German participants withheld their decision/ opinion, or offered alternative methods of prevention such as educating people on Islam and its moral virtues.
Appendix VI

Empty Questionnaire Samples in English and in German

1. English Questionnaire Sample

**General Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When did you embrace Islam and how old were you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was your decision to embrace Islam of a spiritual or practical nature? Please explain in a sentence or two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long and in what way did you get to know or study Islam before embracing the faith?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was the first impulse/trigger that led you to embrace Islam? (spec. topics, persons etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you visited countries with a Muslim majority society before you embraced Islam? If yes, which ones and what were your impressions respectively?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is your Muslim identity to you and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which relationship status do you have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please tell me how important you find the following points and why (all points to be answered by both sexes please, thank you).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 5 prayers a day (salah):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Giving alms (zakat):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Haj (Makkah):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fasting (Ramadan):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Prohibition of pork:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Prohibition of alcohol:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Covering as a women/covering for daughter:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Circumcision as a man/circumcision for son:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Halal foods:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix VI**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe you have changed since embracing Islam? Have you noticed new characteristics in your thoughts and actions? If yes, please provide examples.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had difficulties to change any habits after you embraced Islam?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Clothing/ Style**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you wear specific Islamic clothing since you converted/ reverted?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If there has been a change (even if only slightly), how did your family and your friends react?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If there has been a change of clothing/ style, has it changed your own self-perception?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question for <strong>female</strong> participants:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you wear Islamic dress (ie. Hejab or similar, or abaya etc.)? Why do you wear it/ why don’t you wear it? What are you basing your decision on?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question for <strong>male</strong> participants:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does Islam teach you in regards to Muslim dress?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Friendships, relationships and marriage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has your behaviour changed the way you are now acting towards men/ women? Which changes can you think of?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothetically, if you were interested in a person of the opposite sex how would you today pursue that interest? Would there be a change now than before the conversion?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your opinion on pre-marital relationships between men and women?</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe in friendships between the sexes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is „marriage“ to you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would your partner have to be a Muslim/ Muslima? Please explain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is your family’s opinion when it comes to choosing a marital partner?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>If you are already married</em>: How important was your family’s opinion when you did get married?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your opinion on polygamy (marrying more than one woman)? Would you enter a polygamous marriage?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Family and Friends**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you told your family about embracing Islam? If yes, how did your family react? If not, why did you not want to tell them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you told your friends about embracing Islam? If yes, how did they react? If not, why did you not tell them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you now have a different circle of friends and acquaintances than before your conversion?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Body Awareness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe body awareness in your own words?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you use beauty products (anything separate from the usual such as soap, shampoo, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion, what role do perfume, perfume-oil and after-shave play?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you share the opinion that a woman should not pray during her menstruation? Do you share the opinion that a woman should not go to the mosque during her menstruation? Please state your reason.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sexuality – General Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you understand the term „sexuality“?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion: What is the role and thought of sexuality in Islam?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe that a Muslim man or woman deals with their sexuality differently than a non-Muslim man or woman?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you think of any verses, surahs, ahadith in relation to sexuality or body awareness that are of special importance or have made an impression on you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe that there should be punishments for pre-marital or extra-marital relationships?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important do you believe is virginity? (question addresses male and female participants)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sexuality – Your sexuality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your sexuality harmonize with your religious values?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you experience a different awareness of your body after you converted? If yes, please briefly explain).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have there been changes in religious rituals when it comes to your sexuality? (for example washing after menstruation or sexual intercourse)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did your parents educate you about sexuality and your body? Or did you receive sex education elsewhere?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you think about masturbation? What does Islam say about it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today’s advertisements and films (on TV, in the media in general, magazines and so on) are often sold with an undertone of „sex sells“. For example showergel or alcohol is advertised with a sexual influence. How do you feel about that?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sexuality – The sexuality of others

| If you have/ would have a child, how would you explain to him/ she that pre-marital relationships are not permitted, although you may have experienced them yourself in the past (as in before your conversion) and this is being accepted in society? |
| Which advice would you give to people (here Muslims, born or converted/ reverted) whose sexuality is NOT harmonizing with their religious values? |
| What do you think about transsexuality/ homosexuality? |

### Rounding Up

| Why did you specifically decide to embrace Islam? |
| Which direction and/ or school of thought are you following in Islam? What faith, if so, were you a member of before converting/ reverting to Islam? |
| Would you renounce/ deny Islam, if you were either discriminated, or threatened with torture or persecution? |
| Which enrichment are you adding to society with your change? |
Appendix VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your highest educational level and what are you currently doing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think of this survey?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please use the boxed underneath the questions to complete your notes in preparation for the interview. As there are many and intensive as well as sensitive questions, I would like to ask you to complete the sections in your own time and bit by bit. I wish you all the best with the preparation and I look forward to meeting you at the interview inshaAllah.

Salam Alaikum, Caroline Neumueller
## Appendix VI

### 2. German Questionnaire

**Allgemeine Fragen**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seit wann bist Du zum Islam konvertiert- revertiert?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie alt warst Du beim Übertritt zum Islam?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War Deine Entscheidung für den Islam eher praktischer oder spiritueller Natur?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie lange hast Du Dich vor dem Übertritt mit dem Islam befasst? (Monate, Jahre)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie intensiv und in welcher Weise hast Du Dich vor dem Übertritt mit dem Islam befasst?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was gab den ersten Anstoß für den Übertritt? (Partner - andere Person - Inhalte - sonstiges)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hast Du orientalische Länder/ Länder mit einer muslimischen Mehrheitsgesellschaft vor dem Übertritt besucht oder bereist? Wenn ja, welche, und wie waren Deine Erfahrungen?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In welcher Weise ist Dir Deine muslimische Identität wichtig?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welche Traditionen von Deiner ursprünglichen Kultur und / oder religiösem Glauben hast Du behalten?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welche alltäglichen islamischen „Rituale“ (Gebet, BismiAllah etc sagen oder andere Sachen) sind für Dich wichtig?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Erzähle doch bitte wie wichtig Dir die folgenden Einzelpunkte sind und warum:

- 5 Gebete am Tag
- wöchentlicher Moscheebesuch
- Beschneidung (als Mann)
- Verhüllung (als Frau)
- Schweinefleischverbot
- Alkoholverbot
- Almosengabe
- Hadsch (Mekka)
- Beschneidung (für Sohn)
- Verhüllung (für Tochter)
- Fleisch halal
- Fasten (Ramadan)


Hast Du, seit Du zum Islam übergetreten bist, Schwierigkeiten erfahren, bestimmte Gewohnheiten zu ändern?

Kleidung

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trägst Du seit Deiner Konvertierung Islam-spezifische Kleidung?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie haben sich Freunde und/ oder Familie mit Deiner Kleidungs-Veränderung befasst?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welche Reaktionen sind Dir noch geläufig? Welche Reaktionen gibt es heute, auch von außen?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wenn es eine Kleidungsänderung gegeben hat, hat es Deine Selbstwahrnehmung geändert? Wie nehmen andere Dich wahr?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frage an weibliche Teilnehmer: Trägst Du ein Kopftuch? Warum trägst Du es/ trägst Du es nicht? Worauf stützt Du Deine Entscheidung?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragen an männliche Teilnehmer: Was sagt Dir der Islam in Bezug auf Kleidung?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix VI

## Kontakt mit dem anderen Geschlecht

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hast Du Dich geändert, wie Du Dich gegenüber Männern/ Frauen verhältst? Welche Änderungen fallen Dir dazu ein?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welche Begrüßungsform wählst Du heute, wenn Du einen Mann/ eine Frau begrüßt? Machst Du Unterschiede zwischen der Familie und Freunden/ Fremden?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denkst Du, dass man nicht in die Augen eines Menschen des anderen Geschlechts blicken sollte?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wenn Du an einer Person des anderen Geschlechts interessiert wären, wie würdest Du Deine Absichten kund machen?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Wahl des Partners / Heiratspartner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was für einen Beziehungsstatus hast Du?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie ist Deine Meinung zu vorehelichen Beziehungen, also Partnerschaft ohne Trauschein, zwischen Männern und Frauen?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibt es Deiner Meinung nach Freundschaften zwischen den Geschlechtern?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie wichtig ist Dir der Aspekt „Ehe“?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Würde Dein Partner/ Deine Partnerin ein Muslim/ eine Muslimin sein müssen? Bitte erkläre kurz Deinen Standpunkt.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was sind die wesentlichen Eigenschaften/ Qualitäten eines potentiellen Heiratspartners/ einer potentiellen Heiratspartnerin?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie wichtig ist Dir die Meinung Deiner Familie, wenn Du einen Ehepartner/ eine Ehepartnerin auswählst? Nach Heirat – wie wichtig war Dir die Meinung Deiner Familie?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wie ist Deine Meinung zur Polygamie? Würdest Du eine polygame Ehe eingehen?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Familie / Freunde

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hast Du Deiner Familie über Deine Konvertierung erzählt?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wie reagier(t)en Familie und Freunde?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sind alle vor der Konvertierung bestehenden Freundschaften erhalten geblieben?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sind Freundschaften stärker oder abgebrochen geworden?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hast Du jetzt einen anderen Kreis von Freunden / Bekanntschaften als vor Deiner Konvertierung?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Körperbewusstsein

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bist Du mit Deinem Körper physisch und emotional glücklich?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verwendest Du Schönheitsprodukte? Wenn ja, welche?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welche Rolle spielen, Deiner Meinung nach, Parfüm, Parfüm-Öl, After-Shave?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machst Du Unterschiede zwischen Düften mit alkoholischen und nicht-alkoholischen Inhalt?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie würdest Du Körperbewusstsein in eigenen Worten beschreiben?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teilst Du die Meinung, dass während der Menstruation nicht gebetet werden darf?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teilst Du die Meinung, dass während der Menstruation die Frau nicht in die Moschee gehen darf?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sexualität – Allgemeine Fragen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bitte erkläre mir in eigenen Worten, was Du unter dem Begriff „Sexualität“ verstehst?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Deinen eigenen Worten, wie glaubst Du, steht der Islam zur Sexualität?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geht ein Nicht-Muslim/ eine Nicht-Muslimin anders mit seiner/ ihrer Sexualität um als ein Muslim/ eine Muslimin?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wenn Du Islam und Sexualität im Zusammenhang siehst, welche Suren, Ahadithe und/ oder Aussagen von islamischen Rechtsgelehrten oder auch generell fallen Dir spontan dazu ein und warum?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was ist Deine Meinung und persönliche Auffassung vor vorehelichen sexuellen Kontakten? Generell, hier meine ich nicht unbedingt Beziehungen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sollte es Deiner Meinung nach Strafen für voreheliche oder aussereheliche sexuelle Beziehungen geben?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie wichtig ist die Jungfräulichkeit? (An beide Geschlechter gerichtet)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix VI

#### Sexualität – Deine eigene Sexualität

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harmoniert Deine Sexualität mit Deinen religiösen Werten?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wurdest Du mit einem neuen Körperbewusstsein Dir selbst gegenüber präsentiert (nach der Konvertierung)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hast Du Veränderungen in Deiner Sexualität wahrnehmen können? Wenn ja, inwiefern?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hat die Annahme von religiösen Ritualen in Bezug auf Deine Sexualität Veränderungen eingeschlagen? (Beispiel: Waschungen nach Menstruation oder Sexualverkehr)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haben Dich Deine Eltern über die Sexualität und Deinen Körper aufgeklärt?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie denkst Du über Masturbation? Haben sich die Gedanken seit Deiner Konvertierung geändert?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie reagierst Du auf gewisse Sachen seit Deiner Konvertierung? Im Fernsehen, in der Werbung, in der Medienbranche wird häufig mit dem Motto „Sex sells“ geworben, also dass Duschgel z.B. von einer nackten Frau im Fernsehen geworben wird. Alkohol auch häufig in Verbindung mit Sex geworben wird.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auch Filme sind häufig mit einem sexuellen Unterton versehen. Wie gehst Du damit um?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Sexualität – Die Sexualität/ Das Sexuelleben von anderen Menschen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wie erklärst Du Deinem Kind/ würdest Du Deinem Kind auf eine glaubwürdige Weise erklären, daß voreheliche sexuelle Beziehungen nicht gut sind, wenn Du jedoch genau das in Deiner Vergangenheit praktiziert hast und es auch in der Gesellschaft als akzeptabel gehalten wird?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Würdest Du die sexuellen Handlungen Deiner Kinder einschränken wollen?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welchen Rat würdest Du Leuten geben, deren Sexualität mit ihren religiösen Werten nicht harmonisiert?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wie denkst Du über transsexuelle Menschen?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wie ist Deine Ansicht über Homosexualität?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Schlussfragen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warum hast Du Dich speziell für den Islam entschieden?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Für welche Richtung und/ oder Rechtsschule hast Du Dich entschieden? Und falls Du einer Religionsgemeinschaft vor Deiner Konvertierung zum Islam angehörst hast, welche war sie?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

|---|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welche Bereicherung gibst Du der Gesellschaft mit Deiner Veränderung?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Was muss Deiner Meinung nach getan werden, so daß unterschiedliche Religionen toleranter im Umgang miteinander leben können?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welchen Bildungsgrad hast Du und was machst Du beruflich/ hast Du beruflich gemacht?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Was hältst Du von dieser Umfrage?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


Salam Alaikum, Caroline Neumueller
Appendix VII

Completed Questionnaire Samples in English and in German

1. Completed questionnaire in English (anonymous)

**General Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When did you embrace Islam and how old were you?</td>
<td>February 14th 2005 (St. Valentine's Day) I was 21 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was your decision to embrace Islam of a spiritual or practical nature?</td>
<td>Spiritual. I found university life, the life I had looked forward to for so long, deeply unsatisfying. After having yearned for some solace and contentment I turned towards God in the way I knew how – through the Catholic Christianity of my upbringing. After looking at various religious and spiritual traditions I came across Islam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long and in what way did you get to know or study Islam before</td>
<td>My first knowledge of Islam was my primary school friend Farhan – we were best friends ages 6-9. Then in R E lessons at secondary school I learned a little of Muhammad (S) and the five pillars. Then when I was 16 I saw the film 'East is East' which prompted me to read a book from the library about Islam. I quite liked what I read and I found it very interesting. But that was all and I didn't pursue it further at that time. At university I soon felt the need for meaning, though I continued my university lifestyle, particularly its drug use, for a few years, always looking around for 'Truth' and 'Purpose'. I read widely and when I should have been in the libraries looking at Biology books, I found my self invariably drawn towards the sections on Divinity and Theology or reading about these subjects on the internet. I read about Buddhism, Hinduism (the Hare Krishna variety), various denominations of Christianity, Taoism (which I particularly liked). Then, after being at university for 3 and a half years I came across Islam once again. At the end of January or beginning of February 2005 at age 21, I saw an ad for an exhibition about Islam at Edinburgh Mosque, near where I was studying. This was after extensive reading about other faiths and so I went the next day naturally inquisitive. I met a brother named Fawzi, a qualified medical doctor from Libya who was doing a PhD at Edinburgh University. We spoke for about 2 hours about Christianity and Islam, during which time he showed me contradictions within the Bible which surprised me since I had no idea of their existence. He also said that he had looked at Islam and Christianity himself and chosen Islam. And that made me think since he was an honest, intelligent, sincere individual. Viewing the exhibition I felt that this was what I had thought Christianity was supposed to be. It seemed more Christian than Christianity in a way. I left with a translated copy of the Qur'an and from that exhibition I think it's was about 2 weeks before I took my shahada.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Completed questionnaire in English (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What was the first impulse/ trigger that led you to embrace Islam?</td>
<td>The notion of the Oneness of Unique Divinity came across very clear whilst browsing the posters and information at the Edinburgh Mosque Exhibition in 2005. This was most compelling. Also, my conversation with Dr Fawzi at that exhibition was very important. Not only due to the exchange of information previously mentioned, but as well the feeling that I was speaking with someone on the same “wavelength”. Among my friends I had no-one with whom I could level on the subject of God and/or religion. It was a Muslim who reflected my own feelings on the subject even if, at the time, we had some differing views (though not that different).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you visited countries with a Muslim majority society before you embraced Islam? If yes, which ones and what were your impressions respectively?</td>
<td>Morocco very briefly. I went with my little sister and parents for a day trip when I was about 13 or 14, travelling from southern Spain. Tangier was smelly with cramped streets and it was quite frightening as it was so different to Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is your Muslim identity to you and why?</td>
<td>Identity is something I struggled with. Half Hungarian and half English I am in neither camp with full conviction. And I was somewhat alone in my religious views before becoming Muslim. Then quite suddenly I find I am truly amongst brothers! That said, identity is something often the perception of another. It is the label you would wish to have if asked by another which “box” you might fit in. I now find such labels, though broadly useful, inaccurate and unable to truly reflect the views of any individual. I am a Muslim. And that label is important since Allah mentions it in the Qur’an, and it the name of the people of the ummah of Muhammed (S). So the connection with the label “Muslim” is primarily important <em>celestially</em>, and convenient <em>terrestrially</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which relationship status do you have?</td>
<td>I am married.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Completed questionnaire in English (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please tell me how important you find the following points and why (all points to be answered by both sexes please, thank you).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 5 prayers a day: - Fundamental, the basis of daily practice of Islam and the basis of daily spiritual progression. One cannot expect to gain what is on offer without it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Giving alms (zakat): - Fundamental again, as with all 5 pillars of Islam. I don’t think I need to give proofs, save mentioning that the total consensus of Islamic scholarship, throughout history, is in favour of all five. Zakat is the purifying of one’s wealth and one’s attachment to it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Haj (Makkah) – As before, fundamental and an obligation if one is able –that is if Allah provides the means for His servant to make the pilgrimage. Muslims of every colour, race, school of thought and status levelled before The Creator. Magnificent!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fasting (Ramadan): - Fundamental and a method of establishing control over desires, to turn our attention away from the nafs (self/ego) and towards the Lord – essentially the same purpose as everything else in this deen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Prohibition of pork: - Very important because Allah prohibits it for us – to me the details are unknown as to why, and Allah is the Most Wise. We hear and we obey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Prohibition of alcohol: - Intoxication clouds the mind and hardens the heart. This prohibition is essential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Covering as a women/ covering for daughter: Essential for the protection of women from the excessive gaze of men, and for the protection of men from the temptations of the beauty of the woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Circumcision as a man/ circumcision for son: For my son (inshaAllah) yes it is important, though for me having grown up as a Christian and becoming a Muslim as an adult I have been informed that the ruling (from the Maliki School) is that it is not recommended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Halal foods: Again, essential. To connect strongly with our Lord we must try hard to avoid what He detests, including from what we eat, wear, touch, watch, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you believe you have changed since embracing Islam? Have you noticed new characteristics in your thoughts and actions? If yes, please provide examples.

The ritual aspects for Islam are the most obvious. I have strived to fulfill them as much as possible. After that came changes in ideas. I came into contact with various political and philosophical notions which had previously either not been available to me by circumstance, or I was not open to until I became Muslim (either way it is all by Allah).

In terms of politics it was really looking at democracy and capitalism and its alternatives, and in philosophy the basis for rational belief in God, empiricism, rationalism and similar notions. Then came the real need to change certain characteristics of myself. I realised my deep seated anger, laziness, and other habits like not really paying attention as to how I can affect others and hurt them. I believe that, God-willing, I have made improvements especially over the past 12 months since my connection with a sufi order known as Qadiri-Boutchichi. The treatment/medicine of dhikr (divine remembrance) is a deep and profound one, affecting one's whole being to try and bring it back into line with the fitra (primordial disposition) according to the perfected model of the Messenger of God, Muhammad (S).

I still have a lifetime of work ahead of me, but I feel the benefits are already clear.
## Completed questionnaire in English (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Have you had difficulties to change any habits after you embraced Islam?</strong></td>
<td>As well as the above mentioned, masturbation has been rather difficult. It was a habit deeply ingrained and as such I have found it difficult to uproot. It caused me tremendous anguish since I was aware of its prohibition yet was overwhelmed so often by the desire for its pleasure. It was so frustrating. Marriage, I thought, would solve this. But when I did get married, after a few months the habit re-emerged. Added to this was the use of pornography that is very much attached to it. I found this to be especially damaging and hampering of spiritual progression. But again the desire for worldly pleasure would get the better of me. I felt like 2 different people, unable to reconcile my longing for the Divine with my desire for this pleasure. Hence this would become a hidden shame.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Clothing/ Style

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you wear specific Islamic clothing since you converted/ reverted?</strong></td>
<td>A few cultural items occasionally such as “shalwar chemise” (pakistan) or “thawb” (arab). I hope my dress is Islamic all the time lol! I only tend to wear these round the house as they are comfortable or for special occasions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If there has been a change (even if only slightly), how did your family and your friends react?</strong></td>
<td>I dont feel it appropriate to wear these in front of my family, and I have little contact with my friends from before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If there has been a change of clothing/ style, has it changed your own self-perception?</strong></td>
<td>The clothes could be considered a symptom of a self-perception of 'Muslim' rather than the clothes changing my perception of myself. My muslim self-perceptoin is rather free from cultural ties so there is little trouble in wearing clothes from any muslim culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question for female participants:**

- Do you wear Islamic dress (ie. Hejab or similar, or abaya etc.)? Why do you wear it/ why don’t you wear it? What are you basing your decision on?

**Question for male participants:**

- What does Islam teach you in regards to Muslim dress?

  Modesty. Be neat, clean, not flashy. Don't show off your body. Except to my wife, of course.
Completed questionnaire in English (continued):

**Friendships, relationships and marriage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has your behaviour changed the way you are now acting towards men/ women? Which changes can you think of?</td>
<td>I try and keep a respectful distance from women, ideally. In more mixed company I try and make more of an effort with the men so as not to be cold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothetically, if you were interested in a person of the opposite sex how would you today pursue that interest? Would there be a change now than before the conversion?</td>
<td>Islamically this would need to be for marriage only. As such it is most appropriate to go through the family of the girl in question or another respected intermediary. Before being Muslim, the idea of an intermediary was getting 'my mate' to tell 'her mate' that I fancied her. And then as I got older I would attempt to charm the girl directly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your opinion on pre-marital relationships between men and women?</td>
<td>It is damaging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe in friendships between the sexes?</td>
<td>Hmm...Certainly from the man's point of view thoughts always lead to sex, it is rather inevitable. Excepting the elderly and a few people with particular personality types, though this is a minority. Friendship won't stay that way in my opinion, unless a respectful distance is kept - acquaintances may be more appropriate. This is through observation and my own experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is „marriage“ to you?</td>
<td>It is the basis of society and family. Fundamental to personal and community success and progression – both in a worldly and spiritual sense. For me, it is the practical and emotional basis of my life. It helps to bind my sexual appetites to a halal outlet. My wife is also my best friend and I am hers. This closeness and love is not to be found elsewhere in my experience. It would be difficult to overestimate its importance I feel, and I am struggling to express it appropriately. All this before we've had any children – SubhanAllah!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would your partner have to be a Muslim/ Muslima? Please explain.</td>
<td>In terms of the essential meaning of 'islam', that is to say submission to God and the individual's intention for this then, yes it is a must. Though they may be Jew or Christian at the time of marriage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VII

Completed questionnaire in English (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How important is your family’s opinion when it comes to choosing a marital partner?</td>
<td>If you are already married: How important was your family’s opinion when you did get married?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My family were totally opposed to my marriage at the time. I had to go over their heads. It was an issue of Islam rather than the girl not being suitable for me. They disliked that my Islam would consolidate if I married a Muslim woman.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your opinion on polygamy (marrying more than one woman)? Would you enter a polygamous marriage?</td>
<td>It is part of the deen of Allah, a sunnah of His Blessed Messenger (S) and an incredible challenge for a man to have more than one wife. This requires extensive resources beyond my own capacity in terms of emotional strength and support, energy, time, and of course, wealth. I do not feel prepared for such an undertaking. I have discussed this with my wife and although she agrees it would be very difficult for her, it is certainly not out of the question. I disagree the view that I find some female Muslims carry, that its a straight „no“ to a second wife for their husband, and a „no“ to being a second wife. At least there needs to be an understanding that Allah and His Messenger (S) know best, irrespective of society's current views and trends. That said, I understand this is clearly something that touches on sensitive issues, particularly for women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and Friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you told your family about embracing Islam? If yes, how did your family react? If not, why did you not want to tell them?</td>
<td>Yes. They reacted with tears and notions of betrayal. My father in particular said that he felt like I had spat in his face. I have been unwelcome at the family home on a few occasions. But now, 5 years on, things are much friendlier and warmer. Alhamdulillah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you told your friends about embracing Islam? If yes, how did they react? If not, why did you not tell them?</td>
<td>I am pretty sure everyone knows by now, certainly those that I have had any sort of regular contact with over the years. I rarely see my friends from before, if at all. At the time most were of the opinion that if this is what I wanted to do then fine, do it. But as time has passed and our interests diverged we have had little contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you now have a different circle of friends and acquaintances than before your conversion?</td>
<td>Completely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix VII**

Completed questionnaire in English (continued):

**Body Awareness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you describe body awareness in your own words?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is a term I am not familiar with and can only give my own thoughts on it. On one level we can have awareness of the positioning of our body and its limbs in relation to our environment. This may be most familiar to an athlete or an experienced martial artist. It is the physical positioning of our body in space and time. On another level is our thoughts and feelings with respect to our bodies and their attributes. We may be well muscled and so our awareness of this can give us confidence. Or we may have many spots and so feel a lack of confidence associated with it. Such a thing affects many, particularly teenagers. Then there is a level where we are aware of our bodies use as we journey this life. It's use for good in helping others, or evil in fulfilling selfish desires. The body is a shell, a capsule, in which we are imprisoned for the duration of our worldly existence. It is with the body that we interact and through it our life's transactions are conducted. We speak, walk, run, fight, conduct business, write poetry, make love, all from within this body. Our good and bad actions are conducted from within it. When we see our body as a primary tool in our destruction or salvation, I think this is the highest level of body awareness and the most difficult to obtain on a constant basis. This is linked with the Islamic notion of Taqwa (God consciousness/awareness).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you use beauty products (anything separate from the usual such as soap, shampoo, etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'atar, sometimes pronounced “itter”, is a non alcohol based perfume. The smells are beautiful more than sexually attractive in my opinion. Its purpose is different from after-shave etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your opinion, what role do perfume, perfume-oil and after-shave play?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To attract a sexual partner, and sometimes to simply beautify oneself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you share the opinion that a woman should not pray during her menstruation? Do you share the opinion that a woman should not go to the mosque during her menstruation? Please state your reason.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes I share the opinion that women should not pray salah (the ritual prayer) during menstruation. I know of no consensus of classical scholarship that says otherwise, nor have I heard of any individual scholarly opinion either. (But I have come across a contrary opinion related to people who take the Qur'an alone, without any further explanation from hadith or traditional scholarship). There is no state of wudu (ritual purity) for a menstruating women and without wudu there is no salah. This is not to say that praying by way of du'a (supplication) is not done, rather acts such as du'a and dhikr (remembrance of the divine) are highly recommended. Regarding the menstruating woman entering a mosque, opinions on this vary from what I understand. The opinion of the Maliki school is that a menstruating woman should not enter the mosque ordinarily, though for learning or teaching or other such needs exceptions are made. I am no scholar, merely a layman and may be incorrect in anything I have said here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Completed questionnaire in English (continued):

**Sexuality - General Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you understand the term „sexuality“?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings and expression of sexual desire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion: What is the role and thought of sexuality in Islam?</td>
<td>The aim of Islam is to bring the human being back to the 'garden' from which he fell, back to the <em>fitra</em> (primordial being-ness, primordial nature). The sexuality of the <em>fitra</em> is that exemplified by the Messenger of Allah (S): Man and woman with the appropriate bond (such as marriage) being intimate (with the restriction of anal intercourse). Sexual expression outside of this shows a need for rectification of the individual in some way (if they wish to be successful). In this sense sexuality is no different to other aspects of the human being. Habitual over-eating is equally a symptom of the (spiritual) condition of the individual. Any behavioural deviation from the <em>fitra</em> is the same, and useful if we see it as a sign that we need to rectify ourselves. All of us will require some form of improvement of character in this way, some more than others. So in this way sexuality or other aspects of human behaviour are barometers of one's condition. Also, and very importantly, sexual desire in itself has the natural outcome of furthering the species. If you like, this is the outward aspect of sexuality, the previous point being the inward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe that a Muslim man or woman deals with their sexuality differently than a non-Muslim man or woman?</td>
<td>I believe that a Muslim man or woman probably has the intention to deal differently, though in practice we make many mistakes and often surcome to our desires. After such fulfilling of one's desires, I think for the Muslim or any conscientious person there is a greater recognition of the nature of what one has done. This can lead to a desire to refrain from this in future, God-willing. A non-muslim, or those Muslims who are so in name only, may well remain pleased with what they have done. So a Muslim will want to improve upon his manners in dealing with the opposite sex, if they are not already at a high standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you think of any verses, surahs, ahadith in relation to sexuality or body awareness that are of special importance or have made an impression on you?</td>
<td>Surah Yusuf for me sticks in my mind. A real human being who resisted the advances of a most beautiful woman of high status and wealth. And Prophet Yusuf (a.s.) was a slave at this time and could have improved his worldly situation greatly by accepting the offer of this woman. Amazing awareness (<em>taqwa</em>) of his Lord and the reality of his situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe that there should be punishments for pre-marital or extra-marital relationships?</td>
<td>That depends on the physical context. In a society where Islam is the basis of the society with the Khalifah as its head, then this is appropriate. At the moment this does not exist and so would not be appropriate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VII

Completed questionnaire in English (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How important do you believe is virginity? (question addresses male and female participants)</td>
<td>It is ideal to be a virgin before marriage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sexuality – Your own sexuality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your sexuality harmonize with your religious values?</td>
<td>Not yet, but insha-Allah it is getting there. I feel much less of a “split personality” than when I first became Muslim. The deep guilt and anguish I would feel has lessened as I am less hard on myself and have begun to gradually gain better control over the direction of my desires.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you experience a different awareness of your body after you converted?</td>
<td>My entire understanding of the universe has been refined, as has my understanding of my place within it. I take the issue of my body rather more seriously and I am more aware as to what I do with it. Also, I have much less care for 'body-image' than before. This has changed over a few years as I used to go to the gym very frequently attempting to gain a particular 'look'. Now I don't use the gym at all and find others ways to exercise for my health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have there been changes in religious rituals when it comes to your sexuality? (for example washing after menstruation or sexual intercourse)</td>
<td>As a Catholic Christian there is no ritual washing beyond baptism. As a Muslim I follow the classical schools of Islamic law which require a full ritual body wash after intercourse or any ordinary ejaculation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did your parents educate you about sexuality and your body? Or did you receive sex education elsewhere?</td>
<td>I received the mandatory sex education at school, and basically none from my parents. Its an embarrassing thing for parents and teenagers to discuss sex! Everything else was by self-exploration, talking with friends and then personal experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think about masturbation? What does Islam say about it?</td>
<td>As a general rule it is prohibited in Islam. I am aware of an opinion for exceptional circumstances, however, where it can be used to avoid a greater sin of adultery, though this is truly as a total last resort. Sexual activity is restricted and masturbation falls outside the usual lawful limits. Now, I myself have received a fatwa due to my circumstances as a new Muslim, where masturbation for me was considered <em>makruh</em> (detestable) rather than <em>haraam</em> (prohibited). This makes is bad but not incurring sin. This fatwa was further to seeking help to stopping masturbating altogether.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix VII

### Completed questionnaire in English (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Today’s advertisements and films (on TV, in the media in general, magazines and so on) are often sold with an undertone of “sex sells”. For example showergel or alcohol is advertised with a sexual influence. How do you feel about that?</td>
<td>I feel as if it is an invasion, frankly. I would rather not be subject to this and it truly does affect me. I am 27, and yet vulnerable as a teenager when it comes to being affected by suggestive images. It is a constant hassle. Lowering one's gaze is impractical with tv, so perhaps i should just throw it out?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality – The sexuality of other people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you have/ would have a child, how would you explain to him/ he that pre-marital relationships are not permitted, although you may have experienced them yourself in the past (as in before your conversion) and this is being accepted in society?</td>
<td>I have no children and have no experience here, so I may be making huge mistakes but... I envisage that I would speak with them rather plainly about it as you have done so in the above question. The information gets across. But the important thing is the example of the parents and the atmosphere of upbringing. If the atmosphere is one of peace and gentle affection and guidance then the notions of good character should transmit easily to the children. Sure they will grow up and make some mistakes and do some silly things but overall all will be well insha-Allah. If the environment is rigid then a split personality can emerged – much as I had – where pleasure seeking is kept secret and they are as good as gold in front of the family. Which advice would you give to people (here Muslims, born or converted/ reverted) whose sexuality is NOT harmonizing with their religious values?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heal the heart. Our deviation is only a sign of the underlying issues that need rectifying, those inwards illnesses. This disharmony is not the illness itself. We must go deeper. The true Islamic Sufi paths deal with this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think about transsexuality/ homosexuality?</td>
<td>Similar to masturbation or use of pornography in that it is a deviation of the <em>fitra</em>, it is only a question of degrees. Homosexuality and transexuality are more greatly removed from the <em>fitra</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Completed questionnaire in English (continued):

### Rounding Up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why did you specifically decide to embrace Islam?</td>
<td>I sought solace in God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which direction and/ or school of thought are you following in Islam?</td>
<td>I came from a Catholic background. My current direction can take several labels: Traditional Islam, Classical Islam, Sufi Islam. In terms of school of thought I generally adhere to the classical Maliki School for shariah, and I am a student of the Qadiri-Bouthchichi tariqa. This tariqa, like all others, is a school of tasawwuf/sufism, the inner sciences of Islam dealing with perfecting and beautifying of one's character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you renounce/ deny Islam, if you were either discriminated, or threatened with torture or persecution?</td>
<td>No, but exploring that idea, if others were to be threatened instead I would probably verbally renounce it, though my intention would be otherwise. And Allah is The Most Merciful and Loves mercy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which enrichment are you adding to society with your change?</td>
<td>That is a difficult question and a worthy one. How can one rectify one's community before having first rectified one's self? To do so would be to proceed without wisdom and inevitably ruffle more people's feathers than is needed. And without such wisdom they may end up changing things in the wrong direction without realising it. And without purity of character we are all too easily swayed and corrupted. Wisdom is required to proceed and change one's community or society directly, as in the mould of the Blessed Prophet Muhammad (S) and those prophets before him. However, indirectly one can have huge effects by way of interacting well with people and embodying the good manners and characteristics that the state of Islam can bring to a human being. So to answer your question, my inner striving, my inner jihad is my enrichment of my society. God-willing this will positively affect my family, then my friends, then my colleagues and so on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your highest educational level and what are you currently doing?</td>
<td>Bsc General Science. I currently work in marketing though my specific roles vary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think of this survey?</td>
<td>The survey has been useful for me to crystallise my thoughts and ideas. I hope it is of use to the Muslims as sex is not spoken about often enough. I am also very interested in seeing how German and English Muslims differ in this, if at all.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Allgemeine Fragen (General questions)

| Frage | Antwort
|-------|--------|
| Seit wann sind Sie zum Islam konvertiert- revertiert? (engl. When did you embrace Islam?) | Ich bin seit Oktober 08 Muslima ☺
  (engl. I am Muslima since October ‘08 ☺) |
| Wie alt waren Sie beim Übertritt zum Islam? (engl. How old were you at the time of conversion?) | 17 und 2 Monate
  (engl. 17 years and 2 months) |
  (engl. If I have understood the question correctly, then I would say: both! I chose Islam, as it became apparent to me after a while that this can only be the truth. Since my conversion to Islam I also practise Islam, alhamdulillah.) |
| Würden Sie einer Religionsgemeinschaft beitreten, wenn Ihnen anderenfalls Verfolgung drohte? (ja - vielleicht - nein) (engl. Would you renounce/ deny Islam, if you were either discriminated, or threatened with torture or persecution?) | Nein (engl. No.) |
| Wie lange haben Sie sich vor dem Übertritt mit dem Islam befasst? (Monate, Jahre) | ca. 4-6 Monate vorher (engl. About 4-6 months prior.) |
Appendix VII

Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

Wie intensiv und in welcher Weise haben Sie sich vor dem Übertritt mit dem Islam befasst? (engl. How long and in what way did you get to know or study Islam before embracing the faith?)


(engl. First I looked at a website on Islam a friend had sent to me. On the website’s first page I watched a video and became very curious. After that I I watched further videos of Muslim scholars, and how other people have converted to Islam. Hereupon I searched for other websites on Islam, and found then, alhamdulillah. ☺ I have read a looooot and thankfully understood!)

Was gab den ersten Anstoß für den Übertritt? (Partner - andere Person - Inhalte - sonstiges)
(engl. What was the first impulse/ trigger that led you to embrace Islam? (specific topics, persons etc.))

Eigentlich ich selbst. Eine Freundin hatte mir nur den Link geschickt, weil ich mich für arabisch sehr interessierte, sie meinte, dort sprechen sie auch arabisch. Dadurch kam ich eigentlich ursprünglich zum Islam. Es war also nicht so, dass mir irgendwer sagte „hey, guck mal, das ist die Wahrheit, da MUSST da drauf“. Nein, ich habe selbst durch diese Videos herausgefunden, was für eine tolle, friedvolle Religion es ist, und das wichtigste vor allem, dass es die wahre Religion ist.

(engl. Well, actually it was me. A friend only sent me the link, as I was very interested in Arabic, and she said that they would speak Arabic on it. That is how I initially came to Islam. It was not like somebody said to me, ‘hey, have a look, that’s the truth, you HAVE to get on it’. No, I found out for myself through these videos, that it is a wonderful and peaceful religion, and most importantly, that it is the true religion.)

Haben Sie orientalische Länder/ Länder mit einer muslimischen Mehrheitsgesellschaft vor dem Übertritt besucht oder bereist? Wenn ja, welche, und wie waren Ihre Erfahrungen?
(engl. Have you visited countries with a Muslim majority society before you embraced Islam?
If yes, which ones and what were your impressions respectively?)

Nein, leider noch nie! Ich war noch nie wirklich im Ausland.

(No, unfortunately never been! I have never really been abroad.)
### Appendix VII

**Completed questionnaire in German (continued):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>In welcher Weise ist Ihnen Ihre muslimische Identität wichtig?</strong> (engl. How important is your Muslim identity to you and why?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sie ist mir insofern wichtig, da ich als Muslima ausschließlich den Frieden und das friedvolle Umgehen miteinander bevorzuge! Ich möchte, dadurch dass ich Muslima bin, anderen Menschen zeigen, dass diese Religion nichts mit Terrorismus zu tun hat, sondern dass es hier vor allem um friedliches und respektvolles Umgehen untereinander geht. Die meisten Menschen denken schlecht über den Islam, doch wenn ich gefragt werde, warum ich z.B. das Kopftuch trage, kann ich den Leuten insha’allah ein gutes Bild des Islam erklären. (engl. It is important to me in that I as a Muslima exclusively prefer peace and the peaceful contact with one another! As a Muslima, I would like to show other people that this religion has nothing to do with terrorism. Instead it primarily concerns itself with a peaceful and respectful communication with one another. Most people think badly about Islam, however if I am asked, why, for example, I am wearing the headscarf, I can demonstrate a good picture of Islam, insha’Allah.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Welche Traditionen von Ihrer ursprünglichen Kultur und / oder religiösem Glauben haben Sie behalten?</strong> (engl. Which traditions have you kept from your original culture/ previous religious faith?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eigentlich gar keine. Meine Mutter ist Christin und mein Vater Atheist. Ich nehme zwar die Geschenke, die ich an Weihnachten bekomme, an, doch für mich hat dieses Fest im Islam eigentlich nichts zu suchen. Wir glauben zwar an Jesus und dass er ein Gesandter Allah’s ist, jedoch ist Jesus NICHT Gott. Das ist einer der größten Unterschiede, die uns von den Christen unterscheiden. Darum möchte ich auch die christlichen Feste nicht feiern. (engl. Actually, none. My mother is Christian, and my father is atheist. I do take the presents, which I receive at Christmas, however this holiday has no place in Islam. We believe in Jesus, and that he is a prophet of Allah, however Jesus is NOT God. That is one of the main belief components that differs us from the Christians. Thus I do not want to celebrate the Christian holidays.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Welche Islamischen Rituale für Sie wichtig sind?</strong> (engl. Which Islamic rituals are important to you?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An allererster Stelle steht natürlich das Gebet, in das ich mich 5x am Tag zurückziehen kann alhamdulillah, um mich Allah hinzugeben und ihm zu danken für all die guten, aber auch schlechten Dinge (die sich ja vielleicht noch positiv auf das Leben auswirken könnten, Allah alem) und ihn um Vergebung zu bitten. Dann natürlich die Zakkah, die Spende, die man geben muss an die armen Menschen. Auch den heiligen Monat Ramadan durchzufasten, ist sehr wichtig für mich. Und insha’allah werde ich auch bald die Hadj (Pilgerfahrt) verrichten können. Dies ist mir sehr wichtig. (engl. In first place is the prayer, of course. I can withdraw 5x a day, alhamdulillah, to submit to Allah, and to thank him for all the good, but also the bad things (which may positively influence life, Allahu Alleem) and to ask him for forgiveness. Then of course zakat, the charity one has to give to the poor. And to fast during Ramadan is very important to me. And insha’Allah I can soon go on Hajj (pilgrimage). That is very important to me.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix VII

**Completed questionnaire in German (continued):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Einzelpunkt</th>
<th>(engl. Translation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Gebete am Tag</td>
<td>Five daily prayers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramadan</td>
<td>Ramadan/ fasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almosenabgabe</td>
<td>Zakat/ charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadsch (Mekka)</td>
<td>Hajj/ pilgrimage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beschneidung (als Mann/ für Sohn)</td>
<td>Male circumcision/ adult/ for son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhüllung (als Frau/ für Tochter)</td>
<td>Covering/ woman/ for daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schweinefleischverbot</td>
<td>Prohibition of pork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alkoholverbot</td>
<td>Prohibition of alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halal Produkte</td>
<td>Halal foods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Gebete am Tag: SEHR wichtig!! Das Zurückziehen vom Alltag durch die Gebete 5x am Tag ist mir sehr wichtig, da in diesen Momenten die Verbindung zu Allah besonders groß ist, ich die Dinge des Alltags leichter vergessen kann und die nötige Ruhe bekomme, um danach wieder stark in den Alltag zurückzukehren. ☺ Außerdem ist es eine Pflicht für uns Muslime, zu beten.

(eng. 5 prayers a day: VERY important!! To withdraw from the daily routine through the prayers 5x a day is very important to me, as during these moments the connection to Allah is great. Ich can more easily forget about things in everyday life, and receive the necessary peace, in order to return strengthened into the daily routine. ☺ It is also an obligation for us Muslims to pray.)


(engl. Alms-giving: This is also extremely important to me, as we should help the poor people in this world, who have nothing. We can give a portion of our money to hand it to those who are more in need of it than we are. Alhamdulilah that God has ordered us to do this. Who doesn’t like this good feeling of having helped another person with something? That is why it’s a rule to spend a particular percentage of one’s income. May Allah (swt) help us to be even more charitable in the future to help our sisters and brothers in faith.)


(engl. Hajj: The pilgrimage is also very important to me. Even though I have not been yet, I am hoping to complete it in a few years inshaAllah. Provided I have money to travel there and will not be ill inshaAllah.)
Appendix VII

Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beschneidung (beim Mann): Zu diesem Thema habe ich mich leider noch nicht genug darüber informiert, um mir eine Meinung darüber bilden zu können. Ich weiß nur, dass es im Koran geschrieben steht, dass die Männer beschnitten werden sollten. Daher empfinde ich dies auch als wichtig. (engl. Male circumcision: I have not thought about this topic enough to be able to form an opinion about it. I only know that it says in the Qur’an that men should be circumcised. Thsy I find it important.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beschneidung (für Sohn): siehe Beschneidung beim Mann (engl. Male circumcision for son: See above.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhüllung (bei Frau): Dies ist mir sehr wichtig! Ich fühle mich im Hijab mind. tausend mal wohler und befreiter als ohne. Selbst wenn mich alle Menschen noch so blöd angucken und wohl denken, ich wäre unterdrückt, festigt mich das nur noch mehr in meinem Glauben und bin froh, meine Würde behalten zu können! Eine Muslima sollte kein Objekt der Begierde für einen Mann sein. Leider kleiden sich viele Frauen mit Miniröcken und weiten Ausschnitten, jedoch frage ich mich, was sie damit erreichen wollen? Und dann wollen sie auch noch Respekt bekommen? Eine Muslima bekommt Respekt, indem sie sich verhüllt und nicht ihren ganzen Körper zur Schau stellt. Daher brauchen sich die Mädchen, die die Blicke der Männer anziehen, nicht wundern, wenn sie plötzlich mal begrabscht werden oder gar noch Schlimmeres mit ihnen getan wird. (engl. Covering of the woman: This is very important to me. I feel with hejab at least a thousand times better and freed than without. Even when all people look at me in a dumb way and think that I am oppressed, it only strengthens me in the faith and I am happy to retain my dignity! A Muslima should not be an object of lust for a man. Unfortunately, many women dress in mini-skirts and with low cut tops, I am however asking myself what they are gaining from it? And then they want to receive respect? A Muslima receives respect when she covers herself and doesn’t demonstrate her whole body. Girl who get these looks don’t have to be surprised if they are being touched or worse being done to them.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhüllung (für Tochter): Ich würde meine eigene Tochter nie dazu zwingen, ein Kopftuch zu tragen. Dies muss sie selbst entscheiden können, wenn sie das Alter (also die Pubertät) dafür erlangt hat. Jedoch werde ich mein bestes geben, ihr zu erklären, warum es nur positiv ist, das Kopftuch zu tragen, nämlich dass wir uns vor den begierlichen Blicken fremder Männer schützen. Insha’allah wird sie es dann verstehen und das Kopftuch freiwillig tragen. Mit Zwang jedoch würde dies nicht gut sein. Schließlich muss die Tochter ja wissen, WARUM man es trägt, man kann ihr also nicht einfach sagen: „trag jetzt das Kopftuch“, man muss ihr auch erstmal erklären, warum wir Muslimas es tragen sollten, und dann wird sie es inshaallah auch von alleine verstehen und das Kopftuch tragen. ☺ (engl. Covering for daughter: I would never force my daughter to wear a headscarf. She has to decide for herself, when she has reach the age of puberty. I will however try my best to explain to her why it can only be positive to wear the headscarf, in order to protect ourselves from the covetous glances of men. With force it would not be good. The daughter has to know WHY it is worn. One can’t just tell her: “Wear the headscarf now”. One has to explain to her first, why us Muslimas should wear it, and then she will understand, inshaAllah, and wear it. ☺)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alkoholverbot</strong></td>
<td>Ich achte darauf, nicht mal einen einzigen Tropfen Alkohol zu trinken. Allah hat uns im heiligen Qur’an verboten, Berauschendes zu uns zu nehmen. Und da Alkohol extrem berauschend sein kann, sollte man erst gar nicht damit beginnen! Dies ist mir sehr wichtig. Denn wer weiß, was alles passieren kann, wenn man im Vollrausch ist. Man weiß in diesen Momenten nicht mehr, was man tut (es könnte zu Schlächereien oder anderen schlimmen Auseinandersetzungen kommen), darum sollte man gar keinen Alkohol trinken. Alhamdulillah hat uns Allah dies verboten. Schließlich wollen wir ja friedlich miteinander leben und nicht zu irgendwelchen Alkoholexzessen verleitet werden, die nur Schlechtes für uns bringen!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fleisch (halal)</strong></td>
<td>Da ich sowieso nicht all zu viel Fleisch zu mir nehme (höchstens 1x in der Woche), lege ich auch nicht sehr großen Wert darauf. Jedoch an Festtagen wie z.B. dem Aid al adha oder anderen finde ich es immer schön, erlaubtes Fleisch zu essen. Doch ansonsten bin ich kein großer Fleischesser, da mir es meistens auch nicht so schmeckt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(engl. Prohibition of pork. This is also very important to me. First of all I want to avoid eating pork, as Allah (swt) has forbidden us to do so through the Holy Qur’an. Every Muslim should adhere to it. It is also scientifically proven that pork is the source of many illnesses!)

(engl. Prohibition of alcohol: I take care that I don’t even drink a drop of alcohol. Allah has forbidden in the Holy Qur’an for us to consume intoxicated substances. And since alcohol can be very intoxicating, one should not even start with it! That very important to me. Who know what can happen when one is in drunken stupor. One doesn’t know in these moments what one does (it could end up in physical fights or worse conflicts). That is why one should not drink any alcohol. Alhamdulillah, that God has prohibited us to do so. After all we want to live in peace with one another, and not to be led astray to alcohol excesses which only encumber bad things for us!)

(engl. Meat halal: I don’t place great importance on meat (max. once a week), hence it is not that important to me. Nonetheless, on Islamic holidays, such as Id al-Adha, I like to eat permitted meat. Other than that I am not great meat eater, as it mostly doesn’t taste that nice.)
Appendix VII

Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glauben Sie, dass Sie sich im Zuge Ihrer Konvertierung verändert haben? Welche neuen Eigenschaften haben Sie an Sich entdecken können? Nennen Sie mir ein paar Beispiele.</th>
<th>(engl. Do you believe you have changed since embracing Islam? Have you noticed new characteristics in your thoughts and actions? If yes, please provide examples)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oh ja, sehr sogar, würde ich sagen! Da ich nun weiß, wie sich ein guter Muslim benehmen sollte, versuche ich auch, mich möglichst an die Regeln zu halten. Das heißt, wenn meine Eltern mal etwas lauter werden, versuche ich trotzdem, ihnen ganz normal zu antworten, nur nicht zurückschreien! Das wäre das schlimmste, auzu billah. Auch, wenn mein kleiner Bruder mich täglich an den Nerven zerrt, versuche ich stets, geduldig zu bleiben und ihm bei den Hausaufgaben zu helfen, auch wenn ich als Gegenleistung von ihm nichts bekomme als Herumgeschreie (aber das ist wohl sein Alter (13). Ich bin seit meiner Konvertierung viel geduldiger geworden, denke eher „In der Ruhe liegt die Kraft“ und ich bemerke nun sehr an meinen Mitmenschen, wie ungeduldig und streitsüchtig eigentlich alle sind. Leider…</td>
<td>(engl. Oh yes, a lot, I would say! Since I know now how a good Muslim should behave, I try to keep to all the rules as much as possible. That means, when my parents get louder, I do try to answer them in a normal tone, and no screaming back! That would be the worst, auzu billah. Even when my little brother bothers me on a daily basis, I do always try to be patient with him, to help him with his homework, even though I do not receive anything in return but screaming ( perhaps that has to do with his age (13). I have become a lot more patient since my conversion, and now rather think “within peace lies strength”. And I have realised among those around me how all are very impatient and aggressive. Unfortunately…)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haben Sie, seit Sie zum Islam übergetreten sind, Schwierigkeiten erfahren, bestimmte Gewohnheiten zu ändern?</td>
<td>(engl. Have you had difficulties to change any habits after you embraced Islam?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meine Eltern machen öfter Schweinefleisch zum Mittagessen, jedoch meide ich dies natürlich zu essen!</td>
<td>(engl. My parents often serve pork for lunch. I however try to avoid eating it!)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VII

Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

Kleidung (Clothes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage/Question</th>
<th>Antwort/Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tragen Sie seit Ihrer Konvertierung Islam-spezifische Kleidung? (engl. Do you wear specific Islamic clothing since you converted/ reverted?)</td>
<td>In der Schule darf ich leider kein Kopftuch tragen, doch trotzdem versuche ich, mich angemessen zu kleiden (also keine Ausschnitte oder enge Hosen, trage sowieso gerne Schals, die ja auch zumindest etwas bedecken …) (engl. In school I am unfortunately not permitted to wear a headscarf, however I do try to dress appropriately (no low neckline or tight trousers, I like to wear scarves anyway which cover at least a little...))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welche Reaktionen sind Ihnen noch geläufig? Welche Reaktionen gibt es heute (engl. If there has been a change (even if only slightly), how did people react?)</td>
<td>Eine Freundin versucht mich oft, etwas damit zu ärgern. Also z.B. „na, heute schon gebetet?“ oder „sag dem lieben Gott einen schönen Gruß“ (ich weiß, dass sie nicht wirklich glaubt). Auch, wenn ich weiß, dass sie es nicht ernst meint, … ich mag es einfach nicht, wenn man sich über die Religion anderer Leute lustig macht, ich sage es ihr auch immer wieder. Na ja.. (engl. A female friend often tried to annoy me with it. For example: “hey, already prayed today?” or “please forward my best greetings to the lovely God” (I know, that she doesn’t really believe). Even though I know that she is not being serious...I don’t like it, when people poke fun of other people’s religion, and I keep on saying that to her. Oh well...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wenn es eine Kleidungsänderung gegeben hat, hat es Ihre Selbstwahrnehmung geändert, und wie andere Sie wahrnehmen? (engl. If there has been a change of clothing/ style, has it changed your own self-perception?)</td>
<td>Ja. Ich selbst fühle mich mit dem Kopftuch (bzw. Hijab) sichtlich wohler! Auch, wenn mich alle ansehen, mich bestätigt das nur noch mehr im Glauben! Es ist einfach total schön, dieses Gefühl… unbeschreiblich. Die anderen denken, du wärst unterdrückt oder eine ungebildete Terroristin, das ist vielleicht traurig, aber die Hauptsache ist ja, dass wir Muslimas wissen, warum wir es tragen. Auch, wenn der Rest denkt, er könne unsere Gedanken lesen. <em>g</em> Manchmal wünsche ich mir auch einfach nur, dass die Leute uns doch mal selbst fragen sollen, WARUM wir es tragen. Und nicht gleich schon Vorurteile in den Raum stellen. Dies kann nämlich auch verletzen.Wie auch immer, ich bin sehr stolz, nun Hijab tragen zu können, ich fühle mich sichtlich wohler damit, obwohl ich nun viel mehr merkwürdige Blicke einfange. Es ist okay, ich tue es zum Wohlgefallen Allah’s (swt). ☺ (engl. Yes. I personally feel visibly more comfortable with the headscarf (or respectively, hejab)! Even when everyone looks at me, it confirms me even more in my belief. It is just absolutely wonderful...indescribable. The others think, you are oppressed or an uneducated terrorist. That is maybe sad, but the main thing is that we as Muslimas know why we are wearing it. Even if the rest think, they can read our minds. <em>smile</em> Sometimes I only wish, that people would ask us personally, WHY we are wearing it. And not immediately prejudice. This can also hurt. Anyway, I am very proud to now be able to wear hejab. I feel visibly more comfortable with it, even though I now receive more strange looks for it. It’s okay. I do it to please Allah (swt). ☺)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix VII**

**Completed questionnaire in German (continued):**

Frage an weibliche Teilnehmer: Tragen Sie ein Kopftuch? Warum Sie / tun, tragen Sie ihn nicht? Worauf stützen Sie Ihre Entscheidung? (engl. Question for female participants: Do you wear Islamic dress (ie. Hejab or similar, or abaya etc.)? Why do you wear it/ why don’t you wear it? What are you basing your decision on?)

Abgesehen von der Schule, ja. Ich liebe es, es zu tragen! Weitere Infos siehe letzte Frage. (engl. Apart from school, yes. I love to wear it! For more information see previous question.)

Fragen an männliche Teilnehmer: Was sagt der Islam Ihnen in Bezug auf Kleidung? (engl. Question for male participants: What does Islam teach you in regards to Muslim dress?)

**Kontakt mit dem anderen Geschlecht (Contact with the opposite sex)**

Haben Sie sich geändert, wie Sie sich gegenüber Menschen des anderen Geschlechts verhalten? Welche Änderungen fallen Ihnen dazu ein? (engl. Has your behaviour changed the way you are now acting towards men/ women? Which changes can you think of?)

Ich gebe fremden Männern nicht mehr die Hand. Auch genügt ein aus versehener Blick zu einem anderen fremden Mann vollkommen, denn der zweite Blick ist immer der des Sheytans. (engl. I don’t shake hands with strange men anymore. Also an accidental look to another strange man is enough, as the second look is hat of the Sheytan.)

Denken Sie, dass man nicht in die Augen eines Menschen des anderen Geschlechts blicken sollte? (engl. Do you think that one shouldn’t look into the eyes of a person of the opposite sex?)

Ja, denke ich. Ein Blick aus Versehen ist okay, aber einen weiteren Blick sollte man dann meiden, denn da ist immer der Sheytan dabei. (engl. Yes, I think so. One accidental look is okay, however one should avoid a second look, as Sheytan is always present.)
### Appendix VII

**Completed questionnaire in German (continued):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wenn Sie an einer Person des anderen Geschlechts interessiert wären, wie würden Sie Ihre Absichten kund machen? (engl. Hypothetically, if you were interested in a person of the opposite sex how would you today pursue that interest? Would there be a change now than before the conversion?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hmm… vielleicht etwas länger angucken. Aber bei mir hat sich das sowieso erledigt, da ich mittlerweile verlobt bin. 😊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(engl. Hmm…perhaps looking at him a little longer. This however is none of my concern, as I am engaged by now. 😊)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Wahl des Partners / Heiratspartner (Choice of partner/ marital partner)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sind Sie zurzeit in einer Beziehung? (engl. What is your current relationship status?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puh… könnte man eigentlich so sagen. Jedoch sind wir darum zusammen, weil wir insha’allah bald heiraten werden. Das heißt, alles was vor der Ehe nicht passieren sollte, tun wir natürlich auch nicht! Darum sind wir geduldig und führen bis dahin einfach eine Art „Beziehung“ (ohne jegliche verbotenen Berührungen natürlich), bis wir dann heiraten, was wir natürlich so bald wie möglich tun wollen. (engl. Well…I could say so. But we are together, as we want to get married soon, inshaAllah. It means that prior to the marriage nothing should happen, hence we are not doing anything! That is why we are patient and have a sort of “relationship” (without any forbidden physical contact, of course) until we get married which we would like to do as soon as possible.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wie ist Ihre Meinung zu vorehelichen Beziehungen, also Partnerschaft ohne Trauschein, zwischen Männern und Frauen? (engl. What is your opinion on pre-marital relationships between men and women – without marriage licence?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wenn man in dieser Beziehung nicht haram begeht (also küssen, Geschlechtsverkehr etc.), dann finde ich es okay. Man muss einfach geduldig sein. <em>g</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(engl. If there are no haram occurrences in this relationship (kissing, sexual intercourse, etc.), then it is okay with me. One just must be patient. <em>smile</em>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gibt es Ihrer Meinung nach Freundschaften zwischen den Geschlechtern?</td>
<td>(engl. Do your believe in friendships between the sexes?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigentlich nicht. Man weiß ja nie, wie weit so etwas komrn kann. Darum denke ich auch, sollte man möglichst wenig mit fremden des anderen Geschlechts zu tun haben, solange man nicht auf eine Heirat aus ist.</td>
<td>(engl. Not really. You never know how far this can go. That is why I think that one should have as little contact as possible to the opposite sex, if you are not interest in marriage.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie wichtig ist Ihnen der Aspekt „Ehe“?</td>
<td>(engl. How important ist he aspect of „marriage“ to you?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sehr wichtig! Die Ehe ist die Hälfte des Islams. 😊 In der Ehe können sich Mann und Frau gemeinsam zurückziehen und die Zeit zu zweit genießen, sich gegenseitig gut behandeln, helfen, etc…</td>
<td>(engl. Very important! Marriage is half of Islam. 😊 In the marriage, the husband and wife can enjoy private togetherness, treat each other well, help each other, etc…)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Würde Ihr Partner/ Ihre Partnerin ein Muslim/ eine Muslimin sein müssen? Bitte erklären Sie kurz Ihren Standpunkt.</td>
<td>(engl. Would your partner have to be a Muslim/ Muslima? Please explain.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ja, alhamdulillah habe ich einen guten Moslem als Partner, der mir sehr wichtig ist und den ich auch unbedingt heiraten möchte. Ich könnte mir NIE vorstellen, einen Nichtmuslim zu heiraten. Dann würde das ja alles gar nicht passen, weil jeder andere Ansichten hat etc.. dies würde zu viel Streit führen. Darum denke ich, kann so eine Ehe nur bestellen, wenn beide den Islam als Religion haben.</td>
<td>(engl. Yes, I have a good Muslim as a partner, who is important to me and to whom I want to get married, alhamdulillah. I could NEVER imagine marrying a non-Muslim. It wouldn’t work out, as each person has different thoughts etc..., and this would lead to too many arguments. That is why I think that a marriage can only exist, when both partners are Muslim.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was sind die wesentlichen Eigenschaften/ Qualitäten eines potentiellen Heiratspartners/ einer potentiellen Heiratspartnerin?</td>
<td>(engl. What are the main characteristics and qualities of a potential marital partner/ candidate?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Er sollte immer regelmäßig beten, geduldig sein, behilflich sein, lieb sein.. und sich an die Regeln des Qur’ans und der Sunna halten! Dies würde wahrlich der beste Heiratspartner sein. =)</td>
<td>(engl. He should pray regularly, be patient, helpful, loving…and adhere to the regulations of the Qur’an and the Sunnah. This would truly be the best marriage candidate. =)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VII

Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wie wichtig ist Ihnen die Meinung Ihrer Familie, wenn Sie einen Ehepartner/ eine Ehepartnerin auswählen? (engl. How important is your family’s opinion when it comes to choosing a marital partner?)</td>
<td>Relativ. Da meine Familie selbst keine Muslime sind (meine Mutter Christin, mein Vater Atheist), werden sie wohl schwer damit klar kommen, dass ich einen Moslem heirate. Letztendlich liegt die Entscheidung aber bei mir, finde ich. Und ich gehorche lieber Allah und heirate einen guten Moslem, anstatt dass ich auf meine Familie höre, wenn diese sagen würde, ich solle einen „normalen“ Mann heiraten. (engl. That’s relative. As my family is not Muslim (meine mother is Christian, my father atheist), it will be problematic for them that I marry a Muslim. I think, ultimately it is my decision. And I rather obey Allah and marry a good Muslim than to listen to my family if they would say that I should rather marry a “normal” man.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie ist Ihre Meinung zur Polygamie? Würden Sie in eine polygame Ehe eingehen? Bitte erklären Sie Ihre Antwort. (engl. What is your opinion on polygamy (marrying more than one woman)? Would you enter a polygamous marriage?)</td>
<td>Nein, würde ich nicht. 😊 Einfach, weil ich meinen Mann ganz alleine für mich haben möchte, diese Art der Ehe ist wohl auch die beste und einfachste. Sollte der Mann noch eine andere Frau heiraten, müsste er sich über beide gleich gut kümmern und beide gleich gut behandeln. Und ob das so einfach zu schaffen ist? ;) Nein, ich bevorzuge wirklich die Einehe, auch wenn die Polygamie erlaubt ist und jede Frau, die so eine Art Ehe eingehen kann, Respekt verdient hat! (engl. No, I wouldn’t. 😊 It’s easy…because I want to have my husband all to myself. This kind of marriage is the best and easiest. Should a man marry another woman, he would then have to take equal care of both, and treat them equally well. But whether that is so easily done? ;) No, I do really prefer monogamy, even though polygamy is permitted. Every woman who enters such a marriage, is owed respect!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familie / Freunde (Family/ Friends)</td>
<td>Haben Sie Ihrer Familie über Ihre Konvertierung erzählt? (engl. Have you told your family about embracing Islam? If yes, how did your family react? If not, why did you not want to tell them?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leider noch nicht. Ich habe Angst vor deren Reaktion, doch inshaAllah werde ich ihnen irgendwann bald erklären können, was und wie der wahre Islam wirklich ist. (engl. Unfortunately not yet. I am scared how they will react, but inshaAllah I can explain to them one day what and how true Islam really is about.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question (Engl.)</th>
<th>Answer (Engl.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wie reagier(t)en Ihre Familie und Freunde? (engl. How did your family and friends react?)</td>
<td>Meine Freunde haben mehr oder weniger neutral reagiert. Die einen finden es total übertrieben, die anderen kommen ganz gut damit zurecht. (engl. My friends reacted neutrally more or less. Some believe it is completely over the top, and the others get on quite alright with it.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sind alle vor der Konvertierung bestehenden Freundschaften erhalten geblieben? (engl. Have all friendship from prior to the conversion been retained?)</td>
<td>Ja ☺ (engl. Yes ☺)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sind Freundschaften stärker oder abgebrochen geworden? (engl. Have friendships become stronger or did they dissolve?)</td>
<td>Nichts von beidem. Es ist eigentlich alles wie vorher, nur dass ich von der einen Freundin ein bisschen mehr genervt werde (diese „Späßchen“, wie sie es nennt) (engl. None of the two. It is like before. The only difference is that one female friend annoys me a little bit more ( with “jokes”, as she calls it).)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haben Sie jetzt einen anderen Kreis von Freunden / Bekanntschaften als vor Ihrer Konvertierung? (engl. Do you now have a different circle of friends than prior to conversion?)</td>
<td>Eigentlich nicht, jedoch suche ich noch dringend andere Schwestern!! Die hier leider sehr schwer zu finden sind. =( (engl. Not really, however I am urgently looking for other sisters!! Unfortunately here, they are hard to find =).)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Körperbewusstsein (Body Awareness)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question (Engl.)</th>
<th>Answer (Engl.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sind Sie mit Ihrem Körper physisch und emotional glücklich? (engl. Are you physically and emotionally happy with your body?)</td>
<td>Ja, kann mich eigentlich nicht beklagen. ☺ (engl. Yes, I cannot really complain. ☺)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verwenden Sie Schönheitsprodukte? (engl. Do you use beauty products?)</td>
<td>Hm, nein, eigentlich nicht. Nur manchmal ein ganz wenig Wimperntusche. (engl. Hmm, no, not really. Sometimes a little mascara.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VII

Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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</table>
| Welche Rolle spielen, Ihrer Meinung nach, Parfüm, Parfüm-Öl, After-Shave? (engl. In your opinion, what role do perfume, perfume-oil and after-shave play?) | Für meinen Mann mache ich gerne Parfüm hin, woanders aber hat dies nichts zu suchen. ;)
(engl. I like to use perfume for my husband. Other than that it should not be used. ;) ) |
| Wie würden Sie Körperbewusstsein in eigenen Worten beschreiben? (engl. How would you describe body awareness in your own words?) | Ich fühle mich gut in meinem Körper. Und über die Cellulitis kann ich gut hinwegsehen. Ich esse gerne, bin nicht die dünnste, aber auch nicht dick. Ich fühle mich einfach total normal und wohl in meinem Körper und bin glücklich damit. ☺
(engl. I feel good in my body. And I can look past the cellulitis well. I like to eat, I am not the thinnest, but not big either. I just feel absolutely normal and comfortable in my body, and I am happy with it. ☺) |
| Teilen Sie die Meinung, dass während der Menstruation nicht gebetet oder in die Moschee gegangen werden darf? Bitte erkären Sie. (engl. Do you share the opinion that a woman should not pray during her menstruation? Do you share the opinion that a woman should not go to the mosque during her menstruation? Please state your reason.) | Ja, schließlich ist man in dieser Zeit unrein. Auch, wenn ich das Gebet in diesen Tagen immer sehehr vermisse… ich komm schon drüber hinweg und warte dann schon umso gespannter auf den Tag, an dem ich wieder beten darf. ☺
(engl. Yes, you are not clean during this time anyway. Even though I very much miss prayers during these days…I get over it and excitingly wait for the day on which I am allowed to pray again. ☺) |

Sexualität – Allgemeine Fragen (sexuality – general questions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Bitte erklären Sie mir in eigenen Worten, was Sie unter dem Begriff „Sexualität“ verstehen? (engl. How do you understand the term „sexuality“?) | Meinen eigenen Körper kennen, wissen, was meinem Körper gut tut.
(engl. To know my own body, and to know what is good for my body.) |
| In Ihren eigenen Worten, wie glauben Sie, ist die Einstellung des Islams gegenüber der Thematik Sexualität? (engl. In your opinion: What is the role and thought of sexuality in Islam?) | ganz normal. (engl. Absolutely normal.) |
**Appendix VII**

**Completed questionnaire in German (continued):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Glauben Sie, dass es eine Doppelmoral unter Muslimen gibt? Bitte erklären Sie kurz Ihre Gedanken dazu. (engl. Do you think that there are double standards among Muslims? Please explain your thoughts.)</td>
<td>Ja, denke ich schon! (engl. Yes, I think so!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geht ein Nicht-Muslim/ eine Nicht-Muslimin anders mit seiner/ ihrer Sexualität um als ein Muslim/ eine Muslimin? (engl. Do you believe that a Muslim man or woman deals with their sexuality differently than a non-Muslim man or woman?)</td>
<td>Wenn Sie Islam und Sexualität im Zusammenhang sehen, welche Suren, Ahadithe und/ oder Aussagen von islamischen Rechtsgelehrten oder auch generell fallen Ihnen spontan dazu ein und warum? (engl. Can you think of any verses, surahs, ahadith in relation to sexuality or body awareness that are of special importance or have made an impression on you?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sollte es Ihrer Meinung nach Strafen für voreheliche oder aussereheliche sexuelle Beziehungen geben? (engl. Do you believe that there should be punishments for pre-marital or extra-marital relationships?)</td>
<td>Es kommt drauf an, was für Strafen. Ich bin eigentlich gegen Gewalt. (engl. It depends what kind of punishments. I am actually against violence.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie wichtig ist die Jungfräulichkeit? (An beide Geschlechter gerichtet) (engl. How important do you believe is virginity? (question addresses male and female participants))</td>
<td>sehr wichtig für beide! (engl. Very important for both!)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sexualität – Deine eigene Sexualität**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harmoniert Ihre Sexualität mit Ihren gegenwärtigen Werten? (engl. Does your sexuality harmonize with your current values?)</td>
<td>Tut mir Leid, die Frage habe ich glaube ich nicht richtig verstanden. Hmm… (engl. I am sorry, but I think I haven’t really understood the questions. Hmm…)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VII

Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wurden Sie mit einem neuen Körperbewusstsein sich selbst gegenüber präsentiert?</td>
<td>Jaa, schon! (engl. Yeees, I think so!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haben Sie Veränderungen Ihrer Sexualität wahrnehmen können? Wenn ja, inwiefern?</td>
<td>Ich fühle mich nun sichtlich wohler in meinem Körper, um ehrlich zu sein. =)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hat die Annahme von religiösen Ritualen in Bezug auf Ihre Sexualität Veränderungen eingeschlagen? (Beispiel: das Konzept der Unreinheit in Bezug auf Menstruation, in Bezug auf sexuellen Verkehr)? Wenn Ja, haben Sie von dieser Adoption profitiert?</td>
<td>Nein, das ist für mich keine Veränderung, im Gegenteil, ich befürworte das Konzept der Unreinheit. Schließlich steht es ja auch im Koran, dass die Männer sich den Frauen nicht nähern sollten, wenn diese ihre Menstruation haben. (engl. No, there hasn’t been a change. It is actually the exact opposite. I support the concept of uncleanliness. After all, it says in the Qur’an that men should not approach the women during their menstruation.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haben Ihre Eltern Sie über die Sexualität oder einige Aspekte der Sexualität und Ihres Körpers aufgeklärt?</td>
<td>Nein, eigentlich war das alles die Schule. ;) (engl. No, it was actually all in school. ;)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VII

Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wie denken Sie über Masturbation? Haben sich Gedanken seit Ihrer Konvertierung geändert?</td>
<td>(engl. How do you think about masturbation? Have your thoughts on it changed since your conversion?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hmm… ich sehe die Menstruation nun einfach als normale Periode, die monatlich wieder kommt. Außerdem denke ich immer daran, dass diese es mir ja ermöglicht, inshaallah irgendwann einmal Kinder zu bekommen ☺ darum sehe ich diese nicht nur als schlecht an, außerdem hat Allah (swt) uns so erschaffen, und das sollten wir vollkommen akzeptieren. Dadurch hat er uns Frauen ermöglicht, Kinder zu bekommen, das kann doch also nur schön sein, und da nimmt man auch ein paar Bauchschmerzen in Kauf. (engl. Hmm… I see menstruation as a normal period which comes on a monthly basis. I also always think about it, that it gives me the opportunity to one day have children, inshaAllah ☺ that is why I don’t see this as bad. Apart from that, Allah (swt) has created us this way, and we should completely accept this. He makes it possible for women to have children. So this can only be good. Therefore it is okay to now and then put up with stomach aches.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mixed up masturbation with menstruation)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie reagieren Sie auf gewisse Sachen seit Ihrer Konvertierung? Im Fernsehen, in der Werbung, in der Medienbranche wird häufig mit dem Motto „Sex sells“ geworben, also dass Duschgel z.B. von einer nackten Frau im Fernsehen geworben wird. Alkohol auch häufig in Verbindung mit Sex geworben wird. (engl. Today’s advertisements and films (on TV, in the media in general, magazines and so on) are often sold with an undertone of „sex sells“. For example showergel or alcohol is advertised with a sexual influence. How do you feel about that?)</td>
<td>Ich reagiere darauf immer mehr abneigend. Mir tun einfach die Leute leid, die sich so etwas antun, die sich so billig verkaufen. Als ob sie keine Würde mehr hätten. Ich versuche, solche Filme zu meiden. (engl. I tend to react with more and more aversion. I just feel sorry for the people who have to do this to themselves, who sell themselves so cheaply. As if they have to pride. I do try to avoid such films.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Sexualität – Die Sexualität/ von anderen Menschen (the sexuality of others)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wie erklären Sie Ihrem Kind/ würden Sie Ihrem Kind auf eine glaubwürdige Weise erklären, daß vorrethliche sexuelle Beziehungen nicht profitabel sind, wenn Sie jedoch genau das in Ihrer Vergangenheit erfahren haben und es auch in der Gesellschaft als akzeptabel gehalten wird? (engl. If you have/ would have a child, how would you explain to him/ he that pre-marital relationships are not permitted, although you may have experienced them yourself in the past (as in before your conversion) and this is being accepted in society?)</td>
<td>Ich würde meinem Kind sagen, dass dies zwar sehr viele Menschen tun, die nicht an Allah glauben, jedoch genau das falsch ist. Ich würde ihm (meinem Kind) erklären, dass vorrethliche Beziehungen sehr schlecht sind, da diese sehr schnell zu haram führen können und es nicht gut für einen ist. Man sollte sich selbst sozusagen „aufheben“ bis zur Hochzeit, um sich dann ganz allein mit dem Ehepartnem zu „teilen“. Dies ist besser für uns. Würden wir vorrethliche Beziehungen eingehen, wäre das ziemlich unwürdig und wir würden uns damit nur selbst „herabsetzen“, also eher wertlos machen! (engl. I would tell my child that many people do this, that they do not believe in Allah, but that this is completely wrong. I would tell him (my child) that premarital relationships are bad, as they can easily lead to haram, and that this would not be good for oneself. One should “save” oneself until the wedding, in order to then “share” oneself only with the marital partner. This is better for us. Would we enter premarital relationships, it would be proudless and we would only belittle ourselves, and make us worthless!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welchen Rat würden Sie Leuten geben, deren gegenwärtige Sexualität mit ihren Werten nicht harmonisiert? (engl. Which advice would you give to people (here Muslims, born or converted/ reverted) whose sexuality is NOT harmonizing with their religious values?)</td>
<td>Ich würde ihnen raten, lieber geduldig zu sein und bis nach der Hochzeit warten, dies ist wahrlich besser für sie und sie erhalten damit ihre Würde! (engl. I would advise them to rather be patient and to wait until after the wedding. This is surely better for them, and they will keep their diginity!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was halten Sie von Menschen, welche transsexuell sind? (engl. How do you think about transexual people?)</td>
<td>Hm, gute Frage… ich versuche, normal mit ihnen umzugehen. (engl. Hm, good questions…I try to treat them normally.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wie ist Ihre Ansicht über Homosexualität? (engl. How do you think about homosexual people?)</td>
<td>siehe vorherige Frage (engl. See previous question.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix VII

#### Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

**Schlussfragen (Rounding up)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frage</th>
<th>Antwort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wie sehen Sie sich heute im Allgemeinen, as den Islam betrifft?</td>
<td>(engl. How do you see yourself today in general in relation to the conversion)? Mir geht es besser - viel besser!!! Ich danke Allah jeden Tag dafür, dass er mich zum Licht des Islam geführt hat, alhamdulillah, das ist das allerschönste und es war die beste Entscheidung, zum Islam zu konvertieren. Eine bessere Entscheidung gibt es gar nicht. ☺ (engl. I am feeling better – much better!!! I thank Allah every day, that He has led me to the light of Islam, alhamdulillah. That’s the most wonderful and best decision to have converted to Islam. There is no better decision. ☺)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welche Bereicherung geben Sie der Gesellschaft mit Ihrer Veränderung?</td>
<td>(engl. Which enrichment are you adding to society with your change?) Ich versuche, nicht einfach draufloszureden, bleibe geduldig, freundlich und versuche, Streits zu schlichten, wo es möglich ist. (engl. I try not talk without thought, stay patient, be friendly and try to solve arguments wherever possible.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was muss Ihrer Meinung nach getan werden, so daß unterschiedliche Religionen toleranter im Umgang miteinander leben können?</td>
<td>(engl. What has to be done so that the different religions can be more tolerant with each other?) Jeder sollte einfach offener sein und die anderen Menschen mitsamt ihres Glaubens akzeptieren. Man selbst kann doch froh sein, dass man seinen eigenen Glauben hat, da muss man doch nicht andere Menschen deswegen diskriminieren oder so! Die Leute sollten toleranter werden, auch die Atheisten, die ja meist sehr vor allem gegen den Islam sind. (engl. Everyone should be more open-minded and accept other people including their belief, One should be happy that one has a belief. There is no reason to discriminate against people for that matter! The eople should become more tolerant; the atheists, who are against Islam, in particular.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wenn es um den Islam geht, welche Rolle geben Sie sich selber in der Gesellschaft?</td>
<td>(engl. With Islam involved, what kind of role do you give yourself in society?) Ich versuche natürlich, eine gute Muslima zu sein, wo es nur geht. (hoffe ich habe die Frage nun richtig verstanden). Bin tolerant und akzeptiere auch die anderen Menschen, solange sie mich akzeptieren! ☺ (engl. I try to be a good Muslima, of course. Wherever I can. (I hope I have understood the question). I am tolerant and accept the others, as long as they accept me! ☺)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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379
Completed questionnaire in German (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Was halten Sie von dieser Umfrage? (engl. What do you think of this survey?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fand ich seehr interessant und könnte es ruhig mal öfter geben! ☺ Danke, dass ich mitmachen durfte =)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(engl. I found it very interesserant. This could be more often! ☺ Thank you that I was allowed to participate =).)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VIII

Short biographies of the individual British and German participants

All the participants involved remain anonymous. In order to protect their identity, each participant has been given a pseudonym. The biographies are structured in alphabetical order according to their names and gender; beginning with the British male participants, continuing with the British female participants and German male participants, and will be completed with the biographies of the German female participants. All participants involved are listed, with the exception of four British male participants who first agreed to the interview, however, decided to withdraw from the study.

The biographies include the following information:

- Date of conversion
- Age at conversion
- First contact with Islam/Study of Islam prior to conversion
- Trigger to convert
- Seeking direction (at the time of participation)
- Religious background/previous faith(s)

British participants

13 males:

11 females:

I chose my participants to be British because my university is in Exeter and this gave me the chance to provide a unique insight on the conversion phenomenon. I here used the snowballing technique and convenience sampling. The educational level was higher than average among the British participants, as more than two thirds have attained a higher education qualification, a BA or BSc, an MA or MSc (including one completion of a Ph.D.).
Appendix VIII

Short biographies of the individual British and German participants

Eleven of the participants were salary earners, one person was self-employed and another intended to start their own business, nine of them were students, one was a job-seeker, and three withheld their answer. At the time of the interviews and completion of questionnaires, thirteen participants were married, six participants were single, three participants were engaged, and one participant was separated, while one participant withheld his answer. The average age was between twenty-five and thirty. The youngest British participant was nineteen; the oldest participant was forty-eight.

German participants

13 male participants:
Abdou, AbdulSamed, Amro, Aziz, Gharib, Ibrahim, Karim, Kazim, Khalid, Mikail, Mounir, Nasir, Olaf.

39 female participants:

I chose my participants to be German because I lived in Germany at the time when I started and planned my empirical research. I here also used the snowballing technique and convenience sampling. The educational level was average, with at least half of them having attained a school qualification, apprenticeship or university degree (including one Ph.D.). Twenty-eight people were salary earners, three of them were self-employed, twelve were students, two were pupils, and ten women were at home with young children or pregnant. At the time of the interviews and completion of questionnaires, twenty-nine participants were married, thirteen participants were single, three participants were engaged, three participants were in a relationship, one participant was separated, and one participant was divorced. Two participants withheld their answers. The youngest German participant was eighteen, the oldest participant was forty-eight. The average age was between twenty-seven and thirty-five.
### Appendix VIII

(Q) = Questionnaire, (I) = Interview, (II) = Interview incomplete, (IQ) = Interview incomplete, complete questionnaire

Profiles of British male participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of conversion</th>
<th>Age at conversion</th>
<th>First contact with Islam</th>
<th>Trigger to convert</th>
<th>Seeking direction (at time of participation)</th>
<th>Religious background/Previous faith (s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abd al-Ala</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>No particular situation was mentioned. Abd al-Ala studied Islam six months to a year prior to his conversion.</td>
<td>“I cannot put my finger on the event or the moment I accepted Islam to be right for me.”</td>
<td>Sunni Muslim.</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdullah</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>“I didn’t study Islam. I had a dream and was told by a young man in my dream to become Muslim. Three days later I converted to Islam and at the time I knew nothing about it.”</td>
<td>“I had no intention of becoming a Muslim until I had my dream.”</td>
<td>“I don’t follow any school or thought, I look at all the schools and take the easiest option from what they say (...) all the schools have evidence to back up what they say and in Islam you are meant to take the easiest route (providing that it is halal, of course).”</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdul-Mannan</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“Despite being a practising Hindu, I had drifted away and needed a fresh start. So I went to a college on the other side of London to get away from my ‘bad’ Muslim friends. I had to wake up in the earlier hours and would see the Muslims going to the mosque at a time they were told to go. Unlike myself who could pray at a time convenient to me.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix VIII

| Abraham Asad (I) | **Date of conversion:** Preference of embracing Islam rather than conversion to Islam in 2003.  
| Age at conversion: 24  
| **First contact with Islam:** “Holiday in Egypt and spending some time with an Egyptian family. They lived above the mosque. So, after having, you know, gone to the mosque, and kind of, finding out a bit more, I spent time with them, and we would read together, and they would explain things, and we would talk about the traditions, and study the Qur’an, and things like that. I remember my first time in the mosque – there’s obviously a story behind that – but I went to the mosque and I met the Imam, and there was another brother who was from Morocco, and it was just really through spending time just going to the mosque, and I met this family. I was soon introduced to the family as well, and they were there, and they were just, you know, one of the guys that, the men of the family. He was interested and invited me to his house, you know, and so yeah, really it was through spending time at the mosque.”  
| **Trigger to convert:** “The trigger, for me, was initially my travel, through travel to Egypt, and I visited first in 1997 with my father. I was introduced to the kind of culture and the people there, and we spent time with the people, and I was very, kind of, taken by the way they were, and how sort of generous and open and welcoming they were. And at that point I didn’t really know anything about Islam but I was very drawn to find out why these people were like this, you know, friendly, very open, and they are so trusting. And then really, then it evolved in that I met my fiancée now, and her brother, and some of her friends, and we started to spend time together.”  
| **Seeking direction (at time of participation):** Muslim; “still finding a direction after eight years of being Muslim” – not supporting Shi’a Islam.  
| **Religious background/Previous faith (s):** No religious affiliation prior to conversion  

| Akeem (Q) | **Date of conversion:** January 2005  
| Age at conversion: 28  
| **First contact with Islam:** “I was exposed to Islam, like many in the UK, during religious education lessons in school where I had Muslim friends, although little was discussed of the religion.”  

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Appendix VIII

My primary frame of reference for Islam as an adult, however, was through rap music: many rappers, Muslim or otherwise, allude to Islam in their songs.”

Trigger to convert: “The final trigger for me to embrace Islam – and there were numerous other factors along the way - was the realisation that death can strike at any moment. In the year prior to my conversion I was enjoying the hedonistic lifestyle of a full-time musician, yet, I experienced many reminders of the fragility of life, including the passing of my grandfather and an old school friend a few days later. Since I believed that there was no deity worthy of worship but Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger I did not want to gamble dying without having declared my belief in *Tawheed*.”

Seeking direction (at time of participation): With regards to the Islamic school of thought I follow, I would probably define myself as a *Salafi* with a small ‘s.’ More importantly, I am a Muslim trying to follow the *Qur’an* and *Sunnah* and adhering to the body of believers. May Allah forgive us and those who preceded us in faith. *Ameen.*

Religious background/Previous faith (s): “I was vehemently opposed to organised religion before Islam although I respected the spiritual values of many faiths. As a side-note, I filled in the religion box on the 2001 census form as Jedi like many in my peer group so that the Jedi order would be recognised as an official religion! I’m not sure If we were successful or not but it shows what our blasé attitude to religion was like.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anwaar (I)</th>
<th>Date of conversion: Ramadan 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at conversion: 25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First contact with Islam: “I wasn’t very spiritual but I could see the practical part in Islam but then there was the spiritual aspect as well that I was interested in and it came across as a bit mysterious and I wanted to discover it so it was a combination of both. Meeting with a few different people, obviously on my life journey, encountering different people saying things to me and just things about my own actions so I’d sort of like (…) things would happen to me in my life and then I’d come up with an answer for it and then I’d find out the answer to the problem would be an Islamic solution, you know, it was like part of the *Sharī‘ah*, you know what I mean? And all these different things kept happening and I’m thinking ‘You know what? I think the Muslims might have it right.’ ”

Trigger to convert: “I think it’s just a series of things over a number of years so it’d be like something would be on the news and it would trigger a little thought in my mind and then I wouldn’t think about it for months or years and then something else would happen and then in the end they’d come so frequent that in the end I was like ‘You know what I’ve got to look into this, see what its actually all about, see what people are saying’(...)(...)I’m going to HAVE to go to the Mosque just to talk about how I feel.’ And I phoned up my friend who was Algerian and I said ‘Look can you just take me to the Mosque?’ and he was like ‘Yeah, yeah.’
He couldn’t believe it because at the time I was working in London as a DJ and he’d occasionally come along (obviously a good Muslim!) and he was like ‘What? You want to come to the Mosque?’ and I said ‘Yeah, yeah, you’ve got to take me’ and he went ‘Are you joking?’ ‘No, no’ and he went ‘Oh, alright I’ll meet you tomorrow yeah?’ so I walked into the washroom and he showed me how to wash then we walked on the carpet and just the smell and the people, it was so relaxed and no-one was showing off and it was a lovely atmosphere to be in and the Imam was very gentle and humble and it was just (…) I just thought ‘You know I’ve come home.’ You know, I’d felt that my whole life that something wasn’t quite right, I couldn’t put my finger on it, what it was, that this was not the only way of living? There must be another way and when I went there it just felt like I was at home so that was it.”

Seeking direction (at time of participation): “The mosque I go to is Hanafi but I do like some of the Salafi rules. The way I pray is Hanafi and all that, is what I do, but some of the rules I take are guided from Salafi.

Religious background/Previous faith(s): Prior to conversion: “I didn’t believe in anything (…) My parents (…) just go to church at Easter and Christmas. I wouldn’t call them Christians, they’re just cultural Christians my parents are cultural Christian.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dawoud</th>
<th>Date of conversion: 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Q)</td>
<td>Age at conversion: 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First contact with Islam: reading the Bible at nineteen led Dawoud to question Christianity and study other faiths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trigger to convert: Friends lent Dawoud books on Islam which made sense to him.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeking direction (at time of participation): No set Madhab; following Qur’an and Sunnah only.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious background/Previous faith(s): n/a.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gibril</th>
<th>Date of conversion: 2006</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Q)</td>
<td>Age at conversion: 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First contact with Islam: 2004; “Mainly using the internet to source bits of information. YouTube was surprisingly helpful.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trigger to convert: “I had come to the realisation that god exists. So I was trying to make sense of it, then I met a Yemeni guy who I used to discuss religion with and what he said made sense.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix VIII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of conversion</th>
<th>Age at conversion</th>
<th>First contact with Islam</th>
<th>Trigger to convert</th>
<th>Seeking direction (at time of participation)</th>
<th>Religious background/Previous faith (s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Idris</strong> (Q)</td>
<td>November 2000</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>“I had a little knowledge from being a Primary School teacher in a school with 1/3 or so Muslim pupils. I worked as (VSO) volunteer in a 100% Muslim country from 1998, working alongside Muslims, seeing mosques, discussing religion in general and Islam in particular. I had many and ongoing informal discussions with my Muslim colleagues, at the same time reading articles on the internet and some books. Working on isolated islands I had plenty of ‘thinking time’ which enabled me to question my own beliefs, <em>raison d’etre</em> and so on, a luxury I may not have had in my previous life in the UK.”</td>
<td>“The book ‘The Road To Mecca’ by Mohamed Asad was a key book, gelling absolutely with my thinking and hopes. I found that I empathised absolutely with his personal dilemmas and his considerations of the ‘West, secularism, and such. A female Muslim colleague (Leela), a woman whose bubbly and kind personality and outlook, and the way she ‘lived’ her religion as opposed to it appearing to me to be merely one part of her life, shattered my illusions about religion in general and religious people (as I perceived them). As I said, the specific catalyst that got me to the mosque was my impending marriage (not to Leela).”</td>
<td>Sunni Muslim following the Hanafi school (“though I am no expert in <em>fiqh</em>”).</td>
<td>Raised as a nominal Christian who “lapsed” into atheism at age eighteen/nineteen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Michael</strong> (Q)</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>“Over a period of three to six months I studied textbooks about Islam, mainly written by non-Muslims. Not <em>Dawah</em> material. I saw a 90% overlap with my previous faith – Catholicism but could not convert in good conscience at that stage because of what I had been brought up to believe about Jesus, specifically his supposed divinity.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix VIII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trigger to convert</th>
<th>Seeking direction (at time of participation)</th>
<th>Religious background/Previous faith (s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I then studied the early Christian church and became convinced of the Arian ‘heresy’ - of pure monotheism and the belief that Jesus was merely a human being, albeit a very special one as a prophet of God. From there it was a very small step to accept one more prophet – Mohammed*.”</td>
<td>“I am a Sunni with certain Shia leanings, specifically with regard to Mutah marriage and admiration of Imams Ali and Hussein. I do not follow any Madhab. I am something of a Wahabi in terms of pure theology, ie. the be all and end all of my Islam is Tawheed. But I abhor Wahabi social teachings, particularly with regard to women.”</td>
<td>“I was previously a practising Roman Catholic.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Raif (I)** | **Date of conversion:** March 2001  
**Age at conversion:** 21  
**First contact with Islam:** “I’ve always had international friends from a very young age, including Muslims, in secondary school.”  
**Trigger to convert:** “I suppose the broader background to that would be I did an exchange in my undergraduate degree to the US and met a Pakistani family over there. One or two of the children were in my class, obviously – as international students – we socialised a lot, and they introduced me to the Qur’an which I read on different occasions (...) I was quite familiar and understanding of this Pakistani family and having spent more time with them discussing various issues including Islam then it sort of, I suppose, peaked my interest at the time and it seemed like something I wanted to find out more about when I returned back to London. So, that was the trigger if you like.”  
**Seeking direction (at time of participation):** Sunni Muslim; “I don’t generally differentiate; I understand there’s this difference between Sunni and Shi’a Islam. I suppose I classify myself as Sunni but I prefer to focus on Islam as a religion in itself than focus on sub-divisions within it.” | **Religious background/Previous faith (s):** “Christian prior to conversion” |

| **Suhaym (II)** | **Date of conversion:**  
**Age at conversion:** 19  
**First contact with Islam:**  
**Seeking direction (at time of participation):**  
**Religious background/Previous faith (s):** n/a (Interview was not completed) | **Trigger to convert:** |
Appendix VIII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zaid (Q)</th>
<th>Date of conversion: February 2005</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age at conversion: 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First contact with Islam: “My first knowledge of Islam was my primary school friend Farhan – we were best friends between the ages six and nine. Then in RE (Religious Education) lessons at secondary school I learned a little of Muhammad* and the five pillars. Then when I was sixteen I saw the film ‘East is East’ which prompted me to read a book from the library about Islam.”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trigger to convert: “I met a brother named Fawzi, a qualified medical doctor from Libya who was doing a PhD at Edinburgh University. We spoke for about two hours about Christianity and Islam, during which he showed me contradictions within the Bible which surprised me since I had no idea of their existence. He also said that he had looked at Islam and Christianity himself and chosen Islam. And that made me think since he was an honest, intelligent, sincere individual. Viewing the exhibition, I felt that this was what I had thought Christianity was supposed to be. It seemed more Christian than Christianity in a way. I left with a translated copy of the Qur’an and from that exhibition I think it was about two weeks before I took my Shahada. The notion of the oneness of unique divinity came across very clear, whilst browsing the posters and information at the Edinburgh Mosque Exhibition in 2005. This was most compelling.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking direction (at time of participation): “My current direction can take several labels: traditional Islam, classical Islam, Sufi Islam. In terms of school of thought, I generally adhere to the classical Maliki School for Shari’ah, and I am a student of the Qadiri-Boutchichi Tariqa. This Tariqa, like all others, is a school of Tasawwuf/Sufism, the inner sciences of Islam dealing with perfecting and beautifying one’s character.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious background/Previous faith (s): “Catholic background.”</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix VIII

### Profiles of British female participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of conversion</th>
<th>Age at conversion</th>
<th>First contact with Islam</th>
<th>Trigger to convert</th>
<th>Seeking direction (at time of participation)</th>
<th>Religious background/Previous faith (s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Azadeh</strong> (Q)</td>
<td>July 2002</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>“I started reading about Islam soon after 11(^{th}) Sept 2001. I started reading Quran around March 2002, so study prior to conversion was approx 10 months. Since my conversion I have continued to study.”</td>
<td>“11(^{th}) Sept 2001, the bombing of the World Trade Centre. I wanted to understand how people could have so much faith to die like that, taking innocent people with them.”</td>
<td>Muslim only; following the Qur’an.</td>
<td>Protestant Christian prior to conversion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Azizah</strong> (Q)</td>
<td>August 2009</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>had a feeling long before she converted that Islam was the right choice for her.</td>
<td>studied Islam in order to find faults but ended up believing with no doubt that it was the truth.</td>
<td>Sunni Muslim.</td>
<td>Previously Christian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imaan-Yousef</strong> (Q)</td>
<td>August 2005</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>“The first time that I read about Islam and discovered that they had a holy book that was kept intact, that Jesus was seen as a great prophet and that Islam meant submitting to God without any intermediaries and that we alone were responsible for our own relationship and knowledge of God, I knew that I was already a Muslim. I converted after a few months without really learning about it. I didn’t start to study Islam until some years later.”</td>
<td>“Everything I first read about Islam was already in some way in line with what I already believed.”</td>
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</table>
### Appendix VIII

| **Seeking direction (at time of participation):** None in particular – “I am going to start studying the four schools of thought next September so I don’t know enough about them to follow one now. I like different parts of Sufism like the poems and writing but I don’t follow it. I also really liked what I heard about a unique branch of the Ismaeli’s (which was very different from other Ismaeli branches) in Najran province in Saudi Arabia but I only learnt a little about this and it is difficult to find anything in English as they have so few followers.” |
| **Religious background/Previous faith (s):** Catholic prior to conversion. |

| **Iman** (Q) | **Date of conversion:** January 2006 |
| **Age at conversion:** 14 |
| **First contact with Islam:** 2005 (not sure, as Iman only stated that she had studied Islam for nine months prior to conversion but added no further details). |
| **Trigger to convert:** “The pure scientific evidence behind Islam and that has been discovered in the Qur’an.” |

| **Seeking direction (at time of participation):** Sunni Muslim; not exclusively adhering to any school of thought. |
| **Religious background/Previous faith (s):** Prior to conversion atheist. |

| **Jameela** (I) | **Date of conversion:** October 2004 |
| **Age at conversion:** 20 |
| **First contact with Islam:** “I had quite a few Muslim friends, which is how I found out about Islam. I spoke to them. The internet was a good source for me as well.” |

| **Trigger to convert:** “I guess the first trigger in finding out about Islam was through people that I met; particularly I started seeing a guy who was Muslim, so that was a big trigger to find out about Islam. In terms of actually reverting in saying the Shahādah it was things like just being (...) it’s really hard to explain but the reason the Qur’an (...) one time there was a Sūrah in there which literally bought a tear to my eye and hearing it recited, in Arabic obviously, just touched me. I think it was describing paradise. I can’t remember the exact words or which Sūrah it was, but it was a description of paradise which just sounded so beautiful in the way it was written. I think I was born as a Muslim. Because that’s the true religion from my point of view. So, I think that everyone is born into Islam. Then they choose to become Christian, or maybe not choose themselves but through parents or environment, they follow a certain path. I was sort of brought up as a Catholic and then I decided to come back to Islam (...) I failed (...) so for me it was (...) I’m a revert.” |

| **Seeking direction (at time of participation):** Sunni Muslim. |
## Appendix VIII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Religious background/Previous faith(s):</strong> Catholic prior to conversion.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Khadijah-Maryam (Q)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age at conversion:</strong> 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> “I first heard about Islam in October 2007 through a student on the internet, and after realising God exists I started to read the Qur’an and Risale-i Nur.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trigger to convert:</strong> Discussion with the student on the internet regarding where people come from, who they come into being and the purpose of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seeking direction (at time of participation):</strong> Muslim; following Qur’an and Sunnah; Does not believe in sects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious background/Previous faith(s):</strong> Atheist prior to conversion, never thinking about joining a religion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Layali (I)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age at conversion:</strong> 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> “I think I probably always had an interest but it was an interest that I knew nothing about. I had two books on my ‘to-read list’: well, ‘War and Peace’ was on there as well but I always wanted to read the Qur’an and I always wanted to read ‘Mein Kampf,’ slightly different books, and my aim was to read it in German as well which is probably why I never got round to reading it because I would have had to keep the dictionary very close (...) My looking into the whole thing probably started when I went on holiday to Egypt in August 2006.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trigger to convert:</strong> “About three months before I converted I went to Egypt. Everything was good back home, so I wasn’t looking for anything but I just felt some connection in Egypt, listening to the Adhan, watching people praying (we were on a boat cruise on the Nile). I met a guy called Mohammed, and even though I didn’t see anything developing in a romantic sense because he was Muslim and that wasn’t going to work, I was interested in what he believed in and I developed a connection with him and we kept talking after I came home and I wanted to find out more about what he was thinking. Wycombe has a big Muslim population and I wanted to find out more so that’s when I started doing all the other things, and then it was actually David, my brother’s friend, who said to me one day ‘what are you waiting for?’ and I had absolutely no answer for him. And I was also going to Australia on the day that I actually converted. I was going to Australia later on and part of me thought that’s a really long plane ride and if something’s going to go wrong and I’m going to die I might as well do it on the right side of the fence, as I now see it. So, I think it was kind of ‘I’m going to make some peace with God now before I get on that plane, just in case.’&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix VIII

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I also think I wanted to convert in England, I thought that I would convert at some point (or revert) and I thought I would be going that road and I just was scared of making that commitment and actually doing it and I think that kind of prompted me. I thought ‘well, I don’t know actually when I’m going to be back in the UK the next time’ because my original plan was to travel for about a year and I thought ‘well, I don’t know when I’m going to be back home and I want to do it at home. I want to become Muslim in my own country and sort of sentimental nonsense really.”

**Seeking direction (at time of participation):** Sunni Muslim without following a school of thought.

**Religious background/Previous faith (s):** Prior to conversion “Agnostic with a slight bent towards Buddhism”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ruqayyah (I)</th>
<th>Date of conversion: 1982</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at conversion: 22</td>
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</table>

**First contact with Islam:** 1980. “I finished university then I went to Germany. It wasn’t my first time but I went to Germany just to fill in a gap really – six months until I was going to do something (…) I was going to do nursing but I didn’t really (…) it wasn’t (…) I wanted a long holiday so I had the opportunity to go back to Germany again and there I met up with an old friend and through her I met a French revert Muslim who introduced me to Islam, without directly saying that he was Muslim. He just talked about Islam and what it was politically and philosophically etc., and I was more and more curious and anyway it was a few weeks later he said ‘Actually, it’s Islam that I was talking about and I’m Muslim and it was soon after that I accepted Islam.”

**Trigger to convert:** “It was very straightforward to understand, the theology of it, and because my husband, former husband now, he was very much of the perspective that Islam is for Europe, you know. It fits very well with the true European tradition and way of doing things. It’s not necessarily an Arab thing or an (…) it’s for Europeans as well and this is another thing. I was always very conscious that I’m a European, I’m not just British, little Englander; I spent time in Germany, I was in Germany and France etc. and because my husband had been Muslim for fifteen years so he’d had a lot of different experiences, met different (…) he’d travelled a bit as well, quite a lot actually. He was a revert himself, he’d been to Afghanistan and Algeria and so part of it, because he was fifteen years older than me and looking back, I was twenty-two and young and gullible and looking for the answers and there he was; and he was quite charismatic and lot of people, Al-Ḥamdu Lillāh, have come to Islam through him and everything, so that was it really. Quite a powerful charismatic person. It was something for European people, I didn’t have to become an Arab or adapt how I dress or anything like that (…) it was something beyond all these national boundaries.”

**Seeking direction (at time of participation):** Sunni Muslim following the Hanafi school of thought.

**Religious background/Previous faith (s):** Christian prior to conversion and “sort of practising until late teens”.

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# Appendix VIII

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Souhayla (Q)</th>
<th><strong>Date of conversion:</strong> December 2008</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age at conversion:</strong> 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> “I knew a lot about Islam before I began thinking about converting. When I began to consider Islam personally, I re-read the Qur’an. To re-read the Qur’an took seven months - as someone who reads Proust in a day, this was a very surreal experience! Since I was studying the Qur’an, I studied and questioned it through other means.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Trigger to convert:</strong> “I was planning to be confirmed as a Christian. The more I read about Christianity, the more questions appeared and the fewer were answered. I was at a very stressful stage in my life and not being able to find answers to the questions in Christianity. I felt myself slipping further away from faith in God. One day I watched my husband praying. He didn’t know I was in the room and was absorbed in prayer, reciting in Arabic. I closed my eyes and listened to the Arabic words that made no sense and I felt the same calmness that meditation used to bring. Elhamdulillah. I didn’t convert FOR my husband, yet, he unknowingly helped me find God in Islam. I didn’t mention the experience to my husband but started studying Islam: In Islam, if the Qur’an leaves a question unanswered, or is ambiguous, there is a Hadith to turn to for clarification and I found the answers I was looking for.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Seeking direction (at time of participation):</strong> Sunni Muslim.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious background/Previous faith (s):</strong> Christian prior to conversion.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zaynab (I)</th>
<th><strong>Date of conversion:</strong> October 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age at conversion:</strong> 17 and 11 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> Meeting Muslims in school when she was five years old; “That a couple of the Muslims in my class got hassled, not outwardly because people would not outwardly say it but I remember I was studying once in the library and this one girl made this one comment to this guy ‘Oh, in your religion, the only way for you to get to heaven is by blowing yourself up.’ And I found that I knew instinctively that that was not true since I did not really know that much about Islam and I found myself defending Islam and then I thought If I am going to defend it, I am going to need to know something about it and it was then that this guy also happened to come into my life and I was asking him questions about it and it kind of happened gradually that I got to know about the religion but formally, before I converted I would probably say two or three years that I was really studying all that, It was just something I knew something about, just more for defending other people than for myself. If people are going to say that then I am just going to have to answer back. I don’t really know why really, I just thought that it was unfair the way Muslims were being treated.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Trigger to convert:</strong> “I think it was, well, a couple of nights I had been going out with my friends, typical seventeen year olds, hot pants, little vest, basically trying to wear as little clothes as possible and getting trashed.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
We used to buy white cider and drink it in public toilets it was just horrible. I don’t remember anything at that stage, probably quite a good thing. We used to go to parties a lot and I got myself into some silly situations where I got kind of like violated in some way, I didn’t end up having sex with anyone but situations like that where I was kissing guys that I really didn’t want to and it felt like I had been taken advantage of. I would wake up the next day and be like, I never wanted to do that but some men see you are drunk and then get at you. It was one night in particular. No men were involved that night. I ended up getting really drunk and I passed out in a car park behind a club and a number of times we would go out on a Friday night, and a number of times I would end up saying at 2 am, I am never drinking again, that’s it but I always would and that night I woke up and I was passed out in these tiny shorts and little top on a car park floor and on my own. I had some chips and they were freezing. I looked at my clock and realized that I had been there for an hour and a half, nearly two and I had a bad cold after that and my friends had been looking for me everywhere and couldn’t find me and that was when it clicked that night and I said I am never drinking again and my friends were like ‘you always say that’ but I never did drink again. I think that is the one night that I remember, and the next time I went out not drinking but still wearing the shorts. I just couldn’t do it, I don’t know why but I couldn’t leave the house dressed like that. Now, I don’t wear the Hijab or anything but I do try to dress modestly. I would never go out in the shorts or skirts I used to wear, ever again. I think it was that night that I learned respect and it did all click in one night, like no more. Because of what I had learned about Islam. For a long time, I respected it but didn’t do it that was the night I thought I have to do it. I can’t keep living my life the way I am, I have to make a massive change and it happened that night really. I was at an Easter party under eighteen year olds, March April time, and I converted that October, so it was six to seven months before I actually started practising Islam.”

Seeking direction (at time of participation): Twelver-Shi’a Muslim.

Religious background/Previous faith (s): Church of England prior to conversion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zaynab-Ablah (Q)</th>
<th>Date of conversion: April 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at conversion: 40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First contact with Islam: “Through research at art college (B.A.) – Shirin Neshat, Rumi’s poetry, interest in politics and colonialisation.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trigger to convert: “Fell in love – made me study as well. But really, when I heard the first call to prayer in Morocco and wrote poems related to those events.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking direction (at time of participation): Leaning towards Sufism.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious background/Previous faith (s): “spiritual anarchist” prior to conversion.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix VIII

### Profile of German male participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of conversion</th>
<th>Age at conversion</th>
<th>First contact with Islam</th>
<th>Trigger to convert</th>
<th>Seeking direction (at time of participation)</th>
<th>Religious background/Previous faith(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abdou (I)</strong></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>„I had about six months before I commenced my employment on the Maldives, and there I was told in order to become Muslim, I would only need to say the Shahada. Everything else appeared positive to me so I said the Shahada and flew to my new work placement. It was all out of my own free will. The first attraction to Islam was a particular book. I cannot find it anymore but the first page described how typical people think and that within Islam there are some things not to be done. Like not running after money or similar things (capitalism) (...) in Singapore they even offered frequent lessons on Islam – the five pillars, explanation of Islam, why, how, what. I was very taken since it was very comforting there, how things were spoken about. Very open.”</td>
<td>The positive acceptance by the people in Singapore, and in general my experience with Muslims whom I have met through my work – I am in the hotel business. One has the possibility to travel. In Malaysia and Asia (...) people were very nice and polite. They answered all questions but also asked questions which made me think. I said that I had contacts to members of the Bahai (...) I could see, Muslims seem to have answers to every question. Not always comforting (...) but I was positively surprised how it all worked.</td>
<td><strong>Sunni Muslim.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abdul Samed (I)</strong></td>
<td>Preference of reversion – 1999.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Two years prior to conversion; “Meeting Muslims who regularly met at the weekends or in general. They always talked about religion and there I was able to ask my questions.”</td>
<td>“I have always been a God-searcher. It was not as apparent when I was an adolescent but I always carried this question in me (...) the trigger in the end was that I had this life crisis at eighteen to attend techno parties, and to have a good time. I did that for a year and then noticed the nonsense I was doing. Why am I doing this? What is the point in that (...) partying every weekend, spending money, is that the reason you are here? So, this phase was the trigger (...)”</td>
<td><strong>Muslim; Sufism.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Date of conversion</td>
<td>Age at conversion</td>
<td>First contact with Islam</td>
<td>Trigger to convert</td>
<td>Seeking direction (at time of participation)</td>
<td>Religious background/Previous faith(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amro (I)</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>“About six to nine months prior to conversion, reading the Qur’an that was given to me by a Turkish woman whom I was then in a relationship with. Researching about Islam on the internet, discussion forums, talking about women in Islam, jihad, hejab, and so on.”</td>
<td>“Well, as I said, I received the Qur’an as a gift, read it and then (...) well, I had a relationship with this Turkish woman, and we wanted to get married but it did not work out (...) but I still continued to read, and I think it was the reading of the Qur’an (that was the trigger).”</td>
<td>“Still searching (...) spirituality.”</td>
<td>Christian prior to conversion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aziz (Q)</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Approximately seven to eight years prior to conversion.</td>
<td>Emotional signs during and outside prayer as well as the complete doubtlessness of the truth of Islam through the continuing acquisition of knowledge.</td>
<td>Spiritual Muslim.</td>
<td>Christian prior to conversion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gharib (Q)</td>
<td>November 2005</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“Exchange of views with a Muslim in an online forum, whilst personally still being Christian. Interested in the position of Ismail (a.s.) which was one of the rare things that connected me with Islam. Exchange on the commonalities of Christianity and Islam, whether Jesus is God, talking about the crucifixion story and whether Muhammad* is a prophet. In the end, I had the feeling that Islam is the truth and thus accepted it as my religion.”</td>
<td>“Understanding that the teachings of Islam are true. I was not able to deny the blatant truth. This understanding was made easy due to my conversational partner who was very sensitive and belongs to the most educated people I know so I received satisfactory answers to nearly all my questions.”</td>
<td>Qur’an and Sunnah.</td>
<td>No answer.</td>
</tr>
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### Appendix VIII

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ibrahim (Q)</th>
<th><strong>Date of conversion:</strong> Preference of reversion, December 2004</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Age at conversion:</strong> 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> „I have always believed in God. I looked into spiritual knowledge for three years (fifteen to eighteen). Not into Islam that long. To be honest, not long at all. I could say that I a week prior (to conversion) I heard more about it than the usual nonsense from the media. After that one week, I was invited to a Muslim meeting, and three to four hours later I had become Muslim.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Trigger to convert:</strong> “Contents. My patchwork belief from all religions and spiritual means was Islam. I did not know that Islam is the only religion that officially teaches to believe in all prophets of the world (from Israel to Korea and beyond). It was particularly a decision of the heart. Allah gave me the green light deep inside my heart. And, who am I not to listen to my Lord and to follow Him?”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Seeking direction (at time of participation):</strong> “Being human and Muslim.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Religious background/Previous faith (s):</strong> Christian prior to conversion.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Karim (Q)</th>
<th><strong>Date of conversion:</strong> October 2004</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Age at conversion:</strong> 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> Three years prior to conversion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Trigger to convert:</strong> “Several logical coherences within Islam, fear of death in an army operation and what came after (…)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Seeking direction (at time of participation):</strong> Muslim.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Religious background/Previous faith (s):</strong> No answer.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kazim (Q)</th>
<th><strong>Date of conversion:</strong> December 2004</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Age at conversion:</strong> 26</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> Several months prior to conversion. General interest in religion since adolescence.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Trigger to convert:</strong> An article in the German magazine STERN started Kazim thinking about Islam more intensively.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Seeking direction (at time of participation):</strong> Muslim.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Religious background/Previous faith (s):</strong> Former Catholic.</td>
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## Appendix VIII

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of conversion</th>
<th>Age at conversion</th>
<th>First contact with Islam</th>
<th>Trigger to convert</th>
<th>Seeking direction (at time of participation)</th>
<th>Religious background/Previous faith(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khalid (I)</td>
<td>December 2007</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“About eight months prior to conversion. I met a Pakistani, and I had no knowledge, and I wanted to understand what the Islamic notion of God entails. He told me a lot about it, and three months prior to conversion I read very intensively, chatted with Muslims online.”</td>
<td>“I probably would say searching for the meaning of life. I can’t define it any other way. My father passed away in 2003, and back then I was still a believing Christian. After that I felt that it did not go well together, Christianity, and why is God such a cruel God. That is the end of Christianity. Then there was Hinduism, Buddhism to have a look on how they function (particularly around the time of ‘The Da Vinci Code’), and after that it was Christianity again, in much more extreme form. From 2007 on, it was Islam, and that was the deciding factor. It is just much easier and much, much more logical than Christianity.”</td>
<td>Sunni Muslim; Salafiyyah</td>
<td>Christian prior to conversion and searching for the right direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikail (Q)</td>
<td>March 2009</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Fifteen years prior to conversion through media and books.</td>
<td>Inner conviction and friends.</td>
<td>Muslim.</td>
<td>No answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mounir (Q)</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>One to two years prior to conversion, reading the Qur’an, involved in many discussions concerning Islam.</td>
<td>“The truth of the Qur’an which became apparent through reading. An Egyptian friend pointed my attention towards the Qur’an.”</td>
<td>Ahmadiyyah-Muslim.</td>
<td>No answer.</td>
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## Appendix VIII

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nasir (Q)</th>
<th>Date of conversion: 2001</th>
<th>Age at conversion: 17</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> Two to three years prior to conversion.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Trigger to convert:</strong> “I am not really sure but I think there was a special experience I had during my first prayer which ultimately convinced me of the truth of Islam being the direct contact to God. Apart from that, I was taken by a book called ‘The rescue from sin’ by <em>Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad</em>, and taken by Jesus Christ (peace be upon him), although I was not strictly believing prior to my conversion, I always have had a strong belief in God and found Jesus (as) to be good and a role model since he was prepared to die for something that he loved and for what he lived.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Seeking direction (at time of participation):</strong> <em>Ahmadiyyah</em>- Muslim.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Religious background/Previous faith (s):</strong> “Not really believing prior to conversion.”</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Olaf (Q)</th>
<th>Date of conversion: July 2008</th>
<th>Age at conversion: 29</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> Six years prior to conversion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Trigger to convert:</strong> “I was always searching for something. In Islam I found many answers.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Seeking direction (at time of participation):</strong> “seeking to become a good Muslim, I am not there yet but I am calmed down and I am on the right track.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Religious background/Previous faith (s):</strong> Christian.</td>
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# Appendix VIII

## Profile of German female participants

| Amina (I) | **Date of conversion:** April 2008  
**Age at conversion:** 33  
**First contact with Islam:** „I met Jamal round about end of February, and then through this whole thing with Morocco, I busied myself intensively with Islam during the whole of March. In April 2008, we met for the first time. By then I already knew quite a lot about Islam. I found this topic so fascinating that I couldn’t get enough. So, I read a lot of articles about the religion of Islam on the internet which were great! Then I met Moulay. With him I was able to discuss all the questions I had. And yes, through him I converted. He actually called me, and then I said the Shahada. I got most of my information from the internet. I didn’t know one Muslim at that time.”  
**Trigger to convert:** „Well, it actually was Jamal, whom I wanted to impress. I know, it is not quite the best motif but then I think that my life is rather unorthodox and paradox anyway. I just think that this was inshaAllah the best way for me. I used to say that I’d rather die than convert to Islam. I never thought to embrace Islam but just in that moment when I had an interest in it through Jamal, I suddenly found Islam to be fascinating (...) couldn’t get enough of it. I was up until 2 am reading on the internet, absorbing everything like a sponge. Okay, there were preconceptions about the role of the women etc. but I sorted that all in discussions with Moulay. He helped me a lot.”  
**Seeking direction (at time of participation):** Sunni Muslim.
**Religious background/Previous faith (s):** Christian prior to conversion. |
| Amina (Q) | **Date of conversion:** March 2003  
**Age at conversion:** 23  
**First contact with Islam:** “Three years prior to my conversion, I started to intensively deal with Islam as an alternative religion. Since earliest childhood, I felt religious discontent with my old religion (being a practising Catholic) which led to increasingly questioning my religiosity/ spirituality and my faith.”  
**Trigger to convert:** “It was certainly my former relationship with a Muslim which was decisive for me to deal with Islam. I was, however, as already mentioned, already in search of the true message of God, (however, not yet willing to give up my religion) so I looked at overlaps between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Increasingly, I found out that Islam seemed more relevant and coherent to me but I did not consciously want to admit to it – Islam just had a negative connotation to it, shaped by social and family opinion. I ended the relationship due to increasing pressure to convert to Islam, and I just wanted to remain true to myself. I wanted the conversion to be my own decision, as everything else would have been for me deceit. I already believed that God always knows how it looks inside me (...).
Appendix VIII

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arwa</th>
<th>Date of conversion: September 2005</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age at conversion: 24</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First contact with Islam: Five years prior to conversion, through boyfriend, now husband; “I asked him many things, also it didn’t help me much since he didn’t know much anymore or didn’t want to tell, and well, because we both were not really practising at the time.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trigger to convert: “I have to say it was my boyfriend back then. Although, not practising then, he was Muslim. And it continued with the culture and contact to his family (...) but I also wanted to continue to inform myself, and that was somehow the trigger. It was never foreign to me since I had been on holiday in Tunisia, and my grandfather has had a great interest in archeology, so that it all somewhat mixes together. But the main trigger was my boyfriend since I wanted to know: ‘What is it with all this?’ ”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeking direction (at time of participation): Sunni Muslim.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious background/Previous faith (s): “Practising Catholic”.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Asiye</th>
<th>Date of conversion: October 2008</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age at conversion: 28</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First contact with Islam: „Two years prior to conversion. I first had a look what it is all about since many have only one image of Islam, so I informed myself what it really means. I read several brochures, I read the Qur’an in its German translation, and then I also found a newspaper article about courses on Islam. I now regularly attend them.”</td>
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<td>Trigger to convert: “Well, my boyfriend, right?”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Seeking direction (at time of participation): Sunni Muslim.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Religious background/Previous faith (s): No answer.</td>
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### Appendix VIII

| **CaMaTa** (I) | **Date of conversion:** 1999  
**Age at conversion:** 17  
**First contact with Islam:** “I know about Islam fleetingly eight years prior to conversion. But that was that what is generally known in society. One knew: no pork, no alcohol, well, possibly no alcohol, since one sees many who still drink alcohol. Apart from that, I was part of it. I probably concentrated on Islam properly about six months prior to conversion.”  
**Trigger to convert:** “My husband. Through him, I began to learn a lot of things.”  
**Seeking direction (at time of participation):** Sunni Muslim.  
**Religious background/Previous faith(s):** No answer. |
|---|---|
| **Eileen** (I) | **Date of conversion:** September 2007  
**Age at conversion:** 31  
**First contact with Islam:** “Like a birth, it took nine months to develop. In January 2007, I listened to a radio talk which offers different topics on politics, culture, and religion. Very informative. Judaism was talked about, different aspects of Christianity and also about the prophets. And then I thought, what is next? What or who comes after Jesus? Why is Islam as another great religion not spoken about? That kind of pushed me in looking more into it.”  
**Trigger to convert:** “A big, big inner wish to be close to God. To be near Allah. I used to call Him God. To be allowed to daily think of him, and to daily serve him. It certainly dictated my life. Well, I have always seen myself as a servant of God. Once upon a time, I wanted to become a nun. And no, it’s not that long ago. I wanted to fully belong to God, or have God participate in my life. Because I knew that He created us, and I always believed in it, so I asked myself ‘How can I best serve Him?’ It was not enough for me to go to church on Christmas or Easter. I wanted Him to be involved on a daily basis. That is how I told a friend: I want that God is actively involved in my life. I want to serve Him daily, and I told her this wish in January 2007. And nine months later I converted.”  
**Seeking direction (at time of participation):** Sunni Muslim.  
**Religious background/Previous faith(s):** Catholic prior to conversion. |
| **Fairouz** (I) | **Date of conversion:** January 2007  
**Age at conversion:** 32  
**First contact with Islam:** “It did actually not interest me. I did occasionally read things about it but it didn’t click. Probably six months prior to conversion it was more intense.” |
Appendix VIII

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<tr>
<th>Fatima</th>
<th>Date of conversion: December 2006</th>
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<td>(I)</td>
<td>Age at conversion: 21</td>
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**First contact with Islam:** “It started with the acts of terrorism in 2001. I just thought what kind of idiotic people are they who do something like that. This has to be a really shitty religion. Of course, I had religious studies in school, and I also had visited a mosque. I liked it a lot but I didn’t continue to inform myself about it. And then these attacks happened. At that time, I just thought that it has so many rules, it is oppressive, and I thought it is no good, like Christianity is no good for me either (...) I just thought it is a stupid religion, and I read now and then an article about it in the newspapers. It did really interest me but only because I found it strange that people do things in the name of God. Later I started a university degree in Social Sciences, so the topic of Islam became important again (...) I met a friend who is a Turkish Muslim. Then Theo van Gogh was murdered by Muslims, and it was a hot topic in the media, and this friend and I discussed a lot about this. She was a real Muslim, not just by birth. She had read a lot and thought about it, not only superficially. She knew what she was talking about. Then my interest appeared and after a year I decided to look for a Qur’an in the library.”

**Trigger to convert:** “It’s like this: When I was thirteen, I was no longer a Christian. I decided that it was illogical, and in the ten years after that I have looked into different religions and worldviews, and now and then I thought that this and that could be interesting. Nonetheless, it was not enough to give me the answers to the questions I already had problems with in Christianity. I didn’t like certain values. What bothered me was, dass God needed a son and this whole original sin story, and that one who is born here, will go to hell if he doesn’t believe in Jesus. I found it illogical that God created one person, who after 2000 years is sent to the people to save them. What happens with all the other people?

It says in the Qur’an that ‘With Allah’s help you will really understand it.’ I used to say that it is a nice story (...) something like the Bible. You know, I did believe until I had to go to lessons in order to get confirmed. After that my belief disappeared. On the day I was confirmed, the pastor asked me: ‘Why do you have such a bad relation with the church?’ I told him that it came through the lessons, and that I did not have that feeling prior to it. I asked the pastor why this happened, and he said that I had to believe, just that. This is the difference to Islam. You can question everything that is in the Qur’an. ‘Why are we the way we are?’ It is logically explained. There are few things where it is a matter of ‘take it or leave it.’ ”

**Trigger to convert:** Reading the Qur’an; “I noticed that I had understood what is said in that book. It was harmonious, and I just wanted to carry on reading and reading.”

**Seeking direction (at time of participation):** Sunni Muslim.

**Religious background/Previous faith (s):** Protestant Christian prior to conversion.
Appendix VIII

| Ghariba (Q) | Date of conversion: June 2009  
| Age at conversion: 32  
| First contact with Islam: “I received a book at the age of fourteen. It was called ‘I am a woman from Egypt’ by Jehan Sadat. In this book, she describes very nicely her connection with her religion, how she reads in the Qur’an and what it does for her. She also talks a lot about her life with her husband and which role the religion embodies. There are two things I admired there: 1. How it is possible to read the Qur’an so extensively, and 2. How lovingly the marital partners are with one another. About 1.) As a former Christian, I didn’t know that. Reading the Bible was boring and it still is: boring! How is it possible then to read extensively in the Qur’an? Today, I know it is possible.  
| Trigger to convert: “It was the Qur’an. In Surah 3 or 4, it says something like: He knows their deeds, the public and the secret. And then there is: He looks into their hearts (...) okay; I somehow have to explain why this is so important to me: I think that I am a very giving and helpful person. On the street I ask people if I can help them - if someone looks searchingly around – you know the people who are looking for something. I always hold the door open when someone after me wants to enter a room or building, and I do pick up a can from the floor to throw it in the bin. I used to help my neighbours (both above eighty) to carry their bags up to the second floor. All these little things. These daily little treats, and there was no thank you. It always made me angry. A thank you doesn’t cost you anything and surely puts a smile on the helper’s face. And then suddenly, there was someone who saw all that: God!”  
| Seeking direction (at time of participation): “Shafi’iyyah. This, however, is less my choice. I only found out when I asked in the mosque which school of thought my boyfriend was following. It’s okay for me. It is quite strict but it is good that way.”  
| Religious background/Previous faith (s): Christian prior to conversion. |

| Hawwa-Maryam (Q) | Date of conversion: April 2007  
| Age at conversion: 23  
| First contact with Islam: “I was indirectly in touch with Islam since the age of four since my stepfather is a Muslim from Syria. I saw him pray and reading the Qur’an but I wasn’t brought up islamically. When I was fourteen years old, my mother converted to Islam. |
Appendix VIII

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<tr>
<th>Imane</th>
<th>Date of conversion: April 2006</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age at conversion: 33</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> „Six months prior to conversion. Gathering information from my husband, and when I was at home in Germany, I would read a lot about Muhammad,* and watched a view lectures on <a href="http://www.diewahrereligion.de">www.diewahrereligion.de</a>. What I heard there, made me feel (...) it is difficult to describe (...) it was a wonderful feeling and the urge to convert.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Trigger to convert:</strong> „My partner was the main trigger.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Seeking direction (at time of participation): Qur’an and Sunnah.</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Religious background/Previous faith(s):</strong> Raised as an atheist.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Iman-2</th>
<th>Date of conversion: Autumn 2004</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age at conversion: 22</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> “A chain of events drew my attention towards Islam and I wanted to get to know it better. It was just so logical and clear so consequently there was really no alternative. Approximately six months prior to conversion with intensive study.”</td>
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</tbody>
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Things became more emotional and personal to me. My feelings towards my mother’s conversion were, bearing in mind my ignorance and lack of knowledge, negative and almost scary. At that point, Islam was nothing I could hold onto. I was raised as an atheist, and thus I didn’t know how to deal with terms like ‘God,’ ‘religion,’ ‘holy,’ and similar. When I finished my Abitur (equivalent to A-Levels) in 2003, I spent four weeks with an Islam-practising family in Morocco who conveyed a comforting view of Islam lived within daily life.”

**Trigger to convert:** “Contents, islamic environment, and marriage. The path to conversion to Islam was already there, and I even recited quietly to myself "aschhadu anna la ilaha illa allah wa aschhadu anna muhammadan rasul allah" so I only needed a reason to put this decision into practise. The trigger was that my then boyfriend came to Syria and surprised me that we could marry (...) I had been waiting for that for five years. Since I wanted to speak the Shahada in front of an Imam whom I also knew personally, and simultaneously get married by him, and we only had this one opportunity, both fell together: I first said the Shahada, and then we married islamically. I didn’t recite the Shahada to get married but out of honest conviction, and still I have to say that my knowledge and understanding back then was very little in comparison to my current Islamic horizon.

**Seeking direction (at time of participation):** Sunni Muslim.

**Religious background/Previous faith(s):** Raised as an atheist.
### Appendix VIII

| **Trigger to convert:** | “A very good friend of mine had converted to Islam. Back then, it was more me (...) well, I had this typical image of Islam, like everyone else, influenced by the media. I knew nothing about Islam only that what everything knew, that women wear a headscarf, that men can marry four women, that you pray five times a day, that you eat no pork, and that was it. And my friend, back then, around thirty years old, was German, a beautiful woman, very educated, very intelligent, and down-to-earth. So, one day we had coffee and she said: ‘Oh, by the way, I have converted to Islam.’ I was a bit surprised, and thought to myself: ‘Okay, if she thinks that is the best for her.’ I had a think about it and wondered what such an amazing woman might find attractive about this religion. That was kind of the trigger for me. Later, I thought okay, I am living in Egypt, and my best friend is now Muslim maybe it’s about time that I read a book about it or something.’ And the belief that I had was in principle Islam. Only I didn’t know it back then.” |
| **Seeking direction (at time of participation):** | Muslim. |
| **Religious background/Previous faith (s):** | No answer. |

| **Jenna** (IQ) | **Date of conversion:** Officially “with it” Autumn 2002 |
| **Age at conversion:** | 20 |
| **First contact with Islam:** | “I started reading about Islam when I was about fifteen, and at the age of nineteen I made the decision so about four years prior to conversion.” |
| **Trigger to convert:** | “Theological thoughts. I had thought for a long time about Islam but also about Christianity, Judaism, and partially about Hinduism and Buddhism as well. During my research on Christianity, I found books by Hans Küng and Josef van Ess (on Islam), and books on Jewish Christianity. It was like an enlightenment to me. ‘Son of God,’ for example, was only a title with which one addressed a form of respect. Nobody back then thought about a biological connection. The abolishment of religious rules, how they were formulated in Judaism was the work of the people, not by God. It probably was only a question of time until it became clear to me that it was exactly what Islam teaches, and thus I am much closer to Islam than Christianity, the way it is being taught today.” |
| **Seeking direction (at time of participation):** | Sunni Muslim. |
| **Religious background/Previous faith (s):** | No answer |

| **Jessenia** (I) | **Date of conversion:** July 2006 |
| **Age at conversion:** | 25 |
| **First contact with Islam:** | “Three years prior to conversion, with interruptions. I met two people who were very practising. I had very deep and meaningful conversations with them, and consequently I also read a lot, on the internet, books, and the Qur’an as well. All of it influenced me a lot.” |
| **Seeking direction (at time of participation):** | No answer |
| **Religious background/Previous faith (s):** | No answer |
## Appendix VIII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of conversion</th>
<th>Age at conversion</th>
<th>First contact with Islam</th>
<th>Trigger to convert</th>
<th>Seeking direction (at time of participation)</th>
<th>Religious background/Previous faith(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Karima</strong></td>
<td>April 2000</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>“Not very long prior to conversion. I had a continuous interest in religion, and Islam has always somewhat played a distinctive role (...) but I solely consciously concentrated on this was only for about six months. Then it became current enough to be relevant for me.”</td>
<td>„Reading the Qur’an, of course the German translation. It somehow was my trigger where I had that feeling (...) whatever is in the Qur’an, it is from God and I can now confirm that (...) and now I am Muslim.”</td>
<td>Muslim.</td>
<td>Christian-based traditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kathira</strong></td>
<td>April 2007</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>No contact with Islam prior to conversion. “I only knew that one is not allowed to eat pork, and that the men go to the mosque on Fridays and that one prays and fasts.”</td>
<td>“According to the family of my husband, I had to convert, otherwise we could not have gotten married.”</td>
<td>Sunni Muslim.</td>
<td>Christian background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kulthum</strong></td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>18</td>
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Appendix VIII

| First contact with Islam: “One year prior to conversion. I met a girl from Jordan. We were in the same grade at school and spent a lot of time together. I learned a lot about Islam through her. She answered many of my spontaneous questions. I also spent a lot of time with her family. Previously, I did, however, also have a lot of contact to Turkish classmates.” |
| Trigger to convert: “Well, it was a mixture of many things. 1. Interest in Islam in general, 2. The friendship with my Jordanian friend, and 3. During that same time I met my now husband. It probably was of a spiritual nature since I was fascinated by the thought of having been created. It was practically reasoned as well. My husband could not have married me if I hadn’t converted. I was neither a Christian nor a Jew. However, this was already not primarily important back then because I was already enthusiastic about Islam prior to meeting my husband.” |
| Seeking direction (at time of participation): Muslim. |
| Religious background/Previous faith (s): Atheist. |

| Leyli (I) | Date of conversion: 2007 |
| Age at conversion: 16 |
| First contact with Islam: “The first contact with Islam was in sixth grade when I was about eleven years old. Back then, I hardly knew anything about it, and had always wondered why they couldn’t eat pork. I always understood that they are not allowed to eat meat at all, and then I wondered why they ate chicken (...) I was interested, and we were taught a bit at school, and later on I read more intensively about it. I read a lot.” |
| Trigger to convert: „The first trigger probably was a friend of mine. I had an Afghan boyfriend for about five and a half years with whom I had contact via the phone since he lived in Munich. And I was not allowed to visit him because I was too young. I was eleven, and he was sixteen, it was a sort of childhood love. It was serious for me since it also lasted that long. He was Muslim himself, though not really practising but sometimes he would talk about it. It somehow was a reason to personally deal with it. The conversion itself was my own decision though since I thought: Yes, it somehow fits for me.’” |
| Seeking direction (at time of participation): Sunni Muslim. |
| Religious background/Previous faith (s): Formerly Christian. |

| Liyana (I) | Date of conversion: April 2006 |
| Age at conversion: 23 |
| First contact with Islam: “It started during my childhood. We were taught about religions in school, and then learning through the media.” |
Appendix VIII

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of conversion</th>
<th>Age at conversion</th>
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<th>Religious background/Previous faith (s)</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Mahbubah (Q)        | Officially in a mosque August 2008  | 21                | „One can never learn enough about it in order to know and understand everything. It took about two years until I understood the basics of Islam. Many things were foreign to me or even made me sick. Most of it actually only happen in my head. I had to fight with myself. Sometimes, I just wanted to end everything and to live like I did before since I thought it was easier. But then I couldn’t do that either. It didn’t work out, and I somehow didn’t want it either since subconsciously I knew it, that my old lifestyle was wrong. And in all honesty, I was scared to become the same as I had been before. And I looked at Islam, and I was scared again. I was in a hole. I didn’t know where to go. Didn’t know who I was or where I should go. On the one hand, the things in Islam are correct but on the other hand some things make me sick.  

Trigger to convert: First, my partner talked to me about Islam. Sometimes, I wanted to tell him to shut his mouth because I couldn’t hear it. Later, I informed myself. I also listened to Nasheeds which also changed me to become Muslim.” | Sunni Muslim (Nurcu) | Interest in Christianity. |

But during my childhood, there was also a lot of racism. In order to fight this problem, television channels offered children’s programmes in which children introduced their cultures to the public and to other children. Then there was nothing for a long time and it was only the event of 9/11 that made me re-think it. It was clear to me that there is no God of terrorism, no religion of terrorism, and that it all doesn’t fit together. Terrorism and God? Doesn’t fit together. So, I had thought about converting already then but I didn’t have enough courage at that time.”

Seeking direction (at time of participation): Sunni Muslim.

Religious background/Previous faith (s): Raised Russian-Orthodox.
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of conversion</th>
<th>Age at conversion</th>
<th>First contact with Islam</th>
<th>Trigger to convert</th>
<th>Seeking direction (at time of participation)</th>
<th>Religious background/Previous faith(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malika</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Two years prior to conversion, reading stories, concentrating on the life of prophet Muhammad.*&quot;</td>
<td>“My knowledge about Islam (conviction) and my boyfriend.”</td>
<td>Sunni Muslim</td>
<td>Christian prior to conversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marium</td>
<td>February 2006</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>I moved to a Muslim country so it already started when I was sixteen. Well, fifteen really since that was the first time I was on holiday in a Muslim country. These were the first contacts to Muslims in general. Prior to that, not at all. If I had to think about it, it probably has a lot to do with the relationship I had with my ex-husband which started when I was sixteen. It was, however, not acute that I would talk with him about Islamic topics. It was more subliminal since he already was Muslim and that is what made him be who he is. Perhaps it was around 1998 (...) and then about two, three years prior to conversion that I intensively studied Islam. It was when my ex-husband became more religious and practising, and thus this development also influenced me, and I had to deal with it.”</td>
<td>„Well, I kind of was irritated that my ex-husband was right in a lot of things he had said. I just wanted to know where he is taking all these things he is saying. I want that, too. I also want to just throw something into the conversation, knowing on the one hand that what I am saying is true, and on the other hand also that people understand (...) oh, that is the direction I have to go. The divine level is more heart-felt than the human level. It gave me that kick which told me: okay, I have to make myself independent of any people around me and now solely concentrate on God.”</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Formerly Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naima</td>
<td>December 2006</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Over the period of several years, I sporadically looked into Islam. It started when I was about nineteen, and it happened when I was twenty-five.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Natascha (I)</th>
<th>Date of conversion: 2005</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at conversion: 28</td>
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<tr>
<td>First contact with Islam: “I borrowed books about Islam from the local village library when I was about thirteen/fourteen. It kind of failed, however, since there was no internet back then, and I only had this library and the only Muslims I knew were Turks from the village where the man walks in front of the woman with a moustache and prayer beads in his hand, and the woman waddles behind him, dressed with a flowerly headscarf, carrying the shopping bags.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trigger to convert: “It was all there. One could possibly say that my husband was the catalyst, however, I am convinced that even if I had not met him, I would have found Islam. I didn’t know what was within me, and my husband was the one who somehow knocked at the door. Kind of like: ‘Hello, there is something more (...)’ I didn’t convert for him; actually it was the complete opposite. If I had done it for him, I probably would have left it sooner or later. I noticed through my husband that Islam is different than how it is portrayed in newspapers or books, and that it depends on the individual.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking direction (at time of participation): Sufi Muslim.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious background/Previous faith (s): Raised as a Catholic Christian.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nina (Q)</th>
<th>Date of conversion: October 2005</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at conversion: 19</td>
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<tr>
<td>First contact with Islam: One year prior to conversion, and six months until the decision to become an Ahmadiyyah-Muslima; “I read a lot about Islam very intensively, by Muslims as well as non-Muslims. Reading the Qur’an, and primarily reading on the internet (...) also books from within our community, and later on also non-fictional literature.”</td>
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<th>Nour</th>
<th>Date of conversion: February 2008</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at conversion: 26</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>First contact with Islam: Two years prior with interruptions. Reading, asking my husband, researching on the internet, chatting with sisters (...)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trigger to convert: “I first gained attention on Islam when I was in Malaysia where I met my husband. He kind of gave me the first ‘thinking’ trigger to convert. I did only convert, however, later in Germany, just prior to the birth of our son. This event was so far-reaching that it made me convert since I thought that if anything happens I should not die as an unbeliever. It sounds harsh but I somehow also wanted that my child was born by a Muslim woman. I have no idea (...) there are so many factors coming together.”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking direction (at time of participation): Sunni Muslim.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious background/Previous faith (s): Formerly Catholic. Interested in Buddhism.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Nurjan</th>
<th>Date of conversion: 2004</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at conversion: 21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First contact with Islam: “It was a really long period but really intensive only after I had read the Qur’an for about eighteen months. I researched on the internet, led discussions, and looked at the lifestyle of Muslims, maybe even subconsciously. I liked many things. But I mainly looked at domineering preconvictions.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trigger to convert: “In order to convert to Islam, it would probably be that I have been given the Qur’an. But if it comes to the search for something meaningful, I always looked into things already as a little girl, that although we live in Germany, we live well, and we are an affluent society. And although everything was always good, Alhamdulillah, I questioned myself: Why should I go to school, you know, always asking why this and why that.”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking direction (at time of participation): “German Muslim.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious background/Previous faith (s): Formerly Christian.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>First contact with Islam</th>
<th>Trigger to convert</th>
<th>Seeking direction (at time of participation)</th>
<th>Religious background/Previous faith (s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safiyyah (I)</td>
<td>May 2002</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Eighteen months prior to conversion.</td>
<td>“It had a lot to do with my husband. Getting to know him, having conversations with him all occurred because I wanted to know where he is from. It is a different cultural background, and I had concerns whether it is possible to lead such a relationship or marriage in the long-term, or if there might be a break at some point. So, I asked him a lot of questions, how he grew up, what is important to him, and of course we talked about Islam as well, even though he was practising little back then. Nonetheless, it was somehow important to him, and he never broke with his traditions. After that, it was about literature, and he gave me a little book first, and then a translation of the Qur’an. He was the trigger that I actually drew my attention to it. As an atheist at the time, religion was no concern of mine. I wasn’t bothered at all. Here is one anecdote: We were sitting in a café, and we talked about the history of creation, about Adam and Eve. And so I said to him: ‘But you don’t really believe that it happened like that?’ He disagreed and said that he did. This simple answer changed everything for me. I thought how can such an intelligent person believe something like that today? For me, it was a story from a long, long time ago.”</td>
<td>Sunni Muslim</td>
<td>“Absolute convinced atheist”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saliha (I)</td>
<td>Ramadan 2005</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>“Well, I started studying Islamic Studies in 2002, so roughly three years prior to conversion. The university course was not that theological, however, there was an introduction to the Qur’an but in all honesty, I did not quite get it at the time. There was no plan of action, and sometimes it was difficult but some seminars were good like introductory lectures on Islam. Practical experience with Muslims only occurred when I went to Bangladesh for six months to study.”</td>
<td>“I’d probably say that friends were the main trigger for me to convert.”</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Christian traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samra (Q)</td>
<td>January 2007</td>
<td>29</td>
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<th>First contact with Islam</th>
<th>Trigger to convert</th>
<th>Seeking direction (at time of participation)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sandra</strong> (I)</td>
<td>May 2006</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>“About seven to eight years prior to conversion, however never really intense, only due to the presence of my husband. In the beginning, I had a phase, ie. when I met him, where I read a few things and even had started to read the <em>Qur’an</em>. But it wasn’t really my thing so it was part of my life but then again it wasn’t. I always fasted with him but then that was a bit stupid since I heard that the fasting is not accepted if it is done by a non-Muslim (...).”</td>
<td>“It was a sort of movement within myself. I got closer to the religion and met more sisters through a particular internet forum. And then I also had the intention and willingness to deal with the issue. My husband did not intrude at all. After the conversion, he said to me: ‘Well, you know I had hoped that you convert but I had already given up.’ He did not want to push or force me to anything, and never initiated the topic. He had always hoped and was quite upset that I didn’t convert before his father passed away. It didn’t work out that way (...) but hey.”</td>
<td>Sunni Muslim</td>
<td>Formerly Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selma</strong> (I)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>„Since I know my husband, since 2000. We are now eight years together.”</td>
<td>“Practical decision. We now live as a Muslim family, and it works out. It slowly became more spiritual after the conversion.”</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>Formerly Catholic Christian</td>
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<th>Name</th>
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<th>Seeking direction (at time of participation)</th>
<th>Religious background/Previous faith(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somayya</td>
<td>October 2008</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>“4-6 months prior to conversion. I first looked at an internet link a friend had sent me – <a href="http://www.diewahrereligion.de">www.diewahrereligion.de</a>. I watched a video on it and became very curious. I continued to watch more videos also by Muslim scholars, such as Pierre Vogel or Abu Ubeyda, as these two can explain single things in Islam very well. I also watched videos where people converted, and more. Later on, I read the Qur’an, and this ultimately convinced me.”</td>
<td>“I actually was my own trigger. This friend only sent me the link because I was very interested in Arabic, and she thought that people on this internet platform speak Arabic. That is how I somehow came to Islam. It was not like someone telling me ‘Hey, have a look. This is the truth and you have to see that.’”</td>
<td>No former religion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soraya</td>
<td>April 2008</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Eighteen months prior to conversion; “I only looked into books and asked my husband and his family. It was with him that I visited a mosque for the first time.”</td>
<td>“My husband was the trigger as well as the thought about our life together.”</td>
<td>“Liberal Muslim.”</td>
<td>Formerly Christian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumayra</td>
<td>November 2001</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>“Two, three years prior to conversion, I always thought Islam to be important but I didn’t know that people could convert to it. I read the Qur’an in German.”</td>
<td>“There was no particular trigger, really. I went with this acquaintance to the mosque for the first time, and when I was there I was told that I could convert, so I converted that same day in the mosque.”</td>
<td>“Qur’an and Sunnah.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>Susanne (I)</th>
<th>Date of conversion: 2001</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age at conversion: 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First contact with Islam: Two years prior to conversion; „I lived in an Oriental country for a longer period of time, and there it is normal to discuss about religions. Here in Germany, it’s a taboo subject, to talk about one’s own convictions.”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trigger to convert: “Concentrating on my own religion. Questioning specific aspects of the religion. If I would say ‘through my partner,’ it would not do it any justice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeking direction (at time of participation): Sunni Muslim.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious background/Previous faith (s): Protestant Christian prior to conversion</td>
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<tr>
<th>SteinbA (I)</th>
<th>Date of conversion: September 2002</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age at conversion: 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First contact with Islam: “Apart from having been in a relationship with an Arab man, I had no contact with Islam. The connection and subsequent conversion happened suddenly. This Arab boyfriend and I had cultural problems. He neither prayed nor fasted. I couldn’t see anything Islamic, apart from that, the fact that he didn’t drink alcohol. I just didn’t get along with his character. The Arabs are different than we are, and I didn’t understand his behaviour. I met a converted Muslim woman whose husband is Syrian, and I wanted to know a little more about the country and its people. We spoke for about five minutes about that, and the rest of the evening only about Islam. That evening it clicked (...) this sister directly led me to Islam. After the first few minutes of our conversation. Prior to that, I had not looked into Islam at all.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trigger to convert: “Difficult to tell. It was this conversation when she told me about things from within the Qur’an. Proof of God’s existence. That was somehow the trigger. It kind of started with that conversation and developed after that. There were a few more similar evenings, and then it all became clear to me.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking direction (at time of participation): “Liberal Sunni Muslim.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious background/Previous faith (s): Officially still Catholic for employment reasons.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Touareg 1801 (Q)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date of conversion:</strong> October 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Age at conversion:</strong> 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> Six years prior to conversion. I cannot remember much about the books but the content was general information on Islam, religious doctrine, Islam in comparison with Christianity, experiences by Muslims, scientific aspects in the <em>Qur’an</em>. Listening to lectures primarily found on <a href="http://www.diewahrereligion.de">www.diewahrereligion.de</a>; I remember a lecture by Pierre Vogel, well, which convinced me that not Christianity but Islam is right. The title of the lecture was: Did Jesus die for the sins of the people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Trigger to convert:</strong> Reading the <em>Qur’an</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Seeking direction (at time of participation):</strong> <em>Qur’an</em> and Sunnah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Religious background/Previous faith (s):</strong> Formerly Christian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Varisha (Q)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date of conversion:</strong> June 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Age at conversion:</strong> 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>First contact with Islam:</strong> Seven months prior to conversion; “Very intensive contact with Muslims and acquisition of knowledge through books and lectures. Books about Islamic history, the <em>Qur’an</em> of course, and small readings, such as ‘25 questions on the Muslim woman’ (in German). I kept on increasing my book collection which includes books from all areas, such as the history of our Prophet,* prayer, lectures on marriage and life as a Muslim, or on conversion, rights and duties.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Trigger to convert:</strong> “Contents of the <em>Qur’an</em>, Islamic teachings and acquaintances.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Seeking direction (at time of participation):</strong> Muslim.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Religious background/Previous faith (s):</strong> Christian prior to conversion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### General Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please enter your name or a chosen pseudonym.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How old are you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment/ Study/ School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where is your family originally from?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you grow up in Britain/ Germany? Since when have you been living in Britain/ Germany?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does Islam influence your immediate environment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to your opinion, what picture do Muslims demonstrate of Islam in Britain/ Germany?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel there is a difference in the adherence and practice of Islam in Muslim majority and non-Muslim majority countries? Perhaps you can compare your (parents’) country of origin with Britain/ Germany.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix IX

### Control group – Born Muslims - Questionnaire Sample (contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How important is your Muslim identity to you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you kept or taken over any traditions from your (parents’) country of origin?</td>
<td>These could be religiously or culturally influenced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which daily Islamic „rituals“ are important to you (e.g. prayer or sayings etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of the following points are important to you and why:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Prayer</td>
<td>- Prohibition of alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ramadan/ Fasting</td>
<td>- Consumption of halal products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hajj</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Alms giving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Visit to the mosque</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Circumcision (as a man/ as a baby boy)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Covering -&gt; Islamic attire (for women/ for girls)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Prohibition of pork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe you have changed in your belief, considering the environment you live in?</td>
<td>Are there influences, positive and/ or negative, which have changed your attitude?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there situations in which you are challenged by your religion?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix IX

Control group – Born Muslims - Questionnaire Sample (contd.)

**Clothing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you wear specific Islamic attire/clothing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you are “Islamically” dressed, what reactions do you receive from your environment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you perceive yourself and how do you think you are perceived by others?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female participants: Do you wear a headscarf? Why do/don’t you wear it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male participants: What does Islam teach you in regard to appropriate clothing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contact with the opposite sex**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you use different behavioural means when being in contact with men and women? What differences may these be?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you greet men? How do you greet women? Do you make a difference between the sexes, between family, friends and strangers?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it permitted to look into the eyes of the opposite sex?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you were interested in a person of the opposite sex, how would you let him/her know of your interest?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix IX**

**Control group – Born Muslims - Questionnaire Sample (contd.)**

**Choice of marital partner**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your relationship status?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your opinion on premarital relationships between men and women?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can there be friendship between men and women?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is „marriage“ to you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would your choice of marital partner have to be a Muslim? Please explain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the necessary characteristics and qualities you are looking for in a potential marital candidate?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is/ was your family’s opinion to you when you choose/ chose a marital partner?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think about polygamy? Would you enter a polygamous marriage?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix IX

Control group – Born Muslims - Questionnaire Sample (contd.)

**Family and Friends**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your family’s attitude towards religion in general?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your circle of friends like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that there are different types of friendship, depending on whether or not religion plays a factor?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Body awareness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you physically and emotionally happy with your body?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you use beauty products?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to your opinion, what role do parfumes play in a person’s life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you make a difference in the acquisition of parfumes with and without alcoholic content?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does „body awareness” mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you agree that it is not permitted for a woman to pray during her menstrual period?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you agree that it is not permitted for a woman to enter a mosque during her menstrual period?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix IX

Control group – Born Muslims - Questionnaire Sample (contd.)

**Sexuality**

a. **General questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please explain the term “sexuality” as you understand it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think captures Islam the topic of sexuality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe that there are sometimes double standards among Muslims in non-Muslim majority society?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe that a non-Muslim (male/female) uses his/ her sexuality different to a Muslim (male/female)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you think of any verses, surahs, ahadith in relation to sexuality or body awareness that are of special importance or have made an impression on you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe in punishments for pre-marital or extramarital sexual relationships?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is the aspect of „virginity“ to you (this question addresses both men and women)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix IX

**Control group – Born Muslims - Questionnaire Sample (contd.)**

#### Sexuality

**b. Personal questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your sexuality harmonise with your religious values?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe your own body awareness?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which Islamic „rituals” do you know in terms of sexuality, i.e. washes after the menstrual period or sexual intercourse?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did your parents teach you about sexuality and your body?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think about „masturbation”?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Today’s advertisements and films (on TV, in the media in general, magazines and so on) are often sold with an undertone of „sex sells”. For example showergel or alcohol is advertised with a sexual influence. How do you feel about that?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix IX

### Control group – Born Muslims - Questionnaire Sample (contd.)

#### Sexuality

c. The sexuality of other people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you have/ would have a child, how would you explain to him/ her that pre-marital relationships are not permitted, although (you may have experienced them yourself in the past and) this is being accepted in society?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you like to limit the sexual behaviour of your children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What advice would you give to people whose sexual behaviour may not harmonise with their religious values?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your opinion on transsexuality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your opinion on homosexuality?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Closing Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does Islam mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think is the reason why Western-Europeans convert to Islam?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What enrichment do you contribute to British/ German society?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think has to be done that adherents of different religions are more tolerant in their behaviour with one another?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think of this survey?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix X

### Short biographies of the individual born Muslim participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Biography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Yasin** | **Age:** 21  
**Parents’ country of origin:** Turkey  
**Keeper of cultural traditions:** „Proverbially spoken I am an unwritten book. I am very open about other opinions and customs, as long as they are not inacceptable. Nonetheless, my parents do have some traditions, as they have grown up in Turkey. I can however generally say that traditions do not play an important role in my family.”  
**Importance of Muslim identity:** „My Muslim identity is very important. Already early in life I really wanted to be able to read the Qur’an and not only recite it in Arabic. I was amazed by the beautiful and wise words of Allah. Allah showed me a world in which I feel comfortable. No fixed boundaries...an open society. I never wanted to profile myself as a German or Turkish or anything else. The Qur’an gave me the possibility to adopt a cosmopolitan identity. An identity which is based on mercy, justice, peace and tolerance. An identity which does not curse people who believe different, but calls them ‘People of the Book’ which promises Paradise to them as well as to me. It asks me to get to know the others, the reason why Allah – according to the Qur’an created a pluralistic society of mankind. Ultimately, my Muslim identity is important to me because I love Allah and I thank him for everything, he has done, is doing and will do for me.”  
**Challenges within Islam:** „No. None at all. Well at least not from my side.” |
| **Driss** | **Age:** 39  
**Parents’ country of origin:** Morocco  
**Keeper of cultural traditions:** ??  
**Importance of Muslim identity:** “Very important.”  
**Challenges within Islam:** “No. Islam does not ask anything a human is not able to deal with.” |
### Appendix X

**Short biographies of the individual born Muslim participants**

*(contd.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Parents’ country of origin</th>
<th>Keeper of cultural traditions</th>
<th>Importance of Muslim identity</th>
<th>Challenges within Islam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Bauer</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>“Unfortunately actually none.”</td>
<td>“It is important to me that I am acknowledged being Muslim.”</td>
<td>“The answer to this question would be very long, but in short: yes, there would be many things challenging to me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nisreen</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Libanon</td>
<td>“I don’t live according to any traditions. I try to include everything that our prophet saw used to do. Everything else that is not acceptable in Islam, does not fit into my lifestyle.”</td>
<td>“It is most important to me! My source of life is Islam, and I cannot imagine a life without it. I ask myself everyday, how people who don’t even have a faith can be happy. The faith in Allah is my greatest hope in this life. It is the wish of the reward Allah has promised us, if we submit to him. There is so much to say, but in short: Islam gives meaning to my life.”</td>
<td>“I find it difficult not to pluck my eye brows. InshaAllah I will manage that soon. I would say there is actually litte, but Allah is the best judge, thus I can only say Allah know, may he help us all to improve ourselves.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonja Bint Jeradi</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>“For example helping in the kitchen, giving in to quarrels and discussions, doing housework.”</td>
<td>“My Muslim identity is very important, as I try to be a role model. To demonstrate the characteristics Allah demands of us, in order to satisfy Him in this life (for example, being honest, faithful, sincere, giving, and helpful.)”</td>
<td>“No challenges.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix X

Short biographies of the individual born Muslim participants  
(contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Parents’ country of origin</th>
<th>Keeper of cultural traditions</th>
<th>Importance of Muslim identity</th>
<th>Challenges within Islam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Umazoubeir</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Mother German/ Father Tunisian</td>
<td>“In all honesty, I have broken away from all Tunisian traditions.”</td>
<td>“It is very important to me, as I am neither German nor Tunisian but Muslima.”</td>
<td>“Yes. That a man is permitted to marry four women. I struggle sometimes with that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rufeida</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>“There are many things I was taught by my parents. These are related to culture but also religion. One example is not to answer back to your mother. Others include: to be respectful towards others, and hospitable. Invitations should not unreasonably be neglected, and there is also the right of the wife to be financially provided for and loved by the husband. My parents’ culture is strongly influenced by Islam, thus traditions are mostly based on the Qur’an and the ahadith.”</td>
<td>“I would like everyone to see that I am a Muslim. I am a committed Muslim, and very much stick to it. It is not the pride to be something better, but it is my right to show others that it strengthens me and eases me to lead a satisfying life. Islam is for me the perfect religion and I want to follow it. I was educated this way, but with time it was my own reflection that demonstrated to me my own conviction.”</td>
<td>“Yes. Praying fadjr (morning prayer); fasting after Ramadan; dressing Islamically, and no contact to men.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix X

### Short biographies of the individual born Muslim participants (contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rokaya Chikhi</th>
<th>Age: 27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents’ country of origin:</strong> Morocco</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Keeper of cultural traditions:</strong> “Only the wedding ceremony, such as the henna night. As long as it is not against Islam, I’ll be open for traditions. I actually find it interesting to learn about other cultures and traditions.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Importance of Muslim identity:</strong> “Very important. I do everything to keep and improve my Muslim identity.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges within Islam:</strong> “In the beginning it was only the headscarf and when I was with non-Muslims, it was uncomfortable for me to tell them that I have to pray now or to pray in front of them. Now I am fine, I am open about it and now very self confident.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nina</th>
<th>Age: 28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents’ country of origin:</strong> Bulgaria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Keeper of cultural traditions:</strong> “Prayer, fasting, openness towards other religious directions. Other than that eating habits and music taste.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Importance of Muslim identity:</strong> “My personal religious belief is private, and I only talk about it with others, if I am asked or it occurs within a conversation. I generally do not thematise my religious background. Nonetheless, religion plays an important part in my life.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges within Islam:</strong> “The way I understand Islam, there is litte I find difficult, however I do have a problem with people who understand Islam their way, and try to impose their idea of Islam upon others.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix X

### Short biographies of the individual born Muslim participants (contd.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Parents’ country of origin</th>
<th>Keeper of cultural traditions</th>
<th>Importance of Muslim identity</th>
<th>Challenges within Islam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>“I try to strictly separate religion from traditions. Thus I have separated myself from the traditions based in my home land and live according to the Qur’an and the Sunna and not to mix it with heretic and idolatrous actions.”</td>
<td>“My Muslim identity is important, as it portrays my complete personality: my behaviour, the way I eat, drink, bathe, talk...it is all tied to my Muslim identity.”</td>
<td>“To be honest there are a few things I find difficult, but I try to adhere to them. For example the prohibition of music. Sometimes I want to listen to a little music etc. But then I tell myself that my patience will be rewarded with the most beautiful music in paradise, inshaAllah...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rukaija</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Libanon</td>
<td>“I wouldn’t really know as I don’t know my home country. I feel attracted to Germany.”</td>
<td>“I am very proud to be Muslima.”</td>
<td>“Currently not yet wearing the hejab.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zehra</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>“Of course culture is important to everyone, but culture has to be within the realms of Qur’an and Sunna.”</td>
<td>no answer</td>
<td>“Well, the word challenging seems a little strange to me, since if a Muslim loves Allah, duties will not be challenging or difficult. I only started learning about Islam three years ago, therefore I have weaknesses. I have to try to get to know Allah much better. If Allah wants that I get to know him better and to intensify our contact, I would like to wear niqab.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix X

**Short biographies of the individual born Muslim participants (contd.)**

| **Elif Er** | **Age**: 30  
**Parents’ country of origin**: Turkey  
**Keeper of cultural traditions**: “Spontaneously I’d say nearly none. Okay, a few. One example is that I am the firstborn in the family and there is a specific word for the big sister (abla), and the big brother (abi). This stems from tradition, from family structures which is a little different to the one in Germany. Over there you have bames for aunts on your mother’s side, and aunts on your father’s side, and the same for uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers. That’s just part of me and a tradition that I can’t let go of. Apart from that I haven’t kept any traditions from Turkey. I live according to a tradition, I do. But it is according to Islamic tradition. And that is very different to Turkish tradition. Therefore, I am not saying that I live without traditions, because I do.”  
**Importance of Muslim identity**: “Very important. I do not want to keep my Muslim identity a secret...I don’t want to live a double life. Perhaps it is possible to live very islamically at home but as soon as one steps through the front door, one is less of a Muslim. No, that’s not for me. I want to stay true to myself.”  
**Challenges within Islam**: “Spontaneously no. If something would be challenging, I would have to check whether it is actually Islam that gives me that challenge. Perhaps it is a tradition from somewhere. That’s important to know. If the result is that it’s a tradition from somewhere, then I don’t have to live it. But sofar, I have not had the incident that the religion challenged me to do something which I would not have liked to have done. |

| **Serap** | **Age**: 35  
**Parents’ country of origin**: Turkey  
**Keeper of cultural traditions**: “Hospitality and lively discussions.”  
**Importance of Muslim identity**: “In no way whatsoever.”  
**Challenges keeping to Muslim conduct**: no answer |
### Appendix X

**Short biographies of the individual born Muslim participants (contd.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Djoumana</th>
<th>Age: 25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents’ country of origin:</strong> Indonesia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Keeper of cultural traditions:</strong> “To be apologetic.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Importance of Muslim identity:</strong> “It is my one and only – to be human in every situation.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges keeping to Muslim conduct:</strong> “Islam is easy. We only make it difficult. But to think like that is challenging.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary of Arabic and Islamic terms

Alhamdulillah: Commonly used expression, meaning ‘Praise be to God’ or ‘Thanks to God’.

Allah: Arabic name for the One God. Also used by Arab Christians and Jews. Allah is the same God for Muslims, Jews, and Christians.

al-Insān al-Kāmil: This Arabic phrase is attributed to the Prophet Muhammad*, and translates as the person who has reached perfection.’

Al-sīra: Prophetic biographies about the life of Muhammad*.

Ayat: Verse of a Surah in the Qur’an.

Bid’ah: It means innovations in Islam. In comparison to the English understanding, the Arabic phrase carries primarily negative connotations since traditionalists see no need for Islam to be reformed or innovated. There are, however, positive connotations to the term as well if it fits with the respective situation and time.

Bismi’ Allah: Commonly used expression, meaning ‘In the name of God’, generally used when starting activities, such as eating, starting a car or journey in general.

Da’wah: Call or invitation to Islam. Sometimes translated as ‘missionary activity’.

Deen: Religion, act of submission, the path Muslims try to endeavour to comply with Islamic regulations.

Dhahiba: This is the prescribed method of ritual slaughter of all animals excluding fish and most sea-life per Islamic law. This method of slaughtering animals consists of a swift, deep incision with a sharp knife on the neck, cutting the jugular veins and carotid arteries of both sides but leaving the spinal cord intact. Meat from a Jewish butcher is kosher, and subsequently considered ḥalāl for Muslims.


Dua: Individual prayers to God, supplications.

Emir: Commander or leader. Also known as high-ranking religious authority/ shaykh.
**Glossary of Arabic and Islamic terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Fatwā</em></td>
<td><em>(fatāwā</em> (plural) – is a juristic ruling of an Islamic scholar which is based on the Qur’an and <em>Sunnah</em> which adopts particular <em>fiqh</em>-methods in order to establish this ruling. In <em>Sunni</em>-Islam, <em>fatāwā</em> are not binding, whereas in <em>Shia</em>-Islam, some rulings could be seen as binding depending on the relationship between the candidate and the scholar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fiqh</em></td>
<td>Islamic jurisprudence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>fi sabīli llāhi</em></td>
<td>It means ‘in the cause of God.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fitnah</em></td>
<td>It can have several different definitions: Situations in chaos, negative deeds of people, upheaval, spreading doubts towards one’s faith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fitrah</em></td>
<td>Innate God-consciousness, human nature, childhood innocence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ghusl</em></td>
<td>‘Big washing’, ceremonial washing or ritual bath performed by Muslims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hadith</em></td>
<td>A narration, primarily contributed to the saying and actions of the Prophet Muhammad*, however, it also refers to sayings of his companions and his wives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hajj</em></td>
<td>Pilgrimage. Fifth pillar of Islam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ḥalāl</em></td>
<td>Anything permissible under Islamic guidelines which includes behaviour, speech, dress, conduct, manners, dietary laws. <em>Ḥalāl</em> foods are, for example, foods which are permitted under Islamic dietary laws.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ḥalāl-gelatine</em></td>
<td>This is gelatine produced from islamically slaughtered animals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hamam</em></td>
<td>Arabic Term for a public bathhouse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Haram</em></td>
<td>Anything forbidden under Islamic guidelines, the opposite of <em>ḥalāl</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hejab</em></td>
<td>A hejab is a head- and neck covering for the Muslim woman, but also known as “curtain” which could be interpreted as separation of something or someone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hijra</em></td>
<td>The Prophet’s exodus with some of his companions to Medina. Also known as the Islamic calendaring start.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Houris</em></td>
<td>They are described as either the ‘wives of Paradise’ (azwadj mutahhara) or simply houri can mean ‘companion’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Iftar</em></td>
<td>Fast breaking meal at sunset.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary of Arabic and Islamic terms

**Imam:** Leader in public prayer.

**Iman:** translates from Arabic into English as ‘faith.’ The *Iman* is the inner conviction which is connected to one’s external actions. Translating *Iman* with faith remains difficult since *Iman* does not entail an assumption of something but a certainty which is based on knowledge. Consequently, in Islam one testifies that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad* is His messenger. A central organizing principle in Islam.

**Insha’Allah:** Commonly used expression, meaning ‘God willing’.

**Istihala:** Literally, 'to switch over.' This comes into effect when a particular entity 'switches over' to another entity. *Istihala* occurs when something becomes pure. It was *najis* (impure) but it is now *taahir* (pure).

**Jahiliyya:** ‘pre-Islamic ignorance and darkness, Muslim tends to refer to it in a historical but also personal sense.

**Jamaat:** Group of people, community.

**Jummah:** Friday prayer.

**Jihad:** Literally, exerting or striving. The individual striving to perfection in control of him-/herself, doing good deeds and abstaining from evil ones.

**Kafir/ kuffar:** Unbeliever(s).

**Kufr:** Reference to the rejection of the Muslim belief in One God, the denial of the prophecy of Muhammad* and the *Qur’an* as God’s revelation.

**Mahram:** Unmarriagable, e.g. parent, sibling.

**Mahr:** Obligatory gift of the groom to the bride upon marriage.

**Makrouh:** The Islamic term *makrouh* (English: disliked, undesirable) covers all things and actions which are not specifically prohibited which, however, tend to lean towards the term *haram*. Hence this grey area implies it is better to refrain from things and actions deemed *makrouh*.

**MashaAllah:** Commonly used expression, meaning ‘Praise be to God’, describing something good or positive. It is also used to avoid evil and bad thinking.
Glossary of Arabic and Islamic terms

Nasāja: It translates as ‘impurity.’

Niqab: A veil that covers the face which some women wear as part of their jilbab/abaya.

Niyyah: Intention.

Ramadan: The obligatory month of fasting for Muslims, fourth pillar of Islam.

Revert: Muslim convert, a person who has returned to his/her faith.

Sadaqa: It means voluntary charity or doing a good deed. It differs from the zakāt which is obligatory to every Muslim as long as he/she can afford to give.

Salah: The daily ritual prayers performed by Muslims, second pillar of Islam.

Shahada: The Islamic creed of faith in the Oneness of God and in Muhammad* as His final messenger. First pillar of Islam.

Shi‘ite: The second largest branch in Islam, also known as Shia, meaning ‘follower of Ali’, ‘faction or party of Ali’.

Shari‘ah: Literally, path. Divine law derived from the Qur’an and the Sunnah.

Shaytan: Satan, the devil.

Shirk: Sin of idolatry, deification of the One God, establishment of ‘partners’ placed beside God.

Subhan’Allah: Commonly used expression, meaning ‘Praise be to God’.

Sufi: A Muslim mystic, considering the inner, mystical dimensions of Islam.

Sunnah: Literally habit, path, manner. The Sunnah includes the actions and sayings of the prophet Muhammad*, his companions and his wives as well as certain scholarly opinions and fatawa (a matter of Islamic jurisprudence).

Sunni: The largest branch in Islam.

Surah: Chapter of the Qur’an.

Takfir: Accusation of heresy. Often also used as a label for those deemed incorrectly practising Islam.

Tawbah: Arabic term for repentance.
# Glossary of Arabic and Islamic terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tawhid</strong></td>
<td>Belief in the Oneness of God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tayammum</strong></td>
<td>Dry ablutions with sand or clean earth, if there is no availability of water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ʿUmrah</strong></td>
<td>It describes the optional Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia, which can be performed at any time during the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ummah</strong></td>
<td>Group, nation, used particularly in the <em>Qur’an</em> to refer to the universal Muslim community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Walī</strong></td>
<td>Representative or guardian. An appointed relative for a female within a Muslim family. Particularly in reference to an upcoming marriage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wuḍu</strong></td>
<td>Ablutions, small ritual washing performed by Muslims prior to prayer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zakat</strong></td>
<td>2.5 per cent of saved wealth given yearly to the poor and needy. Third pillar of Islam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zina</strong></td>
<td>Unlawful voluntary sexual intercourse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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