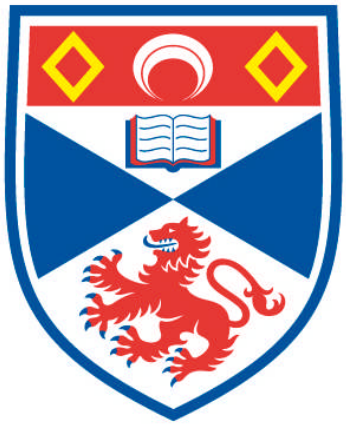
CONTROVERSIES OF CONVERSIONS: THE POTENTIAL TERRORIST THREAT OF EUROPEAN CONVERTS TO ISLAM

Monika Gabriela Bartoszewicz

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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Controversies of Conversions:

The Potential Terrorist Threat of European Converts to Islam.

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Rodzinie poświęcam.

Abstract

The conventional wisdom regarding European converts to Islam is based on the premise that the majority lack the necessary religious knowledge and being thus unable to discern between the various interpretations of Islam, they constitute easy prey for radicals. Moreover, the myth of "convert's zeal" contributes to the belief that being ready to prove their dedication to the new faith and community, converts are ready and willing do to everything, including the most atrocious acts of political violence.

This thesis focuses on the question that asks: *Under what conditions do converts to Islam coming from indigenous European societies radicalise*? In other words, which factors determine both their non-violent (ideological) and violent (with subsequent engagement in terrorism) radicalisation? Consequently, the research aims to examine what the radicalisation mechanisms are that may lead to such an activity, to determine possible regularities and to analyse viable implications pertaining to countering them.

The research aims to establish the conditions under which conversion leads to radicalisation and terrorist violence; analyse recrudescent concomitances of causal mechanisms of this phenomenon; explore possible pathways existing between conversion, radicalisation and terrorist violence; identify key variables pertaining to causal pathways and processes; provide hypotheses regarding the radicalisation pathways, and establish a typology that can serve as a basis for further studies. In this way the thesis contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the processes of radicalisation, establishing a base for further studies and enabling others to follow with more nuanced and elaborate theories in order to provide contingent recommendations for policy makers.

By dispelling many stereotypes concerning European New Muslims this thesis offers a new, contextual approach to the researched question thus inviting the reader to reconsider the concepts of "convert", "radicalisation" and "potential"- crucial for analysing the widely expressed assumptions that European converts to Islam are a homogenous "risk group" and a security threat.

1. Candidate's declarations:

I, Monika Gabriela Bartoszewicz, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80.000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2008 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in September 2009; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2009 and 2012.

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CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES:

INTRODUCTION

Context

After a year spent meticulously reading the available scholarly literature on European converts to Islam and the potential terrorist threat they pose, I contacted Anna through her website. Being a convert herself, Anna set up a website for New Muslims designed as a source of knowledge for fellow converts, and also as a platform for the exchange of ideas with those who might be interested in Islam. The website was in Dutch, and therefore inaccessible for me to read it. However, it was regularly updated and thus I took the decision to contact Anna and ask her for an interview. She responded, and though she was not convinced she could add anything substantial to my research, she agreed to talk to me. Already in her email Anna expressed her disappointment that we had so little time to organize everything, "*If only I had more time,* she said*, I would organize a meeting with more people, or contact those who live near Rotterdam.*" Still, I took the chance and travelled two hours on the train to get to Assen. A distance enormous in tiny Holland was nothing for me (it took me even less than my weekly journey to a "New to Islam" community in Glasgow), yet Anna was positively impressed by my commitment. I stepped off the train searching for a Muslim figure because Anna promised she would wait for me on the train station and since I found none, I headed down to the main hall when I heard someone calling my name. I turned around in surprise and there was Anna; entirely, and totally everything I imagined her not to be. A petite woman in her forties, dressed in jeans and a denim jacket, without a headscarf but with a lovely smile on her face, looking much younger that she in fact was.

There was a moment of awkward silence, typical for the situation when two strangers meet for the first time, but Anna's easy-going personality made it easy to break the ice. We conversed about my journey, the city, and other light topics making our way to the town's main square where we sat in one of the restaurants' gardens. It was a scorching August in Holland and the air was hot, filled with sweet scents and the buzz of other people's laughter and conversations. We ordered coffee and Anna ordered a local delicacy, and then the interview began. My first interview, as it transpired, became the turning point of the whole research.

Anna believes that being a Muslim takes something more than just a name so she did not change hers after conversion. She also does not cover her hair and she continues to wear European clothes. She insists Islam is not about signs, rather about what is in someone's heart: "*No, it is not important that people know that I am a Muslim. I hope that they will see about my behaviour that I am a Muslim [rather] than I have a label here [pointing to her forehead]*."[1] Anna prays in Arabic and goes to

[1] Anna. Interview by author. Tape recording. Assen, the Netherlands. August 08, 2009.

the mosque where the imam does not necessarily preach in Dutch, though she prefers "*reading and reflecting on the Koran in [her] mother tongue*."[2] She also claims that daily praxis is not the most important thing and deems empty gestures and rituals of no use for God: *"... [S]ometimes you do not have the time or you are not focused to pray. You are focused with other things so your prayer will not go there where it should. So, I do not pray [then] because I know it has no meaning at all. I pray but I think of my apple pie in my oven.... So I try to make it better with other things. Go to visit a sick person or…that kind of things*."[3] For Anna conversion did not mean leaving something behind. She has no problems with her family because they accept her decision – or in the worst case, they "*do not talk about it"* – and if she will have children, she recognizes their right to decide about their own religiosity. Conversion did not prompt Anna to change her social circles either; she is not looking for only Muslim friends, neighbours or food, to the contrary she tends to step out of the community because she believes that "*when you stay in the community, you will be one of them and you will be invisible because you [are] only seen as group but not as a person*."[4]

The same attitude can be observed when Anna is asked whether she is happy with place she lives in: "*I am happy. Yes, I was born here. This is my country*."[5] She does not want to move to a Muslim majority country, she is also ambivalent about the introduction of *Sharia* law as she does not agree with all its points and thinks that change must come from the inside. In her opinion introducing *Sharia* makes being a good Muslim only superficially easy whereas living a good Muslim life in an open pluralistic society makes God happier. She votes and sees civic participation as an opportunity to make her voice heard: "*it is also my duty here in this country to live with the people here and live with the rules of the country. It is a privilege to vote…*" She does not, however, vote for a Muslim party. She says: "*I want to find the similarities. That is what I want to find, because that is what gives us a bond."*[6]

Anna apologised for her poor English – indeed sometimes she needed to pause to search for an appropriate word, but otherwise her command of the language did not cause any problems to have a profound conversation. However, understanding that it must be doubly difficult for her to express herself in a foreign language I tried to keep my questions as simple as possible and tried to avoid sophisticated vocabulary, sometimes sacrificing grammar for the sake of being easily understood. During these three hours all the knowledge I had gained through perusing scholarly texts could be safely poured down the

[2] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research diary. St Andrews, UK. May 27, 2009.
[3] Anna. Interview by author. Tape recording. Assen, the Netherlands. August 08, 2009.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*

drain. I learnt I know nothing about the potential of terrorist threat from European converts to Islam. And I learnt I wanted to know more.

Structure

Countless pieces of academic writing mark the widespread recourse of "terrorist threat" as a productive metaphor within the vanguard spheres of scholarly inquiry in the academia today. This study, while remaining within the International Relations field, embraces the possibilities offered by crossing disciplinary boundaries, seeing the creative potential of bridging divergent research fields, empirical and theoretical approaches to converts and radicalisation as well as the converts' narratives to expand the imaginative scope of what was, until now, fragmented and restricted to a rather theoretically oriented domain. This thesis aims to connect the issues and perspectives which, thus far, have not been connected in a systematic and thorough way. The principal concern was to build on the best academic work available in the hope that the juxtapositions of the findings of various fields of research would offer a holistic perspective regarding the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam and serve as a building block for further studies with other scholars who can critically engage with the work presented here.

Radicalisation and radicals are highly fuzzy concepts, open to many interpretations and usages. Moreover, the numerous narratives and diverse accounts of radicalisation leading to terrorist violence do not result in a coherent and compatible theory. Yet, in spite of these divergences, the concepts have become the underpinnings of major anti- and counter-terrorist policies and regulations that translated into practice reshape and reorganise social life in many aspects. It is worrying that this conceptual incommensurability does not prevent the implementation of security policies that do not address the ambiguities pervading scholarly studies. The concept of a "terrorist threat" draws upon so many different themes, each containing a large variety of interpretations, theories and recommendations that in this multifocal field with highly heterogeneous subjects of research it is difficult to produce a unilateral solution. Accordingly, when it comes to converts to Islam, which narratives are used, which criteria are employed, and how are the boundaries drawn? The convert's identity, understood as an important vehicle in the shaping of stories and narratives is to a huge extent different from those of other agents involved in so-called "Islamic terrorism" and does not fall into the wide and incoherent category of "European Muslims".

With these dilemmas in mind, this thesis proposes to use a conceptual framework elaborated by the author, which integrates the converting trajectories and the identity-belonging nexus of being a New Muslim. Such a formulation reflects the ideational considerations emerging from the theoretical background of the thesis and offers a typology of four convert archetypes: Ambassador, Lost, Bridge and Castaway. All four are analysed to prove the need for a more contextualised approach that can be used as a basis for the framing of future policies aimed at countering converts' radicalisation.

In order to achieve the main aim of exploring the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam this thesis is divided into two parts. The first part consists of three Chapters and seeks parallels and analogies amidst a disparate body of work in different disciplines pertaining to radicalisation, conversion and identity construction. Most importantly, it explores the relationship between the convert and the core characteristics of Becoming and Being a European New Muslim. This can contribute to give new direction to the area under study.

Chapter 1 discusses the methodological, conceptual and ethical avenues of the research. Starting with an analysis of the problems and dilemmas facing a scholar conducting a study on radicalisation, it then moves on to explore the gaps in contemporary knowledge concerning European converts to Islam. In particular, it focuses on the available literature on the subject of converts' radicalisation and commonly invoked theories pertaining to the potential terrorist threat of European "New Muslims". This analysis highlights the fact that erratic research and an essentialised approach to converts as a homogenous risk group leads to erroneous views on converts, their vulnerability towards radicalisation and their propensity to embrace political violence. In what follows, the Chapter explains the research question in depth, the used terminology for concept validity and applied methodology providing an initial basis for the theoretical framework which is developed later in the thesis. The final section in the Chapter addresses the ethical dimension of the thesis to ensure an ethically viable contribution to academic knowledge.

In Chapter 2 the thesis moves on to consider whether all converts are the same and whether they always make the most committed Muslims. The popular assumption stipulates that after conversion New Muslims want to prove their worth and sincerity of belief and thus become "more Muslim than Muhammad"; being particularly vulnerable towards radicalisation. Unpacking this essentialist myth, which presents converts as a homogenous group, the thesis starts with the analysis of the process of becoming Muslim. The old cliché that everyone has their own unique path is also true in the case of converts to Islam. This, however, is not very helpful from a conceptual point of view as it impedes any further theorising aimed at diagnosing regularities, similarities and differences among the individuals.

Hence, the Chapter discusses existing theories of conversion to examine the conversion process in order to argue that the converts' community is varied and diverse and should not – indeed cannot – be treated *en bloc*, as a single risk group. Previous research is explored and critically evaluated in order to move the discussion a step further from its current standpoint and to propose a more articulated and effective theoretical framework for analysis of the examined issue. Guiding the reader through the theoretical maze, the Chapter proposes a fresh approach to assessing converts' potential terrorist threat by developing a matrix which helps to delineate the variance within the group. Overall, the Chapter indicates the four main elements crucial when considering conversion, and proposes four overarching trajectories of religious conversion and becoming Muslim. Most importantly, it conceptually clarifies the impact of the variance of converting trajectory in terms of security.

The aim of this Chapter is to argue that there is no single ideal convert or conversion type. Thus, converts cannot be treated as a homogenous "risk group" and the variety of converting trajectories suggest that only a minority of converted individuals are susceptible to radicalisation merely by the fact of converting. The types and modes of conversion change over time and place, they also change across religions. Conversion has the potential to transform the whole intellectual, emotional and social life of an individual. It may compel the person to make serious adjustments in their life style (e.g. quit drinking) or even start anew (e.g. in cases of some prison conversions, ending the life of crime and beginning a new career). Personal attachments or a strong liking for practicing believers might be central to a conversion process or might be irrelevant. Time-wise, conversion can be a sudden and brief experience or a prolonged process happening over moths or even years. Current explanatory schemes cannot be applied in the case of European converts to Islam as the present, securitised understanding of conversion leaves too many question unanswered and too many doubts, grey areas and penumbrae. The proposed framework is not aimed at shattering the understandings of the past, but rather to provide a metatheoretical tool that could help to articulate a framework for explanations more comprehensive than earlier theoretical models and causal accounts of conversions, and provide a foundation on which the understanding of the nature of the change can be further developed.

Chapter 3 focuses on the variance in being New Muslim. Starting with the identification of the boundary-crossing nature of the conversion process, it recognises that conversion involves an identity change, sometimes merely nominal, but most often a conscious shift in "one's sense of grounding"[7] and involves an examination of the core sense of reality; such an action must be responded with one's

[7] Heirich, M. (1977). Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories About Religious Conversion. *American Journal of Sociology*, 50, pp. 353-59.

whole being[8], a "radical reorganisation of identity, meaning, and life."[9]Conversion remains a decision made for a variety of reasons, resulting in a wide range of responses and outcomes, even to the same religious choice. This analysis is tightly linked to a study of the identity-belonging nexus. The Chapter also challenges some prevalent assumptions about the way Islam is lived after conversion, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of ideational changes within the context of borders and boundaries. Therefore, it offers a final element to the proposed theoretical framework deepening our knowledge of the potential terrorist threat of European New Muslims: A comprehensive typology of European converts to Islam. Thus, the Chapter concludes the more theoretical, first part of the thesis and leads the way to the detailed examination of the four delineated archetypes: Ambassador, Lost, Bridge, and Castaway.

The second part, the field-research part of the thesis, consists of four Chapters focusing on each of the proposed archetypes respectively, and is devoted to the concrete application of the suggested conceptual framework of analysis to the data gathered for this research. By looking at the converts' own narratives, these Chapters illustrate the dynamic interplay of the factors crucial during a convert's life after the *shahada* (Muslim profession of faith, i.e. declaration of the oneness of God and acceptance of Muhammad as God's prophet). Each of the elements shaping the way Islam is lived by European New Muslims is analysed through the proposed conceptual framework in order to reflect upon the complex reality of the converts' lived lives within the identity-belonging nexus. In this light, particular consideration is given to rejection, acceptance, exclusion and inclusion factors. The aim here is to underline how each of the archetypes is in a unique position, but simultaneously, also a voice in a richer symphony of converts' narratives creating the typology presented in Chapter 3. This typology, while not only being more flexible than the essentialised positions presented by majority of researchers and analysts, also offers a more accurate and comprehensive approach to existing understanding of the potential terrorist threat, or lack thereof, of European converts to Islam.

Contribution to Knowledge

It needs to be stressed that the converts' own narratives are crucial to this research. Firstly, semi-structured interviews provided the respondents with the freedom and discursive space to express

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Travisano R. (1970). Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations. In G.P. Stone & H.A. Faberman (Eds.) *Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction*. Waltham, MA: Ginn-Blaisdell, p. 594.

themselves and display their characteristic ways of talking about themselves and their beliefs.[10] Secondly, preference is given to quote interviewees at length in order to let them speak for themselves, in their own voice whenever possible, rather than my paraphrasing them; for doing so would inadvertently change the meaning of their words or infuse them with my own interpretations and impressions, creating a "patchwork" in the thesis with quotations taken out of context. Thus, at times the thesis offers a precariously bifocal approach whereby it provides the view of the world through the eyes of the very same convert who is the subject of the research. This also constitutes one of the factors contributing to the originality of this thesis as it looks at the issue of potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam through new, contextual lenses, always keeping the converts at the core of the analysis.

Additionally, instead of inquiring into the issue of the potential theorist threat of European converts to Islam exclusively within the ambit between conversion and radicalisation, the thesis starts the analysis earlier and meticulously investigates the conversion trajectories claiming them a pivotal factor in exploring, describing and investigating the interplay between the determinants for the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam. When European New Muslims are concerned, analysing the way of becoming part of the group is crucial to assess and eventually repudiate the widely expressed assumptions that European converts to Islam are a homogenous "risk group". Instead this thesis calls for a consistency approach and investigating the ways of *becoming* in conjunction with the ways of *being*. Groups are always segmentary and open to differing interpretations; because of their interactive attributes they are in constant flux sustained by a differentiating cultural substratum of their habitus. Thus, while we have some external markers in the form of common religion for instance, far more influential are the phenotypical characteristics like the concept of identity and the sense of belonging, which are inherently subjective and sometimes held by converts against arguments to the contrary.

Finally, in difference to studies focused solely on socio-economic factors, this thesis stands at the crossroads between the socio-economic and ideational sphere maintaining that when attempting to piece together the mosaic of Europeans converting to Islam and their engagement in terrorist activity, ideational factors so gallantly and dismissively described as the "unexplained variance"[11] cannot be ignored. Between the Courtaille brothers and Fritz Gelowicz, between Trevor Brooks and Muriel

[10] Staples, C. L. & Mauss, A. L. (1987).Conversion or Commitment? A Reassessment of the Snow and Machalek Approach to the Study of Conversion, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 26, pp. 133-147.
[11] Goldstein, J. & Keohane, R. (1993). *Ideas & Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, p. 4.

Degauque, there are more differences than similarities. In objective terms, the analysis of palpable, measurable factors would only lead into fruitless stipulations as to purported patterns of age, gender or socio-economic background. All things being equal, one could in fact argue that the only thing all the above individuals have in common is the fact of embracing Islam and the common grounding in European civilizational heritage in which they were rooted. The same principle applies to the many thousands of Europeans converting each year to Islam across the continent. They come from different countries, are inhabitants of big cities and small villages, they are old and young, male and female, coming from quite privileged or deprived backgrounds, secular or religious, politically and civically engaged or withdrawn from the society. In short, they differ in everything and it is only their religion that binds them together as a common denominator. For this reason, this thesis argues that although socio-economic factors should not be entirely ignored in analyses pertaining to the radicalisation processes of European converts to Islam, it is absolutely imperative to give justice to ideational variables – a valuable source of insight hitherto omitted in radicalisation research.

All these endeavours are meant to facilitate our understanding of the following: Under what conditions are the European converts to Islam susceptible to being violently radicalised and how does the process progress?

CHAPTER 1. RESEARCHING THE INVISIBLE.

This Chapter discusses the methodological, conceptual and ethical avenues of the research. Starting with an analysis of the problems and dilemmas facing a scholar conducting a study on radicalisation, it then moves on to explore the gaps in contemporary knowledge concerning European converts to Islam. In particular, it focuses on the available literature on the subject of converts' radicalisation and commonly invoked theories pertaining to the potential terrorist threat of European New Muslims. This analysis highlights the fact that erratic research and an essentialised approach to converts as a homogenous risk group leads to erroneous views on converts, their vulnerability towards radicalisation and their propensity to embrace political violence. In what follows, the Chapter explains the research question in depth, used terminology for concept validity and applied methodology providing an initial basis for the theoretical framework which is developed later in the thesis. The final section in the Chapter addresses the ethical dimension of the thesis to ensure an ethically viable contribution to academic knowledge.

1.1. Noticing the Invisible

In September 2009, during a conference on youth radicalisation held in Copenhagen, Dr. Shahamak Rezai, associate professor of Roskilde University presented the findings of his empirical study on Islamic radicalisation among Danish Muslims. With satisfaction he stated that a large amount of quantitative data was gathered through the dissemination of a detailed questionnaire that allowed for the conclusion that among the study's participants there were 63 individuals who posed a potential terrorist threat. These findings were based on answers to questions, which Dr. Rezai explained were designed to investigate various causal factors of radicalisation such as social identity, social interactions and group processes, but also relative deprivation or psychological factors. One of the questions, for instance, asked whether the individual would be willing to die for Islam and those who answered positively were consequently ascribed to the "radical" group. The ineffectiveness and oversimplification of this scientific tool was divulged by the first question from the audience. Abdul Wahid Pedersen, a convert himself, challenged the accuracy of these findings: "*Words are big when you are young and one needs to be careful when interpreting answers without knowing the context. There are words about dying for what you hold dear also in the Danish national anthem does it mean that a Dane who is*

singing them is also a radical?"[12] The question remained unanswered and the silence highlighted the drawbacks of such attempts to categorise and also, the limits to obtaining a complete picture by processing raw data outside of its context.

1.1.1. Research difficulties

Undoubtedly, radicalisation studies are one of the most difficult fields in academia to carry out field research. Here like nowhere else, scientists investigate people's beliefs, values, attitudes and approaches. They try to analyse the impalpable, assess the immaterial and shed light on the invisible. For many years the field has been dominated by analyses on left-wing and nationalist-separatist movements that set the tone of the methodological debate. With the resurgence of new religious terrorism many of the old techniques were found inadequate in the endeavour to understand why and how people radicalise and embrace political violence.[13]

The methodology of the research was subject to many critical remarks. There are a variety of barriers that account for converts' radicalisation, both violent and non-violent, in a systematic and empirical manner. Not only does the weight of subjective factors (such as deciding what radicalisation is since the definition itself is at least ambiguous) impede the unbiased analyses but also the lack of proper data renders many of the studies to some degrees arbitrary. Collecting data presents a thorny path to every potential researcher willing to pursue the subject. As indicated by Rick Coolsaet[14] field research is difficult, in some cases impossible; survey techniques often reduce the dilemma to statistical figures which can be manipulated to support nearly every theory, as indicated above, were proved to be flawed and finally, the accessibility of the data is severely constrained. Additionally, the information which is available from the media and open sources, biographies and studies by journalists of individual

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[12] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research Diary. Copenhagen, Denmark, September 25, 2009.

[13] For some of the older scholarship on terrorism please read: Crayton, J.W. (1983). Terrorism and the Psychology of the Self. In L.Z. Freedman & Y. Alexander (Eds.), *Perspectives on Terrorism.* Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, pp. 33-41; Ferracutti, F. (1982). A Sociopsychiatric Interpretation of Terrorism, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 463, pp. 129-141; Fromkin, D. (1975). The Strategy of Terrorism. *Foreign Affairs,* 53:4, pp. 683–698; Hubbard, D.G. (1983). The Psychodynamics of Terrorism. In Y. Alexander, T. Adeniran & R.A. Kilmarx, (Eds.), *International Violence*. New York: Praeger; Kellen, K. (1979). *Terrorists – What Are They Like? How Some Terrorists Describe Their World and Actions*. RAND Publication N-1300 SL, Santa Monica: Rand; Price Jr., H. E. (1977). The Strategy and Tactics of Revolutionary Terrorism, *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 19:1, pp. 52–66; Thornton, T. P. (1964). Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation. In H. Eckstein (Ed.), *Internal War: Problems and Approaches.* London: Free Press of Glencoe; Wilkinson, P. (1986). *Terrorism and the Liberal State.* New York: New York University Press; Schmid, A. P. & Jongman, A. J. (1988). *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature.* New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction. The list is not exhaustive.

[14] Coolsaet, R. & Van de Voorde, T. (2008). Jihadi Terrorism: Perception and Reality in Perspective. In R. Coolsaet (Ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 15.

converts or organisations they belonged to (where converts mix with those who were born Muslim), should be carefully questioned as to their accuracy. A growing number of studies by government agencies on individuals, networks, organisations, communities that are radical and/or engaged in terrorist activities are somewhat helpful; other documents include transcripts of legal proceedings, charges and verdicts and reports and analyses.

In the plethora of explanations, of which the majority are descriptive and interpretative, different words are frequently used to describe the terrorist threat (jihadist, radical, Islamist, fanatic, etc.). These writings illustrate efforts to cast light onto what, in general, violent radicalisation is, what it involves, who is receptive to it and why, and how the process is undertaken. It is a sign of our times and the growing and deepening interdisciplinary connections that the literature on radicalisation can be found in many academic fields from politics to psychology, from economic to sociology. Various theories and approaches are complementary and different studies feed into each other: Analyses carried on micro level, interested primarily in individuals, their agency influenced by personalities, beliefs, attitudes, motivations and socio-economic backgrounds as well as those carried on macro level, mainly from the angle of organisations radicalising and radicalised individuals engage with tend to cluster around three main areas: what terrorism is, why people radicalise and endorse violence and how it happens. This multitude of approaches, theories, and levels of analysis only intensifies confusion as to what the breath, depth and indeed the very nature of the terrorist threat actually is and constitutes the most potent trap, i.e. the lack of conceptual clarity without which the term itself is nothing more than a bumper sticker available for everyone to use it as they please. Still, even with this cacophony of studies the question of European converts to Islam remains a mystery.

The specificity of the terrorist threat to Europe, with its home-grown, bottom-up dynamics, drew attention to European converts to Islam who are believed present in terrorist organisations in large numbers, where they occupy key positions.[15] Providing a precise assessment of the potential threat of European New Muslims and a thorough analysis of their conversion processes as well as a typology that can help counter their radicalisation is timely as recently converts are now viewed by many policy makers, as well as representatives of academia, think-tanks and society at large as remaining in the heart of the terrorist threat which looms over Europe.

[15] According to Oliver Roy between 10 and 15 per cent of Al Qaeda activists are converts. *Cf*. Roy, O. (2008). Al-Qaeda: A True Global Movement. In R. Coolsaet (Ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 106.

1.1.2. Conventional wisdom

Indeed, in 2007, when Michael Taarnby from the Danish Institute for International Studies announced that al Qaeda and other terrorist groups recognise not only the operational but also the cultural value of converts to Islam,[16] he voiced a concern shared by many experts[17] and policy-makers.[18] By that time European converts to Islam had been active in several terrorist plots on the continent and beyond its borders. These included the clumsy attempt of the shoe-bomber, Richard Reid, and a foiled plot to bomb American targets in Germany masterminded by Fritz Gelowicz and Daniel Martin Schneider. Similar charges were made in Britain against Andrew Rowe who was arrested in the Eurostar with traces of explosives and Omar Abu Izzadeen (Trevor Brooks) arrested for incitement and radicalisation for the purposes of terrorism, as well as the alleged provision of financial support for international terrorism; likewise Simon Sulayman Keeler was accused of fundraising for terrorism, while Anthony Garcia aka. Rahman Benouis and several other converts, including Don Steward White, a son of a former conservative politician, were awaiting trial. Abdallah Andersen was soon to be sentenced in Copenhagen and in Sweden the public was shocked to discover that a Swede, who changed his name from Ralf Wadman to Abu Usama el-Swede was recruiting *jihadi* fighters through the internet. In Belgium even further turmoil was caused by the first female convert suicide bomber, Muriel Degauque who went on a mission to Iraq in November 2005.[19] Martine van der Oeven, a Dutch convert from the Hofstad group[20] (and former policewoman)[21] and French convert Willy Brigitte were found guilty of being engaged in a terrorist enterprise (i.e. planning attacks on nuclear research facility and military installations outside Sydney).[22] All these incidents only multiplied such fears. Well before that several French converts, including the Courtailler brothers David and Jerome, and Christopher Caze,[23] all of

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[16] Whitlock, C. Converts to Islam Move Up in Cells: Arrests in Europe Illuminate Shift. *The Washington Post*, September 15, 2007. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/14/AR2007091402265.html (accessed September 15, 2007).

[17] Benjamin, D. The Convert's Zeal: Why Are So Many Jihadists Converts to Islam? *The Brookings Institute.* http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2007/0907terrorism_benjamin.aspx?rssid=benjamind (accessed November 18, 2008).

[18] [-]. Al Qaeda is Biggest Threat to Europe, Says EU Anti-Terror Boss. *Deutsche Welle*, November 06, 2007. http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2871866,00.html (accessed November 06, 2007).

[19] Soares, C. Gang Accused of Recruiting Europe's First Female Suicide Bomber Go On Trial. *The Independent*, October 16, 2007. http://news.independent.co.uk/europe/article3063821.ece (accessed October 16, 2007).

[20] There were also other converts in The Hofstad Group including the Walter brothers involved in a foiled terrorist plot in November 2004.

[21] Rotella, S. European Women Join Ranks of Jihadis. *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 2006. http://articles.latimes.com/2006/jan/10/world/fg-women10 (accessed November 18, 2008).

[22] [-]. France Jails Man Over Ties to Sydney Terror Plot. *Reuters*, March 15, 2007. http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL1520123620070315 (accessed November 18, 2008).

[23] Christopher Caze, a 25-year-old former medical student who travelled to Bosnia as a hospital medic and returned to France as a radical Islamist only to lead the so called Roubaix Gang with links to GIA. In March 1996, when the leaders of the Group of Seven industrialized nations, including French President Jacques Chirac were to meet in Lille, near Roubaix, Caze's group filled a Peugeot with explosives and compressed gas and parked it three blocks from the meeting site. French police defused the bomb and raided the group's hideout in Lille. Four of the terrorists were killed there and Caze, who

whom fought in Bosnia and were later involved in other jihadist activities, while another German, Christian Ganczarski, was linked to the 2002 Djerba bombings.[24] What was asserted by Taarnby, instead of being investigated and analysed, was accepted as a new dogma. Thus, a myth has spread and consolidated that converts' zeal was the virus towards which no one had yet found a vaccination. The cliché stipulated that because converts want to prove themselves worthy of newfound faith they are more prone towards radicalisation and a fanaticism that knows no national boundaries. This approach is verbalised in the words of Alain Grignard, both an academic and a practitioner who claims that "Often emanating from marginalised segments of society, they [converts] hope to find in their 'new world' solidarity and ideals which are missing to them in their world of origin. Their zeal to prove the depth of their engagement with respect to the Muslims of origin will unsurprisingly push them to burn through the stages of radicalisation."[25] Data on converts contradicts this assumptions, as the majority of them are not marginalised delinquents at all, indicating that we are not necessarily dealing with embittered victims of oppression, however it is very rare to pay attention to converting pathways and dominant explanations are too often socio-economical attributing the violent actions against the West to the feelings of economic and social frustration. The one who, as Cesari observes, best fits the social deprivation and frustration theory is Richard Reid, who grew up in the poor suburb of London, converted in prison, radicalised in a Brixton mosque and eventually was detained and sentenced on terrorist charges.[26]

The outbidding spiral,[27] counterterrorist experts assumed, caused converts to move forward from organisations and mosques not "radical" enough and/or non-violent (like *Tablighi Jamaat*) into *jihadi* networks and militant training. And although a desire to avoid "lumping everyone together" was expressed by intelligence and security services,[28] the essentialist approach to converts as a "risk group" was more a rule than an exception. This belief was widely held by societies, politicians and specialists and became a basis for popular images prevalent in the media, newspapers, books and films that only reinforced the stereotype of a convert as a somewhat disturbed individual posing a terrorist threat to the

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managed to escape, was stopped the next day at a roadblock and shot during an attempt to ram his way through the blockade.

[24] [-]. 18 Years for Al-Qaida Member: Paris Court Finds German Guilty of Tunisian Attack. *Der Spiegel*, June 02, 2009. http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,605911,00.html (accessed June 02, 2009).

[25] Grignard, A. (2008). The Islamist Networks in Belgium. In R. Coolsaet (Ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 92.

[26] Cesari, J. (2008). Muslims in Europe and the Risk of Radicalisation. In R. Coolsaet (Ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 103.

[27] Outbidding takes place when members of a given group (be it political, social or religious) compete against each other and thus each person is willing to do more than the others in order to prove their worthiness to the group. For a detailed analysis of outbidding and terrorism see: Bloom, M. (2005).*Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terrorism*. New York: Columbia University Press and Kydd, A. H. & Walter, B. F. (2006). The Strategies of Terrorism. *International Security*, 31:1, pp. 49-80.

[28] Ford, P. Why European Women Are Turning to Islam. *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 27, 2005. http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1227/p01s04-woeu.html (accessed November 18, 2008).

society and the state. Such seeds sown in the fertile ground of mass imagination produced a persuasive visualisation of an ineluctable danger posed by the converts. Thus, a buzzword was born and took root with its own dynamics and meaning.

The void of analyses considering a long-term perspective is complicated further by the issue of the fact that the potential terrorist threat of European New Muslims is based on only a tiny fraction of the radicalised; those who follow a violent path. The non-violent fail to appear on the research scene; terrorism viewed as an existential threat links goals of radicalisation and the rationale behind it with the means employed to achieve them i.e. violence. This stems from the simple logic stipulating that a set of uncomplicated assumptions will be easily translated into an effective policy transforming the often contradictory and confusing reality into an easy and digestible world that can be fixed and the problems, otherwise incomprehensible, solved according to the tangible, cognitive assumptions based on a worrying lack of knowledge and recognition.

1.1.3. Literature on the subject

Admittedly patchy research did not improve the situation. European converts to Islam remain a *terra incognita* to modern academic studies, especially where security issues are concerned. There are only a few studies on converts and none of them tackles the potential security considerations in a comprehensive manner. Jensen's,[29] Sinclair's[30] and Ostergaard's[31] research focuses on Danish new Muslims; van Nieuwkerk's[32] study discusses conversion from a gender perspective. Stefano Allevi[33] presents more a general sociological approach to religion researching the changes in cultural and religious landscapes, while the writings of Lassen,[34] Bourque,[35] and Roland[36] investigate conversion as

[29] Jensen, T. G. (2008). To Be 'Danish', Becoming 'Muslim': Contestations of National Identity? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34:3, pp. 389 – 409.
[30] Sinclair, K. *New Muslim Identities? A study of young members of the Hizbut-Tahrir in Denmark*. Islam in Europe: Conversion and Revitalisation. International Seminar. University of Copenhagen. Copenhagen, December 1-2, 2005.
[31] Ostergaard, K., *"Becoming Muslim": Ritualization as part of the process of converting to Islam*. Islam in Europe: Conversion and Revitalisation. International Seminar. University of Copenhagen. Copenhagen, December 1-2, 2005.
[32] Van Nieuwkerk, K. (2006). *Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
[33] Allevi, S. *Reciprocal hybridization: how converts to Islam contribute to create a new Euro-Islamic culture*. Lecture based on Allevi, S. (1999). *I Novi Musulmani: I Convertiti All'islam*. Rome: Edizioni Lavoro.
[34] Lassen, S., *Types of Conversion In the Sufi Movement Burhaniya In Western Europe*. Islam in Europe: Conversion and Revitalisation. International Seminar. University of Copenhagen. Copenhagen, December 1-2, 2005.
[35] Bourque, N. *Conversion and the Creation of Identity Amongst New Muslims in Scotland*. Islam in Europe: Conversion and Revitalisation. International Seminar. University of Copenhagen. Copenhagen, December 1-2, 2005.
[36] Roland, A.S. *Stages of Conversion to Islam*. Islam in Europe: Conversion and Revitalisation. International Seminar. University of Copenhagen. Copenhagen, December 1-2, 2005.

a process without regard to security implications. The meaning of conversion is discussed by Wohlrab-Sahr[37] but converts are conceptualized merely as cultural mediators and Jawaad's[38] account of converts' contribution in the European context focuses mainly on the impact of new Muslims on the Muslim Community in Britain.

Thus, a thorough analysis of the literature reveals a worrying scantiness of the research on European converts to Islam. There are three main areas that the available sources fall within. Firstly, there are the more sociological and anthropological accounts of religious conversion. Such works concentrate on the various facets of changing one's denomination (or acquiring one); here one can find both more academic investigations as well as more biographical publications.[39] The report by Harfiyah Ball[40] presents the results of a small survey of female converts to Islam attempting to explain what attracted them to Islam and how conversion has changed their lives in terms of personal dress, activities, education, prayer, marriage, children and parents and society. A very similar publication by Ali Köse[41] presents the finding of a survey of seventy British converts in order to assess why people convert as well as to examine the socio-economic distribution of the converts and conversion timelines. Similarly, the study of Larry Poston[42] discussing Muslim missionary activity, also offers insights on converts to Islam by examining seventy-two conversion testimonies to create a profile of the typical convert. The second type are the pieces written by New Muslims themselves as a form of witness and propaganda, where they try to describe their experiences and share what they have gone through (also for *dawah* purposes (i.e. sharing the faith). The motives and the process which lead people to conversion, the experiences of the conversion and issues of identity transformation are tackled in Adlin Adnan's *New Muslims in Britain*[43] based on a master's dissertation and a survey of one hundred British New Muslims. In the same vein, Maha Al-Qwidi's unpublished doctoral thesis[44] analyses the findings of a survey of thirty-seven converts in order to understand how and why the respondents came to Islam and examine the socio-cultural ramifications of their conversions. The theme of identity transformation and conversion as a form of critique of Western societies is tackled

[37] Wohlrab-Sahr, M. *Symbolizing Distance: A Sociological Interpretation of the Meaning of Conversion to Islam in Western Societies*. Islam in Europe: Conversion and Revitalisation. International Seminar. University of Copenhagen. Copenhagen, December 1-2, 2005.
[38] Jawad, H.*The Contribution of European Converts*. Islam in Europe: Conversion and Revitalisation. International Seminar. University of Copenhagen. Copenhagen, December 1-2, 2005.
[39] *Cf*. Bushill-Matthews, L. (2008). *Welcome to Islam: A Convert's Tale*. Bloomsbury: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd. or Robert, N. B. (2006). *From My Sister's Lips*. London: Bantam.
[40] Ball, H. (1987). *Islamic life: Why British Women Embrace Islam?* Leicester: Muslim Youth Education Council.
[41] Köse, A. (1996). *Conversion to Islam: A Study of Native British Converts.* London: Keegan Paul International.
[42] Poston, L. (1992). *Islamic Da'wah in the West: Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion to Islam.* New York: Oxford University Press.
[43] Adnan, A. (1999). *New Muslims in Britain*. London: Ta-Ha.
[44] Al-Qwidi, M. Understanding the Stages of Conversion to Islam: The Voices of British Converts. PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2002.

by Zebiri.[45] The book is based on an in depth survey of thirty British converts to Islam. Like previous studies, it attempts to construct a "model profile" for British converts and look at the reasons for conversion, identity markers, views of Western society and the gender issues. Thirdly, there are internet based sources, personal websites, blogs, community centres, groups and other open sources having materials written about, for and by converts themselves.[46]

Although there are a number of other books on the subject of conversion to Islam in Europe[47]as well as a number of articles in academic journals[48]rarely do they touch upon security issues. In addition to the literature on converts being but a small kernel within an increasing political, social and ideological spectrum of scholarly work, in security studies, whenever terrorism or political violence is investigated, converts are always included, though they constitute merely an embellishment. They are mentioned occasionally and accounts of their actions scattered across the literature with no single comprehensive study assessing their role, impact or indeed any potential terrorist threat.[49]

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[45] Zebiri, K. (2007). *British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives*. Oxford: Oneworld.

[46] There are numerous websites of this kind, just to provide a sample of "conversion stories" see: http://www.muhajabah.com/journeytoislam.htmor http://www.islamfortoday.com/converts_2.htm.

[47] Bawany, E. (Ed.) (1961)). *Islam — Our Choice*.Cairo: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Masri; El-Ashi, A. (Ed.) (2005). *Why We Embraced Islam: Fascinating Stories of New Muslims*. New Delhi: Wise Publications; McGinty, A. (2006). *Becoming Muslim: Western Women's Conversion to Islam*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Sookhdeo, R. (2007). *Stepping Into the Shadows: Why Women Convert to Islam*. Pewsey: Issac Publishing; Van Nieuwkerk, K. (Ed.) (2006). *Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

[48] Ostergaard, K. (2004). Muslim Women in the Islamic Field in Denmark: Interaction Between Converts and Other Muslim Women. *Tidsskrift for Kirke, Religion Ogsamfunn*, 17:1, pp. 29-46; Sultan, M. (1999).Choosing Islam: A Study of Swedish Converts. *Social Compass*, 46: 3, pp. 325-335; Van Nieuwkerk, K. (2004). Veils and Wooden Clogs Don't Go Together. *Ethnos*, 69:2, pp. 229-246; Wohlrab-Sahr, M. (1999). Conversion to Islam: Between Syncretism and Symbolic Battle. *Social Compass*, 46:3, pp. 351-362.

[49] Brachman, J. M. (2009). *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice*, London: Routlege; Brighton, S. (2007). British Muslims, Multiculturalism and UK Foreign Policy: 'Integration' and 'Cohesion' in and Beyond the State. *International Affairs*, 83:1, pp. 1- 17; Crenshaw, M. (1981). The Causes of Terrorism. *Comparative Politics*, 13, pp. 379-399; Crenshaw, M. (2000). The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century. *Political Psychology,* 21:2, pp. 405-420; Dornhof, S. (2009). Germany: Constructing a Sociology of Islamist Radicalisation. *Race and Class*, 50:4, pp. 75-82; Ferrero, M. (2005). Radicalisation as a Reaction to Failure: An Economic Model of Islamic Extremism. *Public Choice*, 122:1/2, pp. 199-220; Smith, M. L. (2010). Beyond Belief: Islamist Strategic Thinking and International Relations Theory. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22:2, pp. 242-266; Jones, S. (2009). Radicalisation in Denmark. *Renewal*, 17:1, pp. 22-27; Kirby, A. (2007). The London Bombers as "Self-Starters": A Case Study in Indigenous Radicalisation and the Emergence of Autonomous Cliques. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 30:5, pp. 415-428; Knutson, J.N. (1981). Social and Psychodynamic Pressures Toward a Negative Identity. In Y. Alexander & J. M. Gleason (Eds.), *Behavioral and Quantitative Perspectives on Terrorism*. New York: Pergamon, pp. 105-152; Lewis, B. (1998). License to Kill: Usama bin Ladin's Declaration of Jihad. *Foreign Affairs*, 77:6, pp.14-19; Mandel, D. R. (2008). Radicalisation What Does It Mean? In T. Pick & A. Speckhard, A. (Eds.), *Indigenous Terrorism: Understanding and Addressing the Root Causes of Radicalization Among Groups With an Immigrant Heritage in Europe.* Amsterdam: IOS Pres; McCauley, C. & Moskalenko, S. (2008). Mechanisms of Political Radicalisation: Pathways Toward Terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20:3, pp. 415-433; Monroe, K.R. & Kreidie, L.H. (1997). The Perspective of Islamic Fundamentalists and the Limits of Rational Choice Theory. *Political Psychology*, 18:1, pp. 19-43; Moskalenko, S. & McCauley, C. (2009). Measuring Political Mobilisation: The Distinction Between Activism and Radicalism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 21:2, pp. 239-260; Neumann, P. R. (2008). Introduction. In P. R. Neumann, J. Stoil, & D. Esfandiary, (Eds.), *Perspectives on Radicalization and Political Violence: Papers From the First International Conference on Radicalisation and Political Violence*. London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, pp. 2-7; Newman, E. (2006). Exploring the "Root Causes" of Terrorism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*,29:8, pp. 751-754, 764;

1.2. Research question

The proposed title for the thesis covers a broad area of issues. Nevertheless, the main focus of the research is the question: *Under what conditions do converts to Islam coming from indigenous European societies radicalise*? In other words: which factors determine both their non-violent (ideological) and violent (with subsequent engagement in terrorism) radicalisation? Consequently, the research aims to examine the radicalisation mechanisms that may lead to such an activity, determine possible regularities and analyse possible implications pertaining to countering them. Considering the assessment of the existing body of literature on radicalisation and terrorism and the many gaps in our knowledge concerning religious terrorism in general and converts in particular, one can assess that the current investigation is rather a preliminary one conducted in a relatively under-researched area. Therefore, it is best to describe it as a "building-block" study[50] undertaken to identify causal patterns in an analysis of multiple cases.

People all over the world are radical in many different ways, and characteristics of their radicalism change depending on when and where the process occurs. For this reason studying

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Pearlstein, R.M. (1991). *The Mind of the Political Terrorist*. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources; Piazza, J. A. (2005). Rooted in Poverty? Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages. *Terrorism and Political* Violence, 18:1, pp. 159-177; Post, J. M. (1990). Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces. In W. Reich (Ed.), *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Post, J. M. (2005). When Hatred is Bred in the Bone: Psycho-cultural Foundations of Contemporary Terrorism. *Political Psychology*, 26:4, pp. 615-636; Post, J. M., Sprinzak, E. & Denny, L. M. (2003). The Terrorists in Their Own Words: Interviews With 35 Incarcerated Middle Eastern Terrorists. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 15:1, pp. 171-184; Richardson, L. (2006).*What Terrorists Want?* London: John Murray; Ross, J. I. (1993). Structural Causes of Oppositional Political Terrorism: Towards a Causal Model. *Journal of Peace Research*,30:3, pp. 317-329; Ryan, J. (2007). The Four P-Words of Militant Islamist Radicalisation and Recruitment: Persecution, Precedent, Piety, and Perseverance. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 30:11, pp. 985-1011; Sageman, M. (2004).*Understanding Terrorist Networks.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; Schmid, A. P. (2005). Root Causes of Terrorism: Some Conceptual Notes, a Set of Indicators, and a Model. *Democracy and* Security, 1:2, pp. 127-136; Shaw, E. D. (1986). Political Terrorists: Danger of Diagnosis and an Alternative to the Psychopathology Model. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 8, pp. 359-368; Silber, M. D. & Bhatt, A. (2007).*Radicalisation in the West: The Homegrown Threat*. New York: New York Police Department; Silke, A. (2003). *Terrorists, Victims and Society*. London: John Wiley and Sons; Testas, A. (2004). Determinants of Terrorism in the Muslim World: an Empirical Cross-sectional Analysis. *Terrorism and Political* Violence, 16:2, pp. 253-273; Vidino, L. (2009). Europe's New Security Dilemma, *The Washington Quarterly*, 32:4, pp. 61-75.; Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005). *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.; Pape, R. A. (2003). The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism. *American Political Science Review,* 97:3, pp.343-361; Krueger, A. B. & Maleckova, J. (2003). Education, Poverty, and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection? *Journal of Economic Perspectives,* 17:4, pp. 119–144; Abadie, A. (2004). *Poverty, Political Freedom, and the Roots of Terrorism*. Faculty Research Working Papers Series, RWP04-043. Cambridge, Mass.: John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; Stern, J. (2003). *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*. New York: Ecco-HarperCollins.

[50] George, A. L. & Bennett, A. (2004). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: MIT Press, p. 76. Further from the initial meaning of the "building block study" as described by George and Bennett, the term suggests that the study is meant lay a foundation for future studies, in this aspect it constitutes but a small brick, and does not pretend to pose as a whole, finished monument of knowledge.

radicalisation as a general phenomenon is futile and doomed to failure. In various places over different periods of times people radicalised, motivated by a wide array of incentives and willing to achieve goals ranging from the political such as far-right or left-wing movements, to the advancement of animal rights much like the Animal Liberation Front. People can be radical in their religious beliefs like in the case of Aum Shirinkyo or in their understanding of environmentalist issues, clearly visible in the example of Greenpeace activists whose commitment to saving the Earth goes far beyond the average. Arguably, in every aspect of life, in every ideology or belief, one can be radical, denoted in common language as "taking things to extreme". Thus, the only way to understand why and how it happens that people radicalise either in a non-violent (ideological) or a violent way, is to analyse the specific type of radicalisation, examining its pathways in their specific context. To discover not just the objective condition, the leverage that, notwithstanding other factors, could lead to terrorism, but to explore the entangled multiplicity of factors that in one specific place and time brings radicalisation in its many forms to the fore front.

Simultaneously, considering the purported terrorist threat of any social group it is widely assumed and equally widely passed over in silence that its members are either radical or prone to radicalisation. This kind of scholarship aspires to prediction and flattens the complex issue by creating essentialist risk groups. Thus, each group is treated as if it constitutes a homogenous monolith and each member of the community as a clone of a "model" individual. Ultimately however, even if there is a significant percentage of converts engaged in terrorist activities, not all of them follow the path and it is crucial to know the dynamics of radicalisation processes that will help us escape the theoretical ghetto of essentialism. The core fact here is that we are all embedded in similar environment with all its constraints and pressures, and face similar conditions, yet a small number of people consider the possibility of engaging in violence, and an even smaller number actually transform thoughts into actions. People embracing *different* radical ideas, have *different* histories, social, professional and personal backgrounds. Understandably, various groups will radicalise in a different way: the process will be quite different for a second generation youth from a Parisian *banlieue* from that of a female Belgian who converted through her spouse like Muriel Degauque did and altogether different for a university student as it was in case of Fritz Gelowicz. Close attention to the contextual richness of individual pathways and narratives is imperative

Consequently, if we agree to the theory that a homogenous set of factors can produce radicalisation, this hinges on an assumption that radicalisation itself is a homogenous phenomenon, we are therefore ignoring its susceptibility to adapt to the specific momentum of time and place as well as

the complex relation between the structural and individual factors. Essentially, the relation between the material and the imponderable. Thus, we need to also agree that not everyone from the same environment, or indeed the same "risk group" is bound to succumb to radicalisation. For the same reason attempts to diagnose a personality that predestines a person to become a radical are equally futile. It is nevertheless commonly asserted that in order to develop functional policies against various forms of radicalisation one needs to learn as much as possible about the person involved: their nature, characteristics, their weak and strong points. One also needs a thorough understanding of what motivates such a person, where his impulses for shunning the society and the use of violence stem from and how the process of embracing violence is undertaken. In other words, one needs to examine not only who the prospective radical may be, but also how the prospective radicalisation may happen, what form it takes and in what situation the invisible border between the peaceful and the violent is crossed. What the existing literature on radicalisation teaches us is that there is a wide range of personalities attracted to political violence and perceiving it as a useful tool in obtaining various (even contradictory!) goals with varied responses to various social and political settings.[51] Nevertheless, a thorough analysis of potential terrorist threat of European New Muslims is still missing.

Furthermore, it was assumed that certain people are radical in their beliefs, attitudes, approaches and actions but it was rarely elucidated what radical denotes. When it comes to Muslims, various phrases are used to refer to someone posing a potential threat: radical, extremist, fundamentalist, neo-fundamentalist, fanatic, militant, Islamist, jihadist, terrorist (taken often for a systematic form of radicalisation). Another layer of difficulty is added when one realizes the fluidity of normative dimension connected with the researched issue – the perception of what constitutes a "potential terrorist threat" changes over time, varies in different places and, last but not least, is framed independently by each individual. Cognitive aspects only befuddle seemingly elegant definitions of terrorism since the very concept, just like the notion of threat, is contingent exclusively on one's perception. Although converts' involvement in terrorist plots brings urgency to the study of radicalisation it is evident that a new approach is needed to analyse how they are attracted to risky and violent behaviour.

In reality, it is mainly violent radicalisation that is under examination and thus taken as a key vehicle that over time takes an individual away from normal life to illegal activity. It is however not empirically proven that after crossing some threshold of radicalisation the individual engages in violence nor does there exist any plausible theory that radicalisation *per se* necessitates violence. These

[51] McCauley, C. & Moskalenko, S. (2008). Mechanisms of Political Radicalisation: Pathways Toward Terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20:3, pp. 415-433.

assumptions also essentialise the concept of radicalisation as they imply that there are social risk groups as if being radical was similar to being a redhead and flatten it simultaneously through stipulation that all radicals are radical in the same way. As a consequence, the buzzwords "converts" and "radicalisation" go hand in hand and without a new, fresh look on both we will only be going in circles.

For the aforementioned reasons the research is restricted solely to radicalisation of European converts to Islam because just as important as the place and time, the type of people involved is of equal importance due to the psychological factors that radicalisation hinges upon. The rationale of a young Hamas activist, a European Muslim of immigrant origin and an indigenous European who converted to Islam might be expressed in the same religious terms, but in fact these three social groups have their own momentum governed by specific processes one distinct from another. Islamic radicalisation is quite a recent phenomenon and an extremely amorphous one, encompassing a wide variety of actions and actors. Simultaneously, while the literature on radicalisation of European Muslims is quite extensive, we know virtually nothing about their younger brothers in *ummah* – the converts from indigenous populaces. Recent developments, rocketing conversion rates, and a growing percentage of converts among those who commit terrorist acts points mercilessly to the fact that such knowledge is indispensable, both on an academic level, to have a fuller understanding of the religious wave of terrorism, as well as among the professionals who attempt to counter non-violent radicalisation.

As explained above, the main aim of this research is to examine if there are common patterns determining the involvement of European converts to Islam in extremist ideologies and/or terrorist activities, and to analyse the implications of these phenomena. The specific objectives I intend for my research are as follows: The first is to establish under what circumstances conversion leads to non-violent and violent radicalisation and to explore possible pathways existing between conversion and radicalisation by analysing recrudescent concomitances of causal mechanisms pertaining to this phenomenon. The second is to identify key variables of identified causal pathways and processes and provide hypotheses regarding the pathways through which the radicalisation of converted individuals produces as a result, an act of terrorist violence. Finally I aim to contribute to existing knowledge on processes of radicalisation through a typology that will provide contingent generalizations for policy makers and establish a basis for further studies enabling other researchers to follow up in future with more nuanced and elaborate theories.

1.3. Naming the Invisible

The term "radical" commonly refers to a person who adopted an extremist belief system.[52] Such a definition however, is not very helpful or conceptually constructive. Not only is the notion of radicalisation ambiguous, emotionally laden and pejorative,[53] but also, because norms and values are intricately infused into every definition of radicalisation, the concept is inherently subjective. In addition to confusion and frequent misinterpretations, a majority of the definitions provided are lacking in terms of conceptual clarity and are not applicable in the context of my research. For this reason it is essential to explain what is meant by radicalisation in this study. Due to my desire to avoid prior assumptions about what constitutes "radical Islam" and a willingness to circumvent the heated debate on the nature of fundamentalist religious ideology and practices as well as due to the nature of the research, radicalisation needs to be conceived in broadest of possible terms. Moreover, I find the prevalent instrumentalist definitions inadequate because of their focus on the means used not on the nature of the process itself.[54]

It is important to challenge the idea that the individual engaging in violence is the most radical one. Radical is not co-terminous with being violent and a careful distinction between violent and non-violent radicalisation[55] should be emphasized. The Dutch Intelligence Service identified radicalisation as "the increasing willingness to use undemocratic methods or the willingness to use, support or facilitate violence and fear as a method of effecting changes in the society." Such an approach to radicalisation entirely ignores the sphere of non-violent radicalisation resulting in uncompromising, rigid views inconsistent with pluralistic and democratic norms and values. Radicals exhibit disregard for those who do not agree with and submit to their worldview; they are the dreamers of the absolute. The non-violent radical can exhibit dogmatism and ideological rigidity with an exaggerated sense of morality requiring action against everything and everyone not complying with their norms, beliefs and value system. At the same time they eschew violence but are so committed to their cause that it creates a democratic paradox whereby democracy is used in order to abolish it.

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[52] Precht, T. (2007).*Home grown terrorism and Islamist radicalization in Europe: From conversion to terrorism.* Copenhagen, Denmark: Danish Ministry of Justice.

[53] Hoffman, B. (1998). *Inside terrorism.* New York: Columbia University Press; Laqueur, W. (1997). *Post-modern terrorism.* Washington, DC: The United States International Information Program; Laqueur, W. (2003). *No end to war: Terrorism in the twenty-first century.* New York: Continuum.

[54] An example of defining the concept this way can be found in Taarnby's work where he refers to radicalisation as a change in attitude that leads towards sanctioning and ultimately, involvement in the use of violence. Taarnby, M. (2005). *Recruitment of Islamist Terrorists in Europe: Trends and Perspectives*, Copenhagen: Research Report funded by the Danish Ministry of Justice.

[55] AVID (2004).*From Dawa to Jihad.* The Hague: Netherlands General Intelligence and Security Service; AVID (2007). *Radical Dawa in transition: the rise of Islamic Neoradicalism in the Netherlands.* The Hague: Netherlands General Intelligence and Security Service.

When expressing a radical opinion, in normative terms, an individual is just another minority in tolerant and open democratic society. We are entitled to hold different views and no one in democracy is authorized to tell us that we hold wrong opinions and believe in wrong values. In the first place, a majority of views that the mainstream society deems radical or extremist is not illegal within the framework of liberal democracy. This means that while not everyone believes that everyone should be Christian or Muslim, or that people should not kill animals in order to eat their meat, there certainly are individuals convinced that the aforementioned statements are true but it still does not mean that their views breach national or international laws and that for professing these they should be jailed. They might be ostracized but they will not be thrown into prison. While the criminal nature of terrorism is widely accepted, it is very difficult to find a consensus as to what kind of extremist views should be outlawed and which should still be permissible on the premises of the free speech. In other words: being a terrorist is a crime, being a radical is most definitely not. On the other hand just because some people decide to take things into their own hands and perpetrate terrorist acts, does not mean that they are more radical in their beliefs than those whose choice of method was different. One's radicalism cannot be measured in one's proneness to violent action. Hence, radicalism as an advocacy of and commitment to bringing about a sweeping social, political or religious change and a total, political and social transformation is not necessarily violent. In terms of means used, radicalism can be a perfectly legitimate challenge of the established norms or policies. It does not itself constitute a terrorist threat and does not necessitate violence. In any given society there will always be a certain number of radicals who nonetheless will never act against the law or embrace violence.

I understand radicalisation as a process of turning away from mainstream society and a rejection of its norms and values through advocating a way of life that challenges the status quo and rejecting the core fundamentals of liberal democracy with a possible but not necessary engagement in illegal and/or violent activities. In other words, being radical can be described as a desire to have the monopoly over the way life should be lived and society organized. The ultimate marker of deepening radicalisation is not the inclination towards the use of violence but progressing *totalism* whereby the individual moves from everybody "can", through "should" to "must" live my way of life.

The research takes into consideration the large number of forms of radicalisation in both its non-violent and violent manifestations. A superb summary of the multitude of non-violent activities aiming at the support and facilitation of violent undertakings was provided by Clutterbuck, who argues that the influence of ideological radicalisation cannot be overrated and that non-violent radicals are not less

dangerous than those who prepare and carry out the attacks.[56] This view is shared by Bakker[57] whose analytical distinction between *dawah* and *jihad* oriented groups explicates that they have the same objectives, but just employ different means to achieve these ends of a long-term strategy destructive for social cohesion. Therefore, ideological radicalisation in this study refers to those activities that propagate ideologies advocating a rejection of the open nature of Western values and standards; that question the open nature of the society and its respect for diversity and personal autonomy in the area of ethics and morality; that advocate isolation and intolerance towards other groups and viewpoints, and that encourage the development of parallel power structures based on specific interpretations of the *Sharia* law. On the other hand, violent radicalisation refers to those individuals perpetrating terrorist acts on behalf of or due to religious motives. Terrorist violence is understood in the study as an active engagement in the implementation of a terrorist act or the planning of such an act (even it foiled by the interception of the plot by law-enforcement agencies). In my research the phenomena of scientific interest are solely restricted to the cases of conversion of indigenous Europeans to Islam, that either, in order to explore a variance in dependent variable, do not trigger the process of radicalisation or are followed (or coinciding with) radicalisation that, in some instances, might have led ultimately to terrorist violence.

1.4. Accessing the Invisible

In May 2009, well equipped with theoretical knowledge, map and instructions I ventured out on a quest - my first visit to a mosque where converts held their meetings. As I walked into the building a man smiled at me asking whether I had been there before and whether I wanted to see the place. Obviously I looked either lost or in the wrong place or, possibly, both. We went to the main prayer room and my guide, Shamir, was showing me around when another person approached us. Shamir told the newcomer that it is my first visit to the mosque and there it was – my first encounter with a convert. Mustafa did not play nice, he asked me bluntly: "*Have you come here because you are looking for the truth and want to convert or have you come here because you just want to write something?*"[58] A question I should have been prepared for, sadly - I was not.

[56] According to Clutterbuck they range from raising and couriering money, procurement of weapons and military equipment, travel arrangements, acquisition of forged and stolen documents to radicalisation efforts. Clutterbuck, L. (2010). *An Overview of Violent Jihad in the UK*. In M. Ranstorp (Ed.), *Understanding Violent Radicalisation*, London: Routlege, p. 156.
[57] Bakker, E. (2010). Radicalisation and Jihadism in the Netherlands. In M. Ranstorp (Ed.), *Understanding Violent Radicalisation*, London: Routlege, pp. 176-177.
[58] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research diary. Glasgow, UK. May 27, 2009.

Researching hidden, tight-knitted communities is an inherently difficult and challenging endeavour even in the most optimistic scenario. In the case of such research, both the frame and the scope of the study, as Murer[59] observed, is more than merely a tool. It is "the mode of praxis for inquiry" intrinsically linked to the population being researched, which reflects all the conceptual and methodological problems of investigating a social group that is somewhat invisible and hard to reach. In the case of converts the primary obstacle is gaining access, especially from the position of an outsider who has no connections with community members other than scientific interests. As an outsider I was treated with certain degree of suspicion, especially because not being Muslim myself I could not prove good intentions on religious grounds and sometimes my invitation to participate in the research was staunchly refused due to denominational reasons: "Following the *sunna* and fulfilling the obligations given by Allah seem to be *extreme* if not *extremist*. Hungry will never understand the satiated one, and surely a non-Muslim – *kaffir* will not understand a Muslim."[60] In a few instances gender issues were invoked (I was refused an interview because I was a woman). Sometimes previous bad experiences with researchers and journalists who, converts believe, are looking for cheap sensational stories or do not comprehend the problems they are trying to investigate were expressed. In fact, the very topic of the thesis raised objections as well.

Some people had the impression that just mentioning converts and terrorism together besmirches the good name of Islam. I was frequently asked why I was not writing about the "true peaceful nature of Islam that has nothing to do with terrorism." On the other hand those who were happy to share their stories with me had seen their involvement as doing something that will benefit the community as a whole[61]and often expressed their regrets that converts, who should be in the vanguard of those battling against the stereotypes were the ones most often swayed by the clichés.[62] Sometimes the willingness to participate in the study was expressed in religious terms and described as *dawah*, i.e. giving a testimony of faith. In principle, the more radical the community was, the more closed and suspicious towards the outsiders its members were. There were places where no one wanted to talk to me the moment it became apparent that I was not a religious seeker and did not plan to convert.

Trust building is a time consuming exercise; it took me one year to gain trust of the group where I conducted my participant observation sessions, and even then only few people quite reluctantly agreed

[59] Murer, J.S. (2009). Overcoming Mixed Feelings about Mixed Methodologies: Complex Strategies for Research among Hidden Populations, *eSharp*, *Special Issue: Critical Issues in Researching Hidden Communities*, pp. 99-130.
[60] An email rejecting invitation into the research (spelling and emphasis original). Mróz, Madinah. E-mail to muzulmanka@yahoogroups.com, December 09, 2009.
[61] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research diary. Glasgow, UK. August 21, 2010.
[62] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research diary. Glasgow, UK. December 10, 2009.

for interviews. These were held in neutral places and often interviewees asked me if it was safe or whether we were being followed. Personal safety was also the main reason behind the refusal to record many conversations.[63] Throughout the research I contacted various groups for New Muslims across Europe, but sometimes social networks and snowballing effect were the only way to gain access "inside". There were two scenarios: either after the meeting the interviewee would direct me to other people whom I might find interesting or the person would meet me for an introductory conversation and then after "validating" me and my research, such a "gate keeper" would facilitate my meeting the rest of the community. In the latter case, they would either inform other members of the group about me encouraging them to participate in the study or organise another meeting with the rest of the community. It needs to be underlined that the hospitality I received was unprecedented; I was offered accommodation, food, transportation and any other help I might need.

Internal references help but they do not always guarantee success and consequently people vouching for me were a helpful but not sufficient factor. In several cases even though someone trusted, known and respected within the community endorsed me and my research, the other members were still dubious and refused to participate. Such was the case of one female convert group in Poland. Although I was introduced by one of the members, a vehement argument erupted regarding me (i.e. my motives, attitude and capabilities) and my research (i.e. its sense, its topic and potential harmfulness).The heated discussion resulted in only four women agreeing to interviews. Furthermore, I was often subjected to test questions before the actual interview started. These were meant to verify what kind of person I was, and to probe my knowledge with respect to Islam or Muslim issues. The question varied; most often people wanted to know whether I was a religious person myself, whether I intended to convert or whether I had a Muslim in the family. Sometimes political issues, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or Muhammad cartoons were brought forth. It was clear that I could decline to engage in a discussion of issues unrelated to the study, however a certain degree of openness hinged upon the "right" answers. These moments were especially difficult from an ethical point of view and the ethical dimension of the research is discussed in greater detail below.

The bureaucratic difficulties in cooperation with law enforcement agencies, police, and other official sources of information were equally daunting. Given the specificity of planned research one has to bear in mind two factors: the scarcity of data and the particular difficulties in obtaining them. These impediments are prevalent and several other researchers faced them, finding it excruciatingly arduous,

[63] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research diary. Glasgow, UK. October 22, 2009.

as voiced by Nesser "to obtain sufficient amount of reliable sources to conduct meaningful analyses."[64] National security issues pose at times insurmountable difficulties in contacting convicted terrorists or those under trial, similar obstacles are connected with obtaining permission to interview convicted terrorists. Difficult however, does not mean impossible, and two main resources are necessary: patience and persistence. A whole year of exchanging emails, telephone conversations and meetings with various officials had passed before I have been granted research access into the Scottish Prison System (SPS) and allowed to conduct my fieldwork there. Again, in spite of the fact that I had permission to run interviews in all of the SPS's establishments with inmates who converted to Islam, due to organisational issues (detainees are scattered and rarely does one find more that two to three converts in one prison) as well as time I was able to visit prisons in Edinburgh, Shotts and Glenochil.

1.5. Touching the Invisible

1.5.1. Data

Since my research relies entirely on causal stories, which rest on different chains of complex causal relations I argue that small-n analysis has much higher efficacy for the purposes of the study by finding regularities through qualitative analysis and juxtaposition of similar cases that will facilitate addressing the question of causal processes and pathways within each case. The indispensable data reflects the qualitative nature of proposed research and consist of four main pillars. The first one is academic literature on various forms of radicalisation and on European converts to Islam. This reflects the usual first step in studying cases, which is to gather and analyse the most easily accessible academic literature and interview data on cases of interest and their context. The extreme paucity of research on the latter meant a meticulous search of accounts on radical converts dispersed within numerous publications on terrorism, Muslims in Europe and radicalisation similar to bringing together the scattered pieces of a jigsaw or a puzzle. The second group consists of materials acquired through sustained and systematic archival work with open sources: magazines, newspapers, and internet websites. This allowed for a surprisingly comprehensive documentation of converts' background, biographical data, and individual characteristic, including statements and narratives of those converts who were inaccessible for direct interviews. Thirdly, given the nature of the research, primary sources are extremely difficult to acquire and sometimes simply impossible to obtain, hence official policy reports

[64] Nesser, P. (2010).Joining Jihadi Terrorist Cells in Europe – Exploring Motivational Aspects of Recruitment and Radicalization.In M. Ranstorp (Ed.), *Understanding Violent Radicalisation*, London: Routlege, p. 90.

published by governments, think tanks, research centres and other publicly available governmental analyses were the best source of information in cases where a direct interview was not possible due to the demise of an individual under investigation and/or national security issues. The final tier are fieldwork notes from participant observation sessions, reflective diary, and in-depth interviews with European converts residing in the UK, the Netherlands and Poland, collected between May 2009 and April 2011. In this respect, the research crosses the borders of the four arenas of discourse mentioned by Schmid.[65] It moves between the theoretical avenues of academia to state documents providing official discourse on terrorism, from media accounts to individuals' own statements.

The study consists of thirty in-depth, oral interviews following a flexible but comparable set of open-ended questions which offered the respondents certain flexibility that allowed digressions, yet kept them within the perimeter of the study's interests. The conversations were thus respondent-driven and evolved naturally, put people at ease, and resulted in greater openness once they themselves noticed that I was not pressing for specific information but valued what was being offered freely. The variance was necessary due to country and context differences and thus the set was adjusted to accommodate this –the Polish migrant convert residing in Ireland had a different perspective from a native Scot who converted in prison; such divergences were taken into consideration. Nevertheless, an effort was made to retain maximum consistency across the cases to provide a profound understanding of particular context and trajectory of conversion. The interviews ran approximately 45 minutes, but some were much longer and a few lasted up to four hours. They were conducted mainly in private homes or workplaces and sometimes on neutral grounds: in a shopping mall, a cafe or in a park. If permission for recording was granted, the interviews were recorded and transcribed, but the specificity of the fieldwork made any descriptive statistical juxtapositions impossible. For ethical reasons I decided not to conduct any telephone interviews that would be impossible to transcribe and validate. The quotes used in this thesis are fully anonymised and divulge only the date and place of the interview, accordingly, the names are also changed.

In addition to interviews, participant observation sessions were conducted for a year in the *New To Islam* community in Glasgow which in the study serves as a representative microcosm of a broader panoply of New Muslims communities. I also attended an assortment of activities in which converts participated: Public events like demonstrations, charity dinners or fashion shows but also religious meetings, sermons, lectures, talks, shopping trips and *shahadas*. The learning process was linked on the one side to the possibility of being "invisible" within the group, on the other, to the open nature of

[65] Schmid, A. P. (1993). Defining Terrorism: The Response Problem as a Definition Problem. In A. P. Schmid & R. Crelinsten (Eds.), *Western Responses to Terrorism*. London: Frank Cass, p. 7.

conversations as everyone spoke openly about their experiences, expressed opinions on various subjects and shared problems. A research diary was kept throughout this phase in order to record and systematise the research materials. To supplement the systematic empirical observation I also read various publications directed at converts: magazines, notices, leaflets and books.

1.5.2. Selected cases

The cases analysed and presented in the thesis were carefully chosen to avoid the flaw of selection on dependent variables. Designing the research, I was well aware of the danger of the selection bias and hence the thesis offers a full spectrum of conversions and converts and a wide array of examples covering various socio-economic, political and cultural factors is examined. Furthermore, approaches typical for political sciences are strengthened by anthropological, sociological and psychological insights and theories. It can be argued that the sample case is truncated and that the investigation suffers from systematic error because the selection process relies on the availability of the data: the accusation may arise from the fact that evidence on certain cases is more readily available than on others. However, it needs to be emphasized that the first and foremost criterion for case selection was the relevance for the research objective. It was enabled by careful definition of the sub-class of interest and thus appropriate cases could be selected. All interviewed individuals were European converts to Islam but, to provide full sample and cover the widest variety of possible scenarios, they consist of both non-radicalised and radicalised individuals, old and young, male and female. Furthermore, it needs to be emphasized that the cases employ the whole range of narratives and pathways of theoretical interest for purposes of further exploration. The list consists of cases of men and women, who converted and were active both before and after 9/11, who operated in a group or alone, and who had a role of a leader or a follower. The geographical distribution does not discriminate but offers possible variation – from countries where Islam is settled to those where it is a novelty. What is more, the radicalised group could be further divided into those engaged into terrorist activities and those who did not stray into violence.

At any rate, the selected cases do not aspire to represent the whole variety of converts and the stated aims do not claim to provide findings applicable across various sets of cases. While hardly a probability sample, the presented analysis still provides unique insights into new European Muslims' community that are virtually impossible to acquire through other methods, especially due to access difficulties. It is simply impossible to make a complete and reliable list of converts directly involved in

terrorism in Europe let alone a list that would be representative for the European converts' community. There are thousands of European converts to Islam in Europe – it is however impossible to give their exact number as the statistics are not registered and even the estimations vary. Of the whole community, the overwhelming majority leads a peaceful existence and only a small fraction is radical. An even smaller number proceed to engage into terrorist activities. To those arrested and detained on terrorist charges, access is nearly impossible due to security issues, in addition there is a limitation of sources as the media reports are often unreliable, open sources incomplete and often biased and not all official documents and reports are available to wider public. After Edwin Bakker and his study[66] on *Jihadi* Terrorists in Europe I report that there were fourteen converts to Islam (thirteen people with a Christian and one with a Hindu background) participating in terrorist attacks.[67] Precisely for the reasons of data scarcity, I chose to rely on case studies and process tracing methods rather than on typical quantitative methodology. Qualitative studies enable conceptual refinement with a high level of validity in spite of the modest number of cases. Quantitative research of large amounts of sterile data would offer generalization devoid of context, crucial in the case of radicalisation processes. A qualitative approach is particularly useful especially because many of the variables are difficult to measure. Moreover, an analysis of a case study sample is better for exploring causally complex processes precisely because they do not require numerous cases, difficulties in obtaining the data notwithstanding, or a restricted number of variables.

This study seeks a fine balance between theoretical cohesion and explanatory richness while keeping the cases to be studied manageable. Considering the main research question it is obvious that parsimony is not meant to be sacrificed for the sake of broad applicability. It is true that parsimony may lack richness but the trade-off between the two was determined by meticulous consideration of the purpose of this study and limited generalizability is not the primary concern of this study as I seek to uncover only a contingent generalization that applies solely to the analysed subclass of cases.

1.5.3. Causal Mechanism

[66] Sources on European converts to Islam and their engagement in terrorism: studies on radicalization and political violence, media sources, open sources, official documents, reports, transcripts – but all these only partially address the issue investigated in my research.
[67] Bakker, E., *Op.cit.*, pp. 69-85.

The core of research planned to try and detect systematic differences in conversion pathways and categorise them relies on the firm belief in causal mechanism, so central to causal explanation. After George and Bennett I define causal mechanism as an

> ”ultimately unobservable physical, social, or psychological processes through which agents with causal capacities operate, but only in specific contexts or conditions, to transfer energy, information, or matter to other entities. In so doing, the causal agent changes the affected entity’s characteristics capacities, or propensities in ways that persist until subsequent causal mechanisms act upon.”[68]

The concept of causal mechanism is central for two main reasons: Firstly, the study undertakes the challenge to isolate the causal mechanisms operating between conversion and radicalisation that either is peaceful or leads to an infestation of political violence, and identify the conditions under which such mechanisms trigger causality. Secondly, the study endeavours to discover which independent stable factors in what configurations, and under which conditions link conversion to non-violent radicalisation, and which conditions are favourable for violent radicalisation, and in effect, for terrorist violence.

Detailed analysis examines the operation of causal mechanisms in each of the respective cases and within each case it enables examination of a large number of intervening variables at work. Furthermore, it affords the inductive observation of any unexpected aspects of purported causal mechanisms. It also helps to identify what conditions present in a case activate the causal mechanism. My attempt to explain phenomena via causal mechanisms still acknowledges the complexity of mechanisms operating within certain contexts. It understands that such mechanisms are triggered under certain conditions and effective only in specified circumstances, and hence depend on mutual interaction of the individual within the wider context of the structure.

1.5.4 Process tracing

Since the proposed type of comparative study focuses on cases in the same sub-class where different causal paths lead to the variety of outcomes, a process-tracing method, helpful both to uncover evidence of causal mechanisms at work in the specified sub-class of phenomena and explain their consequences, is incorporated into the research. The process tracing method, as George and Bennett

[68] George, A.L. & Bennett, A., *Op.cit.*, p. 137.

clarify, attempts to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chains and causal mechanisms – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable.[69] Tracing the processes that may have led to an outcome, they assure, helps narrow the list of potential causes and even if it is impossible to eliminate all potential rival explanations it does contribute to narrowing the scope for analysis. It also offers the possibility of mapping out potential causal paths and charting the repertoire that leads to given outcomes and the conditions under which they occur – that is to develop a typological theory.[70] It is one thing to know what set of factors contribute in certain conditions to the fact that a converted individual turns to terrorist violence, it is however, quite a different one to know the specific interactions among them. Thus process-tracing serves as a tool for identifying those within the specified type. In my research the process-tracing has the form of analytic explanation to translate a narrative into a causal explanation outside the individual stories. The same rationale advocated against handing out a questionnaire to my respondents. Categories in the survey would ignore the context and would not relate to individual's narrative but rather mimic my own analytical perspective. Thus, avoiding the predetermined framework of reference leading to reductive and dichotomist vista, the research results in process tracing observations along the hypothesized causal paths.

Due to the complexity of the investigated phenomenon, it might be possible that more than one causal mechanism might be at work and many alternative causal paths might be leading to the same dependant variable (radicalisation). Equally, the same processes might have many outcomes consistent with one particular independent variable (e.g. conversion). These two factors, *equifinality* and *multifinality*, are taken into careful consideration and the chosen methodological tools are suitable for dealing with these aspects of complex causality where the outcome flows from the convergence of several conditions, independent variables (interacting variables) and/or causal chains.[71]Process tracing helps to identify single or different paths to respective outcomes, facilitates the assessment whether each of the potential causal variables can or cannot be ruled out as having causal significance and points out variables that were otherwise ignored in the initial phase. Moreover, by permitting causal inference even within the limited sample set of proposed study, process-tracing provides to tackle one of the main challenges of a planned study, i.e. a check for spuriousness. Even if it is impossible to eliminate all excess explanations, some will be excluded and thus inferences will be drawn for the future use both in academic arena and policy-making field.

[69] George, A.L. & Bennett, A., *Op.cit*., p. 206.
[70] *Ibid*.,p. 207.
[71] *Ibid*.,p. 10.

The use of process tracing method in the proposed study involves attempts to test and eliminate alternative causal processes (derived from other theories) that might lead to the same outcome. However, it needs to be said that due to the rather path-breaking nature of the research, the alternative theories might be complementary and the causal processes they specify not mutually exclusive but rather supplementary. Considering the possible difficulty in obtaining the data, it is necessary to underline that the inaccessibility of evidence at one point of causal path does not disprove the cause, but merely makes it harder to eliminate competing theories.[72] It is not a huge obstacle also considering the fact that theories frequently do not make specific predictions on all of the steps in a causal process, especially when investigated phenomenon is of complex causality.[73] Process tracing thus strengthens the methodological tool set applied for discovering and identifying cases that shall serve for further empirical, inductive construction of a typological theory.

1.5.5. Typology

As stated above the research aims at establishing a typology of pathways from conversion to violent and/or non-violent radicalisation. Such typology is important with respect to planned objectives of the proposed study because it is widely believed that typological theorizing, i.e. the development of contingent generalizations about combinations or configurations of variables that constitute theoretical types, in contrast to general theoretical explanations, provide deep and differentiated depictions of the phenomenon under investigation and are able to generate contingent explanations and policy recommendations. The methodology described above allows for specifying the pathways through which particular types of conversions relate to radicalisation. It identifies conjunctions of variables, as well as sequences of events and linkages between cause and effect that may recur. Each pathway is characterized in terms of variables by identifying the conjunctive effects of underlying causal mechanisms operating within specified conditions. This permits generalization about possible future instances of radicalized converts who fit the same type of "ideal archetypes". In the proposed research the typology is constructed and defined through a case study method refined through process tracing in ways that produce the findings of similar cases within each type, as well as sharper distinctions between

[72] George, A.L. & Bennett, A., *Op.cit.*,p. 218.
[73] *Ibid*., p. 222.

types.[74] Such typology offers not only comprehensive academic explanation, but also demonstrates practical value for policymakers.[75]

The research has an inductive approach, that is, the cases are examined to uncover what causal pathways might operate in them and what processes are triggered under what conditions. Such combination of cross-case (through a comparative case study) and within case (though process tracing) analysis reduces to a high degree the risk of inferential errors that can arise from using each method alone. The typology, on the other hand, seeks to group the various kinds of causal mechanisms and pathways that link the independent variables of each type with its outcome. The ultimate aim is therefore to develop a comprehensive typology through a series of case studies and process tracing methods. The research is thus of an exploratory nature relying on discoveries from the case studies made through qualitative analysis and process tracing in order to refine and adjust the initial theoretical framework (serving as a basis for explanation of individual cases) and to identify components of useful typology.

Ultimately, it needs to be emphasized that the methodology of the research developed and changed quite substantially over the course of study. Based on the discussed above available academic literature regarding European converts to Islam, the study started with a deductive approach. Majority of academics and experts treats converts as a homogenous group posing a challenging terrorist threat. On this basis broad generalisations are conducted whereby converts are presented as gullible individuals, easy to influence and prone to fall into an outbidding spiral when trying to prove their worth to the new brethren. Thus, initially for the purposes of the research, the working hypothesis assumed an "outbidding spiral" with converts wanting to prove their true Muslimness and show without any doubts that in spite of being newcomers to religion they truly belong to the community of believers. The adopted working hypothesis stipulated that converts want to prove that they left behind everything that in their view the West stands for: moral emptiness, hedonism, secularism, shallow consumerism and even a perception of a Western conspiracy against Muslims.

Nevertheless, the first conducted interviews and participant observation sessions proved this claim to be erroneous and thus during the field work the deductive approach was abandoned in favour of the inductive one. Understanding that the researched reality is far more complex and nuanced than the prevailing conceptualisation of the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam, the fieldwork was based around observations and subsequently the theory emerged at the end of the research. Acknowledging that in the real world the elaborate perplexity of interconnected causes and

[74] George, A. L. & Bennett, A., *Op.cit.*, p. 237.
[75] *Ibid*.

effects goes above and beyond a simple causal thesis, allowed also for contextualisation of converts' "terrorist threat" and capacitated a conceptual modification whereby the pre- and post-conversion life of a New Muslim constitute balanced elements of new theory.

Finally, what guided the way this research was performed, was a staunch belief that if a lived experience of the field work is to be converted into ethnography and the perceived reality is to be presented to the reader in a form of a reasoned argument,[76] it must be done on the premise that "the objective conception of the real world is partial or incomplete."[77] This paradigm directed the research design as well as the choice of the research methodology which in turn led to the selection of research methods discussed in this Chapter. Similarly, it justifies and explains the way my findings are presented via rich ethnography.

This thesis was written with a clear caveat in mind that there is no "one best approach" when it comes to the research design. Nevertheless, the choices made during this study were on the one hand highly specific to the proposed research question and on the other, focused primarily on the different components comprising the study. Thus, the proposed research design and methodology is the best available taking into consideration the leading question and intended aims of the research.

1.6. The invisible ethics

When it comes to academic research, the great onus lies with the researcher to ensure that the study project is conducted according to firm ethical foundations and scrupulous considerations of ethical aspects that may arise throughout the duration of the entire research process. While it is true that all research proposals should bear in mind the implications the intended study might have for prospective participants and society in general (with various degrees for its different members) because all research has the great potential to be both exploitative and damaging, even when it was planned to benefit the greater public good, especially studies concerning such sensitive issues trespassing the boundaries of morality and law are of particular importance when it comes to assuring the highest standards of ethical considerations. Even in a situation when proposed research does not manifest itself as having even the

[76] Gay y Blasco, P. & Wardle, H. (2007). *How to read ethnography.* London: Routledge, pp. 96-116.
[77] Shweder, R.A. (1996). Quanta and Qualia: What is the object of ethnographic method? In R. Jessor, A. Colby and R.A. Shweder (Eds.), *Ethnography and Human Development. Context and Meaning in Social Inquiry*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, p. 178.

slightest obvious repercussion for “human subjects,” the ethical dimension should not be omitted and ethical considerations must not be taken for granted.

For these reasons it is important that my doctoral study is ethical and complies with the University’s Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice. Starting from the analysis of the literature on chosen methodology, through guidance of an experienced supervisor, taking into careful consideration of possible risk and its assessment; through the ethics of conducting interviews and further theorizing on the grounds of gathered data, to the final stage of publication, I have undertaken this project with consideration that it is received as an ethically viable contribution to academic knowledge.

Firstly, personal integrity was of an utmost importance. I endeavoured to provide the highest level of ethical responsibility when it comes to the core research design and methodological framework including the institutional approval of an appropriate body prior to any field work, including all of the necessary security checks (i.e. the Enhanced Disclosure Scotland). Additional, external approval was obtained from the Scottish Prison System Research Access and Ethics Committee. Simultaneously, while adhering to the standard research access regulations imposed by external bodies, all possible means were devoted to safeguarding the interest of the research participants. I should also mention that I have never pretended to be someone else, e.g. a person considering conversion or indeed a fellow convert to Islam, although in some cases it would have made the interviews easier and in others, it would have made them possible. Furthermore, sometimes my respondents told me after the interview had been terminated they had heard about me before –either from another Muslim or they had read about me on the internet, and thus the check for personal integrity factor was always present.

While reporting the findings truthfully and with the greatest accuracy, I always bore in mind the possible wider ramifications of the conducted research. The relations with and responsibilities towards the research participants cannot be overestimated. It needs to be emphasised that no individual was included into the research without having freely given their consent. Prior to signing a consent form, each interviewee was informed in great detail regarding the research, as well as its data management, preservation and protection. As the interviewees were asked to disclose information about sensitive issues in their personal life like possible extremist views, such utterances stand in tension with or as an obvious opposition to national and international legislation and norms, thus the security of data storage and archiving as well as the degree of anonymity and confidentiality were of my primary concern. Also clarifying the obligations, roles and rights of participants during the research and the nature and direction of the interaction rooted in the disparity of power and the trust put in me, as a researcher by the participants were discussed prior to interviews. All interviewees were made fully aware of their right

to choose to participate and also to withdraw and terminate the interview at any time without explanation or to refuse to answer any of the questions asked. The very nature of qualitative study means that as an interviewer I enter into a deep personal relationship based on trust and integrity of both sides. Interviewees were reassured of an intersubjective and professional quality of the relationship based on mutual recognition, intrinsic to the research. The most important concern, yet perhaps one of the most difficult to overcome due to the nature of proposed research pertaining to perceptions, values and interpretations, is that the study cannot be deemed as entirely value free. In order to avoid bias and distortion and, at the same time, find the right balance between involvement and detachment, I aimed to conduct the research in a way that allowed me to deepen the understanding, eschewing essentialised explanations while adhering to the best practices in qualitative studies. The autonomy of the interviewees and their narratives were the main concern as means of avoiding the danger of influencing them in any way by asking questions which inhibit their ability to answer freely or preclude from speaking openly and without hesitation or evasion. The main instrument for achieving this result was a carefully prepared semi-structured questionnaire without dictates or innuendos as to how the interviewee should respond. All these steps were undertaken to secure anonymity, privacy and confidentiality, with special respect to guarding privileged or possibly harmful information as well as shielding the participants from every possible exposure and minimise the violation confidentiality and ensure no risk of the identifying sensitive information.

Each of the case studies adhered to these criteria in different ways. It needs to be remembered that the interviews were not conducted in a controlled environment or institutional setting which would enhance rigidity in terms of interaction between myself and the participant. To the contrary, in many cases, the sensitive relation of trust and the informal setting were the only way to open the participants up towards specific questions concerning delicate topics, reflecting on sometimes difficult, personal and guarded beliefs, interpretations or perceptions. Finally, throughout the duration of the proposed research I constantly scrutinised its design, framework and methodology and, when necessity arose, readjusted the procedures to stresses the ethical feasibility of my study. Balancing potentially conflicting interests of the interviewees, the academia and the state had a palpable impact on my research practices.

To summarize, the overall goal of the research is to develop a typological theory fostering our understanding on how and under what conditions European converts to Islam radicalise andto describe the faces of such radicalisation. Comparative analysis of different cases of the phenomenon allows for the identification of a number of conditions which, if present during radicalisation process, increase the likelihood of engagement in terrorist activity of European converts to Islam. Such findings, in turn,

identify ways for policymakers to reduce the likelihood of such an outcome by controlling the factors that might result in embracing terrorism by converted individuals. There is, of course, a danger that such a procedure might lead to an infinite number of types, because each individual undergoes quite a unique process of radicalisation and embraces terrorism in a very personalized way. Here, again, a careful trade-off between parochialism and richness was retained. Each case in the data set is useful because it permits the identification of a different causal pattern and the exploration ofa different causal chain. And thus the data set provides differentiated explanations of the outcomes for the cases as well as becoming part of general knowledge and contributes to more sophisticated typological theory.[78] For future reference, each new case of converted and radicalized individual who either proselytises peacefully or turns into terrorist potentially provides a new type or helps to refine the existing ones thus refining the typological theory. The typology was built via empirical analysis of processes undergone in a set of cases within a theoretical framework. The methodological strategy thus is analytical, empirically derived and theory driven-induction.

1.7. Towards the new theory

There are several advantages of planned methodology. In the first place it has the ability to address a complex phenomenon of radicalisation of European converts to Islam and their radicalisation without oversimplification. For the purposes of the proposed study it is not enough to estimate whether in a given case the individual was indeed converted, radicalized and under certain circumstances, under the influence of specified causal mechanism refrained from violence or committed, or planned to commit a terrorist act; it needs to be analysed how the process proceeded, what factors were at play, what conditions triggered the causal chain and what was the interaction between the structure and the agency. Secondly, such methodology is vital to clarify similarities and differences among cases. Although all the cases are European radicalised converts to Islam, there are many differences between them regarding their age, gender, education, socio-economic background, the reason for conversion, etc. Having a clear juxtaposition facilitates comparisons within the sample. Moreover, such an accurate juxtaposition of the similarities and differences enhances exploration of all the causal paths and provides an ample repertoire of all possible kinds of cases contributing to establishing a comprehensive typology. Finally, this approach supplemented by process-tracing incorporates the effect of interactions between the structure and the agent and among the intervening variables and makes a complex

[78] George, A.L. & Bennett, A., *Op.cit.*, p. 241.

phenomenon of radicalisation more manageable by dividing it into variants of types by identifying clusters of characteristics that differentiate instances of the phenomenon.

The important limitation of proposed methodology is that one cannot predict the frequency of each causal pattern's recurrence. Nonetheless, the frequency is of secondary concern and does not fit into planned research design. Since the main aim is to identify the variety of causal patterns that can lead to an outcome of interest and determine the conditions under which these patterns occur, specification of generalized pathways regardless of their frequency is fully compatible with proposed research and its goals. I am more interested in finding the conditions under which radicalisation of European converts to Islam occurs, and the mechanism that govern the causality rather than exploring the frequency of those circumstances and outcomes. In order to face the challenge posed by the research question, it is necessary to underline that this study is meant to explain the processes and identify conditions triggering causal mechanisms leading to an outcome of interest but not predict them.

Ultimately, the result of this research uncovers just one facet of the general theory of radicalisation and as such hopes to contribute to the general theory of radicalisation's causal mechanisms. While other research focuses on different types of radicalisation (e.g. second-generation Muslims born and bred in Europe) or different pathways (e.g. pathways towards nationalist-separatist terrorism) presented in this thesis a building block approach with its aim to study a specified subtype of subjects endeavours to fill a blank space in current knowledge on radicalisation. I firmly believe that notwithstanding the limited scope, such block constitutes a contribution to a more general theory and addresses the significant instrumental problems associated with radicalisation of European converts and their subsequent resort to terrorist violence or lack thereof. I also believe that while the findings of proposed study might be more narrow and contingent, they will also be more precise.

When it comes to ethics it is safe to say that in deciding to investigate radicalisation, the researcher is voluntarily entering such a moral quagmire that only by ensuring the highest ethical standards, can the potentially conflicting interests of the interviewees, academia and the state be balanced. Keeping this ultimate goal in mind, the scholar must be incessantly critical, and must constantly review the ethical dimension of the conducted research. Ultimately, out in the field, when decisions are made in split seconds, the only way to succeed is to turn ethical guidelines into praxis. It should be invisible in the sense of being fully compatible with research practices and methods. Indeed, invisibility does not mean non-existence; rather it signifies certain obviousness as ethics needs to be as natural as air for any scholar making inquiries into the world of hidden meanings.

CHAPTER 2. BECOMING TO BE.

In Chapter 2 the thesis moves on to consider whether all converts are the same and whether they always make the most committed Muslims. As mentioned in the previous section, the popular assumption stipulates that after conversion New Muslims want to prove their worth and sincerity of belief and thus become "more Muslim than Muhammad", in turn becoming particularly vulnerable towards radicalisation. Unpacking the essentialist myth, which presents converts as a unanimous group starts with analysing the process of becoming Muslim. The old cliché that everyone has their own unique path in life is also true in the case of converts to Islam. This, however, is not very helpful from a conceptual point of view. Hence, the Chapter discusses existing theories of conversion to examine the conversion process in order to prove that the converts' community is varied and diverse and cannot be treated en bloc as a risk group. Guiding the reader through the theoretical maze, the Chapter proposes a fresh approach to assessing converts' potential terrorist threat by developing a metatheoretical matrix which helps to delineate how to determine the variance within the group. Overall, the Chapter indicates the four main elements crucial when considering conversion and delineates the four main trajectories of becoming Muslim. Most importantly, it conceptually clarifies the impact of the variance of converting trajectory in terms of security.

The aim of this Chapter is to argue that there is no one ideal convert or conversion type. Thus, converts cannot be treated as a homogenous "risk group" and the variety of converting trajectories suggest that only a minority of converted individuals are susceptible to radicalisation only by the very fact of converting. The types and modes of conversion change over time and place, they also change across religions. Conversion has the potential to transform the whole intellectual, emotional and social life of an individual, and may compel the person to make serious adjustments in their life style (e.g. quit drinking) or even start anew e.g. in the cases of some prison conversions, ending the life of crime and beginning a new career. Personal attachments or a strong liking for practicing believers might be central to a conversion process or might be irrelevant. Time-wise conversion can be a sudden and brief experience or a prolonged process happening over moths or even years. Current explanatory schemes cannot be applied in the case of European converts to Islam as the present understanding of conversion reality leaves too many questions unanswered and too many doubts, grey areas and penumbrae. The proposed framework is not aimed at shattering the understandings of the past but rather at providing a metatheoretical tool that could help to delineate a framework for explanations more comprehensive than earlier theoretical models and causal accounts of conversions.

In the contemporary understanding of political activism, terrorism is deemed to be the most radical of all radical actions. As explained previously, conventional radicalisation literature does not acknowledge the contextual uniqueness of European converts to Islam, therefore we need to examine the conversion trajectories to see whether and how "becoming to be" Muslim influences later individual development, including radicalisation. Scholars studying terrorism are not concerned with the phenomenon of conversion and the universe of religious transformation as well as its ramifications are omitted in analyses pertaining to Muslims' radicalisation. Equally, converts are not distinguished as a separate group within the larger body of *ummah* (i.e. the community of the faithful), being instead conveniently lumped in with "other" Muslims. Furthermore, hardly any attempt is made to explore the impact of religious conversion, the roots of radicalising mechanisms are looked for elsewhere and "becoming to be" part of converts' stories was and still is largely ignored.

Thus, due to the fact that political science is lagging behind in its ideas on conversion and converts' radicalisation, this thesis argues that "becoming to be," i.e. conversion to Islam, has an immense impact on the subsequent being a Muslim and therefore in an attempt to investigate converts' radicalisation, one needs to look at the conversion stories as they are not mutually exclusive but balance each other and are to be read as complementary parts of a whole. These two elements of individual's life are connected and work in concert. This is going to be achieved by looking at theories of religious conversions, discussing their strengths and deficiencies and proposing an alternative theoretical framework, which proposes four conversion trajectories to Islam. Attempts to construct a general, universally applicable conversion models have failed, partially due to disciplinary biases, and partially due to the fact that conversion does not happen in a cultural vacuum. Thus numerous observations, what has been underlined by contemporary scholars, although correct cannot be cross-culturally valid.[79] On the other hand, political science offers a space for dialogue of various disciplines, where psychology – with its focus on personality traits, sociology – which emphasises social networks and institutional structures, and anthropology – which stresses the influence of social and cultural factors, can have a balanced input and work in unison.

This thesis proposes a new approach, which builds upon a solid research question and argues that the theories investigating the processes of conversion or the experience of it need to be contextually adjusted and thoroughly reconceptualised if converts' radicalisation is to be explored seriously and not as a useful "scarecrow" as it is presently exploited in the media and popular discourse. While carefully distinguishing European converts to Islam from other converting groups, it weaves

[79] Gooren, H. (2007). Reassessing Conventional Approaches to Conversion: Toward a New Synthesis. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*,46:3, pp. 337-353.

together decades of religious conversion research and offers a useful synthesis acknowledging that each conversion process incorporates active, passive, individual, collective, material and spiritual elements. Simultaneously, my proposition is more distinct in terms of research direction while, at the same time as it is more holistic, it avoids overlap and repetition of some of the flaws and biases of earlier models. Instead of reiterating the false underlying assumptions of previous theories, it takes political science beyond what it has been doing so far and places it outside hackneyed debates. While staying in the mainstream of theory development it is not a recycling of old discussions or a simple regurgitation of tired arguments.

2.1. The Mystery of Conversion

Although the mystery of conversion has been a focus of interest for social scientists for years, one will not find unanimity among the scholars regarding its initiating factors, mechanisms or implications or indeed subjects. In its simplest terms religious conversion can be described as a change from one religious belief to another[80] indicating that *change* is indeed both its nature and the very essence lying at the heart of religious conversion. In fact, whether sudden and quick or gradual and protracted, whether complete or only partial, change is the defining feature of a conversion process. Simultaneously, religious re-orientation in terms of denominational affiliation, practices and/or beliefs is not equivalent to the transformation in the sphere of identity (in the case where acceptance of new religion is based strictly on subservience).

This thesis looks at inter-faith religious conversions resulting in a re-orientation of the religiosity resulting in transferring the individual from one faith to Islam, whereby official affiliation is confirmed by taking the *shahada*(declaration of accepting Islam). Conversions from agnosticism are therefore included but the intra-faith ones are not and hence "new born Muslims" are not taken into consideration. Public *shahada* is taken for a token of conversion since professing one's faith in a public, formal ritual is the most obvious evidence of a change of religion regardless of whether such transformation is purely instrumental (e.g. used as a tool for the purposes of marriage) and thus does not involve a change in attitudes and beliefs, or is a genuine manifestation of piety followed by a display of loyalty and commitment to a new faith (in terms of time, energy or money). The inherent subjectivity of religious conversion constitutes the most potent trap for scholars as it virtually leaves the convert him/herself as

[80] Harms, E. (1962). Ethical and Psychological Implications of Religious Conversion. *Review of Religious Research*, 3:3, pp. 122-131.

the only person capable of determining the exact moment of conversion. Accepting *shahada* as a palpable, observable, and undeniable fact of someone converting on the one hand allows us to avoid this relativist trap, while on the other avoids dismissing instrumental conversions from within the range that the phenomena can take form on the grounds that they are not genuine. *Shahada* as a demonstrative event, a social display of conversion,[81] is an important action yet merely a symbolical proclamation of the end of the old self, cutting ties with the old life and moving into the new one. And although it is taken in this study as an ultimate benchmark for distinguishing New Muslims, in a normative sense it is not identical with conversion in terms of identity transformation, but merely stands for formalisation of denominational change and does not necessitate a permanent behavioural change of identity.

Some studies on conversion argue that the precise moment and subject of change is so difficult to determine (is it beliefs and values, behaviour and identities, attitudes and opinions or something even more fundamental?) that the only way to pinpoint conversion is to refer to it as a displacement of one universe of discourse.[82] Snow and Machalek point out the importance of an analysis of the language as a fruitful approach of conversion and provide "the rhetorical indicators" focusing on language. However while this thoroughly cognitive approach provides a valuable examination of the conversion experience, dissolved in discourse analysis, it loses the more palpable, social perspective ingrained in the story of conversion. So although Snow and Machalek[83] reject membership and public displays and welcoming rituals as equal with conversion, because *shahada* is not a question of spontaneity or an outcome of ecstatic trance but a conscious and voluntary decision, in this study it is a sufficient condition to indicate a convert as it cannot be questioned on the grounds of emotional compliance or pressure. The assumption that *shahada*, or more generally, a public act that institutionalises the denominational change[84] is valid as a threshold only if it is dictated by an authentic religious need, ignores the variety of forms religious conversion can take. Conversion does not necessarily have to be a bridge burning act which differentiates in an ultimate way the crossing from the outside to the inside of the border. It is not a terminal act, or at least, it does not have to be endowed with such meaning.

2.2 Theoretical Maze

[81] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1983).The Convert as a Social Type. In R. Collins (Ed.), *Sociological Theory*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 259-89.
[82] *Ibid*., p. 265.
[83] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1984).The Sociology of Conversion. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10, pp.167-190.
[84] Straus, R. A. (1979). Religious Conversion as a Personal and Collective Accomplishment. *Sociological Analysis*, 40:2, pp. 158-165.

In an attempt to apprehend the reality of the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam this thesis looks at conversion because this is where the convert's journey begins. Thus, the thesis follows what Oliver Roy[85] calls the horizontal approach to the process of radicalisation based on the analysis of individual biographies and trajectories of people arguing that we should study radicalisation at the individual level. Sadly, in spite of an abundance of scholarship, existing models and conceptualisations of conversions are not applicable in the case of European converts to Islam. It is necessary to clear a path through the theoretical maze and briefly discuss various conversion theories looking at paradigms, types and researchers' perspectives. This way we can analyse what the literature sees and hopes to understand and explain when examining religious conversions and what it is blind to, what aspects of religious conversion pass by unnoticed or ignored.

In the first place, the majority of studies refer to conversion to and within Christianity, new religious movements and/or deviant cults.[86] Converts might constitute a small portion of a wider populace but treating them as deviants or conceptualising conversion as something odd is not helpful from a social sciences point of view. To date no one has comprehensively and systematically researched conversions to Islam exclusively in security context and the extent of theory in this area has been scarce.[87]

Secondly, the existing research does not take into consideration the differences between denominations; some studies do not even differentiate between conversion to and within the religion and look in the same study sample at those who are "born again" within the same denomination (which, arguably, may also constitute a form of conversion).[88] The majority of the literature does not specify either conceptually or operationally the basic factors pivotal in terms of conversion, being largely descriptive, rarely critical and swaying between the extreme viewpoints of what constitutes conversion, what is its nature, causes and ramifications. It is not evident that only one type of person converts, or that only one set of conditions is conducive towards conversion. The assumption that there is only one path for everyone converting to a religion is not only false, but is also dangerous as there is diversity in conversion that escapes social scientists in their endeavours to categorise and standardise. The

[85] Roy, O. (2008). *Al Qaeda in the West as Youth Movement: The Power of Narrative*, CEPS Policy Brief No. 168.
[86] Parrucci, D. J. (1968) and Stark, R. & Lofland, J. (1965) were investigating the followers of Sun Myung Moon; Broomley D. G.& Shupe, A. D. (1979) examined the Unification Church in Texas; Long T. E. & Hadden, J. K. (1983) as well as Snow, D. A. & Phillips, C. L. (1980) analysed a Buddhist group Nichiren Shoshu active in the US; Gartrell, C. D. & Shannon, Z. K. (1985) focused on the members of the Divine Light Mission while Staples, C. L. & Mauss, A. L. (1987) described active Christians at Washington State University.
[87] As presented in Chapter 1 of this thesis there are only few studies on the subject and all of them are concerned with socio-cultural dimension of the phenomenon.
[88] Heirich, M. (1977). Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories About Religious Conversion. *American Journal of Sociology*, 50, pp. 653-680.

histories of conversion patterns vary from religion to religion and from group to group and the mechanisms typical for one group or religious movement do not necessarily have to be true in the case of another, however abstractly the governing mechanisms are described. All too often the proposed theoretical models are meant to be an answer for a nuanced and sophisticated social reality, whereas as demonstrated below they use convenient but crude measures that ignore the differences between religions and groups. Furthermore, they disregard those processes and factors that are pivotal with actual conversions there is almost no studies on variations in conversion trajectories which could yield important and valuable information as to the differences in membership in religious community.

And finally, theoretical propositions try to generalise but accentuate the wrong variables that supposedly all the converts supposedly have in common. There is an assumption that everyone converts in the same way, that there is one converting route, mechanism, or a master scheme that can be unearthed via learning about the psychological predispositions, backgrounds and behaviours of converts and the ways their conversion processes proceeded. The main reason for that is taking incorrect variables into consideration. Individual factors of economic, social, political or personal nature are going to be invariably different among various individuals. People are independent agents embedded into a social fibre and are a part of a wider social canopy; these dynamics are omitted by ignoring the specific societal context of respective groups of converts. The urge to standardise conversion is a dead end in academic pursuit as literature devoted to conceptualising the dilemmas does so without considering the simple fact that standardising conversion belies the obvious truth that there will be variations not only between religions, cults and sects but also among the places where the conversion occurs and the social groups involved. While other scholars would argue that there are no simple correlations between specific traits or experiences and the end results this thesis places a precedence on typology rather than causal models and explanatory schemata.

Dual dichotomy is the most prevalent feature of conversion literature. Two approaches are evident in the research on conversion – the passive and active paradigms as well as the collectivist and individualist orientation. These dichotomies between the individual and the collective aspects of religious conversion and between enforced and voluntary conversion feed off the assumed exclusiveness infusing majority of the theoretical propositions with the either/or determinism. In short, the scholars are trapped between the Scylla of structure and the Charybdis of agency.

2.3. Passive and Active Paradigms

The active conversion paradigm was introduced by James Richardson[89] as a counterproposition to the old theory built upon the alleged passivity of individuals, deprivation, duress and strain factors. The old paradigm, attempting to explain conversion pointed to a sudden, dramatic experience, highly emotional and mystical, induced by an inexplicable external force, individualised to such an extent that it was truly understandable only for the convert him/herself. This single event transformed the whole existence of the individual involved and was followed by breaking with the past, negation of the old self, an immediate change of beliefs and a development of behaviour congruent with the newly adopted beliefs. Conversion thus was portrayed in the literature as a very internal, quite fatalistic experience and assumed a passive subject verging on psychological determinism whereby individuals were pushed by set of factors to convert to a different religion and frequently depend on the assumption of psychological homeostasis.[90] Such determinism is pronounced in works of James William,[91] John Lofland and Rodney Stark,[92] David Snow and Richard Machalek,[93] and, to some extent, Lewis R. Rambo.[94] Alternatively, scholars depicted a helpless individual driven into the arms of religious group by "brainwashing" where groups mould new members through manipulation.[95] Not only does the passive formulation of conversion not recognise the subjective nature of conversion,[96] but it also assumes supremacy of forces pushing an individual towards conversion, as was described in Zygmunt's model.[97]

The old school conversion style was typically a positive experience usually occurring during adolescence with a subsequent behavioural change based on the negation of the old self. This sudden and dramatic, irrational or indeed magical occurrence involving powerful, external and impersonal force, which usually concentrated on a single event involving a rapid change between two static states, was subsequently replaced by a new paradigm of religious conversion characterised by volition, autonomy, the search of meaning and purpose through multiple conversions. These, though not instantaneous but more gradual and continuous, were also based on rational calculations of costs and benefits as well as

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[89] Richardson, J. T. (1985). The Active vs. Passive Convert: Paradigm Conflict in Conversion/Recruitment Research. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 24, pp. 119-236.
[90] Kilbourne, B. & Richardson, J. T. (1989). Paradigm Conflict, Types of Conversion, and Conversion Theories. *Sociological Analysis*, 50:1, pp. 1-21.
[91] Wiliam, J. (1958). *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: New American Library.
[92] Lofland, J. & Stark, R. (1965).Becoming a World-saver: A Theory of Religious Conversion.*American Sociological Review*, 30, pp. 862-874.
[93] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1983). *Op.cit, pp. 259-289.*; Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1984). *Op.cit*., pp. 167-190.
[94] Rambo, L. R. (1993). *Understanding Religious Conversion*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
[95] Straus, R. A. (1979). *Op.cit*., pp.158-165.
[96] Staples, C. L. & Mauss, A. L. (1987). Conversion or Commitment? A Reassessment of the Snow and Machalek Approach to the Study of Conversion, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 26, pp. 133-147.
[97] Zygmunt, J. F. (1972). When Prophecies Fail. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 16:2, pp. 245-268.; Long T. E. & Hadden, J. K. (1983). Religious Conversion and the Concept of Socialization: Integrating the Brainwashing and Drift Models. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 22:1, pp. 1-14.

negotiations between the individual and the group with possible but not implicit behavioural change.[98] The new, active, paradigm is therefore oriented more toward agency and emphasises an active subject seeking religious meaning in the process of negotiating definitions of the self. Here the individual strives to independently achieve a self-transformation through individual studies interacting with others constituting a religious collectivity. Consequently, scholars like Straus[99] asked how ordinary individuals became seekers and thus a new category of *religious seekers* was introduced. This category pertains to individuals actively searching for religious answers to their problems by reading religious literature, searching the Internet, attending lectures, taking classes, participating in meetings and courses and joining, usually for a short time, various religious groups. The new theories of conversion[100] therefore suggest a broader picture stipulating that conversion should be viewed as a part of a religious activity cycle as an experiment with alternative ways of living in a career approach.

2.4. Collectivist and Individualist Approaches

While the passive vs. active paradigm war was fought exclusively in a personal sphere, the collective vs. individual approaches clashed on an entirely different battleground. While the proponents of passivity like Snow and Machalek[101] described conversion in terms of *what happens to* a person, instead of looking at *what happens with* a person, a more active approach was exhibited by Staples and Mauss among others.[102] Both active and passive opposites however, overemphasised the individual ignoring the wide variety of other factors. Therefore, as the theory developed, the original perimeter restricted solely to a single person was enriched by a collective- understood as a product of social acts of the participants of the group interacting with the convert.

More active approaches stipulate that in the case of seekers personal traits take precedence over social networks, whereas more passive conversion theories argue that psychological factors are of secondary importance.[103] Whereas the individual approach seeks a unique social type of a convert, the collective perspective often follows the traces of social and environmental determinism, where in a broad perspective the individual is considered a pawn at the mercy of an either benevolent or

[98] Kilbourne, B. & Richardson, J. T. (1989). *Op.cit*., pp.1-21.
[99] Straus, R. A. (1979). *Op.cit*., pp. 158-165.
[100] Gooren, H. (2007). *Op.cit*., pp. 337-353.
[101] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1983). The Convert as a Social Type. In R. Collins (Ed.), *Sociological Theory*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 259-89.
[102] Staples, C. L. &Mauss, A. L. (1987). *Op.cit*., pp. 133-147.
[103] Gooren, H. (2007). O*p.cit.,* pp. 337-353.

malevolent social environment that pushes and pulls him into conversion. The collectivist explanations emerge when conversion is attributed to the influence of social networks and institutional pressures and the primary responsibility is placed at the collective forces. According to this logic, converts presumably bounce "like billiard balls of the social structures striking them."[104] Such a view is clearly visible in works of Heirich,[105] for whom immediate personal influences supersede the individual's own characteristics which become a relevant factor only after entering the seekership mode, that is when the individual internalises the group normative system drifting like a flotsam towards given religious community.[106] Conversely, the individualist paradigm usually attributes the personal psycho-sociological situation to the individual deficiencies and inadequacies in detachment to the outer environment.

Analyses which focus on the structure[107] and favour a passivist approach point to two genres of conditions: predisposing conditions, that is background factors and situational contingencies that lead to successful conversion of a "predisposed" person. Stark and Lofland's motivational model of conversion starts with tension, strain, frustration, and deprivation, suggesting that only unhappy people convert and that only this despondency gives them the disposition to act. Their "funnel" sequence hinges on religious problem-solving perspective. This need to find solutions in religious context leads to seekership - an active pursuit of self-transformation. The individual espousing a try-it-out attitude is searching for a satisfactory religious system, going through various churches and groups and comparing alternative religious views. Then the future convert, according to Lofland and Stark, reaches a turning point and is ready to embrace new religiosity. This is possibly due to affective bonds which serve as a link bridging the gap between being exposed to a message and accepting it as true. Integration to a group goes hand in hand with severing ties with the outer environment while being at the same exposed to an intense socialisation within the group. However, Lofland and Stark investigated conversion to a deviant perspective (i.e. a cult or a sect) and thus their model is not applicable in case of converts to Islam which is one of world's major religions. The majority of individuals they interviewed were so unintegrated into society that, as the researchers admitted, they could "fall out unnoticed" by the mainstream. A false impression is created that only people with grievances convert and that only social atoms become religious seekers as conversion settings vary in social support, specific kinds of interactions, numbers of people involved, normative pressures, organisational structure of the community and its size and cohesion, continuity with other socialisation experiences, personal religiosity, cultural aspects and so on.

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[104] Kilbourne, B. & Richardson, J. T. (1989). *Op.cit.*, p.11.
[105] Heirich, M. (1977).*Op.cit.*, p. 669.
[106] Long T. E. & Hadden, J. K. (1983). *Op.cit.*; Long T. E. & Hadden, J. K. (1985). A Reconception of Socialization. *Sociological Theory,* 3:1, pp. 39-49.
[107] Lofland, J. & Stark, R. (1965). *Op.cit.*, pp. 862-874.

Causes for conversions, be them predisposing or situational, were even referred to as the factors that render particular individuals susceptible towards conversion[108] following the Marxist conceptualisation of religion as an opiate for the masses and suggest that religiosity can be contracted like an influenza[109] and can be fully understood in terms of general psycho-sociological processes that can be observed and described. Among the variety of indicators for each of the propositions expounded in the literature as a cause of religious conversion, three clusters can be distinguished.

In the first group[110] are all the psychological factors which make conversion a response to tension and stress including the predisposing personality traits and cognitive orientations: marital difficulties, bereavement, financial strains that shake the certitude and take away the feeling of security, pressures and other tensions, which implies that conversion is a side effect of duress.

The second cluster comprises predisposing social attributes, i.e. situational factors and socialisation circumstances that "leave one ripe for the plucking". A number of studies presented in this thesis portray converts as young, in their twenties and thirties, middle class, educated, frequently from a stable environments indicating that it is not only the disgruntled, marginalised, alienated and socially deprived, unhappy and materially dispossessed people that seek refuge in religion. There are many possible sparks that induce the religious conversions and while tension might be at the heart of some conversion trajectories and might prompt religious seeking but conversions are not always built upon a purely negative experience. Stress and other strain-related factors are far too often used to explain conversions even though they at times precede religious seeking and transformation. Although Snow and Machalek observe[111] that being young, single and free from occupational ties and social attachments, as a stereotypical convert would be, makes it indeed easier and contributes towards structural availability, nevertheless conversion catalysts, though recurrent are varied, and such assumptions decolourise the rich picture of a conversion phenomenon. In fact, this avenue of research often leads to stereotyping a convert and denying the possibility that potentially everyone can convert. It is impossible to come up with an ultimate list of reasons for converting; identity crises and quests for finding answers to existential questions are but a tiny portion of these, sometimes a blurred array of several factors may amalgamate into something described as "the right time to do it".

[108] Dawson, L. L. (2010). The Study of New Religious Movements and the Radicalization of Home-grown Terrorists: Opening a Dialogue. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 21:1, pp. 1-21.
[109] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1984). *Op.cit.*, pp. 167-190.
[110] Heirich, M. (1977). *Op.cit.,* p. 662.
[111] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1984). *Op.cit.*, p. 182.

The final, third tier, is made up of social interactions and immediate social influences, patterns of interpersonal bonds and the processes of encapsulation "whereby inputs from others become so mutually consistent and reinforcing that one begins to see things through the other's eyes."[112] Emphasis on the interpersonal bonds between members and potential recruits as an essential element of conversion, in a complementary approach to the one focusing on the congruence between the ideology of a group and deprivation of those who join, is a prominent feature of Stark and Bainbridge's[113] theory. Other propositions emphasise the situational context of identity transformation; such a perspective is visible in the works of Long and Hadden,[114] who stress that conversion trajectories are shaped by the context of life problems that influence the direction of identity transformation, which ties with Toch's[115] theory linking conversion with social movements and relating it to socialisation processes.

If one were to attribute conversion entirely to predisposing effects of personality traits one would have to concede that the causes of conversion reside entirely within the psyche of an individual impervious to any social or situational influences. This perhaps prompted some scholars[116] to treat the individual as a rational actor experimenting with conversion and pragmatically calculating the benefits of one religion over the other which creates an impression of a completely free social atom able to choose from any religious group. From a rational choice theory perspective conversion is conceived simply as the outcome of evaluating the social and cognitive benefits resulting from converting relative to non-converting and perceptions of the expected rewards of changing religious affiliation relative to remaining within current denomination.[117] On the other end of the spectrum, explanations involving the confluence of a range of elements and proposing causal theoretical constructs argue that friendship and kinship networks provide the most influential and commonly used avenues for the dissemination of religion. Although complete loners are unlikely to convert, it has not been proved that social networks dynamics can be held accountable for the social-psychological transformation implied by the most conceptions of conversions especially in the absence of active seeking. There is however no doubt that positive, interpersonal ties with the group members function as a bridge and increase the credibility of appeal and, particularly in the case of non-seekers, can be a crucial element in the interaction process.

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[112] Heirich, M. (1977). *Op.cit.*, p. 656.
[113] Stark, R. & Bainbridge, W. S. (1980). Towards a Theory of Religion: Religious Commitment. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 19:2, pp. 114-128.
[114] Long T. E. & Hadden, J. K. (1983). *Op.cit.*, pp. 39-49.
[115] Toch, H. (1965). *The Social Psychology of Social Movements*. New York, N.Y.: Bobbs-Merrill.
[116] Finke, R. & Stark, R. (1998). Religious Choice and Competition. *American Sociological Review*, 63:5, pp. 761-766.
[117] Gartrell, C. D. & Shannon, Z. K. (1985). Contacts, Cognitions, Conversion: A Rational Choice Approach. *Review of Religious Research*, 27:1, pp. 32-48.

In fact Kilbourne and Richardson believe that it is best to conceptualise conversion as a form of socialization: "*The process by which individuals learn the appropriate roles, norms and status assignments of a group…and they acquire a new social identity(s) based upon their group membership or group affiliation (present or absent).*"[118] What distinguishes conversion, however, from other forms of socialization is the focal emphasis on self-change (e.g. change of world view) in a religious or quasi-religious setting and the kind of social audience reaction to that self-change.[119] In Lofland and Stark's view if the interpersonal bonds are not present, the newcomers failed to join. Their research was conducted, however, in a fringe group of Moonies, and not within one of the three main Abrahamic faiths. Conversion from Christianity to Islam in Europe is perceived as a conversion between two mainstream, socially approved alternatives as opposed to conversion from a traditional denomination to a new religious movement, the perception of Islam as something unknown, strange, somewhat imported and non-European, obscured and devalued, demonised in the media. Thus the hypothesis that people are drawn through strong interpersonal bonds and convert *for the person* not *for the religion* understood as a set of beliefs, institutions and social networks must be taken with caution in case of converts to Islam. Furthermore, social influence was established[120] to statistically account for only half of the cases of conversion and so one must look at other sources of impact. Social influences have the greatest impact on people who have already embarked upon a religious quest, even more than psychological condition or prior socialisation. Even though the impact of available social networks is striking, to "produce a change of heart,"[121] there are other factors that may account for the path that conversion takes within a population. Some religious seekers interact with the environment and develop affective ties, while others are more individual in their journey towards converting; the transformation is sometimes creative and sometimes individuals convert in spite of the absence of commonly conceded structural "pressures" such as bonds with group members. The thesis of recruitment through pre-existing social networks is a common one. However it entirely ignores the individual agency of a convert. What is more, it cannot be taken for granted that there is an orientation that predisposes someone to change religious affiliation. Finally, an active agent will always be constrained by structural factors of culture, society and the available religious networks as well as by individual predispositions. Consequently, elimination of these constraining factors is as limited and superficial as the conceptualisation of the social network as a kind of morass bogging the religious seekers down.

[118] Kilbourne, B. & Richardson, J. T. (1989). *Op.cit.,* p. 15.
[119] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[120] Heirich, M. (1977).*Op.cit*., p. 663.
[121] *Ibid.*, p. 673.

Lofland and Skonovd[122] attempted a different approach and their study was aimed at isolating "conversion motifs", i.e. key orientations, and using five independent variables proposed six types of conversion: intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalistic and coercive. Accepted criteria looked in particular at the differences in the social organisational aspects of the process: the degree of social pressure, temporal duration of the process, level of affective arousal and content as well as belief-participation sequence. The results suggest that various conversion types dominate at various times but that the experimental and intellectual variants are on the rise nowadays and tend to occur more often. Nevertheless, it needs to be underlined that Lofland and Skonovd's model ignores the steady religious element of conversion experience which cannot be neglected as, regardless of the social and psychological forces driving an individual, conversion is in the first place a religious phenomenon. It is not to say that purely religious terminology and factors describe the process better, but only that these elements cannot be omitted when discussing conversion. Contrary to motifs delineated by Lofland and Skonovd, religiosity is not always expressed in brief, mystical moments, nor is it exclusively attached to the emotional sphere. Interestingly, Lofland and Skonovd's model was tested on 70 British-born converts to Islam in a study conducted by Ali Köse and Kate Miriam Loewenthal[123] who concluded that the most prevalent motifs for conversion was an intellectual, experimental and affectional one and indicated the normative convert to be a single male (however their sample consisted of 50 men and only 20 women what might be a reason for the above stipulation).

Another valuable typology endeavour was undertaken by Harms[124] who distinguished three types of conversion: "give up" conversion when an individual is fed up with their hitherto life or dissatisfaction with their religious affiliation; "come in" conversion is a conformity act when an individual converts for the sake of group homogeneity (when a person lives for a very long time among people having different religious affiliation and converts for the sake of harmonious family relations or other social reasons) and finally, the third trajectory of a conversion process was called by Harms a "turning" conversion induced by a meeting with a representative of the religion (follower, induced by a personal relation or power of the personality) or a piece of propaganda (study of the sacred writings or reading promotional literature like books, leaflets or internet sources). While typologies like these are not flawless, e.g. they ignore instrumental conversions, they aspire to systematise the personal, social, institutional, cultural and contingency factors. Simultaneously acknowledging their idiosyncrasies and

[122] Lofland, J. & Skonovd, N., *Op.cit.*, pp. 373-385.
[123] Köse, A. & Loewenthal, K. M. (2000). Conversion Motifs Among British Converts to Islam. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 10:2, pp. 101-110.
[124] Harms, E. (1962). *Op.cit.*, pp. 122-134.

interconnectedness, more process oriented and stage-sequential models, such as Rambo's[125] try to prioritise them relying on the false assumption that everyone converts in the same way, which is one of the main argument this Chapter argues against. Just like there is no "ideal convert", similarly, no "ideal conversion" exists and the convergences in individual trajectories need to be taken into account and systematised if a theory is to be developed.

2.5. The Security Gap

The main bulk of the scholarly works discussed above was undertaken by sociologists; in the security studies only one work looked at the theories of conversion. Dawson employed the model of deviancy[126] to explain the parallels between converting and joining *jihadi* groups. Terrorists, Dawson concluded, just like converts to a deviant (cult or sect) perspective, are more likely to have fewer and weaker social ties and these almost non-existent social attachments result in lower stakes in conformity, which makes them more available for recruitment to groups that are not mainstream or remain in conflict/at odds with the mainstream culture. These isolated social atoms, geographically mobile individuals, often uprooted migrants and those who left home and having moved to new social environment did not manage to establish new ties or were in the process of doing so and the members of the religious movement happened to be their new anchor and helm. This perspective again cannot be applied to European converts to Islam as among them in addition to young, itinerant and penurious, one will find well established individuals, happy with their personal and professional lives, who never moved away from home which clearly indicates that there must have been other factors responsible for conversion or that the process was governed by different mechanisms. Although there is a certain degree of plausibility in Dawson's observations, such conceptualisation is again quite useless from the perspective of converts to Islam as not all the converts will join *jihadi* networks. Also, the supposed "*struggle to find themselves against the backdrop of tension between their personal life and their family and the 'realities' of the world*" is as vague a variable as it is simplistic and proves that alongside the majority of other models, Dawson was not able to reconcile the individual and the communal element of conversion process. Dawson claims to echo to some extent Jerrold Post's[127] "bred to the bone" theory, suggesting that the new religious identity contradicts inherited paternal identity and expectations and in this way provides the convert with the basis to forge their own, distinct identity, new by the token of

[125] Rambo, L. R. (1993). *Op.cit.*
[126] Dawson, L. L. (2010). *Op.cit.*, pp. 1-21.
[127] Post, J. M. (2005). When Hatred is Bred in the Bone: Psycho-cultural Foundations of Contemporary Terrorism. *Political Psychology*, 26:4, pp. 615-636.

being so different. My research proves that converts to Islam have religious, non-religious and anti-religious parents and rarely do they build their own religiosity in direct opposition to parental orientation. Simultaneously, the role of parents differs: some are actively participating in their child's religious quest and come to participate in *shahada*, others are indifferent to the whole process, and there are also those who disown their progeny and refuse to see them even on their deathbed.[128] Furthermore, claims that religious groups give a protective environment or a social cocoon indispensable to develop and nurture the new "true self" and guaranteeing "an environment suffuse with a larger sense of purpose" as a warrant of "fulfilment of the social and moral ideas" again erroneously places moral deprivation and a lack of sense of purpose at the very core of conversion process.

Dawson fails to see that the process of joining a given group does not always involve negotiation and an exchange of interests and although undoubtedly conversion is undoubtedly a social process, Dawson misapprehends the individual seekership with social stimulants. The generalisation that people seek like-minded individuals has no grounding in the real world. The quality of relations observed within the group often constitutes an incentive to join: "*I wanted to have a family like those Muslims had*" people would tell me during interviews.[129] Also those bonds formed between members and potential recruits are potentially important, nonetheless claiming that "positive personal experiences are crucial for conversion" Dawson ignores a group of people whose main focus is not on the communal but on the individual aspect of religiosity. Furthermore, she eliminates the difference between someone who has converted because they had to, e.g. having a Muslim spouse, and someone who was attracted by the group's closeness, welcoming warmth and support network. She claims though, quite rightly, that the significance of these relationships is not understood adequately and that the patterns of interaction need to be interpreted properly in order to identify the mechanism that cements the turn to conversion. Dawson's main claim that those who join *jihadi* groups resemble in some aspects individuals converting to new religious movements contains a certain leeway: expressed in the claim that the choice to join is "shrouded in an element of mystery" alluding to the mystical nature of the whole process. Sadly "mystical" has the useful role of a storage room to deal with inconvenient factors and to keep everything that the theory cannot account for in a safe place.

Believing that converts are anything but a marginal phenomenon in *jihadi* networks, Oliver Roy's writings contributed greatly to our understanding of violent radicalisation and engagement in

[128] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research diary. Glasgow, UK. May 27, 2009.
[129] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research diary. Glasgow, UK. July 19, 2009.

terrorist activity in the light of conversion.[130] His seminal work on Globalised Islam[131] concentrates on converts as the ultimate product of religious deterritorialisation and deculturation. In spite of being extremely perceptive, Roy's analysis is nonetheless a very limited one as involvement in *jihadi* networks is the only form of radicalisation he considers. Although Roy recognises the possibility of changing religious affiliation for practical reasons, his study remains limited in its scope as, though he acknowledges a variety of causes for conversion, he examines only one type of changing one's denomination, a *protest conversion*. On this basis Roy distinguishes four categories of converts: political rebels, religious nomads, former drug addicts and finally Blacks, Latinos and persons of mixed race. Even though there are minor differences among these groups, they are all marked by the common denominator of rebellious nature: "*To convert to Islam today is a way for a European rebel to find a cause; it has little to do with theology*" observes Roy.[132] Converts are thus portrayed as revolutionaries who are not involved in actual conflicts and instead feed off the imaginary perception of dissent. Roy suggests that there are two main routes for European converts: a personal path to religious illumination and social band-wagonning, i.e. "following Muslim buddies"[133] and usually converting under the influence of a strong leader.

To convert for Roy is thus to revolt against the current socio-economic system and such an opposition is always political in character. Thus not only is there nothing distinct in the mechanism of conversion which becomes just another form of contention but also the uniqueness of converts as a social group is denied. Roy compares the dynamics for conversion to the religious development of new-born second generation Muslims insisting that both groups differ by only minor variations. Furthermore, when reading Roy's book, which undoubtedly belongs to one of the most important treaties on contemporary Islam, one might get the impression that only social cripples convert or, at least that the converts seem to come from the lower echelons of society or are connected with these via social networks. While indeed converts who are directly engaged in terrorist activities will have several connections with the social outskirts that belong to the same radical milieu, others, scattered across all social strata, radicalised or not will just as often, not have these connections. Roy's purely tautological reasoning is rooted in parochialism of his typology that could have been avoided if other kinds of converts and conversions were investigated in his study. The conceptual side of the analysis is particularly weak as conversion is never defined, causes and stage of the conversion process are not identified and no indication as to the mechanism under which radicalisation progresses is provided.

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[130] Roy, O. (2008). Al-Qaeda: A True Global Movement. In R. Coolsaet (Ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 317-19.
[131] Roy, O. (2004). *Globalised Islam: The Search for the New Ummah*. New York: Columbia University Press.
[132] Roy, O. (2008). *Al Qaeda in the West as Youth Movement: The Power of Narrative*, CEPS Policy Brief No. 168.
[133] *Ibid*.

Beside converts who base their religious re-affiliation on the will to actively oppose "US imperialism," conversions for practical reasons are mentioned briefly, while undoubtedly Roy's "few exceptions" list could be further expanded. A priori assumptions about "rebels" are likely to founder when confronted with empirical data. The narratives are far from being self-evident and must be analysed in an appropriate context, otherwise the exercise of labelling converts as "rebels" or "troubled individuals" reminds one of a "join the dots" game where, from scattered points one can draw whichever shape they desire. Indubitably, Roy's account of European converts to Islam is of unparalleled importance as the only study providing an initial analysis of their violent radicalisation and tackling the issue of security ramifications. Nevertheless it remains incomplete and needs to be taken further.

2.6. The Four Elements

Religious conversion cuts across the theories and into the imaginary lines created by man, jutting up through carefully constructed models and without regard for human boundaries. The two polarities described above do not enfeeble all the theoretical discussions regarding religious conversions but existing models do not provide answers as to how to unite the four crucial elements of conversion experience: individual, collective, material and spiritual into a single model.

The great majority of research on conversion phenomenon discuss a situation where an individual meets religion purely in a material sense and the eschatological aspects are entirely absent in the analyses and although it is not always the spiritual sphere of religiosity that prompt conversion, in some instances conversion indeed is a story of an individual's meeting with God. On the one hand, the field is so dominated by rational approach that strictly religious elements were belittled, especially that the mystical dimension of conversion escapes the tools of social sciences. On the other hand, while researchers tend to think about conversions metaphorically and the mystical aspect remains untouched or deemed irrelevant. Typical social science bias reduces religion to social and cultural or psychological factors ignoring the fervent zeal of genuine beliefs. This highly reductionist view, undermining the mystical aspect of religion as a source of spiritual peace and conversion as seeking of meaning and transcendence might perhaps be a consequence of rationalisation so typical for sciences, in the very nature of the sciences is the need to rationalise all social phenomena and therefore they strip the religious down to a set of convictions, a convention or purely social affair.

Also with respect to converts being potential terrorist threat it is essential to investigate the religious element, not because Islam is inherently bad or inherently good (it is neither), but because even though very often radicalisation has little to do with religiosity and radical theology (Salafism does not necessitate violence), religion is still powerfully interweaved into the narrative which attracted the radicalised individual.[134] Whereas the sphere of the inner life tends to be ignored, it must be emphasized that analyses conducted only on the rational level cannot do justice and are not able to portray the whole depth or capture the much wider scope of conversion. Paying attention to the material plane only diminishes the spiritual, and no matter how nuanced our understanding of the material is, ignoring the spiritual will seriously impede any analysis. Similarly, it is wrong to ask only "*what does this faith promise and to whom such promises most appeal*"[135] because it is not always the faith (the spiritual) but sometimes a more mundane religion (material) and in the second place, various things in the same religious group will appeal to various individuals, conversely, two similar people may choose different religious groupings, or someone may convert and someone might not.

Conversion studies that concentrate on innate human characteristics fail to account for the societal factors of conversion which essentially is an interactive and dynamic process. Similarly, investigations on the role of social environment in initiating and fostering conversions, not only produce contradictory findings, but also patently negate individual agency. Conversely, analyses based solely on the notion of innate drives fail to recognise the social and structural aspects of conversion although to conceive the individual as separate from the group is to ignore the normative and discursive processes accompanying the conversion experience. By analogy, research emphasizing the palpable elements of conversion ignores the more imponderable dimension of religious experience, while our understanding of conversion simply cannot be based on instrumental rationality, but must acknowledge and situate the mystical agent appropriately. Hence, analyses stretched between the two poles of individual and collective take either one or the other into consideration while caught in the old agency/structure dilemma, whereas comprehensive theoretical proposition needs to take both into consideration in order to provide insightful answers as to how on the crossroads of life this particular way to God was chosen when establishing new religious identity. The use of available social networks and social encapsulation enhances conversion for those opened towards seekership but does not account for those who go through various religions and it cannot explain the differences in conversion trajectories. The relationship between the individual and his socio-cultural environment cannot be analysed on an either/or basis since every human being as a unique individual reacts differently to their environment

[134] Roy, O. (2008). *Al Qaeda in the West as Youth Movement: The Power of Narrative*, CEPS Policy Brief No. 168.
[135] Stark, R. & Bainbridge, W. S. (1980). Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects. American Journal of Sociology, 85:6, p. 1176.

and exhibits different behaviours in responding to conversion, simultaneously having a different approach towards religion in general. The truth that religious conversion is not a phenomenon that can occur independently of human experience[136] conditions the process of conversion. The understanding of its roots and governing mechanisms that cannot be understood apart from those points of reference that are pivotal from convert's perspective. Important role of convert's normative perspective and a frame of reference in understanding conversion experience makes it impossible to rely solely on the collectivist explanations. The collective levels of behaviours are treated as deriving from such individual action, but also becoming a prime determinant of the contexts upon whose basis that action is constructed. Thus, there is no contradiction between "analysis from the perspective of the collective and of the individual"[137] as they are complementary.[138]

A theory endeavouring to systematically attend to the subjective experiences of a convert in a holistic and qualitative manner needs to recognise both the individual subject and the structural conditions, the mystical religious experience and the more prosaic denominational network. Arguing that distinguishing the trajectories of converting sharpens our understanding of the phenomenon of conversion, my typology adduces conversion paths but is not meant to delineate steps, phases or sequences within each of the quadrants. An analytical framework that takes into consideration that religion is both a safety network of institutionalised practices as well as a spiritual realm of mystical experiences on the one hand, and that each individual possesses unique personal characteristics and traits while at the same time, being a member of a wider social network brings together in a clear manner the wholeness of conversion experience.

A typology is nothing other than an attempt to capture the fleeting temporal experience of the conversion process in a systematic way that broadens the initial general perspective. It does not account for all the aspects of a conversion experience and thus in future new schemes could perhaps be developed rendering this one obsolete. We need to ask under what conditions a person comes to share the new religious worldview, as not all the conversions are the same. It would be quite naive to assume that all conversions follow the same model, or even to suppose that only one kind of people convert to the same religious group. Discrepancies will always exist, nevertheless there is a possibility of systematic treatment that will avoid simplifications and essentialisation but only if all four aforementioned elements are considered. Furthermore the following proposition takes into consideration

[136] Kilbourne, B. & Richardson, J. T. (1989). *Op.cit.*, pp. 1-21.
[137] Straus, R. A. (1979). *Op.cit.*, p. 158.
[138] Kilbourne, B. & Richardson, J. T. (1989). O*p.cit.*, p. 10.

contextual restrictions. I do not claim that it will be applicable to other religious movements or other groups as my study is focusing on European converts to Islam only.

2.7. Metatheoretical Matrix

It is not the purpose of this study to determine the major and decisive factors of conversion, nevertheless it is crucial to know them, both those conscious and those remaining silent in the background as they provide a frame and direction for the conversion trajectory. If not all the conversions are the same, then by the same token, their implications and repercussions will differ. Neither is this thesis interested in tracing the origins of seeking or answering why a given individual converted whereas another did not. The sole aim is to point to the differences in conditions under which the conversion took place and the divergence of factors at play, how the grounds of meaning and the realms of identity retain "ontologically true status."[139] Finally, this study is not designed to explain why Islam proved attractive and successful against the other alternatives; it is not meant to determine which factors determine and guarantee the outcome or to indicate necessary conditions. It is fully acknowledged that the factors described could be applied equally to many other life choices not only the change of religious affiliation. This study is not to ponder over such questions, although they indubitably need to be looked at. The thesis' goal is to examine what the conversion's impact is, in the variance of converting trajectory, on security.

The personal characteristics of the converts are not assumed here as they are to a large extent deemed irrelevant. This relatively weak conceptualisation of a convert is rooted in the strong belief of the author that every person is a potential convert; it is within the rights and capabilities of every individual in Europe to change their religious affiliation. The imagery of human actors constructing and managing their lives within the context of those social, phenomenological and empirical situations comprising their environment must therefore be as inclusive as possible. The popular theory of brainwashing and coercive conversion is non-existent among European converts to Islam and these theoretical explanations of submission to powerful manipulation and group forces are not present and therefore cannot be used to explain the phenomenon of European New Muslims.

[139] Straus, R. A. (1979). *Op.cit., p.* 159.

Roger Straus aptly observed that "*Religious conversion is a post factum added analytical label appropriated for a wide range of phenomena.*"[140] The main problem with conversion is that the researcher is compelled to operate at some level of inescapable abstraction and therefore one will never be able to say precisely what religious conversion is, even though one looks at human interactants through their social acts. The main concern of my model is to take into consideration the contextual specificity of a carefully defined social group and to portray the full range of the phenomenon of religious conversion indicated by other models, transcending their limitations by incorporating the aforementioned factors into a single model of conversion that can be applied to European converts to Islam.

The framework of the study underpins empirical investigations and it incorporates subjective utilities recognising the diversity of conversion experience as well as partially conflicting rationales and goals of changing one's religious denomination which may range from spiritual to ideological and from social to instrumental. Since conversion is the meeting point between an individual and religion, the model thus takes the human aspect in their actual behaviour either involving the individual self or other social actors open to external social forces on the one hand and the approach to the religious element on the other. This approach casts an invaluable light upon the dynamic relationship between social conditions and religious orientation in the identity transformation called religious conversion. These two crucial factors are complementary, not antagonistic, and stretching the analysis fully between the two poles of individual versus collective aspects of conversion captures the multiplicity of the facets of the conversion experience without creating a faulty impression that it is either one or the other aspect, but rather a dynamically interacting and interwoven whole. This is not to say that conversion is a random result of idiosyncratic processes which are impossible to succumb to theoretical generalisation or be described in terms amenable to distinguishing causal mechanisms, but merely to underline that this study does not aspire to label the stages of conversion or their sequence but to contribute to careful reconsideration of existing conceptualisations of conversion in the case of European converts to Islam and to specify the causal relationships responsible for converting and to emphasize their different ramifications.

[140] Straus, R. A. (1979). *Op.cit.*, p. 162.

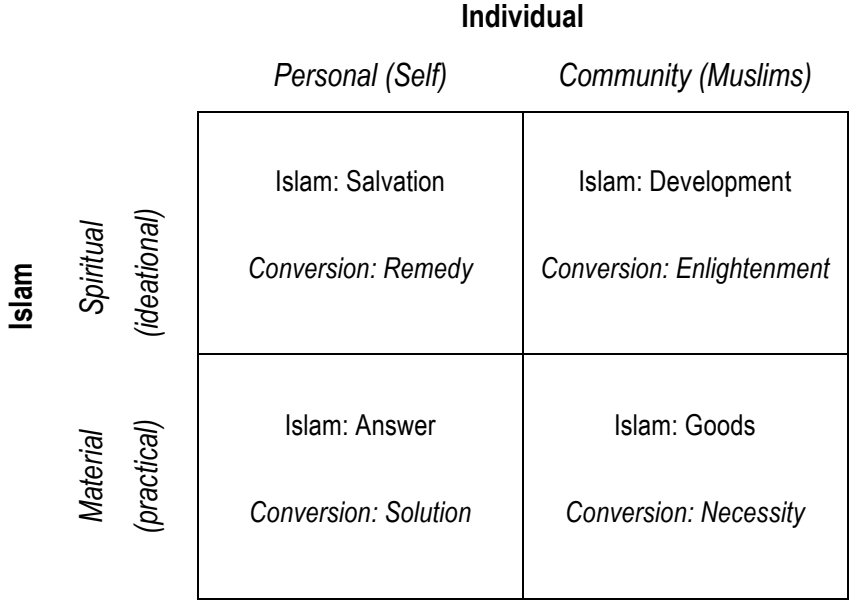

Figure 1.The Conversion Trajectories.

Conversion in the sense of accepting a new religion does not equal *shahada* as it usually takes place before the public declaration. *Shahada* is only the formalisation and public statement in front of the community (its literal meaning is "to witness"). On the other hand, by conversion a person does not become a Muslim, it is rather the *new* Muslim they become: This, aside from the embryo of the new "me", involves a reaction from the new "us" going arm in arm with the reaction from the new "them". The impact of conversion transcends negotiations with both sides and also involves an internal re-evaluation of personal notions that must change with the changed religion. One's views on personal life, on social interactions, and finally, on politics are not detached or unaffected. In this sense, the whole importance of conversion explains the fact that in reality the process of becoming a Muslim starts, not finishes with the *shahada*. Like crossing the Rubicon, conversion epitomises not just belonging to a group, but a free, and conscious decision of existential change. As opposed to groups we belong to by right of birth as e.g. right handed people, being a convert means reaching out; active taking, not merely passive receiving. The broad framework of four following trajectories delineates a diverse landscape that influences and shapes the subsequent post-conversion life by encompassing the differing characteristics of conversion experience. The framework will afford insight into the later religious career of a convert thus providing a foundation for a more informed assessment of their potential security threat.

2.7.1. Islam as Goods, Conversion as Necessity

Scholars often fall prey to an erroneous belief that conversion must be meaningful in identity terms. The fallacy of profundity does not take into consideration the exclusively material aspect of religion in an individual dimension as well as in a communal one when it resembles more an adherence to social criteria and maintenance of outward appearances, without the necessary transformation of identity, behaviour and social attachments. While in some conversion trajectories the concept of weak ideological alignments is disputable, the question of identity is not an issue in the case of this conversion type. Usually, there is nothing to be uprooted from since belonging to former denomination is purely formal and is not combined with practice. Simultaneously the alignment remains equally weak when it comes to new religion. Conversion as Necessity signifies the change in religious affiliation in those cases that are undertaken for purely practical reasons and religion is perceived as nothing more than means to an end, as goods that must be acquired. The majority of these conversions concern an individual (most often female) whose spouse is Muslim and who converts for the sake of community. In this case it is possible to have a change in the nominal aspect of religion, the official affiliation, but it does not necessarily involve any significant change at the ideational level. This may or may not come later for such a convert; initially, however, conversion is viewed as a simple necessity. Alternatively, for instance in prison settings, such a conversion may take place to gain a higher social standing in the community or for the pragmatic reason of getting better food since *halal* food is perceived by inmates as having superior quality over regular food. Such was the case of Steve, who told me:

> "I just say to the officers: I want to become Muslim and want the paperwork. And they just get you diet forms. Normal prisoners will get processed meat. On the Muslim diet you get proper meat." Asked if there were not problems, Steve shrugged: "There are so many things in prison you are entitled to...you are entitled to your religion. If they try to mess with your religion you can get your solicitor and sue them."

Steve did not try to deny the purely instrumental treatment of his conversion. "*I still go to chapel. I am a Roman Catholic through and through, through and through. I strongly believe in God, I love Jesus Christ*,"[141] he confessed ardently. Some scholars refer to such instances of conversions as quasi-conversions,[142] it is however important to remember that this conversion trajectory does not exclude later development of a genuine religious conviction.

[141] Steve. Interview by author. Tape recording. HM Prison Glenochil, UK. May 16, 2011.
[142] Parrucci, J. D. (1968). Religious Conversion: A Theory of Deviant Behaviour. *Sociological Analysis*, 29:5, p. 145.

2.7.2. Islam as Development, Conversion as Enlightenment

The conversion as enlightenment trajectory constitutes the classical case of "religious seeking" defined by Wiktorowicz as a process in which an individual finds their current religious views (or lack of thereof) unsatisfactory and inadequate and therefore searches for an appropriate religion to abate existential anxiety.[143] Concrete interactions with others or their representations absorbed via books and other media, attending lectures or other formal group meetings, participating in official religious rituals and less formal interactions with group members especially following social leads through pre-existing or emerging friendships are often instrumental. This type of conversion "includes introspection as well as interaction"[144] and the impulses for engagement in a given religious group however recurrent are nonetheless varied and idiosyncratic and might lead to a selectivist attitude especially when the perceived inconsistency of religious precepts or its limitations lead the potential convert to the conviction that the given denomination is not applicable to an individual's specific situation (pick and choose attitude). Only after exploring alternative identity choices will the final decision be made and thus the *shahada* is seen as a final act of enlightenment, a culminating point in spiritual development.

Regarding the security perspective, it needs to be underlined that religious seeking typical for this trajectory is potentially dangerous as the complexities of Islamic jurisprudence are so complicated that even nominal Muslims born and bred into the religion are very often not knowledgeable enough to discern between competing interpretations, then what about converts who can easily be convinced that a given thing is just and right and truly Islamic? Considering that there is nothing to force a Muslim to follow one rather than the other imam or teaching, how is a convert to ascertain the authenticity of the given interpretation and how can the convert evaluate the credibility of the preacher or group? This is especially true when these conversions take place over a very short period of time and when the convert having had no prior knowledge about Islam acts on a simple impulse which is recognised as a divine manifestation – God's calling. The spiritual aspect of conversion is very pronounced in Enlightenment conversion trajectory. After combing through the alternative choices and possible avenues of spiritual development, "chance encounters, mass media and any other available sources of information, looking for lead to prospective means of help"[145] the future convert is suddenly stopped in their course of searching. The epiphany, the understanding that one is called to become a Muslim, is the only precondition that is sufficient to make the individual to convert, while adhering to a specific "radical"

[143] Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005). *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p. 23.
[144] Cited in Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005). *Op.cit.*, p. 24.
[145] Straus, R. A. (1979). *Op.cit.*, p. 162.

strand is in fact quite accidental and relies to a large extent on chance encounters. Limited knowledge to assess competing perspectives also makes the convert vulnerable to those who prey on newcomers and their "converts' zeal", and seduce them to practice "real" Islam. How are converts to determine what "real" Islam is? Moreover, this is also when the lethality of radical imams comes into full force; these eloquent and charismatic leaders have no problem in winning "the hearts and minds" of European converts who are unable to understand the context and likely to be impressed by individuals who present themselves as respected and well educated Islamic scholars, particularly when they speak Arabic.[146] Such imams, especially when they are converts themselves like Abdul Jabbar van de Ven, who did not hide his deficiencies in knowledge professing that "in the land of the blind, the one-eyed is king,"[147] are an excellent example of this dangerous trend. Even when the convert's knowledge is profound he will credit an imam who is a convert himself with greater credibility since such person understands their predicaments better and is therefore able to respond to the specific needs of new European Muslims. The influence of such imams is profound and can potentially be toxic when opinions espoused by them are radical or contradict mainstream interpretations.

This trajectory is perhaps best represented by David Myatt or David Wulstan Myatt formerly known as Abdul Aziz ibn Myatt, founder and first leader of the British National Socialist Movement, who until the 1990s was involved in neo-Nazi organisations such as Column 88 and Combat 18.[148] Before becoming Muslim, Myatt not only was active in neo-Nazi movements, but in his religious quest, he also studied Taoism, spent time in Buddhist and Christian monasteries, and also explored paganism and the occult societies. Myatt converted to Islam in 1998 and was greatly impressed by the violent Muslim groups with whom he believed to share common enemies, i.e. the capitalist and consumerist West.[149] As a Muslim Myatt was a staunch proponent of jihad and verbally supported Osama bin Laden, condoning the killings of civilians and non-combatants; he also denied the Holocaust.[150] Interestingly, Myatt did not stop his religious quest with Islam and in 2010 he moved away from this religion only to form his own spiritual movement called the Numinous Way.[151]

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[146] The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (2006).*Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Movement in Europe*. London: King's College London, p. 45.

[147] Lofland, J. & Skonovd, N. (1981).Conversion motifs. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 20, pp. 373-385.

[148] Langenohl, A. & Westphal, K. (Eds.).*Comparing and Inter-Relating the European Union and the Russian Federation*. Zentrumfürinternationale Entwicklungs - und Umweltforschung der Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen, November 2006, p.84; Barnett, A. Right here, right now. *The Observer*, February 9, 2003. http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2003/feb/09/society.politics (accessed May 30, 2010).

[149] Michael, G. (2006). *The Enemy of My Enemy: The Alarming Convergence of Militant Islam and the Extreme Right*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, p. 144.

[150] Woolcock, N. & Kennedy, D. What the Neo-Nazi Fanatic Did Next: Switched to Islam. *The Times*, April 24, 2006.

[151] Myatt, D. (2010). *Myngath - Some Recollections of the Wyrdful Life of David Myatt*, Thormynd Press, 2010 [Eleventh revised edition, November 2011, issued as a pdf e-text.]

2.7.3. Islam as Answer, Conversion as Solution

This paradigmatic type is very similar to the intellectual motif distinguished by Lofland and Skonovd[152] and commences with an individual, private investigation of possible avenues of religiosity. In this active model a person embarks on a quest and by reading books, attending lectures, personal reflection and widening their knowledge about religion, but without developing any significant personal attachment to the group members, reaches the decision to convert independently. Often the real, inner conversion is recounted as a private experience, only later followed by a public confession, confirmation and embracement of the new religion. Although the actual moment of conversion takes place in isolation, and is highly privatised with little or no external pressure, it is not nearly as mystical as it was in the case of Enlightenment trajectory. The Conversion as Solution pathway suggests a rather more rational process and the acceptance of theodicy comes somewhat unwillingly (I knew it was true even if I did not want it to be true).[153] A certain "try it out" or "show me what you have got to offer" attitude is noticeable in spite of the privatised character of the conversion experience. *Shahada* takes place in a group setting but outside the group's influence and the personal religious self is the main point of reference when the future convert is looking for the answers to his existential anxieties. This journey of self-transformation is often a complex and difficult pathway over a long period of time that can take up to ten years. Individuals initiate the conversion process but only later do they act like a convert, and changes in identity and behaviour are gradual and may fluctuate.

Sharif's conversion story[154] accentuates well the key characteristics of this trajectory. Having always been religious, Sharif was at the same time disillusioned by his own denomination. He confessed that through reading and research he looked into every major religion in great detail; his search however was conducted without direct engagement with any of the religious groups. The conversion took about four year and it progressed in solitude, social networks did not play any role in it: "*I just decided after, after reading everything.*" The only person Sharif consulted was an imam and he approached him only after the decision about conversion had already been made. Thus, the Conversion as Solution experience in contrast to the previous trajectory is not determined by a social network, but is instead rooted in the inner, individual sphere of the convert's life and from there it resonates outwards:

[152] Lofland, J. & Skonovd, N. (1981). Conversion motifs. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 20, pp. 373-385.
[153] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research Diary. Glasgow, UK. July 15, 2008.
[154] Sharif.Interview by author. Tape recording. HM Prison Edinburgh, UK. February 8, 2011.

"*It has changed my whole life, it has changed the whole way I think about things, I has changed the way I feel about myself, it has changed the way I feel about other people.*"

Conversion as a Solution trajectory reproduces to some degree the conversion as an Enlightenment type due to the highly individualist way of approaching the religious supermarket. What makes this path distinct is the privatised nature of the whole process. The future convert does not comb through various lifestyles and groups in a society and does not follow random encounters and media leads which advocate various lifestyles. Equally, they do not routinize their conversion experience by systematically sampling different groups or multiple conversions. This trajectory is generally based upon phenomenological approach and focuses on the subjective experience of the convert. Affiliative acts in the conversion career come later in time and are less pronounced. Individuals who decide to embark upon the religious journey tend to convert somewhat unwillingly or inadvertently confessing afterwards that "did not think they would" simultaneously they do so without the influence of social relationships. The turning point does not have to be based on strain or tension, the convert might also negotiate with the group the possible ways and forms of participation and commitment and sometimes they do not pay attention to the communal aspect of their new religiosity at all.

2.7.4. Islam as Salvation, Conversion as Remedy

> "I needed to, I needed to get the forgiveness that I was searching for and I could not get it from anywhere else until the imam said to me, he says 'I am not going to force you to change religions,' he says. 'I know that you are interested in Islam,' he says 'and that is good.' He says, 'That will be brilliant for you,' he says. 'If you choose to go to Islam', he says 'that will be brilliant for you,' he says 'because all your past sins will automatically be forgiven. He says 'As soon as you convert,' he says 'then you will have the forgiveness that you are looking for."[155]

Islam as Salvation is clearly the most mystical of all the trajectories. Little or no social pressures are exerted, the convert is usually alone during the event and the actual conversion experience is highly idiosyncratic, characterised by brevity and description is impossible. When Islam is accepted as true salvation, the conversion, an intense spiritual moment, happens between the individual and God. Here we observe what Snow and Machalek called the "suspension of analogical reasoning"[156] and often metaphors are used not only to describe but also to reaffirm the authenticity and sacredness of the

[155] Ali. Interview by author. Tape recording. HM Prison, Shotts, UK. February 15, 2011.
[156] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1984). *Op.cit.*, p.173.

conversion experience and to assert the uniqueness and incomparability of the new religion. For the convert any analogy threatens to invalidate and profane their newfound sacrum as other systems of meaning reside in the realm of profane. Thus there are no analogies with other religions or situations to explain their conversion because any comparisons would be inaccurate and imperfect.

The Conversion as Remedy pathway can be a truly fundamentalist and radical conversion "*by removing other belief systems from the status of eligible competition, a virtually impenetrable boundary is established around the convert's worldview*."[157] Consequently the new religious self is not malleable but very fixed and does not agree to any compromises. Usually this conversion is induced by powerful mystical forces, sometimes represented or perceived to be working through "people and things that were happening"[158] finding the convert in the middle of crisis. Irrespective of initial intentions and free will the individual feels like they have been left "without a choice" and simply "had to" convert. The brief period prior to conversion is critical when often one of the triggering, contingency factors is present. The conversion is quick, intense and profound; it is also an affectional experience characterised by a strong sentiment, without however emotional attachments to others.

These emotions, often so violent and forceful, make it impossible to explain on a rational level what is precisely happening or how the change is occurring. Because of the intimate nature of this conversion social networks are reduced to triggering devices or catalysts in the service of an innate drive for achieving salvation.[159] The totality of conversion experience causes a thorough behavioural change:[160] The world turns head over heels, what was white becomes black, what used be good turns into bad and there is no middle ground between the two. It is important to underline that such a conversion is by no means equal with involvement in radical groups; neither does it necessitate an inclination towards violence. However, in instances of conversion built on grievances, abjection and violence become a way to channel hatred and hostile feelings and project them onto the former community which epitomises the former sinful life and the old, condemned self. However, conversion seen as remedy is not necessarily a negative experience and it can lead to positive, peaceful changes: self-transformation and making peace with the self and the world. Nonetheless, when built upon a negative, rejective foundation, it tends to be regressive and produces aggressive-defensive changes in the convert.

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[157] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1983). *Op.cit*., p. 275.
[158] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research diary. Glasgow, UK. July 21, 2008.
[159] Kilbourne, B. & Richardson, J. T. (1989). *Op.cit*., p.4.
[160] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

2.8. Conversion - the Boundary Within and Without

Conversion thus is a borderline, a point of junction of dichotomies: God and the world, the eternal and the temporal, the individual and the community of believers; a choice drawn together along unique lines of open borderland specifying ones identity and belonging among inimitable dimensions. Representing a boundary from within and from without, conversion invokes debates on the nature of religious engagement; it is full of contradictions and paradoxes and questions our knowledge of the self, the society and religion.

The common meaning of a border denominates a separating edge, a frontier that divides elements within and the ones beyond it. Conceptualisation of conversion in terms of boundary crossing requires an analysis of the border in its personal and social sense and therefore focuses on soft borders, i.e. highly metaphorical and symbolic lines, whose shape depends to a large degree on a definition of not so tangible phenomena like right and wrong or good and evil. What the anthropologists discovered long ago, political scientists must be reminded of: It is not only the borders of the states that are porous and in some cases have vanished altogether, it is also the boundaries between the social milieus that are harder to find and easier to cross – even involuntarily. The more itinerant the self becomes, the more often and freely it moves across the societal spectrum and is constantly redefined in terms of norms, values and social categories, both those ascribed and those acquired. Conversions, just like borders, vary among themselves in terms of readability (how easy is to detect a border) and crossassability (how easy is to cross it). Some are easier to notice and cross than others, the transition can be sudden or gradual; sometimes it also leads through a grey area of a no-man's-land. Certain borders may be traversed in only one direction, and while some are crossed once in a life time, others are encountered daily. Furthermore, when mapping social boundaries, one needs to remember that the richness and complexity, described by Marx[161] as "a tapestry of blurred borders" of reality, makes them partial and limited with respect to what they include, exclude, separate and bring together.

Self-identifying and self-defining is not a question of a single moment and thus, irrespective of the cognitive performance of *shahada*, a conversion is not a border that is crossed only once but one that is faced daily in a continuous, dynamic process shaped by active and conscious choices as well as by passive noesis and social influence. It is also very much contextual and relative depending on the frame of reference one applies to a certain situation. Converts' identities vary and are not set in stone: they rarely fall into a singular, clear-cut, fixed and bounded group and the changing nature of boundary

[161] Marx, G.T. (2005). Some Conceptual Issues in the Study of Borders and Surveillance. In E. Zureik & M. B. Salter (Eds.), *Global Surveillance and Policing: Borders, Security, Identity*. Cullompton: Willian Publishing, p.32.

crossing makes being a New Muslim an unpredictable context-dependent reality. It is, as Donnan and Wilson describe, in the contested nature of borders and identities which are "shifting and multiple, ambiguous and situational, far from being unproblematic" as there is a connate discord between the desired ideal and the actual reality in which they are embedded and lived.[162]

But as much as conversion is a metaphorical boundary crossed, it is a boundary created, too. In this respect religion itself is a social border that marks and orders membership in communities as well as a cultural boundary that demarcates a line between different worlds of meanings.[163] The disappearance of space between various narrative universes in modern pluralist societies does not mean a simultaneous disappearance of borders, to the contrary – they have become central to our understanding of identity and security. Boundaries do not always disappear simply because of an accretion of mobility.[164] Contrariwise, the migratory and ever-changing nature of modern society is conducive to the feelings of insecurity and thus borders are erected for protection. It is very common that for the sake of securing the new identity, the convert is discouraged from maintaining those out-group relations that can be harmful to it and is prompted to remain entirely within the perimeter of the new religious milieu. Those with relatively short "tenure" tend to be dissuaded from attending Christian services (like christenings, weddings and funerals or other family occasions) or indulging in activities (like dancing) that may bring them back to old habits and ways of life. For those who just entered into the world of Islam, there is a need for strongly emphasized boundaries dividing the old from the new. Fixity and impenetrability of the barrier, which is largely cast in religious terms, is the more pronounced, the more fragile the inner spectrum is. Conversely, the more unwavering, comfortable and established the new identity is, the more interaction and engagement with what there is beyond the border. Nevertheless, even when borders are established and stable (and they tend to be as the time after *shahada* passes), they are still characterised by continuous change and negotiation. If the line itself does not shift, it might still be subject to repeated redefinition. We shall now look at factors that drive these negotiations.

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[162] Wilson, T. M. & Donnan, H. (1998).*Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 13.
[163] Wilson, T. M. & Donnan, H. (1998). *Op.cit*., p.19.
[164] Kirby, P. W. (2009). 'Lost in Space': An Anthropological Approach to Movement. In P. W. Kirby (Ed.), *Boundless Worlds: Anthropological Approach to Movement*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, p. 16.

CHAPTER 3. EUROPEAN NEW MUSLIMS: PROMISE OR THREAT?

Chapter 3 focuses on the variance in being New Muslim. Starting with the identification of the boundary-crossing nature of the converting process, it recognises that identity-wise conversion involves a change, sometimes merely nominal but most often a conscious shift in "one's sense of grounding"[165] *and involves an examination of the core sense of reality, actions that must be responded to with the whole being*[166] *"radical reorganisation of identity, meaning, life"*[167] *so conversion remains a decision made for a variety of reasons which results in a wide range of responses to the same religious choice. This analysis is tightly linked to a study of the identity-belonging nexus. The Chapter also challenges some prevalent assumptions about the way Islam is lived after conversion, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of ideational changes within the context of borders and boundaries. It therefore offers a final element to the proposed theoretical framework aiming at deepening our knowledge of a potential terrorist threat of European New Muslims: A comprehensive typology of European converts to Islam learning to operate in a new religious setting and transformation in self-image implicated by this change and accompanied by possible attitudinal change especially if the individual assigns high priority or importance to the new role. Thus, this Chapter concludes the theoretical part of the thesis and leads the way to a detailed examination of the four delineated archetypes.*

3.1. The Variance in Being New Muslim

Chapter 2 established that various individuals have various trajectories of becoming Muslim and proposed a comprehensive metatheoretical matrix as a viable alternative to existing theories; a meeting point between the two modes of thinking about conversion, between the individual approach focusing on a single person and looking for *the ideal type* of convert and the collective approach analysing structural factors and trying to capture *the ideal mechanism* of conversion. The question arises, however, if there is no ideal convert/conversion model how can the variance be determined and the potential for violent (or non-violent) radicalisation be assessed?

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[165] Heirich, M. (1977).*Op.cit.*,p. 653.
[166] *Ibid.*
[167] Travisano R. (1970). Alternation and conversion as qualitatively different transformations. In G.P. Stone & H.A. Faberman (Eds.),*Social psychology through symbolic interaction*. Waltham, MA: Ginn-Blaisdell, p. 594.

Assessing the impact of conversion on later life is an extremely challenging and daunting task. In the first place, the conversion narrative is not always available. Secondly, the difficulties of establishing the conversion trajectory notwithstanding, we need to remember that Becoming to Be only shapes Being New Muslim. The acceptance of Islam as religion by taking *shahada* is merely a first, albeit the most important, step in being a Muslim and the richness of the conversion experience is not limited to this simple act. The shape and dynamics of mechanisms operating throughout the conversion process do not determine its consequences but they undeniably inform the further development and provide the impetus and stimulus for the first stages of the New Muslim life. In other words, the ways of Becoming suggest the possibilities of Being. While the trajectory of conversion affects the future transformation and provides the grounds for further religious life and infuses the New Muslim identity with qualities that define subsequent religious commitment, it does not conclude it. Furthermore, while knowledge of the former allows for an initial differentiation, it does not provide for any finer understanding of the latter. Making the judgement basing solely on the path to conversion, one cannot determine which of the two alternatives, radicalisation or lack of thereof, is more conducive to become or which of the two instances is at all feasible to happen.

The question of how the individual becomes a convert, however significant, still remains secondary to the problem of how a person maintains their convert identity and what factors have direct and practical influence on these endeavours to sustain the meaningfulness of their new Muslim lives. To change is easy; to develop or to uphold is problematic. The maintenance process, balancing the personal and the collective, negotiating between the spiritual and the material is what makes *shahada* authentic and meaningful. If we view conversion in terms of an attempt to change or to create, the "new self," then it only seems reasonable to view being a New Muslim and the commitment to new religion as the attempt to maintain and develop the "new self" in an authentic and consistent way.[168] In order to translate beliefs into actions all converts who undergo such an identity change must immerse themselves into the world of Islam with the aim of internalising its meanings, practices and norms. It is a continuous process consisting of millions of small day-to-day actions, seemingly insignificant choices and decisions. Every person lives the conversion and experiences the transformation individually and the personal grounds of meaning as well as the perception of collective reality are anchored within an individual subjective experience. Consequently, even when the conversion trajectories remain the same, the subsequent pathways often differ: For instance while converting for a spouse is a rather common motif, yet of two girls, both converted for their Muslim spouses, one will be having a Pakistani celebration and wearing *shalwar kameez* (traditional Pakistani apparel), while the other will enjoy a

[168] Staples, C. L. & Mauss, A. L. (1987). *Op.cit.*, pp. 133-147.

Western style, white wedding with her Muslim spouse wearing the kilt.[169] How does the variation happen between the same beliefs which ultimately lead to different actions? Silvia, who converted for a spouse, retained all the Western cultural affiliations and did not follow her husband's culture in her first marriage. Furthermore, she was not too observant in religious terms and when her husband started following the stricter and more traditional interpretation of Islam, she flatly refused to adjust and divorced him. However, when she married for the second time, not only did she reorient culturally embracing her second husband's Algerian culture and traditions, but she also transformed in terms of religiosity. Undeniably, while Becoming and Being are clearly connected, the thoroughgoing understanding of the shape and direction, which life after conversion can take is contingent on knowledge of both its causes, governing mechanisms and its nature, but even the most profound awareness of these will not render the understanding of the different implications of different conversion trajectories because an individual can change their attitudes, and react in detachment from their conversion trajectory.

Thirdly, analysing the ways of Becoming constitutes just a threshold of scholarly research necessary for understanding the religious identity of European converts to Islam. Because continuous development is an inherent part of human nature, the analysis of conversion and its ramifications goes beyond the actual moment of *shahada* and needs to scrutinise the ways of living the Muslim life concentrating on the processes and factors creating the variance in identity. It needs to be emphasized that conversion truly is a never-ending story, not a brief "Kodak moment." We are faced here with the kaleidoscopic complex that almost inconceivably, forms and informs the convert, based as it is on an element which is constantly in motion – identity. Invariably every convert asked what it means to be a European convert to Islam will give a different answer. Of course we can provide a definite solution in terms of objective parameters, but in terms of behavioural or ideational factors the differences remain essential. There are some converts living fully Islamic lives before taking *shahada* (e.g. covering head and praying) and there are some who, even after they had their public confession of faith, will still be coming to terms with what being Muslim entails, i.e. learning how to pray, readjusting socially (e.g. not going to pubs), etc.

The final difficulty is connected with the fact that the differences among converts are irrefragable. As Chapter 2 proved, the situational characteristics of embracing Islam vary dramatically from person to person, regardless of their age or gender. With regard to background, education, occupation, geographical origins or criminal engagement there are no specific converting patterns as all social strata are represented. Even if we refer only to the biographies of radical converts from Europe, it

[169] Author's fieldwork Notes. Research diary. Glasgow, UK. June 01, 2009.

is clear that the motivating factor is not based on personal humiliation or oppression. The socio-economic rationale also needs to be repudiated when it comes to European converts: deprivation, poverty, racism or social exclusion factors are not supported by data. As Roy puts it, "the radical fringes from where the radicals come from are not socio-economic."[170] Factors like gender, political and civic activism or religiosity prior to conversion as well as social affiliations and grounding are also dramatically different. The same principle applies to the family status and circumstances, as we find married, divorced and single converts. There are far too many discrepancies regarding the economic, social and psychological factors to take them as a basis for further theoretical enquiry as various indicators are so diverse that they cannot constitute any foundation for a theoretical framework.

Converts are not a monolith and the very name designating them as a group is but another social construct with constantly changing boundaries. Nonetheless, amidst the disparity that can be noted when comparing different converts, a common denominator emerges, namely their identity as European New Muslims, which appears to be a unifying factor that overcomes the divisions and discrepancies. To this end it is crucial to analyse the possible ways of living a New Muslim life and establish what factors have a key impact on the ideational change and how they interact. With the aim to refine the current conceptualisation of a potential terrorist threat we need to identify not only the types of ascertaining conversion but also the ways of living conversion. If *shahada* brings converts together and their identity as New Muslims sets them apart, the key to understanding the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam lies in the identity spectrum of understanding of what it means to be Muslim and to delineate the normative space of belonging. Emphasizing the "what" and "why" of conversion and omitting the "how" impedes a complete understanding of the problem. Thus, the ideational dimension renders the impartial knowledge about the factors crucial for security implications.

As explained in Chapter 2, the boundary-crossing nature of the conversion process involves a change in a worldview and identity. Only the Goods/Necessity trajectory is an exception to this rule, but even in this case we cannot assume that a genuine religious conversion will not occur later on. This Chapter argues that in order to understand the direction of such a change and ascertain how the boundary is drawn and what its nature is we need to know whether such a realignment is built on positive (inclusion, acceptance) or negative (exclusion, rejection) foundations. Furthermore, this Chapter claims that convert identity provides an infallible blueprint for understanding the world and rejection/acceptance as well as inclusion/exclusion dyads are decisive agents in construction of the new self.

[170] Roy, O. (2008). *Al Qaeda in the West as Youth Movement: The Power of Narrative*, CEPS Policy Brief No. 168.

3.2. Convert Identity

3.2.1. The Concept

The reticence to problematize identity is central to the impediments to understanding the potential of terrorist threat of European converts to Islam. Conversion, we established, is in broad terms all about change, however the exact breadth and depth of this transformation varies from person to person. Undoubtedly, a convert's metamorphosis will be infused by the way the given individual came to Islam, but since the change is not always cast in exclusively religious terms, the first matrix analysed on its own can be quite misleading and certainly does not provide the whole picture. Conversion may, and may not, involve a dramatic turnabout in one's life; it might be a change completely at odds with a previous lifestyle or a logical consequence and development while the earlier cognitive structure and its components might have been either shaken by the change of religious affiliation or remain an ontological fundament for new religious orientation. Conversion can be an act of rebellion or act of coming home. It may concern people who have already been on a religious quest or those spiritually indifferent or ignorant, who never experienced religious upbringing or were ever interested in faith-related issues. Converts may undergo a number of radical changes in their devotional practices, but also behaviour, lifestyles, the fibre of their social networks and the like. Such realignment sometimes involves repudiation of sinful past and sometimes an embrace of glorious future; it is a process that can be either rooted in the individual or triggered by the group influence and hence either internally or externally oriented.

The new identity and the new social role which comes with conversion might induce several changes of behaviour and belief, regardless of the fact whether such transformation is radical in nature or comes almost imperceptibly, whether it is sudden and wholehearted or gradual and provisional with a more thoroughgoing acceptance of belief occurring later on. No matter the rate of conversion it challenges the convert with questions which, although having been answered in the past, need to be re-answered as the old responses are no longer sufficient or valid. Who am I? What is my place in the world? What does it mean? These rudiments are examined, perhaps even for the first time, and in order to gain a perspective furnishing a comprehensible and ordered picture of the world, often the convert needs to scrutinise things that so far were perhaps too obvious to be even looked at.

Identity has recently become a recurring thread in radicalisation literature and although its definition is still as elusive as ever, its influential position is taken for granted, while the exact role and

ways of identity affecting the individual has not been exactly determined yet. A lack of consensus on how individuals and groups weave their identities and what the traces of ideational patterns built into various theoretical constructs on radicalisation are as well as the policies aimed at countering it, renders this research doubly difficult in determining both the shape and the direction of the discussed phenomena. For psychologists, identity refers to inner processes and thus is determined by cognitive capabilities of the given individual. It is also conceptualised as a reservoir of belief and value patterns[171] or a set of definitions and roles[172] with social identity determined by primarily group membership[173] whereby personal considerations as well as situational factors also play an important role. Affective, normative and cognitive mechanisms contribute to the identity building process. From a sociological perspective, identity signifies a bond between the individual and a specific wider constituency in a clearly defined collective, while anthropologists, on the other hand, put more emphasis on the influence of culture on ideational constructs. Finally, political scientists focus on the way identities are created and embraced as well as the way they influence the political behaviour of individuals, groups and peoples.[174]

The realm of identity running along the continuum from the personal to the social, as Judith Cherni advised, is a "complicated convergence of socio-political and psychological processes...connecting social, psychological, political and spatial dimensions."[175] While the father of the concept, Erik Erickson,[176] perceives self-identity as a development of consistent feeling of biographical continuity where the individual is able to sustain a narrative about the self and answer questions about doing, acting and being which is expressed privately and publicly, for Judith Cherni the primary meaning signifies a reflexive action aimed at identifying with and accepting a group that has shared systems of symbols and meanings as well as norms and rules of conduct.[177]The holistic approach to identity must therefore encompass all these spheres identified aptly by George DeVos. For him there are four levels of analysis, the first being the subjective experience of identity, the second consisting of patterns of

[171] Eiser, R. (1995, p.161). Cited in O'Riordan, T. (Ed.). (2001). *Globalism, Localism and Identity: New Perspectives on the Transition of Sustainability*. Oxon: Earthscan Publications Ltd.
[172] Baumeister, R. F. (1986). *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.13.
[173] Kelly, C. & Breinlinger, S. (1996). *The Social Psychology of Collective Action: Identity, Injustice and Gender*. London: Taylor and Francis., p. 87.
[174] *Cf.* Arena, M. P. & Arigo, B. A. (2006). *The Terrorist Identity: Explaining the Terrorist Threat*. New York & London: New York University Press.
[175] Cherni, J. (2001). Social-local Identities. In T. O'Riordan, (Ed.), *Globalism, Localism and Identity: New Perspectives on the Transition of Sustainability*. Oxon: Earthscan Publications Ltd., p. 62.
[176] Erickson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: Norton., p. 14.
[177] Cherni, J. (2001). Social-local Identities. In T. O'Riordan, (Ed.), *Globalism, Localism and Identity: New Perspectives on the Transition of Sustainability*. Oxon: Earthscan Publications Ltd., p. 68.

behaviour; the third understood as the social-structural level and finally the fourth expressed via patterns of social interactions.[178]

Because identity involves understanding both the self and the world, it must be analysed with respect to social context. Thus, in general, as Karmela Liebkind observed,[179] the multidimensional circles of identity contain components of individuality and components of generality interacting in a continuous process directed and fuelled by motivational forces deriving from an incessant value accommodation, aiming at the development and maintenance of distinctiveness, as well as a sense of continuity and social belongingness.[180] This process is determined by interplay between social elements, such as class or ethnicity, cultural commitments and group memberships and the personal components like personality traits, behavioural characteristics, interests and psychological predispositions.[181]

3.2.2. Master Role

Constituting a "living border" between two worlds converts must develop a *modus vivendi*, which incorporates identities that are contradictory at times. The varying strengths with which people subscribe to a particular identity may be illuminated by the knowledge of border dynamics. In each social context many affiliations can be chosen as a base for behaviour, the question is which one of them is chosen and why. Simultaneously, identity needs to have a durable importance and thus not everything serves as a good base for an identity signifier. Certain identities, like being a parent or a musician, become salient only during specific events or in particular social settings, religious identity, on the other hand, can always be invoked as one is always a Muslim regardless of the context and that simple fact permeates every action influencing other identities, sometimes even subordinating them. Such a salient identity will guide, motivate, and instigate behaviour in many different social contexts and configurations in becoming a central ideational pillar of an individual. It affects the actions but also interprets the reality – even though it is acquired, it is also internalised as a crucial part of the individual

[178] DeVos, G. A. (1983). Ethnic identity and minority status. In A. Jacobson-Widding (Ed.), *Identity: Personal and Socio-Cultural. A Symposium*.Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, p. 139.
[179] Liebkind, K. (1983). Dimensions of Identity In Multiple Group Allegiance. In A. Jacobson-Widding (Ed.), *Identity: Personal and Socio-Cultural. A Symposium*.Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, p. 187.
[180] Tajfel, H.(1974).Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour. *Social Science Information*, 13, pp. 65-93; Lange, A. L. & Westin, C. (1981). *Ethnic Discrimination and Social Identity: A Review of Research and a Theoretical Analysis*. Stockholm: Liber/Publica.
[181] Zavalloni, M. (1973). Social Identity: Perspectives and prospects. *Social Science Information*, 12, pp. 65-91.

self. While religious identity, i.e. defining oneself as a member of a particular religious group,[182] for some converts remains just one of many identity signifiers, for others it becomes the predominant tone. Thisis not to say that the social reality can be neatly organised in monolithic terms, but to underline the fact that the existence of multiple identities within one individual does not exclude the possibility that some are more important than others. Conversely, some are more salient in certain situations and an individual can opt for one overarching identity that influences the rest of the affiliations to a great extent. In this sense Amaryta Sen is wrong, in rejecting the possibility of "singular membership categories".[183]

The sentiments expressed by Amaryta Sen mirror the widely spread expectation that every person will enact a variety of roles depending upon situational context whereby individuals are influenced by identity but certainly not determined by it. Identity in this respect resembles a set of coloured threads that can be woven in many different ways to produce patterns which differ greatly from each other; canopies of social realities, which although they consist of the same strings, are nonetheless composed in a different way. In their research Snow and Machalek point towards the embracement of a master role as one of the defining features of convert's identity.[184] The concept of a master role follows the footsteps the work of Richard Travisiano,[185] who underlines the ubiquitous utilisation of convert identity transcending other social roles. The master role, thus, predisposes converts to see themselves almost exclusively in religious terms and as members of a particular group. This role is not compartmentalised or situation specific, to the contrary, its master status suggests that it is more central than others, both in terms of behaviour and the way individuals view themselves, which, as Staples and Mauss[186] notice, stands in direct opposition to compartmentalisation so typical in modern life. In such a case, the principal, dominant identity recognised to be of paramount importance will have a major influence on how the individual perceives a given situation and acts upon it. Drawing upon Parsons' representative role concept,[187] we can also extend this notion to the role assumed in situations occurring outside the Muslim collectivity in order to represent the group in wider society, which, as I discovered during my interviews, converts are often forced to do:

> "When interfacing with the rest of society, you are made to make a comment on things that happened all over the world in regards to your religion. In a way

[182] Greenfield, E. A. & Marks, N. F. (2007).Religious social identity as an explanatory factor for associations between more frequent formal religious participation and psychological well-being.*International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 2:1, pp. 63-78.
[183] Sen, A. (2006). *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. London: Allen Lane, Penguin Group, XIII.
[184] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1983). *Op.cit.*, pp. 259-289.
[185]Travisano R. (1970). *Op.cit.*, p. 605.
[186] Staples, C. L. & Mauss, A. L. (1987). *Op.cit.*, pp. 133-147.
[187] Parsons, T. (1951).*The Social System*, Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, p.100. Cited in Kemper, D.T. (1966). Representative Roles and the Legitimation of Deviance. *Social Problems*, 13:3, pp. 288-298.

> you are forced to become a spokesperson for the occurrences in the world that are related to Islam. You are expected to have an opinion on situations, which is not necessary true in individual conflicts; yet, it is demanded of you to 'must know something' as you are a Muslim. It is not right, as a convert to Islam you should not be expected to make a comment about something when you have only recently made Islam your religion."[188]

Undoubtedly, some converts enthusiastically announce their identity in all situations, whether verbally or by their appearance or behaviour. They introject themselves on religious grounds and the role of a convert governs their actions, suffusing them with new meaning and significance as the convert is not always acting solely in his own self-interest but is merely a representative acting on behalf of something greater. If compared to a dress, the role of a convert would be then not an overcoat or a smart dress but rather a daily uniform one wears to work. Subordination or indeed, in some cases, elimination of other roles and identities to a master role results in applying the master role in all situations. Clear prioritisation does not render the other roles irrelevant, but their significance is derived from their relation to the master identity.[189] The central identity informs the other subordinate roles and infuses them with meaning, in this sense the Muslim stops being a noun but rather becomes an ever-present adjective: a person is not torn between being a mother and a Muslim at the same time but rather becomes a Muslim mother, a construct that reconciles different aspects of the self and brings them hand in hand. The master role helps to expand the terrain of interaction and via encompassing all the other roles provides an opportunity to display, affirm and maintain unity of the "real self."[190]

3.2.3. Categorisation

Simultaneously, it is understandable that since the new Muslim identity is so central, the individual maintains close relations with other people who share this experience. This dynamic is convergent with the basic tenets of social identity theory claiming that "the relationship between the social categories to which individuals perceive themselves to belong and other social categories is crucial".[191] In converts' community this importance permeates not only the behavioural but also the verbal sphere as group members refer to each other as "brothers" and "sisters" indicating bonds far stronger than friendship or merely denominational categorisation.[192] Sheldon Stryker[193] conceptualised

[188] Batool Al-Toma. Interview by author. Tape recording. Leicester, UK. February 20, 2010.
[189] Staples, C. L. & Mauss, A. L. (1987). *Op.cit.*, pp. 133-147.
[190] *Ibid.*
[191] Herriot, P. (2009). *Religious Fundamentalism: Global, Local and Personal*. London and New York: Routlege, p. 165.
[192] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research Diary. Leicester, UK. April 2-3, 2011.

structural features in terms of people's involvement in particular social networks and carrying on the interactionist theory of Wiley and Alexander[194] stressed the shaping forces of social structures that determine the possibility of action embedded within identity as an image of autonomy through an engagement with society.[195] With conversion the individual changes not only the inner landscape of beliefs and values but also the external panorama is reconfigured. The position in society is changed and the whole context of societal relations acquires new meanings – as the shape of internal borders is transfigured; also some of the outer ones need to be adjusted. The awareness of membership and a sense of being part of the group constitute a dynamic combination linking the self and the social through the centrality of group identity in the self-conceptualisation and also points to the concept of belonging constituting an integral part of ideational framework. A group is a port by the sea, a safe haven offering security from the elements of clashing waves of various identities.

The importance of identity renders alignment to the interpretative framework of the group the convert join a crucial role in the transformation processes. Although every individual is simultaneously a member of different groups this comparative dimension in the case of converts is aided by the master identity to supersede the original differentiation.[196] Various group memberships are weighted against each other and elements within each group are unified over prevalent differences between them. The group offers unique linguistic and cognitive tools as well as interpretative schemata for comprehending the world, interpreting and assessing events and proposing guidelines for behaviour and actions.[197] The process of identification is thus intertwined with evaluation and categorisation and, as Liebkind observes, has two different facets to it. While the positive side acknowledges similarities between the self and the group and, quite idealistically, reflects any identity aspirations which the individual wants to ascertain,[198] the more negative aspects focuses on the differences between the individual and the wider society and indicates the undesired traits that the individual wishes to extirpate. The focus on difference

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[193] Stryker, S. (1987).Identity theory: Developments and extensions. In K. Yardley & T. Honess (Eds.), *Self and identity: Psychosocial Perspectives*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, pp. 111-131.

[194] Wiley, M.G. & Alexander, N. C. (1987). From Situated Activity to Self-attribution: the Impact of Social Structural Schemata. In K. Yardley & T. Honess (Eds.), *Self and identity: Psychosocial Perspectives*. New York: John Wiley and Sons,

[195] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

[196] Gaertner, S. L., Dovidio, J. F., Nier, J. A., Ward, C. M. & Banker, B. S. (1999). Across Cultural Divides: The Value of Superordinate Identity. In, D. A. Prentice & D. T. Miller (Eds.), *Cultural Divides: Understanding and Overcoming Group Conflict*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 173-212; Zarate, M. A. & Smith, E. R. (1990). Person Categorization and Stereotyping. *Social Cognition*, 8:2, pp. 161-185; Mackie, D. M., Hamilton, D. L., Susskind, J. & Rosselli, F. (1996).Social Psychological Foundations of Stereotype Formation. In C. N. Macrae, C. Stangor & M. Hewstone (Eds.), *Stereotypes and Stereotyping*. New York: Guildford Press, pp. 41-78; Gaertner, S. L. & Dovidio, J. F. (2005). Understanding and Addressing Contemporary Racism: From Aversive Racism to the Common Ingroup Identity Model. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61:3, pp. 615-639.

[197] *Wiktorowicz*, *Q*. (2005). *Radical Islam Rising*: *Muslim Extremism in the West*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 15-16.

[198] Liebkind, K. (1983). *Op.cit*, p. 189.

sometimes involves a denial that there are any similarities between the two groups and is underpinned by rejection of the individual day-to-day experience of shared "circuit of culture".[199]

This reflective and evolutionary process of categorisation is critical and selective but also subject to chance factors such as social context, place and time. The deceitful relativity of identity infused behaviour suggesting that each individual can have many identities also ignores the fact that majority of them is based on either or foundation – one cannot be a dedicated vegetarian and a hamburger lover at the same time. In the same sense, the choice of being a Muslim a priori excludes many other ideational choices contrary to what Sen suggests.[200] What is more, plurality of identity choices may in fact be an irrelevant factor, alternatives might be not applicable in certain situation even not because they are not feasible, but mainly because the inter group dynamics often rules them out *a priori* – the choice of identity is extraordinarily limited if in the eyes of the other we are only and just the category they ascribe us to be. It is important to underline here that an individual's self-identification may be different from those ascribed by wider society. A female convert in traditional garb with huge shopping bags waiting for a train cannot choose social activist as her default identity as she will be immediately ascribed a "security threat" label.[201]

The self is a reflexive construct as Michael Hogg framed it,[202] constantly changing via interactions with social environment, adapting to situations not only on the basis of individual behaviour but also on reactions of the others to us. A convert's identity thus reflects the personal construct theory arguments suggesting that "each individual develops a system of categories which consists of interrelated, bipolar constructs, discriminating between anything that can be compared or contrasted."[203] The acceptance/rejection dynamics governs the process of finding the way through the constellation of similarities and differences as the converts identify themselves with this community which represent the desirable traits and reject the community whose values, and behavioural norms they see as unacceptable. This is done, not only in order to find their place within the complex network of social relationships but also to structure the social milieu. Consequently, acceptance/rejection undercurrents guide converts' actions providing a behavioural framework and a point of reference thus being a security agent and helping to reach equilibrium.

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[199] Woodward, K. (1997). Concepts of Identity and Difference in Identity and Difference. In K. Woodward (Ed), *Identity and difference*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, p. 12.
[200] Sen, A. (2006). *Op.cit.*, p. 24.
[201] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research Diary. Glasgow, UK. June 08, 2009.
[202] Hogg, M. A. (2003). Social Identity. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity*. New York: Guilford, p. 18.
[203] Kelly, G. (1955). *The Psychology of Personal Constructs.* New York: Norton; Ryle, A. (1975). *Frames and Cages*. London: Chatto & Windus. Cited in Liebkind, K. (1983). *Op.cit*., p. 187.

Identification and praxis constitute the bonding elements with other in-group members and remain integral parts of the becoming a group member process vie the frame alignment stage,[204] in which the individual adjusts his interpretative framework to the group's set of values that challenge the hitherto dominant hierarchy. Becoming part of a group is therefore rooted in a tendency to share identity with other people and the need to secure it via patterns of social interactions and activities.[205] The process of deciding what and what not to do is necessary due to the identity transformation when all the rhetorical questions are answered through the slowly built practice of a daily routine – what does it mean to be Muslim? How to practise Islam? What are the social, political, cultural and economic repercussions? Every convert goes through something that Wiktorowicz calls "culturing"[206] when they attune to a Muslim ideational template confronted at the same time with the present reality.

3.2.4. Identity Negotiations

The negotiation of the shape and nature of borders includes both the practical daily praxis, as well as more abstract reflections on the meaning of their activities. The group influence is an important consideration in socio-cultural analysis of identity formation and prevalence of relative acceptive or rejective reactions.[207] Among changes in the social atmosphere related to operating in a new setting, the group helps to determine how the New Muslim identity will be developed, whether the assimilative, accommodative or conflicting posture will be adopted. Becoming part of the group is thus not a linear process but one that goes in circles and flourishes, never quite finished as the convert is repeatedly confronted with contradictory values and expectations that demand constant decision making – dietary matters, lifestyle, values and social views (e.g. regarding women). Not everyone can cope with these value choices hence some escape them by withdrawal into a space where they are not necessary – avoiding interactions with the outside, or they just get lost in the grey area between, creating their own spaces of unique hybridity. Another possible solution is creating two parallel social realms: for instance when colleagues at work are not aware of the denominational change, there are two separate circles of social interactions.

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[204] Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005). *Radical Islam Rising*: *Muslim Extremism in the West*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 15 – 16.
[205] Bausinger, H. (1983). Sensless identity. In A. Jacobson-Widding (Ed.), *Identity: Personal and Socio-Cultural*. *A Symposium*.Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, p. 341.
[206] Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005). *Radical Islam Rising*: *Muslim Extremism in the West*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 167.
[207] DeVos, G. A. (1983). *Op.cit.*, p. 146.

Because the Islamic environment is so new and different for converts, they learn to be a Muslim through social mimicry, a process described in Leon Festinger's theory of social comparison[208] whereby an individual observes the behavioural patterns of other people in his milieu and constructs his identity conforming to the actions of the others in the group. In many instances converts are not sure how to behave in the first place: they do not want to be different, they want to be truly Muslim and simultaneously they fear judgement or rejection or community questioning the sincerity of their conversion. Individualism notwithstanding, the social pressure to conform is immense – women are encouraged to dress appropriately, men are invited to mosques, etc. Again the younger (in terms of the time passed after the *shahada*) the convert is, the more the individual is prone to conform even if the decision does not entirely reflect his own opinion.[209] The importance of the new social identity determines whether the newcomer wants to incorporate, merge or dissolve in the new environment and such cohesion can serve as means and ground for collective action[210] which feeds on the in-group solidarity.

The concept of identity negotiations[211] provides understanding for the ever transforming nature of identity when an individual moves between what is accepted and what is rejected, between the experienced and the ideal paradigm of identity. They are especially pronounced when the in-group's norms, values and beliefs are dramatically different from those endorsed by wider society[212] or as described by Sam and Virta[213] when the individual lives simultaneously in two different cultures, a feature prominent in the lives of majority of European converts. Balancing the two can be successful or can be quite tragic. This is so, particularly because minority/majority status is to a large extent, dependent on individual perception and can be changed by a minor detail like a headscarf, for instance. These details and single occurrences are bargaining tokens in the constant process of identifying and re-identifying between the fluxes of social contexts. Identity is thus marked by difference and symbols which are often employed as signifiers. Signals of one's identity are a central component of social

[208] Festinger, L. (1954), A Theory of Social Comparison Processes. *Human Relations*, 7, pp. 117-140; Suls, J. & Wheeler, L (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of Social Comparison: Theory and Research*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
[209]Bond, R. & Smith, P. B. (1996). Culture and Conformity: A Meta-analysis of Studies Using Asch's Line Judgment Task. *Psychological Bulletin*, 119, pp. 111-137.
[210] Wiktorowicz, Q., Mullen, B. & Copper, C. (1994). The Relation Between Group Cohesiveness and Performance: An Integration. *Psychological Bulletin*, 115, pp. 210-227.
[211] Knafo, A. & Schwartz, S. H. (2003). Parenting and Adolescents' Accuracy in Perceiving Parental Values. *Child Development*, 74, p. 595.
[212] Schmälzle, U. F. (2001).The Importance of Schools and Families for the Identity Formation of Children and Adolescents. *International Journal of Education and Religion*, 106:1, p.30; van Hoof, A. & Raaijmakers, Q. A. W. (2002). The Spatial Integration of Adolescent Identity: Its Relation to Age, Education, and Subjective Well-Being. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 43, p. 201. Cited in Kuusisto, A. (2011). Growing Up in Affiliation with a Religious Community: A Case Study of Seventh-day Adventist Youth in Finland. *Research on Religious and spiritual Education*, vol. 3.Münster: Waxmann Verlag, p.20.
[213] Sam, *D. L.*, & Virta, E. (2003). Intergenerational Value Discrepancies in Immigrant and Host- national Families and Their Impact on Psychological Adaptation. *Journal of Adolescence*, 26:2, p. 213.

communication process to delineate, even if only in general terms, who we are, and how to demarcate the interpretative frames and assessable schemata – personal names, clothing, posture, gestures, facial expression, language all contribute important cues for interaction which in turn accounts for categorisation of social environment. This contributes to the maintenance of social boundaries and affects the creation of inter-group stereotypes.[214]

My research proved that only few converts are able to fully reconcile their past and present and future, and establish a secure place where shared values can intensify both the sense of identity based on acceptance and engagement with the society that synthesises multiple belongings. While the majority of converts create the new identity via heterogeneous, symbiotic social contacts which facilitates diverse encounters and opens up a space for dialogue and diminishes the rejective responses, many treat identity as a protective cocoon aimed at strengthening the fragile chrysalis of the new self during the process of metamorphosis. Rather than failing to take root in any of the groups and in the end belonging nowhere fully, they reaffirm the differences instead of focusing on similarities and are not well equipped to deal with those attributes that are ascribed to them. In practice this means, for instance, a preference for non-religious friends who themselves do not have strong beliefs opting for an easy way to manifest the minority status in a majority context, which is not a difficult task when the other person does not care whether or not you are Muslim. Conversely, the longer the convert stays in the community, the more multi-layered and nuanced his impression is as the freshly converted person is inept at dealing with contrasting expectations and with the ascribed abstract image of a convert attributed to them.

3.3. Belonging

3.3.1. The Cultural Aspect

Bringing the strange, "the other" into close proximity blurs lines of identity and challenges who we are and where we come from and thus, Catarina Kinnvall assures, a collective identity that can provide security is a potential pole of attraction. It is an opinion of many scholars that next to nationalism, religion is the second-most powerful identity signifier that is more likely than other identities to provide answers, organize lives and endow them with meaning that is perceived as being true thus infusing

[214] Gumprez, J. J. (1983). Communication and Social Identity. In A. Jacobson-Widding (Ed.), *Identity: Personal and Socio-Cultural. A Symposium*.Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, p. 111.

sense into the world that otherwise would crumble into chaos.[215] Religion wins over nationalism nowadays not only due to the long prophesized demise of the latter but also thanks to the fact that religion has become much more individualised both in the sphere of private belief and public praxis. Today, more than ever, as politics of identity and the nation-state are failing to make the individual the primary principle of identity, alternative communities are emerging through new forms of religious assertions and display. Furthermore, people seek and embrace references of their religious identity in order to challenge current political and social agendas, whatever they might be. Thus, while identity does not have to necessarily be about religiosity, it might be an expression rooted in it. Religion informs the identity of people in a very similar manner to which nationalism professes to do so. Weaver *et al*.[216] conceptualise the nation as a special case of society characterized by affiliations to territory, a combination of present time community with continuity across time, linking past members to current and future members and a feeling of being one of the units of which the global society consists. In a very similar vein religion can be pictured as a larger, or extended, family not only tied together but also stretching back and forward into history, and forging the bond of belonging irrespective of the political orientation of individual members. Thus, although the sources of societal identity are in theory almost infinite, in practice religious identity has a particular prominence due to the fact that next to nationalism, it is the one capable to reproduce a "we" identity across generations. Religion hence not only provides deep and durable fundaments for political constructions (Roman Catholicism) but also offers a greater flexibility of recruitment since rarely there is any prerequisite required (like ethnicity in Judaism).

The search for beliefs, norms and values that would neutralise the uncertainty and risk of modern times provides a meaningful world-view[217] which, although it may seem irrational from the outside, is coherent and rational from within. Conversion, this unique expression of both structural conditions and personal considerations, symbolises change on the one hand, and on the other the desire to preserve a minimum level of stability and independence in a globalised era.[218]

Identity is anchored firmly in its cultural context, and without it the self cannot thrive because maintenance of the sameness would be lost in transition. The cultural parameters of identity,[219] i.e. the

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[215] Kinnvall, C. (2004). Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security. *Political Psychology*, 25:5, pp. 741-767.
[216] Weaver, O., Buzan, B., Kelstrup, M. & Lemaitre, P. (1993). *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*. London: Printer Publishers, pp. 21-22.
[217] Hogg, M. A. & Mullen, B. A. (1999). Joining groups to reduce uncertainty: Subjective uncertainty reduction and group identification. In D. Abrams& M. A. Hoggs (Eds.), *Social Identity and Social Cognition*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 24-48.
[218] Judith C. (2001). Social-local Identities. In T. O'Riordan (Ed.), *Globalism, Localism and Identity: New Perspectives on the Transition of Sustainability*. Oxon: Earthscan Publications Ltd., p. 62.
[219] Collier, M. J. & Thomas, M. (1988). Cultural Identity: An Interpretative Perspective. In Y. Kim & W. B. Gudykunst (Eds.), *Theories in Intercultural Communication*. Newbury Park, CA : Sage Publications, p.4.

indispensable dimension of belonging, which governs the process of adoption of new cultural traits or the retention of others constitutes an integral part of this process, whereby aspects of culture become internalised as social identities.[220] A European who is converting to Islam needs to nest elements of a different culture which sometimes are so merged with religion that it can be impossible to tell them apart within the indigenous cultural milieu. Roy observes that some converts marry culture with religion, while others try to distil it from any cultural influences emphasizing the universal, acultural nature of Islam and to integrate Islam into their indigenous culture.[221] While the former occurs more frequently, the latter is proof of more mature and fully established conversions. I experienced both e.g. when visiting a married convert couple in Yorkshire I was given a *halal* version of toad in a hole, an ideal example of the continuity and compatibility of the corresponding social and religious identities. More often, however, the earlier identity was given up for the sake of new, cultural-religious construct expressed in dress, dietary habits and even language.

Belonging, the category of feeling at home, is a bearer of security in both spatial and symbolic senses and it offers a cavity where identity is nurtured on the fertile cultural grounds and not in an inhabited, empty space. There is always an adherence to a collective, an orientation towards other individuals who anchor identity in common ground and with whom this commonality is shared and experienced. This collective configuration is dominated by an underlying similarity, a signifying trait and a dominant trend in the composition of an individual's identity often expressed metaphorically referring to ostensible entities, such as nations, regions, towns, or ethnic and religious groups.[222]

Culture is undeniably a group product[223] with multiple levels and layers that are not always convergent, nonetheless, as Donnan and Wilson[224] earnestly remind us, culture, this charter for behaviour, marker of social membership, matrix for changing meanings and relations and, last but not least, a metaphor for the values, influences and determines all our grand and lowly actions of everyday life. It is culture, Roger Scruton[225] exhorts that it is "associated with the human need for membership, and describes a shared asset of a social group to define and conserve a shared way of life…[it] defines the vision of the world." And as the purported relativity of the worlds of meanings intensifies the feelings

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[220] Herriot, P. (2009). *Religious Fundamentalism: Global, Local and Personal*. London and New York: Routlege, p. 109.
[221] Roy, O. (2004). *Globalised Islam: The Search for the New Ummah*. New York: Columbia University Press, p.167.
[222] Bausinger, H. (1983). Sensless identity. In A. Jacobson-Widding (Ed.), *Identity: Personal and Socio-Cultural*. *A Symposium*.Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, p. 337.
[223] Herriot, P. (2009). *Religious Fundamentalism: Global, Local and Personal*. London and New York: Routlege, p. 47.
[224] Wilson, T. M. & Donnan, H. (1998). *Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 10.
[225] Scruton, R. (2007*). Culture counts*: *Faith and feeling in a world besieged*. New York*:* Brief Encounters.

defined by Kinnvall[226] as *ontological insecurity*, i.e. a fundamental sense of safety in the world and *existential uncertainty* stemming from a lack of security, confidence and trust appear to exacerbates the need for cultural purification in an attempt to strike a balance in a volatile relationship between certainty and uncertainty.[227]

The voices refusing to invest culture with such a causal clarity are abound. Culture cannot be perceived as a homogenous attribute, they argue, and although being unquestionably important, it cannot uniquely account for determining and directing people's lives and identities.[228] This thesis is far from claiming that culture is a static, homogenous factor or that it does not interact with other determinants.[229] Nonetheless, the argument that a better knowledge of other cultures increases our mutual understanding and diminishes the potential for violence[230] is clearly not applicable in the case of converts who grew up in one culture and therefore know it intimately and still undertake attempts to hurt or destroy it. Typically the less you know about the "other" the more prejudiced and stereotypical your stance is, but in the case of converts we face a different situation when the more you know the "other" the more disenchanted you are.

The process of identifying with others, understood as choosing where we want to belong hinges either on inclusion through lack of awareness of differences; as a result of perceived resemblances, [231] or on exclusion due to a repudiation of dissimilarities. Belonging can progress twofold: either the self is disassociated from the group to which the individual hitherto belonged and the old "us" becomes "them" or the "us" category is enlarged and encompasses the old "them" which vanishes as a distinct signifier. The issue at stake here is thus the reformulation of the "other" taking either the shape of amputation and rejection or, to the contrary, the incorporation of a new aspect to the ideational body. There are two way of responding, either one builds on what they have had up to date, or one tries to cut everything off and constructs one's new Muslim identity based on differences in contrast to the previous life style. Consequently, the structural feature of belonging refers to the degree of inclusiveness or exclusiveness and to the degree of rigidity of the boundaries constructed between them.

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[226] Kinnvall, C. (2004). *Op.cit*., pp. 741-767.
[227] Appadurai, A. (2006). *The Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay in the Geography of Anger*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, p. 7.
[228] Sen, A. (2006). *Op.cit.*, p. 112.
[229] *Ibid.,* p. 113.
[230] *Ibid.*, p. 150.
[231] Woodward, K. (1997). *Op.cit.*, p. 14.

3.3.2. The Boundaries of Belonging

Conversion is one of the identity markers about which Henri Tajfel[232] writes that force most individuals involved to act in terms of their group membership. Just as converting may take different forms, the life after conversion differs. Snow and Machalek remind us of the fundamental sociological axiom[233] that people can be members of the same group in many different ways and with varying degrees of commitment and involvement. Furthermore, as Soledad Garcia explains, "*A shared identity, however, also involves sharing loyalties with different political communities. ... Membership [in a given community]... implies duties, but it also offers rights such as protection from external threat. Concepts such as protection and danger are thus ingrained within the construction of a sense of belonging.*"[234]

The most pronounced model of grounding one's belonging by defining oneself in terms of group membership, and thereby evoking a tendency to see the in-group better than others and to unite in response to perceived threats was proposed by Tajfel and Turner.[235] On top of material and ideational benefits, both pressure and expectations comes with membership. Social comparisons lead towards stereotyping a homogenous group of people who share certain characteristics that vary sharply from those of an in-group (the model bad image) of the enemy and prototypes similar set of features the members of in group have in common (the ideal good mage) of the self.[236]

Belonging is inwardly directed, promotes relationships within the group and can severely hamper those outside, builds networks of trust, as well as reciprocal connections that only reinforce the bond. Belonging must be nurtured and invested, it is not something that once given will remain intact forever – it can be utterly changed. Belonging is inextricably bound with the notions of inclusion and exclusion as it is constructed on the questions of who is included within a particular realm; who and by whom is excluded; against or through what and for what purposes; what is permissible; what is prohibited; what is accepted, and what is undesirable within a given domain.[237]

The analysis of borders must start with the societal classification of "us", and "them" as the most prevalent characteristic of the subjective social order. Consequently, one must consider in what sense

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[232] Tajfel, H. (1978). Interindividual Behavior and Intergroup Behavior. In H. Tajfel (Ed.), *Differentiation Between Groups* (pp. 27-60). London: Academic, p. 39.
[233] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1983). *Op.cit.*, pp. 259-289.
[234] Garcia, S. (1993). Europe's Fragmented Identities and the Frontiers of Citizenship. In S. Garcia (Ed.), *European Identity and the Search for Legitimacy*, London: Pinter Publishers, p. 13.
[235] Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. C. (1979). An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Monterey, CA: Brooks Cole, pp. 33-47.
[236] Wright, S.C. & Taylor D.M. (2003). The Social Psychology of Cultural Diversity: Social Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination. In M. A. Hogg & J. Cooper (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology*. London: Sage, p. 153.
[237] Lloyd, F. & O'Brien, C. (2000).*Secret Spaces, Forbidden Places: Rethinking Culture*. New York: Berghahn Books, XVIII.

the "us" changes with conversion and how it affects "them". Does the convert switch sides and perceives the former "us" as present "them" or is it rather conceptual increment that includes into "us" a new group that initially was not there? Another problematization is the place of the self in the new configuration: Is there still a "me"? When an individual meets an individual in a social interaction they do not necessarily behave as two separate persons, rather the interaction is based on their respective memberships in two clearly delineated societal groups, just as it happens during encounters of football fans supporting different teams. Converts, who live in a situation of constant identity comparison, strive to retain distinctiveness while maintaining integrity; the establishment of distinctiveness results in an attachment to "ideologized positions",[238] such as the question of the *burqa* ban or Palestine, which in principle are neutral, through their reference to super-ordinate values becomes endowed with emotional significance. A situation where the "convert had to live up to a standard of behaviour to conform to that faith, in the eyes of both believers and non-believers."[239] Violent dichotomization characterizes extreme beliefs. It is not me speaking to you, but it is "us" facing "them." The perceived and experienced uniformity extends beyond the immediate persons involved towards all the group members treated as undifferentiated items of the same social category devoid of individual characteristics. The more of the group is there in you, the less of yourself can be found in the group. By the same token, the more unified "we" the more monolith "them".

Irrespective of its multi-layered nature, the identity-belonging nexus is primarily built upon the similarity-difference dyad and therefore it is a process of categorisation by comparing oneself with other people who are either like us and share our norms, beliefs and values or constitute "the other".[240] If the category resulting from such a process becomes the main signifier for social bonding and the primary organising force in one's life it creates a border that bonds an individual with a given group and separates them the from wider collectivity of those beyond the line. The line may vary for different members of the group and can be contested both from the outside and from the inside. Conversion involves a change in the way a person thinks about him- or herself. Not all of our self concepts are equally important, and there is another distinction between the real and spurious selves: who we really are and who we might be in a particular role, under a particular set of circumstances.[241]

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[238] Fishman, J. A. (1968). Nationality-nationalism and Nation-nationism. In J. A. Fishman, J. Das Gupta & C. A. Ferguson (Eds.), *Language Problems of Developing Nations* (p. 45). New York: John Wiley and Sons. Cited in Tajfel. H. (1978) The achievement of group differentiation. In H. Tajfel *(*Ed.*)*, *Differentiation Between Social Groups*: *Studies* in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations (pp. 101-140). London: Academic Press.

[239]Turner, P. R. (1979). Religious Conversion and Community Development. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 18:3, pp. 252-60.

[240]Jenkins, R *(*1996). *Social Identity*. London: Routledge, pp. 3-4.

[241] Staples, C. L. & Mauss, A. L. (1987). *Op.cit.*, pp. 133-147.

Both ideology and practices are embraced – it does not always happen at once as not everyone is instantaneously ready. Sometimes, an acceptance of Islam requires a simultaneous exclusion, i.e. cutting ties with the previous social environment, including the family in more dramatic cases. Close interactions with the wider society are perceived dangerous, as they might have negative influence especially in case of "young" converts who have just taken their *shahada*. These concerns are expressed not only regarding religious activities (e.g. funerals or weddings taking places in Christian places of worship – there is an admonition not to go as in the first place, it is forbidden under Islam. The converts are allowed to go but only if they behave like in e.g. museum otherwise such act would be considered blasphemy),[242] but also cutting social ties is sometimes necessary as old friends may encourage bad habits and practices like going to pubs and clubs or drinking alcohol. Unfortunately, the more that is excluded from the convert's existential sphere, the more alien those remaining outside the membership bonds become, losing their individuality and becoming simply a collective of non-Muslims, or *kuffar* (infidels).

Meetings at boundary points can either weaken or reinforce identity and as Briggs indicated, their main importance stems from the implications of how identities are nurtured, how relations are established and how the individual trajectories are shaped.[243] Belonging is negotiated in a similar way and through a variety of strategically different patterns.[244] The circles of belonging might be overlapping but in some cases, it is the individual's decision to keep them separate. In extreme instances there are not two but only one circle irrespective of social contexts.

The importance of belonging is contextually dependent. In some settings particular areas of belonging compete with each other whereas in others, different loyalties are not conflictual, the relative importance attached to each of the feelings of belonging in convert's case can change depending on the situation as well as changing over time. There are two critical issues to be addressed here: Firstly, one needs to determine how a convert's belonging shaped, i.e. what is included and what is excluded into the sphere of being a European New Muslim. Secondly, what is the subjective importance attached to this belonging in the hierarchy of identities. If the danger of a potential terrorist threat lies in exclusivism and reductionism,[245] it is the case of an individual belonging exclusively to one collectivity and ignoring other affiliations, thus excluding from one identity other areas of belonging and reducing it in a very

[242] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research Diary. Glasgow, UK. October 21, 2009.
[243] Briggs, D. (2010). True Stories From Bare Times on Road: Developing Empowerment, Identity and Social Capital Among Urban Minority Ethnic Young People in London, UK. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33: 5, pp. 851-871.
[244] Kuusisto, A. (2011). *Op.cit.*, p.3.
[245] Sen, A. (2006). *Op.cit.*, pp. 20-21.

restrictive way to an either/or identity. The importance invested in identity is not constant, but it might grow over time, it might be crucial in certain points that obliterate other forms of belonging.

Such understanding of social reality which concentrates on things that separate instead of bringing together, which serve as marker that helps to distinguish the individual and the group s/he belongs to from the others, which nurtures divisions and subsists on differences is typical for a radical person and is rooted in their dominant trait of totality of beliefs. According to Herriot radicals are characterised by their literalist interpretation of the holy scripture that always supersedes human laws, rejection of relativity or subjectivity of religious experience and refusing to internalise it, inherent dualism of black *versus* white, us *versus* them and good *versus* evil, selective in their approach to religion and constant feeling of being under threat.[246] Thus, they are indeed defined by borders and always live in their shadow. It is perhaps the greatest paradox of radicalisation that it actively strives to remove any boundaries by compulsory unification and homogenisation of society which in fact means enforcing borderlines. The desire to create an ideal world in which people would abide by the same laws and adhere to the same principles places a heavy weight on minor differences. Those differences ultimately become the least acceptable ones because the very nature of a boundary makes the critical divergences easy to deal with, whereas the ambiguity of small details makes them the most frustrating, and the most dangerous. The daily praxis and routine that escapes every attempt of categorisation and blurs the boundaries between spaces and times of war and peace[247] ultimately means that even if people share nothing else, at least they have a border in common, even if they share it from opposing sides. Naturally, the nature and shape of the border will vary from individual to individual, in some cases it will be more porous, in some it will encompass more, while other boundaries will not leave much space for manoeuvres and will be harder to breach. Nevertheless, even the most drastically exclusive identity can change over time into a more inclusive one once the circumstances of existential, ontological insecurity have been removed. For this reason it is essential to understand not where the border is but how the line of the border is drawn and what determines its shape. In an attempt to understand the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam from the perspective of the identity-belonging nexus, it is essential to consider that the imagined community of an ultimate radical is in fact a borderless landscape - a homogenous society consisting of mirror like images of his own self cloned into infinity.

The above considerations notwithstanding, it is far more important to acknowledge that identity and belonging constitute processes largely dependent on societal context derived from the closeness

[246] Herriot, P. (2009). *Op.cit.*, p. 2.
[247] Appadurai, A. (2006). *Op.cit.,* p. 32.

between security and the identity-belonging nexus as a base on which security is constructed. An analysis of a situation when identity and belonging as categories of security are lost or endangered can provide valuable insight into the radicalisation processes of European converts to Islam. The ideational framework shows why individuals feeling at ease with their hitherto prevailing identity and who embrace Islam not as the essence of "the other" but as something that completes the wholeness of their personality (acceptance) are far less inclined to proceed to activities that aim at destroying the culture in which they were brought up as opposed to those who, in order to embrace Islam, feel the need to discard all that they were before the *shahada* (rejection). This framework also indicates that when someone not so much embraces Islam, but rejects the West and everything it represents, by excluding the whole sphere of belonging they make themselves more vulnerable towards radicalisation. The first case resembles a situation where a church building is no longer in use for Christian services but can still serve the community as a museum or an art gallery or a mosque. In the second instance the building itself is deemed undesirable and unfit to become a mosque, so it is destroyed to give space for new structures.

3.4. Typology of European New Muslims

Developing typologies is an excellent way to isolate the key attributes of the conversion experience. In this case the real challenge is to develop an analytical framework that will link together the variable trajectories of becoming a New Muslim with a comprehensive array of the methods of learning to operate in a new religious setting as a New Muslim and implicated by this change a subsequent transformation in self-image accompanied by possible attitudinal change especially if the individual assigns high priority or importance to the new role. What makes the change profound? How is the change maintained and developed? How does a convert respond to conversion? And finally, how can a European convert to Islam combine their new religious beliefs or practices with other features of personal identity and other commitments and values. How can one reconcile the new belonging with the luggage of previous experiences, old habits and social networks? As this Chapter explained, in the case of converts it is not a question of a number of identities but in fact a question of what does each given identity entail? These factors are crucial especially in lieu of assessing the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam.

My proposition of the identity-belonging nexus and its influence on individual's actions is presented in the following matrix, being an amended Sandra Wallman's four-part social boundary

matrix.[248] Wallman's original proposition does not provide answers to the enriched "me" versus the changed "me" dilemma: Is conversion a putting on of a new layer of clothing or putting on a new garment altogether? Similarly, it leaves unexplained the question of conquering the border: Does conversion enlarge the space or is it a simple crossing where what once was "us" now becomes "them"? The main signifier is the nexus of identity and belonging: is the new self built on a rejection of the old or an acceptance of the new and what is the attitude towards "them" in relation to new "us"? Here I propose a highly contextualised model that allows for capturing the full texture and the dynamic nature of conversion and an analytic tool that reflect the nature of the problem and has the potential to inform policy making. The matrix also develops the understanding of the relationship between the discursive and normative constituents of being a New Muslim and their role in the relationship between the individual and the group. Rejection and exclusion, as well as acceptance and inclusion always take place at the intersection of an enabling environment and a personal trajectory. My own research approach, while sympathetic to psychological pursuits, is oriented more towards a social self that is partially contingent on underlying psychological structures. Concrete personal experiences, kinship, friendship, worship,[249] inter and intra group dynamics and socialisation in unison trigger and facilitate the process. At the crossroads of personal history and the conducive environment, the interplay of factors within the identity–belonging nexus can trigger radicalisation in varying degrees. Simultaneously, the use of violence is only one of the possible avenues of radicalisation.

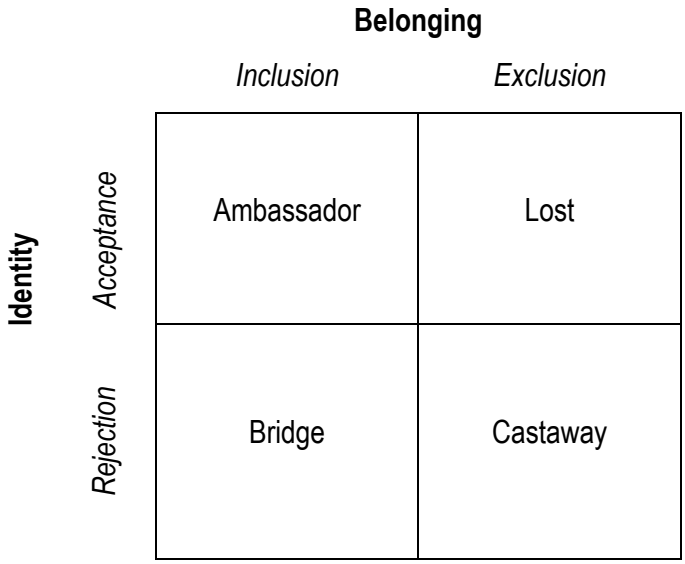

Figure 2.The Typology of European Converts to Islam.

[248] Wallman, S.(1978). The boundaries of "Race*":* Processes of Ethnicity in England. *MAN, New Series*, 13:2, p. 207.
[249] *Cf.* Sageman, M. (2004). *Op.cit.*, pp. 5-10.

The identity of a convert, the "New Muslim" identity, is understood here as a part of an individual's self-concept. The degree to which it permeates life and organizes other self-identities varies: It can be subjugated to the fact of being Scottish or Dutch or, conversely, it can overpower the notion of being a woman. Regardless of how rich and complex the importance of group membership is, its impact upon the individual behaviour will depend on positive or negative attitudes towards social identity categorization (what I am vs. what I am not). These are crucial in reference to the way we react towards "the other".

Belonging, on the other hand, is seen as an emotional attachment, feeling safe and "at home" as defined by Nira Yuval-Davis.[250] In my proposition, belonging, as an act of self-identification, is considered from the cognitive perspective of the dynamics between inclusion-exclusion duality, which reflects the isomorphic nature of the border. Again, the notion of who is incorporated and who remains left out is crucial for determining the direction and intensity of interactions as every boundary must be viewed in a wider societal and political context. The total boundary thus, Ericksson's notion of *Gestalt*,[251] is rooted in a malfunctioning identity and results in a situation where "nothing that belongs inside must be left outside; nothing that must be outside should be tolerated inside" showing the intricate connection between identity and belonging and the importance of borders.

Naturally, one cannot attain a typology without making some sweeping generalisations. Conversion can equally be a tool that perpetuates the barriers, "an instrument for living with difference"[252] as well as an instrument for living a difference. Regardless of which case we analyse, the fact of identity change and the palpability of belonging remains a dominant tone in recreating the past and recounting the present, an undertone and a *leitmotif* of convert's consciousness[253] indicating that this factor remains a master causal scheme which informs all causal attributions.

A single locus of causality focused on identity-belonging nexus provides an analysis which is simultaneously sharpened and generalised. When identity comes to be defined in terms of exclusionist borders, whose edges are sharp and definite, it shapes the discursive focus on the differences, both symbolic and material and a construction of mythology based on inclusion and exclusion. Contrary to

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[250] Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Belonging and the Politics of Belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40: 3, p. 199.
[251] Erickson, E. (1959). *Identity and the Life Cycle. Selected Papers by Erik H. Erickson*. New York: International Universities Press, p. 133. Cited in Kinvall, C. (2007).*The Political Psychology of Radical Islam: Young Muslims in European Cities*. Unpublished Paper, p. 9.
[252] Garcia, S. (1993). *Op.cit.*, p. 25.
[253] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1983). *Op.cit.*, pp. 259-289.

the accepting archetypes, whose boundaries are flexible and more porous, the discourse does not leave space for uncertainty or doubt, no breakdown, no crevice in constructed certainty that could (de)fragment myths of unity, duty and conformity. Such identity and belonging provides means through which the *status quo* is perpetuated and extended. Sociological and praxeological components from an autonomous system of inclusion and exclusion, acceptance and rejection are structured through an ideational narrative. The identity of a convert is a product of social interaction and it emerges through the process of group formation and realignment of boundaries.

It is not an intention of this thesis to argue that the above convert archetypes are set in stone, i.e. that a person displaying one set of features characteristic for given ideal cannot and/or will not move into another quadrant. To the contrary, just like the Goods/Necessity trajectory can result in a genuine religious belief occurring later on, similarly a person displaying traits of a Lost or a Castaway archetype can evolve in time and become the Ambassador. Furthermore, it needs to be remembered that ideal archetypes identified within the proposed theoretical framework remain *ideal*, i.e. while capturing the mechanisms and dynamics of social reality, by their nature offer certain simplified versions of the real world as it was observed by Kenneth Waltz, "*A theory, while related to the world about which explanations are wanted, always remains distinct form that world. Theories are not descriptions of the real world; they are instruments that we design in order to apprehend some part of it.*"[254] The ambiguous nature of conversion and the subtleties of its narratives pose a whole array of dilemmas and contradictions to academics. As we shall see, these dilemmas and contradictions are at the very centre of processes traced in the following Chapters. With these caveats in mind, the reminder of this thesis is meant to highlight the implication of the various narratives of being a New Muslim. It does so by discussing in four separate Chapters each of the above four conversion archetypes from the perspective of identity (acceptance/rejection) and belonging (inclusion/exclusion) nexus.

[254] *Waltz*, *K. N. (1975)*. *Theory of international relations*. Vol. VIII, (pp. 1-85). In F. I. Greenstein and N. W. Polsby (Eds.), *Handbook of Political Science*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, p. 8.

CHAPTER 4. THE ARCHETYPES.
AMBASSADOR: SEARCH FOR MEANING THROUGH REFLECTIVE ENCOUNTER.

In the midst of deep divisions among European converts to Islam across ideological lines, on which the very principles of what it means to be a Muslim are questioned, the Ambassador archetype represents individuals for whom conversion is based upon acceptance and inclusion, the reconciliation of the old with the new, with all elements working in unison. As the first one of the analytic Chapters, Chapter 5 looks closely at the converts' narratives and by examining the cases, it traces the processes induced by the factors of acceptance and inclusion in order to explore the traits typical for the Ambassador archetype and their ramifications, while simultaneously placing it firmly within the wider typology and hence providing comparisons and references to the other positions. Specific attention is given to the meaning of the conversion trajectory, identity, belonging and the dynamics between these elements. As the analysis reveals, Ambassadors are not tussled between contending perspectives like the Lost archetype, nor are they temporary and on the move as Bridges tend to be, neither do they shed their old selves in the same way snakes shed their skins and reify or obfuscate the community like it is in case of Castaways. Ambassadors offer a registry of solutions to potential conflicts and represent some sense of a middle path between the other archetypes that stand divided on ideas central to the lives of European converts to Islam and the issue of them being a security issue.

4.1. Conversion

Lucy and Peter do not fit the picture of a typical convert:[255] They are far too young, successful and intelligent; they are also far too British. It is a cold October evening and we are having dinner at their small house in Bradford. Lucy serves a *halal* (allowed, i.e. without pork) version of a toad in a hole, and we are talking about English accents, education, and of course Islam in Britain and conversions. Lucy and Peter were "simultaneously independent" in their conversion: they did it at the same time but not together and one did not know about conversion plans of the other. They discovered the truth only at the last possible moment when they had "the ultimate conversation" as each of them was prepared to break their relationship for the sake of religion. Lucy's and Peter's interest in Islam turned very quickly

[255] In popular media the conversion to Islam is most commonly explained in terms of "*eccentricity, the insincere by-product of a marriage, the outcome of psychological crisis or disorder, social maladaption…*" for more details see: Birt, J. *Building New Medinas In These Scattered Isles*. August 3, 2002, available at: http://theamericanmuslim.org/tam.php/features/print/building_new_medinas_in_these_sceptered_isles (last accessed: 11.02.2011).

from a general curiosity to "I cannot deny this anymore." Their conversion did not happen "*because I wanted to become a Muslim and it was not like I felt there was something missing, I was not searching for anything, I just got to the point where I was like 'I cannot deny that it [Islam] is true, so that means I am obliged to do it [convert].*"[256]

Irrespective of the speed of the conversion process, those who fit the Ambassador archetype concede that conversion is in fact a unique experience that happens between God and the individual, and that no one can be subjected to this experience by force or coercion, something that the Castaway archetype often proposes. Lucy told me that around that time she became Muslim a lot of her friends were very interested in Islam, and while they would encourage her to share her knowledge with them, she would grow enthusiastic and think that they were going to convert as well. Nonetheless, it was almost as if they got to a point where they would have committed, but then they did not and the time for making this decision had passed irretrievably. Looking back Lucy compares this experience to the magical time from *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, where one can only go through the wardrobe at a certain time and once that moment has passed it is as if the chance has gone: *"[This] ...certainly felt very tangible for me, looking at them, that I thought 'Oh no they have missed it, they have gone past it.'"*

Looking at the couple I think that an incidental spectator would never say they are Muslims. Outside Peter is never taken for Muslim and usually no one knows he is one until Peter informs them; he used to wear a cap but he admits he rarely does so these days. On the other hand, Lucy always wears a headscarf in public and in the first period after conversion she also used to wear a full robe so she looked like a traditional Muslim. She tells me she was often mistaken for an Arab or - a pale Pakistani and told to "go home" by her compatriots unable to comprehend that she has been born in Lake District. Working in hospitals she quite often hears old ladies who exclaim "*My dear! Isn't her English exceptionally good?*" Lucy only smiles and shakes her head, never bothering to explain that it is indeed the case because English is the only language she speaks. I have the feeling she knows how to pick her battles and understands that the majority of people do not venture beyond their visual impressions. Where other converts I met would start an argument based on their hurt feelings or perceived discrimination, Lucy is placid and distanced: something that immediately earns my respect. Like Peter and Lucy, Ambassadors are well prepared and equipped to engage in discussions on the general meaning of identity and transfer the conceptualisation of being a Muslim from the strictly cultural idiom to the more universal religious sphere. Cultural and religious identities are strongly securitised and

[256] All quotes come from: Lucy and Peter. Interview by author. Tape recording, Bradford, UK. October 03, 2010.

presented as societal problems often having political repercussions. As Mouritsen observes, "culture concerns the progress and perfectibility of norms, identities and practices in relation to the communal life and political affairs,"[257] and thus for Lucy Islam is not something cultural. When people ask her "*Do you cook curry?*" she responds, "*Well, actually I am British, my husband is British.*"

Like her husband, Richard, Julia lived what one might call a "Western lifestyle," especially in what she describes as "*the drinking side of things, going to bars [and] watching live bands*."[258] Julia and Richard were both band members and that was how they met. After they got to know each other, they started to talk about spirituality and faith and once Julia explained that she had not quite found what she was looking for in terms of religion, Richard introduced her to Islam as it was not something that had crossed her path before. While Julia was reading Islamic books one thought repeatedly kept resurfacing in her head: "*Yes, that makes complete sense*." She confessed that she was going through checklists in her mind ticking all the boxes as she was gaining a thorough understanding of what Islam is all about. It was not only the spiritual aspects that interested her, but the practical elements of the faith were equally appealing. Julia took the faith on its own, and she was not deterred by the widespread prejudices against Islam, including terrorism. It was because, to her at this stage, these were completely separate issues to this fantastic religion that just she had been introduced to, and she did not associate other issues with Islam and Muslims at that point.

Similar to what many converts experience, for Julia and Richard the real challenge started only *after* the *shahada* when the person coming to Islam needs to learn how to translate their belief into daily praxis and integrate the new faith with their old selves. Before performing the *shahada* they were not practicing any of the Islamic traditions or performing prayers. They did not speak any Arabic, and therefore their basic focus was trying to make adjustments in their lifestyle and in general behaviour starting from the basics like learning how to pray, to small details, like *"…thinking before you speak and thinking about the impact of what you say will have on the other person...for me, it was a case of no more road rage, getting irate with people and thinking about all that kind of stuff. "* This very practical approach and the ability to visualise the grand narrative in the tiniest of daily encounters is one of the Ambassador's unique capabilities.

Thus, Ambassadors unanimously say that the *shahada* is not the most difficult thing; the real challenge is filling empty spaces and rearranging them anew, adjusting the whole lifestyle. For Richard

[257] Mauritsen, P.(2008). Political Responses to Cultural Conflict. In P. Mouritsen & K. E. Jorgensen (Eds.), *Constituting Communities: Political Solutions to Cultural Conflict*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 4.
[258] All quotes come from: Julia and Richard. Interview by author. Tape recording. Hebden Bridge, UK. October 04, 2010.

and Julia, in addition to eliminating alcohol from their diet, the next challenge was prayer and the actual prayer times. Julia admits there are still problems, as growing in faith is a constant struggle, and in addition to possessing a great deal of patience, Julia exhibits also a very common-sensical understanding that there is no threshold after crossing which everything becomes easy: "*I just don't think that that can happen quickly, it depends on the individual, but the prayer …still is…it is hard getting up at 4AM*." This abyss of challenges that opens up after the *shahada* is also reflected in how Lucy describes her experiences:

> *"[Shahada is] just the first important decision, but then what is amazing is that you actually make decisions every day. In a sense that you have to rethink your whole life and reorganize it. I remember my stepmom saying to me that 'It is easy when you believe in God because all the questions are answered' and I was like 'What?!' It just opens up an infinite number of questions. Now I cannot just do what I like. Like what we were saying before "If you would like it, it is good, if you do not like it, it is bad." I do not have that anymore, I have to rethink it all again. Everything I have ever thought and made a judgment about, which is…how many things do you make judgments about? Everything. I have to rethink that with now God in place. Some things are easy, universal, like you do not kill people, you are not cruel, you do not tell lies… Things like that [they] are universal to everybody. But the smaller things, like, you know, God…do you…watch TV? Do you… buy flowers? [laughs] Being, flown across the world and making the world a worse place because Islam has guidance about looking after people, animals, looking after the world."*

4.2. Identity

Identity which springs from mnemonic narratives carves, in turn, a narrative space for itself: Julia and Richard's answers on what it means to be a Muslim were very different yet, possessed the same undertone. Julia underlined that for her it means to be conscious of one's actions, both your physical and verbal communication. In Julia's opinion being is reflected by one's behaviour, not by the nuances of the professed creed. She quite adamantly expressed her view that being Muslim means explicitly not being extreme in anything, just finding a middle ground and being committed to one's actions, caring for other people, and at the same time being grateful for what we receive and making the best of it. Richard, on the other hand thinks it means to recognize one's place on the earth and accepting the truth that we have been created for a purpose. Thus, for Richard being Muslim means that while we are here on earth, we need to try and do what we can and try to redress wrongs and do our best while we are here and simultaneously acknowledging the fact there is a supreme force – a Creator.

This is reflected in their self-proclaimed religious affiliation. When I asked them whether they are Shiite or Sunni, Richard and Julia responded in unison that they are neither and that they feel they have to follow what their hearts think is the right thing to do, which in their words "*is not associate stuff with anything*." In pragmatic terms it means that in certain things they follow more of a Sunni aspect while at the same time other aspects are more akin to Shia traditions. This middle way, a reconciliation of diverse universes is the most defining feature of Ambassador archetype. It does not mean syncretism or patch-working an eclectic amalgam of different bits and pieces. It is an ability to transcend borders and divisions; holism of diversity based on an acceptance of different approaches and inclusion that brings peace and understanding. Stating these truths Richard and Julia do not use big words, and I listen to them amazed at the simplicity of their attitude. "*We do not want to trouble ourselves with thinking 'We belong to this, we belong to that. 'We are Muslim, we believe in Islam*," says Richard; Julia pours us more tea and encourages us to eat some home baked cake. On the other hand, Lucy and Peter were torn between their Sunni and Shia friends and they did not know what to choose. Still they admitted that for them it would be very nice and British to have a little harmony between the two. Nonetheless they found it problematic when their friends continued to say "Well, you know, ultimately we are the same" and decided to tackle the problem asking "What do you believe in and why is it different to them?" In the end they decided for Sunni.

Even though the beginnings of the new Muslim life is punctuated by various hurdles and obstacles, Julia and Richard overcame the majority of them on their own, familiarizing themselves with Islamic customs and practices through reading because at that stage they did not know anyone who could talk them through the basics. Later, via New Muslims, an organisation set up by local people that helps converts and provides them with reading materials and support, Julia was put in touch with a "sister" and in the first months she went to see her once a week while, her husband got similar assistance from a brother from the same community. In addition they attended the Grand Mosque, which provided them with the most diversified religious environment compared to other worship places and, as Richard said, "*It is quite a good mosque to go to if you are a convert because you have lots of white faces, which are nice to see*."

In converts' experience there are numerous moments when the individual needs to adapt, adjust, and change. It is less about going in circles, Peter explains, more like going two steps ahead and one backwards: "*I mean that was the first thing, to learn humility…we just hope we are right sort of thing…So there is lots of chopping and changing*." Consequently, he understands well the frustration and arrogance I have witnessed when talking to numerous converts. I remembered instantly my

conversation with other converts when I could hear that there are not only Muslims and non-Muslims, but also Muslims and true Muslims and that one would have to fulfil certain criteria in order to become one. In Peter's eyes people who refuse to call "Muslim" someone who has said the *shahada* and believes in it but does not follow Islamic practices fully mistakes someone who does not believe with someone who commits a sin. Furthermore, Peter asserts that it is not true that every convert knows more about Islam than nominal Muslims whose affiliation towards religion remains visible only on official documents but he is also very sceptical about self-appointed spiritual leaders: "*Because some bloke in a hat and a beard who speaks nice Arabic says something does not mean he knows the first thing about Islam.*"

For Ambassadors, lowering the "cultural Muslimness" threshold has necessitated defining which values and traits characterise a Muslim and on the other hand has widened the concept so that certain purely cultural traits do not screen out individuals who do not possess them. Frequently, the message coming from Muslim communities, especially those dominated by one ethnic group, suggest that newcomers must learn to appreciate the common culture and relegate much of their own background to the private realm. Ambassadors explicitly reject the powerful *kultur*-Islam as a gatekeeper and integrator screening out intruders who are impervious to the cultural aspect of the community. In the world where the dominant rhetorical style of Muslim community revolves around "unity in diversity", still the idea of *Leitkultur* remains unresolved and begs the question, particularly in European context, what type and degree of cultural sameness is required. The Ambassador archetype follows the ambiguity of social constructivism and points to the discrepancies between the traits the community thinks it has in common and those that are shared in reality as well as the equivocality of empirical differences rejecting the equation presuming binary opposition between two equally essentialised forms of culture. To illustrate this point, Peter is very keen on identifying the contradictions between spiritual and cultural aspects of Islam:

> "I used to think this that Muslims communities should know better [this] sort of thing, but of course they would not. There are certain cultural practices that are based on the religion but that have become warped, and, of course, the classic one for us is Christmas… So of course, because it happened with Christianity, it's a bit older, it is now happening with Islam."

The fact that the Ambassador archetype does not agree with counter-posing the religious and cultural elements of their identity and refuses the latter to be kept at distance in the private realm and thus allowing the convert to stand as the modern, rational, "European Islam" type does not mean that the converts representing this type are barely or not religious at all. To the contrary, the perceived clash

between the non-negotiable secularism and the religious highlights ambiguities in terms of the questionable status of the universalism of Islam which often slides towards the stratum of a culture determining the competing discourses of cultural interpretations of beliefs but is carried out in a religious idiom and therefore escapes group essentialism and introduces the idea of us-ness through cultural dialogue. This cultural and religious pluralism is somewhat a trademark of an Ambassador archetype. Thus, Ambassadors do not represent nominal Islam or a highly diluted, ephemeral and private spiritual belief, which does not manifest itself in actions, one that is so insubstantial that in fact it does not mean anything. Ambassadors are deeply religious and their faith has profound impact on their lives. Describing people who deny that Islam is a way of life, Lucy told me how false and unjust such a statement is. Simultaneously, her account of what "a way of life" means and what is the nature of the change summarizes the Ambassadors' outlook on their conversion experience and explains why she does not have to cook curry to prove she is fully Muslim: "*I did not believe in God before, that was a big shift for me. But once you put God in place it changes everything. It does not change what I find funny or my personality or my, you know, what makes up me, but it changes my perspective on things so - it does change everything.*"

Strict religious observance in the case of Ambassador archetype does not mean acceptance of a purely cultural imprint, this cliché is visible in many aspects of their lives. Julia wears a headscarf only for mosque and she also covers her head if she is going to a Muslim event or visiting a Muslim household out of respect for the host. From her understanding the term *hijab* is a personal interpretation and she thinks that feminine headscarf is an extremely contentious issue and can get distorted. For her, in terms of the Koran, the holy book says "*encourage women to cover their bosoms and their adornments…*" meaning breasts and neck and although Julia understands it could mean hair, she insists it never indicates to cover the hair explicitly. She contends that during that time in history when the Koran was revealed, it was typical for women to have a headscarf and so for her it is more cultural than religious custom. Simultaneously, Julia disapproves of more body exposure than is absolutely necessary and she says she has never been comfortable with that kind of fashion, and this way she follows what "feels right" reconciling the Islamic perspective with a typically European sense of fashion:

> "So I prefer, it is my choice, to believe that modest dress is absolutely appropriate. For instance I have never been a short skirt kind of a woman anyway and I have met other sisters who have had a real big test, a real big adjustment to make going from typical Western dress to what I would term 'modest dress', to wearing longer skirts, to wearing your legs covered...I do know sisters, some sisters have been out night clubbing and have had a real difficult time in that transition from what is

> termed as modest in an Islamic perspective from what they were wearing before."

Acceptance does not need to be blind and total (like it is in case of Lost archetype), contrarily: it is selective and the decisions are pondered thoroughly. As a Muslim woman Julia feels that it is a personal choice as to whether people choose to cover their hair or not. The fact that she chose not to wear it was because she prefers to dress modestly in a European way and she does not feel that she gets any less respect with or without a *hijab* not because she treats the question of Islamic dress code lightly. In fact in a self-professed soapbox moment Julia said that if someone said to her "what would you do to change the world" one of the things she would like seen reduced next to solving problems with global economy as well as the animal abuse, would be for all women to dress modestly because Julia believes that it would solve a lot of problems both for men and women.

Although initially she thought it would have to be her goal to work towards wearing a *hijab*, she abandoned the idea with time. In her heart she is deeply convinced that her interpretation that it is not essential for a woman to wear a headscarf all the time is right. Consequently she wears her as a mark of respect, every time she goes to a mosque "*because obviously it is absolutely a given, you cover your hair there*" but in her daily life Julia choose not to wear it. She cannot say "never say never…" she admits smiling, but at this point in her life it is not something she is concerned about. And before I even manage to ask why or what it is that preoccupies her, Julia continues with great flair:

> "Because being a Muslim is so much more than that and also, it also does not add up because there are Muslim women who will wear a headscarf and an outsider might see that as a sign of faith and commitment to God, but there are Muslim women who will wear *hijab* from a cultural perspective, who might be leading a Western lifestyle but wearing a *hijab*."

Lucy, on the other hand, wears a headscarf daily and never had any doubts that it is not only cultural practice but also a deeply religious issue connected with the anthropology of gender in Islam. She has always covered her hair and worn relatively covering clothes since she said her *shahada*. At first, she found it very liberating because all her life, from a really young age she felt there was a difference between men and women and she always felt obliged to prove that she was as good as any man. Consequently, she was one of the best pupils at school, but in addition to having good grades she was also very sporty and she always, *always* – she emphasizes the word – felt like she was in competition with the boys. Now, after many years, she considers that a lot of her life she spent competing against men to try and be like one, to try and prove that being female did not mean you were not as good as a man is. Unfortunately, regardless of her many successes, she always felt judged by

how she looked: *"…with all of my A's in my exams, with all of my records, sporting wise, with all of my achievements - passing my driving test first time or riding a motorbike or whatever it was I did - I still felt it was how I looked was how I was judged.*" She was never sure why someone was speaking to her, especially with the representatives of the opposite sex at the back of her head there were always doubts that whether were they interested in what she was saying or were they simply trying "to chat her up," as she calls it. I believe the latter was happening quite often as Lucy definitely can be described as an English Rose:

> "And then when I started covering up I felt that took sex out of the equation because they were not able to see me as sexual…so they had to take me on what I was saying, so I had to be valued for only what I thought rather than how I looked…But then I think I went too far in that…I defined *hijab*, which is the word for covering not just for headscarf [but] as being unattractive rather than just being covered. So I just looked like a dyke [laughs] you know…wore really masculine or really baggy clothes and realized eventually that actually you can look smart and still not sexual if you see what I mean…you can be modest but still be feminine."

Therefore, for Lucy acceptance meant also accepting who she truly was and not trying to force herself into a mould that did not really fit. For Julia, on the other hand, the dress code issue was quite straightforward. The real difficulty was hidden entirely elsewhere: in the exposure to alcohol and Julia bravely shared this very intimate issue with a complete stranger out of a sheer desire to foster a dialogue and understanding. While a lot of debate regarding European converts to Islam focuses on female garments, Julia discusses with me entirely different matter, the widely ignored problem of female alcoholism and told me her trials in this particular area.

Because Julia's and Richard's whole lifestyle revolved around playing in a band, going to the pub and having a few pints changing their drinking habits was not easy at all. Nevertheless, they had a gradual plan for reducing their alcohol intake. They elaborated a very structured and precise schedule and first they gave up spirits over thirteen per cent and when they got to that point, they stopped drinking wine, then beer and finally they got to the stage where they were just having shandies. "And *that went on for quite a while. And then,*" Julia said simply, "*we just stopped one day.*" I was very impressed how structured they were but Julia laughed that they had to be as one just cannot simply give up alcohol like that, at least, she said frankly, not the amounts they were consuming.

Lucy also observed that certain cultural practices required new patterns: "*You cannot have a drink after a rough day, so you kind of like have to become a new person.*" She confessed that after her

first exam after she became Muslim, she had a feeling of panic because she did not know what to do as obviously she could not join her friends who went celebrating to the pub:

> "Because after exams I would always go drink I just suddenly thought 'Oh my God! I do not know what to do!' It was not conscious, it was this feeling of panic. I think I went shopping instead, just spent money. Just had to do something semi-reckless, semi-damaging. I think over the years different coping mechanisms come into play."

Julia reflected that Islam was the incentive where everything else failed: "We were not happy with the amount we were consuming anyway… we wanted to cut down but could never find the willpower...so it [Islam] actually helped give us the strength and discipline to cut down." Even though Julia and Richard stopped drinking at home, they would still drink shandies if they were at a social occasion with families or friends who, at this point, did not know about their conversion. Surprisingly, it took quite long to inform relatives and friends as four or five months passed between the *shahada* and the time when Julia and Richard found courage to tell people around that they had become Muslim. Richard admitted it was very difficult to build up to that moment of courage to say it aloud. And the trepidation is woven around the anticipated reaction; it is the paralysing fear of what somebody is going to say, Richard tells me.

> "Religion is never brought up in conversation, in my experience, in this culture, it is rarely brought up. People do not like to talk about it and it is a very contentious issue. We have never talked about it with our friends and things, so I just had no idea how they were going to react. It was going to be completely new to them, but I had to write an email out to my friends and send it off and explain as much as I could why I converted and things ...Of course when I sent the email out they came back saying 'well this is fine, it is up to you to do whatever you want to do. It is your life and we support you in whatever you want to do.' I should have expected it but you cannot help but think someone is going to say 'do not do it, you are crazy' but they did not and they said 'it is fine, we think you are very brave, but we support you.' And it was the same with her family really; they thought 'actually if he is cutting down on his drinking, it is actually healthy for him.' And my dad just said 'do not get involved in any wars or anything like that, do not go volunteering in Afghanistan.' But it was OK."

In other words, acceptance breeds acceptance; instead of rejection, Richard and his wife discovered approval, in place of anticipated judgement they found encouragement. It was more the expected, the imagined they were afraid of than the actual reaction which was not as uncompromising as they have been expecting it. Even the family voiced their objections in a form of jest rather than condemnation. I teased Richard asking why he ultimately decided to divulge his secret. If the question of religion is never brought up, surely he could just keep the news about conversion to himself. Richard

refused to be taken by my bait proving that the Ambassador archetype is able to find the equilibrium between celebrating Islam and living it in a way as natural as breathing is. There is no need to show off, his response suggests, but at the same time, *shahada* is not something shameful that needs to be kept in the closet. It has profound ramifications and an impact on a convert's life, in its social dimension.

> "We needed to make them aware that we converted so that they would understand that we were not drinking or that we were trying to cut down. If they were not aware you would get even more encouragement to have another pint, have another drink. So we had to make them aware so we could carry on socializing with them, nothing hidden…open really with them."

4.3. Belonging

The Ambassadors transformation is not a question of building barriers or excluding someone by principle on denominational grounds. Richard and Julia did part ways with some old friends, but this again was a natural thing. The couple explained that at that point they achieved a certain stage not just in their spiritual development but also in their own relationship and so it did not happen with big decisions being made but they simply drifted away from those people who "*are negative and have prejudices*" and whose "*values, irrespective of the Islamic way of life, were probably quite different to what we were experiencing.*" Such a fluctuation applies outside Islam as well and many people admit that their immediate circle of friends and acquaintances changes steadily over the years. What is important here is that Ambassadors do not plunge into Islam wholeheartedly but somewhat artificially, especially in terms of rapid social changes. They do not switch their milieu from non-Islamic to entirely Islamic; instead they try to suffuse their hitherto environment and lifestyle with Islamic spirit. Julia summarises:

> "... [We] retained a lot of our original friends. It was only the people who might have potentially caused difficulties in the future that drifted away from us… but the guys in the band, who we have known for many years are still great friends and supporters of what we do and we have got close friends who are Christians and so there is no conflict."

The lack of absolute necessity to inform everyone at once that they are Muslim intrigued me as it was something I had never encountered before. As opposed to "I am Muslim – deal with it" attitude displayed by Lost and, to some extent, Bridge archetypes, Ambassadors represent rather "I am who I

am" approach. They do not advertise the fact of their religious denomination, conversely they live their religion and thus it becomes apparent through their deeds rather than declarations. In the case of Richard and Julia people in their neighbourhood are gradually starting to learn only after three years. I was wondering however if it is not similar to leading a double life so I pressed Richard and Julia about how their social and individual aspects of life interacted and asked whether they do not feel like they lead double lives. Richard dismissed my objections in a way very typical for the Ambassador, he did not deny the problems converts might have encountered; he showed me the way to tackle them.

> "It was at first I thought…Now we are integrated and we are who we are and that is it. But until you incorporate your full Islamic values with your daily practical routine, you do feel to be leading [double life]… I have got my Muslim hat on today but I have also got my work hat on today. And it did take a while for the two to feel like they were integrated."

For Lucy, all these different individuals, countless personalities having different backgrounds, stories, places, coming together to be Muslim, and then again going different ways is one of the things she loves about Islam the most: "*There are paths for every personality, you do not have to be all the same to be Muslim and you take it to where you take it to. You can apply it to your life, or apply your life to it and it is going to look different from the way someone else applies their life to it…And I think that both positions are equally valid.*" From these clarifications it seems to me that general things are dealt with easily and what tends to cause problems are details, like where to keep one's hands during prayer. And these are insignificant, Richard insists, because most of the time form is not the key aspect, it is the essence that counts. If you are praying, just do what is comfortable. Of course, there is always guidance for these things, but at the end of the day Richard does not believe that keeping one's hands on one's knees or not is going to make a person holy. It is the sincerity of the prayer that can bring such change: "*It is what is coming from your heart that makes the differences.*"

Contrary to the widespread opinions whereby "Muslims are by virtue of their religion considered part of a different culture,"[259]

For many converts it seems easier to talk about abstract religious principles and values than to confront them with their daily routine and then conform an entire make their way of life conform in order to accommodate the religious principles. Their initial lack of knowledge makes sharing all of life's communal dimensions extremely difficult if not impossible. The Ambassadors accept the fact that

[259] Zapata-Barrero, R., Qasem I. (2008). The Politics of Discourse towards Islam and Muslim Communities in Europe. In P. Mouritsen & K. E. Jorgensen (Eds.), *Constituting Communities: Political Solutions to Cultural Conflict*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 79.

Islamic rules and norms are not mere legal regulations to which an individual must comply but that they carry within a spiritual dimension which must be positively internalised otherwise they are not able to be lived and transmitted outside to future generations of Muslims or newcomers to the religion. It is impossible, an Ambassador archetype insists, to be a private Muslim with private spiritual pursuits; each Muslim must be a member of a wider civic and political culture. Affirming and internalising Islam, in the case of Ambassadors leads directly to sharing and learning to coexist. Such coexistence is the ability to navigate and transcend in tolerance, understanding, self-critical approach to one's own traditions or intercultural dialogue. There is nothing like black and white for an Ambassador type, they live in fullness of colours.

The "need for culture" is recognised by the Ambassador type but the insular interest and inwardly directed identity logic nurtured by the righteous custodians of religious traditions which in turn fuels external stereotyping is flatly dismissed. This form of religious identity becomes an obstacle to belonging to the wider community and delineates what Phillips[260] refers to as coercive "identity wells." In Peter's view this is the reason why converts seem to be a hidden community:

> "The converts are totally enveloped by the new so they just become Pakistani Muslims…They cook curry…they adopt the culture because that solves the problem, you know? They do not have to decide if the old fits in with the new or not. You know, it is kind of like me with the music thing. It had been like my god before. Literally, I felt like I could not live without music before I was Muslim. Then I become Muslim and, I cannot remember really exactly what it was, but a lot of people had said 'No, it is no allowed, any music. No music is allowed.' And so, I got rid of it all. I sold like 400 CDs or something, just got rid of them all."

He admits now that it was strange because close, influential Muslim friends at the time actually listened to music and hence he is not able to explain me who told him that all music is *haram* (forbidden), why he believed them and suddenly eliminated all music from his life.

> "*And the thing is as well it is easier to just say 'no' than 'this is OK and this is not.' And I think at the beginning, when you had all that enthusiasm, it was easy just to get rid of things than to say 'This piece of music is OK, this not, this film is OK but this film is not' and things like that. So we did go through a much more radical stage."*

From all perspectives, cultural and religious pluralism as well as recalcitrant identities require the person to examine their own partialities and to enter into dialogue with conflictual issues as

[260] Phillips, T. *(*2006*).* The *Isaiah Berlin Lecture, delivered* at *Hampstead Synagogue.*11 July 2006.(available at: http://www.cre.gov.uk/Default.aspx.LocID-0hgnew0hn.RefLocID-0hg00900c002.Lang-EN.htm.)

constitutive elements of community. The most important factor for Ambassadors is that the core "us" remains the same; conversion changes it only in the sense of enlargement and thus makes it possible to rework a culture nexus based on a politics of identity contestation and deliberative participating, which reopens negotiations, mobilizes reinterpretation and facilitates dialogue. Lucy's remarks on being radical exemplify how a sense of belonging is the malleable framework that sustains "us" and requires familiarity with the relevant "conversational space" of the society that consists of separate mnemonic vocabularies.

A sense of inclusion is also reflected in the importance of the communal elements in Ambassadors' lives. Julia and Richard have no plans to move, they are well settled in their neighbourhood, they acquired an allotment and plan to start their own garden. In addition to being a part of local community, they regularly go to meetings of a New Muslims group where in addition to spiritual development there is also an element of socializing and occasional visits to someone's house. They appreciate the fact that it is not just converts that are there but lots of traditional Muslims are involved as well and so there is a natural cross over. Lucy and Peter expect their third child; they are also in the process of renovating their house. There have no plans to change the city or country on the agenda, the couple is satisfied with the place in which they live. Both are very active in converts' community, Peter is also engaged in inter-faith dialogue.

4.4. Dynamics

Consequently, while conversion is an existential change for the Ambassador archetype, it is not a change expressed in cultural terms. When I asked them how is it to be British *and* Muslim, they said simply: *We just keep British*. This progressive view on identity is vulnerable in the sense that it cannot precisely account for the degrees of alterations and rhythms of changes but it is helpful as it indicates the need for a structural perspective of various interrelated layers of meaning in the identity-belonging nexus. The Ambassador is not involved in a constant reshuffling of identities; it is not a hydra with numerous heads and numerous hats, it is a wholesome and thick identity. Richard and Julia explained that after the whole turmoil of *shahada* they have just gone back to living how they used to live.

> "[It is] like you come back to normality, and you just carry on as you live before but you are spending half an hour a day of praying. And that is it, that is the only thing you do most of the time and you are just doing a normal routine, but your values have changed…Your goals in life have

> changed and you feel you have a purpose now to help and that is what your life is about and you have got to do what you can."

These are not just empty slogans as Julia tells me that last year she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis what prompted many changes in her job and in her personal life. She is in the process of finishing her job at the television network and has started working from home making handbags. Julia does not have any doubts that it is her faith that helped her through this transition from life without a disability to one which is being affected by it. "*And that's something that has already been decided by God…that that was going to happen in our views, in our thoughts*." It has encouraged her even more to have a positive outlook and made her realize that "when you are having a bad day, just get on with it because there is always someone worse off.

There is then an incredible strength in her weakening body derived from her faith and Julia's unyielding spirit instead of mourning over loss finds enrichment and new opportunities presented by her new circumstances. Julia got involved with diversity initiatives to try and encourage change within the media, in terms of the diversity that is on screen and the diversity that is off screen and to encourage a more inclusive but diverse working group of employees. She confesses that although she has had an understanding with disability issues and always displayed empathy for those who are different to the mainstream, her life after conversion allowed her to see a whole new world: "*Working with a media company as a non-Muslim without a disability was one part of my career with the company, another part of my career with the company with a disability as a Muslim.*" From this perspective becoming and being a Muslim for Ambassadors is more an enrichment than a change in the sense of transforming or adding more instead of taking away. I asked Julia if I understood this correctly and she seemed pleased that I reached such conclusion on my own.

The ability to retain what is crucial and accept what is inevitable affords Ambassadors a particular strength to keep their integrity. In Lucy's words "*it is not like you are a Muslim in one part and a doctor in another part and [then] British. It is kind of like all complementing one another, so it comes together*." Lucy tells me that creating these false dichotomies is not fair. She asked me if anyone would ever thought to tell her to choose whether she is a mother or a daughter. Such a choice is obviously impossible as she is both and cannot possibly prefer one over the other. Divisions therefore seem to be nothing more than following the extreme and such behaviour Richard and Julia tell me takes people away from the true message behind the faith, which is submission to God. If a person has got the true message of Islam, which is peace, then they will be working towards it. If they fail to do so then are not following Islam and therefore, they are not a Muslim in the true sense of the word. "*I would just pray for*

that person to see the right way," Richard tells me and it strikes me how deep his spiritual transformation is – from empiricist chemical engineer to a devoted Muslim for whom, nonetheless, faith goes hand in hand with reason.

When we talk about radicalisation, fundamentalism and divisions with Lucy and Peter I am interested to hear what these terms mean to them. I clarify that I do not want them to feel like I am putting them in a place where they speak for the whole Muslim community, but I ask them to give me their definitions. For Peter the term "fundamentalism" suggests going back to the original, the "fundamentals" whereas he actually views fundamentalism as something very modern rooted in a very contemporary mind-set. He declines to accept is as an Islamic tradition. Simultaneously he observes that somebody who

> "would spend a lot of time doing and praying and doing all these types of things might be viewed from a Western perspective as 'radical' or 'fundamentalist' because they are doing something very atypically British, modern, so rather than going out on the weekend they are going to spend all night in seclusion, you know, just meditating. The thing is that it is just implied that being 'radical' is wrong, whereas it is kind of assumed but it is nowhere in the word."

For Lucy the word "radical" means something different to the norm, nonetheless she highlights the contractual nature of customs and standards, and emphasizes that from a secular, Western perspective, someone who is practicing their religion carefully and, for instance, prays five times a day, might be call a radical. She, on the other hand, would not class such behaviour as radical because she understands that such prayer is simply one of the pillars in Islam, in fact it is the first step of becoming Muslim: "*You pray more than that actually. Five is the minimum*," Lucy says dryly and returning to our topic she states that when she thinks 'radical' she thinks of people who are very angry but she problematizes the issue even further saying that even though some things in Islam, like polygamy, are not illegal, but even though they are allowed, that does not make them right: "*Then I kept thinking - Does it make me a radical, and in what sense radical? And then how do you negotiate with the world…how you come to terms with something like that*." Referring to this old, unbreakable and unchangeable cultural whole which is difficult to swallow at once for the newcomers to Islam as it emerges from the inaccessible past of the Muslim community Peter repeats to me what he keeps saying to one of his Christian friends: "*In Islamic law, because something is permissible does not mean it is the right thing to do. It does not mean it is the good thing*." Such friction between the right and the legal is a derivative function of the individual pursuit of values which spring from group membership in civil

society. References to Islamic practices which fall outside the bounds of liberal tolerance do not mean these values and beliefs are held unreflectively or rather uncompromisingly.

Commenting on converts' incipient lack of religious knowledge of other converts Peter observes that it is a multifaceted phenomenon. There are some things so obvious for the convert that it is nearly impossible to explain them to the outsider. If someone asks the convert "*Why do you pray?*" for them it is something so blatantly self-explanatory that they cannot answer it similarly like it is extremely difficult to answer "*Why is the sun there?*" Peter laughs when I ask him: "*It is shining, it is massive, and you cannot miss it. How do you describe that to someone who cannot see it? You are almost left speechless.*" The ignorance can be dangerous when people start asking questions about sophisticated aspects of *Sharia* law, for example, pertaining to female witnesses. In order to answer a question like that one needs quite a high level of knowledge on Islamic jurisprudence because certain types of witnesses, witnesses for evidence and witnesses for punishment need to be distinguished and explained just as Catholic canon law might seem preposterous for someone who does not comprehend the hermeneutics of historical continuity or does not appreciate the theological intricacies. These differences, unknown and misunderstood by most people lie at the root of numerous misperceptions and superficial judgments about Islam. It is impossible that a convert knows these matters thoroughly and usually they fail to provide satisfactory answers to the enquirers. Nonetheless, Peter signals that there are also positive sides to such fiascos:

> "…because you have become Muslim, any non-Muslim who meets you thinks they can ask you any question under sun…Of course, if you cannot answer their questions, they think they are right because you are obviously, for some bizarre reason, the oracle of all knowledge of Islam. So if you cannot answer their questions then somehow Islam must be wrong. It was a strange thing, but then at the same time, it definitely motivated me to go find out… And of course you learn more and more and more, so of course in some ways it is a good thing."

Acceptance as an instrument for internalizing the differences and enhancing the pluralism of ideas is a pivotal agent in the dynamics of ideational factors with respect to the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam. As much as the Ambassadors will admit that a lack of knowledge might be a problem, they also refuse to see it as a root cause of the radicalisation for it. Peter considers that there is a palpable pattern of a radical first period whereby a lot of converts go through "a Salafi stage." In his view converts experiment with their new religion by going to all the groups and engage with different communities because they want to see and experience the whole variety of different shades in Islam: "*So I think everyone does it but then of course you realize that really, it is very 2D, it does not*

have any depth to it whatsoever. But then of course, you kind of think to yourself - How is this any different to post-modernist Britain in what does it honestly offer?" Salafism never made sense to Lucy as she considers it a very masculine and military strand of Islam. She tells me that female Salafis are very masculine and when I inform her I have never met a Salafi female only Salafi men, she laughs that I would probably never know the difference. Radicalisation for them is not a one-sided process and does not hinge on brainwashing. Peter had a friend who might be called a *Wahhabi* Muslim and who viewed Islam as a political engine. Peter spent long hours discussing with him many issues and he reached a point where he was almost seeing the sense of detonating a bomb in a suicidal attack meant to advance some political gain. He considers he never acted upon this feeling probably only because he was married and restrained by the responsibilities of the head of the young family:

> "I remember saying to him when 9/11 happened it made me physically sick...And he was like 'You cannot be human and not feel that but at the same time it was for political gain or we put right on the day of judgment.' So I started to realize: so, what…you are putting yourself in God's place now?"

Peter is also a person who has known a terrorist:[261] "*And the probability of a Muslim meeting an actual terrorist is…is negligible, and is fine because you talk to some non-Muslims and they view it as something quite commonplace, which of course it is not!*" Thus, the Ambassador manoeuvres among their own lack of knowledge and the ignorance of their friends. After his conversion Peter noticed that not only very few of his non-Muslim friends knew anything about Islam (and he thought that maybe if they did they might have actually want to become Muslims or at least his decision might seem less strange to them)but also, more worryingly, he discovered that there are many born-Muslims that know nothing or next to nothing about their own religion. Such espial seemed very strange to him because as a newly converted person "*you are in this really heightened state that it [Islam] is everything. So how could you have the most precious thing in existence in your hands and just ignore it. How could you do it?*"

The willingness to tackle problems as opposed to remaining blind to them suffuses both private and social aspects of the Ambassador archetype. The Ambassador is well aware of the simplistic and reductionist interpretations of the Muslim community in Europe which fracture Western society in two but at the same time he has an intimate knowledge of his brothers and sisters in Islam and does not pretend that there are no problems on the Muslim side as they do not confuse the reality and the ideal society. This knowledge of both communities enables them to prevent contact zones turning into conflict zones

[261] Peter was acquainted with one of the 7/7 bombers.

as it often happens when Muslims and indigenous Europeans interact. Ambassadors offer discourse and practices that dismantle the fractures and ruptures and are able to transmit their values tied to identity and community irrespectively of the religious change. Julia gave me the best example of such approach. She did an interview for Radio 4 for Women's Hour who were looking into the number of women, white British women, who were converting to Islam. Leeds New Muslim centre sent an email to all of the sisters if anyone wants to take part in this interview and Julia volunteered. After the broadcast interview was aired, Julia met with the local environmental group of people, where she is involved in low key, local community activities like litter picking and planting trees. After the meeting one of the local farming ladies who had heard the interview said to Julia full of awe: "*I heard your interview on the radio, and how on earth do you do it?*" "*Do what?*" asked Julia perplexed. And the lady said: "*Get up at 4AM in the morning to pray!*" Only then Julia understood that up until that point neither the lady, nor, in fact, anyone else in the group had an idea that she was a Muslim and she felt really encouraged by the reaction. She also told me:

> "Had she found out I was a Muslim before she had properly met me, she might have had a different opinion of me…but because she already knew me and heard about this information incidentally afterwards, it did not change her opinion of me, it just made her inquisitive as to why [convert], what sort of brought us to it. And that was a good thing."

Lucy and Peter changed their names with the *shahada* but in our conversation they keep referring to each other with their baptismal ones. Their daughters, however, have "proper" Islamic names and I am interested to learn of the challenges of raising Muslim kids without any background, support and tradition. Lucy explains one of the things we were worried about with the children was that "*they would think they were not Muslim because they were not brown.*" Peter insists that this is one of the key dilemmas for a lot of converts because they want their children to know Islam but they do not want them to be culturally tainted, so they often find themselves in a deadlock with a double danger looming: On the one hand converts' children think that they are not English because they are Muslim, on the other they tend to think that they are not truly Muslim because they are white.

Lucy and Peter used to send one of their daughters to a Saturday school so that the child can learn Arabic because neither of them speaks this language very well. While Lucy acknowledges that it was a really well organized and regimented school from nursery age up until teenagers with "*lots of white people which was nice*," there were certain aspects that she disapproved of: All the children would have lunch in the room where they would pray because it was the biggest room. Paper would be put down on the floor and everyone, from little kids to big kids, would sit there with their packed lunches.

The older kids would finish eating first and then run around, being quite boisterous, while the younger ones would be still finishing their snacks spilling their crisps looking a bit bewildered. Lucy had gone with her daughter because she wanted to see what the school was like before she left the little girl there and so she could see the woman in charge, who just started telling the kids that what they were doing was *haram* (forbidden). It was *haram* that they put crisps on the floor as it was a mosque and should be clean. For Lucy this woman's manner was intimidating and terrifying, showing no compassion, no understanding and she thought "*I cannot leave her [i.e. her daughter] here because I want her to love Islam, not be scared of it*." Ultimately they never took their daughter to Salafis again; the girl does not know the reason why. They decided to wait with telling her the truth until she is older.

Ambassadors are not only active in their immediate local environment but also their general civic engagement is quite high. They do vote and they recognize the important of it refusing to accept the notion that democracy is not Islamic what forces some individuals to choose between citizenship and recognition as good Muslims what apart from stigma may constitute double standards.

Sometimes this civic awakening is also a consequence of the conversion. Richard admits that he did not vote before because he did not read enough about it. But now he understands that voting is important. He and his wife vote for the Green Party. Julia describes the change in their attitude explaining that politics has always frightened her because she has never properly understood it and never felt the people behind it "*fully really knew that they really knew what they were doing or believed what they were saying*." It is not surprising then that such a dubious exercise was something she distanced herself from. But, the more she is aware and the more she feels responsible for her own actions and for the world around, again something that evolved alongside her spiritual development, the more she takes conscious actions which remain within her capabilities. At the same time, she and her husband do not read newspapers, do not watch the news or watch television(what strikes me as slightly peculiar for a television network employee). To the argument that they are not aware of contemporary, topical issues Julia responds calmly that if they are meant to know about something, they will get to hear about it without reading a newspaper or without watching the television. Perhaps this is why they are both somewhat prone to believing in conspiracy theories. "*There are things now we do not know*" is what they said when talking about hidden aspects of political decisions Richard offers me a rhetorical wink that can be shared between two people who know what they are talking about. I do not know what he alludes to but I nod reassuringly.

From Peter and Lucy I got an entirely different account, they believe that there are quite a lot of people who believe in conspiracy theories: "*They will say ridiculous statements like 'The West hates*

Islam' without defining what the 'West' is, let alone how a compass point can hate." Peter is saying "they" so I ask him to define what kind of people he means. He classifies them as radicals who themselves use this undefined "they" in order to manipulate the discourse in a paranoid reaction to the world that is against them. By contrast, he observes, "*that is a very different kind of mentality to being at peace, realizing that everything is in God's hands*." This shows that while being rationally grounded it does not mean that the Ambassador is not spiritual in his outlook. To the contrary, this holistic approach endows Ambassador with the rare ability of navigating among the rocks of the unknown with delicacy and ease. In the first place they never lose the big picture so they are not easily swayed by minor disputes or debates.

I ask my interlocutors how they choose what to do and what not to do. When in doubt, Richard and Julia discuss the contentious matter between the two of them and they come to a consensus as to what they consider the implications of the issue at hand. They examine what they know on the subject, what they have read or heard, what sources that material has come from and, ultimately, they follow what their hearts advise them to do. If they do have an issue or a question they turn to someone they can trust, usually someone from the local converts' community that they trust and respect and know they can ask. Very often converts' issues have no obvious or easy answer and frequently other people try to find solutions to similar dilemmas as well. Richard and Julia are in full agreement and they explain the "procedure" to me finishing off each other's sentences. Julia informs me:

> "You go to people you know, people you can trust…genuine people and you just ask if you have an issue. And then whatever feedback you get, we come home and we discuss it." Richard complements her explanation: "There are only a few issues in Islam where there are differences in opinion. There is not a lot of things we have to think about really, because once you start praying five times a day, fast during Ramadan, and pay an annual charity…that is it. The rest of the time is yours, just life, your life."

Diversity, a variety of opinions, is a very pronounced trait reinforced both by an upbringing in a pluralistic liberal democracy and by the spiritual values of Islam. "*Traditionally, you are meant to allow conflicting opinions and respect all opinions …it is one of the traditions the Prophet explained [to] accept differences. People will always have differences, even within the same faith*." Richard tries to convince me that as Muslims they need to recognize the fact that people will look at the same thing in a different way and although he admits that forcing people to follow only certain path or interpretation is plausible he does not sound as if this is the right thing to do and quickly drops the subject. Similarly Lucy argues that there are different approaches to Islam and that "*people come from all different areas to become Muslims and go off in all different directions as well*." The Ambassador archetype embraces,

understands and applies diversity. But simultaneously it does not mean that everything is allowed and everyone is accepted in sort of "let us celebrate everything and everybody" attitude what would make them not have any opinion in case they offend someone. To the contrary, the Ambassador acknowledges reasonable diversity but assumes homogenous interpretation of Islam and insists that any allusion to violence goes way beyond the core of settlement. Furthermore, although Ambassadors recognise the legitimacy of other groups, the rights of individuals to their belonging, their opinions are quite pronounced and during our conversation Lucy calmly explains me the superiority of Islam over other religions: "*I am a Muslim, and I do not mean to… I am not trying to insult any Christians or Jews or… I think Islam is more balanced*." Simultaneously, this does not render her discourse exclusive or inaccessible.

The same attitude can be observed where *Sharia* law is concerned. Ambassadors are usually impervious about the controversies regarding *Sharia* law in Britain because they are focused more on the spirit rather than concentrating on the dead letter of law: "*Sharia is supposed to be just so anything, any issue, just do what you think is right and is what the Sharia law should be on that subject*." For this reason they also see the synergy between the British law and *Sharia*. They see the British system as a just system of solving social problems, crime and other important issue like education, access to health services but also rights of the old, rights for women and other marginalized groups. Simultaneously, because the law is meant to be a logical way of approaching societal problems, they understand well that it is also embedded in the historical and cultural fibre of a society. Consequently, Ambassadors understand well that in a European context cutting people's hands for crimes seems atrocious and that Europeans are not going to understand why such punishment is righteous and reasonable even though the Ambassadors themselves see the rationale behind the prescriptions of the law. Thus, Ambassadors do not see and do not really want *Sharia* law to be implemented in Europe: "*Everyone has got to be completely practicing the Islam in the right manner for it to work. Because then everyone is conscious of God*," Richard observes and Julia continues this reflection:

> "It is only going to work if Islam has reached everyone's heart in an area so everyone is on the same wavelength and they understand what is right and wrong so *Sharia* law would apply in its full sense. But if half the community is secular, there is just no point. You may as well stick with what you have got because they[Europeans] are not going to understand spiritual laws and it is not going to work. I think everyone has got to be a practicing Muslim before it can be applied."

Will it happen? Julia and Richard do not answer. Peter thinks that Britain needs more religion, not less. He supposes it would be really interesting to have a Grand Mufti who would be a certain

element of binding authority for Muslims. A proposal that could be deemed a radical insertion of religious authority into secular and traditionally Christian environment is explained to me in purely political and pragmatic terms: If the Mufti decides on a particular day for *Ede* then the matter is settled and all British Muslims are obliged to respect that. If they do not then obviously there would be consequences. Similarly, if he provides a ruling or gives an answer to a certain question that would eliminate parallel guidance what for Peter would make more sense. Correspondingly, the situation would be palpably easier for the converts: "*If someone becomes Muslim they just go and see him [Grand Mufti] and he gives a brief outline, or he sets an official course that all converts have to do…it would make much more sense, because at the minute it is chaotic…in the Muslim world there is no Caliph anymore…who is authoritative?*"

Although Peter laughs a little at his own reformist tendencies confessing that he came into Islam thinking "*I am going to teach these awful darkies how to do their religion in a nice British way*" aspiring, in a way, to establish "Mosque of Britain" something very akin to the Church of England, such desires are crucial for the future development of European Islam. And the Ambassador archetype is a key element of this development. Immersed in contextuality of the process of becoming a Muslim they exercise fully what Klaus Eder calls "the inevitable scandal of inclusion"[262] and propose a heterodox solution offering the New Muslim community the possibility to express themselves in their full diversity neutralising cultural differences of believers through religious unity. Ambassadors abandon the theoretical assumption of a hierarchy of belongings which is replaced by the idea of a network of cross cutting identifications working in unison within a common frame and are held together by Islam in which every cultural difference is pushed to the backstage. Islam as an encompassing unity prevents these from producing dynamics that would be prone to radicalisation. This way Ambassadors are given a sense of overarching belonging which means different things to different groups and is normatively influenced by the dialogue between several distinct voices that conceptualise different converts' narratives. With their continuous insertion of new memories and projects the Ambassadors customize and reinvent Islam in order to address the transformation of the direction and the nature of the belief in Europe and provide the framework that corresponds to real life discourse about New Muslim identities.

The main criticism towards converts is that converts are *en bloc* more radical in their religiosity in the sense that they are less compromising, less willing to negotiate between their old and new identities. Ambassadors see the important differences that exist, the main concern being the fit between

[262] Eder, K. (2008). Symbolic Power and Cultural differences: A Power Model of Political solutions to cultural Differences. In P. Mouritsen & K. E. Jorgensen (Eds.), *Constituting Communities: Political Solutions to Cultural Conflict*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 33.

particularistic cultures and universal principles of Islam. Criticism of identities also involve their reconstruction and thus the Ambassador archetypes build the new European dimension daily as well as the meaning of Islam by the nature of contextualization. Undoubtedly, in the future this will lead to the emergence of national versions of Islam whereby Islam is going to be customized to particular historical and cultural circumstances of European countries as undeniably values become charged with emotions by linkage to history and culture. This also makes the Ambassador archetype the true ambassadors of Islam in Europe and the beacons that all the counter-terrorist policies and anti-radicalisation strategies should focus on as the ideal models.

CHAPTER 5. THE ARCHETYPES.
LOST: THE VICTIM OF PUSH AND PULL DYNAMICS.

An attentive reader will have noticed how many times in previous Chapter the Ambassadors alluded to the difficult beginnings of their New Muslim lives, either recounting the trials they endured or mistakes they made. This regularity gives the impression that in order to change from the caterpillar into a butterfly, every convert needs to go through a transitory phase of pupating – a difficult and painful time of transformations, which are somewhat shrouded by the protective veil of the cocoon. Chapter 5 provides a systematic analysis of the most ephemeral and contradictory of the four archetypes where embracing Islam as the new religion based on an acceptance of the new incessantly clashes with the exclusion of the old sense of belonging in their social, cultural and behavioural dimensions. The Chapter argues that the Lost archetype is the most common and simultaneously the least stable of the four archetypes. Simultaneously, it can be claimed that it is a conundrum of so many factors that one can hardly refer to the plethora of circumstances and responses as a cohesive archetype as it encompasses such a multitude of idiosyncratic behavioural traits. It is difficult therefore to describe an ideal individual since the variety within the type is based on an overabundance of highly personalised factors. At the same time, it is the ubiquitous archetype and the main challenge it poses from the security perspective is that it can easily lead a convert into *any* of the other three archetypes depending on which of the push and pull factors prevail in the identity-belonging dynamic. Thus, while what is Lost can sometimes be found and mature as an Ambassador, the Lost archetype can occasionally also become a Bridge archetype and even entirely vanish in the vortex of the new-self and resurface as a Castaway.

5.1. Conversion.

The majority of Lost cases fall within this archetype due to their hastened conversions and a lack of suitable community support. Converts to Islam are accepted very quickly and often encouraged not to postpone their decision but advised to take the *shahada* as soon as possible even if they themselves do not feel ready or prepared enough to commit. The *leitmotif* in all the conversion narratives I have heard throughout my field research was the question: *what would happen if you died today?*, which usually was the feather that killed the camel of hesitation. Thus, many decisions are taken without proper consideration, under the influence of either a charismatic friend/leader or in a sudden whirlwind of emotions. A very potent example of such situation was a story shared with me by Julia and Richard.

They had been considering converting to Islam for quite a considerable time but still had some doubts when Julia went on a course and met a Muslim leader who impressed her greatly. She approached him and explained that she and her partner were considering conversion, but still felt they had a long way to go because of what she described as a "Western lifestyle." Julia assured the leader that slowly they are trying to improve their lifestyle but still felt there is a long way ahead. To this the gentlemen responded that they do not need to delay their *shahadas* since "*Islam does not expect you to convert one day and life a c o m p l e t e l y*[263] *different lifestyle because God had understanding and patience*."[264] He encouraged Julia to convert "the sooner, the better," explaining that they could proceed about their lifestyles adjustments gradually.[265] He made clear that if she or her partner "*does not convert and die tomorrow, then who knows what… where you will end up*." In the interview Julia made it clear that the uncertainty about "*what is round the corner*" and the prospect of a clean slate, the new beginning and absolute annihilation of all past wrongdoings brought by taking the *shahada* was the factor that ultimately convinced the woman not to delay the decision any longer.

Julia returned from the course thinking that this mental agreement to convert is a good starting point to think how the couple can change their lifestyle and start preparations towards embracing their new religion. She explained this to Richard and he consented with her wish that they convert soon. During our conversation Richard also revealed that not so long before this had happened the couple had a conversation regarding their prospective conversion and they agreed that they would need to think about when to convert with the possible deadline set as far as ten years' time precisely because they knew how difficult the whole process will be. Nonetheless, once his wife told him that they had to bring the conversion forward, he thought "*right, the time is right*" and agreed that there was no point in deferring the inevitable.

At that point, the couple did not know anyone from the Muslim community, so the gentlemen who ran the course offered that when they want to take their *shahadas*, he would be happy to administer the ceremony for them. Thus, on the next day after the couple had a conversation Julia decided to phone him and book a date thinking that it could be organized in a couple of weeks which would give them a bit of time to adjust to the prospect of it and start thinking about all the necessary changes the conversion would trigger. Nonetheless, when they were talking on the phone the gentleman said: "*What about tonight? Why do not you come over to the Mosque? I will speak to the imam.*" Once again, the acceleration of the whole process took Julia by surprise, but pressed, she

[263] Emphasis mine.
[264] Julia and Richard. Interview by author. Tape recording. Hebden Bridge, UK. October 04, 2010.
[265] *Ibid*.

agreed to speak with her husband to confirm the details. She knew they wanted to convert, she was very clear about her wish to finalise the process but at the same time she hesitated because it was so soon after they made that decision and secretly hoped for "*a bit of leeway, a bit of time*." She explained her doubts to me with all honesty:

> "In my head, I thought he was a really busy man, he might not be able to fit us in for a few weeks and it just gives us a bit more time to get our heads round what we are doing and everything else. But I suppose, if I am honest, maybe a few more binges over the next few weeks before we make that commitment, if I am completely honest."

Julia returned from the course on Thursday; by Friday events were happening very quickly. She rang her husband who was at work and informed him that they were invited to attend the mosque that night and make their formal confession of faith and that she made her mind up and was going to do it declaring simultaneously that they could but did not have to do it together and that the decision whether or not he wished to participate was completely his choice. "*And there was a big silence…*" she laughed recounting the story. There was a big silence, Richard explained, as the couple was clearly enjoying the suspense and twists in their tale, because he was at work, and at that time he was working in the lab with many of his colleagues around, so when he received a phone call from his wife telling him that he reached a turning point in his life in the first place it was not the most comfortable environment to have such a discussion; and secondly he needed a few moments to ponder:

> "I did pause to think about that and I did have to kind of accept that if I am going to do it [convert] at some point, I may as well do it now. So I said 'Yeah, I will do it.' It took a lot of courage but I knew it was the right thing… So we went that evening, took our *shahadas."*

This story, in addition to presenting inevitable connections and gateways between the archetypes, also by capturing the rapid acceleration towards the *shahada*, epitomises many conversion narratives. In numerous cases even when the prospective convert entertains the thought of changing religion, the actual trigger transforming the thoughts into action is an accidental meeting with someone asking him or her what would happen in the eventuality of death. In a majority of instances the convert is not ready or prepared to start practicing Islam; often they are not even equipped with sufficient knowledge about the religion and the decision is based upon a sincere will to embrace Islam. There are no preparatory courses beforehand and no recognised induction period directly following the first days and weeks after conversion. There are also no organisational structures that could meet New Muslims' needs either due to lack of will or a lack of community acknowledgment of the issue or limited resources. The small centres catering for new believers are usually organised by converts themselves and these are available only in big cities where the concentration of Muslim population is high. In

smaller towns converts are usually left to their own devices and rely upon the internet community unless they are able to travel to a place where New Muslims gather, which is not always possible.

5.2. Identity

Julia and Richard's story encapsulated well that it is when the convert comes back home after the ceremony, when the dilemmas typically begin. One person left the house and someone entirely different returned, hence the main question a New Muslim faces is: What next? What this new person should do and what to avoid, how to behave, how to navigate among the treacherous reef consisting of tiny details of everyday life? During this first, crucial period every choice is like a crossroad and the decisions are not always straightforward. Converts usually learn by trial and error as well as by observing their new community, if such an option is viable. On many occasions during my interviews with converts, both male and female, I have heard stories confirming that such knowledge is costly and it comes with time. This was also the case of Richard, who during his first venture to the mosque for Friday prayers was dressed with great care in full tunic with trousers, a shawl and a hat bought especially for this occasion. To his surprise Richard discovered that he was the only convert wearing this type of outfit and felt somewhat uncomfortable and really out of place because all the converts were just in jeans and t-shirts while only a few of the Asians were wearing similar outfits. Confronted with this situation Richard thought: "*there is no need for this, just wear whatever you used to wear*"[266] and indeed, when we met he presented himself in a smart casual dress of a typical Englishman and no one would have guessed that he is a Muslim judging purely by his appearance. And thus Richard learned quickly that his assumptions that if he went to mosque he would be expected to wear some sort of Asian cultural dress were ill founded as obviously that was not the case at all. But that, as he emphasised, was all part of the learning process and the phrase "*we did not know that... we just did not know*"[267] was often repeated by converts who shared their stories with me.

Nonetheless, being a Lost archetype does not necessarily mean being lost *in Islam*, rather it pertains to a situation when a convert is lost *when it comes to Islam*. When the connection between the person and Islam is being formed it is very easy to get lost in the quagmire of potentialities; very few individuals are so natural in their new incarnation, the majority of the converts need to learn how to live an Islamic life from scratch. Naturally, there is no one particular way to live an Islamic life, but learning to "live Islam" reminds to some extent of learning a foreign language – while the grammatical structure

[266] Julia and Richard. Interview by author. Tape recording. Hebden Bridge, UK. October 04, 2010.
[267] *Ibid*.

remains intact and provides a framework for shaping thoughts, each individual develops their own, exclusive to them that is as unique as a fingerprint and differs from person to person.

Among conflicting opinions, missing knowledge and experience, converts need to find answers on how to behave, how to interact with the society, and how to respond to all the small and big events of daily life. In this labyrinth the past mixes with the present and former habits and customs mingle with new practices, which the convert is trying to learn and establish in his or her routine. The space between two identities is very similar to a landscape between two territories: They are divided by a visible line of a border (i.e. the *shahada*) but aside from this very arbitrary symbol of change, it is very hard to tell where one territory ends and other begins: languages, traditions and lifestyles merge and blend on both sides of the frontier. The crossing thus takes much more than one step and thus frequently, the New Muslims in a desperate attempt to prevent getting Lost opt for a rigid cultural (in addition to the religious one) adherence to principles prevalent in their new denominational community.

In addition to being ephemeral and quite prevalent, the Lost archetype tends as well to be temporal because usually it does not last for a very long time. Rather, the archetypical characteristics are frequently strongly pronounced in the first period after taking the *shahada* and then slowly disappear as the converts mature in their new religion, just like national identity unifies and consolidates upon our onward travel away from the border. In my fieldwork most of the Lost archetype cases were very young converts, freshly converted to Islam and not yet settled fully in their new religious identity and milieu. My observations were reiterated by those who after years of learning how to "live Islam" desponded over such behaviour, which was once their own. One of the community leaders in England told me:

> "When I see them coming here dressed up in different clothing from other parts of the world and speaking pigeon English as if they never had come from this part of the world where they were born and brought up, I despair and wonder how they will ever really gain a true understanding of Islam or help Islam flourish in Europe."[268]

Simultaneously she admitted that this kind of response to conversion is not new to her and confessed that she underwent a similar process in the period immediately following her conversion. However, even if at first she took on the Malay expression of Islam, wore traditional Malaysian clothing and ate only Malaysian food, when she got married to a man from Iraq she found herself in an entirely different community with a different expression of Islam both inward and outward which helped her to realise that different communities express their Islam in different ways and she stopped approaching the cultural manifestations of religion in a dogmatic way. After thirty years the Malaysian cuisine still appeals

[268] Batool Al-Toma. Interview by author. Tape recording. Leicester, UK. February 20, 2010.

to her but she did not restrict herself only to one cultural plane and takes great pride in presenting a "*British-oriented Islam, which expresses a broader spectrum instead of the inflexible Islam that has come from the other parts of the world.*"[269] She believes that holding on to what is more cultural than religious, must be challenged and I could see that because looking at her elegant posture in a simple long-sleeved blouse and a knee-length skirt I could not deny that all the requirements of Islamic modest dress was met by wearing Western clothes. Even her hair was covered though not with a scarf but a small toque.

In most cases, of those who I met who could be ascribed to the Lost archetype, the majority were merely a few months after taking their *shahada* and in all respect, as the name of the archetype suggests, were simply lost in their new role, either because of lack of knowledge or guidance or both. They knew they were on a path somewhere, but proceeded either without a map and did not know how exactly they were supposed to get where they wanted or had contradictory guidelines. Usually also the goal was described in vague terms (e.g. *I want to be a good Muslim*) without specifications what it should entail or what does it take to be one. However, even a considerable time after their conversion, few are still torn between the two parts of their identity, the past and the future, making the present a weird amalgam of both, sometimes incongruous and not sustainable.

The Lost archetype, this peculiar hybrid might have numerous guises. I have met Muslims who still practice some of the Christian traditions like decorating the Christmas tree, or those who still attend Bible study groups; indeed I have myself received a Christmas card from one person with a clear innuendo indicating that she is expecting to receive one from me. The individual in question was by no means a non-practicing, conformist believer. Sandra, back then not even a year after conversion, always wore a typical Pakistani dress and as a zealous Muslim she was actively engaged in a variety of *dawah*(proselytising) activities including study groups, charity events and community outreach. She has tried to convert her whole family (albeit unsuccessfully), indeed on several occasions during our conversations, she attempted to convince me that Islam is the best of religions.[270]

Mehmet's story is quite similar; he confessed that he converted for his girlfriend with whom he was living but when I enquired whether they are going to get married he declined such a possibility insisting that she is not "properly" Muslim to be his wife. When I visited Mehmet, three months after he had taken his *shahada*, the Hague was scorched in the middle of the summer heat wave and certainly I appeared to be more Muslim than the girl who presented herself in a fitted top and jogging trousers with her long hair loose and uncovered whereas I suffered in a long sleeved dress with a scarf covering my

[269] Batool Al-Toma. Interview by author. Tape recording. Leicester, UK. February 20, 2010.
[270] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research Diary. Glasgow, UK. July 21, 2009.

neck as I always tried to dress modestly for my interviews out of respect for those who were hosting me. Nevertheless, the fact that Mehmet's beautiful girlfriend was too "Westernised" did not prevent him from enjoying all the pleasantries of a relationship that was not very Islamic.

5.3. Belonging

Patricia speaks very fast, and often stops her sentences in the middle and then starts her story anew, in a different place. I am not sure whether this is caused by language difficulties or because she does not know how to approach the difficult matters we are discussing in a small restaurant in Bedford.[271] Patricia is a 44-year old lady who neither parades being a Muslim nor hides it. She wears a headscarf, but only because "*it makes things easier in life*" and such conformism is also very typical for the Lost archetype. She has a job, well established family relations, and she is very pleased with her life belying the theories which argue that only socially alienated or economically marginalised individuals convert.[272] What is interesting is that while Patricia's parents are Roman Catholic, of her five children, one is an atheist, one remains a nominal (but not practicing) Catholic, one is a former Jehovah Witness rejected by her community because of her pre-marital sexual relations, one is a Muslim and the youngest one, still a minor, is being raised by Patricia in an openness towards all the religions. This factum neatly summarises everything that needs to be said in terms of the Lost archetype in relation to belonging.

On the surface it may seem that such an approach is a result of Patricia's understanding of the nature of spiritual engagement: "*Religion is a bond between you and God, you know. And nobody can force anything here by some kind of decree or command.*" At the same time, while she does not remain blind to all the different shades of Islam and different approaches to living an Islamic life, she insists that "*Life of us, converts, is more complicated than this of born Muslims, because we constantly live in a state of the conflict of conscience*." This apparent contradiction, and the Lost archetype is built on these, is explained to me in a very detailed way:

> "Being a devout Muslim, one can be perceived as dangerous...because people judge basing on pretences and false appearances. [Consequently] some Muslims who deem it just to wear *niqabs* and so on might be the sweetest and most open people on the face of the planet, at the same time, others in quite Western dress might be more dangerous. So you know, things are not straightforward."

[271] All quotes come from: Patricia. Interview by author. Tape recording, Bedford, UK. February 18, 2010.
[272] *Cf.* Lofland, J. & Stark, R. (1965). *Op.cit.*, pp. 862-874. For a further discussion of such claims see Chapter 2.

As an example Patricia tells me about her friend from London, whom she believes to be extremely radical. I ask Patricia what does she mean by that and she explains, that this friend, a Pakistani, married to an imam of Arab origin, does not, for instance, send her children to school and educates them at home with their curriculum tailored according to her beliefs and values. Patricia tells me that it is wrong from her perspective:

> "I have this deep conviction that we do not bring up children for ourselves but for the world. And if I tell them only those things I approve of what if they hear about something else from a stranger? But she [the friend] has her own vision and her opinions. For her if you are a female Muslim, the only doctor you are allowed to go is a female too, preferably also Muslim...And this is what I mean when I say she is radical, do you know what I mean? Because who is supposed to be this doctor if she is doing nothing to ensure that her children might become one."

I wanted to know whether Patricia challenged her friend with this question. After a brief pause, Patricia gives me a look and then responds pensively: "*You know what, no, I did not. I do not like to cause unnecessary... you know. And furthermore, I do not have the need to change people*." Similarly, when I ask her about the role of converts in fostering understanding and bridging societal gaps, Patricia gently but firmly rejects my suggestions. I have the feeling she takes me for a young and very idealistic representative of an "ivory tower": "*I have never had a sense of mission...Of course I can talk with everyone who would like such conversation [about Islam] but I do not have this feeling of being a missionary because I do not believe in things like that*." Patricia agrees with my arguments however, that she can reach Europeans easier than born Muslims because there are no linguistic or cultural barriers between her and her compatriots but at the same time she observes disillusioned:

> "Do you think that when I will talk to them about Islam they will want to listen to me?... Of course not! You cannot speak about something they are not interested in. I mean, obviously you can, but remember that such endeavour is doomed to failure from the very beginning."

Thus, I understand not to expect any proselytising from Patricia, who believes that the need of Islam must come from within the individual and cannot be imposed or induced from the outside. This existential openness is yet again immediately contradicted when we discuss the nature of society and best styles of governance:

> "When it comes to democracy, and perhaps it is not a popular view," begins Patricia with a little disclaimer, "I think it to be the worst of political systems; the worst one because millions of people who have nothing to do with politics and who are totally incompetent choose [politicians]. And what is the effect – they are manipulated...I would like the world caliphate to happen; it would just make it a better place. Because that it is better when

> there is one governor who takes responsibility for his actions. But, you know, let us introduce caliphate? By democratic means? Let us vote on it? How would that happen? I just believe that it is God's will and if God wanted it, we would have the caliphate in place."

And then she continues: "*That is why when I hear about all these ideas that Islam wants to take over Europe and we all will be forced to become Muslims, [I ask] how would that happen? How to force someone to become Muslim? I do believe that Islam can take over Europe*," she adds placidly, "*I do not say no to this, but it rather will not happen by force*" and explains that in her view it will be a question of natural development and bottom-up grassroots changes.

Patricia understands well that her own life is in constant change also and sees it as an uninterrupted development. This does not mean however, that certain transformations do not invoke barriers that separate her from her past, from former friends and acquaintances. To the contrary: "*Knowing about this [change] I do not even knock to their door anymore and I do not say: 'Well, we used to be friends, and now, you see how things are like.' This [conversion to Islam] was my decision and I do not want to involve them into this, although they still have a place in my heart*."

In her heart, perhaps, but not necessarily in her life. Though evident, from what she tells me, it is left unsaid and politely I do not comment on the fact that she has put her past into a safe-box and has moved on with her life. At the end of our long meeting I ask Patricia whether she thinks it is difficult to be Muslim in Europe. She laughs at me: "*I do not know how it is to be Muslim n o t in Europe! I cannot compare!...But is it difficult? You know, I think that being Christian is equally difficult, that it is not easier at all...because it [also] requires work and because you will always be laughed at*." Patricia would like to go to a Muslim country but not to move there and live permanently, but rather to see it and experience what it is like. "*I would like to go everywhere*" she finishes our conversation and for me this last sentence is a perfect metaphor for the Lost archetype. Indeed, it can take a convert anywhere and it is hard to predict in which direction Patricia is heading.

When analysed from the belonging angle, losing the previous safe environment and venturing into unknown social territories can spark a desire in converts to fit into their new communities by changing their clothes, language and cuisine as well as their attitudes and total outlook on life. An extreme intensity is involved in this process being experienced in the Lost period; the convert, like a chameleon so strongly wants to adapt to the profile of "a Muslim" and be connected with the Muslim community that they melt into and blend with the environment. They gain from the community what they have lost due to conversion but simultaneously the community somewhat enforces their own set of principles onto the people who want to join them.

They want to belong so much to the new group they are a part of that they become invisible. There are converts who in the first period after conversion pursue a total and very literal implementation of Islam and express feelings that being a "real" or "authentic" Muslim or to be fully accepted into the new community, they have to provide some serious responses and thus a number of the new converts go off on a tangent and turn their back on their family and their society and only after the hard-core, initial period they slowly regain their spiritual and social balance. Conversely, the Lost stage can start with accepting Islamic faith and tradition and subsequently lead to slowly dropping out of the practices to the point where "*faith stays in your heart*"[273] or even stopping the practice altogether with the belief and moving on to another religion.

Some converts argue that it is necessary for people who facilitate converts' transition into Islam to be converts themselves, to have personally experienced all the difficulties in order to be able to act efficiently. On the other hand, there are also voices claiming the contrary, that because converts are so new to the religion, those coming to Islam must be properly supervised by born Muslims; otherwise it is very easy for the new believers to stray into dangerous directions. Subsequently, there is no comprehensive infrastructure for New Muslims, no standardised programmes of bringing and establishing them in Islam, and the network of centres where converts can meet, learn and exchange experiences is only being built so its potential of outreach still remains very limited. Such a situation means that each individual converts independently and after conversion finds himself in the middle of nowhere. Just as their pathway to Islam is highly personalised so is their way of living Islam as they need to find their own means of translating it into reality and daily praxis. Community helps but because converts are still relatively few, it is easier for them just to blend in and so they vanish among the wider Muslim community.

The problem, raised repeatedly during many of the interviews, is whether the Muslim communities are adequately equipped to deal with converts. Do they know how to deal with the problems that New Muslims face when converting to Islam and how to address the challenges that await them? Finally, can the Muslim community take them through this passage period to convert to Islam safely and securely? Often the converts are passed like a buck from one person to another, from one mosque to a different one especially if they do not fit into a particular milieu. In one of the mosques I had an exchange with a Lithuanian convert who told me quite blatantly that all Christians were liars and that women, without however explaining exactly what he means by it, were "*deficient.*"[274] Although he was swiftly intercepted by one of the community members and I was earnestly assured that

[273]Laura. Interview by author. Tape recording. Czelad, Poland. December 29, 2009.
[274]Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research diary. Glasgow, UK. May 27, 2009.

he would be asked to leave the establishment as his views are not shared by other members, I kept wondering where he would go and what would happen if he finds a group ascribing to the views he was espousing. This question remained unanswered.

5.4. Dynamics

Being Lost may entail adopting frontstage and backstage behaviour as described by Goffman[275] who identified this intentional manipulation of behaviour towards the out-group members desired to maintain a particular "public" image as opposed to the typical behaviour exercised in the privacy of home or within the inner circle of friends from an in-group. In a way, when facing the rest of the society, converts are asked to speak and act on behalf of Islam. As explained in previous Chapters,[276]converts are often forced to be spokespersons for the occurrences that are related to Islam, to comment on Islamic dogmas and traditions. They are often expected by their non-Muslim friends and colleagues to have opinion on situations and it is demanded that they have some knowledge on the issues they might not be personally engaged or interested in just because they are Muslims. For some people lacking skills and knowledge it is an extremely difficult to uphold the desired impression of a Muslim community and thus find themselves in an uncomfortable situation. This, in turn may lead to concealing one's Muslim identity, for instance wearing a headscarf in certain situations (when visiting a mosque) and taking it off when needed (e.g. in the workplace).[277] Such "part time Muslims" live in a very dangerous state of social schizophrenia and their attempts to juggle identities are not always successful.

As argued above, being Lost at the first stage after conversion does not necessarily mean that an individual will remain the Lost archetype forever. Religious identity continually evolves, and so the person can easily progress and develop, discover their spiritual and social destination and regain their integrity. The Lost archetype is thus as much a category on its own as much as it is a gateway to other ways of living Islam, Asa's story illustrates this in a comprehensive way.

Asa was brought up in a Roman Catholic family and forced to go to church when he was young. He regularly accompanied his grandfather, a devout Christian, but because his grandfather's devotion was imposed on him, Asa used to run away from the service. In spite of his aversion for compulsory worship, the influence of his grandfather, whom he greatly respected, inspired him to seek religiosity.

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[275] Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, pp. 12-57.
[276] Batool Al-Toma. Interview by author. Tape recording. Leicester, UK. February 20, 2010. For a further discussion of these issues see Chapter 3.
[277] Author's Fieldwork Notes. Research diary. Glasgow, UK. July 15, 2009.

Asa explains: "*At the same time I always wanted to know God—like that was point blank, that's what it was. I wanted to know God because my granddad was a very spiritual person.*"[278] Thus, Asa participated in the choir and he truly enjoyed it because, as he says, he knew he was singing for God. As is typical for teenagers, Asa's behaviour was not consistent and when the time came to choose a secondary school and his family wanted him to attend a Catholic one, he failed the test on purpose. This decision was not caused by the rebellion against religion or religious establishments, rather Asa preferred to go to the state school down the road, where the majority of his friends from the neighbourhood were going. When he was fourteen, Asa started smoking cannabis and "*bunk the choir practice*" due to lack of parental supervision. This practice went unnoticed until he was expelled from school at the age of sixteen. Asa confessed that he was doing some "wild stuff", at which point he did not elaborate on the details.

During his youth, in the amazing conundrum of diversity of south London, Asa's social network consisted of people with numerous ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In the middle of a careless life of petty criminality, partying, doing illegal business and enjoying himself, Asa started spending more and more time with Muslims, of whom some were partners in all these activities and some were just parts of the rich tapestry of life. In hindsight he confesses that his Muslim friends "*were doing some wild stuff then because they did not understand the religion*" however it is problematic to estimate whether he held similar views back then. The wild things to which Asa alluded turned out to be drug dealing, extortions and other similar illegal activities, with which the streets of London, and indeed every big city, are ripe. Because Asa tells me that these Muslim brothers were robbing non-Muslims only (even he fell a victim of such exaction as he discloses) I asked if in their opinion they could not have thought that they have been performing righteous deeds but Asa disagrees with me explaining that they were simply using to their advantage the fact that they were Muslims.

Other of his acquaintances refrained from such wrongdoings and did not engage in any illicit pursuits trying to live according to Islamic regulations. Of these, Asa remembers one person with whom he spoke about religion. He admitted that although he enjoyed these conversations, he "*never understood a thing*" because he always perceived Islam through a lens of national divides as something confined within the ethnic and cultural boundaries and this comprehension stayed with him until later on during his spiritual quest, when it dawned on him that "*Islam is for the whole of humanity.*" Asa's conversion however, was not a result of inner processes: a long spiritual elaboration, or growing up in faith, neither was it a consequence of external, structural factors like a desire to belong to a certain

[278] All quotes come from: Asa. Interview by author. Tape recording. London, UK. March 16, 2011.

community; instead it was a happy coincidence, a jointure of many precipitant factors, in particular a serendipitous day and an unplanned meeting.

Asa remembers the details of the day he became a Muslim very vividly, although what led to such sweeping changes in his life began quite inconspicuously. Asa likes to make money; he calls himself a hustler and explores various opportunities of earning some profit by selling something. From selling stolen mobile phones, which he used to do in the past, Asa moved on to the perfectly legal business of selling perfumes. That day Asa went to cricket grounds and was selling tickets to the cricket: In order to get the tickets, he explains the whole procedure to me, "*some people used fraud to buy the tickets and then go and sell it. But us, as young people in that community, we used to wait for people, when they come out and go home, we asked them for their ticket, and then we go and hustle it and sell it to people who want to get in...*"

Hustling cricket tickets was certainly not the most sustainable way of making money, depending not so much on entrepreneurship of a young hustler, but in the first place on a smile of good fortune. Nevertheless, on that day fortune smiled on Asa not once but showered him with favours constantly. Seeing beyond the happy coincidence he knew that this day he made that much money not because he was simply lucky, but because God wanted him to profit heftily. This understanding made him not only content but also grateful: "*I could not believe it. I was just thanking God*."

In this particular mood Asa accidentally met a person "with whom he used to talk about Islam" – he did not say anything more about this individual and I had the impression that Asa wanted to highlight the works of God who just uses random events and people in His grand plans towards human beings. The meeting was not planned, the two men just happened to encounter each other and they started one of their usual spiritual conversations. By that point, Asa was considerably sympathetic towards Islam expressing his uninhibited interest in the religion and the convergence between Islamic beliefs and his own ideas was becoming very prominent. Simultaneously, his conversion plans were rather vague and imprecise, he was just entertaining the idea that perhaps, one day in the future he might embrace Islam. Nonetheless, when in the middle of their exchange Asa was asked "...*so what would stop you being a Muslim right now… what is stopping you from being a Muslim today?*" because of his contentment with life and general excellent disposition he listened sympathetically and with unusual openness. Again, the ace card of "*what would have happened if you died today"* was played and it was explained to Asa that once you he has taken his declaration of faith, the *shahada*, he becomes a new born, like his time started again from this very moment all past sins gone and forgotten. And Asa was thinking that indeed there is nothing stopping him on this very good day, which for him was all designed and given by the

divine will of God so when the person prompted him to come with him "*and go to the mosque*," he agreed. Thus, on that very same day they went to the mosque and Asa joined the community of believers.

In very simple language Asa persuasively described all the snares waiting for a recently converted person:

> "As a new Muslim, if you ain't got no knowledge you are going to do wild stuff...let's say at that time I became a new Muslim, and I do not know nothing about Islam and I have…no sort of a mentor, someone to guide me in the right path, I could of easily fallen into um, um, extremism, you know? Because I think, I think, that is how they target people..."

For him a lack of knowledge and ignorance are clearly the two main reasons causing converts getting lost in their new religious roles. Ignorance breeds vulnerability which in turn makes it easier to grow hatred towards "*the culture*", Asa believes. He had seen it happening to his friends, also to young people with whom he works now in a local non-governmental organisation.

When Asa became a Muslim, everything in Islam was new and exciting for him. However soon enough the novelty wore off and after two or three months, he stopped attending the mosque and praying regularly. His observance loosened significantly and ceased to be as strict and rigorous as it was in the days directly following the *shahada*. This happened partially also due to peer pressure, and what is interesting it was not non-Muslims friends questioning his behaviour, but non-practicing born Muslims, who after Asa's conversion started asking about his motives and reasons for worshipping so fervently. Equally remarkable is the fact that he was brought back to Islam by his friends, who have converted after him and in some measure under his influence. Although he recognizes that some of them converted just because it was fashionable or for strategic reasons (e.g. to avoid robberies and similar abuse) and remain Muslims by name only, and who even today do not practice because they do not understand Islam, others underwent genuine religious transformations: "*The two friends that used to say that to me, that asked me that year, they laughed, now they practice it, and they practice it better than me.*"

Thus, Asa converted, practiced with all the zeal of a new believer, then slowly diminished in his fervour and was on the verge of abandoning religion altogether until he found a proper balance in all that is spiritual and material in his life. Even though Asa was lost along the way, he regained his integrity and emerged from the Lost period strengthened and infused with potency and power to transform his life: "*Because right now I am practicing properly, I feel I can do anything I want*." At present everything in his life makes perfect sense in all its entirety and, Asa maintains, as long as he puts his head down and

does things righteously, that is, perform righteous deeds and pray, he knows things are going to happen the way he desires it. The transformation permeates his private life (he settled down and got married to his long term partner who has also converted to Islam), but also through his community engagement. Asa claims that Islam made him a better person:

> "It has made me feel more intelligent, it has made me have a relationship, a good relationship with my parents...it has made me be a good person of my community … because I know I'm doing it for the sake of Allah. Money is not everything, you know, it's a bonus."

Because he was always a leader ("*I had a little reputation*" he says clearly pleased with himself as he flashes a huge smile) now he tries to use old influences "*in a positive way*", as he describes it, and works for the community in order to "give back". He volunteers in a local grass-root organisation working with street youth preventing them from engaging in gangs and violent extremism and also helping those, who like him in the past, found themselves lost in the maze of the streets of South London. Asa loves connecting with young people and has plans to become a mentor.

For Asa, converts have a privileged position; on the one hand he believes that new Muslims who are embracing Islam practice it better and with greater understanding than the people who are born into it, on the other he believes the converts have a certain cutting edge which gives them advantage over those who were raised according to Islamic rules. When I asked what the reason of such a situation was, he explained: "*Remember, I have been through all of that madness where I have committed sin after sin, and when I come to Islam, I know that is wrong, I know that like I know it*." In other words, for Asa, converts who experienced the real saving force of Islam and its might to reclaim their lost lives are no longer lured by the temptations of contemporary world and hedonistic society whereas some of the born Muslims, Asa observes, "*want to fornicate because they have never done it. Some of them are really good, disciplined, do not even think about sex and things like that, you know, but there is some...mix with this society, right, and they want to be a part, so they will leave Islam*." This observation is of course true in many respects, however the stories he told me about girls taking their headscarves off and "*leaving their modesty*" in order to be like the women seen in the television programmes were full of condemning innuendos which, is not really congruent with the fact that Asa nearly entirely forswore Islamic practices shortly after his conversion. This inherent contradictory way of thinking and a sort of "selective blindness" to certain aspects of his own behaviour not only demonstrate the remnants of typical Lost dynamics with mutually exclusive working in unison, but also proves the fact, that the Lost archetype is indeed a gateway that potentially leads to the other exemplars.

In his discourse Asa at times betrays the idiom of a Castaway with the totality of belief typical for this archetype. The way he perceives converts is very telling in this context: "*I refer [to] it as 'reverted' and not 'converted.' We believe that everyone is born Muslim, everyone is born Muslim, you know? And...it is like you're going back now... yeah, revert*." For Asa, every single person, whether they want it or not, whether they are aware of it or not, is a Muslim. There is no choice, no other option to decide. Consequently, there is no conversion as such, the only conscious act an individual is able to undertake, is to *realise* this fact and apply it to their life.

Even his wife's conversion, as it transpired from the interview, came about under his influence, to put it mildly. In fact two years prior to my meeting Asa, he was prepared to leave his wife who, when faced with such a dire situation also converted to Islam. Asa describes his wife's conversion pathway stressing his desire for her genuine religious transformation. Prior to her conversion, he had actively been trying to proselytise, talking to her about Islam and giving her spiritual books with encouragement for studying. When after some time he still could not see it yielding any results, he gave her the ultimatum: "*And I said to my wife 'I cannot do this no more...I need to get married, if we are gonna have more kids, we are having them in a sinful state. I do not want to die like this...I do not even want to sleep with you no more…*'" Asa emphasises the fact that he has been praying for his wife's true religious rebirth, and insists she wanted to convert for a very long time and did not make the decision earlier only because she was scared of what people would think. Consequently, although Asa explained to his wife that conversion is a win-win position, concurrently, he never left her any choice, putting her instead in an either/or situation with not much space for manoeuvres or reconciling different views, opinions and lifestyles. Even though he urged her not to convert because of him or because of what he has said to her, the alternative to not converting was explicit: "*I made this totally clear to her and yeah, she converted, and when she converted, the next following week we got married straightaway because we wanted to be together in an appropriate way*." Such inflexible totality is more typical for a Castaway archetype with its staunch approach incapable of compromises and rigid, meticulously defined boundaries contrasting clearly with flexibility and eclectic amorphousness of the Lost resembling more a mosaic or a patchwork of behavioural patterns.

Although undeniably what is Lost can potentially be found, it needs to be emphasized that the Lost archetype does not guarantee a happy ending as it constitutes an entryway that has the capacity to lead to any of the quadrants depending on which of the factors gains strength. The main challenge thus lies in overcoming two main factors. The first is posed by hastened conversions of individuals who are neither ready, nor prepared to accept Islam and due to substantial gaps in their religious knowledge can easily be "scooped" by radical groups preying on the fact that converts are not equipped with tools

which can help them to differentiate between various interpretations of Islam. Secondly, the lack of proper structures and a subsequent absence of suitable community support mean that it is relatively easy for such a convert to stray and sink into a radical milieu unnoticed by anyone.

Hence, from the security perspective the main challenge is to facilitate and help New Muslims throughout the crucial first period after conversion via proper conversion strengthening community capacities. At present, there are no standardised conversion mechanisms that would be approved by Islamic authorities; no preparatory courses beforehand and no recognised induction period directly following the first days and weeks after conversion. The deathly potential of such a combustible concoction when a susceptible convert is preyed upon, radicalised and lured into terrorism is best exemplified in the case of Mohammed Rasheed aka. Nicky Reilly, who in May 2008 was persuaded to attempt a suicide bomb attack in a restaurant in Exeter by British-based radicals.[279] His actions and even his conversion are supposed to be manifestations of his vulnerability. The media reported that Reilly, a recent convert, stood out as the lone English convert in the Islamic Centre for Ply and Cornwall in the Mutley area where he attended prayers.[280] While the case of a "Big Friendly Giant"[281] still remains somewhat exceptional, many converts get caught up in the cross fire without engaging into terrorism between now and then; their own past, present and future and thus they end up in a limbo. It is the versality of the symbolic markers that defines the Lost archetype, who through such indeterminacy wrestles to find their own meanings in different symbols. In the constant flux of acceptance and exclusion even if not everything is Lost, a lot of the potential for establishing mature European Islam is certainly wasted.

[279] Fresco, A. (2009).Nicky Reilly, Muslim Convert, Jailed For 18 Years for Exeter Bomb Attack. *The Times*, January 31, 2009.
[280] Seamark, M. & Fernandez, C. (2008).*Face of the 'Nail Bomber': Police Were Tailing Muslim Convert Before Restaurant Attack*. *Daily Mail*, May 23, 2008.
[281] "Big Friendly Giant" was Nicky Reilly's nickname in the neighbourhood. Savill, R. & Bloxham, A. (2008). White Muslim Convert Bomb Suspect Named. *The Telegraph*, May 22, 2008.

CHAPTER 6. THE ARCHETYPES.
BRIDGE: CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BILOCATION.

The very idea of a bridge is a great one; a bridge constitutes a prominent antonym of a border, it brings people together, it annihilates the gaps and rifts, it creates links and fosters maintaining bonds, and finally, it allows safe crossing over the treacherous abysses beneath. Nonetheless, while it is a just thing to admire bridges, being one poses several challenges. A Bridge is always stretched between two opposites, running along the continuum in order to link what is irreversibly separated and what has nothing in common... except for the Bridge. Thus, in a sense acting as a Bridge requires both cultural and social bi-location only intensified by the interplay between the factors of rejection and inclusion, a prevalent feature of the archetype.

This Chapter explores how identity built on rejection and belonging that is open and includes new communities interacting with each other in the Bridge archetype. By closely examining two convert narratives, it translates the theoretical framework into dynamic biographies. The investigation exposes that Bridges are people of concrete deeds and swift actions. The Bridge, although grounded quite firmly in culture, binds the two banks of his religious identity. Simultaneously however, the Bridge indicates a certain migratory tendency: One does not enter the bridge to remain there forever, a bridge leads somewhere and hence those who can be ascribed to the Bridge archetype are always on the move, never rooted in one place, never fully settled. Symptomatically, even though the Bridges professes a world without barriers, by acting as an intermediary between two communities whom they clearly distinguish from each other, they in fact replicate the divisions.

I met Liliana in the shopping mall, although I had not bumped into her randomly in one of the boutiques, nor did I start the conversation by asking whether by any chance she was a convert to Islam. In fact we had been in touch via email for some time before I travelled for nearly ten hours in order to meet her in Reading. And while she greeted me at the train station, she did not invite me to her place so I only left my luggage in a guest house, which to Liliana's delight was run by a Muslim. (It was a pure accident on my part but one that made her really happy to the point that she asked the older owner of the guest house whether he was a Muslim and when he, slightly confused, confirmed, Liliana announced with delight that she was one too as if one could not recognise it from her headscarf and a long robe-like garment she wore over her jeans.) We ventured out into the city centre as I did not want to conduct the interview in a hotel room but preferred to bring it to more neutral grounds. As it was too late for us to go to any cafe and far too cold to sit outside on a rather chilly February evening, we

instead went to a big shopping mall where we sat on one of the benches until a security guard asked us to leave when the place was closing.

The mall was busy as it was Saturday and the two of us made a weird pair sipping our coffees from paper cups, without any shopping bags and sitting for hours buried in a deep conversation. Liliana was really interested in my research so I spent a good half an hour explaining to her what and how and why I do, what I do. This often happened during my fieldwork that a "reverse interview" took part first, with me answering questions and only after I had satisfied my interlocutor, or perhaps to put it crudely, when I had passed the test, would my turn come. Liliana told me her story with force and conviction, and it was of these powerful statements that leave the listener without a trace of doubt as to the power of religious conversion. In many respect Liliana epitomised the "converts' zeal" phenomenon with all its fervent righteousness, optimism and sometimes blind or naive faith. Liliana did not convert because she wanted to change religion or because she was looking for sense in her life, she simply learnt about Islam and it made such perfect sense for her, leaving her no option but to embrace it. The whole conversion process did not take longer than a few months.

6.1. Conversion

Back then when it all started, Liliana was a diligent student in one of the most renowned universities in Poland, her home-country. One day, shortly after an intense period of examinations, she felt bored and decided to practice her English by talking to an English speaker in an on-line chat-room. Indeed, not only did she find a partner to improve her linguistic skills, but also someone with whom she could talk about everything and with whom she formed a deep connection. She tried to describe her enchantment to me explaining that he was a bit different from anyone else she has met before and emphasizing that she was not fascinated by her interlocutor, as he was a man, at least not at the beginning; the fascination was awakened by the fact that his views and his ways of thinking were entirely different from everything she knew. Liliana gave the man her telephone number and soon enough they started speaking on the phone. What does one talk about to a complete stranger from a different country, whom one has never seen and who does not even speak your language? Liliana shrugs and says simply: about everything. So they talked about everything, but mainly on many topics related to relationships and also about religion.

The issue of religion was strongly pronounced and transcended through all the topics during their long conversations. Because the man started asking questions about her religion Liliana started reading up on Christianity because although she had some sort of knowledge about her religion, it was quite general and she did not have answers to more detailed or sophisticated questions. Simultaneously, she confessed that when the man was asking questions of this sort, she thought: "*He is attacking me, I have to defend myself*"[282] and hence started reading spiritual books, looking for the answers on the internet and in the Bible, asking people in chat-rooms and internet forums and she even attended inter-faith dialogue meetings in order to know what to say and to learn about Christianity even more.

Interestingly, Liliana said that at first she was not really pleased about the spiritual conversations because, as she explained, she was scared to tackle the spiritual issues and went through a whole period in her life when she was afraid to talk about religion and refused to do so. She would not even read about religion, nor would she test her beliefs for the fear that if she finds something that could threaten her faith and that she might stop believing. She wanted to remain religious and "*simply believe*". She did not want to expose herself to potential dangers or temptations to abandon her faith. I asked her whether she used to be a practicing Christian when she was young but she only laughed and said that it was not so long ago and that she is still young and that yes, actually she was religious and practicing. In fact she started these conversations to strengthen her faith and religiosity. Liliana was aware of the widespread opinion of Islam and although she did not profess it exactly, she had her own "buts" which she presented during conversations with her friend. And finally she recounts:

> "He was able to counter all my arguments – and indeed I said to myself: He is right. In everything he is right, he is right, he is right. In the end I could answer perfectly every question/doubt I had and I knew that I can myself defy all the arguments that were in my head. Eventually I could not keep pretending that I don't accept it [Islam]..."

The next thing that followed was a real meeting, face to face with the man who was the catalyst of her conversion, as she described it "*a real test for Islam*." Liliana was wondering what he is going to be like, how he would behave and symptomatically, she did not view the religion through an individual, but the other way round – Islam is great, let us see what kind of Muslim he is. It was looking at an individual through a lens of religion. The meeting went well and consequently Liliana went back home for a couple of months, said her *shahada* and then migrated to the UK to get married. She was twenty years old.

[282] All quotes come from: Liliana. Interview by author. Tape recording. Reading, UK. February 18, 2010.

It was logical reasoning then that made her accept Islam through a process of discussion and debate which answered all her questions and wiped all her doubts. The original religiosity was not wiped thus, but rather redirected. Liliana was not like St. Paul who converted suddenly on his way to Damascus through heavenly intervention; these were phone conversations not divine revelations, and it was arguments instead of prayer that triggered the change. The change however was extremely fast and that is a trait typical for the Bridges. The journey does not take long and once the decision has been reached, action follows immediately. Although the reasons for the conversion might be non-religious or the change might come through religious seeking or even a very unexpected and spiritual inspiration, the Bridge archetype usually does not hesitate and swiftly acts upon their spiritual discovery.

I met Laura thanks to the appeal posted on a Polish site for Muslim women. Since the site is closed to unregistered guests and an outsider cannot even read let alone post anything on this website, my plea was published there by a friend of mine, a journalist well known among the community. The invitation to interviews, innocent for me, caused a considerable amount of havoc and a very heated discussion erupted whether or not I should be trusted (as an infidel) and subsequently spoken to. Finally, only four people decided to talk with me, and only one was actually residing in Poland (as the rest were Polish migrants to the UK and Ireland). We had an extensive e-mail exchange before I went to see her in December 2009. When I interviewed her, Laura lived in the South of Poland in a small town near a great industrial suburb and invited me to her house. So I jumped on the train on the wintery day and went to see her. It was not difficult to find her at all: As I finally arrived in Czelad, she met me at the bus stop, all clad in black Pakistani dress, although, truth be told, in Polish settings she looked more like a Catholic nun than a Muslim woman – such an unusual sight in Polish landscape of a suburban residential area. Laura wears a headscarf and a long black robe over her trousers, she tells me that black is just her favourite colour and laughs that in the summer she looks like a black ghost walking down the street. Asked about *niqab* (face veil)she says that because it indicates a wish of isolation she would not wear it in Europe but in an Arab country most probably yes. "*I am a person who likes to stop by on the street and talk to people so clearly it contradicts the idea of niqab*,"[283] she says amused and I have an impression that the rather enjoys the status of a local celebrity.

Then she guided me to the house where she was living – a modest, but very warm dwelling with her parents inhabiting the ground floor and Laura, her husband and their three children residing upstairs. The sitting room was very homely, slightly messy – a feature so typical for the spaces conquered by little children. I was asked to feel at home and indeed I did so instantly (I even let the

[283] All quotes come from: Laura. Interview by author. Tape recording. Czelad, Poland. December 29, 2009.

oldest girl to comb my hair as she wanted to play the hairdresser with me), it was obvious that Laura did not treat me as a revered guest who is meant to see only representative parts of the house; rather I was invited to see the family life from within.

Laura's spiritual journey also began in cyber space, though there are however, quite pronounced differences in her pathway to Islam. Laura was never as staunchly religious as Liliana; she is better described as the religious seeker type. Since high school she was in quest of spiritual inspiration in many religious communities finding the Catholic Church, the denomination she was born into, insufficient for her needs. Laura was only a nominal Catholic and she bought her first Bible when she seriously started looking for sense in religion. Her parents are not practicing, they rather passively follow the traditions they inherited and go to church only for Christmas or other special occasions. Laura's religious search started in the Catholic Church and gradually spiralled outward. At first she was seeking guidance from various priests (at one point she even wanted to become a Catholic nun) and later on from different Christian denominations including Jehovah Witnesses, and finally from other religious sects and cults, like the Unification Church.[284] Her seeking proved to be futile and highly frustrating, leading her to the decision that all the religions are nothing more than human invention, which is when she abandoned them altogether. Instead of pursuing institutional channels she maintained her relationship with God independently by praying directly to Him. She still read the Bible, but her religiosity became more eclectic as she took various elements from various denominations to fit her preferences.

She came into her first contact with Islam during a very particular period in her life when, as she said "*everything went dark*". She had experienced a failed marriage, she had to pay the debts of her former husband requiring her to hold down two jobs, she was engaged in full time studies (geology), and in addition to all these burdens she experienced a great deal of problems at home. The debts were substantial, and her request to pay them in instalments was refused. So with an ache in her heart she dropped her beloved studies and abandoned all the plans she had for her life. She confessed that back then the Internet was for her "*like the light at the end of a dark tunnel*". Laura tells me that she had no electricity at home and the only power appliances that worked were a refrigerator and a computer (plugged into the same socket interchangeably). Again, a desire to "polish her English" made her active in international chat-rooms and she also started chatting with English speakers via the messenger.

[284] Followers of Sun Myung Moon are also known as Moonies.

Her story almost mirrors Liliana's narrative: there was one particular person asking Laura a lot of existential questions regarding her behaviour in various situations in life, her views, and her opinions on several matters. After some time, the interlocutor asked Laura whether she has heard about Islam. The very word "Islam" made Laura very defensive and even aggressive, for in addition to her general dislike for organized religions she also had a very bad opinion of the Muslim faith, though she admitted with slight hesitation in her voice, not so much knowledge on the subject. Faced with her defiance, the person (Laura does not want to divulge to me the details of this acquaintance and throughout our conversation she keeps referring to this individual simply as "*the person*") said simply: "*Listen, it is such a shame you do not want to talk about Islam, you would make such a great Muslim*".

The above statement made Laura feel bad and for this reason she agreed to favour the person with the request he had made: finding five things about Islam she hates, five arguments, five accusations against Islam. He said that when she finds and presents these five things the topic of religion will vanish from their conversations and will never return again. Wanting to get rid of the annoying theme, Laura started reading. She started reading and she was amazed: suddenly every single piece of the jigsaw had fallen into the right place presenting her with a picture of beauty and truth. Some things were still new, strange, surprising and difficult to understand for her: abstinence from pork and alcohol – yes, but why cover your head? But the rest made perfect sense: "*All my imaginations, my impressions, my intuitions, my visions and internal needs were found in Islam…It was not a question whether I would believe, it was rather the feeling that this, this one link, is what I was lacking.*" And so, she smiles and concludes, after three days of reading the Koran…after three days with my hands shaking I said my *shahada*." It was 6th of February 2003, Laura remembers the date well. She said it in the privacy of her own house; only later on the occasion of her wedding, she repeated the ritual publicly in the mosque.

At this point Liliana's and Laura's stories part ways and evolve in different directions. After a mere three days, Laura had contacted the person who introduced her to Islam with a request: "*Listen, tell me how to pronounce the shahada words because I want to become Muslim.*" She tells me very pleased with herself and bursting with mirth like a little girl that to say that the person was shocked would be an understatement. However when the man heard that she was willing to embrace Islam, he totally changed his approach to Laura and declared she should become his wife which entirely antagonised her and she promptly terminated the relation. They have not spoken since then. This shows that, while in Laura's case, it was not a conversion triggered by infatuation, it was also not a

change induced by a reasoned, logical debate. She says clearly that for her, this person was only a tool in God's hand and her own understanding of past events is suffused with spiritual meanings:

> "A week before [the *shahada*] I was crying because this whole life, all these hardships caused that I felt trapped and I also felt the urge to please God. [I had] an impression that had I die this very moment, I am lost. I begged God, in truth not for the first time, but then it was the most sincere and coming from the greatest need of a heart: Lord, why am I not able to believe like all people do? Help me to believe as I should, help me to find my own place, so I can be, so I can follow religion so that you are pleased with me. I was thinking about Christianity and never gave a thought to Islam, but I have never précised what was the religion [I wanted to follow]! And so, suddenly the Internet, it was the matter of a week, the answer came."

In other words, when Laura was praying for the grace of being born again in Christianity, God sent her an invitation to follow Islam. And Laura followed, regardless of the fact that her new identity would be built on a rejection of everything she used to be in the past.

6.2. Identity

Liliana started practicing immediately and made no secret of the fact that she converted to Islam, which must have been an immensely difficult decision in a non-Muslim and strongly anti-Muslim society. "*I am an idealist a bit, when I decided [to convert] I told myself that if I will not start immediately wearing the headscarf, the longer I will wait with wearing the headscarf, the more difficult it is going to be start wearing it and I decided I wanted to do everything properly from the beginning.*" She lost some friends, she had to listen to rude remarks on the street, but in the end, she prevailed.

Laura, for whom the answer was more spiritual, also followed the calling even though her beginnings of Muslims life are slightly different from Liliana's. "*It was hidden; it was learning Islam, trying to change my life. But the more I knew about the religion, the more I wanted to follow it and the more inconvenient was the fact that I am not able to exercise some of the precepts*." For the first three months Laura did not cover her head because in the first place she was too scared to admit her conversion to the family. When she finally did so, the first reaction of her parents was quite strong. Laura lists shouts, cries, suppositions that she is a cult member now or that her behaviour is a result of diabolical possession, throwing the Koran, threats to burn the headscarves, bringing various articles from the newspapers with scandals from the Muslim world, then finally after a long time when emotions subdued,

some attempts at dialogue and reasoning. While her father was easier to convince -- as Laura says, for him a bare midriff and a pierced belly button would be a bigger problem –her mother, especially at the beginning, withdrew and distanced herself from her daughter. Because her town is also a small place where everyone knows everything about everyone, the conversion process was not an easy one and required a lot of courage on Laura's part. She had to "break herself" almost every day, as she calls it. She had to overcome her fears, conquer her nervousness and attempt to prove that Islam is indeed different than people think, and that it has nothing to do with the image created by the media. Fighting stereotypes is still one of Laura's main goals, almost, as she assures me, a mission she sees for converts.

Laura's and Liliana's cases are very interesting in this sense that both women did and did not convert for a man, i.e. a man was the converting catalyst, but it was not for marriage purposes as is typical for many narratives (Islam as Goods conversion pathway). Laura also met her husband via the web but initially she was just helping him to establish a business enterprise in her area. Very unusually, although they had known each other for a year, when he came from Algeria to visit her and validate the virtual impressions, he did not know that she was Muslim. Laura decided it was better not to tell him so that he would not treat her as a "*potential wife and a gateway to Europe*". They did get married however, also very shortly after the first meeting. She does not tell me whether it was love.

It was not love in the case of Liliana, who nearly a decade younger than Laura, one might think would be more prone to romantic raptures. To the contrary, she is consistent in her logical, reasoned approach and just like her *shahada* did not happen under the influence of emotions, neither did her marriage: "*I am not with him because I was in love at the beginning; it was something entirely different. It was like that: when you choose a husband, the first criterion is that he is a good Muslim and so I hoped that yes, I will be with a good man*." She clearly tries to explain things that are so obvious to her that for a moment she is lost for words.

> "It is just not important, you know... in general, earlier I thought that I will have an intelligent husband with a university degree, who... well, I did not think about money too much, but there is some truth in the fact that if he has money, he knows his way about life and so on... and my husband does not have any degree or things like that, but he is a good man. He is Muslim, he is intelligent and has all these features that are attractive to me like confidence and so on. And before [we met] I was meeting other guys who seemed to be just ideal, for example I met one computer specialist who was working in CERN in Switzerland. He was charming and handsome and athletic, you know – but you do not feel this you know – this connection and with my husband – yes."

But it was not, she repeats again, that she was in love "or something." It is evident that even now, after two years of marriage, there is a huge measure of respect, but also distance when she speaks about her husband. In fact, during our conversation, this is precisely how Liliana refers to her spouse, without using his given name even once. I asked her how she managed to make such a difficult decision without having any feelings for the prospective spouse. Liliana's reply is curt: "*I knew I had to leave the country. No, I love him now, but earlier... well, I was praying to God so that I was able to love him*." She believes that when you have Islam it is enough to serve as a foundation for a long and stable and happy relationship, that the religious bond is the building brick of a marriage: "*Islam is the thing you have in common, the connection that you know will keep both of you in place*." In her opinion, a husband and a wife do not have to necessarily have the same interests, listen to the same music (she confessed that in her marriage they do not listen to music at all as in their understanding it is not Islamic to do so) but it is all right as long as Islam is the foundation upon which you build a family and a strong relationship between the spouses. Because I did not seem to be convinced, she reinforced her statements: "*Really. In general, you never know how will you react to... some situations in a relationship are really hard and it is not that you are sleeping on a bed of roses, but thanks to religion you really can solve your problems*." Liliana admits there are cultural differences, but insists that nothing that could not be overcome, for her eating habits and different cuisines are the most bothersome ones. In any case, she adjusted.

With swiftness typical for Bridges swiftness, she decided on marriage when she visited her future spouse for the first time in Britain. He did not propose in an ordinary way. Instead the couple sat down and decided about their future in a business-like manner, as if they both knew they had only the time of her visit to make their choice. So Liliana recounts the events: "*It was not that there were any romantic scenes, besides my husband is not a romantic*." She bursts with giggles: "*My husband reminds somewhat of a big child and he is thirty two!*" Of course she had some afterthoughts later on, some doubts, and some questions. What about her studies? What about her parents? What about the conversion? Her story is like a story of a victorious war, there were hardships but eventually there was a triumph. "*I knew I would do it [convert] when I agreed to be his wife, it was obvious. So I had my doubts, but in the end, when I embraced Islam and all of this was just thrown on my head, all these problems, I somehow managed to deal with them*." In her voice I can hear victorious notes as she concludes her tale.

And even though, from what she tells me, it is blatantly clear that, just like in Laura's case, her new identity is built on rejection and that her life is entirely different from the one she had previously

envisaged for herself, that instead of having a rich and educated husband she is married to a migrant without a degree, instead of having a dream job as a manager (Liliana was studying to get a management degree), she works as a shop assistant in a foreign country and barely makes ends meet, she is adamant that her decision was right and as she says she feels grateful for God that he guided her this way: "*I know it is a right place for me to be, I know I should be here*." And although she is clearly content with her life and sure that she has made a right choice, Liliana does not answer many of my questions regarding her marriage and keeps the details of the relationship to herself. Instead she offers statements meant to convince and reassure me that she has done the right thing.

Thus, Liliana's migration is rooted in the fact that she was not able and not willing to negotiate on her new identity. In order to become someone new, she needed to cease being someone old. She emphasized it several times with regard to her spiritual development and maintains this stance even in reference to her looks: "*I changed in terms of my appearance, I look better when I do not have all this on me,*" she said gesturing towards her outer garments. "*I am more... well, more attractive, but no one sees it as I am covered!*" and concludes proudly that men do not bother her on the street any more or throw inappropriate comments in her direction.

6.3. Belonging

After conversion, instead of limiting their normative spaces of belonging, like it was in the case of those who got Lost, Bridges are open towards conquering new territories and including new communities into orbits of their existence. Nonetheless, such openness has certain ramifications when it comes to the nature of Bridges belonging that is worth a thorough examination.

Liliana admitted openly that her *shahada* would have happened much earlier if not for the problems with her family who was fiercely opposed to her conversion to Islam. "*My dad said that if I convert to Islam I would be dead to him*." She confesses and I have the feeling that she is quite proud of her own persistence and that the aura of martyrdom-like trials in her eyes makes her faith more genuine. The whole family resisted but with time became resigned to her decision. Liliana remembers the first period as particularly challenging: the family disapproval, the novelty of her unusual choice, the constant confrontations with the relatives, friends and wider society members, including a long and heated debate with two Catholic priests who were asked by the grandmother to come and reason with the rebellious girl. As she was the only Muslim in her small town, she said "*I needed to be strong –*

especially back then." In her understanding, the worst period is over but Liliana does not acknowledge that by migrating she removed herself from all the problems instead of solving them. So although she claims that she has reconciled with the family, and matured in religion, it is questionable what her development would have been had she stayed in her hometown, or if she were to return there for good.

Liliana explains her own decision of migration in the same calm and logical manner of a strategist choosing the best option possible:

> "I knew I was going to become a Muslim and I knew the consequences of my choice: that I will not be able to stay at home because it would be hard and that my studies will not help me in anything, in life I mean. I also knew that I would have to leave because most of the [Muslim] guys live abroad, those with whom I would like to be. Because it is not that religion forces me[285] and for this reason I will not be with a Christian or a Buddhist but the reason is that we [Muslims] have the same ideology and we want to raise our child in faith and that was the most important thing for me – to raise Muslim children."

For both women children are one of the primary reasons for moving into a more Islamic environment so I ask them what would they do if their child would want to convert to a different religion. Laura informs me that although her parents eventually came to accept her conversion, the only remaining "but" they ever verbalised was the fact that she would not baptize her children. Laura responds staunchly that they do not understand that the children are within her custody and as a mother she is the one responsible and has the right to decide. "*They [the kids] will have the choice when they are older,*" she adds. Education is the first priority; Laura would try to reason with them and she says she is ready for the challenge. Later on, when I hear the kids invoking the name of Jesus in their play (which provokes an instant and very stern rebuke from their mother) it is explained to me with an apologetic smile "*That is grandpa's doing*." I begin to understand what she means.

If Liliana's child wanted to change religion in the first place she would think they lost common sense and said that she would try to reason with them and explain why they are wrong. If they insisted on abandoning Islam, as much as she would be sad and disappointed, she would not cut herself off as he would still remain her child. She is very conscious of the fact that a lot of children from Muslim families somewhat lose faith and they start practicing when they are considerably older. The main factor to blame is secularised Europe as Liliana believes that "*there is a lot of things that take them away from religion. Children simply do not wish to be different from the society*." Despite her relative social withdrawal and certain alienation, Liliana does not dispute the fact that community is one of the most

[285] In Islam marrying outside the religion is permitted only for Muslim men.

important aspects of Islam, and the greatest asset of a community life for Liliana is its self-correcting nature: "*It is good to live in a community because people do pay attention what you do, see your mistakes and can always advise you, you can progress in religion, spiritually*." The fact that in England this community spirit is lacking and that sins and omissions are widely accepted and treated as normal is for Liliana an incentive to migrate to a proper Islamic society.

In spite of her rather hasty marriage, Liliana is not planning on having children any time soon; she started college instead as she insists "*she wants her children to have a smart mummy*" so they respect her. She also plans that, in spite of the family rift, in four years' time, her mother could help her with kids as she would be retiring then. Her long term plans however, are not connected with England. Liliana and her husband are planning to move to a "*properly Muslim country*" where they could practice without any obstacles and raise children in a genuine Islamic society as the risk of contaminating children with the wrong beliefs and values is tantamount for her to an ultimate danger. Their plans range from Malaysia to the Middle East, interestingly her husband's homeland was dismissed after a thorough deliberation as it is too corrupted and dangerous for a young family. First though, they want to make sure they have good qualifications to find employment there (hence Liliana enrolled into a computer science course) and then go and visit the countries before making the final decision. The family issues thus, and kids especially, not so much spiritual considerations are the primary criteria for the Bridges to choose their destination. A bridge is only a tool after all and should be used pragmatically.

Laura also demonstrates those features so typical for the Bridge archetype. The Bridge, although grounded quite firmly in the culture *sensu largo*, and as the name suggests, binds the two banks of her religious identity, being a white European Muslim converted to Islam from Christianity, simultaneously the Bridge indicates a certain migratory tendency. One does not enter the bridge to remain there forever, a bridge leads somewhere and hence those who can be ascribed to the Bridge archetype are always on the move, never rooted in one place, never fully settled. Even when a person is residing and interacting with the local environment, they either migrated to the area quite recently or are already thinking ahead, already planning to move somewhere else, always thinking of "more Muslim" societies or countries. For Laura, after travelling extensively around Poland and not being able to settle anywhere, the UK is the next destination; she admires the fact that the Muslim community in the UK is much bigger than the one in her homeland, that it is more open and has a better dialogue with the rest of society. She and her husband planned to go back to Algeria but due to a serious medical condition of their daughter, they decided the UK would be a better choice.

Liliana's belonging also hinges upon inclusion and the very fact that she has agreed to speak with me proves her openness. There are however certain prescriptive traits when it comes to her explicit beliefs, although this tendency is very delicate and is not as pronounced for her to be actively engaged into implementing the changes in the society: "*I do believe that we should be governed by the laws of God because God knows the constraints of human beings. He knows how He created them and simply knows how we should be governed and what is the most just. I do not say that it should be fought for but every person should reach this conclusion.*" Liliana believes that it is only an illusion that people have some kind of power, when asked about *Sharia* she says she lives her life according to *Sharia*, at the same time she understands that introduction of *Sharia* is not possible in Britain and thus another reason for migration. She also prefers not to get involved in politics but pray for the change that will surely come as it was promised in the Koran.

The urge to move to a Muslim country is not however rooted in idealising everything Islamic. Liliana is very critical when it comes to born Muslims, she does not have any unrealistic visions of a perfect community of the faithful, to the contrary, she is well aware of the discrepancy between the theory of Koranic verses and the practice. "*Literally*, she says, *some of them have so strange views and twist the religion adjusting Islam to their needs*." When pressed to clarify what she means, she explained that some Muslims do as they please and reject some Islamic "things" in order not to practice them or, she admitted, some of them have such a limited knowledge about Islam that sometimes ignorance is to be blamed. She upholds this view when it comes to the European community she lives within as well as her husband's "properly Islamic" relatives telling me somewhat disappointed that the women from Sri Lanka although very traditional, gossip all the time. For Liliana gossip is forbidden and practicing it is sinful.

Again, she tells me not to be swayed by everything everyone says as though they are Muslim or they have something to do with Islam and she encourages me to talk to different people and to not judge Islam by what this or that Muslim says. I counter her argument suggesting that not all the converts are the same either but she replies that she does feel a very special bond with the converts and with all those "*who really choose Islam*." Liliana becomes really emotional and agitated and gives me a long speech which unmistakably indicates that although she is able to note the differences between the ideal and the real, she still believes that the ideal is possible to implement:

> "In reality, you become a Muslim and the religion is beautiful, the rules are beautiful and you really see how it can make you a good human being, and then you meet the people and fell a bit disappointed and wonder where are those really good Muslims who really believe and really will do

> everything... Well, you do not meet many of those, really. And so, you are so disappointed that they do not practice, that they bend the rules, that they simply reject some things... For instance someone will be selling the alcohol and someone else will not be wearing a scarf and another person will not pray. Such things that, well... you do feel disappointed and only in the converts you find the strength. Sometimes it simply that they strive more, that they keep the law and motivate the others to do so because I am not sure if they can change but sometimes when you meet people, you feel that they really sacrifice their lives for... Well, but it is very difficult to find such people, very, very difficult. Yes, it is not easy."

Laura also espouses a very impartial view on the Muslim community, especially as she is very sceptical about the "*Arabisation of the converts*." Indeed, she wants to learn Arabic because it is the language of the Koran, but believes that "*girls who would not cook anything Polish because Arabic is better*", who will not teach their children their mother tongues are simply silly and swayed by their fascination with Islam or the husband (the factor that Laura admits quite unwillingly and with considerable regret) because not everything that comes from the indigenous culture is wrong from the Islamic point of view. She explains: "*I, myself surely did not become an Arab; I became a part of the world, including its Arabic part*."

When asked about the reasons for this "Arabisation" she says that the phenomenon is indeed very interesting and lists several factors. In her opinion some, *some* (she underlines the word with emphasis) of the girls accept Islam for or because of their husbands or in order to avoid problems with his family. It does happen, says Laura as if she was admitting something shameful or disgraceful. Consequently, the fascination with the husband is translated into fascination with Islam, but then when they get to know Islam, gradually the Islamic laws are rejected one by one and what stays can be described as "keeping the faith in your heart" when the beliefs have no translation into practice, an attitude Laura strongly disapproves of. She also thinks that on the other side "Arabisation" might be caused by the fact that many converts have problems with their families who condemn their conversions and sometimes even reject them so when such convert finds shelter with an Arabic family, they are understood, accepted and praised; they feel they belong and they want to melt in. However Laura disclaims that she is not sure and that these are only her personal speculations.

But are you still a Polish woman, I ask. "*I am still a Polish woman*," confirms Laura. Yet I want to know where the boundary between tradition and culture lies. Some borders, Laura says, are fluid as Islam itself is not a unified monolith, there are different interpretations, different schools of law. For her the fact that someone does not exercise Arabic culture does not mean that they are not a good Muslim. Nevertheless, she does not believe that singing carols or dressing up the Christmas tree are just

traditions because although some converts do practice these customs, they directly contradict Islam. Laura's approach is grounded in common sense as she adds quickly: "*However I have nothing against 'bigos'*[286] *with halal meat."* These for her are the boundaries between culture and religion.

6.4. Dynamics

The dichotomy between "Islam" and "Europe" is one of the silver threads that run through my conversation with Laura as a potent reminder of the dynamics between identity and belonging. Here, says Laura describing her homeland apologetically, our girls are hiding and religion is a taboo. Some girls start wearing the headscarf only when they go abroad because they are not able to overcome the fear at home. She often recalls situations when she was dispelling myths about Islam which was greeted by comments "What you are saying is not Islam!" and thus she asks me ruefully: "*Who knows Islam then, the one reading the Koran or the one reading newspapers?*" She believes that there is a widespread ignorance and that this ignorance breeds fear and this fear in turn leads to withdrawal on the one side and attack on the other. Laura then is a bridge also in the sense of building bridges between the communities, but she does it in a very particular way that clearly distinguishes her from the Ambassador archetype.

She perceives a very special role for converts as the ones who bridge the gap between the two sides:

> "Converts discover Islam suddenly: they discover it from the very roots, they learn it and are enchanted, and it suddenly becomes an unearthed treasure that has been brought into daylight. And suddenly one would like to draw from the opulence of Islam and show it to the whole world."

According to Laura after their detachment from religion (as she believes the majority of them comes from a non-religious background), converts immerse themselves in Islam. They do not take only bits and pieces, but embrace it all and unmistakably notice all its beauty. Laura's words are quite strong and she does not hesitate to express her opinion without political correctness: "*All this nonsense and behaviour of even Muslims themselves sometimes. Well, we cannot pretend that occasionally Muslim behaviour entails that people do not see Islam the way it really is.*" At the same time in Laura's view, as Europeans, converts can also influence communities from the Islamic world:

[286] Bigos is a traditional Polish dish made of cabbage and meat.

> "In contrast to Europe where we have stereotyping of Muslims, in the Arab world they are stereotyping Europe, yes they are! And a lot of our Muslims [female converts] have problems just because they are European. They are rejected…So these are two different worlds, based on their cultures I would say, and converts are just a group in between."

I wanted to know to which of the groups she belongs to, but Laura only reaffirmed the universal and a-cultural value of Islam:

> "You know I do not put myself into a pigeon hole, do not label or classify, I do not belong to any of the schools or groups, I am just a Muslims and I try to be faithful to the Koran and trustworthy *hadises*. But I do not look for groups and do not concentrate on differences but on the essence instead. On this what we have in common, what is real, take from the roots."

Symptomatically, although Laura professes the world without barriers, they are still visible in what she says: "*There is Islam and there are certain cultural influences. A Pole will always get on with another Pole better than a British or a German, there is a different mentality, different priorities and different values.*" In fact the very desire to act as an intermediary between the two communities serves only as a means of reaffirming differences, instead of erasing them – what is a trademark of the Ambassador archetype.

When I spoke with her, Liliana had been Muslim for only two years which did not discourage her from having very pronounced and often critical opinion on many subjects. She believes that time is not an issue as a convert can progress in religion very fast and develop more spirituality than some born Muslims do throughout their whole life. She clearly sees a difference between someone who is Muslim just because they happened to be born in a Muslim family, and someone who has consciously chosen Islam and strives for spiritual perfection. Furthermore, Liliana believes that born Muslims lack converts' motivation and reflection as well as being lost among the boundaries between tradition and Islam:

> "They do not choose pure Islam but instead they opt for something that is contaminated with tradition. There is a pure religion outside the culture, we, as converts take pure religion, they choose elements of religion, elements of culture, mingle it together and thus a weird ideas come, which we [converts] do not understand as they are not grounded in Islam."

Liliana refuses to retain any cultural traits from her home country (she also changed her name into an Arabic one but admits to not using it very often), to the point that she does not even celebrate birthdays anymore because it does not fit into "the ideology of religion". When asked about the boundaries and the criteria she applies when it comes to choosing, Liliana admitted that it is her own understanding and interpretation of Islam: "*I read various sources and I generally know that it is Islam's*

stance on given topic and that is my only guide." Choosing for her is natural, she says she knows most of the time what to choose when confronted with a problematic issue. "*It is not like I have to ponder hours and hours. In the worst case all I need to do is to read an opinion of an Islamic scholar. I read and I ask myself whether the decision based on his argumentation makes sense and that's how I decide*." I asked her about a situation where there are many opinions regarding the same contentious issue and whether she does not have any dilemmas then, but again she just shrugged my doubts off and declared that it is not a difficulty at all because then it is enough to choose with the best intention not to please yourself but to be faithful to Islam and choose according to Islamic principles.

Liliana is also not too active when it comes to community life. She does not attend any groups, meetings or lectures. She only attends the mosque during Ramadan as she maintains that only men have the duty to worship there and that it is not recommended for women who are generally busy at their homes where they can pray and their prayers are equally rewarded. When asked where she worships Liliana answers instantaneously with the name of a mosque insisting that this is the best one to go to. Asked for explanation she points out that the Pakistani community, although religious *en masse*, place tradition over religion to a certain extent and thus that there are numerous sects among them which espouse very strange views or customs. She tells me a story about the mosque from the street she lives on where it is believed that Prophet Muhammad descends from heavens during the prayers and so a spot for him is left next to the imam. She believes that those who "prefer purer Islam" attend "hers", or the central, mosque. "*Of course, one can go everywhere and the prayer will be still valid, but it is better to keep away from places like that*."

She learns Arabic by herself and admitted that she once went to a lecture but that she prefers to choose a topic of interest and explore it on her own reading books or internet sites. The reasons she gave were a bit feeble as she explained that she might know some of the things mentioned during the lecture or that they might be repetitive. From our conversation it was apparent that the unstated reason for this situation was the fact that she does not have established religious social network. Except for her husband, she exchanges thoughts and shares experiences with only a couple of "sisters." However, bearing in mind that her closest "sister" is in Birmingham, one can safely assume that the main bulk of Liliana's social life is virtual. At the same time it is clear that Liliana feels a part of the *ummah*, her cordial greeting of the Muslim hostel owner was, as I understood, only one example of her general openness – she confessed that whenever she meets a "sister" and says the customary 'peace be with you' greeting she feels a connection, feels that they have the same views and that they pursue the same goals:

> "When we need to organize help for one of the sisters, organize something… we do have great trust in each other and it is really a small family in a big world. We feel closer to each other [than to non-Muslims]. It is always such a joy to find a new Muslim sister, but at the same time it does not mean that I entirely deny my roots and Europe. [Non-Muslim] people around me did not become suddenly bad."

The last sentence made me smile, not only because it is nice to hear it, but also because couple of months earlier Laura said exactly the same words. The internet connection is another similarity between Laura and Liliana. Just like Liliana, Laura is also very active in the virtual world, aside from her involvement into managing the website we got connected through, she is also one of the administrators on a blog established by five female converts (of whom three live outside Poland) where they fight stereotypes pertaining to Islam and to help converts in family and community life without transgressing the borders of Islam which sometimes, Laura observes, is extremely difficult. She believes that dialogue is indispensable so that people see in Muslims fellow human beings because, as she says "*In the end, we do not differ much, except for the fact that we have our own religious practices in the privacy of our houses*."

I ask Laura about her community engagement as it is clear to me that contrary to Liliana she is not restricted to the immediate family, cyber space and few acquaintances. Indeed, Laura is very active: in addition to involvement in the website we met through and the blog she administers, she does translation work for the Egyptian *dawah* organization and translates simple booklets and brochures about Islam from English into Polish, individually she is also very open and throughout our conversation she often invokes examples of random interactions with strangers. At the same time, there seems to be quite a contradiction in Laura's approach to community engagement. While on the one hand she insists that Muslims should avoid "ghettoization" and believes that interactions with the wider society is a huge task for Muslims who should not be concentrating their life around the mosques but should face the world instead, on the other she tells me her main priority is to create "oases" for Muslims in the secular world. She gives me an example of the nearest Islamic Centre, where a pool table was installed to the dismay of some older members of community, who were not happy about the fact that there is this sort of entertainment available in the mosque. Laura voiced her opinion saying:

> "And would you prefer that your child go elsewhere, outside the mosque, to a bar perhaps and spend their time in such surrounding distancing themselves from Islam? Here when playing the pool they will at least hear about the spiritual aspect of temporal life which is nothing but a short moment."

This kind of approach is also typical for the Bridge archetype; interactions with the outside group, however frequent are somewhat superficial and inconsistent. More similar to meeting people along the road, these brief encounters when two travellers meet for a moment and then part ways. Bridges are always in motion, on their way somewhere else; they do not really belong to one place. "*We tried to live in other parts of the country but it did not work so we returned to my parents*," says Laura explaining that the couple went up North to live at the seaside for almost a year and then tried anew in the centre of the country but they could not settle, as they did not feel at home. Laura also had few very unpleasant incidents with members of the community, including a doctor who refused to treat her child.

Again, the rejective traits of identity juxtaposed with the inclusion of belonging result in the dynamics where even if the Bridges are grounded in one community, they are already looking ahead and planning an outward journey, often spiritual, but sometimes in a material sense too. The lives of Bridges are migratory and changing, temporal in their nature. In some respect, interactions are most often acts of proselytising than real community involvement meant to trigger change in the society. The virtual presence is, as in Liliana's case, more pronounced than the real one. Also Laura admits than in many respects cyber space is her second life: "*Sometimes it seems that the virtual one is the first one, because I do not work, I sit with the kids at home and I am on the internet every day and I spend a lot of time there which mobilizes me in a sense.*"

I wanted to understand what she means by this and we discussed civic engagement. Laura believes that living in a particular country, she has certain duties towards the state of which she is a citizen. Such loyalty is, however, not unconditional and still remains within Islamic remit:

> "In truth I do not agree with everything and I do not have to participate in everything but wherever I can help in any way be it other citizens or even Muslims, why would I not use that opportunity? In many countries Muslims are in parliaments or somewhere where they can achieve something. If they withdrew from politics they would not have this chance…"

That statement stands in clear opposition to Liliana's approach, as she believes that involvement in politics can do more harm than good Laura argues that all the people should work together towards peace and "*all these priorities which are common for all the people.*" Nonetheless, her statements are so round and empty that I rather get the impression that Laura offers them to me because she feels she is expected to voice them and these nicely sounding formulas are very different from her usual narrative. She also does not provide any examples of the activities that could be ascribed to this only says that she has no "*prejudices whatsoever when it comes to acting with other people of other faiths*". Despite this alluring manifesto, Laura is not involved in any sustainable activities that

would translate them into action. Her non-virtual engagement is highly idiosyncratic and unsystematic; it does not mean however, that it does not exist.

> "People change their mind [about Islam when they interact with Muslims]. One lady told me after a couple of exchanges we had on the street: You know, she said, I had such an opinion about those Muslims but you are a normal person! I say: Of course, Muslims are people too and this is the main task, to show this human being inside. Do not be guided by the divides but rather see what we have in common and we have a lot in common. Because we all do believe in God and this is the basis."

What if someone does not believe? Laura does not say. Still, even if she does not possess all the answers, she is convinced that the ones she has are correct and is never shy to present them to non-Muslims and Muslims alike:

> "We spoke to a Muslim once, my husband's colleague his former workplace married to a non-Muslim woman. So this man visited us with his wife and a small child and started convincing me that as a Muslim I should be treating non-Muslims with more caution because God says in the Koran – and he started quoting all these verses and trying to turn me against non-Muslims. I summarized his speech with one question: Why is your wife still alive? What do you mean, he said, it is my wife! But she is not a Muslim, I replied. What is the priority, the fact that she is your wife or the fact that she is a non-Muslim? And that silenced him; he did not understand what I mean."

Also Liliana sees a bright future for Islam in Europe:

> "Islam in Europe grows and grows. It cannot be stopped and the more they are trying to stop it, the more people will hear about it and perhaps will start think and there are more and more people who accept Islam as well as those who are Muslim and migrate here as the world is a global village as you know, people travel and cultures mix. Of course, some of those people do not want to share Islam because they do not have enough knowledge or as if they do not have their views shaped properly, but – but, slowly, slowly..."

It is clear then, that among the doom and gloom of the present situation, Liliana is convinced that the situation of Islam and Muslims will only improve in the foreseeable future which in a sense contradicts her migratory plans. This sentiment is shared by Laura: *I am full of hope*, Laura laughs, *one always needs to have hope*. Nevertheless, there are several challenges ahead:

> "In the first place Islam needs to make up for all the losses caused by some Muslims or pseudo-Muslims…Because although it is a very small percentage, it affects the whole community. In the first place to show that

> we are people, the same like everyone else. The fact that we have our own rules…does not mean that we cannot live together, we cannot help each other…"

The itinerant nature of belonging and the reproving character of Bridges' new religious identity are the two hallmarks responsible for the antinomy permeating the narratives of the convert belonging to this archetype. While the aim of the bridge is to provide a safe passage over the gap or barrier constituting a link between two separate entities, the paradox of this archetype lies in the fact that instead of bringing together and conjoining what is detached, it only reaffirms heretofore divisions. Both Liliana's and Laura's stories indicate that whereas they profess to have both of their feet standing firmly on the respective banks of their past and present selves and are at home in both of the worlds, the realities of their lives suggest something to the contrary: the Bridge archetype does not belong anywhere fully and hence any attempt at consolidating the "Muslim" and "European" communities are not sustainable if not unavailing. The enigma of this archetype that is supposed to facilitate bonds and in fact preserves the *status quo* of fragmentation is seconded by another ambiguity distinctive for the Castaways. There, as the next Chapter will elucidate, what is ostensibly presumed to thrive on irrevocable partitions aspires to achieve a world without borders.

CHAPTER 7. THE ARCHETYPES.
CASTAWAY: A DREAM OF A BORDERLESS WORLD.

The Castaway, analysed in this Chapter, is but one of many archetypes, but it is also the one that has become emblematic, often being taken as representative of the whole convert community. This Chapter argues that the Castaway is perhaps the most difficult to understand, and perhaps is actually the least understood, of all the types presented in the thesis. To define this archetype in one sentence, one could say that instead of living Islam *in* Europe, the Castaways live Islam *instead* of Europe. The Chapter elucidates how the tandem of rejection and exclusion trigger dynamics whereby a desire for a borderless world results in perpetual reaffirming of existing divisions. The Castaway is but a minority in the converts' community and hence the matrix proposed in this thesis might help develop policies to target radicalisation vulnerabilities, because tackling potential terrorist threats does not hinge solely upon the construction of an ideal psychological or social "terrorist prototype" or on the rooting out its background causes. In the first place those are not able to be eliminated entirely (How could we eradicate perceptions of relative depravation or how could we seal the internet so that no radical Islamist message can be aired there?). Secondly, background factors, which are only secondary variables, are unlikely to fade away and so, by focusing on them, governments are dealing with only a part of the problem.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to present the profiles of all the converts engaged in planning or implementation of terrorist acts, let alone of all the radical ones. The cases presented in this section are selected to illustrate the key characteristics of the Castaway archetype. It was also not my intention to give a full account of their activities, but rather to explain how the Castaway's mentality is translated into actions of both violent and non-violent nature. Of necessity my comments will be preliminary and this brief review of arguments about the nature of the Castaway archetype in the contextual sphere of conversions to Islam needs further studies in order to explore this phenomenon.

The Castaway archetype, a figure which the majority of people have in mind when they think of terrorist threats posed by European converts to Islam, is not so widespread as commonly thought. In fact it is quite rare as during my two-year long fieldwork research carried out in five different countries, from community centres to private houses, from neutral places, like parks and shopping centres to prisons, I have not managed to interview a single one. There are two main reasons for this: First, in addition to the fact that the converts representing the Castaway archetype are not as numerous as they are believed to be, the majority of them are either in custody awaiting trials or already serving sentences

under terrorist charges and therefore access to them for a young researcher is tremendously restricted due to security reasons. Second, because of the inherent characteristics of the Castaway archetype, i.e. identity built on rejection and belonging defined by exclusion, individuals representing this group burnt bridges behind them and are not willing to talk with strangers, or the *kuffar* (infidels). As a result someone who does not belong to what they perceive as their in-group, the *ummah* of true believers, will never be endowed with trust deep enough to allow for sharing personal stories. In view of the above, the narratives presented in this Chapter are built on the basis of available secondary data (media coverage, security reports, think-tank analyses, open sources, etc.) gathered and analysed from the theoretical perspective proposed in this thesis. While it is enough to explore the core characteristics of the Castaway archetype, undoubtedly more research will be needed in future.

The Castaway archetype visualises how crucial the negative factors of rejection and exclusion stemming from identity-belonging nexus are in the process of being a Muslim. As Klaus Eder noted in his elegant analysis, symbolic struggles are the key to explaining the emergence of a "we" because in the essence identity "is an act of naming which says who belongs to the "we" and who does not."[287] For the Castaway, just like for Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe,[288] struggles are not only symbolic, they are palpable. And just like in the novel, the Castaway archetype represents an individual who, saved from mortal perils, finds himself on the virgin terrain of a new land; he is both delivered *and* in danger of losing the new life. Usually the conversion process of a Castaway, falling into the Salvation/Remedy pathway, is quick and total. Unlike the very gradual and long journey some converts take on their way to Islam, the Castaway suddenly and unexpectedly is swept away from the deck of a ship on which they undertake their existential journey into the waters of the ocean, but instead of certain death, he or she experiences deliverance from the depths. This salvation is a truly life changing occurrence, to the point where after conversion nothing is as it was before, and so we can argue that the old man died and a new one is born. Being a Castaway is not a question of spiritual development, but of total transformation.

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[287] Eder, K. (2008). *Op.cit.*, pp. 37-38.

[288] "I was now landed and safe on shore, and began to look up and thank God that my life was saved, in a case wherein there was some minutes before scarce any room to hope. I believe it is impossible to express, to the life, what the ecstasies and transports of the soul are, when it is so saved, as I may say, out of the very grave…After I had solaced my mind with the comfortable part of my condition, I began to look round me, to see what kind of place I was in, and what was next to be done; and I soon found my comforts abate, and that, in a word, I had a dreadful deliverance; for I was wet, had no clothes to shift me, nor anything either to eat or drink to comfort me; neither did I see any prospect before me but that of perishing with hunger or being devoured by wild beasts; and that which was particularly afflicting to me was, that I had no weapon, either to hunt and kill any creature for my sustenance, or to defend myself against any other creature that might desire to kill me for theirs." Defoe, D. (1719). *Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe.* London: Printed for W. Taylor, Chapter 3.

Simultaneously, in spite of being saved, the Castaway's new life on a lonely island is not without its own hazards. In the first place, the Castaway knows he has been removed from the previous environment and separated from that world; facing these new dangers alone he will not hesitate to use any tool at his disposal in order to save himself and everything that is dear to him. The Castaway is by definition radical; it does not mean however that all Castaways pursue a violent path, as violence is not the defining dimension of this archetype. The vocabulary in which the concept of radicalisation is anchored is determined to a great extent in violence by the research agenda which privileges the questions concerning operational potential value of future policies and thus favours the idea of the use of violence as the governing element. I want to examine the phenomenon from a wider perspective. The Castaway archetype constitutes an excellent ground for the conceptualization of the "radical" with three elements constituting the core of radicalisation: identity, belonging and the normative obligation. Identity here refers to beliefs, norms and values; belonging concerns both formal requirements of becoming Muslim as well as broader cultural determinations related to identity and the normative obligation is understood as rooted in the belief that the Islamic way of life is the only true and just way and that everyone should live a Muslim life as understood by the Castaway. Hence radical–ism, a doctrine of how society ought to be, relies on a basic hermeneutic insight claiming that any interpretation of values and principles must be grounded in a limited sphere of interpretation. All these elements we can find in individuals of Castaway archetype.

7.1. Conversion

The Castaway path itself is full of contradictions reflected in a convert's capacity to articulate both transcendent closure and immanent openness of their new lives. It is this also which gives such a poignancy to Castaways from the pent-up hatred for their own past and serves as an enabler of radicalisation on the fertile grounds of rejection and exclusion and finds relief in a framework of Islamic discourse that is adjusted to this need, like was the life of Muriel Degauque.

Muriel Degauque was born and brought up as Catholic in the small factory town of Monceau-sur-Sambre in Belgium. In spite of her working class background she graduated from the best high school in the area, although her life changed diametrically after the tragic death of her brother Jean Paul, who was killed in a motorcycle accident. From the scarce data available on Degauque's youth a grim picture appears: she drank heavily; became a drug user (although she was never arrested) and she sometimes ran away from home or was seen sleeping at the doorstep of a local community centre.

In her early twenties Muriel moved out to Brussels and married a much older Turkish man, whom she subsequently divorced two years later, in 1990. However, there are no further details available regarding this relationship. Once her rebellious youth was over, for the next ten years Degauque lived a normal, unremarkable life; she worked as a waitress and a baker's assistant. Being a very pretty, blue-eyed blonde, she had several boyfriends, leading her mother to remark that she lost count of how many relationships her daughter had.[289] In the late 1990s, while she was in her 30's, Degauque met an Algerian man who introduced her to Islam, to which she converted (nonetheless, without forming any romantic relationship with this individual). Shortly after becoming Muslim, she met Issam Goris, who was seven years her junior, the son of Belgian man and a Moroccan woman, and known to Belgian police as a radical Islamist.[290] They got married in 2000 and moved to Morocco where Degauque learnt Arabic and studied the Koran.

The couple returned to Belgium two years later; by then Degauque was no longer Muriel but Myriam. During her second marriage the new religion became the axis of her whole life and replaced everything that was there before. Migration to a foreign country followed by a social and cultural rupture only intensified the importance of Islam. At this stage Degauque was wearing not only a headscarf but a *chador*, i.e. a full length robe worn by Muslim women in North Africa. Eventually, she wore a *burqa* with gloves so no one could recognise her, not only the regular Belgians who did not suspect that the quiet woman was a white Belgian, but even her friends who had known her for a long time.[291] Of course at that point Degauque removed herself from all kinds of non-Islamic influence and with the exception of her parents, she socialised only with Muslims. Degauque and her husband organised meetings and prayers in their house. Typically for the Castaway, not only did she conform to the strictest interpretations of *Sharia*, but also required other people, including non-Muslims, to follow them. For instance, when she and her husband were visiting her parents she would eat separately from her father and forbid them to turn the TV on or to allow any alcoholic beverages to be consumed in the house. Her mother described her as "more Muslim than Muslim", and[292] the relations with her family suffered because parents remained sceptical towards Islamic lifestyle of their daughter. The family grew very distant, eventually to the degree that Degauque did not even visit her mother when she was hospitalised. Similarly, Mr And Mrs Degauque did not even know that their daughter left the country when in August 2005 Muriel called for the last time from Syria informing her parents she would be gone

[289] T. Browne, A. & Watson, R. (2005). The Girl Who Went From Baker's Assistant to Baghdad Bomber. *The Times*, December 02, 2005.http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,7374-1900483,00.html (accessed: 25.05.2011)
[290] Smith, C. S. (2005). Raised as a Catholic, She Died as a Muslim Bomber. *New York Times*, December 06, 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/06/international/europe/06brussels.html?pagewanted=all (accessed 25.05.2011).
[291] Tihon F. (2005). Making of Muriel the suicide bomber. *The Sunday Times*, *December 04*, 2005, p.3.
[292] *BBC News* (2005). Journey of Belgian Female 'Bomber'. December 02, 2005. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4491334.stm (accessed 25.05.2011).

for more than a year. On 09 November 2005, at the age of 38, Degauque committed a suicide attack against American forces in Baquba, Iraq driving past a U.S patrol and wounding one soldier in what is believed to be the first European woman convert suicide mission. On the same day, her husband, wrapped in explosives, was shot dead near Fallujah by the American military minutes before detonating charges.[293]

In the absence of any meaningful narratives from the converts themselves, proxy hypotheses are built on thin grounds of extrapolation. The troubled childhood/adolescence thesis is often invoked like in the case of Vladimir Khodov, who was one of the six leaders in the 2004 Beslan school hostage crisis or Pascal Cruypennick, a white convert from Belgium, who was arrested on suspicion of sending suicide bombers to Iraq. Cruypennick spent some time in prison, married and divorced an African woman and finally converted to Islam. As a Muslim he pressed his girlfriend, a young Rwandan convert Angelique, to travel to Iraq on a suicide mission. Angelique did not yield and later gave an emotional interview on Belgian television explaining how Cruypennick tried to manipulate her. The spectre of unhappy childhood, trauma of physical abuse he suffered from his father and subsequent divorce of his parents allegedly pushed him into the life of crime. Similarly, Jerôme Courtailler (and his younger brother David), coming from aFrench Catholic petit-bourgeois family are presented as the sons of a respected butcher who, after his business failed, divorced his wife, and moved to a job in a meatpacking plant far away. The Courtailler brothers first turned to alcohol and drugs and then converted to Islam. Jerôme moved to London, where he subsequently radicalised, travelled to Pakistan, and is now being held in Holland, suspected of an attempt to blow up the U.S embassy in France.[294]

Accounts of conversions, a subject to reconstruction, are conspicuously retrospective in character and are therefore not fully reliable when it comes to pre-conversion lives.[295] It is only natural that personal biographies and identities are redefined continuously in the light of new experiences but especially in the Castaway's case, the archetype based on rejection of the past, we need to remember that the narrative is retold in an entirely different light as it is constructed on the basis of the data available at any given time. Hence, Snow and Machalek are right when they urge[296] that "data derived from converts about their cognitive orientation and life situation prior to conversion should be treated as

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[293] Watt, N. (2005). From Belgian Cul-de-sac to Suicide Bomber in Iraq. *The Guardian*, December 02, 2005. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/dec/02/iraq.islam (accessed 25.05.2011).; *BBC News*. (2005). Belgian Woman Bomber Identified. Belgian 'Suicide Bomber' Is Named. December 02, 2005. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4488642.stm (accessed 25.05.2011).

[294] Barnett, A. (2001). UK Student's 'Key Terror Role'. *The Guardian*, October 18, 2001. http://observer.guardian.co.uk/waronterrorism/story/0,,582225,00.html (accessed 25.05.2011).

[295] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1984). *Op.cit.,* pp. 167-190.

[296] *Ibid.,* p. 177.

information that tells us more about the convert's current experience and orientation than about his or her past."

Nonetheless, the cases of Degauque and other converts of the Castaway archetype focus our attention on the treatment and use of converts' verbal accounts (if they are available).[297]Most of what is published on the subject, when it comes to academic research, policy reports and media coverage attempts to explain conversion, radicalisation and terrorist activities and relies principally on accounts accepting converts' statements as valid and reliable records of past events and experiences while at the same time ignoring the socially constructed nature of converts' accounts and their conspicuously retrospective character. Each convert brings their own unique narrative to the conversion experience but their accounts are based on a fundamental algorithm of faith. Thus, the narrative of the biography does not remain fixed throughout the duration of one's life as a New Muslim. To the contrary, the hindsight account only reflects the dynamic nature of religious life or indeed life in general.

7.2. Identity

Unlike Muriel, about whom all we know is rather anecdotal and indirect as all the details we are able to piece together from sensational news and a few friends', family and neighbours' statements, Eric Breininger left a written account full of details regarding his conversion, his views, his daily life as a convert as a member of a radical community connected with the so-called "Sauerland Cell," and his experiences in Waziristan, as well as his personal reflection on theological and existential issues. If we analyse Breininger's written legacy and trace the processes of his transformation in order to identify the crucial variables active during both his pre- and post-conversion life irrespective of the changeable background factors, it becomes clear that the Castaway constitutes a total opposite of the Ambassador archetype.

When the Ambassadors live Islam *in* Europe, the Castaway's motto is Islam *instead of* Europe. Usually the rejection of everything that builds individual's identity in the negative way, the rejection of everything that *we are not*, is based on the inexperienced strangeness. We are not what is alien to us, we are not what is different, unknown. But the case of the Castaway is even more complex, because here rejection of the past and exclusion of everything that comprised the old "me," key factors in this archetype, are not based on fear stemming from ignorance or the lack of knowledge of "the other." To

[297] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1984). *Op.cit.,* p. 177.

the contrary, Castaways have an intimate understanding of the values and norms they repudiate because they have been born and brought up within the European culture which they subsequently discard and replace with values they deem as standing in stark contrast to those of Western civilisation. "*I lived exactly the kind of life that every young person in the West wants to live. But I could not see any meaning*," wrote Eric Breininger, in his memoirs known also as Abdul Gaffar El-Almani. Breininger is an author of *Mein Weg nach Jannah* "My Path to Jenna," (*Jenna* meaning paradise in Arabic), an autobiography that was published after his death on one of the jihadist websites. Although it is extremely difficult to verify the authenticity of the document, it is believed to be a genuine account of the German convert. It provides rare insights into the thoughts of a Castaway and offers a perspective unique to this archetype.[298]

Pages 6 to 38 are devoted to describing Breninger's path to Islam (*Mein Weg Zum Islam*) with one section exclusively focusing on the new identity (*Neue Identität*). Even after his parents' divorce, when he was living together with his mother and sister, his pre-Islamic life was that of "a typical western teenager," which included frequenting parties and numerous relationships with girls. What was normal for him before the conversion, in hindsight becomes "following condemned Satan's way."[299] Breininger's quest for the meaning of life took a new turn when in his workplace he came into contact with a Muslim colleague who introduced him to Islam and took him to a local mosque.[300] Breininger found the truth and sense his life was lacking; like a Castaway who discovers a paradise island. Subsequently Breininger converted and radicalized and his conviction that everyone must live their lives according to the values he professes, progressed incredibly fast. After conversion Breininger devoted himself to the study of Islamic audio lectures and books. He quit school, stopped playing football, withdrew from his social circles and spent more time with new "brothers in Islam."[301] He convinced his German girlfriend to convert and marry him under Islamic law. That was not enough for him though, and consequently, Breininger demanded that she stay at home and avoid going out and observe the strictest Salafi interpretations of *Sharia*. The woman refused to conform, as she converted only to please Breininger,

[298] It is impossible to verify the origins of this document or exclude the collaborative effort, especially that the concluding part describing the circumstances of Breininger's death must have been written by other people. Nonetheless, in spite of certain spelling inconsistencies and incongruence in the narrative (some parts are clearly written for non-Muslims explaining basic Islamic concepts like *burqa* or *Ramadan*), the detailed information pertaining to Bereninger's private life suggest that he was the main source of the document.

[299] El-Almani, A. G. (Eric Breininger), (2010). *Mein Weg nach Jannah* (My Path to Jenna). Elif Medya, p. 6.

[300] Global Jihad.*Eric Breininger*.http://www.globaljihad.net/view_page.asp?id=1198(accessed: May 27, 2011).

[301] Schneider, F., Koch, E., Wichmann, M. & Feldhaus, K. What Does Eric Breininger Have Planned for Germany? *Bild*, March, 03, 2009. *http://www.bild.de/news/bild-english/news/into-germany-but-what-does-he-have-planned-5944284.bild.html* (accessed: May 27, 2011).

not out of genuine conviction; they ended the relationship and Eric moved in with another convert, Daniel Martin Schneider, who in April 2007 was arrested as a prime suspect in the Ramstein Plot.[302]

Only four months after his *shahada* Breininger confessed in his diary that he knew his duty and expressed his wish to join the jihad: "*I knew that I had to take measures against the crusaders who were humiliating our brothers and sisters. Also every Muslim should stand up for a life according to the law of Allah and for that reason that we must build an Islamic state*."[303] Indeed, a mere week before Schneider was arrested, Breininger left for Pakistan to obtain military training in one of the Islamic Jihad Union camps. In a propaganda video released in 2008 he was seen armed and in fighter's gear, confessing that he wants to die as a soldier of God.[304] Breininger's verbal claims were further reiterated in his diaries: "*Hate of the kuffar*[305] *grew in me*", he wrote and there is no doubt that he believed his choice to be the only option viable for every Muslim person: "*Every Muslim should instil in themselves that one must live according to Allah's laws and that we need to rebuild an Islamic Nation. Yet, most seem to be satisfied with living in a country of infidels*."[306] His theological deliberations and passages suffused with the pathos of a soldier of God mingle with very pragmatic passages concerned with practical sides of terrorist enterprise. He appeals to German Muslims to financially support the jihad in a way typical to a Western fundraiser: "*If the brothers would buy one doner kebab less a week it would be possible to buy almost 20 sniper bullets to fight the kuffar*."[307] Breininger also calls all Muslims, not only males, to join the *mujahidin* (fighters) explaining that many of the fighters want to start a family insisting that terrorist camp is an ideal environment for raising children free from the harmful influences of the western societies.

Finally, Breininger was allocated in the German Taliban Mujahidin group created especially for German-speaking Muslims who wanted to join jihad or, as Breininger describes it: "*to fulfil their duties to Allah and fight in the path of Allah to make Allah's word reign supreme*."[308] He was ecstatic to see the group steadily grow, because before, in spite of fulfilling his dreams, he was somewhat alienated from the rest of the *mujahidin* due to the language barrier. He admitted to being deeply unhappy in the camp

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[302] Musharbash, Y. Eric Breininger's Death: The Memoirs of a German Jihadist. *Spiegel Online*, May 05, 2010. http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/eric-breininger-s-death-the-memoirs-of-a-german-jihadist-a-693216.html (accessed May 25, 2011).
[303] El-Almani, A. G. (Eric Breininger), (2010). *Mein Weg nach Jannah* (My Path to Jenna). Elif Medya, p. 53.
[304] Musharbash, Y. German Jihadist Eric Breininger Killed in Pakistan, Group Claims. *Der Spiegel March 05, 2010.* http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/homegrown-terrorists-german-jihadist-eric-breininger-killed-in-pakistan-group-claims-a-692673.html (accessed: February 04, 2012).
[305] Arabic for "the infidels".
[306] El-Almani, A. G. (Eric Breininger), (2010). *Mein Weg nach Jannah* (My Path to Jenna). Elif Medya, p. 53
[307] *Ibid.*, p. 102.
[308] The Middle East Media Research Institute Report (October 08, 2010). *German Jihadists in Waziristan: Background*. http://www.memri.org/report/en/print4658.htm (accessed: February 04, 2012).

because there was no one to share his thoughts with or no one able to comfort him after a hard day.[309] The new group consisted of whole families with children making Breininger's dreams of new generation of *mujahidin* a reality.[310]

> "With God's permission this offspring will become a special generation of terrorists that is not listed in any of the enemy's databases. They speak their enemy's languages, know their manners and customs and are able to mask and infiltrate the land of the *kuffar* [infidels] because of their appearance. There they will *Insha'Allah* be able to conduct one after another operation against Allah's enemies thereby sowing fear and terror in their hearts."[311]

Breininger was looking brightly into the future and indeed his wish was fulfilled as he was killed during one of the operations of his group against Pakistani forces.

Breininger's case reiterates the importance of the Castaway's reactive self-definition. Not only does a Castaway perceive as "the other" everything that is beyond excruciatingly defined borders, but more importantly this notion is extended across time and rules also convert's past organising their memories as well as re-shaping their future. Every Castaway, irrespective of whether or not they endorse violent means, devotes a lot of energy and effort to point out what had stayed in the past, what is not "me" anymore and then to undermine it, identify its flaws and correct them. In Breininger's case, the only way of amendment was to destroy and start anew. Violence is inscribed within the importance of symbols to the point of obsession which overwhelms other priorities and values. Riches observes that as both a social and cultural resource, violence employs four key properties that make it extremely useful both from a practical (as a means of inducing a change) and a symbolic (dramatic expression of ideas) point of view especially as the other social acts are not nearly controversial, conspicuous and relatively easily performed enough and also they can be more abstruse in their meaning.[312] Consequently, as Breininger proves, to employ violence is not only to assault boundaries in an attempt to change them, but also to create new ones, even more impenetrable than the frontiers of old. In a

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[309] Musharbash, Y. Eric Breininger's Death: The Memoirs of a German Jihadist, *Spiegel Online*, May 05, 2010.http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/eric-breininger-s-death-the-memoirs-of-a-german-jihadist-a-693216.html (accessed: May 25, 2011).

[310] We do not know exactly how many people were in this group. German authorities believe several dozen German-born jihadists are currently in Afghanistan and Waziristan. *Cf.*: Musharbash, Y., Rosenbach, M. & Stark, H.(2010). The Third Generation German Jihad Colonies Sprout Up in Waziristan. *Spiegel Online*, May 04, 2010.http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-third-generation-german-jihad-colonies-sprout-up-in-waziristan-a-687306.html (accessed: February 04, 2012).

[311] El-Almani, A. G. (Eric Breininger), (2010). *Mein Weg nach Jannah* (My Path to Jenna). Elif Medya, p. 104.

[312] *Riches,* D. (1986). The *Phenomenon of Violence.* In *D. Riches* (Ed.), *The Anthropology* of *Violence.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p.11.

world devoid of clear cuts, Bowman suggests,[313] violence is the ultimate bifurcating force reducing the complexity of societal reality; a border-marking tool between the in and out group members of whom all are forced to take a stance, integrating what is within and isolating what is beyond and "producing particular crystallisations of sociality out of what had previously been larger networks of interaction".

As a final note, Breininger's story emphasizes that in spite of certain problems (a feeling of alienation, language difficulties) that religious identity can link people who would otherwise remain separate. Another interesting insight as to the meaning of rejection in Castaway's religious identity is provided by Ole Weaver,[314] who argues that "radical Muslims are engaged at war not with another religion but against 'anti-religion'" and consider modern secularism as the main enemy of faith. Thus for Weaver "one party feels threatened by religion, while the other feels that their religion is threatened" transforming radicalism (understood as a normative formulation of how the society must be organised) into a security policy. This argument is reiterated by Walter A. Davies, who pointed out that one is on the offensive when one feels threatened and consequently, the most aggressive are those individuals, who feel cornered and without viable alternatives.[315]

The above, in turn, challenges the rationale of assessing the potential terrorist threat on the basis of their religiosity and external identity markers (e.g. dress, devotion to religious practices, like praying or fasting, etc.). Radicals do not necessarily have to be more religious than other members of the community and hence the main parameter that their radicalisation should be scrutinised against is the degree to which they are willing to defend and impose their worldview on other members of the society. Chapter 4 proved that the Ambassador archetype can be deeply religious and at the same time embrace pluralism. Accepting by principle the imminent danger purportedly posed by the pious believers and securitising religious identity is thus a dead-end policy, which used selectively, excludes and antagonises those who should be engaged in anti-radicalisation debates.

7.3. Belonging

[313] Bowman, G.W. (2001).The *Violence in Identity*. In B. Schmidt & I. Schroeder (Eds.), *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict*. London: Routledge, pp. 30, 34.
[314] Weaver, O. (2008). World Conflict Over Religion: Secularism as a Flawed Solution. In P. Mouritsen & K. E. Jorgensen (Eds.), *Constituting Communities: Political Solutions to Cultural Conflict*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 208-235.
[315] Davies, W. A. (2009). Us, Them and I: Traumatic Subjectivity and Public Identity. *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*, 14, pp. 82-88.

The Castaway's sense of belonging presents us with yet another paradox as it entails fixed territories versus transgressions and flows versus rigid borders. Striving for the ideal world, Castaways are the nomad community in permanent movement between present and future, always in the state of becoming. Castaways project on every individual excluded from the ideal community of believers all the features, characteristics and traits that used to be typical for them in their pre-conversion lives. Consequently, on the personal level, the "otherness" is kept in the sinful past, whereas in the community dimension it is delineated by rigid boundaries that run across the single "us" and "them" line. While there are no ambiguities or space for negotiations as far as these divisions are concerned, paradoxically, the borders are both multiplied as they refer to every aspect of life *and* at the same time reduced as the Castaway strives for the world where everyone would be identical to him.

David Mitterhuber converted to Islam in 1998, when he was eighteen. Straight after graduation from high school he enrolled into Medina University in Saudi Arabia. Mitterhuber stayed there for two years and, while studying Arabic and *Sharia* law, he acquired mastery in wahhabism. Additionally, in 2003 when he came back to Germany, Mitterhuber joined a course in the "Academy for Islamic Studies in Aachen" founded by the former leader of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Prof. Issam el Attar.[316] Thus, Mitterhuber was well prepared theologically and started preaching at the Multi Kultur Haus in Ulm, Germany.[317] It is noteworthy that David Mitterhuber is very careful and never calls for or justifies violence publicly. Nonetheless, his ideological struggle aims at the same targets that the jihadists espouse and his rhetoric in terms of its narrative is at time impossible to distinguish from that of groups endorsing political violence.[318]Franz Horst in his analysis of Salafist jihadism in Germany argues that the best description of Mitterhuber's views can be found in a Saudi book "*Misconceptions on Human Rights in Islam*", the German edition of which Mitterhuber helped translate. This volume, according to Horst, shows remarkably close proximity to Mitterhuber's narratives of his non-militant Islamist thought and ideology which approves strict corporeal punishment for any minor offence and legitimizes the killing of apostates if the rejection of Islam becomes public. Apostasy as identified by Mitterhuber is a critical threat to the whole Islamic society. The strategy of imposing an orthodox idea of unity beyond the differences typical for a Castaway's mind-set is clearly visible in the book's passionate argumentation:

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[316] Horst, F. W. (2011). *Salafist Jihadism in Germany. International Institute for Counter-Terrorism*(*ICT*), Herzliya, Israel *2011*. http://www.ict.org.il/Articles/tabid/66/Articlsid/887/currentpage/1/Default.aspx

[317] The Multi Culture House was founded in 1996 by Ramez Aly. In addition to a mosque, the organization managed a grocery store, an extensive library, accommodation for guests as well as several class- and prayer rooms where Koranic lessons for adults and children were held.

[318] Considering that one of the founders of the institution was Dr. Aldy el-Attar, member of Jamaah Islamiyah, it is not surprising that German inter-state group of criminal investigators raided the Multi Culture House thrice in 2005 under suspicion of the formation of a criminal organization. The police found numerous publications and recordings promoting armed Jihad which was repetitiously propagated as an individual duty of every Muslim. *Cf.*: *Verfassungsschutzbericht des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen über das Jahr 2005*. Dusseldorf, March 2006, p. 194.

> "Rejecting Islam as a way of life amounts to malicious propaganda against Islam. Furthermore, rejection of Islam is also a disgrace to the Islamic society and the immediate community where the apostate lives. Such rejection will discourage people for joining Islam as a way of life. The example of rejecting Islam indicates that the person who joined it was only testing it, but was not serious about his commitment to this way of life. Therefore, this rejection will tend to attack Islam and attempt to rebel from within. Therefore, such a punishment was prescribed, Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala) knows best."[319]

There are several interesting elements in this fragment. It is obvious that for Mitterhuber the pathway to Islam is a one-way journey only and that leaving the religion is not an individual act of religious self-realisation, but an act directed against the whole community of believers. Indeed, the very strong word "attack" implies hostile and harmful intentions of the person wishing to leave Islam. For Mitterhuber the boundaries of Islam guard not only against what is on the outside, they also prevent those on the inside from transgressing from what is permitted to what is questionable, if not strictly forbidden. Furthermore, the passage insinuates that since every member of the community has the potential to destroy Islam, only accepting the faith unquestioningly and unconditionally guarantees success which is fostered even further by the hanging sword of punishment indispensable to prevent the Muslim community from falling apart. Hence, where normally boundaries are in a perpetual state of transformation, Mitterhuber's landscape is fixed and unmovable.[320] Identity is constantly consolidated, and governed without any space for questions. Exclusion means that in this world, identity formation and boundaries belong together and the boundary of rejection is understood as exclusive constituent if identity which is taken for granted.

Another noteworthy feature of Mitterhuber's outlook is his explanation of the conception of *jihad*. He follows the interpretation arguing that jihad is the highest and most important aspect of Islam and every Muslim should dedicate his life accordingly. Interestingly, jihad's main aim is the abolishment of tyranny, but tyranny defined as deviation from Islamic law. Jihad is therefore a legitimate means to strive for full implementation of *Sharia* law into society and consequently forbid the worship of other (false) gods and to support the dissemination of Islam throughout the world so that everyone can become Muslim. Such a view not only captures the present but also transforms the narratives regarding the representations of the past and the projections of the future in a practice and discourse by which social groupings and distinctions between them are created and maintained. This is what sociologists call the

[319] Horst, F. W. (2011).*Salafist Jihadism in Germany*.International Institute for Counter-Terrorism(*ICT*), Herzliya, Israel 2011.http://www.ict.org.il/Articles/tabid/66/Articlsid/887/currentpage/1/Default.aspx

[320] It is worth noticing that prohibitions against change can also be found among most ultra-orthodox communities of Judaism and Christianity (mostly among Protestants).

boundaries of human life[321] realising that such boundaries are social symbols and institutions instrumental in creating meanings and interpretations of the world. Here we must follow the steps of Cohen who asked what the individual is conscious of when they invoke an identity derived from such a social boundary.[322] Mitterhuber, an excellent example of a Castaway archetype, points indubitably towards an individual enmeshed in thick webs of exclusion and rejection. Most of them are below the level of conscious awareness yet they impinge the whole life of a Castaway framing their biographies and narratives as linear regulators shaping their thoughts and actions from the intimate personal sphere to the communal, from local to global. Perhaps this is the reason why Mitterhuber who confined himself to the ideological struggle, despite his obvious sympathies for the jihadist rhetoric, allegedly have left Germany.

Joining the group means not only acquiring or building a new identity as one receives a whole baggage of meanings – both positive and negative. The research of Tajfel *et al*. emphasises the importance of inter-group dynamics and argues in favour of the evaluative bias against the out group expressed in discriminatory and hostile behaviour.[323] If the existence of an out-group is perceived as a threat then hostile dynamics will be established; the more inclusive the out-group, the more exclusive the in-group. But this does not really mean that the group itself must be inclusive or exclusive, it is enough if the individual perceives it to be so, and thus the variation comes within the group. In the new milieu the convert must dwell on where the familiar and the foreign are conjoined and where at first it is not clear where the former concludes and the latter begins. In the process of identity formation, the strange is either excluded or assimilated: this process of "domestication" tackles the dilemma of permanent otherness and constitutes the axis of belonging.

Thus, belonging is not a question of converts' willingness to construct boundaries, as in many cases the newcomers to any religion will find them firmly in place, but the meanings they are ready to invest in them and the importance of the boundary, i.e. the maintenance process. If the convert feels they need to exclude influences threatening them from within, the rejection becomes increasingly prominent and everything from the outside comes to be seen as dangerous. In a similar way Morley[324] observes that "if identity is necessarily articulated as difference, it is at the boundary that the difference is most likely to be articulated in an aggressive form." Converts themselves are boundaries, a meeting point of two different worlds, thus it is crucial to know whether a convert bases his belonging on differences, or on similarities. This according to Morley follows the logic of Ignatieff's notion of social

[321] Lamont, M. & Molnar, V. (2002).The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28, pp. 167-195.
[322] Cohen, A. (1994).*Self-Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*. London: Routlege.
[323] Tajfel, H. & Turner, J. C. (1986). The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), Psychology of Intergroup Relations(2nd ed; pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson Hall.
[324] Morley, D. (2000). *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*. London and New York: Routledge, p. 212.

autism, which means that the strengths of the bonds and the sense of belonging to one's group determines on the other hand the hostility and violence directed to the outside and completes Anthony Cohen's[325] assertion that the symbolism of boundaries gains prominence precisely when they are threatened to be undermined, blurred or weakened. Hence, examination of the relative rigidity of boundaries is a key focus of the research.

The existence of the boundary signifies not only something that is alien and hostile but also often things that are forbidden and therefore guarded by protective barriers. The fixed bodily boundaries are often the primary allegorical demarcations representing the dividing line between opposed categories. In the words of Mary Douglas,[326] it is the "fixed boundary of the physical body [that] makes it a natural symbol of the closed social group" and a powerful means of expressing the "I" against "you." The anxiety to protect transforms the human body into a powerful medium of manifestation of both "inner, personal states and social relationships,"[327] a bounded entity that most immediately offers to represent these categories which for the Castaway remain unified. Paradoxically, the body does not belong exclusively to the individual but is also the property of a community which it represents and which has a certain control over it. This function, as Jacobson-Wedding persuasively argued, is a result of the "connection between body control as a separate identity, on the one hand, and its function as a symbol of the social system."[328] Thus, social boundaries between *halal* and *haram* (allowed and forbidden) are carefully policed by the community and transgressions especially with regard to gender relations are met with disapproval and appropriate response. Visibility of a barrier (e.g. a headscarf) is therefore a logical manifestation of the border's controlling function[329] aimed at preventing and minimising unsanctioned passage. Focus on the borderline not only enables the understanding of how individual landscapes are shaped or superimposed but also by drawing upon the heritage of political anthropology, the focus on the everyday life of a convert and the ideational constructions which render meanings to the boundaries between communities via praxis of the daily nature emphasizes a perspective often absent in security studies.

The same argument thus can be reiterated from the perspective of belonging: Whereas radicalisation is not something espoused simply by people who are serious about their religious beliefs, or indeed beliefs in general, it is a process of framing and re-framing the worldview along certain lines.

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[325] Cohen, A. (1994). *Op. cit.,* p.7.
[326] Douglas, M. (1973).*Natural symbols: explorations in cosmology*. *Harmondsworth*: Penguin, p. 112.
[327] Jacobson-Widding, A. (1983). Body and Power: Symbolic Demarcations of Separate Identity. In A. Jacobson-Widding (Ed.), *Identity: Personal and Socio-Cultural. A Symposium*.Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell, p. 371.
[328] *Ibid*., p. 380.
[329] Lloyd, F. &O'Brien, C., Eds. (2000).*Secret Spaces, Forbidden Places: Rethinking Culture*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, XVI.

The more the lines are defined, the more staunch and strict the radicalisation is, the less room for ambiguity, dialog, and compromise. Despite being visible signs of more imperceptible ideas, symbols, customs and rituals which help delineating boundaries cannot be taken for markers of actual levels of religiosity or indeed of the radicalism of the individuals and the communities in question. They are meant to induce and reinforce the feeling of belonging and strengthen the identity more than being tokens of what is within and what is without. Violence, constituting a potent border making force which "changes the perceptions...about the very nature of group relations and boundaries,"[330] analysed from a vantage point of a boundary, becomes something more than means to an end, it becomes a very specific borderline with its own unique potential to disentangle the mixed, extricate social strata otherwise entwined within the shared reality and create impenetrable obstacles. Furthermore, violence faces every member of the community with an unavoidable choice invoking a new type of either or consciousness with no space for dual loyalties. "Communities, like individuals, draw borders not so much to assert presence but to exclude the influence of that which is perceived as threatening to the persistence of that presence" claims Bowman passionately maintaining that violence delineates the boundaries of belonging as a boundary marking tool utilised both for maintenance and defence purposes.[331] This argument is reiterated by Appadurai for whom violence, and especially extreme and spectacular violence, "is one the ways in which the illusion of fixed and charged identities is produced."[332] Violence thus is not a product of identity but conversely - a means to produce or at least reaffirm the sense of belonging.

For Castaway, "me," is to a large extent constructed from, as Baumeister[333] observed, "us" i.e. social interactions and the sense of belonging. In terms of borders, on Castaway's paradise island there are none that clearly separate the individual, the personal, mine, from the social, communal, ours. The untold plays the safe; you cannot trespass when there is no boundary. Castaways seal themselves off from the outside world and at the same time the impenetrable boundary of belonging imposes a strict control of behaviour and belief, restraining and curtailing any possible deviations. Mitterhuber's case shows clearly how in the paradoxical binaries of the conversion process, the Castaway circumscribes instead of connecting, isolates as opposed to encompassing, separates rather than meets and confines him or herself to rigid dichotomies instead of transgressing them. The notion of a flat, two-dimensional ("us" versus "them") border of belonging is a key component in the Castaway's identity, the main source of contextualisation of the whole life and its ontology. This border is nonetheless static, it is produced in

[330] Duijzings, G. (2000). *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo*. London: Hurst & Co., p. 33.
[331] *Bowman*, G.W. (2001). *Op.cit.*, p. 42.
[332] Appadurai, A. (2006). *Op.cit.*, p. 7.
[333] Baumeister, R. F. (1999). The Nature and the Structure of the Self : An Overview. In R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), *The Self in Social Psychology*. Hove, UK: Psychology Press, pp. 14-15.

the process of conversion, not reproduced during life after the *shahada* and remains impervious to being modified, transformed, recreated or finally transgressed and erased. All the subtle interplay of subjectivity bounces back from such a demarcation line, so two-dimensional that it does not even cast the slightest shadow of a doubt or contingency. Such a boundary acquires an almost mythic significance of distinctiveness and separateness but also of unity that becomes explicit, consolidated and impermeable. And the more closed the frontier is, the stronger its impact is, and the stronger the belief that careful policing is essential in the maintenance of the order within its realm because frontiers cannot be separated from the entities which they enclose.

7.4. Dynamics

It almost feels as if the same story was retold over and over again, with only a minor adjustment and small details, like the name or the country of origin amended here and there. There are no major differences between Degauque, Breininger and Mitterhuber. We find the same elements just in different configurations: rebellious youth, influence of an impressionable older colleague, conversion and radicalisation. At the same time, the stories of converts presented in this Chapter in spite of the deceiving depth and richness of details are devoid of any information that could shed light as to the process of becoming a Muslim and the factors influencing New Muslim life.[334]

This stark contrast of the past juxtaposed with the present can be found in the BBC 3 documentary called "*My brother the Islamist*" depicting Rich Dart, or Salahuddin. The film was made by his brother Robb Leech, in an attempt to understand the rationale for the changes that Rich Dart underwent. Before Rich Dart converted, the brothers were inseparable; now (or after) Islam placed a chasm of difference between them. In the documentary we can see Salahuddin in his daily life, during rallies, interactions with other people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In one scene, Rich Dart refuses to use his right hand to shake hands with step-brother, instead he uses his "dirty" left hand - the same one he uses after going to the toilet. In another, he refuses to allow his mother, who is not Muslim, to

[334] Taking the *topos* of a violent convert out of context and infusing it with life of its own is perhaps most palpably observable in the case of Rakan Ben Williams. Ben Williams studied in a Western educational system, prayed in Christian churches and lived a Western life; he drank alcohol, lived promiscuously, and hated Muslims. But then, Ben Williams experienced an existential shift and secretly became a devoted Muslim adopting Al Qaeda's aims and values. Hidden in Europe, undetectable, Rakan Ben Williams is "the one who thirsts for the blood of the Crusaders, the secret soldier of Al-Qaeda," gathering information and planning attacks and various Islamic websites presented his warnings as well as hunger for martyrdom. It would be worrying if not for the fact that Rakan Ben Williams does not exist in reality – he is just a created figure, the model *jihadi* warrior who was born and raised in the West and now fighting against it meant to inspire other converts to follow his footsteps. Cf. [-]. *The next Al-Qaeda soldier*. November 24, 2005.*http://www.al-farouq.com/vb/showthread.php?t=3769* (accessed: May 27, 2011) and Malkin, M. *Who Is Rakan Ben Williams?*, Michelle Malkin. March 12, 2006.*http://michellemalkin.com/2006/03/12/who-is-rakan-ben-williams/*(accessed: May 27, 2011).

appear without a veil claiming that it would bring him dishonour. We hear offensive comments and gestures from him: During a visit to his hometown of Weymouth in Dorset, Rich Dart scorns local men for "looking like women" only to proceed with a condemnation of homosexuality.

Immediately after converting to Islam Rich Dart allied himself with the Islam4uk group and its leader Anjem Choudary. His sober form and zealous demeanour are a familiar sight on the streets of Whitechapel, East London, which he roams about, gathering support for the fight to create a global Islamic state. In his preaching Rich Dart is anything but politically correct; he has branded British troops "murderers" and during a rally he proclaimed that when the allies are defeated by the Taliban, *Sharia* law shall be established. He actively proselytises and has helped recruit new members to the religion. His missionary inclinations are blatant in the documentary; when his brother wanted to talk about their shared past, Salahuddin was more interested in teaching his non-believing sibling about Islam.[335] In spite of numerous attempts, the author of the movie discovers that it is impossible to make a connection with his brother. As a non-Muslim he is excluded from Salahuddin's world and the only gate to enter it would be to accept Islam.

In the movie the former Rich Dart is repeatedly contrasted with Salahuddin of the present. There is no convergence of the two as if the rupture of conversion of Rich Dart, the average Briton who worked for the BBC had never existed. His rejection of the former self is further extended into a general dislike of English culture. The discovery that Rich Darts collects benefits from the same state he claims to despise and that he is living a very high standard of luxury makes him even more interesting.[336] After what has transpired Rich Dart came under public pressure and was labelled a "hypocrite" (he maintains his actions were just), perhaps however there is more than simple "hypocrisy" to Rich Dart. Perhaps we need to carefully scrutinise the borderlines of rejection and exclusion in order to understand converts like him.

The term radicalisation affects basic points of orientation in our vocabulary related to political and religious elements and have forcefully entered public and academic debates becoming, in the words of Reinhard Koselleck[337] a basic concept combining manifold experiences and expectations in a way rendering it crucial when addressing urgent issues of given time. My deepest hope is that by

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[335] *My Brother the Islamist*, directed by Robb Leech (BBC Three, 2011). Available at: http://kitmantv.blogspot.com/2011/04/my-brother-islamist.html.

[336] [-]. Revealed: How TV Islamic Extremist Who Hates Britain Enjoys £1,250-a-month Benefits and Rent-free Luxury Flat. *Daily Mail Reporter*. April 07, 2011. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1374387/TV-Islamic-extremist-hates-Britain-gets-1k-month-benefits-luxury-flat.html#ixzz1oNdFlLVe (Accessed: April 07, 2011).

[337] Koselleck, R. (1996). A Response to Comments on the Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. In H. Lehmann& M. Richter (Eds.), *The Meaning of Historical Terms: New Studies on Begriffsgeschiche*. Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, p. 64.

looking into the conceptual laboratory emerging from academic debates on the current challenges posed by radicalisation as well as those evolving around the nature and the development of this phenomenon, that this thesis will highlights some conceptual choices in the debate and discuss the epistemological and normative as well as pragmatic consequences involved in the cases of European converts to Islam.

In the proposed matrix, the Castaway archetype indicates clearly how rejection and exclusion limit the space of communication to those sharing a cultural/religious idiom which is produced by intensified communicative links among people and in this way the collective memory which is enacted day by day. The typology acknowledges that radicalisation is socially produced within the social context being both the medium and the presupposition for it and at the same time radicalisation is an ultimately solitary experience in the sense that the radical self constitutes the centre of the whole universe that should be aligned according to the vision nurtured in the radical "mind and heart." Indeed, on the lonely island it is obligation of the Castaway to strive and keep everything is as it should be; to guard it against the dangerous, the unwelcome, and the alien which remains on the other side.

It is therefore, just as David Morley phrased it: one's person inclusion is another's exclusion[338] to the extent, that an incredible amount of solidarity is necessary for the maintenance of the homogeneity if the island and dependence on this ability to control the physical, psychological and social borders of Castaway's living space. This is most clearly dramatized in the fact that because for the Castaway the frontier is only a temporary truce line[339] their radicalism does not remain solely a narrative, in the sphere of ideas and values. To the contrary, it involves regular patterns of activity and structures in time which expresses the contingency of the dynamics between identity and belonging. Thus for a Castaway the ideal world is not a fortress with reinforced walls and strong, unyielding borderline. Rather, it is a place where borders are in fact not necessary because everyone is alike, if not identical, where there is no need to discern who belongs to "us" as there is no "they" and no sinister "other" threatens the wellbeing and unity of the society. Borders are viewed as something dangerous where different attitudes and values intermingle and where identity is questioned. For the Castaway, there is no question that he is right and that he holds the truth. The Castaway is so adamantly convinced of their monopoly for the righteousness that they will always unabashedly claim that everyone must live the life he lives. It is what Ghaffar Hussain from Quilliam Foundation calls the "Talibanesque" attitude of a person who thinks they have the right and duty to impose their interpretation of Islam on others. Because when it comes to the Castaway that is precisely the case, waiting for the ideal world to

[338] Morley, D. (2000). *Op.cit.*, p.18.
[339] Anderson, M. (1996).*Frontiers: Territory and State Formation in the Modern World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

come, bordering practices inform and order the daily life in an attempt to control and reclaim space, select and prioritise social relations. Hence the border becomes a normative idea and as argued by Henk van Houtum et al., becomes an active verb and an artefact that creates and shapes the world of societal reality.[340]Such a myth continues the specific tradition of framing the social order and the ownership of a symbolically highly valued habitus.

Eder addresses the importance and potency of exclusion maintaining that „*We always have to exclude some from collective action in order to produce strong particularistic bonds among those engaged in group action. The exclusivity of those included in collective action contains a power dimension. Power is thereby the simple fact of excluding others from being trusted co-actors*."[341]The causes of this paradox are many, but perhaps the most important ingredient can be found in the recurrent yet widely ignored problem that has been haunting the field of International Relations for decades, the problem that is summed up in the identity-belonging nexus. The common socio-economic conditions are not sufficient, and those scholars who examine the process of how the convert progresses from a newcomer to religion to a newcomer to violence identify a whole assortment of various triggers that are needed to radicalize a person. Radicalisation thus, even analysed solely in its violent guise not to mention the non-violent incarnations, reflects a number of diverse factors. In the context of rejection of *shahada* and the exclusion of the new Islamic life, the dialogue space is little more than a chimera.

The story of New Muslims', which I would call, "conversion to radicalisation" is varied. In official documents, reports, and also in media reports, this is something that is taken for granted and accepted as a given. The questions of how it happened or what the process was like are rarely posed. Instead the whole portrait is static and two-dimensional with a departure point of a "normal" person and a final product of a "radical" person usually committing violence while the analyses search for the causes of such change. What this thesis emphasizes is the fact that the radicalisation seeds might be hidden in the process of conversion itself. In other words, assessing the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam, one needs to interweave the conversion process itself, i.e. becoming Muslim, but also how it informs the subsequent being New Muslim stage which, properly analysed, might give an indication of whether or not a "conversion to radicalisation" might occur.

This totalizing tendency of a Castaway fails to acknowledge the important and meaningful intermediate positions, hybrids and syncretisms. In Islam this archetype disguises the practice that

[340] Van Houtum, H. Kramsch, O. & Zierhofer, W. (2005). B/ordering space. Prologue. In H. Van Houtum, O. Kramsch, & W. Zierhofer (Eds.),*B/ordering Space.* Wiltshire: Ashgate.
[341] Eder, K. (2008). *Op.cit.*, pp. 33-34.

claims religious binding but that is derived from the cultural experience of the dominant national community. The Castaway is inhospitable to difference and the mutually dependent processes of exclusion and identity projection hinges on him rejecting any attempts to identify or articulate discourses which are not identical with the Castaway's narrative and thus may bring with them attendant dangers. Where the Ambassador draws upon a wide range of cultural resources continually transforming the alien into what becomes their own secure identity, the Castaway reverts the process and continuously converts what *is* into what *is not*. This alternative is badly need in the study of conversions because, converts, at least mentally, keep crossing borders.

CONCLUSIONS

The increasing awareness of the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam has resulted in a growing number of academic, governmental and professional publications on European New Muslims. Nonetheless the focus of most of these studies is on the differing social and cultural aspects of conversion whereas less attention has been given to the security context and the specificity of the potential threat of European converts, who are usually lumped with other Muslim communities under the label of "*jihadi* threat". There are exceptions, including a few scholarly publications discussed in Chapter 1, as well as biographies and studies of various individuals undertaken by journalists or security analysts. Such publications are of much value but they lack a systematic and comprehensive approach to the problem of converts' radicalisation. The relatively small body of scholarly research means that as far as European converts are concerned we are still in the dark when it comes to a proper assessment of the security threat they might pose. Much more knowledge is needed if we want to know the patterns of converts' radicalisation and their terrorist potential. This exploratory study addresses a few of these needs and aims to contribute to the body of knowledge offering a better understanding of the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam.

The proposed interpretative framework explores the many facets of complex phenomena like conversion or radicalisation. This thesis endeavours to go beyond the customary, "dry" security analyses and for this reason in spite of the clear security focus remaining clearly within the field of International Relations, first of all provides a novel contextual basis from within which we can ponder the limits of existing security accents regarding the phenomenon of European converts to Islam. If the thesis was to avoid the previous flaws of writings on European converts to Islam an appropriate, more interpretative prelude regarding the conversion process was necessary before any meaningful security analysis. As Chapter 1 explained the link between conversion and radicalisation has not been established within the relevant literature and the observations were seriously flawed and hence security analysis relying purely on post-conversion period appeared inadequate and must have been preceded with a demonstration how existing knowledge pertaining to conversion and radicalisation is limited In other words, in order to move two steps forward, the thesis took one step back. Thus, Chapter 2 provides the necessary framework grounded in insights derived from field work in an attempt to contextualise the terrorist threat within the conversion process. By doing so the study has confirmed that the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam should be seen against the background of a wider conversion process. Therefore, this thesis has adopted the point of view that clarification of the issue of the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam should begin with clarifying with the issue of conversion and its role in the process of radicalisation.

Furthermore, the conceptual and ethnographic work undertaken throughout this thesis suggests that identity and belonging should be integrated into an interpretative and explanatory model that accounts for radicalisation of European converts to Islam. Consistently with the approach focused on the central research question, the first part of the thesis scrutinised the theoretical developments pertaining to conversion and radicalisation while the second part stressed the linkages between academic theories by systematically reviewing each of the archetypes from the proposed typology. On the basis of the ethnographic analysis is not exhaustive, nonetheless the main aim of the thesis, that is assessment of how relevant the proposed framework is for the purposes of a comprehensive and nuanced social science inquiry and adequate policy advice was achieved.

Reconsidering the Convert

The invitation to reconsider the concept of a convert stems from a simple but disconcerting observation made during this research: all the European converts to Islam differ from each other drastically. It is thus not a question of redefining *who* a convert is, but rather *what he/she is like*, both in the personal dimension, and in the individual. This thesis departed from the prevalent essentialised approach whereby the converts are treated as a homogenous "risk group" *en bloc* posing a substantial terrorist threat and the thesis proposes two solutions. Firstly, it advocates a realistic vision of the convert based on a contextualised image of the individual human being. As proven in Chapter 2, neither the ideal convert type, nor the ideal converting mechanism exist. To the contrary, there is a breath-taking variety of converting individuals and pathways of which at least four main trajectories can be distinguished. Secondly, the metatheoretical matrix of converting pathways proves the significance of converting processes. Therefore, a consistency approach is put forward in the thesis; one that considers the issue of the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam from a pre-conversion vantage point and that proposes a concurrent, highly contextualised framework linking the converting trajectories with their subsequent influence of post-conversion period in converts' lives. Thus, the typology presented in Chapter 3 answers to conceptual weaknesses and offers an alternative that entails a deep change in our conceptions and presumptions about converts.

Snow and Machalek[342] point to the fact of biographical reconstruction involving "the dissolution of the past, on the one hand, and its reconstruction on the other" but they are not able to explain whether the above is due to the *fact* of change or the *nature* of change. This issue is tackled in Chapter 3 which highlights the difficulties in delineating the scope of conversion and clarifying its capacity.

[342] Snow, D. & Machalek, R. (1983). *Op.cit.*, pp. 259-289.

Converts' narratives illustrating the proposed typology are full of stories of change: various individuals point out how their lives have improved, how much happier they are and how differently they now see themselves, the society and the world. Simultaneously, conversion, contrary to what the majority of the conversion literature critically evaluated in Chapter 2 implies, does not necessary mean a tectonic shift in the grand narrative of life. Only sometimes is the convert's understanding of the self in the past, that is his/her previous identity, transformed into a negative and is regarded as a misunderstanding. In other cases the change is rendered as a reasonable development remaining in continuity and unison with the former self even when viewed from the vantage point of the enlightened present, especially since in Islam (similar to other religions) personal transformation constitutes both the goal and means for changing the world.

Why is that? To this question we can only try to find an answer by looking at the identity-belonging nexus of the convert. Irrespective of whether we look at the agency assigned to the individual or whether we focus more on the community dimension, the proposed framework allows us to look at the intra-individual (e.g. personal constructs, predisposing traits, psychological features) and the inter-individual (e.g. group influences, social networks, societal pressures, cultural milieu, organisational setting, social role, economic factors, etc.) levels of analysis. The proffered typology permits the conceptual flexibility retaining the systematic explication of conversion trajectories. It facilitates the understanding of underlying assumptions and conceptual priorities always keeping the convert in the centre. It is in the nature of every typology to reduce and simplify the archetypes to essential features and to provide clear cut divisions, whereas in real life the boundaries might be blurred with hybridisation. It nonetheless provides the conceptual basis for more refined theories. The result is, therefore, a more enabling and flexible understanding of "a convert" adaptable to contextual circumstances. As attention and analysis move towards the converting narratives and the dynamics of the ideational factors within the identity-belonging nexus, the question remains as to what is the most effective method of practical implementation of the findings of this research. One could hope that it will give direction to changes in practice instead of being confined to perennial academic discussions.

Reconsidering the Potential

Chapters 1 and 2 gave us the flavour of the two prevailing pictures of European converts to Islam taken from a security perspective. One presents converts as operational assets for the jihadist circles, whereby the instrumental value of European New Muslims is underlined not only in case of proselytising, logistics or support, but also for planning and carrying out terrorist attacks. Official reports

and analyses discussed indicate that radical groups recruited converts because of their ability to cross borders easily or serve as front men for renting accommodation or for providing other logistical support adding that many recent converts were women; a factor further complicating the standard profile. The second picture, prevalent in the media[343] and somewhat preceding the security services' analyses, presents converts as disaffected and often troubled young people, who perceive the current wave of Islamic terrorism as the new revolution and join an idealist fight against the evils of the world, against the rich, the powerful, and the unjust. From this perspective, *The Koran* appears as the new *Das Kapital*.

The first picture partially explains why in spite of the small numbers drawn to terrorism, the security services are stubbornly focusing on converts, and why they perceive them as a serious and growing terrorist threat. From such an angle, the road from convert to jihadist is remarkably short and simple and the terrorist potential is immense. Chapter 1 provided numerous examples on how it is suggested that only because someone new to Islam does not have the cultural bearings or religious grounding sound enough to resist radical interpretations of Islam. Consequently, it should be relatively easy to influence such person and furthermore it is believed that many young converts come with romanticized notions of the clash of ideas so typical for adolescents.[344] These allegations suggest that it does not take much to make a terrorist out of an ordinary convert.[345]Unfortunately, the approach espoused by the officials and intensified in the media coverage is often mimicked in scholarly analyses, which stipulate that the conversion to Islam of fragile individuals undoubtedly leads to the risk of diversion to terrorism. A clinical example of the above is the following excerpt from Mia Bloom's writing, which displays all the features indicated above:

> "Converts are particularly dangerous group, not only because they can evade most profiles, but also because they carry European passports. Also, like in most faiths, converts may feel the need to prove themselves and can be more radical in their views than people born into the faith – thus making them more susceptible to extremist interpretations of Islam. Converts, male as well as female, may very well be a key resource in the future for terrorist organizations. Pascal Cruypennick was arrested in Belgium for sending suicide bombers to Iraq; other converts, like Richard Reid and Jose Padilla, are also in custody. In Belgium, as in many other

[343] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a meticulous analysis of media discourse, nonetheless, even the most perfunctory analysis of news articles reflects the narrative trends. *Cf.*:[-]. Essex Boys Sign Up for 'Holy War'. *The Observer*. February, 2002; [-].Whites Being Lured Into Islamic Terror.*The Telegraph*, July 02, 2006; [-].Al-Qaeda's White Army of Terror. *Scotland on Sunday*. January 13, 2008; [-].Exeter Bombing Suspect Was 'Brainwashed', Friends Insist. *The Independent*. May 24, 2008.

[344] Barnett, A., Bright, M. & Paton, N. UK Student's 'Key Terror Role'. *The Guardian*. October 28, 2001. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/oct/28/terrorism.uk (accessed: March 04, 2009).

[345] [-]. Europe Fears Threat From Its Converts to Islam. *The New York Times, via The International Herald Tribune, USA*. July 19, 2004 http://www.religionnewsblog.com/7916/europe-fears-threat-from-its-converts-to-islam(accessed: March 04, 2009).

> countries in Europe, it appears that converts are leading the charge to jihad in Iraq."[346]

Bloom's short diagnosis (following an otherwise excellent analysis of the growing role of women in terrorism) contains every possible conceptual error when it comes to New Muslims, which leads to a false and misleading perception of the connection between European converts to Islam and terrorism. Bloom treats converts as a homogenous group and broad generalisations are conducted on the fragile basis of a few cases, without an attempt to carry out a more thorough analysis of the whole group. Here, just like in other examples evidenced in Chapter 2, converts are presented as gullible individuals, easy to influence and prone to fall into an outbidding spiral when trying to prove their worth to the new brethren. The "youthful anger" hypothesis, so popular when it comes to analyses of second and third generations of European Muslims, actually holds its ground but is adjusted and presented rather as an "outbidding spiral" with converts wanting to prove their true Muslimness and show without any doubts that in spite of being newcomers to religion they truly belong to the community of believers. Therefore, as opposed to the inchoate rage of a young person who is in general very impressionable, we have "youngsters" in religious terms, who want to prove that as Europeans they left behind everything from where they came and everything that in their view the West stands for: moral emptiness, hedonism, secularism, shallow consumerism and even a perception of a Western conspiracy against Muslims.

In spite of the fact that some of these elements are true to a certain degree, it is necessary to point out that these are not present throughout all the cases of converted individuals. The cases presented and analysed in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 powerfully contradict the above claims. In Chapter 4, Lucy, Peter, Julia and Richard show how acceptance and inclusion are instruments for internalising the differences and enhancing the pluralism of ideas countering radicalisation. Chapter 5 presents Patricia's story countering the theories arguing that only the young, socially alienated and economically marginalised individuals convert, while Asa's case challenges the unidirectional dynamics of radicalisation and shows how a convert can practice with all the zeal of a new believer, then slowly diminish in his fervour being on the verge of abandoning religion altogether until a proper balance is found in the spiritual and material elements of life. Liliana and Laura's narratives at the core of Chapter 6 explain how is it possible to build one's identity on the foundation of rejection and at the same time, instead of limiting the normative spaces of belonging, be opened towards conquering new territories and include new communities into existential sphere. Only the examples discussed in Chapter 7 indicate how a unique coalescence of rejection and exclusion provide favourable conditions for a totality of belief which has the potential of resulting in susceptibility towards terrorist violence.

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[346] Bloom, M. (2007). Female Suicide Bombers: a Global Trend, *Daedalus*, 136:1, p. 36.

Thus, of all the four archetypes, only one, the Castaway, displays characteristics described by Bloom, who so generously ascribes the potential for danger and destruction to the whole convert community. Furthermore, it needs to be emphasized that even if they can be found, the purported "potential" is less a matter of appearance of a given factor but rather the nature of dynamics between the constituents. The range of examples used in this thesis are a clear illustration that not all young people are idealist, conversion is not always a consequence of childhood traumas, and a lack of religious knowledge does not designate everyone a member of a terrorist group. All the above generalisations are false and the widespread belief that some people constitute a threat by the definition of belonging to a certain social group is wrong.

In addition to redefining "the convert," also a concept of "the potential" needs to be redefined. Perhaps instead of "exploring the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam," future studies should focus on "European converts to Islam *and* the potential terrorist threat". The lack of understanding of converts' drives and the very nature of the process of their radicalisation culminate in an ignorance of the fact that the convert community, *en masse*, vehemently opposes their label as a security threat. In particular, *the potential* of the convert community is ignored as first and foremost allies in countering any terrorist threats, which in turn raises profound concerns in terms of the efficacy of anti-radicalisation and anti-terrorist policies.

Policy Advice

The study has demonstrated that a contextualised consistency approach enables not only a thorough contemplation of the points of controversies regarding conversion, radicalisation and the potential terrorist threat of European New Muslims, but also contributes to the debate by offering an alternative policy advice. The study has shown that in essence the proposed matrix might help develop policies to target radicalisation vulnerabilities, because tackling potential terrorist threats does not hinge solely upon the construction of an ideal psychological or social "terrorist prototype" or on the rooting out its background causes. For these reasons this thesis proposed looking beyond the concept of a terrorist threat understood solely as a post-conversion phenomenon. This thesis urges a critical eye to be cast on what I call a "conversion to radicalisation". The questions of how it happens and what the process is like should be at the very core of all counter-radicalisation policies. Instead of focusing on a static and two-dimensional portrait with a departure point of a "normal" person and a final product of a "radical" person usually committing violence, the security policies must take into consideration that radicalisation seeds might be hidden in the process of conversion itself. In other words, assessing the potential

terrorist threat of European converts to Islam, one needs to interweave the conversion process itself, i.e. becoming Muslim, but also how it informs the subsequent being New Muslim stage which, properly analysed, might give an indication of whether or not a "conversion to radicalisation" might occur.

Accordingly, the results of these examinations serve as a basis for a policy advice. Although an evaluative analysis of contemporary security policies pertaining to European converts to Islam is beyond the scope of this thesis, my research substantiates the twofold answer to the question how to minimize converts' terrorist potential. Firstly, this thesis has emphasized that from the security perspective the main challenge is to facilitate and help New Muslims throughout the crucial first period after conversion via proper conversion strengthening community capacities. At present, there are no standardised conversion mechanisms that would be approved by Islamic authorities; no preparatory courses beforehand and no recognised induction period directly following the first days and weeks after conversion. Perhaps efforts to streamline and strengthen the nationalised version of Islam are needed and a creation of a binding authority for Muslims who would be obliged to respect his rulings and accept his answers to a certain question that would eliminate parallel guidance. In practice, this would mean that all converts would have to go through the same, official course before the *shahada* and this way the emotional, prone to radicalisation Remedy/Salvation conversions would be curtailed.

The second change crucial for the future development of European Islam is to shift the main accentuation of the security policies from an *ex post facto* approach whereby majority of efforts is concentrated on neutralising the threats and minimising the damages to more proactive strategies aimed at strengthening converts' potential. In other words, the negative approach aimed at eliminating Castaways should be replaced by a positive one resulting in strengthening and facilitating the emergence of the Ambassador archetype. This thesis has demonstrated that Ambassadors are not tussled between contending perspectives like the Lost archetype, nor are they temporary and on the move as Bridges tend to be, neither do they shed their old selves in the same way snakes shed their skins and reify or obfuscate the community like it is in case of Castaways. Ambassadors offer a registry of solutions to potential conflicts and represent some sense of a middle path between the other archetypes that stand divided on ideas central to the lives of European converts to Islam and the issue of them being a security issue what makes them an ideal type to thrive in the modern pluralistic societies across European continent.

It was shown that the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam springs at the root of rejection and exclusion present before, during and after their profession of new faith. Consequently,

anti-terrorist and counter-radicalisation security policies should employ strategies and tactics which will support the accepting and inclusive Ambassador archetype. The Ambassadors conversion is not a question of building barriers or excluding someone by principle. Converts representing the Ambassador archetype, regardless of the differing levels of their personal religiosity as well as the diverse and sometimes conflicting interpretations of Islam, prove such assumptions false by creating diversity through a process of contextualisation and a synthesis of Islam and the domestic culture of the country of their origin. Ambassadors will never shed their cultures of origin, Germans will remain Germans, Dutch will be distinctively Dutch, while Britons retain their Britishness, irrespective of how contested these concepts are. What is more important, the two identities, the national and the Islamic, are not conflicted or competing and the indigenous cultural element does not vanish after crossing the religious border. Based on a harmonious, bonding solidarity and loyalty of two various communities, two common trans-cultural values that make it possible to create an autonomous and secure environment conducive to developing a rich and empowered belonging nurturing a stable identity. Because of the flexibility in the inclusion process and the contextualisation of Islam that best suits one's circumstances, converts falling into the Ambassador archetype acquire a new status with a new European dimension which also acts as a safeguard against the securitisation of their identity. Furthermore, affirming and internalising Islam, in the case of Ambassadors leads directly to sharing and learning to coexist. Such coexistence renders the ability to navigate and transcend in tolerance, understanding, self-critical approach to one's own traditions or intercultural dialogue while at the same time capacitates to eschew radicalisation and abjure political violence.

Ultimately, Ambassadors are spearheading the efforts conducted at redefining the meaning of European Muslim identity. Acceptance as an instrument for internalizing the differences and enhancing the pluralism of ideas is a pivotal agent in the dynamics of ideational factors with respect to the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam. The Ambassador is well aware of the simplistic and reductionist interpretations of the Muslim community in Europe which fracture Western society in two but at the same time he has an intimate knowledge of his brothers and sisters in Islam and does not pretend that there are no problems on the Muslim side as they do not confuse the reality and the ideal society. This knowledge of both communities enables them to prevent contact zones turning into conflict zones as it often happens when Muslims and indigenous Europeans interact. This way Ambassadors are given a sense of overarching belonging which means different things to different groups and is normatively influenced by the dialogue between several distinct voices that conceptualise different converts' narratives. With their continuous insertion of new memories and projects the Ambassadors customize and reinvent Islam in order to address the transformation of the direction and the nature of the belief in

Europe and provide the framework that corresponds to real life discourse about New Muslim identities. Undoubtedly, in the future this will lead to the emergence of national versions of Islam whereby Islam is going to be customized to particular historical and cultural circumstances of European countries as undeniably values become charged with emotions by linkage to history and culture. This also makes the Ambassador archetype the true ambassadors of Islam in Europe and the beacons that all the counter-terrorist policies and anti-radicalisation strategies should focus on as the ideal models.

Finally, in line with the claim of a paramount importance of acceptance and inclusion as factors bolstering the emergence of mature European Islam impervious to radicalisation, this thesis challenges the rationale of assessing the potential terrorist threat on the basis of their religiosity and external identity markers (e.g. dress, devotion to religious practices, like praying or fasting, etc.). Radicals do not necessarily have to be more religious than other members of the community and hence the main parameter that their radicalisation should be scrutinised against is the degree to which they are willing to defend and impose their worldview on other members of the society. Accepting by principle the imminent danger purportedly posed by the pious believers and securitising religious identity is thus a dead-end policy, which used selectively, excludes and antagonises those who should be engaged in anti-radicalisation debates.

One more remark needs to be made. The seemingly trivial nature of the above policy advice is yet universal enough to be comfortably implemented in countries like the United Kingdom or the Netherlands where Islam is quite established as well as like those where it is regarded to be a relatively recent phenomenon like Poland or other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The specific features of respective policies would need to be tailored to fit within the national context, nevertheless instead of elimination of the negative, which often comes too late, reinforcement the positive in a form of structural enhancement of capacities necessary for elimination of the Salvation/Remedy conversion pathway and efforts safeguarding the Ambassadors can be applied across the continent.

A More Flexible Perspective

Undoubtedly, the lack of reliable data, with respect to being and becoming Muslim has deterred the true understanding of European conversions to Islam and has blurred the clarity of relation between conversion and radicalisation of a given individual. As indicated in this thesis, the available materials vary between superficial media reports and extremely technical, security services documents, void of any “non-verifiable” substance. This worrying shortage of qualitative research data sustains the

continued shallow knowledge on conversion from a security perspective as there is not enough information to illustrate the processes and their dynamics. Concomitantly, as a result of the various pathways observed in the process of converts' radicalisation it is difficult to develop strategies for preventing these processes as developing a measure that will fit them all is not feasible. The problem with theories where the starting point for radicalisation occurs after the *shahada* is twofold. Firstly, they do not differentiate between the various individuals whose pathways are different and secondly, very often the potential terrorist threat can be detected and identified at a very late stage in the process, when it is already too late.

Notions like radicalisation or terrorism are constructed and influenced by political, social, cultural, economic and religious factors. Moreover, meanings and perceptions of the "terrorist threat" are not homogenous and are tightly linked to structural power dynamics. The theory presented in this thesis accompanied by the empirical evidence underscores the apparent heterogeneity across the spectrum of European converts to Islam with respect to the potential terrorist threat they might constitute. The narrative stories presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 have spoken to the issue of how the converts themselves see their roles and identities and indeed their potential in society. By highlighting the interplay of factors indicated in the metatheoretical matrix and the typology, the thesis opens up the alternative avenues which might be used on the policy making level in order to inhibit and disrupt processes of converts' radicalisation.

The problem of typologies on profile based, ideal types might mean that some individuals might not "fit in", by either falling between the ideal types or by being transient (although some traits and qualities may tie them more firmly to one archetype than to the others), nonetheless, typologies to a great extent work well for one type of group and therefore can foster our knowledge on converts and their "terrorist potential". Thus the concept of somewhat static types while incapable of explaining the considerable variety of hybrids between the archetypes still enables us to identify several positions which individuals may move towards or away from within the process of becoming and being New Muslim. Overall, identifying different archetypes of individuals who follow diverse pathways of becoming and being New Muslim is not a futile task in the sense that it helps develop not grand preventive strategies which will be applicable for each separate dimension of terrorist threat but several specific measures of prevention tailored to the specific drivers behind converts' radicalisation.

The analysis, which focused on the factors highlighted by the theoretical framework proposed in this thesis allow for a more flexible perspective, and a fuller and more appropriate understanding of potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam. Because of its demanding and burdensome

nature, and precisely because of contextual circumstances, one can understand the challenges in applying such a typology. Nonetheless, the fact that it is possible is encouraging and suggests that a nuanced, accurate understanding of the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam could be more successful than a rigid essentialised approach of a "risk group", far too generic to be functional at the contextual level. The framework proposed in this study is not exempt from critique, nonetheless it attempts to offer a more innovative perspective.

Implications for Future Work

To make a complete and reliable list of radical converts, let alone converts engaged in terrorist activities is a complicated, if not impossible[347] endeavour for a number of reasons. There are hundreds of individuals under observation, some were arrested but then released without charges. There are difficulties in obtaining official documents and media reports as well as open sources are incomplete and at times questionable as far as their reliability is concerned. With the notorious lack of access to governmental sources, in some cases there was too little open source information to include them into this research. The obstacles concerning data accessibility are sung like a mantra in every study on terrorism, and scarcity, unreliability and bias of available of information is not a new phenomenon, but something that a large number of researchers wrestle with while undertaking their scholarly inquiries. Furthermore, in the cases of European converts to Islam, conversion stories are to a large extent ignored and converts' narratives played down. Indeed their biographies are stripped down to operational details useful for the security agencies but devoid of background information making it very difficult to obtain a complete picture of the individual. Undeniably these common obstacles and limitations had an influence both on the quantity and quality of some of the research material obtained for the purposes of this study.

This research is formed around the individual, bringing together the political, sociological, anthropological and psychological approaches in order to provide a wider explanation of the studies phenomenon. Due to the scarcity of data the research is inevitably incomplete; indeed it can be deemed a work in progress and requires further academic enquiries into the subject of potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam. In doing so the research aims to offer a comprehensive framework that can

[347] Some of the studies attempted to identify converts engaged in terrorist violence, nonetheless more comprehensive research is imperative. For details on converts participating in foiled plots and successful terrorist operations see Bakker, E. (2006). *Jihadi terrorists in Europe: Their characteristics and the circumstances in which they joined the jihad. An exploratory study.* The Hague: Clingendael Security and Conflict Programme or Thomas, J. (2011). *Global Jihadist Terrorism: Targeting the West*. Washington, DC.: Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress, November 2011.

shed light on the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam and propose a comprehensive approach to the preventive side of New Muslims radicalisation.

As this thesis exposes the risks and shortcomings of existing theories, it also offers more questions than answers. Undoubtedly, further research on converts' radicalisation is needed, especially with respect to the following approaches, areas and themes. In the first place comparative studies of different types and developments of becoming and being New Muslim in different European countries, including contextual analyses on how surrounding societies and discourses influence those processes are needed. Furthermore, empirically based studies on converts, with a focus on their individual characteristics are necessary in order to verify the theoretical stipulations of this study as well as to identify the differences or similarities between the archetypes. Similar studies on individual motivations and long-term investigations on factors such as ideology, strategic considerations, tactical dimensions and converts' operational value in terms of potential terrorist engagement would be useful as the developed archetypes are not static elements and they do change over time. Another, more substantive study on where converts radicalize and where the "conversion to radicalisation" occurs within the community is needed preferably in conjunction with an informed research on the structural factors facilitating the emergence of Ambassador archetype. Additionally, since exploration of the role of media, especially the Internet and the social media platforms exceeds the limits of this thesis, a separate study on specific media factors relevant for converts' radicalisation is essential. Such investigation would be able to cast light on the debates on radicalisation "by proxy" as well as on the community-building potential of the social networks. Finally, a thorough examination of past and current counter-radicalisation strategies and initiatives should be undertaken with particular focus on their usefulness and efficacy with respect to European converts to Islam. It is mandatory to evaluate not only the factors that facilitate and promote converts' radicalisation, but also to investigate the factors that can explain how the individual continues their adherence to the Castaway archetype as the one espousing the greatest terrorist potential. This will make it possible to begin to understand the key features of a process that can move the Castaway to another quadrant, precisely because the individuals are not permanently assigned to the archetypes but can move among them.

Thus, while the study brought light to understudied aspects of the potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam and fully met the indicated objectives it also constitutes a foundation for further academic investigations. In order to empirically asses the current trends of conversions to Islam in Europe, qualitative studies should be mirrored by quantitative investigations collating statistical data on conversion rates in Europe and on the percentage of converts in terrorist groups. This thesis also encourages further, more quantitatively oriented work that would examine the operational value of

converts versus their cultural value and assess whether the converts are merely curiosities or key players in the terrorist cells in Europe. Another key aspect is expanding the analysis in order to cover of roles assumed by converts within terrorist organizations and their engagement in committing acts of violence. More consistent inquiries in this area would indicate whether there are any regularities that may be perceived in converts' engagement in terrorist activity and violent involvement. In doing so, such research would expose the similarities and differences that would broaden the understanding of the issue and give rise to additional strategies and present the possible counter-measures with regards to patterns of radicalisation of European converts to Islam. Ultimately, a comparative study of violent and non-violent radical converts is needed to understand the limitations and possibilities of current approaches and enable the formulation and application of more effective methodologies.

To all intents and purposes, while this thesis challenges us to think about European New Muslims in a broader and more nuanced manner, numerous issues pertaining to their radicalisation and subsequent engagement in political violence is yet to be explored in depth and therefore the question of potential terrorist threat of European converts to Islam is still open to discussion and needs further scholarly attention.

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