



CONVERTS IN THE WEST AND THEIR RELATION TO THEIR SURROUNDINGS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Project Course Presentation

THE AIM:

- 1) To provide an overview of significant studies concerning Muslim converts in the West and their relation to their surroundings.
- 2) Determining key issues, through which possible research gaps can be identified.

Themes in the field

1. MOTIVES TO CONVERT

**2. CONVERTS, GENDER AND THE
RACIALIZATION OF RELIGION**

3. CONVERTS AS MEDIATORS

I. MOTIVES TO CONVERT

1. Social

It is expected that the majority of Muslim converts became Muslim through (intimate) meetings with other Muslims. These can be family members, spouses or friends.

(Roald, 2004; Harmsen, 2008; Ramahi & Suleiman, 2017)

2. Intellectual

The intellectual path to Islam is generally a big part of their conversion. They are known to study Islamic material in depth, such as the Quran and Hadith, join study groups and critically analyse other sources of learning material.

(van Nieuwkerk, 2006; Harmsen, 2008)

3. Social-structural

In the eyes of converts, where western society encourages consumerism and materialism focussing on the ephemeral, Islam is the engine behind a society based on values such as equality, modesty and self-consciousness

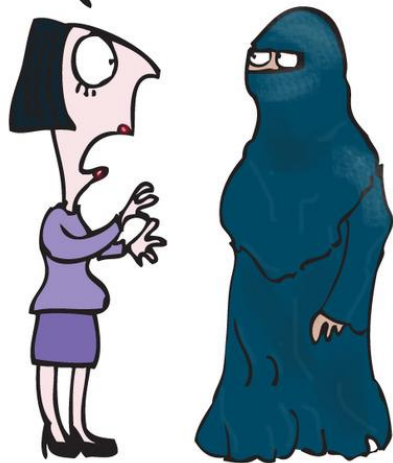
(Haddad, 2006; Harmsen, 2008; Zebiri, 2014)

4. Problem-solving

Experiencing addiction, depression, violence or problems with school or family might lead a person to search for a solution to their problems. Islam offers an alternative lifestyle.

(Wohrab Sahr, 2006; Harmsen, 2008)

You must be so
restricted and
uncomfortable!



I am! And I've only
been wearing them
for 20 minutes...




Shelley

2. CONVERTS, GENDER AND THE RACIALIZATION OF RELIGION

Western European studies concerning converts and gender show three main trends:

- **First**, research increasingly focusses on the agency of women. It reveals the actions of women in choosing their own path towards Islam and their specific ways and manner of spreading Islam.
- **Second**, studies focus on how western women, in opposition to men, have to deal with a larger cultural gap between their old lifestyle and their current social positions.
- **Third**, studies increasingly focus on the effects of female conversion for and in their surroundings. → Racialization of religion

“People stare at you because they see that you are white. Maybe that is the cause of the aggression; you are a traitor to the race” (van Nieuwkerk, p. 16, 2009).

3. CONVERTS AS MEDIATORS

- Bridging the gaps between communities, religions and cultures
- Hybridize the Islamic beliefs
- Ability to 'translate' between cultures
- Making the important distinction between religion and culture.
- Critically study gender issues such as patriarchy and equality
- Development of a 'deculturalized' Islam

(Ramahi & Suleiman, 2017; Zebiri, 2014; Allivie, 2006; Roald, 2004)

LITERATURE GAPS (CONVERT MOTIVATION)

1. Overemphasis on studying the push-factors which motivate people to convert to Islam.

2. Approach the convert as a passive agent who has no personal ownership or control in the conversion process.

3. An overemphasis on distancing and separating processes caused by the conversion between the convert and his or her surroundings, while overlooking/underrepresenting positive outcomes of the conversion.

LITERATURE GAPS (GENDER/RACE)

- **4. Underrepresentation of convert men**

Due to the gender-sensitive nature of the topic, and the Islamic etiquette of gender division, the underrepresentation of males as study subjects, is possibly partially due to the lack of male researchers

- **5. Race in relation to converts is understudied**

How do converts create, embody and transmit their dual (Western/Islamic) identities and how do they deal with the public imagination that they choose a different race, be it the Arab or African, above their 'whiteness'?

LITERATURE GAPS (CONVERTS AS MEDIATORS)

- **5. Little emphasis on the positive role of converts in Western society.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FURTHER RESEARCH

The importance of acknowledging the salient but influencing western societal structure needs to be underscored:

- 'Background of the researcher (male/female)
- Study the influence of Christian/ White privileges, where/how does privilege start and where does it end?
- Place the debate in the 'good versus bad religion' debate; how do converts embody the border between 'good' and 'bad' religions?
- Examine how converts function as cultural/religious mediators in their communities.

A close-up photograph of two hands shaking in a firm grip. The hand on the left is wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt, and the hand on the right is wearing a black long-sleeved shirt. The background is blurred, showing other people and an outdoor setting. A white rectangular box with a black border is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text "THANK YOU".

THANK YOU