TRANSLATION AS SELF-TRANSFORMATION: SCRUTINIZING THE PROCESS OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION THROUGH TRANSLATION

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Abstract

An individual who converts from one religion to another undergoes a significant change in their worldview. Not only do they need to accept a new belief, but they also accept the changes that come along with it, such as a change in ethics and morals, rituals and acts of worship, and sometimes even in appearance. The convert is therefore expected to translate their previous worldview into a new one, thereby transforming their worldview and adding new aspects to their identity. Although other terms relating to various aspects and modes of cultural translation have been proposed in Translation Studies, such as "translation as transposition" and "translation as rewriting" as found in Conway (2012), we will soon see how converts fit *neither* of these categories, since they have neither migrated, nor do they require anyone else to translate their experiences on behalf of them between certain communities. To fill this gap in the research, a new term and theory has been proposed: translation as *self*-transformation.

In order to analyze the newly proposed theory of translation as self-transformation, two main questions must be addressed: namely, what is translation as self-transformation, and how does translation as translation as self-transformation take place in the context of Canadian and American Muslim converts? To answer these questions, literature in relation to culture, identity, and worldview, as well as the notions of *Bildung*, and more specifically, alienation and appropriation, has been analyzed.

Furthermore, research methodologies such as questionnaires and focus groups are employed in order to gather empirical data from Canadian and American Muslim converts regarding their thoughts on the notions of culture and identity, as well as how religion falls among them. Additionally, they are asked questions regarding their own conversions and, therefore, their own processes of translation as self-transformation. Furthermore, it is also possible to analyze the

important and unique role that converts are able to play as mediators and cultural translators between communities, given their experience of having lived as part of both the non-Muslim and Muslim communities in Canada and America.

The findings of the research then suggest that converts do indeed undergo a process of translation as self-transformation. Furthermore, they are able to act as mediators and cultural translators between the non-Muslim and Muslim communities. However, their ability to translate effectively depends on two factors: 1) that they neither alienate their own culture nor appropriate another culture; and 2) that the community that they translate for is willing to be receptive of such a translation.

Such work may pave the way for future research on topics such as islamophobia in the West and how improved translation between the two communities may lead to establishing a better understanding and appreciation between both communities.

Résumé

Une personne qui se convertit d'une religion à une autre subit un changement important dans sa vision du monde. Non seulement elle doit accepter une nouvelle croyance, mais elle accepte également les changements qui l'accompagnent, tels qu'un changement de comportement moral, de rituels et parfois même d'apparence. On attend donc de la personne convertie qu'elle traduise son ancienne vision du monde en une nouvelle, transformant ainsi sa vision du monde d'origine et ajoutant de nouvelles dimensions à son identité déjà multiple. Bien que des concepts relatifs à divers aspects et modes de traduction culturelle aient été proposés en traductologie, tels que "translation as transposition" et "translation as rewriting", comme on les trouve chez Conway (2012), nous verrons bientôt comment les converti.e.s ne correspondent à aucune de ces catégories, puisqu'ils n'ont ni migré, ni besoin de quelqu'un d'autre pour traduire leurs expériences en leur nom entre leurs diverses communautés d'appartenance. Pour combler cette lacune dans la recherche, nous proposons dans ce travail un nouveau terme et une nouvelle théorie: la traduction comme *auto-transformation*.

Afin d'analyser la théorie nouvellement proposée de la traduction en tant qu'auto-réécriture, deux questions principales doivent être abordées, à savoir : qu'est-ce que la traduction en tant qu'auto-transformation, et comment la traduction en tant qu'auto-transformation se déroule-t-elle dans le contexte des converti.e.s musulmans canadiens et américains ? Pour répondre à ces questions, nous avons analysé la littérature en lien avec les notions de culture, d'identité et de vision du monde, ainsi que celles de *Bildung*, et plus particulièrement ses alternatives extrêmes d'aliénation et d'appropriation.

En outre, des méthodologies de recherche telles que des questionnaires et des groupes de discussion sont utilisées afin de recueillir des données empiriques auprès de converti.e.s

musulmans canadiens et américains concernant leurs réflexions sur les notions de culture et d'identité, ainsi que sur la place de la religion au sein celles-ci. En outre, nous leur avons posé des questions sur leur conversion et, par conséquent, sur leurs processus de traduction en tant qu'auto-transformation de leur identité. De plus, nous avons également analysé le rôle important et unique que les converti.e.s peuvent jouer en tant que médiateurs et traducteurs culturels entre les communautés, étant donné leur expérience de vie au sein des communautés non musulmanes et musulmanes à la fois, au Canada et aux États-Unis.

Les résultats de la recherche suggèrent donc que les convertis subissent effectivement un processus de traduction en tant qu'auto-transformation. En outre, ils sont capables d'agir en tant que médiateurs et traducteurs culturels entre les communautés non musulmanes et musulmanes. Toutefois, leur capacité à traduire efficacement dépend de deux facteurs : 1) qu'ils ne s'aliènent pas leur propre culture et ne s'approprient pas une autre culture que leur culture d'origine dans le processus de conversion ; et 2) que la communauté pour laquelle ils traduisent soit elle-même disposée à être réceptive à la médiation, le cas échéant.

Nous en conclurons, enfin, que ce travail pourrait ouvrir la voie à de futures recherches sur des sujets tels que l'islamophobie en Occident et la manière dont une meilleure traduction entre les communautés musulmanes et la société plus large peut conduire à l'établissement d'une meilleure compréhension et coexistence entre celles-ci.

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1. Introduction to the Proposed Theory of Translation as Self-Transformation

Conversion, when specifically referring to religion, may be described as "the process or experience of changing somebody's or your own religion or beliefs" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries). Indeed, someone who converts from one religion to another undergoes a significant change in their worldview. Not only do they need to accept a new belief, but they also accept the changes that come along with it, such as a change in ethics and morals, rituals and acts of worship, and sometimes even in appearance. The convert is therefore expected to translate aspects of their previous worldview into a new one, thereby transforming their worldview and adding new aspects to their identity. They translate their worldview rather than simply replacing it with some aspects because it is through both interaction (translation) with Others and their own self-reflection and self-transformation that their worldview is altered. Although other terms relating to various aspects and modes of cultural translation have been proposed in Translation Studies, such as "translation as transposition" and "translation as rewriting" as found in Conway (2012), we will soon see how converts fit *neither* of these categories, since they have neither migrated, nor do they require anyone else to translate their experiences on behalf of them between certain communities. To fill this gap in the research, a new term and theory has been proposed: translation as *self*-transformation.

For the reasons outlined above, conversion is of interest to Translation Studies as it has been for Anthropology. In particular, it will be of interest to further explore which categories of translation conversion falls under, and how this translation takes place. Thus, the translation in worldview from pre- to post-conversion and the tension that converts experience between Self and Other will be of clear importance. This leads us to many questions that we may be able to

ask about the process of translation as self-transformation, such as: how do converts view their identity? How has their conversion/process of self-transformation changed them? Have the converts alienated aspects of their previous identity or appropriated their new culture or identity to fit with their old worldview? To summarize and encapsulate the above questions, we can adopt two broader research questions: What is translation as self-transformation, and how does it take place in the context of religious conversion in Canada and America?

In order to analyze the questions and issues that have been raised about this topic of translation as self-transformation, the current study has been designed to address the issue at hand in two ways, each of which occupies one of the two main sections of the thesis. Therefore, after introducing the topic, the first main section of the current study will provide a review of the literature related to the formation of the proposed theory of translation as self-transformation. Thereafter, a review of the methodological approaches to the study will be explained. The second main part of the study will analyze empirical data taken directly from Canadian and American Muslim converts by way of questionnaires and focus groups that were designed to provoke their thoughts on the notions of *culture* and *identity*, while also reflecting on their own conversion and process of self-transformation. Although the main research aim is to formulate a tentative definition of the proposed term *translation as self-transformation*, it is interesting to also note how the data explored how the converts were then able to mediate and act as cultural translators between Muslims and non-Muslims in a Canadian and American context, given the fact that they have experience in both communities, having lived as both non-Muslims and Muslims. From here, we can then draw conclusions that will briefly summarize the findings from the study and answer our main research questions.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Approaching Cultural Translation

The premise for the current study was developed after having read Kyle Conway's (2012a) article "A conceptual and empirical approach to cultural translation," in which he provides a synthesis of how the term *cultural translation* has circulated through six modes of cultural translation. More specifically, the two types of translation that he mentions are "translation as transposition" and "translation as rewriting". Conway, paraphrasing Bhabha and Rushdie, describes translation as transposition as "the movement of people from one locale to another, and their ability through that movement to interrupt hegemonic narratives of national identity, is one way by which "newness enters the world"" (Conway 2012a, 269). In this way, one can see that translation as transposition refers to the physical movement of people from one place to another, thus also bringing their culture with them. As for translation as rewriting, Conway says that it is "namely to explain to members of one cultural community how members of another interpreted their experience in the world, if not the world itself" (Conway 2012a, 267).

In order to illustrate different aspects of cultural translation, Conway chooses to provide examples of the distinction that he is trying to make. In particular, Conway chose to focus on the case of Muslim women who wear the niqab in Quebec. These women were examples of translation as rewriting because a woman acted as a mediator for these women and gave them a space to speak for themselves and explain their own views and beliefs. Furthermore, Conway also used these women as an example of translation as transposition because some of them were foreigners who moved to Canada. However, Islam and, therefore, Muslims, are not necessarily foreign, as some Muslims were born and raised in Canada, while others convert from another religion to Islam, which is something that Conway has explored in another work of his, namely,

"Quebec's Bill 94: What's 'Reasonable'? What's 'Accommodation?' And What's the Meaning of the Muslim Veil?" (2012b). In any case, Muslim converts are not necessarily foreigners, and do not fit the bill for neither translation as transposition nor translation as rewriting. Therefore, this raises the question of what category of translation converts should fall under. Of course, we could also consider a more metaphorical meaning of translation as transposition. It is possible for someone to *move*, albeit not in a physical way. Perhaps this move could take the form of a shift in identity, belief, or even worldview, etc. In order to express this possibility, while avoiding confusion with the pre-existing term of translation as transposition, it may be possible to consider another term that could encompass this metaphorical aspect while also expanding upon it.

Furthermore, in order to explore this question in deeper detail, it will also be necessary to explore issues related to the Self and the Other. How do converts view their identity? How has their conversion/process of self-transformation changed them? Have the converts alienated their previous identity and/or culture in favour of a new Islamic one? Or, rather, have they appropriated Islam to fit in with their previous identity, culture, or perhaps even worldview? Moreover, an attempt to define these notions of culture, identity, worldview, will need to be made, and then an analysis can be prepared to see where religion fits amongst them and what role it plays. Therefore, we shall order the review of the literature thematically, so that it builds up to a way that answers the above research questions.

Of course, although Conway provides a synthesis of how the term *cultural translation* has been used across various fields of study, it may be useful to also look deeper into how the term has been used (and, in some cases, even contested by) several scholars within Translation Studies.

2.1.1 Cultural Translation as a Social and Political Construct

The first of these scholars are Buden & Nowotny, who explain the concept of cultural translation through the examination of the German citizenship test. They point to how the questions are arbitrarily used to define what "being German" is. However, they also draw attention to the fact that many of the questions, such as, "A woman shouldn't be allowed to go out in public or to travel alone without the company of male relatives. What is your opinion on this?", and "Please explain the right of Israel to exist." (Buden & Nowotny 2009, 197) were designed to subtly discriminate against certain ideologies, held mainly by Muslim applicants. In essence, the point that Buden & Nowotny seem to make is that the idea of "being German" is socially and politically constructed to be a certain way. The argument that Buden & Nowotny then put forward is that, in order for an individual to be able to answer the questions on the citizenship test, the individual who is taking the test "is in the literal sense culturally translated into "being German" and consequently provided with a new political identity, in other words with a particular set of rights and duties attached to German citizenship" (Buden & Nowotny 2009, 197).

Despite Buden & Nowotny's assertion and supporting research, several critiques have been put forward regarding the work. Namely, Sarah Maitland, in her (2017) book, *What is Cultural Translation?*, points out the fact that, among other problems, Buden & Nowotny do not actually define cultural translation. In fact, throughout their entire paper, they only devote around 600 words to the topic. She cites other scholars, such as Anthony Pym, who also reports being just as unsure and confused about what cultural translation means after having read the article as he was before having read it (Pym in Maitland 2017, 16). Another critique of Buden & Nowotny's work that Maitland poses is that, by answering the citizenship test questions, one does not necessarily

culturally translate oneself (Maitland 2017, 15-16). Rather, it is completely possible for an individual to take the test and simply answer the questions in a way that they feel is expected of them, without believing in the answers that they are giving, nor changing themselves in any way to reflect what they answered. In any case, despite the problems that have been brought up in the critiques, Buden & Nowotny's (2009) work remains important in showing how cultural translation can also be construed as a social and political construct in some ways. This remains relevant to the current study at hand as well since, assuming that the idea of "being German" could be constructed, it is assumed that "being Canadian" or "being American" could also be a construct. How then, would this affect a convert's idea of culture and/or identity?

2.1.2. Cultural Translation as it Relates to Power Differentials

The term *cultural translation* has also been used by scholars in Translation Studies and other fields to reflect the issue of the power differentials that can be a result of the translator acting as a mediator between different societies/cultures. Talal Asad, in his (1986) chapter, "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology," outlines how the term *cultural translation* has been used in the field of Anthropology. In particular, he believes that cultural translation is an institutionalized practice that results from differentials of power that separate languages and societies.

Throughout his work, he explains how such a power differential between societies becomes possible due to the nature of the anthropologist acting as a translator/mediator for those societies. In order to understand how this happens, we need to first consider a bit how Anthropology has generally taken place. Historically, anthropology has typically been dominated by white, Western anthropologists. These anthropologists historically focused much of their work on studying societies that could be considered to be part of the so-called "third world." These

societies have typically been characterized by inhabitants who are non-white, coloured peoples who do not speak English. The Western anthropologist then goes in to study such societies, but in acting as a translator/mediator for them, we also need to not only consider the source, but also the target audience that the anthropologist will be translating for. One must consider that the target audience is also Western, and that any publications that are made will need to be appealing to a Western audience. Additionally, since the source society likely does not have access to the English language, or at least to the final publication, they are at a disadvantage by not having accessibility or a final say in what the anthropologist is translating on their behalf. In a nutshell, it is the combination of these facts that, for Asad, creates a situation of power differentials, which he sums up briefly when he says,

> To put it crudely: because the languages of Third World societies—including, of course, the societies that social anthropologists have traditionally studied—are "weaker" in relation to Western languages (and today, especially to English), they are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around. The reason for this is, first, that in their political-economic relations with Third World countries, Western nations have the greater ability to manipulate the latter. And, second, Western languages produce and deploy *desired* knowledge more readily than Third World languages do. (The knowledge that Third World languages deploy more easily is not sought by Western societies in quite the same way, or for the same reason.) (Asad 1986, 158)

In the case of the current study on translation as self-transformation, it is important to realize that these power differentials that Asad is concerned with largely do not exist. This is because the individual who undergoes the process of self-transformation is simultaneously both the *translator* and the *translated*. There is no mediator, so there cannot be a power differential caused by any mediation. However, external factors, such as Islamophobia, that may come from the culture/society that surrounds the convert may cause a feeling of discrimination and/or oppression, which could be considered as a type of power differential, although it is not

necessarily done through mediation in the same way that Asad was concerned with anthropologists. However, should the self-transformed convert decide to act as a translator/mediator between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities, this may create a type of power differential if the convert engages in either alienation or appropriation and leans too much towards preferring one community over the other. This point will be discussed further in section 4.2.6. In any case, self-transformation is concerned with one individual and their own journey back to themselves. Therefore, cultural translation as a form of power differential is not applicable to the study in this sense.

2.1.3. But Couldn't *Everything* be a Form of Cultural Translation?

As previously mentioned, there have been some scholars that have critiqued the notion of cultural translation. Amongst such scholars is Harish Trivedi. In particular, in his (2007) article, "Translating Culture Vs. Cultural Translation," Trivedi takes issue primarily with the metaphor of "carrying across" and migrants often being used as examples of cultural translation. Of course, as we have seen in Conway (2012a), migrants would fall under the category of translation as transposition, because it is believed that they are able to act as translators because they themselves have been translated across space and different cultures through the process of migration. However, Trivedi is saying that perhaps this metaphor has gone too far, and he explains this point by mentioning a few people, such as Hanif Kureishi and Jhumpa Lahiri who have been cited as acting as cultural translators, despite not having even moved anywhere. Both of these authors happened to be South Asian and were seen by others as cultural translators based on their ethnicities, despite never having even been to the places of their cultural background (namely, India) (Trivedi 2007, 284-285). Furthermore, Trivedi sees the growing usage of the term *cultural translation* as deeply problematic since it is generally used to refer to situations

that are monolingual in nature. He fears that the inter-lingual aspect of translation may be lost, and the English language may gain more ground as the globally dominant language. This is clear in several of his statements, including: "[…] if literary translation is allowed to wither away in the age of cultural translation, we shall sooner than later end up with a wholly translated, monolingual, monocultural, monolithic world," and that "rather than help us to encounter and experience other cultures, translation would have been assimilated in just one monolingual global culture" (Trivedi 2007, 286).

To summarize Trivedi's concerns, he is worried that cultural translation has lost the inter-lingual aspect of "traditional translation" and that a term that seemingly has no definition could lead to the term *cultural translation* being boiled down to relate to any act of communication. However, to counter Trivedi's fears, Sarah Maitland, in her (2017) book, *What is Cultural Translation?* provides us with a definitive definition of the term: "To qualify as cultural translation a phenomenon of human expression in the social sphere must be shown to engage in a contemplative work of understanding addressed towards a particular substance, but it must also have as its primary objective nothing short of the transformation of human hearts and minds" (Maitland 2017, 53). In fact, her entire (2017) book is an attempt at both defining cultural translation, but also of providing real-life examples of the term in action, which she does by using Paul Ricoeur's notion of hermeneutics, which also forms a key element of defining what translation as self-transformation is in the current study.

2.1.4. The Hermeneutic Circle as a Journey to Self-Transformation

In the previous section, it was shown that, yes, a definitive definition has been attempted to be assigned to the term *cultural translation*. However, it has yet to be seen how that might be possible. As previously mentioned, Sarah Maitland assures readers that her definition of cultural

translation is sound by way of using Paul Ricoeur's approach to hermeneutics. Which Maitland describes as, "[…] the 'art' of interpretation that questions the limits of our interpretation, a form of understanding that is not simply a way of knowing or a method of analysis but an ontological imperative: to understand who we are and where we stand before the object-for-interpretation" (Maitland 2017, 7). In short, it is a description for what we do in life. Throughout her (2017) book, *What is Cultural Translation?* she uses each chapter to describe different parts of the hermeneutic circle, and how they link back to not only cultural translation, but also inter-linguistic translation, thus dissuading critics who say that translation has expanded too far.

Maitland's (2017) work is composed of five main chapters. Although each chapter is dedicated to an aspect of the hermeneutic circle, it will suffice for the current work to summarize the beginning and end of the circle/process. In the first chapter of her book, Maitland explains that life is a mystery that seeks to be understood; it is a quest for understanding in which one looks to discover the hidden meaning behind that which is apparent. To put it simply, one begins the journey of life by seeking to understand. Jumping forward to the fifth and final chapter, Maitland explains that it is by interacting with Others and by learning about opposing viewpoints and even worldviews that we can learn about our Selves. She emphasizes this point by quoting Hobbes when he writes, "read others, read thyself, know thyself" (Hobbes in Maitland 2017, 161). Therefore, to sum up the hermeneutic circle, one begins by seeking to understand. The next step then is to interact with Others. Indeed, it is by interacting with Others that one can learn about opposing viewpoints and worldviews. When one interacts with these opposing positions, they can then come back to their Self having better understood where they stand in opposition or agreement with the new knowledge and viewpoints gained from the Other.

To return back to the beginning of the book, we can see the application of Maitland's statement that "understanding is only a possibility; it is not something we achieve but a journey we undertake and it is one that does not leave us unchanged." (Maitland 2017, 7). In a nutshell, the hermeneutic circle represents a journey of self-development and self-transformation. The Self is clearly the source in this translation, and although the Self may engage with Others who serve as targets along the way, the Self remains the ultimate target. Translation is a process of self-transformation; it is the journey homeward bound. In order to better analyze this process of translation as self-transformation, we will take a look at it as it is used in the concept of *Bildung*, as well as how it then can also relate back to inter-lingual translation.

2.2. *Bildung*

The first section of literature that we will analyze thus deals with the main theory upon which the current study is based: *Bildung*. Firstly, we will begin by analyzing the historical use of this term, and then we will proceed to see how it has been defined by different scholars.

2.2.1. How Has the Term Been Used Historically?

Historically, the term *Bildung*, has been used in different ways and manners according to different time periods. Let us then take a look at the different uses of the term by various scholars, as summarized in Danner (1994).

When analyzing the first instance of the term *Bildung*, Danner notes that it is important to pay attention to the stem of the word *Bildung*: *Bild-* which means *picture* or *image*. In the context of the German mystics of the 13th-17th centuries, they used the term in the sense that "the religious person should internalize the image of Jesus in a spiritual way in order to become close to God" (Danner 1994, 7). Despite this being the original use of the word, we will see that the

use of the term by scholars around the 1800s in post-Enlightenment Europe differed significantly. Let's take a look at a few of their views on *Bildung*.

Firstly, Herder used the term *Bildung* in the sense of a *self-Bildung*. In other words, the human being needed to grow like a *plant*- to develop and un-fold his inner forces. In terms of this *self-Bildung*, no outside influences should interfere (Danner 1994, 7). Perhaps in a more integrated sense, Schiller then made the case for an *aesthetic Bildung*, which emphasized "the harmonic penetration of the sensorium by mind and vice versa" (Danner 1994, 7). On the other hand, Hegel then advocated that *Bildung* should be "the *coming to oneself by and in the other* in the universal" (Danner 1994, 7). In other words, only by the encounter with other human beings and with the world, a person can be formed. Finally, for Humboldt, *Bildung* meant the harmonic growth and development of all the inner forces and potentials of the human being in an equal way (Danner 1994, 8).

2.2.2. Defining *Bildung*

The concept of *Bildung* is historically strongly related to the German context of education. But why would a term related to education be of interest to Translation Studies? As we see in Basalamah (2020), he explains that

> […] it has been argued in anthropology, in cultural and postcolonial studies — around the notion of *cultural* translation notably—that culture is in and of itself a *translational* phenomenon as dichotomous structural boundaries have faded away in favor of hybridity and *métissage* (Wolf 2002; Bachmann-Medick 2006; Buden and Nowotny 2009). This means that the framework of education is itself a place where culture as an intellectual practice and process can be actually transmitted. Culture, then, is considered as education, and education as a space of predilection for the transmission/translation of culture" (Basalamah 2020, 1)

Here, we can clearly see how education itself is a translational process that particularly facilitates a kind of *cultural* translation, of which our current study is also concerned.

However, it is also important to mention that there are many different aspects of the educational process, such as socialization, *Erziehung*, and teaching. Let us explain each facet in some detail. Socialization is a process that begins when we are born and only ends when we die. Danner defines socialization as *automatic* and *unintentional*. In other words, a child is "socialized" and *moulded* by his or her surrounding environment and society. A child grows up surrounded by these influences and is conditioned by them. The child is unable to actively choose the situation he is raised in and surrounded by, hence Danner's mention of this conditioning being unintentional and automatic. On the other hand, the other terms that we will explore, *Erziehung*, teaching, and, finally, *Bildung*, are intentional.

Danner then proceeds to explain how *Erziehung* refers to education, although in a narrower sense. He explains that

> 'Erziehung' is the interpersonal event, founded on trust, where responsible persons help in a competent way those persons who are not yet (fully) responsible, however with their active participation, to live independently together with others at present and in future and to achieve goals which have socio-cultural and personal conditions. Finally, this process should aim to maturity, responsibility, and 'Bildung'." In this way, "'Bildung' is the free take-over of the educational intentions of another person by the child. (Danner 1994, 4-5)

Finally, Danner also explains the role that teaching plays with regards to *Bildung*. Namely, that "*teaching* is the (more or less) systematic, methodological, and intentional activity of a person to increase the knowledge, the abilities, the skills of another person by information and training" (Danner 1994, 5). Therefore, we can understand from this definition that the

process of teaching is meant to simply guide an individual on their own learning journey and personal growth. Rather, it emphasizes and amplifies the skills and abilities that an individual already possesses.

Naturally, it is all of these processes combined that then form a part of the larger process of *Bildung*, which Spranger describes in detail as follows:

> `Bildung' is the formation of an individual's essence which is acquired by cultural influences and which is homogeneous, structured, and suitable to be developed; this formation of his essence enables the individual to objectively valuable cultural achievements and it enables him to experience (to comprehend) objective cultural values. […] Real `Bildung' always contains "*developmental dispositions* and *continuous growth*, because principally, it is nothing else than a refined result of development.... (Spranger in Danner 1994, 6)

If we can summarize three main important points of *Bildung*, it would be that *Bildung* values critical knowledge, consciousness, and responsibility of the individual, that it comes about as the fruit of one's own personal effort, and that it is a response to education and teaching.

Whereas Danner has done an excellent job of giving a historical overview and description of *Bildung*, which helps us to better understand the use of the term and the context in which it finds itself embedded, he has, however, not made the crucial link between *Bildung* and Translation Studies, of which the current study is interested. For this reason, we must look at Antoine Berman's work *L'Épreuve de l'étranger*, in which he links the concept of *Bildung* to the field of Translation Studies. In particular, it will be of particular interest of this study to analyze the notions of alienation and appropriation which are also found in Berman's work and that can be linked to *Bildung*. However, before we delve into *L'Épreuve de l'étranger*, we should first take a glance at Sherry Simon's article "Translation as a Mode of Engagement" (1999), in which

she speaks of the importance of Berman's book, as well as describing the context in which his work was written.

2.2.3. Translation as a Means of Engaging with the Other

Simon perfectly summarizes and describes why Berman's *L'Épreuve de l'étranger* is relevant to the current research. She mentions that there are two main aspects to Berman's book. The first part, an investigation of the writings of the German Romantics as they relate to translation, is what most concerns the present study. In particular, the link that Berman makes between the notion of *Bildung* that was mentioned by the German Romantics and the sub-notions of alienation and appropriation, relate back to our topic of translation as self-transformation.

But why would such a topic that was addressed by German scholars of the 1800s be of interest to a French scholar in the later 1900s? Furthermore, how would it then be relatable to the present situation concerning Canadian and American converts to Islam? Simon explains that Berman was concerned with the "relationship between Self and Other, Native and Stranger, which agitated French culture during the 1980s" (Simon 1999, 114). In Berman's own words,

> la *visée* même de la traduction – ouvrir au niveau de l'écrit un certain rapport à l'Autre, féconder le Propre par la médiation de l'Étranger – heurte de front la structure ethnocentrique de toute culture, ou cette espèce de narcissisme qui fait que toute société voudrait être un Tout pur et non mélangé. (Berman 1984, 16).

Here, we can begin to make a comparison to our current study. Indeed, we see Muslim converts as being in the same position upon undertaking the decision to convert and thus undergo the process of self-translation. They are the Self—the one (in the case of our study) living in a Canadian or American context. However, at the same time, they are confronted with a new religion: the so-called "Other." Although, as we will outline in the next section of our literature

review on culture and identity, the religion of Islam does not necessarily inherently have a set culture that its adherents must follow, nevertheless, it is oftentimes associated with the culture of some of its followers. Whereas the secular states of Canada and the United States (having no state religion) are seen as the "Self" (in the case of the current study) the religion of Islam and the various cultures that may be associated with it and/or its followers are seen as an "Other." The convert, acting in the position of a translator and mediator between both the secular Western community and the Muslim community, must then go from the Self to the Other, interact and engage with said Other, and then return to the Self, much like the hermeneutic process that was also mentioned in Maitland (2017). In this way, they interact meaningfully with alterity, but, at the same time, they do not lose their sense of Self. This process can be likened to the phenomena of alienation and appropriation, which are defined in the quote by Berman below:

> Choisit-il pour maître exclusif l'auteur, l'œuvre et la langue étrangère, ambitionne-t-il de les imposer dans leur pure étrangeté à son propre espace culturel – il risque d'apparaître comme un étranger, un traître aux yeux des siens. Et il n'est pas sûr que cette tentative radicale – Schleiermacher disait : « amener le lecture à l'auteur » - ne se renverse pas et ne produise pas un texte côtoyant l'inintelligible. Si, par contre, la tentative réussit, et est même par chance reconnue, il n'est pas sûr que l'autre culture ne se sent pas « volée », privée d'une œuvre qu'elle jugeait irréductiblement sienne. On touche là au domaine hyper-délicat des rapports entre le traducteur et « ses » auteurs.
>
> Le traducteur se contente-t-il par contre d'adapter conventionnellement l'œuvre étrangère – Schleiermacher disait : « amener l'auteur au lecteur » -, il aura certes satisfait la partie la moins exigeant du public, mais il aura irrémédiablement trahi l'œuvre étrangère et, bien sûr, l'essence même du traduire. (Berman 1984, 15)

However, whereas the above-described process may seem simple and clear—go from Self to Other and then back to Self—it does not always go according to plan. In the above-mentioned quotes, Berman explains how alienation and appropriation take place. Namely, he describes the risk of becoming too much like the Other when approaching them, thus alienating oneself. Nor

should he take so much from the other culture that the other culture feels "stolen from," by appropriating aspects of the other culture.

Converts may also experience alienation or appropriation. For example, upon their conversion, they may find themselves as adopting cultural aspects from the Muslims that surround them (ex: Arab, South Asian, African, etc.) while leaving behind and alienating aspects of their previous Canadian or American (in the context of our study) culture. On the other hand, they may appropriate Islam to fit with aspects of Canadian or American, when those aspects directly contradict religious regulations/requirements.

2.3. Islam: Culture or Identity?

2.3.1. The Argument for a "Culturally-Clear" Islam

Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, himself a convert to Islam, has written several works related to the idea of culture in Islam. Here, we analyze two of his articles which we find to be the most relevant to the study at hand: "Islam and the Cultural Imperative" (2004) and "Seek Knowledge in China: Thinking Beyond the Abrahamic Box" (2006). Let us then begin our discussion with "Islam and the Cultural Imperative" (2004).

The main premise of "Islam and the Cultural Imperative" (2004) is that Islam has always shown itself to be a "culturally-friendly" religion. In other words, Islam never attempted to erase culture. Rather, Islam was always accepting of the compatible values that came from any given culture. One of the keystone quotes that we will focus on from Abd-Allah (2004) is, "in history, Islam showed itself to be culturally friendly and, in that regard, has been likened to a crystal clear river. Its waters (Islam) are pure, sweet, and life-giving but—having no color of their own—reflect the bedrock (indigenous culture) over which they flow. In China, Islam looked

Chinese; in Mali, it looked African" (Abd-Allah 2004, 1). Although this quote may have some shortcomings, as we will discuss later, it nevertheless promotes the idea that Islam is able, at least in some ways, to change its image to reflect the cultural context that it finds itself surrounded by.

The above-mentioned quote will serve as a key argument for the fact that converts do not need to change their culture in order to become Muslim. Rather, since Islam, and, more specifically, religion in general (with the partial exception of ethno-religions, as we will see later), is an issue of identity, changing one's culture should not be a pre-requisite for conversion. At most, converts would only be asked to change some aspects of their culture that do not fit in with Islamic values (ex: drinking alcohol).

Abd-Allah further argues Islam's ability to be culturally friendly in the section of his article entitled "Respecting Other Cultures: A Supreme Prophetic *Sunna*," in which he provides historical examples from the prophet Muhammad's *sunnah*[1] that prove Islam's ability to accept and adjust to certain compatible aspects of different cultures, such as when Muslims came to the Prophet's mosque and performed a cultural dance, which the Arabs were not accustomed to, but the prophet Muhammad ordered them not to interfere with. Furthermore, in his section "The Cultural Imperative in Classical Islamic Jurisprudence," Abd-Allah argues that both custom (*al-'urf*) and usage (*al-'ada*) form important aspects of Islamic jurisprudence, in which "*al-'urf* and *al-'ada* connote those aspects of local culture which are generally recognized as good, beneficial, or merely harmless" (Abd-Allah 2004, 6).

In the rest of his (2004) article, Abd-Allah spends his time arguing the case for a distinctly American Islam. America, particularly being a country built upon immigration, is

[1] Sunnah: Prophetic sayings and actions

comprised of immigrants coming from many unique countries, including those of various predominantly Muslim countries. Thus, the Muslim community in America does not have one single dominant culture. It is then Abd-Allah's belief that the American-Muslim community must form their own unique cultural identity.

2.3.2. Islam in China

Here, we will make very brief mention of another of Umar Faruq Abd-Allah's works, an article called "Seek Knowledge in China: Thinking Beyond the Abrahamic Box" (2006). The work follows his 2004 article "Islam and the Cultural imperative." In his 2006 work, Abd-Allah continues to make an argument regarding Islam's adaptability to different cultures outside of the religion's birth in Arabia. In the case of this article, he describes how Islam adapted itself to various aspects of Chinese culture. For example, since the transliteration of Arabic words into the Chinese script was nearly impossible,

> the Hui circumvented the problem of transliteration by innovating meaningful Chinese renditions of Arabic words. They referred to God as the One, the Real, the Real One, the Real Lord, and the Real Ruler. The expressions corresponded to Islamic names of the Abrahamic personal God but did not clash with Chinese tradition, which regarded references to a personal God as anthropomorphic (Abd-Allah 2006, 8).

Although we have only mentioned translational examples of Islam's adaptation to culture, the article also delves into other examples of cultural adaptability, also citing art (calligraphy) and even the design of Chinese mosques. Essentially, this article is helpful in lending the current study historical precedence that shows that, assuming that Islam could adapt itself to other cultures in the past, it can certainly also do so with the Canadian and American converts in our study.

2.3.3. Religion as Culture

The current study on translation as self-transformation focuses on converts to Islam. However, it may be of interest to also comparatively analyze how culture is conceived according to other religions. For this reason, culture as it is conceived of within Judaism has also been researched. The reason that Judaism has been specifically chosen for comparison with Islam in terms of the issue of culture and identity is due to the fact that some people believe that one can be Jewish by inheriting it as a culture and an ethnicity (Himmelfarb 2009, 67). Therefore, while Judaism can certainly be conceived of as a religion, it can also be conceived of in terms of it being a culture and ethnicity. This is in direct contrast to Islam, which is not inherited, and which necessitates belief (regardless of the level of piety or practice) from its adherents.

In researching Jewish culture, two main sources were consulted: *The Idea of Modern Jewish Culture* (Schweid, 2008), and "Judaism in Antiquity: Ethno-Religion or National Identity" (Himmelfarb, 2009). *The Idea of Modern Jewish Culture* (2008), looks at the formation of a modern Jewish culture from the perspective of European Jewish liberation from ghettos and their desire to fit in with the surrounding non-Jewish European society. Here, it is important to mention that this book's perspective on Jewish culture is limiting in several aspects. Firstly, the book only focuses on Jewish culture from a modern perspective. To analyze Jewish culture across the span of its entire history would be a daunting endeavor which is certainly outside of the scope of this book. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, although the book does specify its scope as being *modern* Jewish culture, it still neglects all non-Ashkenazi (European) Jewish culture. Sephardi (Jews from the Iberian peninsula and their descendants that were expelled following the Spanish Inquisition) and Mizrahi (Jews from the "East") Jewish culture has been

neglected in this book. In any case, the book is still useful in explaining how a *secular* Jewish culture emerged in a European context.

Perhaps the most important argument that is missing from Schweid's work regarding Judaism as a culture is the fact that Judaism (and other religious groups such as Samaritans and Yazidis) is an ethno-religion—a group that shares an ethnicity derived from adherents of the same religious group (Himmelfarb 2009). Therefore, as we have mentioned earlier, it is completely possible that someone could identify ethnically and culturally as Jewish, but not follow the religion.

2.3.4. The case for a Cultural Islam

Following the case that was made for Judaism as culture, we should also examine any counter-arguments that it might be possible to also practice Islam as a culture. We find this counter-argument present in Abdennour Bidar's (2016) book, *Self islam : Histoire d'un islam personnel*. Here, we will give particular attention to his chapter of the same name, "Self islam."

In a nutshell, this chapter is an attempt to argue for an Islam that is *personal*. What Bidar means by this is that Islam must be free of all compulsion—free of guilt related to not practicing certain aspects of the Islamic faith that might be deemed as necessary. Thus, not doing such necessary or required acts would be considered as sinful. Rather, what Bidar argues is that freedom of choice and religion is inherently a part of Islam. He elaborates on the concepts of *islam* and of *ihsan,*[2] explaining the difference between the two terms. In Bidar's view, *ihsan* refers to the individual's capability to reach personal excellence in determining what is best for them in their life. Therefore, in order for one to reach this state of excellence, one must be able to

[2] *Ihsan*: Excellence

choose those aspects of faith which lead them on the path to personal excellence. (Bidar 2016, 112).

Islam, if practiced in the above sense, *could* potentially deplete any religious aspects from it at all. Indeed, Bidar confirms that one should be able to practice Islam as a part of one's *culture* (Bidar 2016, 108). In a sense, Islam still remains a part of one's identity, since they may still *believe* in it in their hearts, but they may choose not to practice its rites and rituals. This would make one sinful for not performing the rites, although not necessarily take them out of the fold of belief. Furthermore, some people may only choose to *passively inherit* the faith as culture. Such an example may include celebrating Islamic holidays such as the two *Eids*, and exploring other aspects of Islamic culture, such as art. Indeed, the case of a self-Islam is very nuanced. However, what is clear, is that the concept of self-Islam advocates for Islam as choice—and that choice may lead to Islam becoming either a part of one's identity or simply a part of one's culture.

2.4. Worldview

Now that we have made an attempt to define culture and identity and explore various aspects of each, it would now be of benefit to see how each of these terms relate to the larger umbrella term of *worldview*. To properly understand worldview, we should look first to the man who many attribute the coining of the term to—Wilhelm von Humboldt.

2.4.1. Worldview and language

As we have previously mentioned, in order for translation as self-transformation to take place, a shift in worldview must happen. For this reason, we should evaluate what the term *worldview* means. Thus, we will draw on several chapters of Underhill's work, *Humboldt, Worldview and Language* (2009) as part of our review of the concept of worldview. Although

worldview is used in a combined sense in English and French, the term contains the meanings of two different terms in German, namely, *weltanschauung* and *weltansicht*. Humboldt saw worldview

> as the fundamental and necessary processing of the world by the mind through the faculty of language. This was the human capacity which intrigued Humboldt, and it was by painstakingly examining the different ways in which each language assimilates the world and organizes its concepts for what *is* and what *takes place* within the world, that Humboldt hoped to make worldview a primary conceptual tool for understanding and classifying languages. (Underhill 2009, 16)

Therefore, in our analysis of Humboldt's use of the term *worldview*, it becomes clear that he sought to develop the concept of *Weltansicht*, not the concept of *Weltanschauung*.

On the one hand, *weltanschauung* "has often been used to refer to a personal stance, a view of the world which is more deeply intuitive than a philosophy" (Underhill 2009, 16). It also has a wider scope, which has come to be associated with ideology. On the other hand, "*weltansicht* refers to the way the language system shapes the perspective and conception we have of the world and to a large extent shapes the way we negotiate our way through the course of life on a day-to-day basis as we converse with others." (Underhill 2009, 17). In other words, *weltanschauung* is an individual's innate need to produce language and thus conceive the world by clarifying his thoughts through speech with others. *Weltansicht* is language-bound and "is the capacity which language bestows upon us to form the concepts with which we think and which we need in order to communicate" (Underhill 2009, 56). Therefore, *weltansicht* is a precursor for *weltanschaaung*, the latter of which "implies the construction of various kinds of world-conceptions which takes place in our speech with others" (Underhill 2009, 106). Clearly, both terms in German work in conjunction with each other to form a composed *worldview*.

Of importance here is the fact that *weltansicht* is related to an *individual* endeavour. On the other hand, *weltanschauung* is more collective in nature as deals with world-conceptions that we share through speech with others. Thus, *weltanschauung* affects worldview at the level of the social and culture that we share with others and are surrounded by. Considering that the term *worldview* in English evokes the notions of both *weltansicht* and *weltanschaaung* (Underhill 2009, 16), when we speak of a convert undergoing a change in their worldview, this change naturally necessitates changes at both the individual (one's identity) and cultural levels.

2.4.2. Transforming religious worldviews

As we have previously discussed how worldview was used in a general sense to relate to both aspects of identity (*weltansicht*) and culture (*weltanschauung*), we now need to see how these aspects relate to religion. For this reason, we will take a look at Paul G. Hiebert's work *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (2008). Although Hiebert looks at worldview through a Christian lens, it is nonetheless also applicable to the case of our Muslim converts, as we will later see.

The first point that we need to make in our discussion regarding worldview (as seen in Hiebert 2008) is that humans (including both societies and individual persons) have three dimensions, which include: the cognitive, the affective, and the evaluative (Parsons and Shils 1952 in Hiebert 2008, 24).[3] The cognitive is what determines what is true and false. The affective determines what is beautiful and ugly. Finally, the evaluative then refers to the decisions that are made by an individual which then lead to actions. Thus, the term *worldview* (at least as it is used in the field of anthropology) is "the foundational cognitive, affective, and

[3] The PDF from which this book was accessed did not contain page numbers. Therefore, the page of the PDF file has been referenced.

evaluative assumptions and frameworks a group of people makes about the nature of reality which they use to order their lives" (Hiebert 2008, 25).

Moreover, according to Hiebert, worldviews are also our own "plausibility structures." They help us to answer ultimate questions about our life and purpose, such as: who are we? Where are we? Where are we going? Essentially, worldviews help us to "build our systems of explanation and supply rational justification for belief in these systems" (Hiebert 2008, 28). Furthermore, worldviews also provide us with emotional security because they validate our deepest cultural norms and also help integrate our culture and monitor cultural change. Perhaps most importantly, "our worldview helps us select those [ideas, behaviours] that fit our culture and reject those that do not" (Hiebert 2008, 29). This point in particular thus also provides supporting evidence to the argument that was made earlier in Abd-Allah (2004) regarding how Islam (and, therefore, an Islamic worldview) allows us to select those aspects that fit with religion and reject those that do not.

Now that we have described the three aspects that form part of worldviews (cognitive, affective, and evaluative), we can now begin to analyze how they relate to a process of religious conversion, which Hiebert describes as a transformation that "has simple beginnings (a person can turn wherever he or she is) but radical, lifelong consequences" (Hiebert 2008, 317). Conversion involves all three of the previously mentioned dimensions of culture: the cognitive aspect relates to a person's belief, the affective aspect involves one's feelings, and, finally, the evaluative aspect deals with the norms that surround us. Thus, although some knowledge of religion (the cognitive aspect) is often required prior to conversion, it is typically feelings (the affective aspect) that provide the initial impulse for conversion. Furthermore, although the cognitive and affective aspects are usually what initiate a person's conversion, the process also

requires an *evaluation* (the evaluative aspect) of the moral dimensions of cultures and their worldviews. Hiebert emphasizes this fact by saying that "recent studies reveal that an initial conversion is generally followed by a period of evaluation during which the new way of life is critically re-examined. If the new is no better than the old, or the cost of adopting it is too high, the person or group turns back to traditional ways" (Hiebert 2008, 320). Hence, this is why some conversions fail. Therefore, a process of conversion (and thus, process of translation as self-transformation) that is enduring is the result of many decisions to adopt and develop a new worldview.

2.4.3. The Cognitive, Affective, and Evaluative, as They Relate to Translation

We can then connect these three aspects of the cognitive, the affective, and the evaluative from Hiebert (2008) to Douglas Robinson's concept of somatics in his 1991 work, *The Translator's Turn*. Indeed, somatics is a holistic term which can also be broken down into two further concepts: the idiosomatic, which relates back to the individual level; and the ideosomatic, which then affects the level of culture. Together, both terms form the wider concept of *somatics* (Robinson 2015, 303), Furthermore, Robinson's concept of somatics of translation can be summarized as "a denizen of the middle ground between mind and body, thought and "feelings and intuitions," "good and bad," and so on […]" (Robinson 2015, 306). He goes further by saying that "Successful translation depends on the words 'feeling real,' a bodily reaction in part based on intuiting how native speakers feel when they speak" (Robinson 2015, 307). Therefore, Robinson is concerned with how translators *feel* when they are translating. It seems that translators need to be able to trust their intuition more regarding their translation decisions.

Thus, it seems that what Robinson is suggesting in his somatics is that translators push past, and not be restricted by theories in which one should practice systemic sets of principles,

rules, and procedures merely rationally. A translator must also trust his feelings and intuition. Therefore, both Hiebert's cognitive and affective aspects are incorporated, which could then lead to an evaluative process in which the translator determines the best way to proceed with his or her translation.

2.4.4. Forming a Muslim Worldview

Whereas Hiebert's (2008) work tacked the issue of worldview from a Christian perspective, Altıntaş's article titled "Worldview Theory and its Relation to Islam and Muslim Identity" (2021) leads us to a Muslim application of worldview, which serves to further define different characteristics of the term, as they relate to both identity and culture. As we will later see, the article will also lend credibility to the current study's argument that religion is more of an issue of identity (and thus, belief) rather than culture (see also sections 2.3 and 4.1 for more information on this point) by highlighting and centring the individual aspect of faith and spirituality, while also relegating other communal aspects such as transmission and participation to the periphery.

Altıntaş says that there are four main characteristics of worldviews: religious, cultural, theoretical, subjective/objective or personal/collective, and multi-dimensional. Here, it is important to note that worldviews can be either personal or collective. Oftentimes, they include aspects of both. Thus, the collective aspect of worldview conditions, or, as in Danner's words (1994), "socializes" the individual. It includes aspects from culture, history, etc. On the other hand, the personal aspects are formed solely by the individual, and may differ in some ways from the norms if the surrounding culture. Altıntaş argues for both sides of the coin by citing Wolters and Baker, the latter of which states that while one's worldview is personal, it usually reflects the "negotiated mores and perspectives resulting from involvement with a cultural group" (Baker in

Altıntaş, 2021). The personal and collective aspects align with Hiebert's cognitive, affective, and evaluative aspects in a few ways as well. In particular, it was previously mentioned that all three of these aspects taken together help an individual to make decisions. Essentially, those aspects help us to decide which aspects to take from the collective aspects of worldview (for example, which aspects and norms from culture to keep or take based on judgments of truth or falsehood, and beauty/ugliness). One can then incorporate these selected aspects with their own worldview (the personal aspect).

In the case of the converts in our study, the process of translation as self-transformation requires a shift in worldview in order for it to take place. Of course, as we can see the different composed aspects of worldview as described above, not *everything* about a person's worldview needs to change. As worldview is simultaneously collective and yet still personal, and, as discussed in Abd-Allah (2004), Islam is able to mould itself to compatible cultural values, it follows that converts are able to maintain certain aspects of their worldview, while shifting others.

Finally, in attempting to then define what could form the basis of a Muslim worldview and identity, Altintas forms a diagram of what he believes to be the four key aspects of what a Muslim identity should include: 1) faith, religious practice and spirituality; 2) understanding the texts and contexts; 3) education and transmission; 4) action and participation (See figure 1 below). However, as we will see later on in section 4.1.5 of the findings, regarding the question, "how do you define 'being a Muslim,'" one can see that, according to some of the participants, one can be Muslim simply by belief in their heart and by self-identifying as such. Nevertheless, Islam, like many other religions, also includes rites and rituals. So, although someone may believe in Islam but be lacking in certain practices, that simply makes them less-practicing, but

not any less-Muslim. In conclusion, while certain aspects of Altıntaş's diagram may not seem useful to the study at hand due to the point that was just brought up regarding belief vs. level of practice, what *is* useful about the diagram is that it does place belief as the *central* aspect of a Muslim identity. Accordingly, the secondary points of understanding texts/contexts and education also form different aspects of belief. Action and participation are only secondary to belief, which follows our argument as well.

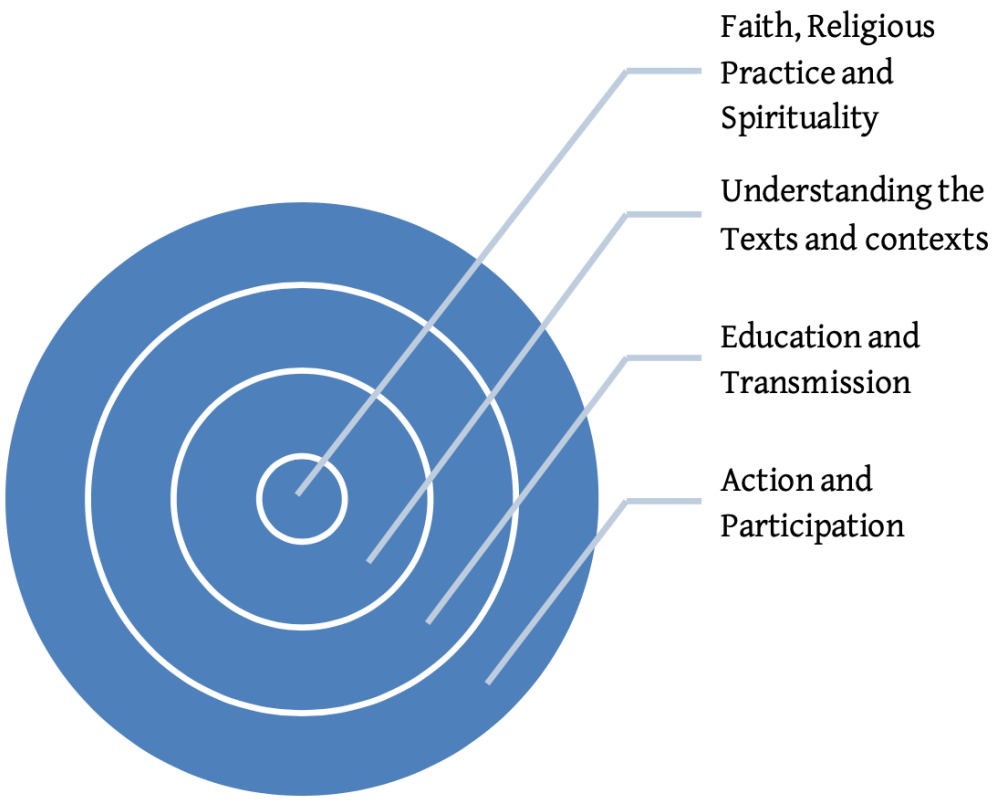

Figure 1 (Altıntaş 2021, 153)

2.5. Translation as Self-Transformation

2.5.1. The issue of *agency* as it relates to translation as self-transformation

Another work that is relevant to the topic of translation as self-transformation that is at hand is Vicente L. Rafael's (1993) work, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule*. In Rafael's book, he analyzes the

conversion of the indigenous Tagalog people of the Philippines to Christianity at the hand of their Spanish conquerors. Rafael focuses in particular on the *mistranslations* (and in some cases, the complete lack of translation) along with the cultural implications that led to the conversion of the Tagalog people to Christianity. However, it is not these details that concern us. Rather, it is the level of *agency* exercised by the Tagalog converts that is of interest in comparing with the case of the modern-day Muslim converts that will be analyzed as part of the current research project.

It is important to note that the Tagalog converts were placed under a situation of colonization, which necessarily implies an imbalance in power dynamics. In the presence of a colonizing force and the choice to either convert or, assumingly, suffer the negative consequences of their refusal to convert, which would likely include physical punishment and/or death. Clearly, the Tagalog were not in a position that facilitated the free and unpressured decision to choose to convert to Christianity for themselves. Therefore, although the converts did indeed undergo a significant personal change that would have necessitated some changes at the level of their worldview, they nevertheless did not do so of their free will. Let us then compare this fact with the situation that the modern-day converts of our study find themselves in.

In the case of the converts that took part in the current research project, they came to Islam of their own free will. They initiated their own conversion and process of self-transformation. Therefore, the level of *agency* between the Tagalog people and the Muslim converts of our study differs significantly. One process was begun under coercion from a colonizing power, whereas the other was done voluntarily and of free will. As we mentioned earlier when summarizing Conway's work, he mentioned a category called *translation as re-writing*. When discussing what that term meant, we realized that it was used in the sense of

explaining “to members of one cultural community how members of another interpreted their experience in the world, if not the world itself” (Conway 2012a, 267). In particular, this term was used in reference to a reporter explaining niqabi women’s choice to wear the niqab to non-Muslim audiences. The Tagalog people were forcibly rewritten, and their faith dictated to them by the Spanish conquerors. Just as the niqabi women did not translate for themselves, neither did the Tagalog. To clarify, the niqabi women, although they were able to express their own opinions regarding why they wore the niqab of their own free will and with full agency, in this particular case, they did so through the use of a mediator (namely, the journalist). Therefore, we can conclude that one key feature that distinguishes translation as rewriting from translation as self-transformation is free *agency*, without requiring any outside mediator.

Let us now remind the reader that the main research question that we are seeking to answer is: What is translation as self-transformation? To help answer this question, we can also ask ourselves, what does this phenomenon look like in the case of a Canadian or Muslim convert as they negotiate their new lifestyle and changed worldview post-conversion? How does translation as self-transformation take place? Additionally, another interesting hypothesis that our present research could either confirm or deny is: given that converts have had life experiences in both Muslim and non-Muslim spheres, could converts then possibly be in an ideal position to act as translators/mediators between each respective community?

3. Methodologies

In order to answer the questions that we were left pondering on at the end of the last section of our literature review, and to confirm or deny the sub-research hypothesis, we then need to ask ourselves, how can we define translation as self-transformation? Thankfully, we have already formulated a tentative idea of translation as self-transformation through the literature that we have reviewed in the previous section. However, we then also need to ask ourselves, how can we provide empirical evidence and an analysis of such a phenomenon? For this aim, we have used the following sources of data: questionnaires and focus groups. The questionnaires and focus groups will pose questions relating to coverts' thoughts on the notions of culture, identity, and where religion may fall between them. Additionally, they will ask questions regarding the converts' own personal experiences as they traversed the process of self-transformation, along with any positive and/or negative experiences that they may have faced along the way. Such questions should be enough to provide insight into how a convert's worldview and lifestyle has changed during their self-transformation.

3.1. Setting

The current study took place completely online—from the recruitment process, until the actual data collection. The recruitment of participants took place through several online applications, including WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. As for the data collection, it too was completed online, via Google Forms and Zoom.

3.2. Sampling Technique and Participants

For the purpose of the study, participants were selected for both the questionnaire and the two focus groups constituting the gathered data. The focus groups were separated based on gender, with one for women and one for men. In total, there were 20 participants for the

questionnaire, six participants for the women's focus group, and four for the men's focus group. The focus groups were separated based on gender as the primary investigator believed that participants would be more comfortable to freely express themselves only with others of the same gender. Indeed, some Muslims believe that unnecessary gender interactions are forbidden in Islam (SeekersGuidance 2014). Of course, some Muslims are fine with interacting with the opposite gender. However, due to the time- and participant-related restrictions, only two focus groups were able to be arranged, with one being for men and the other for women (see section 3.4.5. "Limitations" for more information).

Participants were contacted via pre-written recruitment scripts shared on social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. These recruitment scripts were only posted on the primary researcher's personal accounts. Participants also came to the study via word of mouth spread by those whose acquaintances and friends had seen the social media posts. Participants then individually contacted the primary researcher either via WhatsApp, email, or personal message on social media. Provided that the participants who had reached out to the primary investigator fulfilled the participation requirements, they were then invited to participate in the study. Namely, the participants must have been Canadian or American residents, must have been 18 years of age or older, and must have been Muslim converts in order to participate in the study.

As for the participants and their responses for both the questionnaires and the focus groups, several steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the participants. Namely, this was done through the very research design itself. A mixed methods research design was employed. Such a design ensured triangulation, since multiple methods were used to corroborate the information that was provided. For example, if a participant responded in one way to a question, and it was seen to be a trend across the other research methods, then it would be deemed trustworthy.

However, it should be noted that people are individuals, and every individual's life experiences are different. In this case, it may be possible to see some outlying data that does not follow the general trend. The key is that the majority of the data follows general trends.

Apart from the research design itself, other steps were also taken to ensure trustworthiness on behalf of the participants. It should be noted that individuals who participated in the questionnaires were *not* allowed to participate in the focus groups, and vice-versa. This decision was made in order to prevent not only the overlapping of responses (since the questions were similar in both the questionnaires and the focus groups), but also so that the participants would have had no prior knowledge about what the content of the research would be. This would allow them to approach the questionnaire or the focus group with clear minds and minimal expectations. Of course, participants were provided with minimal research-related materials prior to their participation. These materials were provided in order to inform them briefly of the nature of the project, and also to obtain their informed consent, which would not have been possible without such minimal information and resources being provided. All recruitment materials have been provided in the appendix, such as the recruitment scripts, questionnaire questions and full responses, focus group guide, and complete focus group transcripts. The focus group transcripts were included for reference in the appendix, and also to demonstrate that there was no leading or pressuring of the participants done by the primary investigator.

3.3. Instructional Materials

3.3.1. Recruitment Scripts

Participants were contacted using a pre-written recruitment script. This script included basic details regarding the study, such as the subject of the research, what their data would be used for, and the time commitment that would be required of them. Additionally, the recruitment script

also included the recruitment criteria that participants must possess in order to be able to participate in the study. Namely, the participants must have been at least 18 years of age or older, residents of either Canada or the United States of America and must have been a Muslim convert. It was also mentioned that participants would be able to answer the questionnaire in either English or French (although the questions and instructions of the questionnaire were presented solely in English). However, participants in the focus groups were required to speak English. This is due to the mixed nature of the group, seeing as not everyone was able to speak French. A copy of the recruitment script is available in appendix 7.4.

3.3.2. Informed Consent Forms

Prior to the data collection, participants were asked to sign an informed confidentiality form. They were assured that they would *not* be able to participate in the study without having previously completed and signed the form. To make the informed consent process quicker and easier for those who were participating in the questionnaire, due to it taking place on Google Forms, they were provided with an initial consent page outlining all the terms of the study, how their data would be used, and assuring them anonymity (Please see appendix 7.3 for the full informed consent page of the questionnaire). Should they have agreed to the terms outlined in the consent, they would then check a box saying, “I agree.” Once they confirmed their agreement to the terms, they were then able to proceed to the questionnaire. Should they have chosen “I do not agree,” then they would be taken to a separate page outside of the questionnaire and they would not be able to participate in the questionnaire questions.

As for the focus groups, since they would be taking place orally and visually via Zoom, the consent process was naturally different from that of the questionnaire. Instead of an initial consent page, participants were provided with a PDF consent form (see appendix 7.3). They

were then asked to digitally sign it and return it to the primary investigator prior to the start of the focus group discussion. Participants were made aware that they would not be allowed to participate unless the consent form was signed and returned *before* the time set for the focus group.

3.3.3. Focus Group Guide

A focus group guide was provided to the participants during their recruitment and prior to the enaction of the focus group. The guide explained what the participants would be expected to do during the focus group, the time commitment that would be required of them, what the purpose of the study was, inclusion criteria, and information on how their data would be used. Additionally, some questions were provided for them to ponder over before the focus group took place. Please see appendix 7.5 for a copy of the focus group guide.

3.3.4. Questionnaire

Once the questionnaire was filled out by a participant, their responses were automatically saved within Google Forms. It was then possible to browse each question and see all of the participant responses per question. Alternatively, the results could be viewed based on each individual. However, for the purposes of the study, the answers were viewed collectively according to each question, rather than according to each individual. The data that was stored in Google Forms could also be viewed as a summary. In the summary view, the responses were viewable as graphs, which could then be downloaded. In this way, it was possible to directly download the graphs from Google Forms and use them for analysis in the research. The questionnaire and all of the responses are available as part of appendix 7.1.

3.3.5. Focus Groups

As previously mentioned, both the male and female focus groups took place on Zoom. The entirety of both focus groups (audio and video) was recorded via the Zoom application. After the focus group discussions were completed, the recordings were saved to the primary investigator's Zoom account. Thereafter, the video recordings could be re-watched and listened to. Due to the promise of anonymity to the participants, audio transcription services were not used, since they save the voices and content of the recordings. Rather, all of the audio files were transcribed by hand using Microsoft Word. In a separate Word document, all of the transcription data was copied, and participant names were changed to make the data completely anonymous. The data was then able to be analyzed by highlighting important quotations that had the clearest ties to the research and that would further the discussion of the findings. Please see appendix 7.2 for the complete focus group transcripts.

3.4. Data Analysis

Several methods were used for analyzing the data. As for the questionnaire, some questions were multiple choice. For such questions, graphs were created both directly in Google Forms, and also in Microsoft Excel. By using these two means, visual representations of the data were able to be created. Short answer questions were then used to explain the graphical data. These short answers were stored in Google Forms and could be copied and pasted as direct quotes into the research. The focus group audio and video were downloaded and saved on the Zoom application. It was then listened to and transcribed into a Google Doc. The transcriptions were then perused for relevant information that would best answer the research questions and relevant quotations were copied as direct quotes into the research. Finally, case studies were taken from relevant literature and used to exemplify various aspects of the self-transformation process.

Once the answers to the questions were all obtained, a separate Word document was set up to categorize the data, which was separated into four main interrelated categories, including “get to know you,” self-transformation, culture vs. identity, and translation/mediation questions. Each of the questions from both the questionnaires and the focus groups were set up on the Word document. Then, the corresponding answers from the questionnaires were placed under the questionnaire questions. The primary researcher was then able to look for trends in the data, as well as for contrasting viewpoints. The most relevant of these were highlighted, while the others were deleted. However, even though not all of the short answer responses made it into the body of the study, they remain available for context and reference in section 7.1.

The focus group transcripts were also copied into separate Word documents where they could then be highlighted. The focus groups were divided into different sections by the questions that the primary investigator asked the participants. Discussions and answers that related well to the question at hand were highlighted so that they could be copied into the body of the study. On the other hand, contrasting views were also highlighted to show diversity of viewpoints. Furthermore, even though the focus groups were divided into different questions, the discussions related to specific questions also often overlapped with each other. In these cases, a comment was left on the transcript to refer back to which question the discussion related back to.

In conclusion, all of the highlighted passages and answers were evaluated based on their relevance to (and contrast with) the research questions that the primary researcher was asking. As was mentioned earlier, the participants were believed to have answered in a trustworthy manner. In order to ensure this, triangulation through mixed methods research was used.

3.4.1. Design of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed in a specific way so that each question would draw links and parallels between different aspects of the research. Here, let us review each question and how it added to the research and the goal of confirming the research questions.

Part 1: Consent

The very first question in the questionnaire asked the participants whether or not they consented to taking part in the questionnaire. Please see appendix 7.3 for more details about the consent process.

Part 2: Questions

1) Gender

Experiences are markedly different between male and female converts, especially those who dress in ways which visibly identify them as Muslims. Unlike women, men are not required to wear outwardly identifying religious symbols. Some may argue that men are asked to keep a beard. However, beards have now become a norm, and, in some cases, even a fashion trend in North America. This typically leaves Muslim men, especially converts, as blending in with the other men around them. Additionally, some see the practice of keeping a beard as being a part of the Prophetic *sunnah* (a recommended act), rather than as being a religious obligation. Furthermore, women also suffer from stereotypes that assume that Islam oppresses women. In short, it is important to know the gender of participants because visibly Muslim women will likely have a much different experience than men.

2) Age

Participants were asked to state the age range that they fell into because the research was interested in seeing if older and more mature converts would have different post-conversion experiences than their younger counterparts due to different life experiences and responsibilities.

3) How old were you when you converted?

Participants were also asked to state the age that they were when they converted for similar reasons to that of the previous question. It is assumed that the younger that someone converted to and started practicing Islam, the easier it would be to progress into an Islamic lifestyle and find community. For example, if someone were to convert before the legal drinking age, it may be the case that they would not have had to deal with the same struggles that someone who has been drinking for years would have to deal with. On the other hand, it is also entirely possible that someone who converted at an older age could have also been at an advantage, perhaps due to their maturity and level of life experiences that they may possess. Additionally, for those who converted when they were in university, they may have had an easier time finding community through Muslim Students' Association (MSA) events. Young adults may also have an easier time gaining access to Islamic education and activities in the local mosque or Islamic community, assuming that they have more free time than someone with a full-time career or a family might have. This, of course, is assuming that they wish to go out and learn/integrate into their local Muslim community (if they even have one). Of course, these are simply assumptions that may or may not have affected the self-transformation process of the participants who are a part of this research. For future research, it may be useful to ask participants if they believe that their age at the time of their conversion put them in a position of either any advantages or disadvantages regarding their conversion experience, and, if so, why.

4) **What were the positive experiences and personal changes/evolutions you had following your conversion when integrating into the Muslim community? (Please list and give further detail/describe if needed)**
5) **What were the difficulties/challenges you faced in integrating into the Muslim community after your conversion? (Choose all that apply. You may add more categories if needed.)**
6) **What were the positive experiences and personal changes/evolutions you had following your conversion in your relationship with the society/culture at large? (Please list and give further detail/describe if needed)**
7) **What were the difficulties/challenges you had when evolving in society after your conversion?**

In preparation for this research, the primary researcher consulted with friends and acquaintances who were Muslim converts on both their positive and negative experiences during their conversion in both the Muslim community and the broader North American society at large that they were a part of. Unfortunately, while they were able to list many negative experiences, they were unable to come up with many positive experiences. The primary researcher was then able to sift through the negative experiences that they had told her about and notice recurring trends that she could then organize into multiple choices for the research participants to select from, while also leaving the question open to other suggestions that she had not included. As for the question regarding their positive experiences, it was decided to leave this question completely open since there were so few categories that could be created for a multiple-choice question.

All of the questions regarding both negative and positive with the Muslim and non-Muslim communities (questions 5, 6, 7, and 8) were asked in order to analyze how the converts fit in with either community. Were they generally accepted or rejected? What was the reasoning for such acceptance or rejection? Again, this question goes back to both the main and sub research questions. In particular, these questions aim to help analyze whether converts would be able to potentially act as ideal mediators due to their grounding within both cultures. Being generally accepted or rejected by either (or both) cultures would then either confirm or disprove this research hypothesis. Additionally, it is believed that the acceptances or rejections of the converts would shape their self-transformation journey, potentially posing either ease or difficulty for them.

8) **How has your relationship with your relatives and pre-conversion friends evolved since your conversion?**

Question nine also seeks to find out how the relationships between the converts and those around them has changed (or stayed the same). In this case, the question focuses on those closest to the Muslim converts, rather than the community at large.

It is important to remember that the purpose of this research is not only to see if converts are able to act as effective mediators/translators. The purpose of this research is mainly to examine the phenomenon of translation as self-transformation—namely, the transformation and translation that converts see themselves go through during their conversion. This translation is not completed all at once; rather, it is an ongoing personal transformation that will continue as they transition into their new faith. One of the translations that they find themselves undergoing is with their personal relationships with those who are closest to them.

Here, it is important to note that their relatives' and friends' behaviour towards them might be partly uncontrollable (for example, if they have a bias towards Islam or have strong political or religious opinions of their own). Additionally, the relationship between converts and their loved ones may also deteriorate if they transition into their new faith too quickly, if they adopt seemingly "stricter" religious opinions, or if it seems like they are losing their sense of self, and/or their cultural markers, in the conversion process. However, on the other hand, the relationship between the converts and those closest to them may also change for the better. For example, converts may find themselves trying to be kinder to those around them, and especially their parents, in order to emphasize Islamic teachings. By analyzing the findings from this question, it is hoped to see how both how the converts' senses of self have changed (translation as self-transformation), and as well, how, and if they have acted as effective mediators/translators with those closest to them.

9) How do you define "being a Muslim"?

This question was asked with the intention of seeing how Muslims define what is necessary to believe to be a Muslim. Selections were deliberately posed to see if the participants would choose between a response that could be linked with the idea of religion as culture, or religion as belief/practice. If they chose the first option, "belonging to a (Muslim) culture," then it was clear that they associated Islam with a specific culture, which in turn might suggest that the convert would need to adapt themselves to a certain culture in order to "fit in" with the faith. However, if they chose "having (an Islamic) belief, no matter the culture," then they were prioritizing belief over culture. This is important to note, as one of the main arguments of the current research is that Islam does not have a specific culture. Rather, it is accepting of the compatible values of all cultures, as was illustrated earlier in section 2.3.1 through Dr. Abd-Allah's example of Islam

being like clear water flowing over a riverbed, in which the distinct and colourful rocks (the culture) shine through. Islam will therefore look like, and take on characteristics of the culture that the Muslim lives in. However, it should be mentioned again that Islam is also only accepting of those aspects of culture that are compatible with the religion and rejects those that are not. The third choice is aimed at emphasizing the fact that some people may believe that to be a Muslim, one cannot simply believe in the faith; they must also practice the faith. If a participant chose this response, then they were also emphasizing that religion is more based on personal belief than on cultural factors. The final closed option was: "nominally (as long as you define yourself as Muslim, you are one)." This choice places more emphasis on personal growth and change rather than on culture or belief. In this way, one can be a Muslim if they so choose, regardless of culture or "correct" beliefs or level of practice. Rather, Islam is a personal choice. The question was also left open in case a participant disagreed with the categories that were chosen or had their own way of defining what "being a Muslim" meant to them.

10) What were your motivations/reasons for converting?

This question may be personal and sensitive for some converts. This question was left open because individual experiences vary too much to be able to categorize them. The participants could also go into as much or as little detail as they felt comfortable with sharing in their response to this question. Their individual reasons for converting will naturally have impacted their personal translation and transformation during the conversion process, since this is the initial stage of the conversion, and therefore, of self-translation, itself.

11) Do you consider conversion as a change of identity and/or a change of culture?

12) Please explain why you chose your response to the above question.

Again, questions 11 and 12 were designed to prompt the participants to think about their conversion process and see how it changed them. Was it a change of identity, of culture, of both, or of neither? The aim of this question is to therefore see where the participants place religion: among culture or identity (or neither). Question 12 builds off of question 11 and asks participants to explain why they think of conversion in the way that they do. This provides deeper insight into their reasoning, rather than just asking them on the surface level to categorize their response.

13) Do you distinguish "culture" from "identity"?

Participants were asked whether they distinguished between culture and identity in a simple yes or no question. This data was then used to create a graphical representation of the number of participants that made a distinction between the terms or not. Whereas this question was designed with the intention of eliciting quantitative data in order to create a graph, the following question (14) would provide qualitative answers to the quantitative graphical data.

14) Please explain your response to the above question.

Questions 13 and 14 follow up from questions 11 and 12. Whereas the previous questions ask participants if there is a difference between the two terms or not, and if so, how they would define that difference. One of the key points that is integral to this research is to attempt to properly define culture and identity, and then to see where religion falls among them. This question seeks to discover whether or not these converts are able to distinguish these two terms, and then to explain in which ways they may overlap or be different from each other.

15) When you think about Islam, what culture do you primarily associate with it?

16) Why do you associate Islam with that culture?

Questions 15 and 16 relate back to the theory of *Bildung* that we previously explained in our theoretical framework (See section 2.2). More particularly, it relates to the concepts of alienation

or appropriation. Do converts associate Islam with a foreign culture? If so, what does this mean for them, seeing as they are currently situated in a Western culture and context? Will they alienate their own culture to follow a foreign one, or will they appropriate Islam (that is, assuming that they believe it has a different culture) to fit with their own cultural context? If Islam is only geared towards a foreign culture, then how can it be accepting of everyone? This question is important in order to gauge how the participants see themselves as fitting into the religion. Furthermore, would a convert to Islam then necessarily have to change their culture (and possibly certain aspects of their identity) in order to fit in with the cultural expectations of the religion. These beliefs could greatly affect the participants' conversion process (their own self-translation and transformation) and also the way they translate between Muslim and non-Muslim groups.

17) **What are some examples of times in which you saw yourself acting (or wishing to act) as a translator/mediator between Muslims and non-Muslims?**

This question was designed to elicit answers regarding a secondary research hypothesis. Namely, that converts would be able to act as effective translators/mediators between Muslims and non-Muslims due to their dual experience of having lived a life as both a non-Muslim and a Muslim. By asking this question, it was hoped that the participants would provide anecdotal responses either confirming or denying their ability to act as effective mediators. In this way, the hypothesis could be confirmed or denied as well.

18) **Do you feel like you acted as an effective mediator in those situations? Why or why not?**

After undergoing a process of self-transformation, one can then wonder if, due to the self-transformed individual's unique experiences of having lived their lives as part of both the

Muslim and non-Muslim communities, would they then potentially be in a better place to act as a mediator between each of those communities? Question 18 thus seeks to find empirical examples of the translation process involving converts mediating/translating between these two groups. Whereas question 18 asks only for empirical examples, question 19 follows up by asking whether the participants felt like they truly acted as effective mediators in those cases or not. This will either help to confirm our hypothesis or contradict it.

19) Do you wear any visible religious symbols?

This question was purposely left until the end of the questionnaire. This is due to the belief that if it were placed earlier in the questionnaire, it could possibly cause the participants to answer the following questions in a biased manner. For example, if this question was placed first, then it could cause the participants to look at their positive experiences, and especially their negative experiences, only through the lens of discrimination based on what they wear/how they look. It is suspected that participants who are visibly Muslim could possibly have more of a difficult experience than those who could not immediately be visually identified as Muslims. However, this is not the main goal of the research. Therefore, this question was left until the very end of the questionnaire, and may be used to help confirm or deny that visibly Muslim converts have a more or less difficult time during/following their conversion due to how they outwardly present themselves.

3.4.2. Focus Groups

Whereas the questionnaire was designed with multiple choice and short-answer questions in mind, the focus groups were designed to provide additional long-answer responses to build upon and expand the data from the questionnaire. Moreover, the focus groups also allowed participants to hear their peers' thoughts and experiences and have a discussion and build off of

each other's points. This is markedly different from the questionnaire, which only provided one person's point of view.

For this reason, many of the questions that were selected for the focus group participants were the same as the ones in the questionnaire. However, it was hoped that the focus group participants would be able to expand upon the space limitations of the questionnaire and also add their own deeper perspectives and discussions. Due to time limitations, not all questions from the questionnaire were asked in the focus groups. Only the most relevant questions that required more explanation were included. See section 3.4.5. for more details on the limitations of both the questionnaire and the focus groups.

3.4.3. Focus Group Questions

As previously mentioned, most of the focus group questions were the same as those from the questionnaire. For this reason, we will not mention the repeated questions here. Please see appendix 7.1 for the full list of questions that were planned for the focus group. Here, we will outline and explain the questions that were not repeated from the questionnaire.

1) **If you had to choose a few words to describe your identity, what would you say?**
2) **In terms of culture, what culture do you belong to? How would you describe that culture?**

Questions one and two were asked with the intent of prompting the participants to think about how they identified themselves, and also how they defined culture. The hope was that, by defining each term and ascribing it to themselves, it would be possible to see whether or not they differentiated between the terms, and if they did differentiate between them, then how so? Additionally, it would also be possible to see where the participants placed religion—either under identity or culture.

3) **What was your belief before Islam? How would you describe it, and how did it change? (Think not only about Islam, but also your general basic beliefs about society, life, etc.)**

This question was intended to highlight the participants' processes of self-transformation by analyzing how their beliefs and worldviews have changed. However, due to time restraints on the focus groups, this question remained unanswered. Please see section 3.4.4 for more information on limitations.

3.4.4. Limitations

There were several time and space limitations that needed to be applied to my study, which will be outlined here. The first limitation was with the questionnaire, since it needed to be made concise enough that participants would be able to finish it in around 20 minutes, depending on the level of depth that they provided in the open responses. The choice was made to limit the questionnaire to 20 minutes as it was believed that, with anything longer, participants would be less likely to finish the entire questionnaire. Additionally, the questionnaire was set up in such a way within Google Forms that participants would need to finish the entire questionnaire in order to submit their answers. Should they exit the questionnaire early, all of their data would be lost. In this way, it prevented any unfinished and/or unequal levels of responses between the questions.

Another limitation was with the number of participants from each gender and geographical location. Initially, it was intended for there to be an equal number of Canadians, Americans, women, and men. However, despite reaching out to people across all of these spectrums, not everyone responded or was willing to be a part of the research, so whoever was willing to participate was accepted, regardless of gender or physical location. So, whereas it was initially

planned to have five Canadian men, five Canadian women, five American men, and five American women, the actual number became 14 women, five men, and one non-binary person.

As for the segregation of the focus groups by gender, this was again intended by the primary investigator to hopefully allow any participants who were uncomfortable in a mixed situation to feel at ease expressing themselves. However, as was mentioned earlier, some Muslims may agree to a mixed gathering, provided that it is professional and respectful (like a focus group should be). It should be noted that Muslims all hold different levels of practice, and while something might not be acceptable from one Muslim's point of view, it may be acceptable to another. Regardless of the previous facts, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other logistical setbacks, such as the lack of participant response and willingness to participate, along with time-related restrictions regarding the submission of the project, the primary investigator decided to still follow through with at least two focus groups dedicated to individuals who identified as male or female. It is recommended that future research on this topic should address the need for a mixed focus group.

Aside from the time and participant restraints for the questionnaire, the focus groups were also affected by certain time restraints. Initially, participants were informed that there would be a one-hour time commitment for the focus groups. However, the time was exceeded in both focus groups by as much as 30-40 minutes. Despite exceeding the initial time commitment that was allotted, some questions that would have been good to ask remained unanswered. The most important unanswered question that had been planned for was: What was your belief before Islam? How would you describe it, and how did it change? (Think not just about Islam, but also your general beliefs about society, life, etc.). This question would have been important to answer, as it would have shown how the converts' beliefs and worldviews evolved and changed-

a key part of the self-transformation process. This question should be addressed in future research on this topic.

Furthermore, it should also be mentioned that other than the time and participant restraints, there was also a geographical restraint. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the primary researcher was not able to conduct any in-person research. This led to all of the research being completed online through Google Forms and Zoom, as previously mentioned. It would have been preferrable to have had a wider range of converts representing different communities and religious groups. However, despite reaching out to different mosques and community centres/groups, no one responded to participate in the study. Thus, the call was put forth on social media instead, which resulted in what could be considered as a "convenient" sample, despite the mix of participants coming from different backgrounds and geographical locations. Therefore, although the current results may be a steppingstone on the way to reaching definitive conclusions regarding the phenomenon of translation as self-transformation, it cannot stand on its own as representative of the wider Muslim convert community, and further research would be required in order to make greater generalizations.

Additionally, as for both the questionnaires and the focus groups, it would have been ideal to have created a glossary reflecting all of the Islamic terminology that had been used. However, due to time constraints, this was not possible. Instead, Islamic terms found inside quotations and that were used in the body of the thesis were italicized and a footnote was made with a definition of the term at its first instance.

As we have now outlined our methodological questions and how we answered them, along with how we have intended to use said methodologies to answer our wider research questions of "What is translation as self-transformation?," and, "What does it look like in the context of

Canadian and American Muslim converts?," the next step is then to discuss the findings of such research. Thus, in the next chapter, we shall analyze the findings from the primary research methods of the focus groups and questionnaires, while drawing parallels with the literature.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Culture vs. Identity

Muslims come from many diverse cultural backgrounds, and Islam accepts the compatible values that comes from all of them, while only rejecting cultural concepts that go against Islamic principles, such as drinking alcohol. The fact that Islam is able to accept compatible facets from all cultural backgrounds is exemplified by Abd-Allah's statement that, "In history, Islam showed itself to be culturally friendly and, in that regard, has been likened to a crystal-clear river. Its waters [Islam] are pure, sweet, and life-giving but – having no color of their own – reflect the bedrock over which they flow. In China, Islam looked Chinese; in Mali, it looked African" (Abd-Allah 2004, 1). The main idea behind this quote is that cultures act like the rocks on the riverbed. Each culture has its own unique practices, and thus each rock will look different and have differing colours and designs from the others. On the other hand, Islam is like a clear river. It allows the colours of the rocks that represent different cultures to shine through, without overpowering or covering them. Therefore, the culturally accepting and clear river of Islam would look like the rocks in their respective cultures/countries.

However, it is also important to remember that, while this analogy of Islam as a clear river accounts for Islam's ability to accept aspects of other cultures, it also neglects to account for the fact that Islam was still revealed in a specific time and place: that being seventh century Arabia. Many of the analogies used in the Quran and *Sunnah* were geared towards that specific audience (seventh century Arabs) and would have been understood within that specific cultural and temporal context. However, that is not to say that these analogies are not also useful and understandable to audiences today from different cultural and temporal backgrounds. Rather,

these analogies may just need to be translated in ways that stay true to the same meaning, but that make sense to different groups. Another option may be to include explanatory footnotes for readers. Regardless, Abd-Allah's analogy of the crystal-clear river forgets to include the fact that the river of Islam still has an undeniably Arab taste, despite its clarity. However, from the logic of the analogy, and, of course, assuming individuals would follow Islam in such an idealized way (which may not always be the case), we can still deduce that surely Islam in Canada and America would be expected to look Canadian and American. But does it indeed?

When asked which culture they associated the most with Islam, the participants' answers from the questionnaire could be grouped into several categories: Arab, South Asian, African, Western/North American, No culture, or Other. These categories are represented below in figure 2.

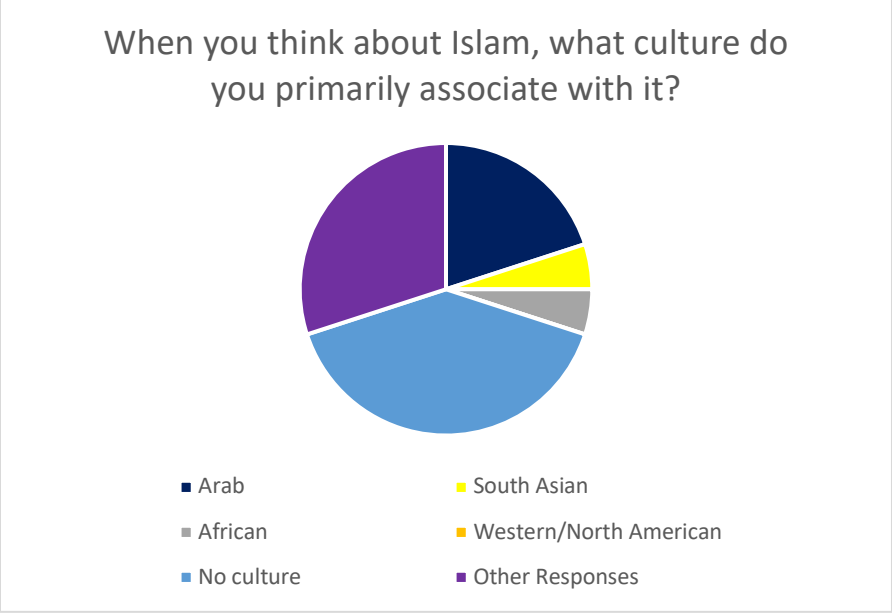

Figure 2

The majority of respondents to the questionnaire were able to recognize that Islam is open to more than one specific culture, and that it is not only meant to be a religion for Arabs, despite its origins in the Arabic peninsula. They demonstrated this knowledge by selecting the

option “No culture” (40%). Others thought even deeper by stating other responses along the lines of “all cultures.” These responses included:

- “All of them.”
- “I do primarily associate Arab culture with Islam. However, I constantly remind myself and others that anyone can be a Muslim, regardless of race, ethnicity, or culture.”
- “I think of Hajj. All cultures. I think Africa is a good example in its diversity of HOW Islam permeates culture.”
- “A huge diversity of cultures – there is no single Islamic culture!”
- “There are so many cultures that are associated with Islam so I don’t feel I can choose one over the other.”

There seems to be a fine line of distinction between “no culture” and “all cultures.” Initially, when the categories for this question were created, the idea was that, by saying that Islam has no culture, it meant that Islam does not have a culture itself and that rather it accepts all cultures. However, the participants themselves saw these as two different categories, thus prompting the question, “what is the difference between Islam having no culture versus Islam being accepting of all cultures?”

If we return to our earlier analogy of Islam being like a clear river flowing over rocks, then culture acts like the multi-coloured rocks that allow the clear Islam to take on their hues. However, if Islam had no culture, then our analogy would no longer work. Rather, the water would be opaque because we would not be able to see the culture on the bottom of the riverbed. Only by being accepting of all cultures can they then shine through the clear river of Islam. In any case, although we have pondered over the question of what an Islam that is accepting of all cultures might mean, it is also possible to interpret the participants’ responses of “no culture” in other ways. Perhaps they meant that Islam simply doesn’t have any elements at all that tie it to a particular culture. In any case, although the participants were given a subsequent question asking them to explain their choice, they were not asked why they chose “no culture” over “all cultures”

or vice-versa. Therefore, further research would be required to determine what exactly the participants meant when they made these choices.

Nevertheless, let us return to our previous discussion on the metaphor of Islam being like clear water flowing over a colourful riverbed. It is also important to remember, as we discussed earlier, that this clear water of Islam still takes on an Arabic flavour and taste. Perhaps it is for this reason that 20% of the respondents from the questionnaire indicated "Arab" as the culture with which they primarily associated Islam. Additionally, some respondents chose the "other" category, but by analyzing their responses, they could also be categorized among "Arab." These responses are reflected in figure 3 below. Furthermore, two participants also chose to associate Islam with Africa and South Asia, respectively. Interestingly, despite being from a North American/Western culture, none of the participants associated this culture alone with Islam. This then begs the question, what does it mean for our analogy of the clear water flowing over the riverbed? To think of this by the way of another analogy, perhaps the rocks representing some colours are able to shine brighter through the water, whereas others are seemingly less associated with Islam, and are thus duller and unable to shine clearly through the water. Although one might say that the options "no culture" or "all cultures" may account for the presence of a North American Islam within them, it is nonetheless striking that every other culture was chosen by at least one participant (each one being a culture that traditionally has a lot of Muslims amongst it), except for the North American option. Future research may do well to explore this reasoning.

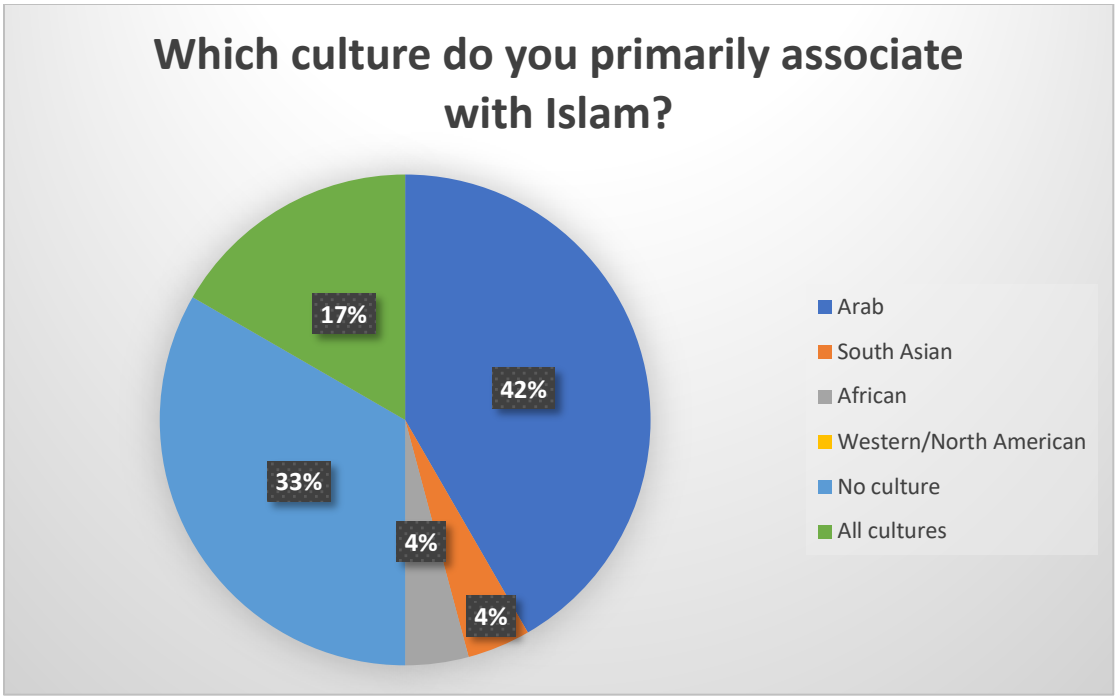

Figure 3

When asked to explain why they associated the particular culture that they chose with Islam, the answers varied. For those who chose Arab culture, their reasoning was mainly due to the fact that the religion was revealed in Arabia to an Arab prophet, and that the language of revelation was Arabic. On the other hand, despite Islam's Arab history, many others chose no culture, or all cultures, with the general reasoning for their choice being that Islam is a religion for everyone, and not just for Arabs. Additionally, some other respondents chose other cultures, such as South Asian or African, mainly due to them being the first cultures they encountered in the Muslim community, or the strongest culture that they felt a connection to.

Of those who chose to associate a specific foreign (non-North American/Western) culture with Islam, this is interesting due to the fact that they themselves do not belong to those cultures, but yet are still part of the Islamic faith. Basalamah (2008) clears up the misconception that Islam is intrinsically tied to Arab culture by stating that, "bien que l'arabité soit fondatrice de l'identité musulmane au travers de la langue des références scripturaires de l'Islam (Coran et

tradition prophétique), il demeure qu'elle n'en est ni le substrat constitutif des identités individuelles ni la condition pour appartenir de plein droit à la *umma*" (Basalamah 2008, 4). The point that Basalamah makes here clarifies the fact that anyone can belong to the *umma*.[4] The point that he makes is also important to the earlier argument in which we discussed how Islam, despite being a universalist religion in the sense that it welcomes all peoples and cultures, also cannot be divorced from its Arab origins and revelation.

The participants from the focus group were asked the same question regarding which culture they primarily associated with Islam. However, they were not given categories to choose from, and the question was left open for them to choose a culture (or lack of culture) and provide the reasoning for their choice. In the case of the male focus group, the answers varied widely between several cultures, including: South Asian, Somali, Arab, African-American, and no particular culture. The reasoning provided for primarily associating some of these cultures with Islam was simply that the participant had been in high contact with these cultures, whether through friends and/or community. This was the reasoning given for the choices of South Asian and Somali culture. The participant who chose Arab culture did not provide any reasoning for his choice. African-American was chosen by one particular participant due to the significant impact that African-American Muslim culture had on producing American cultural products. Here, it is important to keep in mind that perhaps many of the respondents had not answered the question in the way that was expected/intended. This question was designed to have them choose a culture related specifically with the religion of Islam. However, due to the reasoning that the participants provided in their answers, it seems that perhaps they interpreted the question to mean the culture that they associated the most with Islam due to their own personal experiences. This may be due

[4] *Umma*: Islamic community of believers.

to the fact that people sometimes associate a religion with its followers, rather than by looking deeper at the content of the religion. However, should timing have permitted, it would have been wise to have asked the participants to clarify what they meant by their responses, and more particularly, what they think about regarding the differentiation between a religion and its adherents. Future research should address these questions and concerns.

Interestingly, the answers from the female focus group differed quite greatly from the males. It seems that they better understood that the question meant for them to associate a culture with the religion, not based on those who practiced the religion or what was the most common culture amongst their friends and/or community. Of the six participants in the female focus group, all four of the participants that chose to answer this question answered that they either did not associate any culture with Islam, or no particular culture with Islam. The slight difference between these two responses can be equated with the findings from the questionnaire, in which some respondents associated Islam with no culture, and some with all cultures.

Of the female focus group participants, Tara made an excellent case for Islam being accepting of all cultures when she stated,

> I agree. I think Islam is—I mean, like, you cannot practice in a void. You cannot be Muslim and all and do these things in a cave on a top of a mountain. Well, you could, right? But… the thing is, I think for me, all the basic principles and guidance of Islam, they can be practiced and performed in any cultural background. So, I wouldn't either say they're all Arab culture, or this culture. I think the virtue of Islam is precisely that, that you can take it and practice it anywhere, on any context.

Through this response, we can see that Tara believes that Islam is able of encompassing any and all cultures, as was also likely the intention behind Abd-Allah's metaphor of Islam being a clear river, which we previously analyzed above. Furthermore, of the other focus group participants who said that Islam had no particular culture, several of them cited that, although it may often be

mistaken as an Arab religion due to its origins in that region, rather, it is a religion for all of humanity:

> Yeah. I wouldn't. Because Islam is not cultural at all. Like… It's not an overt culture, right? Like, we can choose… I mean, we can choose to follow Islam in our religion as part of our culture, but it's not something overt. It's not for the Arabs, it's for everybody.
>
> I feel like it should not be associated with any cultures, but I feel like oftentimes it is… I think that somebody had mentioned earlier as well that in their journey they thought that they had to be more Arab, for example, but it's interesting, again, because Islam is not an Arab religion.
>
> I don't primarily associate it with any culture, in particular. And I would say there isn't, maybe—I don't know if I ever did, particularly. I never really thought of it as like, an Arab thing or, you know, a Turkish thing, or West African.

Nevertheless, the response "no cultures" can also potentially carry the implication that Islam is accepting of all cultures, although it has no intrinsic culture itself. On the other hand, though, it could just mean that they do not see Islam as being cultural in any sense. Again, participants were not asked to make this distinction between the responses, neither in the questionnaire nor during the focus groups. For this reason, future research would need to be conducted in order to determine whether converts make this distinction between the two responses or not, and if they do make a distinction, how they do so.

At this point, it is important to define what is meant by both culture and identity, and to make a distinction between the two. Although culture is often part of identity, and we can think of them as two circles that overlap like a Venn diagram—the two should not be confused as being the same. Basalamah's (2008) article differentiates between the two by stating that,

> Alors que la culture et l'identité s'acquièrent pareillement par les voies d'une transmission à la fois familiale et sociale, la première est en revanche beaucoup plus déterminée par le contexte local immédiat que la seconde. C'est que les déterminants de l'identité ne sont pas aussi tributaires de l'historicité et de la localité que ceux de la culture. La principale différence étant que cette dernière

> est le produit continuellement changeant d'un espace particulier lui-même en perpétuelle transformation, par opposition à l'identité qui, elle, peut-être reproduite même en rupture avec le milieu et les aléas de l'évolution contextuelle. (Basalamah 2008, 5)

It now becomes clear that culture pertains more to a specific place and time, whereas identity does not experience these same constraints. Rather, identity continually evolves and changes as one goes through their life and acquires new experiences.

The questionnaire participants were also able to discern that there was a distinction between culture and identity. All 20 of the questionnaire participants responded that they distinguished culture from identity. However, although they were able to notice that there was a distinction between the two terms, they were less sure about what exactly that distinction was and how to describe it. The same phenomenon of simultaneously making a distinction between the two terms, but then also not being able to quite explain it, was also repeated by the participants of both the male and female focus groups.

Although the answers to how exactly they differentiated between culture and identity varied, there were clear trends that could be discerned. In particular, many of the participants in the questionnaire clarified that, although the two terms were different, in many ways they overlapped. One questionnaire respondent stated,

> I believe that culture influences identity and is a part of it, but culture does not define identity, nor are the two concepts equal or the same. Culture influences identity, but the two are distinct concepts. Identity is individual, whereas culture is communal or shared. Likewise, identity is not dependent on culture to exist.

In this way, one can think of culture and identity like a Venn diagram, in which culture is one circle, and identity is a separate circle. Each circle has characteristics that are unique to it alone. However, in some cases, the circles can also overlap, as in the centre of a Venn diagram.

Let's begin by looking at the ways in which the participants identified culture and identity as being different. Among the ways that they clearly differentiated the two, was by noting that culture was more so bound by time and place, whereas identity was unique to each individual, and thus is not necessarily restricted by time and space. For example, some responses to the question about the distinction between culture and identity with regards to time and place included:

> I feel like identity is something that changes over time and evolves, while culture is fixed.
>
> Culture is where you were born.
>
> Culture is about customs, art, social institutions of a particular group of people. Whereas identity refers to individuals within that group and how they see themselves.

However, perhaps the most interesting and significant response that a participant gave was, "culture to me is a term that might apply to geography or region, or be an overarching term that is a little more obscure, but it is definitively distinct from religion for me." Here, the participant has realized that culture changes based on geographical location. However, this is not the only significant finding in this response. It is also significant that the participant chose not to distinguish culture from identity, as the question asked. Instead, they chose to distinguish culture from religion. Such a response suggests that the participant already knowingly categorizes religion with identity rather than with culture.

Furthermore, several participants also stated that culture was more of a collective endeavour, whereas identity was strictly individualistic. One respondent made this connection directly with the concise statement, "Identity is individual whereas culture is collective." Several other participants expanded upon this statement by adding that:

> Though culture seems to refer more to a collective process and identity to something more individual, I think they are both fluid.
>
> Culture is the way you grow up with all of its traditions, your identity is who you really are inside.
>
> To me, identity changes from person to person—but culture has to do with a large group of people.

From the quotes above, we can see that numerous participants in the questionnaire were able to decisively distinguish culture from identity on the basis that culture is collective whereas identity is individual. This finding now also begs the question, if culture is collective and identity is individual, then where does religion fall between the two? One participant in particular attempted to make this classification by saying, "culture is part of identity, but identity is deeper. Culture, is our relation to other human beings, while identity, at least in the religious sense mentioned above, is our relation to our Maker." Therefore, according to this participant, religion would fall under the umbrella of identity, as it is our own personal relationship to God. Although religion may be cultural in the sense that the majority of people in any given region/culture may follow a specific religion, it remains an individual choice as to whether a person believes and/or follows that religion. In this sense, especially in the case of someone who has converted to a new religion, religion becomes an individual choice and a willing, conscious part of their identity. As we saw earlier, it may also be the case that a conversion takes place, but the individual was not necessarily willing to undergo it, as was the case of the Tagalog converts in Rafael (1993).

Amongst the focus group participants, the distinction between culture and identity revolved around a different point of contrast, which was that of identity being something that was relatively fixed and unique to the individual that one was not able to change, whereas culture was something that was collective, but that also could be chosen, albeit to some

extent. However, despite the seeming differentiation that was made between the terms, a few of the participants also recognized that there was a certain level of overlap between the terms as well. One such participant, Mike, reconciled such differences by explaining that,

> There is crossover in the sense that, yes, being Muslim is, in some sense, a choice for someone who is converted to, or accepted Islam. Although, at the same time, sometimes we feel like—I think the reason there's the crossover in that regard is maybe because there's that feeling that maybe it wasn't a choice. Like, for me at least, it was a choice, but, at the same time, it felt like it was what I always was, and I was just coming into something that I always was, and I just hadn't known prior to—if that makes sense. But, yeah, I think that that kind of makes some sense is that identity is, in some cases, maybe more so who you are without being able to change it.

.

Thus, from the above discussions on culture and identity, we can establish a few clear distinctions between the two terms: 1) culture is related more closely to particular times and places, whereas identity is not; and 2) that culture is more communal, whereas identity is something deeply personal for the individual; and finally, 3) that although both culture and identity can both be chosen to some extent, an individual is more likely to be able to choose or reject their culture, rather than their identity, for which some aspects cannot be changed. In fact, it is in the case of the third point that we can observe the phenomenon of translation as self-transformation at work. However, interestingly enough, from Mike's quote above, it seems that identity is so deep that one thinks that they've changed, but in fact they've only discovered what was there, deeply rooted, all along. However, is this not then a paradox? Can one speak of translation as self-transformation if there is merely a discovery or a realization of something that has always been present within oneself? Then what has really changed? Although it may seem that one has not changed at all, but rather that they have simply reached a deeper realization of who they truly are. It is precisely this *realization*, or rather, *initiation*, that promotes a change in worldview. As Hiebert (2008) mentions, this is where the cognitive and evaluative aspects of the

conversion process come into play. The cognitive aspect of the convert *realizes* the truth. They then *evaluate* how that truth fits in regarding the wider aspects of their life such as their culture and their identity, which then promotes a shift and change in worldview. Again, this can also relate back to the hermeneutic circle mentioned in Maitland (2017); one starts by seeking to understand, and through translation and interacting with Others, one returns to one's Self; it is a journey homeward bound.

Again, we are reminded that this is translation as self-transformation since the individual undergoes a significant change at the level of identity, and this change was of their own will, and did not require the translation or explanation to come from any other individual other than themselves. Therefore, again, we are reminded that not only is the proposed theory of translation as self-transformation a translation of the Self as the object of the translational process, but at the same time, the Self is also a free agent who both initiates and performs that translational process, being simultaneously both the translator and the translated.

However, as mentioned earlier, culture is capable of overlapping with identity in some respects. One participant's response perfectly encapsulates these ideas:

> Yes, I distinguish culture from identity. However, they interplay together. So, they are not synonymous, but they do influence one another. Culture, to me, is about shared practices and ideologies (ex: pizza as a standard birthday party food; ex: the ideology that bikinis are perfectly acceptable to wear to the beach, but underwear is not). Identity is more specific to the person, such as a Muslim, a woman, someone who enjoys being active, etc. However, both influence one another. Ex: my identity as a Muslim woman is influenced by my Western, Canadian culture in that I can struggle with hijab more than someone who is in an Islamic country where modesty is the cultural norm, and, therefore, there's less pressure to have female bodies on display all the time.

Using the examples that the participant provided, we can see exactly how culture and identity can differ, but also how they can overlap. As mentioned above when discussing the

quote by Abd-Allah (2004), Islam accepts all the compatible values that come from all cultures and rejects cultural practices that go against Islamic values. Some cultural practices are shared amongst the wider North American/Western society, such as eating pizza at a birthday party. Whereas pizza is acceptable for Muslims to eat (provided that the ingredients and preparation comply with Islamic dietary standards), the majority of Islamic scholars have agreed that clothes that reveal other than the face and hands are not Islamically acceptable for Muslim women (SeekersGuidance 2016). So, although some practices may be generally culturally acceptable, they may not align with someone's personal identity as a Muslim or otherwise. These points on culture diverging from faith were also confirmed by another participant who said:

> I view it as two separate, but interlocking things. Identity can be what a person perceives themselves as, whereas they belong to a culture as a whole, along with individual subcultures. Humans are made up of all these subcultures within a culture that helps create an identity. I identify as Muslim, but my culture is not Islamic at all.

The last sentence of the above quote is particularly important to our discussion as the participant clearly states that being Muslim (following the religion of Islam) is part of their identity. However, they do not necessarily see the culture that they are surrounded by as following principles that align with their Muslim identity. Her statement then drives us to ask the question, what exactly makes any given culture an "Islamic culture?" Indeed, it seems that what makes a culture "Islamic" are only the general principles/moral guidelines that make up the shared identity of the community. In other words, religion is a set of moral teachings. And as previously mentioned, religion can be thought of as a clear river. It allows culture to shine through it, but does not carry the culture in the waters itself (Abd-Allah 2004). However, as we have also previously mentioned, Islam is accepting of all compatible values that come from any given

culture (the rocks that shine through the clear water). Therefore, the space-time related cultural elements from given communities are not inherently Islamic or un-Islamic. What matters are the morals and values that come from acts performed by the individual Muslim within the culture and how s/he is more or less satisfied with his/her level of compliance, no matter how others may perceive it as Islamic or un-Islamic (see Bidar 2016, 111).

When discussing the above quotes, it is also important to keep in mind that although someone may identify as a Muslim, they may have varying levels of practice within the religion itself or may choose to follow less-common or less-standard opinions within the religion. This adds to the argument that religion is more so a part of identity rather than culture, as it is one's personal choice to follow not only the religion, but also it is their own personal choice as to how they practice said religion. However, it is also important to mention that some scholars, such as Abdennour Bidar (2016), have put forward arguments that Islam could be practiced in a cultural way. Please refer back to section 2.3.4 of the literature review for further information on this discussion. Furthermore, it is also important to realize that, although this study is operating from a Muslim perspective, experiences of other religions, such as Judaism, may be made in either religious or cultural senses, since they are ethno-religions (Schweid 2008, Himmelfarb 2009). In any case, as we can see how it is possible for different levels of religiosity to exist while still believing in the faith and considering it as a part of one's identity, we should also discuss the possibility that both religion as culture and religion as belief cannot be relegated to a binary. Let us analyze the case of both Sarah and Reverend Thorne, two characters from the television series *Little Mosque on the Prairie* below.

4.1.1. Illustration: Religion as Culture or Religion as Belief

In Kyle Conway's book *Little Mosque on the Prairie and the Paradoxes of Cultural Translation* (2017), according to the producers of *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, religion is defined as fitting into two categories: religion as culture, or religion as belief. To help in defining these categories, two characters from *Little Mosque on the Prairie* are contrasted: Reverend Thorne and Sarah Hamoudi. Through an interview with producers of the show, an explanation is provided for how each character came to represent either religion as culture or religion as belief:

> Mary Darling and Clark Donnelly spoke with me at length about two different approaches to religion. Is it a matter of belief, they asked, or of culture? They wanted to talk about belief, but the CBC, as they saw it, wanted to talk about culture. Rev. William Thorne and Sarah Hamoudi came to represent the two sides of that debate: Thorne gave voice to the idea of religion as culture, while Sarah, in her doubt and reflection about her religious identity, gave voice to the concept of religion as belief. By tying their storylines together the producers staged a symbolic resolution to the conflict between these views, where belief won out.
> (Conway 2017, 101)

From the above quote, we can begin to analyze how each character came to represent either the case for religion as culture or religion as belief. In the case of the characters of *Little Mosque on the Prairie* mentioned in the quote above, we see that Rev. Thorne has come to be used as the example of the case for religion as culture, whereas Sarah represents religion as belief. Why might this be the case?

In the case of Rev. Thorne, he was born into the Anglican faith, and chose to retain that faith throughout his life. In other words, he inherited this religion from his family and the culture that he grew up in. However, on the other side of the debate, Sarah was born Anglican, but decided to change her faith and undergo a process of self-transformation through her conversion to Islam. She actively chose her faith, whereas Rev. Thorne inherited his faith. However, it should also be noted that, although Rev. Thorne is seemingly an example of religion as culture

due to the inheritance of his faith, he may very well also be an example of religion as belief, since he actively learned about his faith (he would have studied to become a reverend), and also interacted with other faiths (for example, he shared his church with Muslims), and yet he still chose to actively retain and believe in his faith. Therefore, religion as culture and religion as belief cannot be defined as clear binaries. Indeed, there can be a spectrum between religion as culture and religion as belief, and it is important to keep this fact in mind. However, for the purpose of this study, the two categories of religion as culture and religion as belief will remain as categories to help with explaining where religion falls under either culture or identity.

Carrying on, it also remains important to analyze Sarah's reasons for converting—did she truly convert out of belief in Islam, or were there other ulterior motives? Indeed, we learn that Sarah initially converted to Islam in order to marry her husband, Yasir. Despite falling in love with each other and wishing to marry, his mother insisted that Yasir marry a Muslim girl. For this reason, Sarah initially decided to convert to Islam for the purpose of marriage, and not necessarily out of belief in the faith. However, as we observe Sarah's character development throughout the series, we come to see that Sarah does actively choose to learn about Islam and practice some of its requirements, such as prayer. Additionally, we see that in episode 12, season 2, Sarah is learning about lottery tickets and the prohibition of gambling. Although she may struggle with some Islamic concepts, she is clearly trying to learn and implement Islamic teachings and live an Islamic lifestyle.

Moreover, in his (2017) book, Conway helps to explain the difficult decision that Sarah has to go through in season six of *Little Mosque on the Prairie*: her marriage with Yasir, which was the initial reason for her conversion, has fallen apart and the two have decided to divorce. Sarah is then faced with the internal dilemma of whether to remain Muslim or return to her

previous faith of Anglicanism. As part of her return to Anglicanism, she decides to join the church choir. At a practice session, it is Sarah's turn to sing a verse containing the words "from the hour I first believed," except she is unable to say "believe." The scene then cuts to a dialogue between her and Reverend Thorne after the choir practice (see appendix 7.6). In the dialogue, Thorne asks Sarah if it was belief in Jesus that brought her back to the church. She replies by saying that she returned because she felt like she was missing something. The discussion between the two continues to describe that the reason why Sarah came back to the church was likely because she missed the traditions that were associated with it:

- Sarah: Maybe I'm looking for the wrong thing in the wrong place. I don't want to be Christian again. I'm sorry.
- Thorne: No, no, no, come on, don't be sorry. It's only your eternal soul. Kidding! Sort of. Eighty percent. (Rises.) It's your call. The church will always be here if you change your mind. Again.
- Sarah: Well, the church has really changed since I was a little girl.
- Thorne (with kindness): No, I think you've changed. But traditions have their pull.
- Sarah: They sure do! I used to love that brassy thing with the incense in it.

(Conway 2017, 117-118)

The scene above clearly demonstrates how often times, converts feel a pull towards their culture and traditions pre-Islam. Furthermore,

> Sarah's emotional attachment to Christian ritual suggests a deep connection to her childhood faith, one that is qualitatively different from her attachment to Islam, which until this scene appeared to be one of convenience. Her conversion was pragmatic – it let her marry Yasir. But the depth of her emotional connection suggests that ritual – which appears to fall under the category of religion as culture – is something greater. It suggests that ritual is an embodied form of knowing, one that is outside the bounds of the rational, Cartesian self. In other words, this scene raises an interesting but unanswered question. In what way does tradition become an outward expression of belief? And what effect does this crossing over have on our understanding of the culture/belief distinction? (Conway 2017, 152)

Despite the pull towards her previous traditions, and therefore, culture, Sarah actively decides to remain Muslim, which could decisively be defined as belief. In one of the final

episodes of the series, episode 90, Sarah decides to confirm her belief by returning to the community's newly inaugurated mosque to say her *shahadah*[5], an act of pure belief, in which the person who is saying his or her *shahadah* declares that there is no God worthy of worship except for Allah[6] (which includes the belief that God is One and has no partners, equals, children, etc.), and that Muhammad is His last and final messenger. Certainly, the act of saying one's *shahadah* is a pure act of belief, as there is nothing cultural at all associated with it. Indeed, one must actively believe in what they are saying to be considered a Muslim.

Although the producers of *Little Mosque on the Prairie* have clearly defined and given examples of both religion as culture and religion as belief, it is important to realize that the spectrum of faith cannot be restricted to these two binaries, as was also previously discussed, and which has been further drawn into question by Conway in his above-mentioned quote when he says, "In what way does tradition become an outward expression of belief? And what effect does this crossing over have on our understanding of the culture/belief distinction?" (Conway 2017, 152) Rev. Thorne may have been born Anglican, but he went through the process of learning more deeply about his faith in order to become a reverend. Furthermore, Thorne lived in close contact with Muslims, and also shared his church with them. Surely, he would have learned about Islam, and yet he still chose to keep his faith as an Anglican. Despite the producers' classification of religion as culture, Thorne is clearly a man of religion as belief. In this sense, it is possible for religion to fall under the category of being both someone's culture and identity. The two need not be mutually exclusive. For this reason, we see that anyone, whether a convert like Sarah, or someone who was born into their faith, such as Rev. Thorne, but actively and consciously chooses to learn about it, practice it (even if that practice may be lacking or

[5] *Shahadah*: Islamic declaration of belief
[6] Allah is the Arabic word for God. Christian and Jewish Arabs also use this word to refer to God.

considered “imperfect”), and believe in it, is a case of religion as belief. Regardless, it is clear that religion as belief would fall under the category of identity, as it is something that is chosen, and as described earlier, is not restricted by time or location.

Here, it is important to mention that the character of Sarah, as previously mentioned, is *fictional*. *Little Mosque on the Prairie* is not based on a true story, and Sarah’s character is not based on a real person, although some aspects of the story and characters may overlap with real-life experiences. As Conway mentions, Sarah’s character was heavily mediated by the show’s producers, and then even further mediated by the CBC (Canadian Broadcast Company). Even her story arc was designed to fit around co-star Carlo Rota’s departure from the show, which the directors explained in the show through his divorce from Sarah. In the show, it was this divorce that then prompted her to question her faith. In fact, CBC executives wanted to have Sarah revert to Christianity, as this is what they thought the viewers would want. However, Darling and Donnelly wanted Sarah’s choice to grow from her experience, even if that surprised viewers and didn’t align with what their expectations might have been (Conway 2017, 101). Thus, producers were interested in keeping the diversity of the show, and in keeping her as an example of religion as belief.

In conclusion, although many aspects of Sarah’s story are depicted in the show as overlapping with certain aspects of translation as self-transformation, she cannot be considered as a complete example, due to the mediation of her character that took place, affecting the level of agency available, since fictional characters cannot have agency. As was mentioned earlier, when speaking about the Tagalog converts, freedom of choice and full agency are conditions for translation as self-transformation to take place. For this reason, Sarah has remained useful as an illustration of what the process of translation as self-transformation might look like, but cannot

stand on its own and needs to be taken into consideration only with other empirical data, such as the questionnaires and focus groups also provided in the current study.

4.1.2. Why Does One Decide to Convert?

The reasons for undergoing a self-translation are many, and naturally affected how the convert underwent their process of self-translation, as the first step in any process is the decision to undertake it. For this reason, it was important to ask each participant of the questionnaire what their reasons for converting were. However, due to time constraints, it was not possible to ask the focus group participants this question. Essentially, the reasons for converting could be summarized into several categories; either the converts underwent a thorough process of research, through which they were searching for the truth, including proper ethics and morals that they aligned with and could follow, or they learned about Islam through reading the Quran and feeling the truth in its teachings, or they felt that the Islamic doctrine of *tawheed*[7] was the truth. While none of the converts in the present study cited reasons outside of belief (except for one participant who simply stated that she converted so that his or her child would grow up with a religion), it is also sometimes the case that some converts choose Islam for personal reasons as well, such as when marrying a Muslim spouse, or due to an encounter that they had with a culture that practices Islam as the majority religion. Nevertheless, perhaps the most important thing to note about the above categories of responses in the present study is that nearly all of them resulted from research and seeking the truth. None of their reasons for converting were related to culture. In this case, it would seem that the converts see religion and culture as two separate entities. However, is this truly the case?

[7] *Tawheed*: Islamic term for belief in the Oneness of God

4.1.3. Conversion: A Change of Culture or Identity?

When the participants were asked as to whether they thought that conversion was a change of culture and/or a change of identity (See figure 4 below), none of the respondents answered that it was just a change of culture. The majority (50%) of participants thought that it was neither a change of culture nor of identity. The remaining 50% of participants were divided evenly between believing that conversion was a change of identity (25%) and both a change of identity and a change of culture (25%). Interestingly, not a single participant believed that conversion was solely a change of culture.

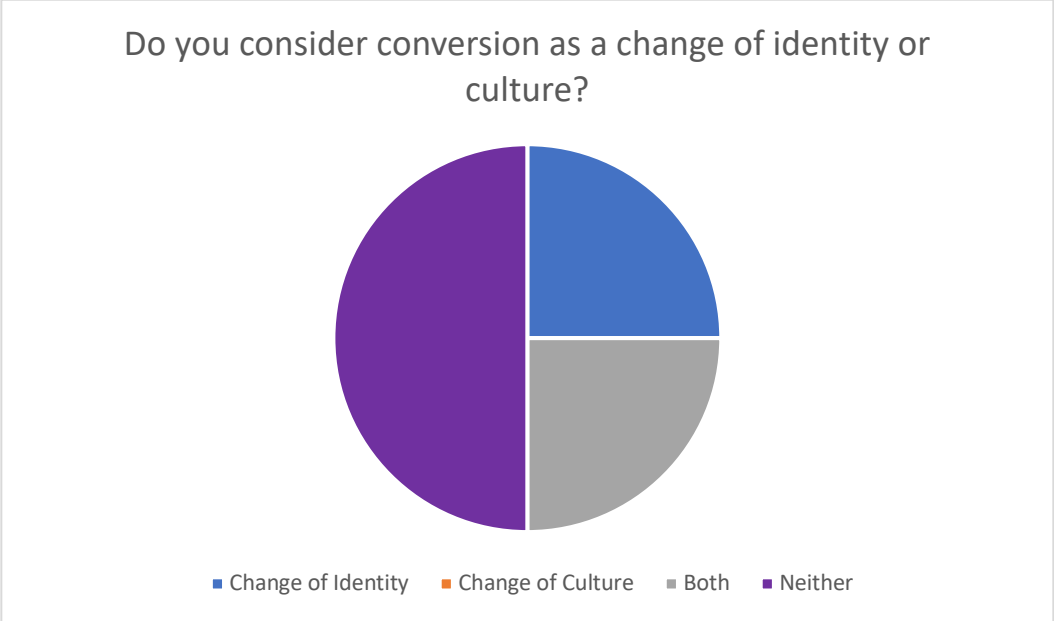

Figure 4

By choosing the response "change of identity," participants acknowledged that Islam is accepting of all cultures, and that they did not need to change their cultural background in order to fit in with their new religion. Rather, by selecting this response, it likely means that participants consider religion to be a part of their identity, or who they are as individuals. By undergoing the work of self-transformation, they add to, and possibly remove some aspects of, their identity. Just as in the case of linguistic translation, whereby there is always a shift in the

product and the translation ends up producing difference from the source, a convert who undergoes the process of translation as self-transformation also produces difference from their pre-conversion Self and their post-conversion Self. By selecting "neither" as their response, the respondents likely did not see Islam as inherently changing them in any way. Instead, the converts were able to maintain their sense of identity and their culture. Perhaps they did not see Islam as changing the identity that they already possessed, but rather as adding to it. On the contrary, the response "both" suggests that the participants feel that by accepting Islam, they have changed on both a personal and cultural levels.

Of course, while one can draw possible conclusions as to what such answers may mean, it was also important to ask the participants to clarify their choice and what they meant by it. When asked to explain why they considered (or didn't consider) conversion to be a change of culture and/or identity, a surprising number of those converts who responded that it was neither a change of culture nor of identity stated that they did not see Islam as needing to change their culture, which formed a part of who they were (in other words, their identity). For example, many people made statements regarding how, although Islam required some aspects of their culture to change, they were able to keep the positive aspects of their culture. A few examples of relevant statements included:

> Even though I have converted, I still grew up, and came of age in, am a part of, and continue to live in, the culture of South-Eastern Canada, and of Western society, more generally. I choose to opt out of certain aspects of the culture that I do not find are in line with my Islamic values and beliefs. I have not, however, changed my culture. Likewise, I have changed my lifestyle, aspects of my identity (ex. behaviour, appearance), and my choices. However, I am still the same person as I was before converting. I have not changed as a person, and my essential or core identity remains the same. I don't think of myself as a different person—I think of myself as the same person but improved.

> I believe that culture and religion are two different things. I am culturally American but religiously Muslim. I eat stereotypically American foods, wear modest, American-style clothing, speak English, expect a certain type of interaction between individuals in the public, greet people in American ways, etc. All of this is not mutually exclusive from practicing Islam.
>
> I personally don't feel being a Muslim woman changes my identity or my culture. I feel Islam only cultivates the best aspects of yourself.

For those who said that Islam was a change of identity, many of the respondents made reference to how Islam changed their way of thinking, or the lens through which they saw the world (their worldview).

> Identity is about knowing who one is/is not. Being Muslim is identifying with God. After converting, my identity (sense of self) is now affected by my relationship with God. *Islam is a lens by which we look at ourselves and the world around us*.[8]
>
> Both—although mostly identity. For identity, *Islam has completely changed the lens through which I perceive the world*.[9] I look at things much more mindfully now, recognizing a purpose in all things and seeing much more beauty in all things, especially hardship. For culture, not really, but in some ways. I don't adopt the culture of many other Muslim majorities (ex: I haven't changed to cooking samosas or drinking tea a different way than I grew up with). However, some aspects of my culture have changed within the framework of Islam. For example, Islam requests modesty, but doesn't specify whether modest clothes have to be black, or coloured, or whatnot. Culturally, I am comfortable in pants and athletic-looking material, so culturally I still adhere to this, while applying a modest Islamic lens (baggy pants, athletic shirts with sleeves, hijab on top).

Although the majority of the participants were able to clearly distinguish between conversion being a change of identity or a change of culture, some questionnaire participants also mentioned that both culture and identity are intertwined.

> Both identity and culture are linked together, and conversion to Islam does bring things from other cultures into one's life, so it is a change on both levels.

[8] Emphasis is my own.
[9] Emphasis is my own.

> Identity and culture are intertwined, I think. When I began to practice Islam, I started integrating myself particularly with Arabs and *Desis*[10] more than if I had not converted, I believe.

On the other hand, many said that Islam does not change one's identity, or, in other words, who they are as a person:

> I don't consider it as altering your identity. Our identity and experience of our "selves" is wholly individual, and is even distinct from how the outside world perceives us. I never experienced an earth-shattering change in how I perceived myself when I was learning about or converted to Islam. As I learned about it, the values and teachings resonated with me. They carried an innate "truth feeling" that felt unique from a lot of the other theories, or teachings, or world views I had previously learned about (enthusiastically, but experienced, and learned about, from a removed perspective that FELT like learning about "something else" versus something I believed).

Clearly, the participants are divided on the issue of whether conversion is either a change of culture or of identity. Moreover, their justifications for their choices were quite varied. However, that being said, the responses could be grouped into several main categories, as we have seen above. Most importantly, although some of the participants thought that conversion was in some ways a change of both identity and culture, absolutely none of them said that it was just a change of culture. In this sense, one participant mentioned how culture had been mixed with Islam, which caused her to be confused about her identity. However, when she was able to separate Islam from the interfering culture, it was then that she was able to find herself again.

> Identity is the qualities, beliefs, personality, looks and/or expressions that make a person or group. One can regard the awareness and the categorizing of identity as positive, or as destructive. A psychological identity relates to self-image, self-esteem, and individuality. I believe conversion is an addition to an evolved identity. I have experienced the "change of identity" due to cultural influences of my ex-husband, and it was disorienting through what I lived through. I lost sense of myself and who I was through absorbing so much culture mixed in with Islam. Now that I have reclaimed balance in my life, I feel more of a connection to myself as how I identified before with the completion of self as Muslim as a whole.

[10] *Desis*: Individuals of South Asian descent

So, it seems that we can safely assume from the above participant statements that religious conversion is more of an issue of identity, although culture (that is external to the faith) may sometimes become intermixed with Islam. In order to further clarify how the participants' stance on whether religion falls under an issue of identity or culture, we then asked them to provide a brief description of what they believed it meant to "be a Muslim." Furthermore, once we can determine whether religion is related more to identity or culture, we can then analyze how it relates to the broader notion of worldview- then assuming that such a shift in worldview would also constitute an act of translation as self-transformation.

4.1.4. What Does it Mean to "Be a Muslim?"

Seeing as the previous sections have been discussing the phenomenon of translation as self-transformation through the lens of religious conversion, specifically to Islam, it is then important to attempt to define what exactly "being a Muslim" means, since it is relevant to the convert's new identity and decisively different from what they identified as before. Additionally, by asking the converts themselves about how they define what it means to "be a Muslim," we will be able to see whether they define it in terms related to culture or identity. It then follows that we should be able to determine whether religion relates more to an issue of culture or of identity.

When asked how they defined "being a Muslim," the majority of the participants' responses (55%) were "having (an Islamic) belief, no matter the culture" (figure 5). Such responses directly connected religion with belief. These responses also clearly indicated that culture, in their opinion, was not part of what made them Muslim. Therefore, one can say that, for these participants, religion clearly falls under the umbrella of belief rather than culture. Here, it is important to note that not a single participant chose "being part of a (Muslim) culture" as a

way to define being a Muslim. This finding is important as it confirms that, according to the participants, culture is not a defining factor of being able to practice Islam, thus helping to confirm the earlier findings that religion is more under the category of belief rather than culture.

Whereas the responses "belonging to a (Muslim) culture" and "having (an Islamic) belief, no matter the culture" are fairly self-explanatory, it remains essential to explain the other categories. The response "having a belief sanctioned by actions regardless of secular laws (rituals and transactions)" was intended to mean following Islamic laws and practices. For example, this includes the five pillars of Islam: belief in God and the Prophet Muhammad, daily prayer, prescribed charity, fasting the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. However, since this was not explicitly explained in the question, it seems that the participants did not understand its meaning, as no one selected it as a response. This response means that it is not just enough for someone to believe in Islam to be a Muslim—they must also follow up that belief by action and practicing the religion.

On the contrary, by selecting "nominally (as long as you define yourself…)," this meant that someone could be Muslim regardless of whether they practiced other aspects of the faith or not. This may also include Muslims who grew up in a Muslim culture that was inherited from their family. These "cultural Muslims" may or may not practice the religion, but they still identify with being Muslims as Islam is the only religion they are acquainted with.

Comparatively speaking, the idea of "cultural Muslims" can be related back to the example of Sarah and Rev. Thorne and the notion of religion as belief vs. religion as culture. Whereas Sarah actively chose Islam through belief, Rev. Thorne believed in Anglicanism because he grew up with that particular religion. However, as previously discussed, these two categories should not be considered as a binary, as although Thorne inherited his religion from

his family and upbringing, he also spent much of his time surrounded by Muslims, and yet actively chose to learn about his faith and stick to his beliefs. Additionally, it is also important to mention that one can believe in a religion, but at the same time, they can choose not to belong to a religious community. Indeed, some believers prefer to keep their faith as a personal conviction, rather than as something they share with others. Regardless of whether one decides to practice their religion/faith in a group or alone, it does not negate the belief in their heart.

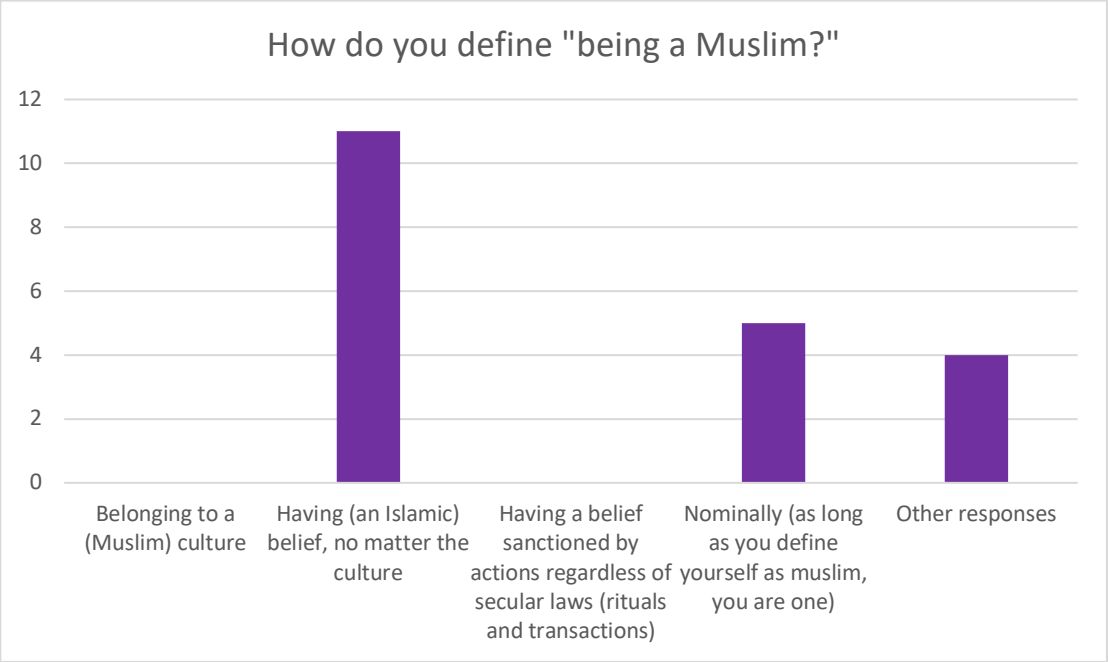

Figure 5

The remaining responses that the participants themselves added included:

> Living with purpose; actions guided by belief
>
> I would like to select both the second and fourth options. 'Having (an Islamic) belief, no matter the culture,' and 'Nominally (as long as you define yourself as Muslim, you are one).' It is my opinion or position that if you believe, you love Allah and his Messenger, and you repeat the *shahadah*, this is even to qualify someone as a Muslim. On a more basic level, I would even go so far as to say that all human beings are Muslims, according to the *fitra*[11]—some people realize and choose to act on this, others do not.

[11] *Fitra*: Natural disposition. The Islamic belief is that every human is born with the natural disposition to seek God and worship Him.

> Someone who believes in the 5 pillars, with or without action. God knows best.
>
> This depends if you mean religiously, culturally, etc. It is a belief at its core, but I accept other definitions of it to the extent that it doesn't flatly contradict or nullify the belief.

By analyzing these responses, they could all be found to fit into either the category of "belief" or of "nominally." These responses are represented in Figure 6 below. By "nominally," we mean anyone who simply calls themselves a Muslim and identifies as such, with or without any additional worship or related acts of devotion.

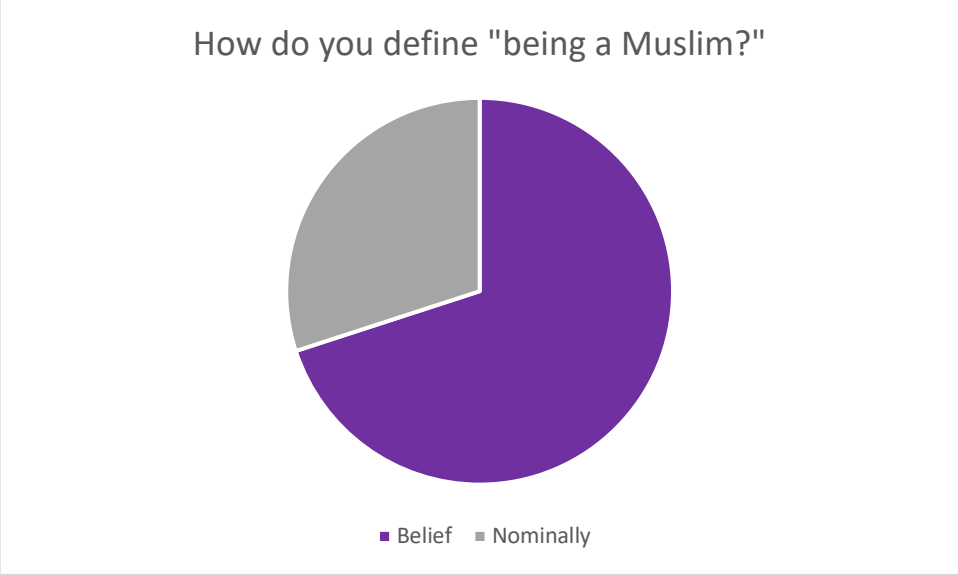

Figure 6

The responses of the focus group participants echoed the sentiments that the questionnaire respondents expressed above. When asked how they defined "being a Muslim," not one single focus group participant likened being Muslim to culture in any way. On the contrary, nearly all of them responded along the lines of religion being directly linked to belief. Some participants also chose to respond that someone was Muslim as long as they themselves identified as being Muslim (which would align with the "nominally" category in figure 6 above). The one response that could neither be categorized as being "belief" or "nominally," was that of

a participant who described "being Muslim" as "service." Additionally, one other participant also added onto her "belief" centred answer for being Muslim, that a Muslim should also be a good representative and ambassador for wherever one finds themselves. Indeed, she said, "for me, being Muslim means establishing a relationship with Allah, following to the best of your ability the principles of the Quran and the Sunnah, while being a citizen of wherever you are. That, for me, would be—and a good ambassador as well."

For those participants who linked being Muslim with belief, their reasonings included:

- Belief in Allah
- Belief in Prophet Muhammad
- Belief in the Prophetic *hadiths*[12]
- Belief in the six tenets of faith: 1) belief in the pure oneness of God (known as *Tawheed* in Arabic), 2) belief in the angels of God, 3) belief in the Divine Revelations (Books), 4) belief in the prophets of God, 5) belief in resurrection after death and the Day of Judgement, 6) belief in preordainment (also referred to as destiny, or *qadr* in Arabic)
- Doing things and making choices purely for the sake of Allah.

Here, I would like to pay close attention to this last response in the list, which was that of Mike, who described what being Muslim meant to him. Notably, Mike said that,

> being Muslim, to me, I guess, is making choices—belief of course, but beyond that, being Muslim, doing Islam, and being Muslim, it's to do with making choices which you are making purely for the sake of Allah. […] So, the reason I brought up the whole Ramadan Muslims thing is because now I don't look at it that way. Now, I look at it like, well, it's still one month of time where you, if you fast, if you usually drink outside of Ramadan, but you choose not to for the month. Should you drink? Should you drink as a Muslim? No, you shouldn't, but you're still, for that month, making a choice purely for the sake of Allah. You could easily walk out to the store, or pick up, open your fridge if you keep them there, or whatever you do. So, what is Islam? What is being Muslim? The *shahadah*, the belief, the faith, but I've been thinking a lot about that other part lately, that it's the choices that you make purely for the sake of Allah.

[12] Hadith: a prophetic saying and/or teaching

There are several important points that we can take away from what Mike said in the above quote. Namely, that being Muslim is a conscious choice that someone makes to do acts for the sake of Allah. In other words, it is an act of devotion and belief to one's Creator. Secondly, it does not matter if the person is always practicing. Mike's mention of Ramadan Muslims was in reference to an earlier part of the conversation, in which he explained how sometimes someone may not generally be practicing but will become extra practicing just for the month of Ramadan. To clarify, Ramadan is a month that Muslims spend fasting and generally engaging in much extra worship such as prayer, reading Quran, giving charity, etc. Despite their level of practice, he recognizes that as long as someone is making a choice to become closer to Allah, then they are Muslims. Indeed, many Muslims falter in their worship, but still consider themselves to be Muslims. Another focus group participant, Parker, then built upon this sentiment by saying that,

> I would say, if someone says they're Muslim, identifies as a Muslim, and then also has, you know, if we were to talk about it, you know, do they believe in Allah and His messenger*, sal Allahu alayhi wa sallam*,[13] that's obviously there. There's the other four: the books, the angels, the messengers, the Day of Judgement, *qadr*,[14] and all of those things, but, you know, I would start with just the first bit—if someone says they are, and then belief in Allah and His messenger. We could start there, and then, as far as the day-to-day, that's obviously a much more complex question.

To this, Mike agreed, saying,

> Yeah, and I'm just going to jump in to say that I like that, and I agree with that, too—that if someone says they are, then, for me, too, that's how I approach it as well. If someone says they are, I try to—I say "try," because if you see or know they're doing certain things—*astaghfirullah*[15]—the things come into your head, and then you're like, oh, well, really? But if someone says they are, then I try very hard to say, oh, well, then you are Muslim.

[13] *Sal Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*: "peace and blessings be upon him."
[14] *Qadr:* Pre-destination
[15] *Astaghfirullah:* "I seek forgiveness from Allah."

For that reason, it is important to accept someone as being a Muslim, regardless of their level of apparent devotion. However, from the other responses, it is also clear that they must follow that nominal acceptance of Islam up with (at least) internal belief—namely, in the six tenets of faith mentioned above. Therefore, we can conclude that "being Muslim," at least according to the participants in both the questionnaire and the focus groups, is a combination of identifying as a Muslim (nominally) and then following that up with proper belief. Hussein, another focus group participant, confirms this by defining a Muslim as being,

> […] somebody that accepts the *shahadah*. So, accepts that there is no one worthy of worship other than Allah, *subhanahu wa ta'ala*,[16] and accepts that Mohammed, *RasulAllah*,[17] *sal Allahu alayhi wa sallam*, is the last, like, the final messenger of Allah, *subhanahu wa ta'ala*. And then I guess the main tenets of *iman*,[18] so, belief in Allah, belief in the angels, belief in the books, the messages, belief in the messengers, and belief in *Yawm al-Qiyama*,[19] and *qadr*. So, someone who has those, then generally I would consider them to be Muslim. But if one of those things were lacking—for example, some sects would, for example, deny the afterlife, in a sense. For me, that's like, *Yawm al-Qiyama*, so, then I wouldn't consider them to be Muslims. But other than that, I think within that there's a lot of room for areas which, might be lacking in some areas, but, at the same time, I would still consider them to be Muslim.

In conclusion, when asked questions directly about defining the terms *culture* and *identity*, the participants in both the questionnaire and focus groups seemed unsure about how to accurately define them. Furthermore, when asked whether they would categorize religion as being more of an issue regarding culture or identity, although many participants leaned towards categorizing it as identity, a significant number of participants also categorized it as being a part of both culture and identity. However, and quite surprisingly, when asked a question that was designed to determine whether participants would classify religion as being something that is

[16] *Subhanahu wa ta'ala*: "glory be to Him."
[17] *RasulAllah*: "Messenger of God."
[18] *Iman*: faith
[19] *Yawm al-Qiyama*: the Day of Judgement

more related to belief (and therefore, identity) or culture, but was not worded to include any of those terms (How would you define "being Muslim?"), it became clear that, for them, religion falls under the category of belief and identity rather than culture.

From the analysis of the above questionnaire and focus group data sets, we have determined that religion would fall more under the category of identity rather than culture, although there may also be some overlap between the two categories. Now that we have addressed the issue of where religion falls regarding culture and identity, we can now look more in-detail at the self-translation process in regard to participants' identities, and how converts can use aspects of their identity and position as converts to potentially act as mediators between both the Canadian/American Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Will the converts be well-received by either or both communities? Furthermore, will their translations be effective? Let's take a look.

4.2. Converts as Mediators

Converts occupy a particular place between cultures. They have lived and experienced life in Canadian/American culture pre-conversion, so they are able to understand Islam from a non-Muslim perspective and, on the other hand, are also able to explain their understanding of the Muslim religion/ethos to non-Muslims. This is further exemplified by the case of Sarah from *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. The directors of the show recognized that non-Muslim viewers of the show would have a healthy curiosity about Islam, and so they intended for Sarah to act as a mediator between the majority of non-Muslim viewers, Islam, and even their Muslim co-citizens. Since she herself was a convert who was still learning about the faith, she was in the perfect position to be learning about Islam herself, and then translate what she learnt to the audience (Conway 2017, 101). Of course, one could argue that people who were born Muslim (especially

second and further generation Muslims of immigrant descent) and were also born in the West or who have lived there for numerous years may also be in a good position to translate their experience/ethos. However, these Muslims have not had the experience of living in a non-Muslim family and being brought up that way. Therefore, they are unable to connect with non-Muslim society on the same level as a convert who can say, "I used to live a life just like yours." For this reason, converts would be in a better position to do such mediation/cultural translation work, given their unique attachments to both communities.

Francisca Cho (2012) also talks about the importance of religious practice in order to be an effective mediator. In her chapter "Buddhism and Science: Translating and Re-translating Culture," Cho speaks about cultural translation in Buddhism, in which she notes that many Buddhist meditative practices have been appropriated in the West. In particular, she focuses on MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction), a meditative practice derived from Buddhist meditation, and its use in treating medical conditions. An important aspect to note was how MBSR practitioners themselves must take part in MBSR in order to be able to convey it effectively to their patients. The idea here is that one is in a better position to explain a practice if they themselves have experienced it. This is why converts are in an ideal place to mediate and translate, since they have experienced both cultures.

Here, we would like to note that there is a clear distinction between the functional/medical appropriation that MBSR practitioners must take in order to convey the practice to their clients and the dual cultural situations that converts naturally find themselves in. The appropriation of MBSR practices is a medical necessity that certified medical practitioners must undertake in order to effectively convey the practice to their clients. Should they not do so, they run the chance of negatively affecting the client's medical treatment. Nevertheless, converts do still find

themselves in a relatable situation in which they find themselves translating a religion to non-adherents of that religion simply by practicing it and living through that religious experience.[20] Were they not practicing Islam, of course it would be more difficult to explain to non-Muslims, since they would not have the deeper understanding of the religion that someone who lives and practices it daily would.

Nida's diagram of Biblical translation (Nida 1959, 152) further exemplifies the above point about converts being in an ideal place between two cultures. In the diagram (see figure 7), the source text, culture, message, and receivers are represented by squares. Likewise, the target text, culture, message, and receivers are represented by triangles. Between the two lies an arrow pointing from the source to the target. If we were to represent where converts would fall on this diagram, they would likely fall under the arrow—having one foot in each culture and neither finding themselves situated fully in one culture nor the other. Perhaps if we were to edit the diagram in order to provide a better explanation of a convert's role, the arrow would be bidirectional, going back and forth between both the source and target cultures. Both non-Muslims and Muslims can learn from each other through the mediation of a convert who shares both life experiences and is able to translate them to both sides.

[20] N.B. Converts of white, European descent, often find themselves in a position where they are asked to speak about Islam because it seems that non-Muslims, at least in Canadian and American contexts, assume that born Muslims all have darker complexions. Indeed, many non-Muslims seem to be ignorant of the fact that Muslims also exist in Muslim-majority regions such as parts of the Balkans and Russia where people tend to have lighter complexions. So, yes, white converts are often asked to be in a translator position. However, since converts of darker complexions are usually assumed to be born Muslim, they are not usually asked to be in such a translator position. Moreover, this fact was exemplified by some of the participants in the focus groups when they were asked about the difficulties that they faced when integrating into both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities after their conversion. Specifically, in regard to the Muslim community, they expressed that they were often overlooked as a convert and did not receive the support that they needed from the Muslim community post-conversion because they were assumed to have been born a Muslim.

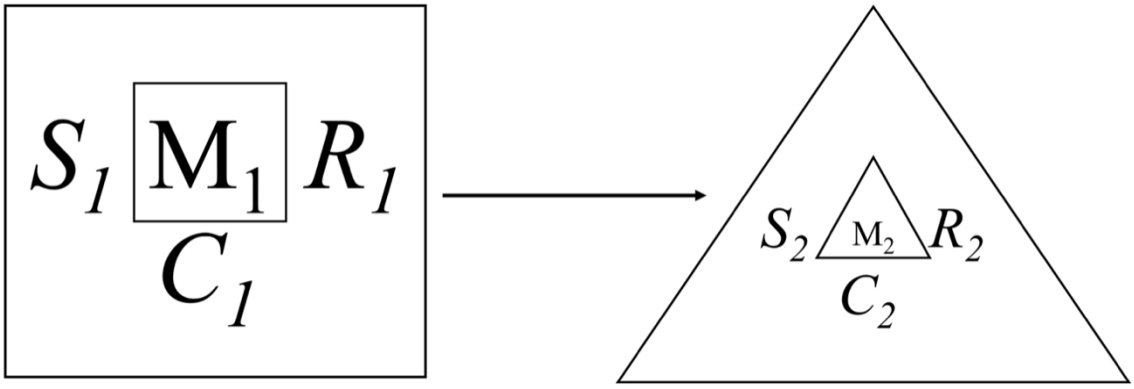

Figure 7 (Nida 1959, 152)

From the evidence provided above, including Sarah's depiction in *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, MBSR research, and Nida's diagram, it would seem that converts are in a position to potentially become the ideal mediators. However, the data from the questionnaire seemed to suggest another reality. Absolutely all of the participants in the questionnaire reported having experienced some form of discrimination or another, from both the non-Muslim society at large and also from within the Muslim community itself.

The two charts below (Figures 8 and 9) show the varieties of different difficulties and discrimination that the converts reported having experienced. Here we define *discrimination* as any hardship that a participant experienced due specifically to their identity as a Muslim. Most notably, it seems like the converts struggled with maintaining inter-personal relationships after their conversion. Fourteen respondents reported difficulties related to losing friends and finding community when evolving in the society at large after their conversion. The same number of participants also faced the same difficulty of finding community with other Muslims after their conversion. Such data seems to suggest that converts did not feel completely welcomed by either community. Rather than being in the ideal place to translate between cultures, it instead seems

that they were rejected by both cultures, never truly fitting into either. Additionally, according to the participants' responses, there appears to be a high level of discrimination against the converts coming from both the society at large and the Muslim community. Of course, some categories of difficulties/discrimination differed between the two communities based on different circumstances. For example, one would likely lose non-Muslim friends after their conversion rather than losing Muslim friends. In such cases, some categories were not comparable between each society.

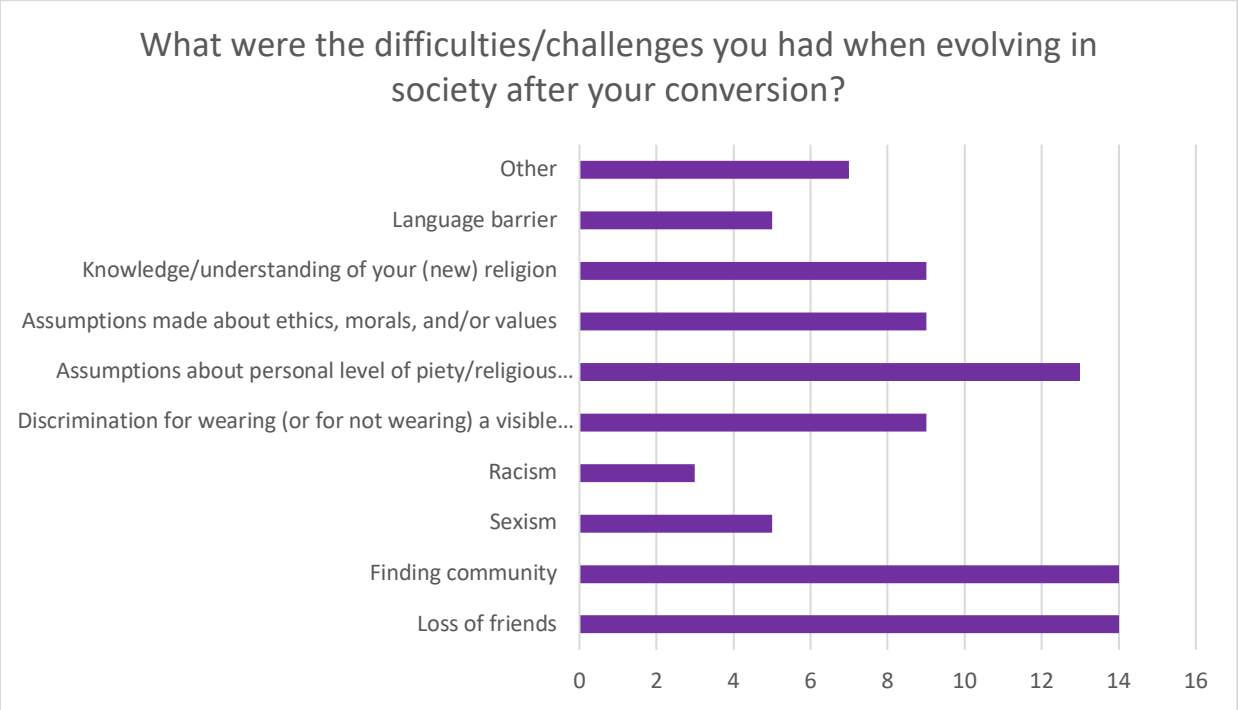

Figure 8

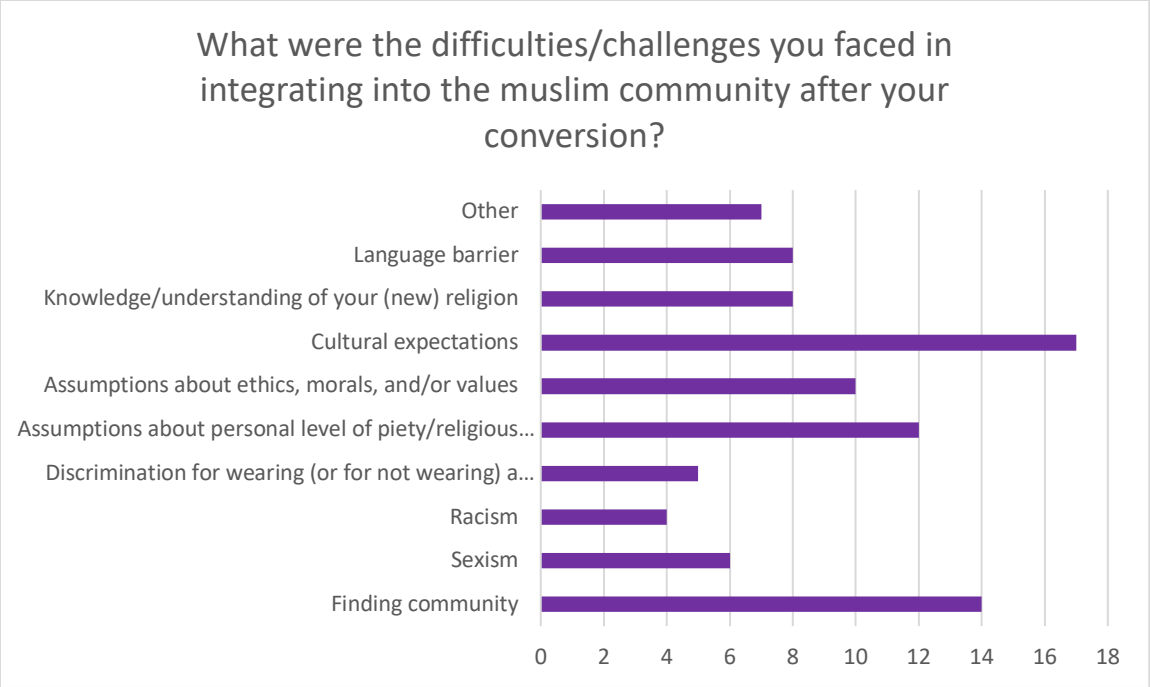

Figure 9

Participants from both the male and female focus groups were also asked the same questions regarding the difficulties and challenges that they faced upon evolving/integrating into both the society at large (i.e.: American and Canadian society) and the Muslim community. However, it is important to note that, unlike the questionnaire, the focus group participants were not provided with categories to select for their difficulties/challenges. Rather, the questions were left open for them to discuss. The responses that the focus groups provided were also very interesting to observe since they had deliberately been segregated between men and women. In this way, it became more clear which issues were more related to one gender as opposed to the other.

For example, when speaking about the negative experiences that the men faced when evolving in the American/Canadian society at large, all of them reported rather minor challenges. Namely, one participant chose to use the term *micro-aggression* to describe his experiences, which included incidences such as fellow coworkers passing comments about how him leaving

for Friday prayer would make his schedule a bit more difficult, and how he was less productive during Ramadan. Another participant, Hussein, also mentioned how sometimes he felt excluded from certain work events due to alcohol and partying going on, which also affected his ability to network and socialize with his coworkers. Perhaps the most severe incident reported by a participant included a racist/Islamophobic law professor who made the student's time so difficult that he was forced to change course sections in order to not have any discrimination from the professor based on his faith.

On the contrary, the difficulties/challenges that the women experienced when evolving in the Canadian/American society at large were quite more marked and severe than those that the men experienced. This is likely due to the fact that most of the women reported wearing the hijab, thus making them visibly identifiable as Muslims. Generally speaking, Muslim men do not experience as many aggressions against them due to their faith because they are typically less likely to be outwardly recognizable as Muslims. For example, Prama, a Canadian participant of Indian background, reported an increase in the level of racism she received after deciding to wear the hijab:

> So, I am born in Ottawa, in Canada, and so, throughout my whole life, I have experienced a lot of the racism that comes with just being, firstly, just brown, and I feel like, in my twenty-some years, I've kind of come to terms with that, and I've noticed the community be more welcoming. And I think Ciara kind of mentioned as well that in Canada people are more tolerant of, first, skin colour, right? So that sort of racism. But, it's interesting—when I first put on hijab last year in, wait, was it last year? Yeah, I think it's been a year, *alhamdulillah*.[21] I started noticing, again, a lot of staring, and a lot of racism. And maybe because I work in the public sector, I was experiencing specific attacks from some clients, so, yeah, I don't know.

On a separate occasion during the focus group, she also related how once she began to wear hijab, people also began to see her more as a foreigner who wasn't capable of speaking the

[21] *Alhamdulillah*: Thanks be to God

English language fluently, despite her being born and raised in Canada. Indeed, she shared with the group that,

> […] when I put on the hijab, I'm often—I've never experienced this before—people see me as though I don't know how to speak English, right? I've had someone come into my workplace, and they said very condescendingly, is English ok? And I just said, you know, English is fine, *français* is good as well, whatever language you want to speak—I'm from Canada.

Interestingly, it seems that the decision to wear hijab in American/Canadian society brought on a perception of foreignness and otherness to all of the female focus group participants, regardless of their cultural and/or ethnic background. Even for the participants who identified as being Canadians of a White European background, and who had likely never experienced racism before, they reported a higher amount of discrimination and being mistaken for a foreigner after having worn the hijab. The experiences of racism from the two converts of a White European background are related below.

> I wanted to relate it also to race, because, in Canada, when I started wearing hijab, even though I'm white, people would assume—I've been mistaken for Iranian, Pakistani, Turkish, Lebanese, Syrian—nobody thinks I'm Canadian, which is—it kind of reveals that implicit, but systemic bias in Canada. Like, "everybody who wears a hijab is not Canadian" kind of thing. And that's why I don't feel always at home in the country where I was born and raised.

> Ok, so, Canadian community—I live in a relatively very white community, a kind of racist neighbourhood, and—it's just how—ok that's minor, but the thing that, you know, now, well, people imply that I'm a foreigner. I was not driving, but I was in an accident and, like, I was the second person and we were both white reverts, and this older white lady was like, "we don't drive that way in Canada!" Like, things like that. And somebody at work came and asked me if I was married, because now I was wearing hijab, and if I was being forced to wear the hijab, and I'm single, and, you know, small, dumb things. But it just, it adds up a little bit, and the stares and all that—because I know other sisters, they are saying it's less, but for me it's been a lot more, because I never experienced any kind of racism before—and it's not racism, it's just, they don't understand, so they stare.

Clearly, all of the participants who reported wearing a hijab experienced a significant change in how they were perceived before and after their self-transformations. Such a change in perception may possibly be due to the portrayal of Muslims in Western media. Such portrayal can be related to Althusser's notions of *subjectification* and *interpellation*, as seen in Robinson (2015), which are "Althusser's terms for the process by which the internalization of authority is achieved. In Althusser's ideal scenario, individual members of a society do not become subjects until they are 'hailed' or 'interpellated' as subjects by ruling forces in society" (Robinson 2015, 22). Furthermore, according to Althusser, one is not born as a *subject*, but rather is *transformed* into a subject by society (Robinson 2015, 22). Additionally, "*interpellation*, or *hailing*, is Althusser's other term for the calling of a person into subjectivity/subjection. The idea is that by calling someone something, especially from a position of authority, you transform that person into the thing named" (Robinson 2015, 23). Therefore, as we can connect to the case of the convert women in our study who chose to wear hijab, they have been *subjected* by the wider non-Muslim Canadian and American societies. They have been *translated* into subjects and discriminated on based on the way that they dressed. Through their racism and discrimination, they have *interpelled* or referred to the female hijab-wearing converts as *Others*. In simpler terms, the converts, at least in the case of the above-mentioned situation, have been *othered* by members of the wider, non-Muslim society. Of course, one could argue that not all Canadians or Americans are racist or discriminatory towards Muslims, which is certainly true and a valid point to make. However, it unfortunately remains the fact that Muslims are still minorities in Canada and America and experience high levels of discrimination based simply on their faith, which is exemplified by the NCCM's (National Council of Canadian Muslims) tracking of anti-Muslim incidents

reported across Canada from 2013-2019 ("NCCM – National Council of Canadian Muslims," n.d.).

In any case, one of the female focus group participants, Ciara, goes on further to explain why she believes that people who wear hijab generally experience a higher level of discrimination within Canadian society. She states that,

> […] something about Canada that the last woman said—Kristen —that was really interesting, is that Canada prides itself on being a non-racist kind of place and I think that they're doing ok maybe when it comes to skin colour, potentially? Although I do believe that there is some real systemic discrimination. But, if you think differently, that's when you really feel the prejudice. There are some sacred concepts to secular Canada that, if you challenge those, you're basically out. And, so, there's kind of an epistemic—a deep epistemic kind of racism against spiritual ways of thinking and being, and I believe that Indigenous Canadians have kind of done a lot of groundwork to kind of indicate the fact that Canada is epistemically homogenous, essentially. And I think that we have to really give credit for that and find a time when we can start moving through those doors and say, look, we have different understandings of why we exist, and where all this comes from, and these need to be taken seriously. And society, and in school, and in the academies as well…

From Ciara's quote above, we can see that she believes that, although racism certainly exists in Canada, an extra layer of discrimination exists for people who think differently, particularly those who challenge secular thought. Perhaps this is why, although Prama reported experiencing racism prior to her conversion, the racism and discrimination did not necessarily increase for her after her conversion, only until she began to be visibly identifiable as a Muslim by wearing hijab.

On the other hand, just like the respondents to the questionnaire, the focus group participants also experienced significant discrimination from the Muslim community. Again, the question regarding discrimination from the Muslim community was left open for the focus group participants to answer however they chose to do so and was not separated into categories as the questionnaire was. Notably, in the case of the difficulties/challenges that the converts faced

while integrating into the Muslim community, the women also faced a much harder time than the men.

In the case of the male focus group participants, many reported so-called micro-aggressions, such as being asked why they converted (despite it being a deeply personal and sometimes traumatic process for many converts), being given unsolicited advice in the mosque, such as on how to pray (despite having been Muslim for many years, whereas someone who wasn't White and therefore would be assumed to be born Muslim would not have been bothered with the same "advice"), saying *salam*[22] and not receiving it back due to the confusion of why a White man would say such a thing, and also just having some people react to them in a very standoffish and defensive/suspicious manner. As one of the male participants put it when describing his experiences, "[…] I wouldn't say that was difficult. Really, there was no lasting harm from any of that." While these experiences were unfortunate and likely uncomfortable for the male participants, there was no deep or severe harm in what happened, besides making them feel less confident or welcome as a Muslim within the Muslim community.

However, the female focus group participants experienced perceptively higher levels of difficulties/challenges from within the Muslim community, based on the responses that they provided. The most common response from the women was that they would experience high levels of judgement from the Muslim community, and especially from Muslim men. In particular, Prama again noticed a difference in how she was treated after choosing to wear the hijab and become visibly identifiable as a Muslim, which she emphasizes in her statement that,

> I didn't get this until I did start wearing the hijab. I was identifying as Muslim, for maybe three to four years before, and I never got this line of questioning. But as soon as I put on the hijab, right? When I'd go into a store, or when I'd get into an Uber, or things like that—and it's always men, it's always Muslim men—they always seem to ask about my marital status, whether I'm single or

[22] A Muslim greeting, literally meaning *peace*.

> married. And there's always this kind of connotation that, as a sister, like, where's your *mahram*?[23] Why are you alone, right? And I feel like it's so… Like, a lot of sisters, they'll accept Islam well into their lives, and maybe they're not married or whatever. And so that judgement I feel that we get, right? With—because, yes, we all know you shouldn't do x, y, and z without a *mahram*, and this and that, but a lot of us, we don't have a mahram, right? Especially if our families, right? Our father, our older brothers or whatever, they're not Muslim, right? So that's a negative experience, and I feel like the community needs to be just a little bit more compassionate when it comes to that, and not questioning sisters all the time about why they're alone or things like that.

On top of the discrimination from Muslim men, another participant named Tara also spoke about how she would receive heavy criticism and judgement from the Muslim community, which essentially led her to unfortunately keep her distance from the Muslim community altogether.

> As a Muslim woman, I had that reflection as well, that basically—that you have all this judgement from the Muslim community in several aspects, and then you are also judged by the non-Muslim community in many other aspects. So basically, damn if you do, and damn if you don't, right? So, it's like you can never make anyone happy, or at least silent about who you are. That's why for me, for instance, when I came to live in Ottawa, I have been very careful to join the community, because I know I'm a woman in my 40s, I am divorced, and I know what will happen. […] I just want to be able to go somewhere and don't ask me questions. Don't question me. Don't judge me. Don't—I am doing my best, and you are not paying my bills, and you are not finding me a husband, and you are not solving my life, so just shut up. Ha ha. You know? Let me just sit down here and do my thing, and you go on with your life and let me be. But that doesn't happen, right?

Although both the men and women reported facing difficulties and, more specifically, unwanted advice, from the Muslim community, it appears that that the women have experienced far more hardships than the men, even to the point that some of the participants had decided to keep their distance from the community, as was the case of Tara in the quote above. The importance of what we learn from such quotes is that converts such as Tara, in facing such difficulties from the Muslim community and in choosing to distance herself from the Muslim community due to the

[23] A woman's guardian to whom they are of unmarriageable kin.

criticism and judgement that she faced, shows that she was unable to fully integrate into the Muslim community. Indeed, it demonstrates an initial rejection from the Muslim community through a lack of welcoming behaviour, and then a secondary rejection from her side, in which she herself, despite identifying as a Muslim, chose to keep her own distance from the Muslim community and at least partially reject it.

It is also important to note from both Tara, and Prama's quote above as well, that most of the harsh behaviour that female converts experience comes specifically from men. Indeed, Tara continued her criticism of Muslim men further into the conversation when she said,

> I have a lot of anecdotes of going to mosque and then men telling you you can't be there, or women telling you that your hair is showing, or that your skirt is not halal, or—oh my God. And the list goes on. Then, every city where I have been, I have installed myself, it's like, I have been a revert for 20 years—over 20 years. So, every time I change places, It's like I'm a new convert. And I'm like, no, I'm not a new convert. Do you know *Al-Fatiha*?[24] Of course, I know *Al-Fatiha*! Of course, I know how to pray! You know, one time someone asked me, do you know what the *adhan*[25] is? And I was like, oh my God. Do you think that you can be a Muslim for twenty years and not know what the *adhan* is? Like, do you think that's possible?

Although Tara initially starts her critique of the Muslim community by saying that men often tell her she can't go to the mosque or that she shouldn't be there, she quickly pivots to also mention the criticism that she experienced at the hands of fellow Muslim women, most notably regarding the way she dressed. Additionally, it is important to note that, like some of the male focus group participants, she also reported that many members of the Muslim community assumed her to be a new Muslim who had little to no knowledge of the religion, despite having converted more than twenty years ago. So, here we can see that although, yes, a lot of the women converts struggled

[24] *Al-Fatiha*, literally *The Opening*, is the opening chapted of the Quran.
[25] The Muslim call to prayer.

with unwanted comments and advice from Muslim men, clearly, they still experience varying forms of discrimination from the Muslim community—including from women.

By analyzing how the participants responded to questions that were posed to them regarding the difficulties/challenges that they faced both during and after their conversion, we can clearly see that they have all faced a variety of difficulties, especially regarding their integration into the Muslim community, although a high level of discrimination and hardship was also reported regarding their interactions with the non-Muslim community. It was especially the case that the convert women faced the most difficulties and challenges from both communities, most likely due to the fact that, if they choose to wear hijab, they are visibly identifiable as Muslims, more so than the men (who may optionally keep a longer beard or wear more traditionally Islamic clothes and accessories). However, just by analyzing the difficulties and challenges that the converts faced necessarily leads to a biased/skewed view that they only face hardships, challenges, rejection, etc. For this reason, questions were also posed to both the questionnaire and focus group participants regarding the positive aspects of their self-translation journey, both during and post-conversion with regards to their interactions with the Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

4.2.1. Positive Experiences

Whereas the difficulties/challenges that the converts faced with regards to both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities were relatively easy to categorize, it is unfortunate that their positive experiences were less easy to separate into clear categories. For this reason, the questions for both the questionnaire and the focus groups were left open for the participants to describe their own positive experiences. Despite the lack of clear-cut categories provided to them, the responses that the converts provided did overlap in several ways.

4.2.2. Society at Large

When interacting with the society at large, namely, the Canadian and American non-Muslim societies, the converts reported several positive experiences. They could be categorized as such: increasing in cultural competency and ability to translate for others, becoming a better person/a more functioning member of society, attaining a better understanding and empathy for other people, and being accepted for their choice to visibly represent their religion. A selection of relevant participant responses included:

> Islam has given me a perspective of life and society as a whole. I don't feel as bothered by people who believe differently because it's their choice and I'm confident in my decision. It has made my self-worth improve greatly. I reflect deeper on life, and am able to put my feet in the shoes of other people regardless of race, culture, socioeconomic status, religious or non-religious, etc. I think before I act, and I always go out of my way to have an ease of interaction with people, making sure others are okay, giving support when needed, and being kind to those I cross in my daily life.

> Similar to the above, I believe that, since converting, I am more accepting of others and am better able to empathize with others. I am also more interested and motivated to contribute and be active in the community, and to help others. I feel that I have acquired better *cultural competency*[26] and am better at connecting meaningfully with individuals from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. I feel that I am generally more open-minded and accepting since converting. I also feel that I am better able to navigate different situations, especially when difficult or stressful, as I feel more grounded and able to manage my own emotions, as well as accepting situations as they are.

> A positive experience I've had is being able to share my religion with non-Muslims.

However, several participants decided to make it quite clear that they had never had any positive experiences with the non-Muslim society in Canada or America:

> Zero positives: I don't have positive experiences. I was rejected by Western society and the American culture that I was a part of before I converted. I lost my direct family and many close friends.

[26] Emphasis is my own.

> I found myself having some difficulty with navigating socializing with new peers due to me not participating in alcohol culture.

Despite mixing in a few negatives amongst the positive responses, the converts have nevertheless demonstrated that they feel that their conversion has had positive effects on the surrounding non-Muslim members of society. However, it is also important to draw attention to the fact that the vast majority of the participants' responses were about how their conversion affected how they perceive others, and not necessarily how others perceived them. In other words, although their responses reflected positive experiences, those positive experiences weren't necessarily due to them being accepted or appreciated by the society at large.

4.2.3. Muslim Community

As for the converts' positive experiences regarding their integration into the Muslim community post-conversion, one trend that was clear between both the questionnaire respondents and the focus group participants was that they both reported finding a greater sense of community. Interestingly, this response comes despite the converts also relating many instances of difficulties/challenges that came at the hands of the Muslim community, which made them feel unwelcome and/or distant from said community.

Another overlap that was mentioned quite frequently from male and female participants in both the questionnaire and the focus groups was that of feeling an increase in positive character traits and general happiness and fulfillment in their lives. Additionally, several participants reported having given up aspects of their previous life that were harmful for them, such as drinking, partying, and having casual sex.

> The most positive part about converting is that I feel I am being true to myself and true to God—like I am following what Allah willed for me. Also, as a part of my conversion, I gave up drinking alcohol, using drugs, dating/ casual sex—leaving these habits behind has been one of the best things I

> have done in my life up until now. Also, I feel more beautiful now that I observe hijab. I feel that I am more considerate and accepting of others, and more conscious in my decision making. I also feel that, since converting, I am better equipped to deal with different situations especially situations or experiences that are especially challenging or stressful. I have also been able to meet and build significant relationships with amazing people through integrating into the Muslim community, who I would never have connected with otherwise.
>
> It was a very gradual step-by-step process to becoming Muslim. It's as though something didn't make any sense, then it was a matter of knowledge until it suddenly clicked—indescribably better degree of contentment in life. I used to have this unending, underlying angst about life and just not knowing what the purpose of life is—wondering what happens when you die and just falling asleep theorizing without ever coming to a conclusion. Now, there's such a contentment with knowing how all the pieces fit together (as informed by a book (Quran) undeniably from Allah/God). Many teachings about Islamic perspectives, such as conduct with parents (greatly improved now), respecting others' privacy in conversations, being mindful of/staying away from backbiting, only sharing information about someone/something if there is a benefit to it, implementing greater cleanliness in my day to day life, and how being a just and pious believer doesn't mean you allow yourself to get walked on, but rather that it entails both gentleness and courage to stand up for what is right in all situations, including for yourself (basically not being a passive doormat, while still handling all circumstances with great character).

What is quite interesting about the quotes above is that they all demonstrate an aspect of translation as self-transformation. Namely, that the converts showed that they underwent a significant personal transformation/translation. In this case, that translation manifested in several ways. Firstly, converts took conscious steps to move away from their previous lifestyles and habits. Several of the participants above noted how their previous lifestyles that included alcohol, partying, drugs, and casual sex were harmful to them. After their conversion to Islam, and thus, through their process of self-translation, they rid themselves of these habits and became much happier with their lifestyle. Furthermore, even for those participants who did not report any changes regarding such substance use, many became noticeably happier. This happiness was due to an improvement in personal relationships with friends and family,

the development of a more positive self-image, and a deeper understanding of how they fit into this world (worldview) and the role that they play within it. Assuming that their conversion did indeed play a pivotal role in their improved relationships, could that then suggest that converts may then find themselves in a better place to potentially act as a translator and mediator?

4.2.4. Does the "Ideal" Mediator Exist?

Being in the place of a mediator also assumes that both the source and target cultures are willing to be translated and received. According to the information depicted in figures 8 and 9 above, along with the quotes from the focus groups, it seems that converts have difficulties being accepted by both groups.

Furthermore, the converts who participated in the questionnaire were each posed the question "what are some examples of times in which you saw yourself acting (or wishing to act) as a translator/mediator between Muslims and non-Muslims? This question was then followed up by asking them if they had believed that they had acted as effective translators/mediators in those situations. The responses to the first question were quite varied, although it seems that the majority of the participants said that they acted as mediators specifically in situations where non-Muslims asked them general questions about Islam, or were looking to clarify misconceptions about the religion, typically due to stereotypes from media representation. One particular participant emphasized this in her response by saying, "I work at a hospital, and sometimes there are questions about Muslim patients' beliefs. I've also had people ask me if stereotypes they've heard are true. Another thing I've had is questions about Islam when people purporting to me Muslims commit violent acts that are reported in the media."

Other participants also report translating, not only at work and in different institutions, but also for their family members, excitedly stating, "when I am with my family! When I was at work or interacting with any non-Muslim." Being able to translate for the society at large may be easier as there is less of an emotional tie on the translator. This allows the converts to translate more freely and in a less-emotionally strained manner. However, it is also important to consider the implications of acting as a translator for those who are closest to the participants—their family and friends. It will be of particular significance to analyze how these personal relationships have evolved as it is likely these people who have witnessed the converts undergoing the process of self-translation. These relatives and friends have seen how the converts were before they became Muslim and will have seen how different aspects of their personality, culture, identity, and/or worldview have changed after their conversion.

The responses in this section varied greatly. Some participants reported little to no change in the quality of their relationships with their family and friends, whereas others reported worsening relationships, or, surprisingly in some cases, improved relationships. Again, the key here seemed to depend on two main points. The first of those points was the will to be receptive of, and respectful towards, the convert's choice to self-transform/convert. If the family member or friend already had a negative bias towards Islam, and they were unwilling to look past that bias, then the translation was not received successfully. The second point to consider here is that, as mentioned earlier, the converts are translating under the restraint of being a friend or family member. If their relationship with their family was not on good terms before their conversion, then there was also a possibility that the relationship would not change for the better post-conversion either. Such was the case with one participant who said that "My relationship with my mom before conversion was extremely bad. My mom has

always been hyper-critical and judgemental. After converting the relation has remained the same." However, it may also be the case that during the self-translation process, the convert changed their character for the better and placed an increased emphasis on respect for parents and kin. Indeed, many converts reported a positive change in their character, ethics, and morals after their conversion. Keeping with these two points in mind, let's now analyze the other responses.

Below, we are faced with two accounts of negative reactions from relatives to the participants' self-translations:

> I had just moved across the country to the state to be closer to my relative less than a year before my conversion. After my conversion, I lost my stepmother, my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, and, eventually, my birth mother, all within five years. I would say we had a good relationship before, but becoming a Muslim changed everything.
>
> Only three of my relatives will speak to me even four years later: my mom, my grandma who raised me, and a cousin. I have made an effort to be a more dutiful daughter and repair my relationship with my mother who has struggled with drug abuse my whole life. My friends, *alhamdulillah*, were extremely accepting.

In the two examples given above to represent the participants' negative reactions from family members, we can notice two very distinct reasons. The first is due to a negative bias towards Muslims that was held by the convert's family. Despite the positive changes that the convert underwent, the target's bias proved too much to be overcome, and they were thus unwilling to receive the translation. The second example of a negative response that was provided above was due to quite a different reason. Namely, it was due to the fact that the questionnaire participant's mother was already struggling with drug abuse, which also in turn affected her ability to effectively receive her child's self-transformation.

On the other end of the spectrum, some of the participants said that their relationships with their family and/or their friends had improved from how it was before their conversion.

> My relatives (especially parents) have become my highest priority. The relationship with the mother of my daughter has improved. Aunts and Uncles have become closer. I have kept in touch with only a few pre-conversion friends, but those were the good ones!

Not only does the success of translation depend on the target's willingness to receive, but it also depends on the translator's willingness to translate. In some cases, the participants knowingly refrained from translation, for various reasons. In one instance, a participant revealed that they had avoided certain friendships out of fear of compromising their religion.

> At first, I had to stay away from many friends because I feared falling into what I deemed as bad influences. Many of my friends were succeeding in academics, and some not, but I didn't want to interrupt my life from Divine Success. There is school, there is career, and then there is the scale of the Day of Judgement. So, in the latter, the grade is long lasting. I think I had to go through that stage. However, now I do wish I could have maintained some of those relationships as I now have the maturity and strength to preserve my faith while being a good friend to others of different viewpoints.
>
> Regarding pre-conversion friends, I have only maintained relationships with two of my female pre-conversion friends. The rest I have broken ties with as they were either male, they were "party friends," or they lived lifestyles that I could no longer relate to, or participate in.

Clearly, the participants' worldviews and morals/values had changed significantly during their self-translation processes. Due to this, they felt like they no longer aligned with some of their pre-conversion friends' lifestyles. However, it is also important to take note that, in the case of the first quote, later on in their journey of self-transformation, the participant then gained a higher level of maturity and confidence in their faith which led them to be able to better interact with, and translate for, people of differing worldviews. These facts emphasize the evaluative aspect of conversion that was described in Hiebert (2008), during which the convert interacts with the surrounding culture and evaluates which aspects of it are beneficial or not to their new

religious identity. If the convert deems certain aspects of their culture to not be of benefit to their religious worldview, they will leave them.

Just as conversion is a process, self-transformation, and the very act of translation itself also should not be relegated to a binary of start to finish, or source to target. Rather, it too, is a process, with its own ups and downs and backs and forths. There is no clear start or finish to the process of translation as self-transformation, as it is a constant back and forth, bidirectional translation between both source and target communities, with the convert acting both as the facilitator of translation, and also, it's translated object. In fact, multiple participants reported that, while they had initially been rejected by friends and/or family, these same people eventually came around to understanding and respecting their choices with time and through witnessing the continuous process of the converts' self-transformation.

> Overtime it got a lot better. I think since my family had a very negative view of Islam, they were quick to pass judgments. Now, since I've been Muslim for 5 years, it shows them how devoted I am, and that this wasn't just something I took lightly.
>
> It took about 10 years for my family to get used to being Muslim. They thought it was a phase, but now no one really notices. My friends didn't change much because of being Muslim.

Again, the quotes above emphasize not only the ongoing and continuous nature of the process of self-transformation, but also the necessary bidirectionality of such a process. The acceptance of the converts by those who were closest to them (family and friends) did not happen overnight. Rather, it took the constant translation between source and target, back and forth, over a period of time in order for the translation effort to finally have been deemed as effective and accepted. Even now, this translation process is likely still ongoing, as the positive translation will need constant maintenance in order to remain effective and accepted.

Indeed, any negative experience could potentially undo all of the positive translation work that has been done by the converts thus far.

Apart from being able to mediate between family and friends, several respondents also reported that they felt as if they were able to act as translators solely by existing in their unique position as a convert. For example, one participant said that she translated "on a daily basis, because of my situation as a French-Canadian Muslim." Others clarified the above statement by adding that "I do that in my family and in every institution I am a part of. By simply being a member of this society, I am mediating between Muslims and non-Muslims," and "I feel like in everyday life I do this just by existing in a place where there are Muslims and non-Muslims."

Another respondent went even further in clarifying the above statements by saying,

> Yes, I do feel like I am able to act as an effective mediator. I have spent several years living in a Muslim-majority country and have spent significant time since converting learning about Islam and Islamic values/ beliefs. I feel that I am an effective mediator as I have a strong understanding of my own (Western) culture, of the foundations of Islam, and of the culture of a Muslim majority society. For this reason, I believe that I am able to explain various, and sometimes complicated, or specific concepts, to non-Muslim individuals in a relatable and culturally competent manner.

Clearly, the questionnaire participants have recognized their unique position and ability to translate due to their experience with both cultures and societies. Such experiences would seem to suggest that they are in an ideal place to act as translators between their respective communities of belonging. However, as we shall see, this is not always the case.

As mentioned earlier, it appeared that the converts experienced discrimination from both the society at large as well as from the Muslim community. Interestingly, when posed the question about which circumstances they had seen themselves acting as translators/mediators, one respondent answered, "I think I've seen ignorance on both ends of things, where Muslims

don't understand where a non-Muslim is coming from, and certainly vice-versa. It's an interesting place to be in, to understand a non-Muslim's perspective, go through a transformation, then understand a Muslim's perspective. It's a learning journey." This response is particularly important as it shows that the converts themselves also understand the process of self-transformation they undergo as they progress throughout the conversion process. They are able to see things from a non-Muslim perspective, as that was the starting point of their transformation/journey. They then underwent a self-transformation process in which they began to see things through a new perspective, and perhaps even through a new worldview. Additionally, this response also emphasizes the lack of understanding on both sides and thus the resulting inability for the convert to translate/mediate effectively. Here, it is again important to emphasize and remind that bidirectionality is a key feature of translation as self-transformation. The convert cannot only translate to one target, but rather is constantly going back and forth between the source and target communities, while simultaneously acting as both the translator and the translated. On the other hand, this feature is not present in linguistic/text-based translation in which the translator merely takes the source and relates it to the target. In that case, there is no need for the target then to be translated to the source. Moreover, the translator only fulfills her/his role as translator; they do not become the object of translation—the translated.

By analyzing the participants' responses to the question "Do you feel like you acted as an effective mediator in those situations? Why or why not?", it became apparent that the participants' unique positions as converts were not the defining factor about whether they could translate effectively or not. Rather, the most important condition for effective mediation/translation was the willingness of both sides to be receptive to the information that

was being translated. One of the participants clearly identified this circumstance by saying, “it all depends on people's openness. When people are interested in learning, rather than simply debating, great exchanges can take place.”

In order to be willing to receive the information that the translator is conveying, the target must also have a clear channel through which to receive. For example, this channel may become partially or completely blocked by one’s own internalized stereotypes, hatred, or simply ignorance. In one case, a respondent said that they only felt like they could mediate effectively sometimes. They continued their response by saying,

> I try to rationally approach things through what I’ve learned in my education through sociological and intercultural communication classes. Other times, I keep my mouth shut for fear of backlash from both communities (White small town/Muslims): being called non-Muslim/Kuffar, being called a towelhead, a terrorist, fear of abuse from strangers in community, etc.

In another case, a participant reported that she had an easier time translating because she was not visibly identifiable as a Muslim. She said that due to her position as a non-visibly Muslim woman,

> I feel like I’m more likely to observe peoples stereotypes regarding Muslims and Islam because of this and often times it gives me an opportunity to educate or correct them. I also think if people perceive you as a “neutral” or “less conservative” opinion, they’re more likely to seriously consider what you are telling or teaching them, vs. interpreting it as bias or skewed. So, in that way, I feel I’m afforded a great opportunity to effectively mediate people’s misconceptions or judgements on Islam, and I do feel I am usually successful in how I educate them.

From this response, we can take note of two important points. The first being that, as stated earlier, the target needs to be free of any bias they may have in order to be able to openly receive. However, it is likely the case that completely removing an already held bias may be an impossible or even unrealistic task. Nevertheless, the target must remain as open-minded as possible in order to facilitate the reception of the translation. The second important point

that we must discuss is that, not only does the bias of the receiver need to be cleared, but also the translator must remain invisible and unbiased in order to work effectively. If the target perceives any bias from the part of the source and/or the translator, they will be much less likely to listen to the information that is being translated to them.

For this reason, the participants were also posed a question about whether or not they felt like they had acted as effective mediators/translators in those situations. The responses could be summarized into four categories: yes, no, unsure, and not applicable. Here, the respondent chose non-applicable as she had not found herself in any situation that had required mediation or translation. The categories of responses are represented below in figure 10.

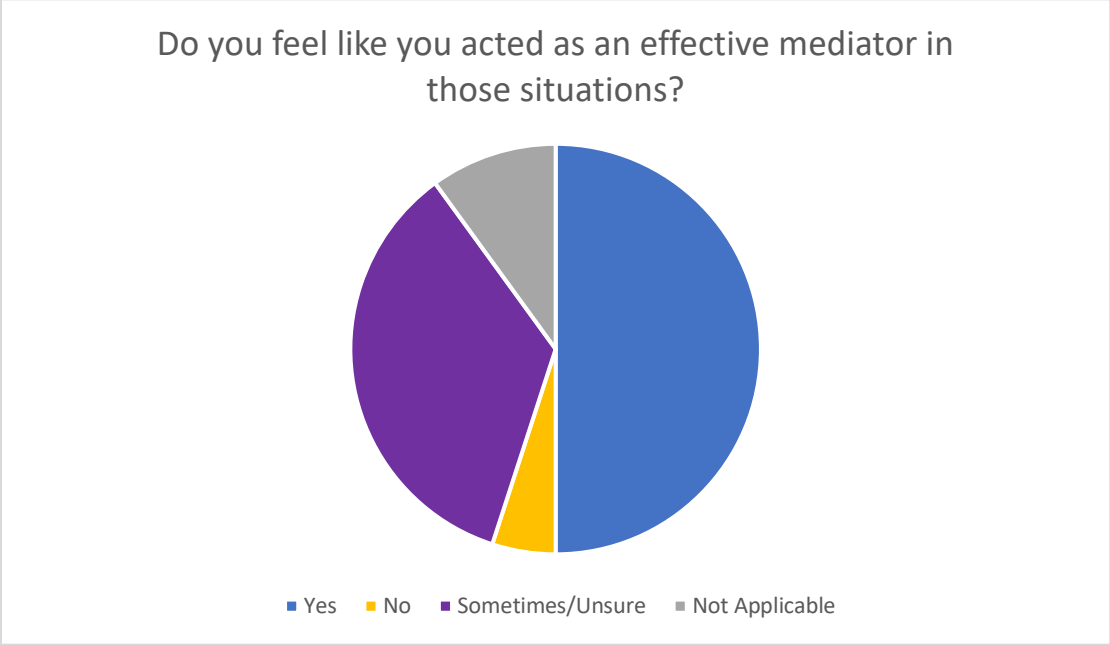

Figure 10

4.2.5. 'Reverts' as a Third Culture

Let us now remember our initial hypothesis; namely, that converts would occupy a unique position in which they could potentially act as an ideal translator between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities due to them having experience with both communities.

However, throughout the rigorous analysis of both the findings from the questionnaire as well as the focus groups, we have seen that converts have unfortunately experienced high levels of discrimination from the non-Muslim and Muslim communities. This finding suggests that perhaps, despite their experience with both communities, the converts are not indeed in an ideal position to act as translators, due to the certain level of rejection that they faced from both communities.

Nevertheless, Nida's diagram that we analyzed earlier on in figure 7 suggests that having a good footing in, and cultural understanding of, both the source and target cultures would ensure a better translation. While Nida's reasoning in figure 7 may be true to a certain extent, we must also realize that Nida's diagram in figure 7 is simply idealistic in the way that it does not take neither the source's willingness to be translated, nor the target's willingness to receive the translation into consideration. Of course, one could argue that the kind of translation that Nida had in mind when creating his diagram was that of a written text in one language being translated into a written text of another language. Indeed, in such a case, the role of the translator is more passive, and the issue of translatability and reception is less apparent, due to the nature of the text being inanimate (although still inevitably linked to the culture of the author), rather than a group of people, as is our case with the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Even more importantly, the translator, at least in written works, is much more invisible. Although he or she may choose to include a foreword, footnotes/endnotes, and perhaps even a translator's biography, the source and target communities do not interact with the translator on a deeper level in person. However, in the case of the converts in our study, they are acting in an extremely visible position with direct in-person access to both the source and target languages. Thus, the willingness of the source culture to be translated and the

willingness of the target culture to receive the translation of the source culture through the lens of the convert acting as a translator is of paramount importance. Therefore, while Nida's diagram for Biblical translation has some bearing to it, we should also take it with a grain of salt regarding the aforementioned issues of translatability and reception, as it does not take these factors into consideration.

So, what does this information mean for the study at hand? Well, in some ways we can re-imagine Nida's diagram to show the source and target cultures as overlapping, as is the case with a Venn diagram. The convert who is acting as a translator would then occupy the middle part of the diagram, where the source and target cultures overlap, representing the convert's experience with both cultures. The converts then fall into a new third category, which takes aspects from both the source and target cultures. Let us call this third category, "the revert culture."

Here, it is important to clarify the fact that some converts make a distinction between the terms *revert* and *convert*. The focus group participant, Kristen, preferred to use the term revert and justified her choice as such: "the reason that I identify as a revert rather than as a convert, is that a convert to me implies coming from one religion to another and I wasn't really raised in Christianity nor Catholicism. I really embraced Islam from a blank canvas. So, for me it's coming back to my original state." Although the terms have slight differences in connotation, they can be used interchangeably. It should be mentioned that the author's preference is to use the term *convert* for the purposes of the current study.

Indeed, several of the participants in the female focus group reported belonging to this unique "third culture." Kristen started off the discussion in the focus group by saying that,

> Well, I mean, can't you say that, in a way, that reverts is a culture? And, like, that that's part of our identity, too? Like, culture isn't necessarily just, like,

> "I'm Canadian," or, you know, "I'm from wherever" —it's a community, right? So, our community, I think they can be tied and that, but I totally agree with the other ladies that my culture would be… I'm a revert in a way, because now it's like, we're kind of alienated from both, in a way, because, you know, we weren't brought up Muslim, and now our past culture's not the same, so, now our culture—and personally identity is, as a revert—and that doesn't mean that we all do the same exact thing, but we're all part of the same community.

To Kristen's initial statement of reverts having their own separate and unique culture, several participants chimed in and responded in agreement. In particular, Ciara drew some very deep and thoughtful connections between the state of the Muslim converts today and that of the very first people to accept the message of Islam and become Muslims.

> But I also wanted to state that, I think as Muslims, our entire culture is a revert culture. Everyone broke —even the early *Sahabas*[27]—they broke away from whatever their cultures were, and they were all reverts. So, *subhanAllah*,[28] like, just through being Muslim, our culture, being the revert culture, we are connected to the first Muslims.

Furthermore, yet another participant of the female focus group, Amirah, further deepened the analysis of revert culture, both past and present, by demonstrating the act of Self-Translation that the initial converts to Islam underwent by breaking off from certain aspects of their pre-Islamic identity, and in some circumstances, from their own family and community:

> And someone mentioned their unhappy attempts being associated to their culture, because, maybe there are things happening in the world, but, we need to also remember that those —I mean when *RasulAllah*, *sal Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*,[29] was present, it was the age of *jahiliyyah*,[30] and those people chose to reform themselves and show them Arabs can be different people. They can be people with all of their already positive traits that they had, and then they can include Islam on top of it to be some of the best people that we know.

Prama also agreed with Amirah's statement, confirming that,

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[27] *Sahaba*: A companion of the prophet Muhammad
[28] *SubhanAllah*: Glory be to Allah
[29] *Sal Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*: A term of respect used when talking about the propet Muhammad. It means "may peace be upon him."
[30] *Jahiliyyah*: Ignorance

> That's exactly what I was going to say in response to what Kristen said—that we, as reverts, that in itself is a culture, and it immediately made me think of the time of the *Sahabas*—may Allah be pleased with them all. You know, they had so much tension within their own families, and, you know, leaving what their forefathers did, and leaving that culture. So, as she had mentioned, that our Prophet, *sal Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, created this new kind of culture based on our Islam, and based on our spirituality, and, yeah, no, that's actually exactly what I was going to say.

Ciara then took the discussion deeper by tracing the phenomenon of reverts even further into Islamic history by including a reference to the story of Prophet Abraham. "What's really so interesting is that even Ibrahim[31] *'alayhi salam*[32], he broke off from his people, even what his father was practicing. So, this idea of that we are all reverts is really beautiful and profound, I think." In this quote, Ciara is referring to the story of how prophet Abraham broke away from his own family and community, who were worshipping idols, in order to follow a purely monotheistic religion.

4.2.6. A "Balanced" Convert – *Bildung*: Alienation or Appropriation?

Part of being an effective translator/mediator is being able to translate in a "balanced" manner between both the source and the target languages. Revisiting Nida's diagram of Biblical translation, we can imagine our translator as the arrow going from the source to the target, as we saw in the diagram. However, a more accurate depiction of the role of the convert would see the arrow going bidirectionally between the source and the target, with the convert having one foot planted in each culture. It is by this depiction, that we can envision a "balanced" convert—if they were to become biased towards one culture more than the other, they would lean to one side and their foot would become unstable and perhaps they would fall out of one culture and lean more towards the other one.

[31] Ibrahim: the Arabic name for Abraham
[32] *'Alayhi salam*: Arabic for "upon him be peace"

In order to analyze the phenomenon of what being a "balanced" convert means, we must draw inspiration and parallels from the theory of *Bildung*, which we covered in section 2.2 of the theoretical framework. More particularly, what interests the current study with *Bildung* are the concepts of alienation and appropriation, which draw on the notions of "Self" and "Other."

Indeed, converts to Islam find themselves in a unique position as they often feel like they have a dual identity, seeming to be neither entirely Self nor Other. In the case of Canadian and American converts, they feel as if they are the Self because they were born in Canada and America and were (likely) raised with a predominantly Canadian/American culture[33]. Of course, many Canadians and Americans possess a secondary culture (or multiple cultures in the case of those who come from mixed families, and especially in the case of those who are second generation Canadians/Americans or those who immigrated to Canada or America later in life.) However, through living in Canada or America for a great deal of time, they likely have an excellent knowledge of the dominant culture and are active participants within it. Indeed, many of the converts reported that, pre-conversion, they felt as a part of the majority culture and did not previously identify as a minority, or an "Other." However, due to their conversion, many converts also feel as though they are othered, especially those who wear visible religious symbols, such as the hijab. So, in some ways the converts felt a sense of "Self," but at the same time, they also felt the sense of being an "Other." When going through the process of conversion, and thus a self-transformation, a convert may tend to lean towards one culture or the other (Self or Other/source or target). In this case, the notion of *Bildung* will be key in understanding the self-translation that the convert is going through.

[33] Here, it is important to mention that, for the purposes of this study, we do not use the term *North American culture*, as North America also includes Mexico and central America. These cultures are significantly different from the American and Canadian cultures that we are analyzing, so it does not serve the purpose of this study to use the more encompassing term of *North American culture*.

By definition, *Bildung* is:

> […] concernée au plus près par le mouvement de la traduction : car celui-ci part en effet du propre, du même (le connu, le quotidien, le familier), pour aller vers l'étranger, l'autre (l'inconnu, le merveilleux, l'*Unheimlich*) et, à partir de cette expérience, *revenir à son point de départ*. (Berman 1984, 76-77)

For example, many of the converts who participated in the questionnaire and focus groups reported feeling unwelcome in their birth culture, such as Kristen, who said,

> The culture I grew up in was very white-Canadian. My family has been in Canada for many generations. And part of my family is Indigenous. So, a very long time in Canada. But, after I reverted, I definitely experienced a culture shock because of how differently I was treated now by the culture that I grew up in. Because, it's just, you don't know it until you experience it, but like, pre-hijab compared to post-hijab, it's just how strangers act around you, and how people treat you. I'm kind of new-ish to Islam—I mean, it's been less than a year since I reverted. But, before that, I was very patriotically Canadian. I am still very patriotic, but it's different than before. I used to have this ideal view of Canada as being not such a racist place, but it's just—it's different. But, now that I—I'm just a regular Muslimah, no real strong cultural ties.

Some even went as far as saying that they felt like they tried to be "more Arab" following their conversion, as the focus group participant, Aliyah, did when she said,

> Since I converted, in the beginning, I felt like I should make myself more Arab. Because I know, Islam is from Arab people. But then I slowly, slowly, the more I studied, I realized that Muslims should try to be *Sunnah*-oriented[34] instead of culture-driven. Because, basically, there is no perfect culture, but the *Sunnah* is what we should follow.

Through the two examples provided above, we can see that the converts are finding themselves from their culture of birth, whether due to community perception or of their own choice. The key thing to note between both types of distance is the level of the convert's agency. For example, in the first case, Kristen did not find herself as choosing to distance herself from the wider Canadian society. Rather, she was *othered* by the community, which led to her own (at

[34] *Sunnah*: The way/lifestyle of the prophet Muhammad.

least partial) alienation of the culture that she was raised in. In the second example, we saw Aliyah as purposefully rejecting her birth culture as she associated Islam with the Arab culture and thought that in order to be a better Muslim, she need to first become more Arab. However, with time, she realized that Islam was accepting of all cultures, and that she should instead focus on the *Sunnah*, which Islam emphasizes.

Now that we've discussed the above examples, let's revisit the concept of *Bildung* that we described above, and analyze the concepts of Self and Other through the metaphor of a mirror. In this way, the translator (in this case, the convert) can be thought of as looking into a mirror; they see the Other in the mirror but must still return to the Self. However, there is a chance that the convert may see too much of the Other in the mirror and not return to the Self. The opposite is also possible, in which they only see the Self and do not interact sufficiently with the Other. The first case would be considered as alienation, whereas the second would be appropriation. Provided that the convert is able to find a healthy *balance* between both Self (their culture pre-conversion) and Other (their post-conversion culture), despite being translated themselves, they may also become the ideal translators and mediators between cultures as well.

The key word which we have emphasized in the above paragraph is *balance*, which leads us back to our main point regarding the importance of a convert being balanced and as un-biased as possible in order to translate well between cultures and peoples. In Kristen's case, she didn't feel accepted by her birth culture. If the source culture is unwilling to accept her, and is treating her as an Other, then her ability to translate is negatively affected. As previously discussed, good translation requires both the source and target cultures to be willing to *receive* what the translator is telling them. If one side or the other is unwilling to receive information in an un-biased way, then naturally the translation is negatively affected. Again, we are reminded that bidirectionality

is a necessity for the phenomenon of translation as self-transformation. On the other hand, Aliyah was the one who initiated the alienation of her source culture, since she believed that she needed to be more Arab in order to become a better Muslim. Doing so pushed her away from her Chinese and Canadian cultures. However, she did eventually realize that Islam asks one to follow religious guidelines rather than any specific culture, as was discussed in Abd-Allah (2004) and also exemplified through Abd-Allah's work on Chinese Muslim identity (2006).

Additionally, many of the converts experienced discrimination from both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities, which we analyzed in section 4.2. This shows that, in general, converts face a high level of discrimination from both the source and target cultures/communities. Thus, despite being in an advantageous position to translate between both cultures, it seems that converts are ostracized in some ways from both communities. Without a willingness to receive, the convert will not be able to mediate and translate effectively.

5. Conclusion

Until this point, we have analyzed literature, such as that on the theory of *Bildung* and the related notions of alienation and appropriation, along with Paul Ricoeur's notion of hermeneutics, as described in relation to cultural translation in Sarah Maitland's (2017) work, which helps lead us towards a tentative definition of what translation as self-transformation is. Furthermore, as part of the current study, we have analyzed how the phenomenon of translation as self-transformation has presented itself in the case of Canadian and American Muslim converts through the collection of empirical data acquired from questionnaires and focus groups. The data that was collected from the convert participants in our study, as well as the examples of characters in *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (Conway 2017) and the Tagalog people (Rafael 1993), demonstrated that translation as self-transformation is a conscious act, which requires translating many elements of a person's previous worldview into their new identity. These elements can include facets of both their culture and identity.

As seen in section 4.1 of the findings, culture and identity are not mutually exclusive and often overlap. Furthermore, Conway's distinction between religion as culture and religion as belief, as was demonstrated through the examples of Rev. Thorne and Sarah Hamoudi in *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, was helpful in determining the fact that religion, at least in the case of conversion, was closer to falling under the category of identity. Additionally, this fact was corroborated by the data collected from the questionnaires and focus groups, particularly in questions where the participants were asked about their own thoughts on the notions of culture and identity, and also where religion might then fall between the two.

By determining how converts function in relation to culture and identity, it was shown that there was a potential for them to act as translators and mediators between the non-Muslim

Canadian and American community and the Muslim community provided that they are able to balance between both cultures and not fall into the trap of alienating or appropriating either culture. Such a translator could help to foster greater understanding and acceptance between the two communities. However, as demonstrated through the responses to questions regarding the difficulties and challenges they faced post-conversion within both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities, the data seems to suggest that converts experienced a good number of challenges and hardships from both communities. Therefore, it is also important to mention that, although converts may find themselves in an ideal position to act as translators due to their position of having experienced life as part of both communities, translation can only be successful if both communities are willing to be *receptive* of it.

The research that has been done as part of the current study on the theory of translation as self-transformation is significant to the field of Translation Studies since it is a unique contribution that has looked at translation through the lens of religion and, more specifically, religious conversion. Although Rafael (1993) has already tackled religious conversion in his work with the Tagalog, as we saw in section 2.5.1, his work focused more so on the cultural and translational gaps that led to such a conversion, which was also done under *force* and *coercion* by the Spanish conquerors. Thus, although religion, and more specifically, conversion, have been looked at in terms of translation before, it has not been done so in a way that addressed a *chosen* and *willful* conversion process. Moreover, the ability of the converts to act as cultural mediators and translators between communities has also not been addressed.

By interviewing different Muslim converts and by understanding how they are perceived by the wider non-Muslim, Canadian or American society in which they live, we may begin to understand how politics and societal expectations in their particular regions affect their ability to

express themselves and their faith (translation from source to target) and how they are received by the wider non-Muslim society (reception). Since the current study worked with Muslim converts in Canada and America, it would also be of interest to focus future work on other regions (and even religions) around the globe, particularly in Europe and the Middle East. For example, someone who converts in North America may have a very different experience from someone who converts in France, Jordan, or Israel/Palestine due to the different socio-political complexes that are present in those regions. Such research would also be important for general society as it highlights key issues in why some peoples/groups are well-received or are not well-received by the society at large. This research would then likely be able to highlight issues of discrimination and social inequalities and some of their likely causes. It would then be possible to look at these causes and suggest potential ways for the society to move forward and look at ways to correct such inequalities. Such translation work would be a key link to work in matters of social justice. Therefore, future work on this topic may answer the question: by looking at cultural translation through the lens of religious conversion, how are translation and reception affected by different socio-political contexts?

In conclusion, could there be other possible applications of the proposed theory of translation as self-transformation outside of the realm of religious translation? Of particular interest to this question is Sumner and Sexton's (2014) article, "Lost in Translation: Looking for Transgender Identity in Women's Prisons and Locating Aggressors in Prisoner Culture," due to their contrast of prison "aggressors" vs. transgender individuals. The distinction between the two terms is important because, as Sumner and Sexton state, "unlike transgender, aggressor does not denote gender identity; rather, it implies presentation and performance as reflexive of gendered ways of navigating relationships within the context of a sex-segregated setting" (Sumner and Sexton

2014, 1). In short, prisoners sometimes adopt the role of an "aggressor" while in prison to assert social dominance. However, more often than not, these prisoners relinquish their "aggressor" identity once they leave the prison system, thus reverting to their pre-incarceration self. However, transgender individuals are markedly different, as the identity that they adopt is decidedly more permanent, and deeply affects their life at the level of worldview—just as translation as self-transformation affects the worldview of religiously converted individuals. Therefore, the theory of translation as self-transformation *can* be applied to more cases than just that of converts, but further research on the topic is necessary to confirm this hypothesis and analyze how such self-transformation in other contexts might take place.

As we can see, the proposed theory is valuable not only to the current context of religious conversion, but may also have important implication amongst other facets of the societies in which we live, such as gender identity. By researching how translation as self-transformation takes place in different social groups, we can then analyze issues of social inequalities and move forward on the journey to social justice and equity. As Maitland (2017) mentioned, cultural translation begins by seeking to understand. One begins the journey with the Self. The journey then ends by learning more about where one stands in relation to difference by interacting with Others. Thus, by understanding how the process of translation as self-transformation unfolds for various individuals, we can start to approach a better understanding and appreciation of the translated/transformed Other. It then follows that, by approaching that which is different/Other and by interacting with it, we learn more about ourselves. Cultural translation is the journey homeward bound; it is the journey to self-transformation.

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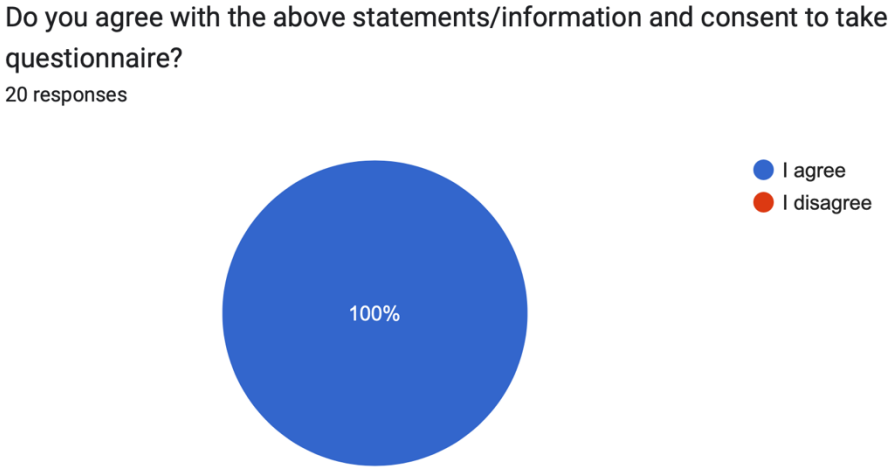
7. Appendix

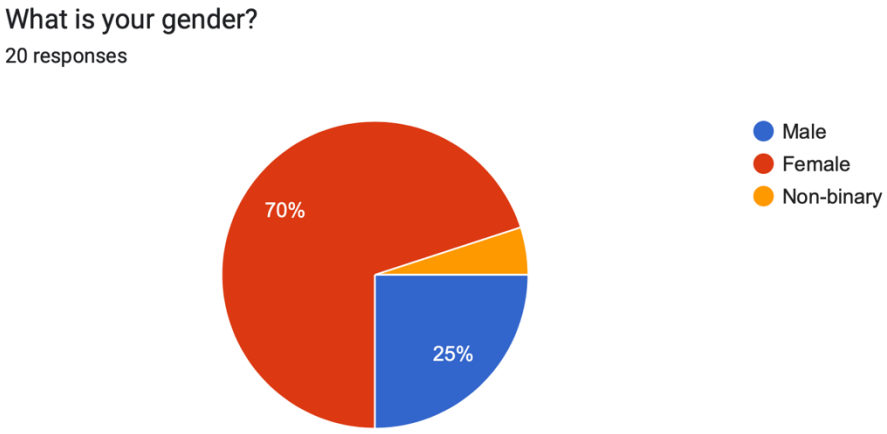
7.1. Questionnaire and Answers[35]

Part 1: Informed Consent
Do you agree with the above statements/information and consent to take part in this questionnaire?



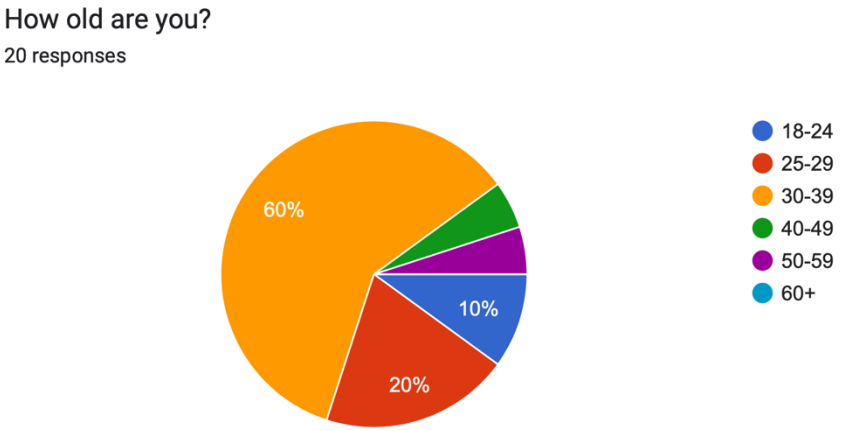
Part 2: Questionnaire Questions

1) What is your gender?

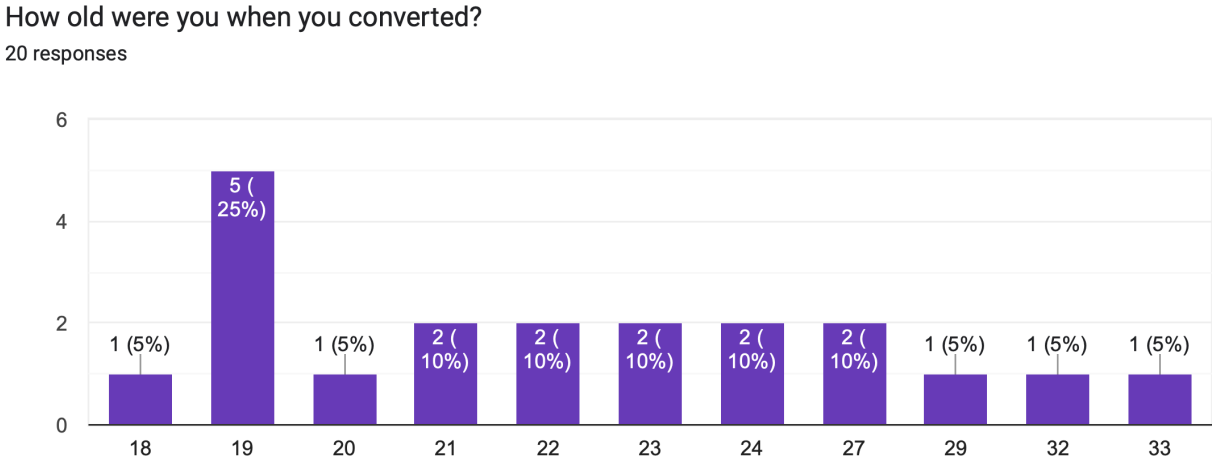


2) How old are you?

[35] Questionnaire responses and graphs have been copied directly as-is from Google Forms. The participants' quotes have not been edited for grammar or spelling. However, for readability purposes, they have been edited for clarity within the thesis body itself.



3) How old were you when you converted?



4) What were the positive experiences and personal changes/evolutions you had following your conversion when integrating into the Muslim community? (Please list and give further detail/describe if needed)

- We integrated into our local mosque quickly and it allowed us to learn important aspects of Islam within a community setting and that took off a lot of pressure. It also put more pressure on us to dress more "Islamicly". Which of the time I wouldn't say with a negative or a positive. After I came out as non-binary all of that changed.
- I accepted Islam in Bangladesh and learnt almost everything I know about religion in Pakistan and in a madrassah in South Africa. I then traveled seven months in Egypt and Sudan where I learnt to read and speak arabic relatively well (though far from perfectly). In other words, it was a great learning expérience and it changed my whole life around. I used to be an alcoholic and drug addict, almost homeless. My younger brother and i more or less went the same path at first, but I converted to Islam and he died of an overdose a few years back.

- I found myself no longer dependent on alcohol/partying and the like for socialization and emotional management. I also developed a more positive self image of myself.
- I saw myself become very active in learning, I taught myself to pray and kind women at the masjid corrected any big mistakes, I happily became an early bird. I became softer in my character alhamdulillah and my family noticed that change a lot in me. As a Jewish woman I already was quite modest so Islam seemed a natural next step for me, and the women at my masjid helped me understand the honor of the hijab.
- I don't think I've ever integrated into the community unfortunately. I have met some Muslim friends though. I have enjoyed having people to hang out doing halal activities rather than those that involve alcohol. I've also found comfort in having friends who can use Islamic principles and Quran when reassuring me or talking to me in hard times.
- I became more confident in myself. I feel like having security in my faith made other things around me better. I didn't feel the need to worry as much about issues that now felt irrelevant. I also gain closer relationships to other girls and felt uplifted through that. I focused more on building myself into a better person and this consciously made me become less selfish. I feel like it also made me more curious and excited.
- I can't say I had a ton of positive experiences. When I converted I did so alone. There were women around in the Masjid when I converted. I followed what the Iman told me and that was it. My own family was not fond of me converting. Honestly it been a tough rode.
- Positive experiences were exposure to many many different cultures in one place (masjid). Was lucky enough to join a community with all different ethnicities and origins. Had greater exposure to different languages (learned to read arabic, now am familiar with a lot of conversational urdu) and a greater baseline understanding of cultural regions (Southeast Asia, the Levant, and North Africa/East Africa) I'm not sure I would have been able to acquire without the collection of so many diverse people in one place. Obviously I became more attentive to my own personal behavior— paying greater attention to the pervasiveness of dishonesty in myself personally (whether it was white lies, exaggerating, being less forthcoming in general), my values (modesty physically and behaviorally), I no longer drink, the importance of not passing judgement (judgement/intuition is a life skill and I still pride myself on being very perceptive, but I am far more attentive to the subconscious labeling I may be doing as I experience the world). I also became even more in touch and aware of my white privilege AND was able to connect/discuss life experience with POC more openly due to the fact that we had a common faith/connection that "may not have been there otherwise" (which is really sad— but true and understandable— the average North American or even european white person is not assumed to be "safe" to be honest/comfortable with until proven otherwise by a lot of POC due to the pervasiveness of racism.
- I found the place and the spiritual family I belong to 3 years after converting. After I found them life start to be easier and I felt that I was not so lonely anymore. I found great frienship.
- - Amazing community of sisterhood; because of the physical modesty and modesty in conduct with men (hijab as a whole), I noticed that Muslim women weren't as catty with one another as I had experienced with other women, and I suspect it's because

they're not serving as sexual competition to one another. I noticed much healthier relationships between women, and they were a LOT of fun to be around too! Very goofy personalities, lots of energy, and kind hearts that were also able to give sincere advice when necessary. Invested in each others' growth. Of course this wasn't all Muslim women I met, but a larger proportion than some other female relationships I'd had before as a woman. - Very gradual step-by-step process to becoming Muslim. It's as though something didn't make any sense, then it was a matter of knowledge until it suddenly clicked - Indescribably better degree of contentment in life. I used to have this unending, underlying angst about life and just not knowing what the purpose of life is, wondering what happens when you die and just falling asleep theorizing without ever coming to a conclusion. Now, there's such a contentment with knowing how all the pieces fit together (as informed by a book (Quran) undeniably from Allah/God). - Many learnings about Islamic perspectives, such as conduct with parents (greatly improved now), respecting others' privacy in conversations, being mindful of/staying away from backbiting, only sharing information about someone/something if there is a benefit to it, implementing greater cleanliness in my day to day life, and how being a just and pious believer doesn't mean you allow yourself to get walked on, but rather than it entails both gentleness and courage to stand up for what is right in all situations, including for yourself (basically not being a passive doormat, while still handling all circumstances with great character).

- I don’t have a Muslim community near me that I am a part of (aside from my husband,) but when we travel out of state to his family’s house and go to their masjid everyone is always very welcoming and willing to help with whatever I need. I’ve also made many friends online within the Muslim community. I’ve been able to make friends with born Muslims and reverts, and it’s always been a positive experience.
- Praise God - Countless positive experiences and personal changes - Islam is an Ocean, Elhamdoulillah. Better health, better relationships, better life focus, and insha'Allah, eternal salvation.
- Deeping relationship with my parents, spiritual and personal discipline, improved relationship with my ex/mother of my daughter (divorced 5 years before conversion), marriage and integration into a Muslim family structure (East African), inspired by Islamic intellectual and artistic history, deepening commitment to equity, social justice, and Indigenous relations
- Among the personal changes, was the ability to find the strength to abstain from what is harmful to the human soul in disobeying God as the entire group has a moral code by which to live by. I also benefitting from the various Adab or Manners that are innate in the plethora of Muslim cultures and ethnicities. There is also an ethos that life isn't incomplete if you don't reach your goals immediately. I always considered that not entering an Ivy League school was the end of my life. However, I saw many Muslims continuing their education not matter their economic standing. A Muslims is taught to keep striving for higher achievements till their last breath.
- Welcomed by everyone, given opportunities and help, new friends, communities of convets, encouragement and support.
- I began to understand myself, and began to view myself from a deeper perspective. I focused on and realized the importance of consistancy. I was fairly attached to the

notion of external things bringing fulfillment to my life, instead I turned inwards and began to balance internal with external.

- The most positive part about converting is that I feel I am being true to myself and true to God, like I am following what Allah willed for me. Also, as a part of my conversion I gave up drinking alcohol, using drugs, dating/ casual sex - leaving these habits behind has been one of the best things I have done in my life up until now. Also, I feel more beautiful now that I observe hijab. I feel that I am more considerate and accepting of others and more conscious in my decision making. I also feel that since converting I am better equipped to deal with different situations especially situations or experiences that are especially challenging or stressful. I have also been able to meet and build significant relationships with amazing people through integrating into the Muslim community, who I would never have connected with otherwise.
- I felt accepted and celebrated by the community. However there was no follow up support, no one to mentor me or teach me how to embody this new life. It was an adventure. I had a firm rooting in my own Jamaican culture, and I feel this enabled me to relate to the nature of culture and how it affects religion. It helped me not to get caught up with how people interpreted religion and instead to stick to the quest for truth. It was very sweet to see how my own shaha deeply affected others in the community- although we had never met before it seemed that my experience of taking my shahadah was a metaphor in other womens lives for repentance.
- My experiences are too many to enumerate, but I came to know so many inspiring people. An authentic way to express my beliefs into daily practices
- Positive experiences of Islam have been spiritual connection to life and the Earth in a way that enriches my life. It is a personal journey for me and I find comfort in my faith. I was able to travel to UAE and India because of my experiences as a revert. I met a lot of different Muslims which vary so much depending on geographical location, culture and world view. I was living as a guest in an Islamic country and I felt quite at home among people who shared my values. I was able to learn more about Islam from my experiences and to this day I am thankful for every difficulty that has been sent my way. I feel positive changes Islam has given me is patience during hard times, holding on to what's good in the world, tolerance for others, the value of taking care of family, the value of modesty, and emphasis on being a good person from the inside out to make the world a better place for all people to live in. My faith has driven me to study Health Education and Health Promotion to be able to improve living conditions within my own community.

5) What were the difficulties/challenges you faced in integrating into the Muslim community after your conversion? (Choose all that apply. You may add more categories if needed.)

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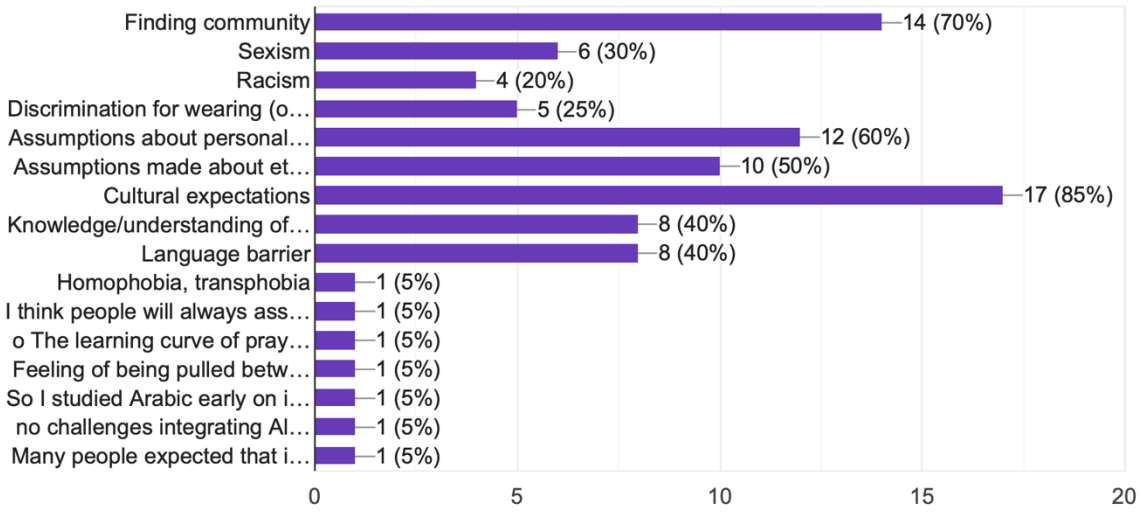
20 responses



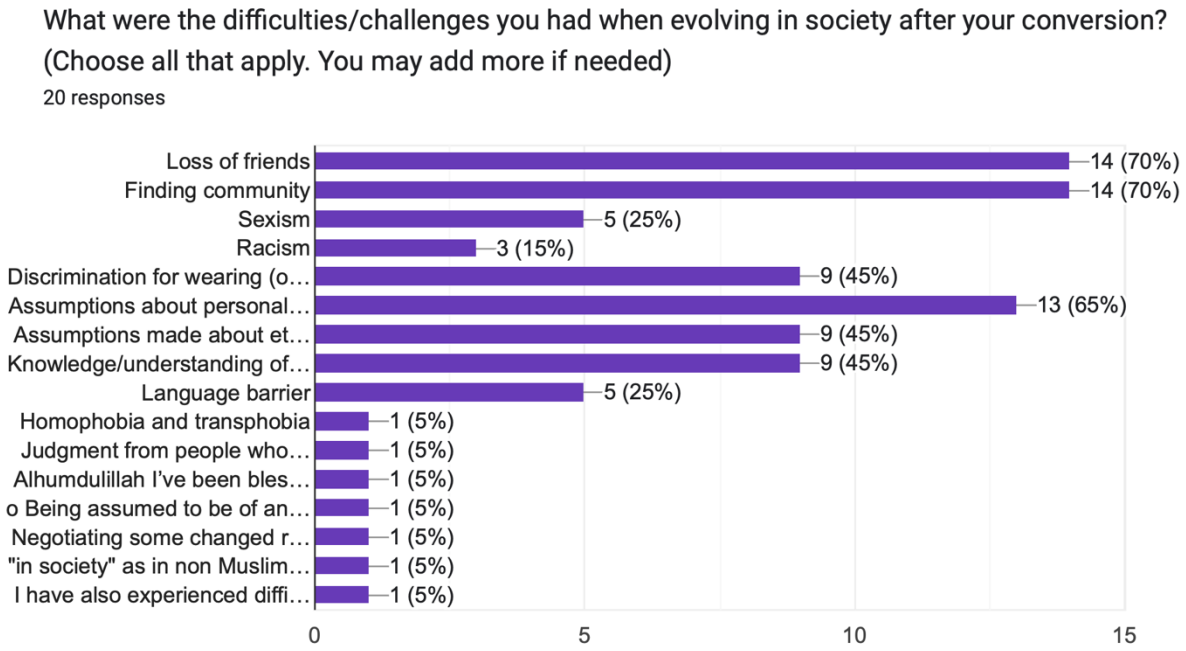
6) What were the positive experiences and personal changes/evolutions you had following your conversion in your relationship with the society/culture at large? (Please list and give further detail/describe if needed)

- I don't have positive experiences, I was rejected by Western society and the American culture that I was a part of before I converted. I lost my direct family and many close friends.
- I always had a problem fitting in, which probably had me traveling in the first place. I spent, all in all, years in Latin America and Asia with very little money sleeping the cheapest place i could find or at the train or bus station. When I came back, I had lost all ties, never really got to make friends again. My relation with my parents ended up getting better, especially after i married and, well, after my brother died. I somewhow managed to find odd jobs here and there and finally ended up going to university. It's still not easy, I had to deal with mental health issues but all in all I think I am more fucntional now than I would ever have been if I didn't become muslim.
- I found myself having some difficulty with navigating socializing with new peers due to me not participating in alcohol culture
- I realized a lot about how people felt about who I was by how they treated me so differently. I valued immensely the loyalty and understanding/willingness to understand of the people who stood by my side. I was proud that people at my school accepted me as a niqabi and that others around me would stand up for me if anyone bothered me which was rare.
- I have a better body image and feel less influenced by beauty standards. I no longer believe I have as much control over my destiny as I did. Allah swt is who is in charge. I feel I try harder to be kind and polite to represent Islam well compared to when I blended in as just another white woman.

- I feel like I was able to navigate friendship more and find people I felt were genuine. I became aware of the values I had and how I wanted that translated in those I surround myself with.
- Where I live it seems to be a convert you are an outsider. The community is not welcoming of converts.
- I give others much more benefit of the doubt. I feel more connected to all other humans. I think I've become more humble and more in touch with my smallness (literally and universally, not necessarily irrelevance or a nihilistic way) than I was previously. The importance of my kindness to others and community service or charity.
- I live in two different provinces, the first province (Quebec) it wasnt a good experience but in the second province (Ontario) I feel respected. People see me as someone of faith and some person asked me to pray for them.
- - Many people are soooo much more chill with me as a hijabi than I'd expect (in Ontario and in British Columbia, even in total 'white' towns) - Much greater respect for and interest in learning about other religions - Much greater respect for cultures and languages. I'm now seeing more of the connection between culture, language, and immigration, and just how incredibly admirable it is for any immigrant to come into a new country - Finding confidence in myself with a new identity; now as a 6.5 year Muslim feeling totally confident with where I'm at (Alhamdulillah!)
- A positive experience I've had is being able to share my religion with non-Muslims.
- A greater appreciation for tradition, history, and religious experience.
- Stronger sense of self, pride in my ancestors, motivation to be a good ancestor to my descendants, even better relationship with parents, putting neighbours as a priority, commitment to social justice, such as combatting police brutality and solidarity with Indigenous peoples
- As a Muslim you can and should begin to be human, a real human that wants to spend this life improving the human condition.
- From an Islamic perspective, I became concerned for other people more - for their guidance, and being good towards them.
- Honestly everyone in the community so far have been extremely friendly and welcoming, I have met many people who are genuinely kind and considerate. I have also met a lot of knowledgeable people who enjoy sharing perspectives and their own experiences.
- Similar to the above, I believe that since converting I am more accepting of others and am better able to empathize with others. I am also more interested and motivated to contribute and be active in the community, and to help others. I feel that I have acquired better cultural competency and am better at connecting meaningfully with individuals from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. I feel that I am generally more open-minded and accepting since converting. I also feel that I am better able to navigate different situations, especially when difficult or stressful as I feel more grounded and able to manage my own emotions, as well as accepting situations as they are.
- - It was mostly positive, I felt accepted by the society at large. Wearing the hijab made me more conscious of my behaviour in public which was good for my own self development and it also encouraged muslims to salaam me in public.

- I had to cope with experiences whereby people began to treat me as if I didn't speak English or I was not intelligent or I was not suitable for the look the had in mind for employment
- - Islam has given me a perspective of life and society at whole. - I don't feel as bothered by people who believe differently because it's their choice and I'm confident in my decision. - It has made made my self worth improve greatly. - I reflect deeper on life and am able to put my feet in the shoes of other people regardless of race, culture, socioeconomic status, religious or non-religious, etc. - I think before I act and I always go out of my way to have an ease of interaction with people, making sure others are okay, giving support when needed, and be kind to those I cross in my daily life.

7) What were the difficulties/challenges you had when evolving in society after your conversion? (Choose all that apply. You may add more if needed)



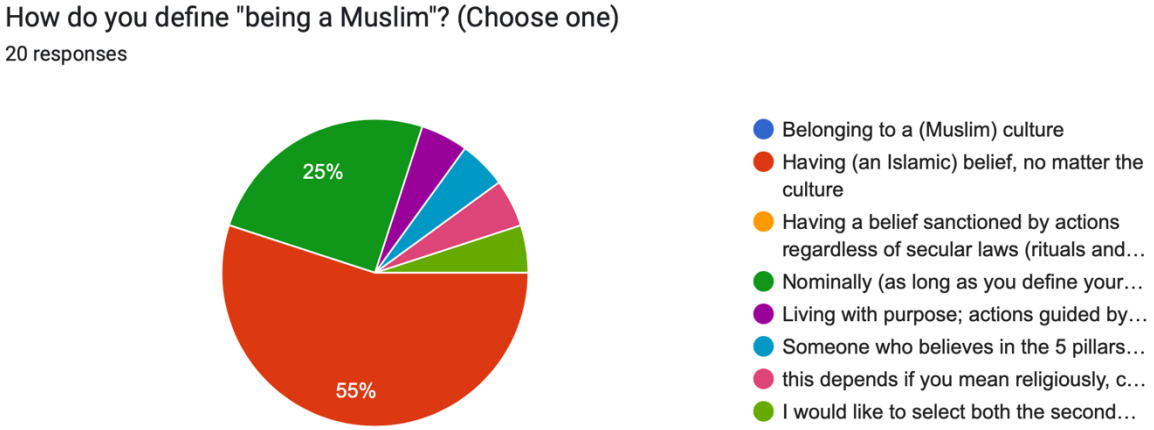
8) How has your relationship with your relatives and pre-conversion friends evolved since your conversion?
- I had just moved across the country to the state to be closer to my relative less than a year before my conversion. After my conversion I lost my stepmother, my grandparents and my aunts and uncle's and eventually my birth mother all within five years. I would say we had a good relationship before, but becoming a Muslim changed everything.
- It became better than it ever was with my parents. Because of my social anxiety, I still can't really have friends and keep them.
- Most have remained unchanged. Some no longer speak to me however
- Only three of my relatives will speak to me even four years later, my mom, my grandma who raised me, and a cousin. I have made an effort to be a more dutiful

daughter and repair my relationship with my mother who has struggled with drug abuse my whole life. My friends alhamdulillah were extremely accepting.

- Only some of my relatives know. The ones who do know have been supportive. I have grown distant from some of my friends who I used to socialize with involving alcohol. I no longer have male friends that are not "family friends" with my husband and I.
- Overtime it got a lot better. I think since my family had a very negative view of islam they were quick to pass judgments. Now, since I've been Muslim for 5 years it shows them how devoted I am and that this wasn't just something I took lightly.
- Family is not fond of conversion. Most friends don't really care.
- It has stayed exactly the same.
- In the begining of my conversion some of my relatives was very nnot happy about my conversion and they rejected me, i did not cut the link with them and now they accepted me as I am. I still have a good contact with one of my friend.
- Immediate family - I became closer, as I became more open to various topics of conversations, could now talk 'religious' to my mom (Christian) which I think she also finds relief in, in being able to share ideas about trusting God and such (in ways where we both connect). With my extended family (aunts, uncles, etc) I think there's still some confusion as to why I became Muslim and some weird feelings around some things (I tried implementing 'no hugs' for non-mahrams and it's made things awkward). - With pre-conversion friends, for some they have rolled with it, others have distanced, and others we've had to work through things with where our perspectives differ.
- I did lose some friends around the time I converted, due to my lifestyle changes. Thankfully my family has always been very accepting and never judged me for my new religion.
- With relatives, it mostly improved, with former friends, those relationships mostly dissolved.
- My relatives (especially parents) have become highest priority. Mother of my daughter relationship has improved. Aunts and Uncles have become closer. Have kept in touch with only a few pre-conversion friends, but those were the good ones!
- At first, I had to stay away from many friends because I feared falling into what I deemed as bad influences. Many of my friends were succeeding in academics and some not, but I didn't want to interrupt my life from Divine Success. There is school, there is career, and then there is the scale of the Day of Judgement. So in the latter the grade is long lasting. I think I had to go through that stage, however, now I do wish I could have maintained some of those relationships as I now have the maturity and strength to preserve my faith while being a good friend to others of different view points. Perhaps also this is more meaningful to American converts as perhaps Canadians are a bit more easy going on various religions due to the strong immigration policy.
- Most pre-conversion friends (especially girls) are not around except a few old buddies I once in a while keep in touch with. Relatives, I have a great relationship with my family but there was tension for many years before getting better now Alhumdulillah.
- My relationship with my mom before conversion was extremely bad. My mom has always been hyper critical and judgemental. After converting the relation has remained the same.

- Luckily, my relationships with my parents and sister were not negatively impacted by converting. They have always been supportive of my choice to convert and of my lifestyle changes. My relationships with my parents and sister have changed for the better since converting. Regarding pre-conversion friends, I have only maintained relationships with two of my female pre-conversion friends. The rest I have broken ties with as they were either male, they were "party friends," or they lived lifestyles that I could no longer relate to or participate in.
- It took about 10 years for my family to get used to being muslim, they thought it was a phase but now no one really notices. my friends didnt change much because of being muslim.
- They have gotten used to me being Muslim, but there is still a feeling of a loss of connection, feeling that myself and my kids are marginalized or treated as second class citizens, ignored or dismissed.
- Alhamdulillah. It has gone well with my relative as my parents always support me. My sister are supportive as well. My friends too. I have lost a few friends both non-Muslim for being too Muslim and Muslim friends for not being Muslim enough. It is a struggle to find balance but the core support of my life have given me a solid foundation to be myself.

9) How do you define "being a Muslim"? (Choose one)



10) What were your motivations/reasons for converting?
- Allah (SWT) saved me. I had been studying Quran since high-school, my college major was middle eastern studies. But it took one day for me to commit to Allah (SWT), Alhumdulillah.
- I converted after i saw what poor bangaldeshi villagers would do because they believe, namely treating me as a guest even though they did not know me. I guess the very indivualistic Western society made me misanthropic, but everything changed after i traveled to South Asia.
- Finding the truth, salvation, happiness
- I was majoring in theology to become a rabbi but for another class I read the Quran. That was all I needed. Allahu Akbar

- I read the Quran. For some reason I was drawn to read it and it blew my mind. I knew in my heart that I need to change my life and become a Muslim because it was the truth.
- I never felt connected to religion growing up and I floated around trying different things but they never stuck. I also really liked this direct relationship I could have with God. I also was heavily influenced by Black politics and the cultural history of Islam that was a part of my ancestry.
- More so that my children grew up with a religion.
- The oneness of God that is unique to Islam from all other religions. The values taught to us via our prophets including Nabi صلى الله عليه وعلى آله وسلم that resonate personally with me.
- I found The Friend by excellence
- - Experienced an 'inner pull' that I couldn't ignore towards seeking knowledge. I came to Islam very 'factually' rather than spiritually. In fact, as I started to learn about Islam I was keen to shoot down all of its religious non-sense - Hah! And now here I am. I found it was all very logical, entirely congruent with much of what we know with science and actually exceeding some scientific knowledge, and really made sense when I put aside my own cultural biases and perspectives.
- I didn't want to die as a non-Muslim.
- Peace, Knowledge, and seeking Communion with God
- Searching for ethical code; example of social justice fighters such as Malcolm X; richness of Islamic history, art, and culture; the literary magnificence of the Quran and that many people have memorized it in its entirety (a fact that always amazed me and I saw as one of the proofs of Islam)
- It's not easy to express in the abyss of internet space, however, I was raised a spiritual person and I senses the light in Muslims and in their Call to prayer.
- In a large part, the interest of marriage to a Muslim, but also searching for something meaningful and fulfilling.
- My first time reading the Quran, I felt it hit me in a very personal way, when I read it, it felt as though it was answering or describing a lot of personal experiences I've gone through in my life. Quran made me feel at peace. I began researching and teaching myself, the more I learned, the more I knew I was going to convert.
- I had an experience in which meaning was somehow communicated to me with complete clarity, or I came to realize/ understand that Allah is real, without a doubt. Once I knew the existence of Allah to be an absolute truth that I had actually experienced, I knew that I had no choice but to act on this realization by accepting Islam, taking it on as a lifestyle, and doing my best to please Allah and do what he expects of me.
- To live life on a path of holistic self development.
- Learning that there was a prophet after Jesus and being convinced by Quranic revelation
- I felt it was the right thing to do. I felt peace in my decision. It has given me motivation and reason to live life every day. Being close to Allah and being aware of this life drive me to cling to my faith.

11) Do you consider conversion as a change of identity and/or a change of culture?

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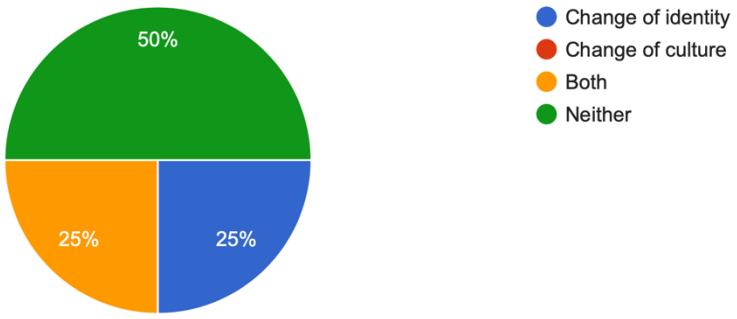
20 responses



12) Please explain why you chose your response to the above question.

- I'm still the same person, I'm still white, becoming a Muslim doesn't change those things. And it doesn't give me a free pass to utilize things that are from other cultures just because they're Muslim as well.
- As much I tried to make it both, it seems the old me would keep haunting me. I then had to accept that I was a weird hybrid that would still not fit anywhere. The solution was somehow to come back to an older incarnation of myself, the writing, the poetry, the fascination for rebel writers like Antonin Artaud, William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsbeg (his indian journals were a big influence for my travels in South Asia) and cinema as well (Fernando Arrabal, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci, Pier Paolo Pasolini) and somehow make those coexist in my own personal reading of the universe. Hakim Bey, an anarchist philosopher infleunced by sufism was a great influence that would somehow bind all this together. Adopting a leftist anarchist stance somehow made it work too.
- Identity and culture are intertwined I think. When I began to practice Islam, I started integrating myself particularly with Arabs and Desis more than if I had not converted I believe
- Islam is our nature. Turning to god is who we always already were inside.
- I believe that culture and religion are two different things. I am culturally American but religiously Muslim. I eat stereotypically American foods, wear modest American-style clothing, speak English, expect a certain type of interaction between individuals in the public, greet people in American ways, ect. All of this is not mutually exclusive from practicing Islam.
- I don't think Islam takes away culture it just let's me know what things I should keep and reject. I think it changes more of your identity as you grow into having a religious ethos.
- I believe converting to any religion doesn't necessarily change the person. Perhaps more of an identity. Culture is something that isn't changed. It's where you were born grew up doing.
- I don't consider it altering your identity. Our identity and experience of our "selves" is wholly individual and is even distinct from how the outside world perceives us. I never experienced a earth shattering change in how I perceived myself when I was learning

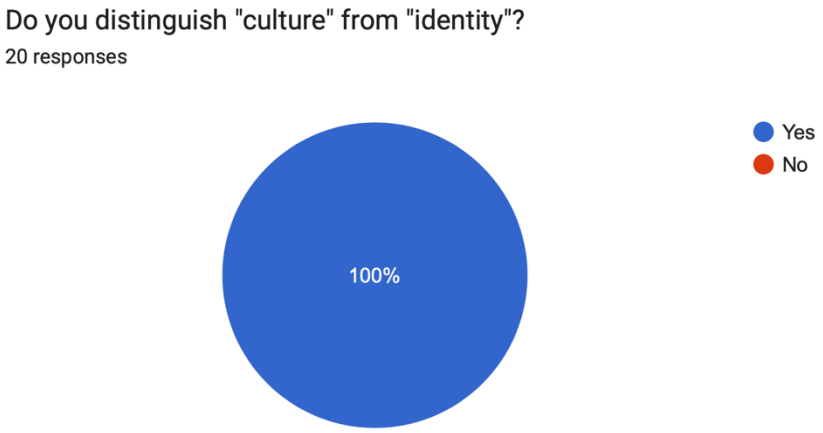
about or converted to Islam. As I learned about it, the values and teachings resonated with me. They carried an innate “truth feeling” that felt unique from a lot of the other theories or teachings or world views I had previously learned about (enthusiastically, but experience and learned about from a removed perspective that FELT like learning about “something else” verse something I believed).

- I am still me and my culture will follow me. I am a french canadian.
- o Both, although mostly identity. o For identity, Islam has completely changed the lens through which I perceive the world. I look at things much more mindfully now, recognizing a purpose in all things and seeing much more beauty in all things, especially hardship. o For culture, not really but in some ways. I don’t adopt the culture of many other Muslim majorities (ex. I haven’t changed to cooking samosas or drinking tea a different way than I grew up with), however some aspects of my culture have changed within the framework of Islam. For example, Islam requests modesty, but doesn’t specify whether modest clothes have to be black or coloured or whatnot. Culturally I am comfortable in pants and athletic-looking material, so culturally I still adhere to this, while applying a modest Islamic lens (baggy pants, athletic shirts with sleeves, hijab on top).
- I consider it a change of identity for me personally because my way of thinking has changed since I found Islam. My culture has also changed a bit because I don’t celebrate most non-Muslim holidays which was a big part of my American culture.
- It is foremost a change of identity, embracing the identity of 'Abdullah, being a Slave and Servant of God, as the foundation of identity. All other identities (brother, lover, husband, father, son, student, teacher, etc.) branch out from the trunk, the pillar of 'Abdullah.
- It is also a change of culture, as adopting elements of another culture invariable change a person.
- My basic culture and identity have remained the same - Islam has made me approach both with more excellence and higher principles. However, one's religion is an undeniable aspect of one's identity and plays a part in it.
- Conversion is a change of something deep within for some. For others it is identity as many early Muslims did not have strong faith, rather they had to change identity. The over time culture either was changed or integrated. Moreover, in short, conversion is changing one's tenets of faith.
- Both identity and culture are linked together, and conversion to Islam does bring things from other cultures into one's life, so it is a change on both levels.
- I personally don't feel being a Muslim woman changes my identity or my culture. I feel Islam only cultivates the best aspects of yourself. I openly feel good embracing aspects of my culture and Islamic culture, which is in itself very diverse.
- Even though I have converted, I still grew up and came of age in, am a part of and continue to live in the culture of South-Eastern Canada, and of Western society more generally. I choose to opt-out of certain aspects of the culture that I do not find are in line with my Islamic values and beliefs. I have not, however, changed my culture. Likewise, I have changed my lifestyle, aspects of my identity (ex. behaviour, appearance), and my choices, however, I am still the same person as I was before converting. I have not changed as a person and my essential or core identity remains

the same. I don't think of myself as a different person, I think of myself as the same person, but improved.

- Identity is about knowing who one is/is not. Being muslim is identifying with God. After converting, my identity (sense of self) is now affected by my relationship with God. Islam is a lens by which we look at ourselves and the world around us.
- My identity as a Muslim does not replace the culture from which I come from.
- Identity is the qualities, beliefs, personality, looks and/or expressions that make a person or group. One can regard the awareness and the categorizing of identity as positive or as destructive. A psychological identity relates to self-image, self-esteem, and individuality.
- I believe conversion is an addition to an evolved identity. I have experienced the "change of identity" due to cultural influences of my ex husband and it was disorienting through what I lived through. I lost sense of myself and who I was through absorbing so much culture mixed in with Islam. Now that I have reclaim balance in my life, I feel more of a connection to myself as i identified as before with the completion of self as Muslim at whole.

13) Do you distinguish "culture" from "identity"?

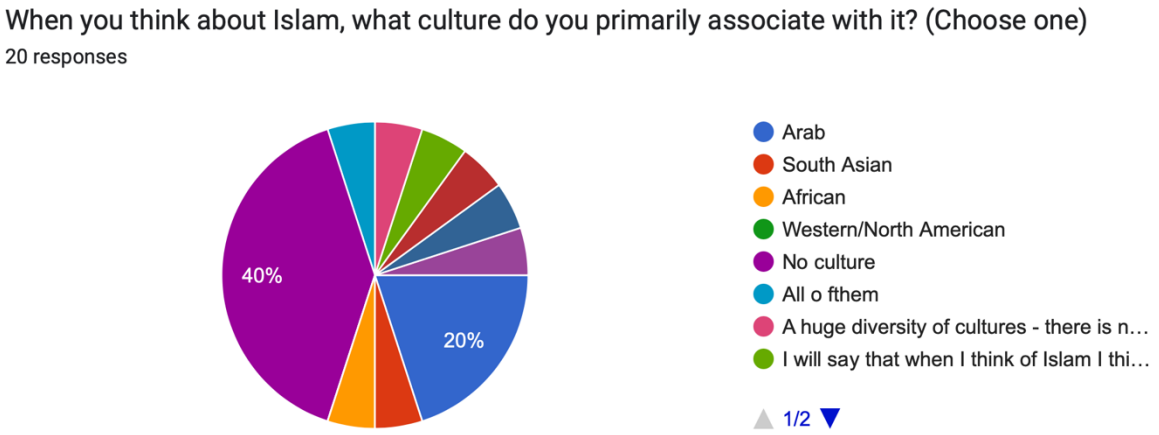


14) Please explain your response to the above question.

- Culture impacts identity but I don't think they're one and the same.
- I think it is an often a political strategy, in Quebec for example, to fuse both concepts and to define a collective "we" as a way to legitimate itself and its power. Though culture seems to refer more to a collective process and identity to something more individual, I think they are both fluid. In fact, Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray had a big influence on how I see identity, not only in gender an sexual matters, but for alll categories applicable to a person.
- Identity is individual whereas culture is collective
- My culture will always be Jewish. Being Jewish is ethnic and becoming a Muslim doesn't change my ethnicity which is tied with my culture. But i know as a Muslim that my identity revolves around being a servant of God, and that comes first before any culture or ethnic background.
- Yes. I believe culture is only one part of what comprises an individual's identity.

- I feel like identity is something that changes over time and evolves, while culture is fixed.
- Culture is where you were born.
- Culture to me is a term that might apply to geography or region, or be an overarching term that is a little more obscure, but it is definitively distinct from religion for me.
- The culture is the way you grow up with all his traditions, your identity is who you really is inside
- Yes I distinguish culture from identity, however they interplay together. So they are not synonymous, but they do influence one another. Culture, to me, is about shared practices and ideologies (ex. pizza as a standard birthday party food; ex. the ideology that bikinis are perfectly acceptable to wear to the beach but underwear is not). Identity is more specific to the person, such as a Muslim, a woman, someone who enjoys being active, etc. However, both influence one another. Ex. My identity as a Muslim woman is influenced by my Western Canadian culture in that I can struggle with hijab more than someone who is in an Islamic country where modesty is the cultural norm and therefore there's less pressure to have female bodies on display all the time.
- To me, identity changes person to person- but culture has to do with a large group of people.
- Culture is part of identity, but identity is deeper. Culture, is our relation to other human beings, while identity, at least in the religious sense mentioned above, is our relation to our Maker.
- Culture (defined ethnolinguistically) is one aspect of identity - others include gender, ability, religion, etc.
- Perhaps I am ignorant but one's identity can be defined by culture and we see that with many Muslims for better or for worse. Sometimes culture affects identity. I don't know actually and it may require further study on my part.
- Yes, because two people can have the same culture overall but two different identities or ways to identify, but culture is also a fact despite whether you identify it or not. So a person can identify as just a Muslim, but they have a culture even if they don't acknowledge it.
- I don't feel culture collectively defines any individual, but I do feel culture shapes people. My culture doesn't dissappear because I converted, I still feel I can embrace my culture and identify as a Muslim woman.
- I believe that culture influences identity and is a part of it, but culture does not define identity nor are the two concepts equal or the same. Culture influences identity but the two are distinct concepts. Identity is individual where are culture is communal or shared. Likewise, identity is not dependent on culture to exist.
- Culture is about customs, art, social institutions of a particular group of people. Whereas identity refers to individuals within that group and how they see themselves.
- Culture is only part of what forms a person's identity.
- I view it as two separate but interlocking things. Identity can be what a person perceives themselves as whereas, they belong to a culture at whole along with individual subcultures. Humans are made up of all these subcultures within a culture that helps create an identity. I identify as Muslim but my culture is not Islamic at all.

15) When you think about Islam, what culture do you primarily associate with it? (Choose one)



16) Why do you associate Islam with that culture?

- Islam is a religion it's for everyone it doesn't associate with any culture. It took me a few years to realize that though. The Quran tells us to bring all of our cultures to Islam.
- Because I accepted Islam in South Asia and learnt most of what I know there.
- The majority of Arabs are Muslim and the holy language is Arabic
- My masjid is extremely diverse alhamdulillah.
- Likely because the Muslims in my area are primarily Arabs. Also the media focus is on the Arab world. Additionally Arab is the language of the Quran.
- I associate Islam heavily with the Moors and African Americans. This was where i was truly first exposed to Islamic values and ideas.
- No
- I said no culture
- The culture is like the cup and islam is a liquid deverse in it.
- It's easy to associate it with Arab or Pakistani culture, given that those are the two ethnic backgrounds that I'm most exposed to in my geographic location. However, throughout my time as a convert Muslim I have learned that Islam doesn't have a culture in the sense of the usual word that we think of. The culture of Islam lies in mannerisms such as doing good deeds without requiring other's approval or validation, or being kind to your parents and going that extra step for them, or being mindful of your speech and interactions with others, being mindful not to litter or harm the environment. These are concepts that I now see as the culture of Islam; there is no clothing or food or race that I relate to it anymore. Islam really supersedes culture and can beautify and enrich every culture. I do have a huge problem when culture supersedes Islam, i.e. people putting their cultural practices in front of Islamic practices. This happens all too often and is a huge source for why so much of the world has an issue with Islam; they see faulty cultural practices being preached as Islam and then turn away (and I don't blame them!). Allow culture to thrive within the parameters of Islam and one will live a beautiful and enriched life.

- N/A
- Islam is inseparable from the Arabic language, which itself is interwoven with culture.
- Islam's heartland stretches from Senegal to Indonesia - impossible to boil down or simplify. And now we have the blessing of many communities of converts - so there are tremendously different cultures adhering to Islamic principles. Black American Muslim culture is one beautiful example.
- Islam is Loving God in entirety. That's all I see.
- Because the faith was founded within a historic version and subset of that culture, and the literature and history was influenced by it, as well as many of the things in the religion itself; plus, I spent years in the Arab world studying Islam, so its culture was the vehicle for my Islam though South Asian culture is also a strong contender too because I am South Asian but also studied with South Asians, but I realized that South Asian culture is actually influenced by the Arab-Persian culture as well.
- I associate Islam with various cultures
- I primarily associate Arab culture with Islam as the Prophet SAWS was an Arab and Islam "began" in the Arab world. Also because Mecca is in the Arab world and Arabic is the language of the Quran. I am careful to remind myself and others that anyone can be a Muslim because I constantly have to explain to people that I am not Arab and that you don't have to be Arab to be Muslim. I continually am asked and respond to the question, "where are you from?" or "where are your parents from?" or "what is your background?" and I want people to understand that anyone can be a Muslim.
- I think Africa is a good example in its diversity of HOW islam permeates culture.
- NA
- None, because I know Muslims practice Islam in individualized pockets determined on geographical location, environment, culture, society, and various interpretations of Sharia Law. I think of many cultures when I think of Islam

17) What are some examples of times in which you saw yourself acting (or wishing to act) as a translator/mediator between Muslims and non-Muslims?

- Constantly! I find myself being a translator quite often for all of the queer non-Muslims I know. That includes me trying to communicate with my family after conversion because they are all queer as well.
- On daily basis, because of my situation as a french canadian muslim.
- Unsure
- In my philosophy and religion classes in college I often wanted to explain a different perspective on Islam as someone who was very practicing and had a more inside take. Especially when it comes to dressing very modestly I feel that I can humanize that for non Muslims and help them realize there's still a real caring breathing human under my niqab!
- I work at a hospital and sometimes there are questions about Muslim patients beliefs. I've also had people ask me if stereotypes they've heard are true. Another thing I've had is questions about Islam when people purporting to me Muslims commit violent Acts that are reported in the media.
- I feel like in everyday life I do this just by existing in a place where there are Muslims and non Muslims.

- Mainly so that people realized Muslims are not evil or harmful people more than anyone else in the world
- I don’t know if I would refer to it as a mediator as my dad I find myself shedding light on what Muslim beliefs are versus how they are perceived in media or even in popular culture. I feel like when we say “how Muslims are perceived in media “that often read that with a negative context. I’m not always finding myself correct and negative stereotypes as much as I am just shedding light on what Muslim beliefs are or connections/similarities/beliefs of Muslim people to other religions, Or even just what we believe in general.
- Every time something happen in the world for which the muslim are accused of having done something
- I think I've seen ignorance on both ends of things, where Muslims don't understand where a non-Muslim is coming from, and certainly vice-versa. It's an interesting place to be in, to understand a non-Muslim's perspective, go through a transformation, then understand a Muslim's perspective. It's a learning journey. An example would be hearing how Muslims are so weird with practices such as segregated hangouts; then I've also heard Muslims express how weird it is that non-Muslims are comfortable in mixed gatherings. This is a mild example but one that has come up more than once.
- I haven’t
- Trying to help Christians understand that Allah is God of the Bible.
- I often answer the questions of non-Muslim family members or colleagues about Islam. Happens all the time. I find most Muslims in Ontario, mostly being members of racialized groups, understand white non-Muslims pretty well through constant interaction, and so I don't really have to translate the other way.
- After "September 11" I helped Imams in their speeches and partook in interfaith debates.
- When I am with my family! When I was at work or interacting with any non-Muslim. Sometimes with my own children as I explain life in Canada to them, as we have recently moved back.
- I have not felt the need to do that, but if people ask me questions or need my help I will offer it.
- I actually think I do this on a very regular basis - perhaps several times a week. I answer questions people who are not Muslim have about Islam or about Islamic values/ culture, or I try to include/ introduce an Islamic perspective into conversations. The most specific example I can think of is when I was working in employment services as a job developer. An employer who had hired one of my clients, a Muslim man, called me to complain or raise her concern about the fact that the man would greet his male colleagues in the morning but would not greet or make eye contact with the females. From the employer's perspective, the man was exhibiting sexist and misogynistic behaviours but from my perspective, he was trying to show respect of the highest level to the female colleagues by lowering his gaze and not engaging in superfluous conversation with them. I explained my perspective to the employer, after which she became very understanding. I spoke to my client about "Canadian workplace culture" and how the women in his workplace perceived his behaviour. It is my understanding that he resolved to politely greet the women in his workplace and the issue between him, the employer, and his female colleagues was resolved.

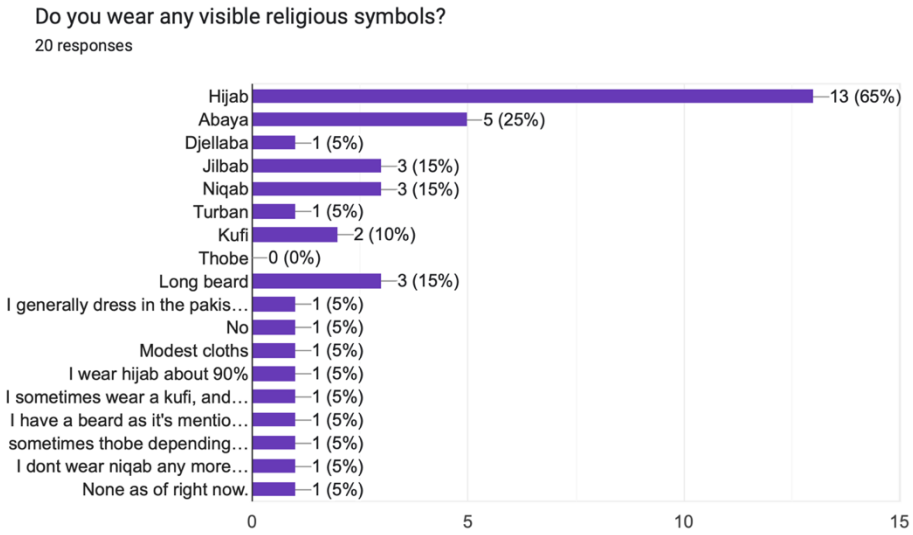
- I do that in my family and in every institution i am apart of. By simply being a member of this society, I am mediating between muslims and non muslims.
- All the time as a community worker who tries to present Islam in ways that are relevant and understandable to non-Muslims
- Often. I feel there are too many view points that edge on the irrational side (Non-Muslim and Muslim) that bring huge misunderstandings when it's simply religious, spiritual, and life style differences mixed with culture. More often than not I find myself defending Jews while defending Muslims from Jews. Defending LGBT (for right of existence) from Muslims while defending the same thing for Muslims. I defend Islamic values to the West while defending Western values to Muslims who see it as evil. I feel stuck between both worlds but that's because I am naturally a "live and let live" person. I usually do not speak up unless it's absolutely terrible because I do not like conflict nor do I have solutions.

18) Do you feel like you acted as an effective mediator in those situations? Why or why not?

- Yes. And only because I've had people reach out and thank me for explaining aspects of Islam to them when they were misinformed.
- No. Not really. To this day, I still feel better at home in Pakistan or Latin America (i'm part hispanic and speak the language) than in Canada.
- Unsure
- Usually, yes. I was unafraid to be myself and let my personality come through and being kind and gentle and allowing people to ask me their "awkward" questions helped them understand Muslims and Islam better.
- Hopefully. I think if somebody who has come from a non-muslim culture I can do better understanding where the non-muslims are coming from.
- I'm a believer in leading by example and just being authentic to myself. Whatever anyone comes away with after our interaction insha'Allah it was something beneficial.
- Sometimes
- I personally am not visibly Muslim even though it's very important to me and I find it defining to my character and to me as an individual. I feel like I'm more likely to observe peoples stereotypes regarding Muslims and islam because of this and often times it gives me an opportunity to educate or correct them. I also think if people perceive you as a "neutral" or "less conservative" opinion they're more likely to seriously consider what you are telling or teaching them, vs. interpreting it as bias or skewed. So in that way I feel I'm afforded a great opportunity to effectively mediate people's misconceptions or judgements on Islam snd I do feel I am usually successful in how I educate them.
- Yes i guess
- I'm not sure. I just try to bring light to each side, to make the person aware of why the other person may be coming from the perspective they are, even if I ultimately agree with the Islamic perspective.
- N/A
- In some instances, yes. It all depends on people's openness. When people are interested in learning, rather than simply debating, great exchanges can take place.

- I feel I have to the best of my ability, but God knows best. I encourage my non-Muslim relations and colleagues to ask me questions and never embarrass them for asking the obvious or the offensive.
- Yes because I was raised a Christian, hold Middle Eastern Jewish ancestry and love Islam completelty.
- Yes, because I understand both cultures and empathize with much in both. I also love to bring people together Alhumdulillah.
- I have not experienced any situations like this yet.
- Yes, I do feel like I am able to act as an effective mediator. I have spent several years living in a Muslim majority country and have spent significant time since converting learning about Islam and Islamic values/ beliefs. I feel that I am an effective mediator as I have a strong understanding of my own (Western) culture, of the foundations of Islam, and of the culture of a Muslim majority society. For this reason, I believe that I am able to explain various and sometimes complicated or specific concepts to non-Muslim individuals in a relatable and culturally competent manner.
- It depends on what I was trying to portray. I always think there is room for self development but in general I would say that yes I am a good mediator-- because I am honest and I try.
- Yes, I often receive feedback from people that lets me know that they understood something new about Islam
- Sometimes, yes. I try to rationally approach things through what I've learned in my education through sociological and intercultural communication classes. Other times, I keep my mouth shut for fear of backlash from both communities (White small town / Muslims): being called non-Muslim/Kuffar, being called a towelhead, a terrorist, fear of abuse from strangers in community, etc.

19) Do you wear any visible religious symbols?



7.2. Focus Group Transcripts[36]

Focus group (Men):

Participant Key:
M= Mike
A= Abdullah
H= Hussain
P= Parker
HD= Hailey De Jong (Primary researcher)

Start of first recording:
HD: Assalamu alaikum guys, how are you?
M: Walaikum assalam, good, how are you? I see, I have my Zoom background from work. Sorry I use it for work a lot.
HD: It's ok. No problems. Um, just so you guys know, I have it on record just because I have to do audio transcripts. But, uh, your audio and your video will not go to anyone except for me. No one's going to see that. Good. I have, uh, two more people who should be joining shortly. We still have two minutes. Um, so yah. If you have any questions for me, I'm here, and we'll start shortly.
H: Salam, how are you?
P: Hello.
HD: Can you hear me well?
P: Assalamu alaikum.
HD: Walaikum assalam.
P: Um, is everyone there? Did I? This is, uh…
HD: Um, everyone's here. I think brother Abdullah is still connecting to the audio, so I'll send him a chat message… and then we'll start. Perfect. Um, the brother with his screen name for iPhone- do you have a pseudonym you want me to use, or a, a specific name?
P: Uh, no. Parker is fine.
HD: Ok, perfect. Ok. Alright. Hopefully brother Abdullah is able to connect… Um, just to let you know, I am recording with the audio and the video. If you choose to use video, you don't have to. It's only going to stay with me, um, no one is going to, except for me will see it. It's just so that I can transcribe it later. Just for like ethics purposes and whatnot. Um… Ok, he's still connecting to audio, but, um, I'll send him an email to make sure everything's ok, and, um, we'll get started. Brother Abdullah, is that you?
A: Assalamu alaikum, this is- yes, this is Abdullah.
HD: Ok, perfect, great. So, you were able to connect. Alright. So then, um…
A: Yah.
HD: Ok. So, we'll get started um, if everyone's ready. Um, my name is Hailey. Um, just a little bit about me… I'm studying Translation Studies. So, what that exactly is, is, um, it's what you'd normally think it is, like language between language translation. However, once you get to the master's level, it's a lot more of the theory behind the languages. So, like, culture, identity, um,

[36] Focus group transcripts were written to include all indications of pauses and repeated words. However, for the sake of readability, they have been edited to remove pauses and repeated words within the thesis body itself.

these kinds of things. Translation not only between languages, but as metaphor. So, we're kind of looking at the, uh, self-translation and transformation process that converts go through. Um, so, just kind of keep that in mind and hopefully that'll help. So, thank you all for joining. I really appreciate it. Um, I know it's Ramadan and it's really hard to organize schedules. Some of us are all in different time zones. Um, I'm personally in Turkey so it's eleven at night here. Ha ha. But, um, yah, so, I have some individual questions to kind of start, and then we'll do a circle. Um, we do have the raise hand feature if, if everyone knows how to do that, or, um, if no one else is talking then just go ahead. Uh, I'll also be typing the questions in chat so that I don't have to repeat them and it's easier for everyone to see them. So… Um, we can get started with this question: if you had to choose a few words to use to describe your identity, what would you say? And, um, I'll just go in a circle as I kind of see people on my screen. So, Mike, you are first.
M: Oh, lucky me. Um, words to describe my identity… That's a difficult question to answer, actually. I mean, Muslim is the one that comes to my mind first. It's always been the one that, of anything that I can kind of feel strongly about and concretely say is a part of my identity, I would, I could say Muslim. Um, I'm from Toronto, Canada- and I'm not worried about the whole, um, what's it called, anonymity thing, as you can tell. Uh, and there is a kind of specific culture to certain parts of, of Toronto, especially where I'm from. So, being from Toronto is a big part of my identity as well, I would say. Just in terms of being very multicultural, having lots of access to tons of different, um, ethnicities, religions, races, everything is here. Um, and then I don't- this, this would be a long story to have a conversation about- but, uh, white. As a white person, a white man, it has a big part in the way I, obviously the way I interact with the world and the way that the world interacts with me. So, regardless of how I feel about that, that's another, a big part of my identity I think and those are the words that I would use. So, Muslim, a white man, and a Torontonian.
HD: Awesome. Thank you for sharing! Um, the next person in line is brother Abdullah.
A: Assalamu alaikum. Can you hear me?
HD: Walaikum assalam. Yes, I can.
A: Can you hear me?
HD: Yes.
A: Oh, ok, ok. Alhamdulillah. I'm so sorry I don't have my, uh, my video on right now. I had just kind of a, a big planning failure and I'm, uh, I'm in, uh, a taxi headed home right now, but, uh, in sha Allah I'll have my video on soon, once I get there. But, um…
HD: No worries.
A: Uh, yah, I'm, uh, I'm really grateful, uh, thank you for, for going first Mike. I'm really grateful I didn't have to go first, uh, but, uh, I, uh, it being, uh, American and being around a lot of other Americans, um, uh, I also having grown up specifically in the, in the Pacific North-West and having my, my, my family being from the, the Mid-West and the northern part of the US, uh, I, I work with, I work with a lot of, uh, Southerners and people who are originally from the southern US, so, uh, I'm, I'm very aware of sort of being, uh, like a Northerner or, you know, a Pacific North-Westerner, uh, in the, in the American context. Um, in, in the multicultural, uh, you know, it's, it's, it's interesting how, how Mike, um, said like, like, uh, like white Canadian and, uh, I've, I've, I've found that, uh, I've said that to people before and, and, and, uh, in a, you know, in the American context and, uh, they, they didn't know what I meant. Like, they were, they were confused by that statement. And, um, I, uh, given, I, uh actually, I, uh, thinking about, that I've thought about, um, identifying more as English than as, than as, uh, white because, uh, not because of all my, uh, not all of my ancestors were from England, and you know, maybe

about half of them were, but, uh, at some point all of them, uh, had a, had a, uh, a transition to speaking English and so, and that, and that was a major part of their, uh, life story. So, um, so, I think Northerner, um, Pacific North-Westerner, Muslim, Englisher, or Anglo would be the few words I would use to describe myself.
HD: Perfect. Thank you. Uh, brother Hussain, you're next.
H: Yup. Uh, assalamu alaikum everyone. Um, it's a little bit, I guess complicated for me too. Um, so my great-grandparents moved from India to Madagascar, and then both of my parents were born in Tanzania, which is close to Madagascar, so, uh, there's definitely some African tinges- ha ha- like the, culturally-speaking. Um, but, from like a, from looking at us it's obvious- well, some people think we're Arab, but Indian. Um, and then I was raised in Canada. I was born in Ottawa. Um, I went to mostly Caucasian schools so, um, I guess you could kind of say, uh, you know, Muslim first, I guess. Um, Muslim and then Afro-Indian-Canadian- I don't know, but yah.
HD: Thank you. And finally, uh, brother Parker.
P: Um, bismillah, uh, I would say I'm Muslim, I'm, from New England, uh, Western-Massachusetts specifically, and, uh, I am, uh, Northern-European background, as far as I know. My family are primarily Irish, um, but uh, also English, Dutch, Norwegian, so, uh, that's how I think of my identity.
HD: [Inaudible due to background noise from one of the participant's microphones.]
P: In a, in a, in that order too. Sorry.
HD: Ok, no problem. Uh, the next question I have then is: in terms of culture, uh, what culture do you belong to and how would you describe that culture? So, if Mike wants to start us off.
M: Really? These are hard-ball questions, eh? Um… Again, uh, I'm a white man and that's how I am, that's how the world interacts with me, and the way that I am perceived in the world, so it has a huge element of things and that is- in that way it's definitely a culture that I belong to. Um, and through family, obviously, of course, as well, uh, but beyond that, I mean, for the most part I have friends that are from two places. I have friends that are from South Asia, and I have friends that are from, uh, well, South America slash the Caribbean. Uh, so I have a lot of that kind of informing the way that I do things, like, a lot of the food that I eat, unless I'm eating at home with family, with family, I'm eating food with friends, or like friends that have become like family, or friends that are making food that I prefer, that is usually, like, a little more stronger-flavoured than my, uh, white family prefers- let's put it that way. Uh, so, I don't belong to those, like, I, uh, I guess, uh, a lot of my answers will kind of go this way, just kind of because of my academic background as well, I think, but I don't belong to those cultures in the sense that I can't- as a white person moving through the world as a white person. But, I feel a big connection to those cultures because of the friends, the friends that are like chosen family that I've made and that are a part of those cultures, and that's, like, what my life has been, so, like, entrenched in. Uh, and that has a, like, that has a big role in- well, not role, I guess, but it has a, a, there's a connection to the way that I became a Muslim through that as well because it was a, my high school was very much South Asian Muslims. Those were the people that I met in my kind of exploration of religious identity and what religion made, was mine, and kind of made sense for me. That's who I accessed Islam through, for the most part. So, I have that internal, I guess, connection and feeling towards that. And again, I'll also say, there is a pretty unique culture to Toronto and the part of Toronto that I'm from, and people that I spend time with in Toronto, so there's also a sort of Toronto, and specifically Scarborough-Toronto, that area of Toronto, and Toronto culture that I've kind of grown up with and been part of as well. So, yah. That's, I guess

that's how I'd answer that as the culture that I belong to, or I hope that I feel I belong to. And how I'd describe that culture? I mean, I, I, I might need some time to think about that. Uh, the reality is again, South Asia and the Caribbean are really diverse, and there's not just, not all people from South Asia are Muslim, not all people from the Caribbean are Muslim. So, I usually am friends with, and around the Muslim folks from those places. So, it's kind of a South Asian Islam, slash Caribbean Islam- Guyanese specifically, maybe from the Caribbean-Islam part of culture that I'm part of. So, I guess, um, I don't know. I need to think a bit more about it, just how I would describe that culture? I guess diverse. It's difficult, it's difficult, it's sometimes difficult to put your finger on, is kind of… is kind of the way that I would kind of describe it. It's not the best way, but it's maybe true.
HD: Ok, thank you. Uh, brother Abdullah?
A: Uh, I feel very… I, I, I feel like this is a harder question because, um, I feel like culture is something that, um, is harder to see, uh, and from the first person, um, or identity implies it is something that, uh, is something that, that you sort of reflexive, but culture, it seems to me, is something that other people um, you know, kind of perceive rather, or other people, uh, say that you, uh, accept you as belonging to. So, um, yah, it's a, it's a, Seattle, uh, you know, where I grew up, is very eclectic. Like very, like very different kinds of music, and food, and stuff that people like, and it's kind of like no one really has- there's not a lot of loyalty to, like, a specific kind of, you know, doing things in a certain way, and people are just, you know, like, they try everything. Um, uh, it's an interesting, it's an interesting question, uh, um…
HD: Are you still there? Or did we lose you?
A: Um…
HD: Ok.
A: So I, I now live in- oh, can you hear me? What was the last thing you heard?
HD: Um, no, I think you're good.
A: Sorry, what was the, what was the last…
HD: … Just for a few seconds. Yah. Go ahead.
A: Uh, yah, it's an interesting… Um, so, so, I, uh, moved to Egypt actually, uh, seven months ago, and I, uh, have a job here as an expatriate, basically, and I'm working for a US government contractor, and, um, it's an interesting, uh, you know, and my wife is from here originally, she's- I'm in Alexandria, Egypt, and my wife is, like, grew up here, so, uh, being that I've sort of, you know, assimilating into her, into her family's culture more than I could imagine previously, um, in terms of, like, the food I eat and, and just, uh, the kinds of activities that I do, so, so that is maybe not the best, uh, answer for this kind of, uh, study, um, but, uh, yah, it's, uh, I work with, I work mostly with other Americans, but, um, most of them don't have the same kind of, uh, background as I do, as far as being, you know, as far as being a practicing Muslim. So, um, yah, so that's, I think that's, I think that's all I have to say.
HD: Perfect, thank you. Brother Hussain, you're next.
H: Yah, like everyone else says, it's very, very complicated, ha ha, in terms of how to answer it, cuz I'm not sure. But, like, um, I still think I'm, like, building a culture, and I don't think it can be described in a certain context, like, and I think it puts a lot of second, third generation people, not necessarily converts, but Muslims, um, there is a huge change from what their parents, uh, in terms of cultural side of Islam, um, have been, have been doing. And even in the context of Islam as well, um, you know, just, like, whether they pray 20 raka'as, or eight, or anything like that, a lot of us have kind of re-evaluated a lot of those things. Um, so, I definitely do identify- like, the way I talk, the way I speak, the way I interact, um, like, for example, I do differentiate between

people from Toronto and Ottawa- like I definitely find people from Toronto more aggressive, so, I guess, in that sense, Ottawa definitely influenced me significantly. Um, but also my parents being, you know, African-Indians and from a sect called the Pahoras Shia sect, so, they definitely have a very strong culture that, um, I've completely, like, a lot of second and third generation people, I guess, can kind of distance themselves from, but, uh, it's, it's very similar, I guess, in terms of values, probably like the Jewish culture where, like, they're very, you know, together. They're small groups usually. Um, they invest heavily in the community, but they also kind of, there's a lot, I guess, like, you know kind of this us and them kind of thing. Uh, and they're Gujarati Indian, uh, mainly, uh, considered usually Gujarati Indians. Um, so there's a lot of business-minded individuals in it as well. Um, they came as, like, merchants and stuff like that to Africa, um, but all across the world. That's generally the idea, we should go into business. Um, but, I think, from the, like, just being a Muslim and, uh, and joining a lot of the masajid and stuff like that in Ottawa, we don't necessarily have concentrations like some other, like, well, the major cities would have, I guess. Um, so, like, Toronto for example, I, I, this one masjid I went to- I think it was in Thornhill or something. Like, a lot of people there were Gujarati, and they assumed I was Gujarati, and they introduced themselves to me with Gujarati like [foreign term] type questions, like, how are you brother, in Gujarati. While in Ottawa we don't necessarily have that, just because we didn't have the, the, the population. So, a lot of, like, the communities work together to build the masajid, um, and it's, it's generally very mixed. So, people that, you know, I would, would volunteer with are people, or at the university and stuff like that, um, like, I do have a lot of, you know, South Asian friends, but at the same time, I have a lot of Somali friends, a lot of Arab friends, um, that, uh, we mix with. So, I know since, like, culturally speaking, like, in terms of what I practice at home, um, I think it's still being built. When, in sha Allah, we get kids and stuff like that then we'll re-evaluate everything as, as we go. But, in terms of the way I speak, the way I interact with others, well, there's definitely some of my parent's aggressiveness, um, but you know, from Kenya and Tanzania, and yah, that exists, but at the same time, like, being raised in Ottawa, it's kind of mixed between two encounters. Sometimes they'll be very aggressive, and then sometimes they'll be like, yah, oh, walk away, it's fine. Um, pick your battles, I guess, but, um, yah, I guess, in conclusion, I would say very Ottawa-influenced. Um, and then very, uh, second/third generation Muslims in North America, which I do think like, they do have, like, a certain commonality. Like, whenever you go to America or something, and you meet Muslims there that are, like, second/third generation, um, it's easier to talk to. They're into, like, similar things, and I think North America has a huge part of that. Yah.

HD: Great, thank you. Um, brother Parker?

P: Bismillah. Can you hear me?

HD: Yes. Yes, I can.

P: Cool. Um, alright, um, well, uh, as far as my culture, um, I would say, um, my parents, um, you know, I grew up sort of uh, my, my mother's side is, uh, working-class, Irish-Catholic. So, that was kind of, like, my, that was maybe half of my culture growing up, um, and I still have, um, a lot of fondness for that. Um, I would say, in general, people are much wealthier now, even though they came from, from a poor background a few generations ago, but most people seem to be pretty well off and maybe more distant from that religion. Um, but I still feel, uh, a closeness to it. Um, you know, just to the people. Um, um, my father's side is more, um, sort of, uh, a boarding school, prep school, um, which is, um, I would say, in many ways a relatively intact culture, um, perhaps to this day. You know, that, that, you know, there's this practice of people who are, um, from generational wealth, and many, I would say, you know, in the sort of urban

areas are sending their children to boarding school for, um, you know, for, um, particularly for high school, um, and that that becomes, like, a very strong culture, um, and strong connection with people there that tends to sort of process throughout, throughout life, um, so… Um, yah, so, it's sort of, you know, not necessarily a, not a lot of crossover between those two, and, um, and, and, and furthermore, my father's family was, um, they were actually teachers, primarily, within that school system, um, so they, they were sort of participating in it- and that's sort of like a class, sort of within the prep school culture as people who are teachers have, you know, access to it, and interact with people, and, you know, have really nice stuff around all the time. We don't personally have, um, you know, all that much money necessarily. I mean, certainly not, like, um, you know, you know, like one one-thousandth of the net-worth of the people who are actually sending their kids to the school, um, a lot of times, um, but they still have, you know, they still have a comfortable life, um, they still kind of live in that wealth. So, that's sort of my father's side is, like, identity with it, but not necessarily full participation, um, just because, you know, you know, you don't have, necessarily have, like, multiple vacation homes, and, you know, we don't have the same kind of lifestyle outside of school. Um, so it's really education-based there, um, though there's a culture, there's a strong culture that's a part of it, you know, like, wear a suit and tie all the time, um, things like that. But, um, and you know, um, my, my wife is of, um, Arab-Palestinian background, and it's kind of interesting that like, she grew up in, um, also in Western Mass, so, also kind of on the periphery of that, that culture. Like, she, like, not really fully participating in it, but, like, in a, in a different, different town, you know, there's a lot of those types of schools up here. So, she was, um, you know, I think in part, um, due to her racial background, maybe more so, and, um, her culture, cultural background, she wasn't like, a full participant in it really, um, but, um, but had a somewhat of a perspective on it, um, that way, so... Yah, so, I, that oddly, you know, it wasn't something really, something we expected, but that we sort of found out that we can kind of share that. Um, and so, um, you know, personally, I would say, I would still, I still feel, um, a strong connection to, you know, um, to both the Irish-Catholic cultures and culture, and, um, I'm American-Irish-Catholic, um, as well as sort of the, um, what would be the term, like, WASP, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant type of, uh, prep-school culture, um, and, um, you know, obviously I don't fully participate in the, um, Irish-Catholic culture anymore, being not Catholic, um, even in a sort of lapsed, like, you know, my cousin might only have the wedding there, and they might not ever really go to church, you know, except for, you know, maybe Easter or Christmas maybe, um, and maybe they, maybe, or maybe they don't have their wedding in a church, but, um, it, it, uh, you know, whereas on the other hand, I would say that prep-school culture I'm still to some extent a full participant in that. Like, you know, I still have, um, you know, basically all of those friendships, um, though at a distance, um, and I might not participate in that all like you know, you know, go out drinking with people and all that stuff, but, uh, but, yah, uh, I mean I still live, live in the region, and, and, uh, you know, that, um. I don't know. I, I guess that that's sort of the… It took a while longer, but that's an answer I can give for now.

HD: Yah, thank you. Um, so, the next batch of questions are going to be more interactive, so I'm not gonna ask like, specific people, and if you have an answer you can raise your hand or if no one's talking you can just go ahead. Um, so the next question is… just to make it a little bit harder for you all… Um, we had a lot of talk about culture and identity. And there's a lot of overlap between the two, but I want to know, like, do you guys distinguish that? Because obviously there is a distinction, but what would you say makes culture different from identity?

P: I think of culture as, as what you, what you do and where you live, whereas identity is kind of who you are. Um, I guess that that would be the, the simple- like I can't change that my ancestors are, you know, from mostly Ireland rather than other European countries. You know, I can't change that I grew up in- I, I could move out of New England, but I, I can't change that I'm from there, you know? Um, though to some extent that is a chosen identity as well, um, and, uh, you know, being Muslim is a choice, but it, it's, you know, it's a choice of identity.
HD: Does anyone else want to jump in?
M: Um, I was just going to say- had Parker not said that, I don't know what I would have said to answer this question. But, yah, I think that that makes sense for me in terms of how much I've thought of it, I guess. Um, and there is, there is crossover in the sense that, yes, being Muslim is in some sense a choice for someone who is converted to, or accepted Islam. Um, although, at the same time, sometimes we feel like, I think the reason there's the crossover in that regard is maybe because there's that feeling that maybe it wasn't a choice. Like, for me at least, it was a choice, but, at the same time, it felt like it was what I always was, and I was just coming into something that I always was, and I just hadn't known prior to- if that makes sense. Um, but, yah, I think that that kind of makes some sense is that identity is in some cases- in some cases- maybe more so who you are without being able to change it. Uh, culture is in some cases what you do. Uh, and then I think in some ways culture, I guess, maybe can become a part of your identity over time. Whereas, again, to go back to what Parker said about New England and what I've said about being a white guy, it's not something that I can change. It's not- that's, that's what I am. Whereas, I think culture maybe, maybe it doesn't work backwards, like, I can't- identity is not going to become a part of culture, maybe- if that makes sense- or you might resist your identity becoming culture, becoming part of your culture, but you… I guess that maybe that's kind of what I'm thinking.
P: Yah, being called, I guess, uh, uh, culture would be more like active participation and, and active renewal- it would require that. You know, like choosing to dress a certain way, or, like, have certain types of social gatherings, or, like, certain types of food, or certain types of, um, interactions with people. Um, all of those things are sort of, they, they, if, if you don't continue to renew it, it might fade, um, and you might lose it. And it can even change, you know, a lot, you know? Whereas identity, I think, is more fixed and, and not a choice, um, in the same way.
HD: Um, brother Abdullah or Hussain do you want to…?
H: Yah, I guess this was already kind of said, but just, I feel like culture, um, is your values, your beliefs, the traditions, and the rituals that you follow. Um, while identity influenced that heavily, just because it gives that- it gives you a sense of, like, comfort when you're with that group, uh, if you identify with them. Um, so, like, as an Indian- like, it's, people would identify me as Indian, and, I guess, like, I think, like, ethnically-speaking, I guess I would be Indian, even though we don't have any family members in India, and my great-grandparents were basically cut off. Um, then, like, if I'm with South Asians, then they would receive me a lot more, like, like, it's kind of not, like, I don't want to use the word racism, but it's kind of like, they're just comfortable, because they have a feeling that they have an understanding of, of, the structured values, and beliefs, and stuff like that, they have, um, which can, which can differ between Muslims as well, so, it's not, like, just cuz you're Muslim, then, um, which is unfortunate, but it is also the reality, um, that, like, different Muslims are possible that have different traditions and values different, you know? In some areas in, in, in Morocco, they definitely have different ways that they practice, um, the schools of law that they follow, on average, generally speaking, even, um, yah, like, compared to, you know, India, and stuff like that. So, um, that's definitely there,

and also the challenges that people face. I guess it's difficult for people in our generation just because, um, a lot of our, like, kind of, but, but our generation is more 1994, so, um, in, in that area. But, for example, like, my parents and stuff like that, um, you know, the challenges that Indians then would hear, like, forty-something years ago or whatever, I don't know, I don't know, something around there, um, they faced similar challenges. So that identity kind of plays into it, even if they have completely different cultures, or, or, like, apparent cultures, like, let's say, as a Sikh and my parents, or something like that, um, they would still have that sense of comfort, because they have that closeness, because of, like, the struggle they assume each other kind of went through, or even then, or even now. Um, so, I, I definitely think identity helps with, with comfort, and bringing you closer to a community which would influence your culture as well. Um, so think if an Arab converted, I'm sure that, like, you know, he would be more comfortable around, you know, Muslim Arabs, um, as opposed to South Asians that are there- which is, obviously, there are going to be exceptions, so, on average I would think.
HD: Ok, um, I wanna make one comment before we continue. Um, if you've noticed, there is a time limit because I don't have the professional account, the paid account, um, so, if, the Zoom will end at 40 minutes, but I will send out another link. The same link should work, but I'll send out a new one just in case. Um, everyone's made, like, a one-hour time commitment, uh, the Zoom closes after 40 minutes, of course, like, if it does go more than an hour, you don't have to stay. It, it's nice if you could, but you don't have to, because, um, I did say one hour. So, just keeping that in mind, it will end in four minutes, um, and then we'll just rejoin, and it should take about two minutes, and then we'll go ahead, um, but just, um, to put that out there. Does anyone have any more comments on this question, or should I move to the next one, or…? Um, ok, let's move to the- ok, go ahead.
P: Yah, no, no, uh, I don't have any more comments.
HD: Ok, perfect, so, um, before I, I have another question in the chat- but I want to know, um, if we're talking about identity and culture, then would you guys say religion falls more under identity or culture? I think I know everyone's answer, but, like, just to, um…
M: Um, I, I, I'm thinking, I'm thinking it, about with what Parker said, and what we had started talking about, but, for me, I would say, especially as a, as a white person who, who became Muslim, um, it's there, there's no way to untangle them, for me, personally. I think that it, both, like, being a Muslim is a huge part of my identity, but I don't know that celebrating and practicing Ramadan and keeping halal when it comes to eating, those things fall to me, and Parker made a comment about this along these lines too. Those fall more into a cultural thing. Even the fact that, whether we like it or not, there's not just one crys- there's not just one, like, crystalized form of Islam. The way that South Asian people practice Islam, even amongst different South Asian groups is different than the way, uh, Black Arab people, or even just Arab people, celebrate and practice Islam. There are lots of connections, and also lots of differences, too. So, for me, I don't have one answer to that. I don't think it can be one or the other. It's definitely both.
HD: Anyone else want to say anything?
H: Yah, I, I definitely think that it's both. Um, I think it's kind of hard to argue against that it can be both. But I do think, like, I think definition-wise, um, I think there are Muslims that have a hard time identifying as Muslim, um, because of the context they live in, but it still, in terms of their culture, is significant. Um, so, I think with that kind of example, like, I would say that Islam definitely influence- I, I would think that Islam influences culture more than it might identify- or, or influence identity, though it should do both, cuz it is important to identify as Muslims, um, for

that comfort, with, with the ummah, but, like, there are a lot of Muslims that are kind of uncomfortable with it, and they're still kind of struggling, but at the same time, they won't eat pork, they won't drink alcohol, like, stuff like that, so, um, yah.
HD: Does anyone else have a comment?
A: I mean, I think that, um, if, if you have a, a sense of religious certainty, um, that, uh, that sense of certainty, um, I don't know if that really matches with what I think of culture. Culture is something that, um, can sort of change over time, um, but, um, it obviously, there, there's a lot that, uh, a lot that, uh, that Islam influences of how, of what people do and, um, you know, how they live their lives, but, um, it's, it never really, it, it bothered me, it, it's always bothered me a bit to hear people, um, refer to Islam as a culture, primarily because it, it seems to sort of remove the, um, remove the possibility that, that people are really certain of, um, certain of the, of the truth of this teaching that, and kind of that downgrades it, in a sense, to being, um, you know, something that, like, the, the faith aspect is sort of optional, so.
HD: Alright, the Zoom's going to end, so I will send the new link. Um, Hussain I'll send it to, um, your wife because I don't have you on, uh, email or anything. Ok?
H: Ok, in sha Allah I'll come back.
HD: Ok, so then I'll just end, uh, the recording, and then I'll end the call and start a new one. Ok.

Start of second recording:

HD: Just going to take a few seconds to get everyone back into the meeting, um… I think the only person we're waiting for is brother Abdullah so hopefully he will join, uh, soon. I should get a notification about it. Um, but for now, we can continue and then, um, if he has an answer, he can jump in if he is still able to join. So, the next- oops- the next question I have, then, um, is, um, how would you define being a Muslim? I'll pop this in the chat in a second, but, uh, how would you define that? Is everyone, um, here and can hear me? It's good?
M: I, I hear you. I'm just thinking.
HD: I'm just making sure. I have like a washing machine going in the background, so it's a little chaotic but…
H: I guess I can go first. Oh, sorry.
M: No, I was going to say something unrelated. Go ahead Hussain.
H: Oh, ok. Um, yah, I guess I'm just trying to define Muslim, it would be somebody that, uh, like, I, I guess someone that accepts the shahadah. So, accepts that there is no one worthy of worship other than Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala, and accepts that Mohammed, RasulAllah, sal Allahu alayhi wa sallam, is the last, like, the final messenger of Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala. Um, and then I guess the main tenets of iman, so, belief in Allah, belief in the angels, belief in the book, books, the messages, belief in the messengers, and belief in, uh, Yawm al-Qiyama, and qadr. Um, so someone who has those, then generally I would consider them to be Muslim. Um, but if one of those things were lacking, like for example some sects would, for example, uh, deny the afterlife, in a sense. For me, that's like, Yawm al-Qiyama, so, uh, then I wouldn't consider them to be Muslims. Um, but other than that, I think, like, within that there's a lot of room for, you know, uh, areas which, might be lacking in some areas, but, at the same time, I would still consider them to be Muslim.
M: I would agree. Um, I remember I was in, I went to, I went to India, and I went to the jama'a masjid in New Delhi, and I was trying to go for, for jumu'ah prayers, and because I don't look Muslim necessarily, um, the guy who was, like, basically, getting tourists and visitors to leave,

he was kind of like, well, no, we're, we're closed. And at first, I didn't realize that it was for jumu'ah that he was closed, but eventually I saw people going in, and it was for jumu'ah, so I said, like, I'm, I'm Muslim, I'm Muslim. And I remember that he said to me, well, he's like, oh, you're Muslim, well, what, what is Islam? And I was like, how do you answer, how do I answer that question? So, I said the same thing basically that Hussain said, I just said, like, but he didn't speak English perfectly, so I was like: la ilaha ill Allah, Muhammad ar-Rasool Allah. That's what Islam is. And he was like, ok, ok, come in, come in. So, that's pretty much what I would say, um, defines being Muslim, um, or what is Islam. In terms of being Muslim, I've been thinking about this a lot lately, lately, because, with it being Ramadan, a lot of people will talk about, you know, Ramadan Muslims who, they practice more, they'll do things during Ramadan, and years and years ago, I maybe would have a little bit side-eye or judgement towards that, but I've, I've been thinking more about it as I get older, and I guess I, I'm, I'm less crotchety- I don't know what, what it is. Um, and being Muslim, to me, I guess, is making choices- belief of course, but beyond that, being Muslim, like doing Islam and being Muslim, it's to do with, like, making choices which you are making purely for the sake of, of Allah. Like, for example, it's technically, physically, it would be very easy for me to go out and eat, well, to, to eat pork, like my mother makes bacon and I could wake up in the morning and I could say well, what? It's food. I'm hungry. I'm going to eat this bacon. It's, there's nothing physically stopping me from doing it. It's a choice that I make for the sake of faith and belief and Allah and what He says to do. So, being Muslim, to me, is any of those choices that people make for that, for the sake of Allah. Not because it gets them something, or they physically can't do something. It's that you're making the choice to do it purely for the sake of Allah. So, the reason I brought up the whole Ramadan Muslims thing is because now I don't look at it that way. Now I look at it like, well, it's still one month of time where you, if you fast, if you usually drink outside of, of Ramadan, but you choose not to for the month. Should you drink? Should you drink as a Muslim? No, you shouldn't, but, you're still for that month making a choice purely for the sake of Allah. You could easily walk out to the store or pick up, open your fridge if you keep them there, or whatever you do. So, what is Islam? What is being Muslim? The shahadah, the belief, the faith, but I've been thinking a lot about that other part lately, that it's the choices that you make purely for the sake of Allah.

HD: Does anyone have, uh, any more to add about the how do you define being a Muslim?

A: Um, I think of it as, um, service, basically. I don't, I don't know a better way of saying that, but, uh, if it's a verb, then I think being Muslim is, is, um, serving other people.

HD: That's beautiful.

P: Um, I would say if someone says they're Muslim, identifies it, as a Muslim and then also has, um, you know, if we were to talk about it, you know, do they believe in Allah and His messenger, sal Allahu alayhi wa sallam, um, that's, um, you know, and then obviously there, there's, you know, there's the other four: the books, the angels, the messengers, the Day of Judgement, um, qadr, um, and all of those things, but, you know, I, I would start with just the first bit, if someone says they are, and then, um, beliefs and, um, in Allah and His messenger. Um, we could start there and then, um, and then, as far as the day to day, that's obviously a much more complex question. Um…

M: Yah, and I'm just going to jump in to say, um, that I like, that I like that, and I agree with that too, that if, if someone says they are, then, for me, too, that's how I approach it as well. If someone says they are, I try to- I say "try" because if you see or know they're doing certain

things- astaghfirullah- the things come into your head and then you're like, oh, well, really? But if someone says they are, then I try very hard to say, oh, well, then you are Muslim.
HD: So, if no one has anything else to add, uh, the next question, which I kind of popped into chat early by accident, but that's ok, give you some time to think about it, is, uh, when you think about Islam, what culture would you primarily associate it with? Like, if you had to pick one culture, or, um, or no culture, or all cultures, or, anything.
P: Um, I would say my, our culture, for people like me, our culture as Muslims, is, is in the early stages of formation as there just aren't a lot of us, you know, like, in our town there might be two other Muslim families that I know, um, and it's a decent-sized town, so, um, you know, we have a little masjid…
HD: I think we lost him. Um, but, I want to clarify, like, Islam as a religion, like, if you had to put a culture with it, what would you choose, if any? Um, while he rejoins, just to clarify that.
M: So, for me, um, it's probably somewhat split between two, but one kind of edges out, just because I kind of already mentioned it from where I, from where I'm born and raised. Um, South Asia. Probably, most specifically, uh, because South Asia is diverse. Most specifically Bangladesh just because so many people that I've known and grown up with have been there. Um, if you get a little bit broader it would just be like, Indo-South Asian. So, cuz my friends who are from the Caribbean are mostly Indo-Caribbean and they're friends who are Muslim as well. Um, so that's the culture that I most, that I associate with, if I think of Islam, the first thing that come, that comes to mind. Um, the other one that I'll just throw out there, because, again, this is a very Toronto thing is, uh, Somalia and Somalian culture, because, especially in Scarborough- the Somalian folks are everywhere, so I'll be tossing wallahi into my sentences without thinking about it, or asking people, oh, is that actually true? Oh, say wallahi. I'm just used to that kind of thing. So, South Asia kind of ekes it out a little bit, but because of my, because of where I grew up as well, but then there's also the, the, the Somalian, Somalian culture. Somalia and Somalian culture edges it, edges it a little bit sometimes too.
H: I guess, uh, like…
A: Uh…
H: Oh, sorry, keep going.
A: No. You go ahead. You go ahead.
H: Ok thanks.
A: You're first.
H: Yah, um, I would say that, like, the way that you, like, asked it, I would definitely pick Arab culture. Um, just cuz I, like to me a lot of, like if I were to lump up, which would be not fair, but if we were to lump up, for example, like all, um, like in India, like even if I made it more specific, Gujarati culture, or, you know, Punjabi culture, stuff like that. Um, out of all those cultures, I think of one that has the most influenced by Islam, um, not necessarily saying what people are following the best, um, but that, the culture that a lot of things that are in it, are built ingrained with it that, um, I, I would definitely put it to like the Middle East. Um, I wouldn't, like, I would, I would probably, I would probably just say Arab culture, to be honest. In terms of the most.
A: It's, that's really interesting that you, um, that you said Arab culture, cuz I'm, uh, being in Egypt now, I, I find that, uh, I mean the, the culture in Egypt is so hyper-local and there's, there's so many, uh, it's like there's so many different cultures here, and, uh, I, I feel like that's, that's actually a, a contrast to, um, in, in different stages of my life, uh, I was around more South Asian Muslims, and, uh, and when I was in predominantly South Asian mosques, it felt like, like

they were more- I don't know- like more, like, they were more of a, of a unified community than the, than the Arabs were. Like, they sort of, they like to, sort of, uh, stand out from the more, the more, the general American culture more than the, than the, than the Arabs did. Um, uh, which I think is, which is a good thing, in, in my opinion. But it's, it was, I, I think that there was a big difference between, like, the, the more Arab mosque and the more South-Asian mosque. Um, uh, when I, when I think of, I mean, of the culture of Islam, um, I think of African-American, um, Muslim culture, just the, uh, it's just the, the fixture in like, in, in hip-hop I think. I don't think there's really, um, I don't think there's anything that compares to it, in as far as in American culture, um, like the hip-hop groups, like, uh, the Poor Righteous Teachers, and, uh, Omar Suleiman, The Poet, um, Mos Def, Yasin Bey. I, I, I don't think there's other, I, I don't think we have yet to have, um, Muslims from other backgrounds that have, that have, um, produced, uh, as much, as much, um, American, uh, you know, media, American cultural products, uh, as African Americans and, um, I, I was, um, in, in my, the last period that I, that I lived in the US, I lived in Washington D.C. and I was, uh, um, I attended a, a predominantly African American, um, masjid, um, for the last, it was, it was most of it was during Covid so I sort of started attending, and then stopped, and then started again, but, uh, uh, but I, I think there is, like, the, the way that- so in America, people will say, like, kufi, like a hat, a brimless hat we call a kufi. That's not- Arabs don't say that. That's actually, like, West African, and, uh, a minor saying is, um, the African Americans took that from the West Africans, and now everyone in America says kufi for a brimless hat. But, but in Egypt, they call it taqiyyah. So, um, you know, it's, like, you, you kind of assume that it comes from Arabic, but it's not Arabic. It's, it's West African in, I think it's…
M: I, I think from the Toronto area it's a topi.
A: Yah, yah. Because topi, that, that's like, is that South Asian, or Turkish, or something?
M: Uh, I think it's like a mix of a lot of- and it's funny because you just brought up, cuz you brought up, started bringing up language, that's kind of why I was saying, like, you can't…
A: Yah.
M: Like, the fact that I associate it with more the South Asian culture, like, I obviously know that it's like, like we, we've, we've pray five times a day salah, but I'll be usually say like it's fajr namaz-
A: Namaz.
M: I'm going to pray, I'm going to pray fajr namaz, and today, today's the 23rd roza, not the 23rd fast, or 23rd day of sawm.
A: Um…
M: I just wanted to bring that up because you brought up the words, and it's like, that's the reality, like, that's how it, that's how it…
A: Yah.
M: Anyways, sorry. Yah.
A: Um…
HD: Does anyone else have anything…
M: Sorry if I, if I derailed you there.
A: No, no, I think that's a bit like the story how we, how we use these words is, uh, yah, it's really fascinating.
P: Did, um, did you get much of what I said before? This is Parker.
HD: Sorry?
P: Um, this is Parker. I, I, um, did I just hang up before, or…?

HD: I think you just got disconnected, um, but the current question is, though, when you think about Islam, what culture do you primarily associate it with?
P: Yah, ok, uh…
H: Just quick advice on, I think the last thing I remember hearing was something about you living in a village with two other Muslim families, or something like that. I don't know if that helps. Like, I heard the first part, but it's just that the two other Muslim families and then it cut off from there.
P: Oh, uh, right. So, um, yah, I guess maybe I wasn't quite answering the question as it was asked. Um, I don't primarily associate it with any culture, in particular. Um, and I would say, um, there isn't, maybe, I don't know if I ever did, um, particularly. Um, I never really thought of it as like, an Arab thing or, um, you know, a Turkish thing, or West African. Um, you know, I would say, as far as, our own Muslim culture, it's in the early stages of formation and it doesn't really exist yet as a culture. It's more like on the family level, um, the family and individual level. That's fine. Um, around here, um, and, um, you know, the mosques around here, there aren't many of them and, uh, they are very mixed, as far as, like, having many different cultural backgrounds, um, with none of them particularly dominant. Um, I would say within each mosque, at least for most of them, so.
HD: Um, so I just wanted to jump in for a second because we are coming up on our hour. So, it's clear we're going to go over the hour, but because people have time limitations, if you do have to leave, um, I really appreciate you coming and you're free to do so whenever you have to go, um, cuz I know some people are in different time zones. It's kind of late at night, but, uh, we'll just keep continuing, and then if you have to go, just- it's totally fine.
M: I was going to say, I was going to say, just so I don't interrupt, later I'll probably have to go at, like, maybe 20 after five, just so I, just so I don't interrupt in the middle of something.
HD: Ok, perfect! No problem. Um, the next- we're almost done. The next few questions are- we're kind of moving on from the culture and identity side of thing to your own kind of experiences and personal transformation. Um, so the next questions- I'll pop them in chat- are uh, what were the positive experiences you had following your conversion when integrating into the Muslim community? And on the other hand, like, what were some of the difficulties you also faced.
M: Um, I can speak to this a little bit. Um, I don't know if I can start with negative or positive. Ha ha. Uh, there was nothing, like, nothing overtly negative has ever really happened, I wouldn't say. Um, and again a lot of it, where, with this particular set of questions, and, again, I have a background that's not, I'm not going to say that's similar to yours, uh, Hailey, but you kind of can pick up some of the things that I've thought about or studied. Um, again, especially as a white man becoming a Muslim, like, some of the negative experiences I would say I've had are just things, like, um, I'll give salams to someone and I'll not get it back. They're just, sometimes you'll just get, like, just like a kind of a surprised blink, or they'll just somehow, like, they'll just, they'll just ignore it completely and just say, like, hey, how are you, or something like that. Um, and only, it's only negative in the sense that, like, obviously, especially as someone who has become a Muslim, and has come into Islam, you kind of want- at least I felt like, and this is more so, I'm talking years ago now, I kind of wanted that recognition, like, I've, I'm Muslim now, I've become a Muslim. So, that sucks, it's, it's not, it sucks when that happens. Um, but, again, I as, I, I'm very, as a white man coming into Islam, it's not, it's not a huge, like, oppressive thing that happens. Um, beyond that it's just, I guess there's sort of, like, we all know for better or for worse that there's lots of ways that folks practice Islam. There's lots of schools of thought, and

jurisprudence, and everything else. Um, and I, it's in my experience a lot of times that, that the masjid is, I'll be doing something, I've been Muslim for 12 years now, I'll be hoopla, or I'll be praying, or I'll be doing something, and I'll still have someone who comes up to me and says, like, you know, oh, brother, assalamu alaikum, you shouldn't do that, or don't do this. And I'll just have to, like, I, I, I just grit my teeth a little, and, like, just go jazak Allah brother, thank you so much, but it gets a little, it, it's frustrating especially because it's an experience that you can talk to other folks who are going into the masjid who are more visibly so-called Muslim, sometimes they'll experience it, sure, but it's not something that they experience all the time. Like, going for taraweeh prayer after being Muslim for ten years and being told that my feet are not spread apart far enough. It's just, sometimes it's a little, you get a little, like, you know. Um, in terms of challenges, this has nothing to do with other Muslims, this is fully in myself. When I first became Muslim, I struggled going into a masjid I had never been to before. I felt, I felt a little, a little nervous about the, about the fact that it would be kind of, very, very frequently all eyes on me kind of thing, and I'm not a person who likes to be in the spotlight, so, just, like, lots of things, that was just, like, that was, it was, it was challenging at first. I used to, I haven't used this, this description in a long time, but I used to describe it as, like, I hadn't become my own Muslim yet, if that makes any sense. I didn't trust in myself, I guess enough to, like, like, trust my own self as a Muslim enough to be, like, this is my space, and I belong in this space, and that's the way it is. And that just took time, time to happen for me at least, and now I'm, now I can definitely, confidently walk into any masjid I want, and that's the way it goes. Uh, in terms of positive experiences, um, those are more difficult to, like, describe, I think. Um, it's funny, cuz I just said I had a difficulty feeling confident in myself as a Muslim, but my confidence in general definitely increased when I became a Muslim. Just general confidence as a person. Um, I just felt more, just, I mean, just in general I felt happier. I didn't have, like, that missing element or piece that I had been looking for. Um, and in terms of, in terms of integration with the Muslim community, I was very lucky in the sense that I had so many friends, very close friends, who were Muslim. That was because when I converted, I had that immediate built in support network, so, for some converts, like, Ramadan is a difficult time, because depending on where they live, if they have family who are Muslim or not, they have iftar alone, or they have, or they don't know where to go for Eid. They have nowhere special to go for Eid. It's just another day. I was very lucky that I had those friends and was able, I always had iftars to go to, and I had- Eid was a big thing, even before I became Muslim. I was already going to big Eid celebrations and things like that. So, and that in general has to do with, I, I guess the way that Muslims and- I don't know- they're just very, and it's obviously very welcoming to, to converts. Uh, it's an exciting thing. Yah. So, I, those are my, those are my, I guess, challenges, if that is, is something to say, and, um, for the positives, the positives internally for myself, and then in terms of integrating with the community, it was that I already had so many friends that were Muslim. And going back to the kind of cultural elements of it because I had grown up around South Asian folks, and Arab folks, and Somali, and Black Arab folks and things like that. Uh, and I'm saying Black Arab, because in Canada there's not as many Black Canadians who are, who are Muslim. It's not as big of an element in Canada in the Black community. Um, yah, because I had grown up around those folks, even before I became Muslim, there wasn't as much of a like, there wasn't as much of a literal culture shock for me, because I had the kind of built in- it was more so just, like, oh, instead of my friends going to pray, I'm going to go with them now. So, it was, that was a bit of an easier transition for me.

HD: I'm glad to hear the positive experiences. Does anyone else want to share?

A: I, I would really, uh, I really liked how you said, uh, like talking about, uh, becoming your own Muslim and the, the confidence thing. I, I have, you know, positive and negative aspects of, of becoming Muslim, and, uh, in the sense of positive aspects as in the good things that bring you to it and the negative aspects of what was I trying to get away from. And so, um, the, when, when someone asks me, being asked, you know, like, why did you become Muslim by, by a stranger and, uh, not having the confidence to say the positive aspects, and then my mind immediately goes to, like, do I have to tell this, this stranger who just, who just, I just met in a parking lot how depressed I was? Like, does he have a right to know that I was, like, you know, like, do you have a right to know that I was, like, how lonely, that I used to be very lonely? Like, is that something?
M: Ha ha, I, well I'm glad you're laughing now, because I just wanted, I knew I was on mute and I was laughing just because I, I feel it. I feel, I feel you so much.
A: Yah.
M: That's why, that's why I just want to try to make that clear. That's, that's why I made that, I laughed because I feel you.
A: Yah, yah. It's, it's, so that's been, that's been um, like that wasn't even just the first thing at the beginning, that's been throughout. Um, you know, my, my, my life since uh, conversion, so, but, um, but I had, I had, uh, you know, people at my, I, I was in, I was in the last year of high school, uh, I was a senior in high school and I had, there were people in my, in my school that I, uh, that I, I wasn't close friends with them, but then, um, I, I was, I was sort of, admired their, um, their character and then sort of decided on my own to, um, to look into Islam. But then they, then they accept me and, and became friends with me afterwards and, uh, and that was really positive. Um, but then, but then having, uh, yah, yah, I, I mean, uh, the, the confidence thing is, is probably the, um, have, having people, having people in other contexts who, who aren't the same age, usually older people, um, just kind of questioning different, like, um, questioning whether you're really, like if you really have it in you kind of, like, asking questions, but it, kind of the subtext sounds like, are you really, can you really handle this? Um, and, uh, yah, and I, I still have people, um, you know, do, do those sort of prayer criticism comments to me, and, um, and, uh, I feel like it, it's, it's very, yah, it's, it's disturbing, but, and I, I try to just be optimistic, and just sort of, you know, say, like, just act like I'm enthusiastic about having, having a, discussing it, and it, it's still, it's difficult to, to adapt to.
P: Um, I could share something else, um, if you want.
HD: Sure, sure.
P: Um, um, I would say, um, when I first became Muslim, I found people maybe a little bit standoffish, I don't know, everything was foreign to me, but also, like, I think they, you know, to some extent I don't think most people really know their own religion all that well, and they definitely don't know what to do with converts. Um, and I, I guess maybe to back up a little bit. I've seen a big difference between a lot of American mosques are, like, really mixed in terms of culture, uh, at least around here. Um, there is one that I've been to which is Turkish. It's a Diyanet mosque that is, you know, the imam is trained in Turkey and almost everyone that comes there for Eid is Turkish, and though it is a little, it is some mixture jama'ah, and, like, that's a totally different experience, because, like, that's one coherent Muslim culture that is in the mosque, um, and is, so, like, you, you know, it's had time to deal with various issues, whereas I think, um, yah, I mean, as far as, as negative experiences, like, feeling people were a little bit suspicious, standoffish, um, and also didn't really know what they were talking about themselves, necessarily, um, I mean, it, maybe, maybe the basics, but you know, they might not

have known all that much, and they, they certainly didn't really know how to deal with, like, you know, what do you do when someone from this particular background wants to become Muslim, or like, is even thinking about it. Um, the, the most positive experiences that really stand out are one particular brother who was, um, Emirati from the UAE, um, uh, when I first met him, he like, you know, we talked a little bit, and he, he kind of assessed that I was serious, and then he spent, um, probably about thirty or forty hours, you know, teaching me how to read and, and, you know, the, the, the short surahs, basically, um, another brother who was actually also an American who, uh, sort of white, American convert, um, was, uh, very intentional about, you know, calling me a lot and, like, checking in, even though, you know, if that, uh, that, you know, we, uh, are still close friends today. Um, so that, that, those, between those two, um, they both also, kind of, you know, shared in teaching me how to read and the alphabet and stuff, so those, those two positive experiences were kind of, like, um, you know, what really, what really stands out, um, you know, at, at least when I initially became Muslim.
HD: Um, so again, like, the time limit is at ten more minutes and then it will end. I'll just keep the same Zoom link, so the one that I just emailed out or texted out. I think Mike has to leave, and if anyone else has to leave, I understand, cuz like, subhanallah I didn't think they would go more than an hour. The women's group went for an hour and forty, ha ha. Um, so if you can imagine, like, I have to type up every word you guys say, ha ha. Um, but it, but I really thank you for your participation. We'll continue with this question, um, and then I, I have another question, which is like the same question, actually, but, um, about, like, society in general, so, like, Canadian or American society. Um, but yah. I, I thank you all for your participation, and if you have to go, I understand, if not, uh, when it ends we will rejoin the same link that I just sent out, and, uh, we'll finish up. This is the last question. Yah.
M: Hussain, though, we didn't hear you for the last one.
H: Yah, I guess, uh, just, uh, I don't know, for me it's a different perspective, just cuz I'm not obviously a convert, uh, and by convert I guess within Islam, so, like, from Shia to Sunni, so it was a different framework, significantly different framework in terms of like, how to gain knowledge, and, uh, like, what the rulings were and everything like that, but, uh, like, I was pretty good with the Quran before, so I guess one of the issues that I dealt with was, um, because, again, I guess because of my Indian genes, I was able to grow a beard pretty quickly, um, and my pronunciations are pretty ok, so no one really assumed I was a convert, for good reason, um, and though it was very positive, in the sense that I could, you know, like, when, whenever I would go to a masjid, like, I never really had those experiences, and, um, like, what negative, I, I don't know if they're all negative, but the experience of people, like, constantly coming to me and asking how you converted, I could see, I could see that that could be pretty annoying over time. Um, but, um, and in terms of, like, entering the masajid, alhamdulillah it was very good, especially because I was a concerted youth, and, uh, some of the, like, the masjids in Ottawa, they're, they're generally large, pretty large. So, the one that I was mostly volunteering with at jumu'ah prayer was two or three thousand people, um, but they were very opened for me to be on the committee, for me to do this, for being in decision making roles, for me to host programs and stuff like that. Um, and I didn't really have a, like, an issue with, with that, but in terms of, like, now for example, being, like, going to the masjid, like, if we know someone converted, if someone converts and then you have people who convert, you know, pretty frequently, um, we reach out to them, we have full support, um, teaching how to read Quran kind of thing, right? Um, and we definitely try our best to follow up with them. Um, I did not receive any of that, um, because no one ever assumed that I needed it, so it would have been

nice. Alhamdulillah I did have a lot, I, I was in university so a lot of the, like, being a part of the MSA made a big difference. But I could see how a lot of people that I, I guess more so, specifically, you know, people from South Asia or Black people that convert to Islam, they're, or even Arab, I guess, um, not I guess, if they're Christian Arab and they convert, um, where they're not, like, and people that there're certain interactions though don't necessarily know that they converted. Um, and it's not something that they're like proud of to be constantly, like, oh, by the way, you converted? Um, they wouldn't probably be exposed to the same, that I would hope every Muslim community would have the support networks available for converts, um, that's not just in Ottawa, specifically. Obviously if you are in a village with few Muslims, then that probably does not sound the same thing, but, um, that's one of the same things that I guess I would, I would say as a negative for, for people that convert from the Black and Brown communities. But at the same time, like integration was, was very easy. Um, and not even that, but, like, because I grew the beard, like, it's not just a Muslim, like, he's a religious Muslim, we're just Muslims, like, they'll ask me to lead salah every single time, and they'll ask me, like, you know, questions, and, ha ha, um, which, which was, again, maybe annoying, but at the same time, it's just, that's how it was. So, um, yah, I don't know there's much to add about that, but, um, alhamdulillah in, in Canada, like, I felt like from work perspective, from everyone's perspective, um, and government work, government working, private, blah, blah, blah, like, everyone was very supportive, uh, to be honest. The stories I've heard about people, you know, having issues with it, like, a lot of times, uh, like you know, it would just be that person was shy kind of thing, but, like, talking to the managers, um, the experience that I found anyways, and again, this is different context, cuz I'm in a more professional field, so it obviously depends on the field that you're in, um, like, if you're in STEM, and stuff like that, the, the managers are generally more professional, and stuff like that, while someone working in a restaurant, or something like that might face a little bit more difficulty when they say they want to go pray at a certain time, um, when it's a very busy schedule, or retail, or something like that. But other than that, like, I, I've had a really, very positive experience, and it's not, I, I think the way you pointed it out, really, like, bring up, for this study, would be that for people who converted from the Black and Brown, and you know, communities, are not obviously, you know, generally speaking, Muslim, the issues that they face is that they would not be, that, that they could be missed by the support networks created for converts.

HD: Um, that was, that was one of the things that the female group, uh, brought up as well. Alhamdulillah, we had like a really diverse group of, of girls and, um, I think at least two were, yah, like, um, three girls, two were South Asian, and, uh, one was, uh, East Asian, and it was really interesting to see the, the difference between white converts and, uh, the ones that might be, uh, mistaken for born Muslims. So, that was really interesting. Um, so I wanted to say we have three minutes left on the Zoom call. We have one more question, um, left, so whoever has to go, um, I really thank you for joining, and I really appreciate it. Um, we will rejoin with the same link for whoever can. Of course, you don't have to. Um, I've already kept you longer than, than the hour. Um, about my thesis, I'm still writing it. This was the last piece, alhamdulillah, that I needed to, to finish. Uh, it was really difficult to try and organize these groups, and to get people together at a specific time. Um, but I should be defending my thesis, in sha Allah, before September, and then once it comes out, I'll be sure to, like, email you guys the link to read it if you want, or to peruse, like, in sha Allah. So, I'll end the recording here. Um, and then we will rejoin. I'll start the meeting again. So, whoever can… Does anyone have any comments, or, before I…? You know…

M: Uh, I was just going to say I, I'm going to, uh, not rejoin because it's about 20 after here. Um, Hailey, this was, this was, I know it was for your thesis, but this was really, I really enjoyed this as I was looking forward to it, and, uh, Abdullah, and Hussain, and Parker, I really, really, really enjoyed hearing your guys', uh, your thoughts, and the things you guys had to say, it was really, really nice to talk to you guys. I don't actually know any other converts, so I had no one else to really suggest for this, so it was, this was a, basically, a new experience for me, to be totally honest with you. Uh, and Hailey, good luck, in sha Allah everything goes well, and I would really love, really love when everything is, whenever it's the right time to do so, I would definitely like to see, to read what you, what you've put together.
HD: Ok, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. And if, uh, you ever need like a convert support group. Maybe, I don't know, if you want, you could, like, drop your email or something in the chat, in the group chat, and then if anyone wants to keep in touch, you could. Um, but that's up to you guys, if you're interested in that, or know anyone else in the Toronto area who Mike might be able to, to contact with. It might be good.
M: I, I'll toss my email to you, Hailey, since we're about to, we're about to end, and if you could, if you could pass, you can feel free to pass it out as you like, but, uh, as I'm, I'm kind of 12 years in now, so I'm maybe past the convert support group at this point, but, but jazak Allah, I appreciate it very much. Alright, that, that's all for me.
HD: Ok, so I will, uh, end, unless anyone has anything else to say, and then I'll restart with the same link. Ok?
H: Assalamu alaikum, it was nice hearing from you, too.
HD: Awesome. Ok, see you guys.

Start of third recording:

H: Ok, so I'll pop that question in the chat again. This'll be our, our, um, last question, unless you guys have anything to kind of add. Just because I went over like, um, you know, the, the Muslim community, I still want to know what the, uh, positives and negatives of just society in general, not necessarily, like, for those of you who, like, us who are outside of Canada and the US, but, like, North American society, specifically.
P: Um, are you talking about positive and negative experiences just, uh, in, in the society in general.
HD: Yah, so like North American society. So, if you're American, then in America, or if you're Canadian, then in Canada.
P: Yah, um, I don't know. It's been pretty cool, I would say, um, you know, maybe a, you know, nothing, nothing too hard to deal with. Um, nothing that would even rise above, I mean there's this, there's this term, which I don't really like, I've never really used it before, but like, micro-not aggression, but like, just, just really small stuff, you know? It, it, at, at most. Um, I don't know that, um, yah, I don't really know that I've had any particular, particular difficulties. Um, you know, maybe, um, like, I was working with a guy one year, and, you know, he mentioned, like, near the end of the year, that, you know, me taking Friday afternoons off for jumu'ah, so, it's tough on his schedule, you know, but, like, he was super accommodating other than that, you know? And, actually, he was a guy who generally didn't like Muslims, and didn't have good ideas about them, um, but, uh, he was, you know, generally quite fair, um, so, um, yah, I would, I would say it's generally been pretty good. Um, from my own, I mean, um, even to the point of like, you know, um, uh, yikes. I mean, this is kind of maybe, maybe more generally the type, this

is actually more characteristic of how, how it's been, um, we, um, we established a new mosque around here, um, a few years ago, and a local, uh, I don't know what- they're Protestant, I don't know what, um, maybe Methodist, uh, church, hosted a huge interfaith gathering, uh, which was a fundraiser, and, uh, and, like, you know, maybe a hundred different other local religious communities all raised, you know, it wasn't a huge percentage of the funds we raised. It might have been like forty thousand, for a project that was significantly bigger than that. But, still, I mean, like, you know, I saw friends I hadn't seen in a while, and, you know, people I had known from all sorts of places, and, you know, yah, it was literally, like, I think close to a hundred, if not more than a hundred. I think, including businesses, it was well over a hundred, but I think in terms of other religious communities, um, you know, certainly, like, the majority were Protestant churches, like, various Jewish communities, um, Buddhist communities, like, all kinds of other people signed on and actually materially participated in like fundraiser auction to help the mosque, like, um, you know, get their, um, you know, to help us get our, our parking lot in order, and it was, like, for some specific thing to do with the mosque, so, kind of above and beyond in some ways. Um, I would say, that's probably been more characteristic of people have either been, like, cool and, like, generally accommodating within, like, the bounds of, you know, as, as long as it didn't, um, you know, again, that guy I was working with, he was a contractor, and I was working as a carpenter, and he, yah, you know, like, in Ramadan I was a little tired, like, you know, so I was doing roofing and stuff while, you know, he mentioned that, like, maybe I was not working as fast as, as I might have ordinarily, but, you know, he didn't, he just mentioned it once, he didn't, he didn't make a big thing of it, um, and, um, you know, I generally got through it, um, so, um, um, but yah, that's, that's what I would say.

HD: Does anyone else have any, uh, answer they want to share with the general society that they're, um, you know, America or Canada… Hussain?

H: Yah, well, like in Ottawa in the major [inaudible due to background noise from another participant] it's a pretty liberal. So, I think like, in terms of, um, like their perception of Muslims is very like, like, for example, at work and stuff like that, whenever I'd say anything with Muslims, they'd be like, take off, don't worry about it, blah, blah, blah, I gotta pray, go, go, pray, go, go, or whatever. Um, does that, I don't know, there could be that sense of, ok, like, we gotta be careful, which I didn't mind, to be honest. Um, and, like, they would ask me, like, even for example, like, are you good? Like, can we get you a Christmas gift, or? Like, give it to me, I'd be, like, I can't give you a gift, but, I guess, I guess, no problem. Um, and, and stuff like that, so I guess I did have a very good, positive experience from, I think from, uh, that. The only negative experience I think I had was one of the, like, one of the, my, the professors, the law professors, uh, was pretty racist. Well, like, like, might not have been racist, but, like, he obviously had a very negative opinion of Muslims. Um, so, like, the first class was, like, hey, um, so, just an example of how law has gone wrong in Islam, and talked about, you know, like, inheritance and stuff like that, and I would raise my hand, like, you know, my dude, like, be a little bit more nuanced and a little bit, like, you obviously don't have a very good understanding of it, and you shouldn't be presenting to the class on it, and blah, blah, blah, and, obviously, he, he was pretty hard on me, to the point where the, like, it was another person, he actually eventually died from cancer, so, but in terms of, actually, like, um, like, the, the school actually just told me to switch classes, just to make it easier, um, to another section, which worked out, but that was the only experience where I was kind of, where someone actually had an influence. Generally speaking, when people were racist, it's kind of like, oh, I feel bad for you. It, it's never been the case where, um, like, it might have been some random person that might have had some issues, you

know, downtown, and just been like, ah, you know, but it wasn't necessarily towards Muslims, more just towards immigrants, I think. Um, but that very rare, and, again, it was never from a position of, like, or those of us who were, where it actually impacted, you know, negatively. Um, and, uh, I, I guess the only negatives that probably, like, the difficulties were from at work. Cuz at home, like, I could basically just isolate myself to my family, and then my friends, and, like, a few of my friends, I mean, most of my friends are, happen to be Muslim, I mean, other than some of my work friends. Um, but then, and in the masjid, and events, and blah, blah, blah. Um, but at work, um, where it's obviously, like, we're, we're, generally speaking, where Muslims are a minority, so, for example, there was, like, you know, a wine and cheese event, or a networking event, or they want to do some social events, the, like with the bar, or there's someone leaving, or retiring, and they want to go to the bar. Uh, that's the only time where it was kind of awkward, but after a few times, people understand it. Um, a lot of times, they'd actually just choose, um, unless they're like, partying, or someone's retiring and they really want to drink, um, but generally speaking, they choose restaurants where, like, I would be more comfortable going, and stuff like that. Um, so I, and that's fair, and that's not a big issue, that I would say, oh sorry, you need to fix that, just because, like, that's their culture and, like, I also have to respect them, and I don't need to be part of every single thing that they do, um, as long as it doesn't affect my work culture, which it kind of does, in a sense, because of the social aspect of it, but at the same time, like, what do you do? Um, so other than that, uh, but I have heard of experiences in other, in, in areas where, like, you have to not regulate, like, if it's in the federal government, it's different, but, for example, if you're working in retail, or, or, or in an area where there's less, I guess, like, in a smaller company where, um, people can be a little bit more, like, if they have a negative view, like, it could, it could creep into your life a little bit more. Um, so, for example, scheduling for jumu'ah, salah, like, the fara'id- some people had issues with that. So, I've definitely heard of these problems, but I've never experienced them myself. But I've definitely heard of people, um, where their, their manager would have a negative impression, or would think they're just wasting time, like the brother said, and, you know, during Ramadan fasting, and stuff like that, I mean, I've never heard of, you know, anyone being fired or anything, but like, being kind of nervous about it, like after jumu'ah they'd run back to work, um, or they would only come for, like, the, uh, like, the prayer part. They would miss the khutbah because they're like, it's not wajib anyways, and work is going to get rough, and things like that anyways. Um, and, uh, I definitely do think there's some people that immigrate here that are very shy with their Islam. So, once I heard in one of the, uh, in the uh, I'm not going to say the company, but, uh, um, but, basically, a partner walked in, and she saw, like, a sister praying in the bathtub, and the partner was like, uh, what the heck? And it was just, at that point, it was just too nervous to ask the partner to work, like she didn't have a board room or something to pray in. Um, so definitely seeing that, um, and I guess more insecurity. Like, it doesn't, like, usually it doesn't happen to people who are raised in it, because they know, like, generally they know people, you know, if they were raised in Ottawa, then they know how people in Ottawa work, but, um, people who are coming from abroad, and stuff like that, that they definitely have that feeling that, like, ok, if I tell this person, then I'm never going to move up in life, or stuff like that, so, um, I, I definitely do recognize that area as well.

HD: Great. Um, brother Abdullah, do you have something to add? Any experiences?

A: Yah. My, my, uh, I mean, I uh, I've done different kinds of work, but when I was, when I was roughly from 23-27 years old, um, I worked in the maritime industry, um, and, you know, operational, uh, types of roles, and, um, you know, do, doing physical work, and, uh, really,

frankly, I think I was too, uh, I didn't have the maturity to be able to discuss that, you know, I'm fasting now, and, so, uh, I'm not going to be able to, you know, work as hard, or, like, be as productive, or, you know, I, I would, uh, sometimes I would ask, like, can I leave an hour early on Friday, and then I, like, our normal schedule was, like, 6am to 2pm, and I'd ask can I leave at 1pm so I, so I can find a jumu'ah to pray at. And even that was so late, I'd have to drive, like, really far away to find a, a jama'at to play with, to pray with, but, uh, I just, I didn't have the maturity at the time at that stage, being in my, in, you know, mid-twenties. Um, I, I, the, were the confidence perhaps. Um, so I, I wouldn't say that was difficult, it, really there was no lasting harm from any of that. Um, but, um, it, it was, it definitely got a lot easier when I, when I sort of went back into academia, and I, I went to graduate school, and then, and then started working in more, like, office-based roles, that it's, it's just kind of, you know, there, there's not really a consequence if you're, if you're, you know, expected to work independently in a, at a, in a cubicle anyway, no one really cares if you, uh, take half an hour off to, to pray jumu'ah, and, uh, and so, so there's definitely, I mean, yah, I can definitely, like, let it get, as Parker said, being, you know, um, that I, I have a lot of respect for, you know, doing like, you, you're doing, you're doing real work, and, and, you know, having to ask for, for permission to do that, that's really, like- I, I didn't, uh, you know, I haven't had to do that- I, or I, I wasn't able to, um, cuz I was, I was, I didn't have the maturity to do that. Um, but I, I think it makes a big difference what kind of, what kind of, uh, you know, uh, how you relate to the economy, and, uh, how, how much difficulty you face.

HD: Thank you for sharing. So, that's, um, the last of our questions, um, unless you guys have any other comments about your personal journey, or, like, the self-transformation you went through that you would like to share. Um, that's all, and I'll hang out for a few more minutes on call if you have any questions for me, or questions about the research, or anything. Um, yah, I'll be here, but thank you so much and I wish you guys a really great Ramadan. Uh, the last ten days- thank you for making it during Ramadan. I was really scared, like, no one would want or have time. Um, but I really appreciate it, really. Um, it means a lot, so, thank you.

A: Thank you.

H: Jazak Allah khair, Hailey. I really appreciate it. And thank you everyone for sharing your experiences. It was definitely a learning experience.

P: Yah, thank you. Jazak Allah khair.

HD: Assalamu alaikum.

P: Yah.

H: Walaikum assalam wa rahmatullah.

A: Thank you. Thank you all. Walaikum assalam wa rahmatullah.

Focus Group (Women):

Participant Key:
H = Hailey De Jong (Primary researcher)
K = Kristen
P = Prama
A = Aliyah
T = Tara
C = Ciara
AM = Amirah

Start of first recording:
H: … Forget.
P: Oh, I'm glad I said that before you started recording.
T: Hello.
H: Ok, so, now it's recording. Hi Tara, how are you?
T: Hi, assalamu alaikum. Yes I'm good. I'm doing fine, alhamdulillah. How are you?
P: Assalamu alaikum Tara.
H: I'm just going to kind of wait a few minutes for everyone else to kind of pull in.
T: Ok, but you can hear me, right?
H: Yes, I can hear you.
T: Ok, great. Can you see me? No, I don't think so.
H: No, it's up to you if you want to keep the camera on or off. I think that most people will probably want them off, so.
T: Oh, awesome, yes. I would rather have it off. Perfect. Thank you.
H: No problem. Prama, I think that all of your participants that you managed to collect from your side, they should be showing up around two, but then mine, they might show up a bit later.
P: It's ok, in sha Allah.
T: What are you studying? This is a part of your studies, I guess.
H: Yes. So, I'm, um, studying Translation Studies. But, when you get into the, like, MA type of thing it's no longer just, like, looking at, uh, language between language. It's a lot more theoretical, a lot of out of the box thinking, so, um…
T: It's all about the context.
H: It's, um, it's more about the concepts that are behind the languages, so, like, culture, identity, these type of things.
T: Awesome, very nice. I, I, I, I can, I, I've read the paper that was sent for the… And I was puzzled, yes, because basically it's all about how, you know, being a convert can kind of be a way of translating, so, sorry, stuff, so, wow, ma sha Allah, yes.
H: Yah, alhamdulillah it's, uh, it's thinking of, like, translation but, like, applying it to other, other things. So, kind of keep that in mind as we go, that it's not just, um, like, we're going to think of it as a metaphor, not so much as, um, what most people would think of it as. Ok.
P: Can you clarify that again?
T: …. Like translation.
H: Yah, so, Prama…
P: Also, welcome sister Aliyah and Kristen, assalamu alaikum.

K: Walaikum assalam. I'm sorry I didn't hear the first part.
A: Walaikum assalam.
P: Do you wanna?
H: I guess I can go over it again. It's ok, no problem.
P: yah, yah, yah.
H: So, as we're waiting for people to join, um, so, we were talking about what translation studies exactly is- sorry if you can hear the adhan, I'm actually in Turkey so it's nine o'clock at night. Um, so, we've just finished iftar, alhamdulillah. Uh, but, essentially, we're talking about translation studies and how we're kind of thinking it not only as language to language, but the concepts that are behind it. So, like, culture, identity, translation as metaphor… Um, so kind of think of it in this way and that should help. In sha Allah. Ok, I think, um, Prama, this is all the people you had brought together, right? And I wanted to give you guys a huge shoutout and thank you for, um, showing up super last minute. I really appreciate it.
K: I think a lady named Joy was also talking about joining. Uh, Prama, did you tell her the new updated time?
P: So, um, actually, sister Joy, like, she still lives with her family and they're, like, Christian and it's hard for her to join, um, like, Zooms and things like that when we're talking about Islam, so if it was, like, a spoken or, uh, if it was written, then she, she would have been able, but um… Subhanallah. Let's all make du'a for her and her families- and her family, sorry, because it's hard for her, so, um, yah, she, she, she couldn't be a part of it today.
T: Ah, Kristen.
K: How does it look? Good?
T: Beautiful!
K: Sorry, I uh, only put it on for this. So…
T: You look good.
H: Thank you so much for joining.
K: No problem.
H: So, I think, um, my other participants were thinking of joining around 2:30, so we can get started with some questions and then as they join, like, they can catch up, and then I'll go over the questions that they missed with them after. Um, so, just a few things… Everyone signed the consent form, yes? Ok. And I just want to get, like, verbal consent from everyone again before we start. Like, you agree to all of the terms of the consent form and we can continue.
T: I agree with the terms, yah.
P: You have my consent
K: I agree.
A: I agree, same here.
H: Perfect, thanks. So, I'll start with some individual questions. And again, this shouldn't take more than an hour. Um… I think I have a TA account with the university, so it shouldn't cut out at forty minutes, um, but if it does, I will send another link and we'll just rejoin. It should take about two minutes to rejoin. So, um, the first question is kind of a get-to-know-you question. It's if you, if you had to choose a few words to kind of describe your identity, uh, what would you say?
P: Um, wait, sorry, can I, uh, just ask one thing before we get into the questions? What would be the best way to answer them? Because, like, should we raise our hand? Because I think there's an option to, like, kind of raise your hand, or, or just so we're not all talking at the same time, should we?

H: We can, um, for the individual questions we can kind of do, like, a circle, like, um, I guess there's four of us, so we'll start with Prama and…
P: Oh no!
H: And the next person on my screen is Tara, and then Aliyah, and then Kristen. Ok, well, Prama you can go first.
P: Uh… that backfired for me. Um, do you mind repeating the question?
H: Um, sorry, I'm just sending the link to another person, one second, she might be joining, she's in Saudi Arabia, um, but she's Canadian. So, she's just taking her kids to the dentist. Um, so, the first question was, if you had to choose a few words to use to describe your identity, what would you say?
P: Hmm… Uh… so, my identity, um, so, uh… A few words… Multicultural, um, I mean, I'm Canadian-born, but my family came here from India. So, um, Desi, um, what are some other words I can describe? Uh, I don't know. Yah. Uh… having a blank. I don't know. I shouldn't have gone first. Somebody else.
H: It's ok, we can come back.
C: Salam.
H: Just wanted to say salam to Ciara. Do you have a specific pseudonym you would like me to call you by?
C: Oh, uh, can you hear me?
H: Yah, I can hear you.
C: Ok, uh, you know, I hadn't thought- you know, It's so funny, usually I'm the one asking people about pseudonyms. Um, let me, let me think about it. Let me think about it a little bit. I want it to be a good one. And it has to be, because in the published work you want it to be a good one.
H: Um, I mean it doesn't matter because I can choose one after. Everyone else has chosen to keep their names as their real-life names, but you don't have to.
C: Uh, no, I don't think I will. Just because my name is not a Muslim name and I don't know, let me just think about it.
H: I mean, like, uh, in the publication…
C: Yah.
H: … Regardless of, like, let's say Prama put her name, I cannot put it in the publication. Like I will change everyone's names regardless.
C: Oh, yah. So, I want to pick one and have you use it in sha Allah.
H: Ok, in sha Allah.
C: Ok. Great.
H: Ok. So, um, we're just going through the first question. So, I'll ask Tara, um, to go next. If you had to choose a few words to describe your identity, what would you say?
T: Uh, so, for me, I am in the conjunction of the three worlds to whom I belong, which is my Mexican identity, my Islamic identity, and being Canadian now. So, I am someone that lives in the places where these three cultures touch, with all the contradictions- I don't care, but that's who I am.
H: Ok, that's cool. Aliyah, would you like to go next?
A: Yah. So, I came up with three words. The first one, um, definitely is Muslim. Uh, it is, uh, this identity that I remind myself of every day. Uh, so that's the first thing. The second thing, I would say I'm a mother. Because um, I'm most of the time I'm [inaudible] with my son, so that's, I think most of the time I'm playing a role as a mother in the family. Uh, the third one… I

have to say um, that I'm a, I'm a Chinese, because I spend my first twenty years of my life in China. Even though I'm Canadian now. Um, while I still feel like a lot of things inside of me, um, you know, has a, has a view, or is, uh, influenced by Chinese culture. So, I would say that that would be the third thing that comes to mind, if I have to choose three, but if only two, then I would just choose, like you know, the first two: Muslim, mother.
H: Ok, thank you. Kristen?
K: Um, so, for me, I put Muslimah, and, uh, Canadian, and revert. And, uh, yah, that's…
H: Is there a particular reason why you choose revert instead of convert? Just as a side note.
K: No, not really. Um, I mean, convert to me sounds like, uh, because I was raised Catholic, and uh, when I hear convert, I think of someone converting into Christianity. And so, um, like, it's like, and revert is, you know, it's like we're all born Muslim, but um, you know, we come back to Islam when we, uh, when we choose to accept it. Uh, if we were raised in a different religion, so that's why I chose that word.
H: Ok, beautiful. And uh, Ciara? Since you haven't decided on a pseudonym yet I'll just go with the screen name.
C: Ok, thank you. Can you just repeat the question? Because I missed it.
H: Right, so if you had to choose a few words to use to describe your identity, what would you say?
C: Oh, ok. I suppose I consider myself, first and foremost, I really consider myself a stranger. Uh, in line with the hadith that Islam came as something strange, and it will one day be something strange, and give glad tidings to the stranger- because my identity, really primarily is a spiritual identity and wherever I go in the world, um, I find that, uh, if I am around Muslims, I feel a sense of spiritual solidarity. But sometimes our cultures, um, are, um, there are, there's cultural in, um… I wanna pick the right word… and you can edit this out, by the way, if you were to use this as a quote. I'm always thinking about that, because whenever I interview people, there's kind of, like, filler words and thoughts that can interrupt, like, a solid thought. Um, so, uh, basically, even if I have a spiritual consonance with people, there is oftentimes a cultural dis-consonance. And I find that the people who most closely align with my identity, and to whom I can relate, are the people who are both, uh, spiritual Muslims and culturally Western. So, I don't, and, uh, it doesn't, it, it isn't always the case, but, that's what I've found, really, so I think that the people that I fit most closely with reflect back to me what my identity is. Um, so, I really do put that spiritual identity first, but I have been shaped in a Canadian cultural context, which is really a part of my being as well. So, it's an integrated identity. And from my research with, um, I'm also a researcher, and I've done a lot of, um, work with Muslim educators. Uh, and, also, observing Muslim children in, uh, mosque schools. Um, I think that this ability to integrate is a really important one. And that means integrating concepts that might appear conflicting, but that's what we're being called to do today. Like, we can't live only in one conceptual world or another. We really do need to be able to fluently move back and forth between worlds. So, I guess that's why I picked stranger as kind of a key word. When I go home to Canada as a Muslim, um, I don't fully fit in, in the culture of my birth…
H: Yah, that's really beautiful, and I think like this is right on brand with what, like, where we're going with the research. So, actually, the next question I kind of had, unless, um, Prama, did you have another word for your identity, or? Um, do you want to move on to the next one?
P: So, uh, actually ,after hearing, you know, what the other sisters have to say, I, I can't think so much of a word, but, um, if I could just say, like, one thing, um, about my identity… So, I actually find it interesting that I, um, that I mentioned that I'm Desi, and, um, and I'm from, like,

an Indian background and everything. But, um, listening to, you know, what Ciara had to say, I started thinking, actually, when I take part in, um, activities and events that are more Desi- so, like, Pakistani, Bengali, or Indian- it's actually really interesting, because as a Muslim, like, uh, revert. And, uh, Hailey, you know a little of my family's history, right? So, having left such a traditional and cultural family, um, because there was issues with morality and stuff, and then coming to Islam where it's not based on a culture- it's based on the Islamic teachings, right? Um, I feel often when I'm part of, you know, these events and whatnot, uh, there's a part of me, an inside part of me, um, that feels this clash where I'm no longer interested in being, um, uh, you know, in upholding those, those specific cultures, cuz I feel like, actually, it divides the ummah, and I think, uh, yah, ha ha, I hope you understand what I'm trying to say. Um, I hope that makes sense, but, yah, so, it's, again, it's interesting that I classified myself as that, but what I'm hoping to accomplish as I go on with my life and in my journey is to just, kind of primarily identify myself as, as Muslim, first and foremost, and, and surround myself with, um, people who are more focused on, um… and no judgement, but just, you know, people focused on the deen, and on, you know, uh, you know, the spirituality of Islam, and less on, um, you know, on the cultural traditions that our parents, and their parents, and so on, that they, um, they try and bring into the fold of Islam. So, that's just something I wanted to add.
H: Ok. It's interesting cuz, like, the next question I had written down was, uh, in terms of culture, what culture do you belong to, and, uh, how would you describe that culture?
P: Hmmm… Ha ha, um, should I, should I answer that even though I just…
H: I mean, I think you kind of got it, but we can go around, like, the, the table, so, if Tara could answer. I think she mentioned that she was, uh, Latina, right?
T: Uh, Mexican. Yes, I can go Prama, if you don't want to continue.
P: Um, Sorry, just, just, I'm sorry, repeat the question again for me Hailey?
H: Yah, um, in terms of culture, what culture do you belong to, and how would you describe it?
P: Ok, so, again, so, I mentioned that my background is, uh, Desi Indian. But, at the moment, I would say I don't feel like I belong to a culture. Um, uh, I'm trying to find my footing in, in the Muslim community. In where I am, um, and, uh, yah, I don't know, I don't feel like I specifically belong to any one, and it's hard because, you know, I grew up- although I grew up with the Desi culture, um, so I can't really relate so much to the Canadian culture, um, and I feel like, again, that, that's why I'm just trying to just disassociate myself from cultures all together and just focus on, um, focus on Islam and, uh, yah, ha ha.
H: Ok, nice. Tara, do you wanna go next?
T: Yes, um, this might sound sad or weird, but I don't think I belong to any culture anymore, um. Uh, I'm Mexican and I personally don't like the term Latina, because it's, it comes from a very ignorant English position of the world. Uh, the Latin people are originally the Italians, or the people that spoke Latin, and then we call Latin all the languages that derived from Latin, which are English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. But my culture is not Latin in that way, or the culture I was born upon. So, uh, that's one thing, so I don't identify as Latina, though it's very widespread- I don't care. Ha ha, you know, because, uh, basically, I mean, I don't fit in with any category, so I might as well just… So, yah, I just don't think I belong to any culture basically except my Mexican culture, uh, I, what I do is, I visit, right? When I have to- when I go with my family back to Mexico, well, I, I, I know the drill, I know how it works, you know, and I go along for the sake of not cutting ties of kinship. But I don't enjoy it, and I don't particularly miss it. Uh, but I just, you know, for the sake of family. And, uh, I wish I could say I belong to Canadian culture, but that's not true either- like, I will forever be an immigrant, right? And even

Canadians wouldn't recognize me as Canadian, even though I, uh, believe myself to be one. And with Muslims- uh, well, since Muslims nowadays, unfortunately to my liking, most of the Muslims I've been in touch with, they wouldn't, there's nothing called an Islamic culture, in abstract. Basically, we have some kind of portions of what it is to be a Muslim, and then it's all coloured by a particular country, or a particular language, and some particularities, um, and, uh, a lot of people confuse that with some way of being a Muslim, and I disagree. And I disagree with that. And most of all, most of all, is, because, um, in my experience, at least in the countries I've lived in, uh, if you wanna go to a mosque, and there's a predominance of, I don't know, Pakistani people, well, you don't belong because you are not Pakistani. If you go to a mosque and there is a predominance of Moroccan people, you don't belong either. Because you are not Moroccan. And I could go on, right? So, um, I, I, I don't belong. Really. It's uh, it's a- all I do is, whenever I go to a mosque, I behave the way I know I have to behave in a mosque if I am invited to a mostly Moroccan gathering- I know, you know, the drill, so I follow it. Uh, if I am with Mexicans, that's what I do. If I'm with Canadians, that's what I do. Um, if I'm with whoever, right? Um, so I, I truly don't think I belong. Um, sometimes, even with reverts, right? Even among reverts, and I also identify mostly as a revert than a convert… Um, even among reverts it does matter a lot which cultural background you come from. So even, even I would have a lot of points in common of being a revert, from someone else, let's say with a Canadian background, but the challenges will be a little bit different. So, there's, there's a distance in that. And the reason that I identify as a revert rather than as a convert, is that a convert to me implies coming from one religion to another and I wasn't really raised in Christianity nor Catholicism. I really embraced Islam from a blank canvas. So, for me it's coming back to my original state. So, in a nutshell, yah, I don't think I belong. I don't belong truly to one cultural background. I belong to several, and then I navigate them. And, yes, you could say it's a bit of chameleonic, or, uh, a contortionist act. It is. It is. But that's how I get by. There you go.

H: Ok. Um, these are, like, really good answers. They're really in-depth, and I love it. Um, and they're definitely helping, because I see so many ties with my research, and it's very interesting to hear your guys' take on it as well. Um, the one thing that I'm just keeping my eye on the time, because I promised everyone one hour. If you can stay longer, that's great… um, but just to, like, maybe let's just try and keep the answers a little bit more precise. Um, so that we have time for all of them. But, um, let's go with sister Aliyah next. So, commenting on, like, what your culture is, um, and then, I guess, how would you define that.

A: Um, since I converted, um, in the beginning, um, I feel like I should make myself, like, more Arab. Because I know, Islam like from Arab people. Um, but then I slowly, slowly, the more I study, I realize that, uh, that Muslims should try to be, uh, sunnah-oriented instead of, uh, culture-driven. Because, basically there is no culture perfect, but the sunnah is what we should follow. And that is complete, actually, compared with any culture it has all the aspects of our life. Um, so, uh, when I, when I'm culture to make a decision, follow the sunnah. Um, but, uh, if something that is not, like, you know, religious, uh, like, what to eat, whatever, I personally think I'm more influenced by Chinese culture because I grown up there and brought up there. However, there are still a lot of things I'm against with going on in China, and uh, with Chinese culture. So, I try to learn, since I'm in Canada, so I'm trying to learn- also I studied in the States- I'm trying to learn from different people that, what could make me, uh, better and please Allah. Um, so, I don't, like, I think, uh, if it's not, uh, really matter religious-wise, I would say that I'm Chinese culture. But, uh, culture is not, uh, like, I mean, it's not the main thing that shapes me. But rather, I would say the Sunnah and, uh, Quran.

H: Uh, so I just wanna say salam to Amirah before we continue. Amirah, we're only on the second question, so you've joined just in time.
AM: Assalamu alaikum.
H: Walaikum assalam. So, the first question we had was, um, if you had to choose a few words to describe your identity, what would you say? So, you can kind of, um, think about those ones. And I'll also post them in the chat, like the ones we've already done, and the ones we're working on, um, since I do have them. And then we're kind of just doing a circle around the participants for the individual questions. So, then, um, you will be after Ciara in terms of who's next to answer. And I'll post the questions now. So, uh, Kristen is next I believe. So, Kristen, if you wanna talk about your culture a bit?
K: Ok, uh, so, uh, the culture I grew up in was very white-Canadian. Uh, my family has been in Canada for many generations. Uh, and, um, part of my family, um, like, you know, is, is Indigenous. Um, so, like, a very long time in Canada. But, uh, after I reverted, it was, uh, I experienced, I definitely experienced a culture shock, because of, because of how differently I was treated now by the culture that I grew up in. Because, um, t's just, you don't know it until you experience it, but like, pre-hijab compared to post-hijab, it's just how, like, you know, like, how strangers act around you, and how people treat you. It's, so, uh, I'm kind of new-ish to Islam- I mean, it's been less than a year since I reverted. But, before that I was very patriotically Canadian. Um, I am still very patriotic, but it's different than before. Like, I used to have this ideal view of Canada as like being like not such a racist place and like, but it's just, it's, it's different. But, um, now that I, um, now, like, I, um, I'm just a regular Muslimah, like, no real strong cultural ties. Um, you know, I had to abandon basically all of it, like, cuz, you know, my family is very practicing Catholic, and, like, you know, like, Easter, Christmas, like, you know, all our cultural celebrations are pretty much, like, I can't really celebrate it anymore. Like, like, Tara, I don't really feel like I really belong. So, I volunteer to try to make friends with, uh, other Muslims. But it's been much easier to make friends with other reverts. So, I'm sorry if that was long, but, basically, I don't know. Um, culturally, I am Muslim. That's pretty much it.
H: Ok. Um, Ciara, would you like to talk a bit?
C: Uh, yah, can you hear me?
H: Yup.
C: Ok, so, um, you know, responding to what the other participants have said, I really felt this too, um, in my hometown of Vancouver, which is quite a new Muslim community, and every mosque or sub-community seem to be ethnically rooted, and as a, as a white convert I didn't really fully belong. I didn't feel culturally, uh, like I belonged in any of those places. And simultaneously, all of my family and friends I grew up with were non-Muslim, so that's one reason why I felt out of place. But what I've noticed in places like New York City, or London, or LA, where there are really mature Muslim communities- meaning, um, there have been Muslims there for, for, you know, four generations. Um, you have, uh, there's a different kind of blending that happens across cultures. And, so, you really do have people from various different cultural backgrounds who are all culturally American, or Canadian, or English. And Toronto would be another example- I, I would imagine, um, so, I think that there can, there can be that blending. But something about Canada- that, um, that the last woman said, uh, Kristen, that was really interesting, is that Canada prides itself on being a non-racist kind of place and, um, I think that they're doing ok maybe when it comes to skin colour, potentially? Although I do believe that there is some real systemic discrimination. But, if you think differently, that's when you really feel the prejudice. There are some sacred concepts to secular Canada that, if you challenge those,

you're basically out. And, so, um, there's kind of an epistemic- a deep epistemic kind of racism against spiritual ways of thinking and being, and I, I believe that Indigenous Canadians have kind of, have done, um, a lot of groundwork to kind of indicate the fact that Canada is epistemically homogenous, essentially. And, um, I think that we have to really give credit for that and find a time when we can start moving through those doors and say, look, we have different understandings of why we exist and where all this comes from and these need to be taken seriously. And society, and in school, and in the academies as well… Um, just one final thing that I kind of wanted to say, is that all of us have indicated this kind of cultural disconnect between, um, ourselves, and Canada, and coming from different places, and going different places, but, uh, I really do believe that there are pockets of people who are of integrated cultural backgrounds, and it's just a question of finding those pockets of people. Um, who, you know, I found them in places like Dubai, or [inaudible], or, you know, you can find them, and I think it's important to keep feeling, to keep looking for that sense of belonging where you're- also, there's so many interpretations of Islam and ways of being Muslim that you also want to find a community where there's a relevance between how you practice your Islam. So, uh, I think [inaudible].

H: Well, Amirah, you're next. Um, the questions are in the chat because you missed the first one. Also, the Zoom will end in ten minutes, so, when that happens, um, it'll just end by itself, and then I'll send out the link again, like, a new link and you guys can re-join. Ok?

Various: Ok. Alright. In sha Allah.

AM: Ok, so, I'm, uh actually a third-culture kid. I was born in India, but I was raised in Dubai until I finished high school. And then I came to Canada by myself when I started university. Um, and even within India, even though I'm Indian, I belong to a minority persecuted group there. Um, so, there has never been a strong cultural identity… Um, and until I became Muslim, I, I didn't have a sense of identity, um, and alhamdulillah that's what Islam gave me- it gave me a sense of purpose, it gave me things that I could ground myself to. And, um, I guess, I guess that's the only kind of culture that I can really, um, really ascribe to. Um, when people mix in a lot of their culture with religion- I do not know how to interact with it. It becomes very difficult to navigate certain systems. Um, and although, uh, since I look brown, I look, I almost blend in with the rest of the community, I always feel a bit out of place, and so I try to work with groups so I can feel like I can fit in better. Um, and how would I describe the culture? Um, I guess, I mean, since I've been living in Canada recently, I would, um, I, I completely agree with what Ciara said. Um, I guess since I grew up in Dubai, you could see how people practice their actual culture and they're accepted for it. Although there is also a lot of racism there, but, like, you could be completely Indian there and you could practice your cultures and you would be accepted for it. You could be Filipino, and you would be accepted for your practices. Over here, like, during university, um, being against, like, the party culture, or not wanting to drink- I was immediately an outcast. Um, from the get-go. Um, so, like, finding my pocket of friends, and I was studying engineering, so I was always surrounded by men. Um, um, the, if you do not belong to, like, the major culture here, you will immediately become an outcast, and you will become that odd one out. Um, and you really need to, like, work to find your group of people. I hope I answered all of the questions.

H: That's good. Um, the next one, which I'll pop in the chat in a second- I also have them written on my iPad, so I have two screens… uh, is then… I've noticed a lot of, like, kind of Muslim, but also being defined in both the identity questions and the culture questions… So, like, um, do you guys distinguish between culture and identity? And what would you say is the

distinction between the two terms? This is open to everyone, so we're not going to do a circle anymore- just, if you have something, raise your hand and go ahead. I'll pop that in the chat too. Uh, Amirah, go ahead.
AM: Um, so, the one like culture that I was raised in was Indian, so, like, things that separate culture from identity, I, for instance, um, the food we eat, uh, the clothes we wear, culturally. Um, there's no Islamic set of laws, except for being modest. And, uh, what modesty itself is. So, how you choose, like, what garments you wear to distinguish yourself- uh, I think that a lot of it is about culture. Um, I mean, even pop-culture, and music, and poetry is also culture, uh, if you, uh, if you are into the arts. So, I guess those are the ways that I would differentiate culture from, like, my identity of being Muslim.
H: Ok. Great. Tara, you can go ahead.
T: Yes, I would say that they are very different, like, um, unfortunately for a lot of people they are the same, because they are wherever they grew up, that's what they believe they are. I personally believe in the right of self-determination, so you can grow up in a culture and become someone completely different, and I don't see anything wrong with that. So, for me, culture is something that's given to you, and identity is something that you create for yourself.
H: Ok, beautiful. Um, Kristen?
K: Um, uh, I had an answer and now I don't know so much. Uh, I was going to say that I don't really distinguish it. But, I mean, I guess, um, and why not? Because, I mean, you, you, you- the other people raised very good points that, um, so, um, I'll leave that as unknown. Sorry.
H: That's ok. Um, Prama?
P: Um, am I on mute? Uh, no? Ok, yah. Um, so, do I distinguish culture from identity? Um, personally? Yes, absolutely, I do. Um, actually, even not just personally. I think, by definition, culture is also something that is more, um, as I think I mentioned earlier, it's, uh, tied into traditions, um, based on, like, the generations, and kind of your, your genealogy, I guess, right? Like, where you come from? But identity, I think, is something that individuals, like, we cultivate ourselves. Um, I mean, depending on what your family, your family's culture is, like, a lot of individuals, I feel, and, uh, I, I hope I don't misspeak, but I think a lot of reverts as well, they don't feel like they, um, fit in with their families' cultures, and maybe that's what leads them to uh,- as someone else mentioned- kind of seek what their purpose in life is, and what their identity is. Um, so, yah, I think it's, uh, there's, there's a really big difference between, uh, culture and identity, and, uh, culture is something more that I think is a representation maybe more based on your ethnicity, and, and where you come from. But identity, I think, is very, very personal, and it's what, um, yah, what distinguishes someone as an individual, vs. uh, yah, that, that community, or where they come from. Yah.
H: Kristen, I see that your hand is raised again. Did you wanna continue?
K: Well, I mean, can't you say that, in a way, that reverts is a culture? And, like, that that's part of our identity too? Like, culture isn't necessarily just, um, you know, like, um, I'm Canadian, or, you know, like, I'm from wherever- it's, like, it's a community, right? So, our community, I, I think, I think they can be tied and that, but I totally agree with the other ladies that, like, my culture would be, you know, I'm a revert in a way, because now it's like, we're, um, we're kind of alienated from both in a way, cuz, you know, we weren't brought up Muslim, and now our past culture's not the same, so, now our culture- and personally identity is, as a, as a revert, and that doesn't mean that it's, like, you know, we all do the same exact thing, but we're all part of the same community. So uh, I'll stop there.

H: Ok. Um, I'm going to let Aliyah go next cuz she had her hand raised for a while, and then we can, if anyone has any further thoughts on this, we'll add them in.
A: Um, I personally also think, um, I do distinguish culture from identity, um, because I eat Chinese food, I speak Chinese language, I, I feel like Chinese culture really, really influences me a lot. Um, I used to hang out with a lot of, um, Chinese Muslim sisters, and we trying to get on the same page, uh, like, about Islam, and understanding our Islam. Um, I feel, um, I can't really, uh, get rid of how Chinese tradition has, uh, shaped me, so, I would also agree with Tara and Ciara. They mentioned that culture is something that we are given, but identity is something that is what we, how we identify ourself according to the core value or the objective that we are working on. Um, so I, I'm trying to be a Muslim, I'm trying to set me to Allah. So, that is my identity. I'm trying to be a good mother that's how I identify myself, but culture is really, like, uh, regardless, like, how much I don't want to call myself a Chinese, for a lot of reasons- I'm very sad about that- but still, I cannot get rid of what is inside of me that is Chinese. Yah, so that's my answer.
H: Ok. So, just a reminder on the time limit- it's at one minute. Um, so then it will end, and I will send out another link, and it might take like a few minutes to reconnect. Um, so, until then, maybe I'll just stop the recording here.

Start of second recording:

H: Ok… I think… Who are we waiting for?
P: Tara and Aliyah?
H: Ok, let's turn my camera back on. Ok.
C: Uh, assalamu alaikum. Can I say something about this topic?
H: Sure, yah, go ahead.
C: Ok, uh, I, I agree. Somebody said it so beautifully in one line, like culture is something given to us, and identity is something we choose. Um, but I just wanted to point out that I think they're really integrated, and I think that neither of them are necessarily fixed. And it's kind of empowering to think about the fact that we can… um, choose our culture to some degree. And in some cases, to quite a large degree and, if we think about the fact that culture does shape who we are, you know, some people have spoken about culture as being externalized mind, um and mind being internalized culture- we have agency in how we decide to construct the culture around us, so, uh, with my three kids, um, I just decided that Canada is a fantastic place in some regards, but I wanted them to grow up in a place where they could hear the call to prayer five times a day, they could learn Arabic. Um, and so we actually moved out of Canada just for that reason. But I still think it's really important for them to understand that they are Canadian as well, and so we do go back and we participate, but they go back with a critical lens, like- and they keep that critical lens, no matter where we are, and I think that's really important for us today as Muslims, is to be inclusive and encouraging, and yet to always be thinking about what is the Islamic principle here…. Because we can see Islam in everything around us. Um, and one other point I wanted to say, is that from my understanding of the Prophet's seerah, Sal Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam, um, he was really inclusive and supportive of culture- and one example is when, um, there was, there was a delegation that came from uh, a part of Africa to, uh, Medina, and, uh, they were doing, uh, a, uh, cultural dance, and the Prophet, sal Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam, was watching them. And Aliyah was peeping over his shoulder, and he encouraged her to watch their dance. So, if this isn't a celebration of acceptance, and the celebration of culture, then I don't

know what is. So, I don't think we need to be scared off by this idea that there is only one culture of Islam and it's an Arab culture, and- no. I mean, the beauty of Islam over history is that it is expressed through the lens of culture. And we keep our principles strong, but we can do those principles in many different ways. We can, you know, if we want to dress modestly, we can dress modestly in all kinds of ways. Hijab doesn't need to be only one way, for example. So, I just wanted to say those things.
H: Yah. That's beautiful. And I know, like, um, I'm assuming you've read the Islam and the Cultural Imperative. I should link that for everyone also. That article is very useful. And then… I think Amirah has her hand raised?
AM: Ah, yes, um, is that article by Dr. Umar?
H: It is. Yes.
AM: Ok. Um, yes, that's a great article. Um, but I also wanted to, uh, state that, I think as Muslims, our entire culture is a revert culture. Everyone, uh, broke- even the early Sahabas- they broke away from whatever their cultures were, and they were all reverts. So, subhanAllah, like, just through being Muslim, our culture, being the revert culture, we are connected to the first Muslims. Um, and I think that that's something very powerful in that, and the fact that we have our own traditions, like, that's what's so beautiful about the Sunnah. You know, you can come down, sit on the floor, uh, use your hands to eat food, and you can eat with each other, and you will be, uh, that is a culture that RasoolAllah, sal Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam, created for us, and that we can all feel connected to him as a result from it. Um, uh, and someone mentioned, uh, their unhappy attempts being associated to their culture, because, maybe there are things happening in the world, but, uh, we need to also remember that, like, uh, those, I mean, uh, when RasoolAllah, sal Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam, was present, it was the age of jahiliyyah, and those people chose to reform themselves and show them, like, Arabs can be different people. Um, they can be people with all of their already positive traits that they had, and then they can include Islam on top of it to be some of the best people that we know. Um, so that's all that I wanted to add.
H: That's really beautiful, and I never really thought of it that way, but I'm really glad you said it, um…
C: Um, can I add something to that comment? What's really so interesting is that even Ibrahim 'alayhi salam, he broke off from his people, even what his father was practicing. So, this idea of that we are all reverts is really beautiful and profound, I think.
H: Yah, that's true. Prama, do you have anything to add?
P: Um, actually, um, sister Amirah just- that's exactly what I was going to say in response to what Kristen said, that we, um, as reverts, like, that in itself is a culture, and it immediately made me think of the time of the Sahabas- um, may Allah be pleased with them all. Um, you know, they had so much, uh, tension within their own families and you know, leaving what their forefathers did and leaving that culture, so, um, as she had mentioned, that our Prophet, sal Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam, created this new kind of culture, um, based on our Islam, and based on our spirituality, and, um, and, and, and, yah, no, that's, that's, that's actually exactly what I was going to say, but then something else that just came to mind is, um, when it comes to culture, um, you know- me and, and my brother- for example- I feel like we, too, are, are individuals who are very focused on, um, just kind of using, like just kind of following the Sunnah as our culture? And not kind of ascribing to anything else, because I think it's important to recognize as well that a lot of reverts, they face a lot of backlash from their family, and they're no longer accepted by their family, and it's hard, um, for individuals, um, to kind of reconcile their identity with

their culture, because now their culture is associated with so much, um, oppression, or hate, or bigotry. Um, and, I feel like that's something important to, um, to recognize in the Muslim community, when, you know um, we have reverts, that are, you know, coming into the community, and differentiating between traditional, cultural practices and what actually is the Sunnah, because, and, and, you know, not to be so over-sensitive, but I think, um, trying to fall into a new culture, right? Whether it be Arab, or Pakistani, or, or you know, Senegalese or whatever- it, it could bring up, a lot of, um, unsettling feelings of, of rejection from their original culture? Um, but, yah, I think that we, we just need to be, uh, as a community, hopefully more cognisant of that, and, and try and to strive to always focus on the Sunnah that our Prophet, sal Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam, you know, gave to us and yah, that's… I hope that wasn't too much of a ramble.
H: So that kind of leads into our next question- since we're, um, dealing with um,
P: I keep doing that, I'm sorry!
H: No, no!
P: Just jumping the gun!
H: It's good! I love how everything is just flowing into each other… Um, but the next question, I guess, is how do you guys define being Muslim? Like, if you could put like a short, like, a sentence or two definition with it, how would you define it?
P: I'll go last. I'll let other people speak.
H: Ok, Kristen.
K: I would define it as, um, you know uh, uh, accepting that the Quran is true, and, um, like, uh, and trying to follow the, the Sunnah of the Prophet and the, uh, the hadiths, and you know, basically, at its basic core, that's it. You know, follow the Quran, uh, like, we don't know about all the hadiths, um, but like you know, try your best, uh, to please Allah and that's pretty much it.
H: Amirah?
AM: Um, I'm going to reiterate what Kristen said, and, um, submission to Allah subhana wa ta'ala, um, and that would be my guiding purpose, um, and, um, using RasoolAllah, sal Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam, as my guide. To submit my will and my being to Allah, subhana wa ta'ala.
H: Ok. Does anyone else want to add any definitions, or does that kind of summarize everyone's thoughts?
T: I could give it a try. Uh, for me, being Muslim means, uh, establishing a relationship with Allah, uh, following to the best of your ability the principles of the Quran and the Sunnah, while being a citizen of wherever you are. That, for me, would be- and a good ambassador as well. You know, like there's no point of being a great Muslim, but you are harsh to non-Muslims. Uh, that, for me, that does not compute… But anyhow, let's leave it at there.
H: Aliyah?
A: I would just add one more thing. Um, except to, like, you know, um, submission to Allah and following the Prophet, sal Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam… Like, I think, um, it doesn't matter how much you achieve, or how much knowledge you have, uh, like, basically, we can turn everything in our life to be a worship by having a good intention. Uh, and to please Allah. Um, so, yah, that's- that would be the third point for me of, uh, being a good Muslim.
H: Um, moving on from that then… I'm seeing, like, a lot of similar answers… So, would you guys then define religion more as culture or identity? And, like, why would that be? And, I guess, Aliyah, you can continue. If you want.
A: Yah, yah. I would do- I would do consider it as identity instead of culture.
H: Prama?

P: Um, yah, I think now, um, as I go on in my journey- it's been about a five-year journey, um, I'm seeing it more as an identity, and something that's, um, Islam is very personal between the worshipper and, and Allah, right, our Creator, but I just want to add something a little personal. It's very interesting that when I was first coming to Islam- so my older and my younger siblings had already accepted Islam, and, um, there was a little turmoil in my life, and, and I was kind of deviating a lot from my family's culture, and I was looking to kind of reconcile my identity and figure out who I was, so I thought, ok, well, my siblings are, they've accepted Islam, and Islam was something that was always a little familiar to me because I'm Indian. So, with Bollywood movies, you know, you always hear terms, like, um, ma sha Allah, assalamu 'alaykum, like a lot of the language was associated with it was very… So, I thought that I could kind of join Islam, and it would kind of be a, I'm joining a new culture that isn't oppressive like the one of my parents, right? Um, but now, it's interesting, as I go on in my journey, I realize it's not so much about, you know, the Arab culture, the food that you eat, or, or the language- you know, obviously Arabic is very important, right? It's a language sent down by Allah. Um, yah, but anyways, I'm, I'm rambling but as I go on in my journey, I'm realizing that it's, it's more just about, um, yah, the worshipper and, and the one who created us all, and kind of creating that connection, and, um, yah.
H: That's beautiful. Um, so, is your name *K-ri-sten* or *K-ir-sten*? I want to make sure I'm saying it right.
K: It's *K-ri-sten*.
H: Ok, Kristen, go ahead.
K: Ok, so, um, I differentiate, and I don't see culture as being tied to ethnicity or where you're from, but more as a community thing, but like I said before, that I see them kind of as very similar. So, I would say that, um, since my culture is, I'm, I'm a revert- that religion is tied to my culture.
H: Tara?
T: Uh, for me, it's neither. It's a little bit of both. They have to- like, there's a little bit of culture, and there's a little bit of identity, and, uh, I think it would be a little bit reductive to try to make religion just culture or just identity. Uh, for people that were born into an Islamic family or an Islamic country, uh, of course it's a little bit of culture, and then when they develop a consciousness or a real commitment to Islam, then it becomes identity. Uh, if that, if that thing never happens then they are just culturally Muslim, which, which, happens. Um, and then for reverts, uh, like, us, I think there's a, there's a, it starts first, probably depending on your situation, a little bit of culture and then you, then you, you, uh, go forge an identity and then you have, uh, elements of both according to…
H: Ok, uh, in that case, like, some people said Islam has a culture, and some people said it's an identity. Um, if you had to pick a culture to associate with Islam, what would you, what would you choose?
P: Um…
K: Is that for everybody?
H: Yah.
K: Yah. I, I, I wouldn't. Because Islam is, is not cultural at all. Like, it's not… It's not an overt culture, right? Like we can, we can choose uh, well, I mean, we can choose to follow Islam in our religion as part of our culture, but it's not something overt. It's not, like, it's not for the Arabs, it's for everybody.
H: Ok.

T: I agree. I think Islam is- I mean, like, you cannot practice in a void. You cannot be, um, Muslim and all and do these things in a, in a cave on a top of a mountain. Well, you could, right? But… um, you can, but the thing is, I think for me, uh, all the basic principles and guidance of Islam, they are, they can be practiced and performed in any cultural background. So, I wouldn't either say they're all Arab culture, or this culture. I think the virtue of Islam is precisely that, that you can take it and practice it anywhere, on any context.
H: Ok. Amirah?
AM: Um, I agree with what both Kristen and Tara said. I mean, if I converted to Islam when I was in Turkey, I would think that would be the dominant culture- like, eating those kind of sweets at Eid morning. If I converted to Islam in India, I would be, like, oh, uh, my culture would be, oh, I drink *shirkhouma*. Um, so I guess there is no dominant culture, and then whatever path you're on leads to Islam.
H: Ok. Prama?
P: Um, do you mind just saying the question again? Um…
H: I didn't put it in the- oh, I was kind of, like, off the top of my head… Um, but like, would you say that Islam has a culture, or, or no? And, if it has a culture, what culture would it be?
P: Um, yah, I feel like, um, it should not, uh, be associated with any cultures, but I feel like oftentimes it is… Um, I think that somebody had mentioned earlier as well that, um, in their journey they thought that they had to be more, um, Arab for example, but it's, it's interesting, again, because Islam is not an Arab, uh, religion, uh, yah, I'm losing my, my, my thought, so, um, yah, no. My answer, let's just say, is no, it isn't. There is no culture associated with Islam. No.
H: Alright. So, uh, just as a reminder, we have five minutes left. Um, because I promised, like, max an hour. So, if you do want to stay, that's welcome, and that would help a lot. We're, almost done. I'm done the, um, culture and identity questions. The only ones are left are your experiences. But if you do have to go after an hour, you're welcome to do so. Um, so the final questions are kind of about your experiences as a convert. Um, we'll start with what your positive experiences were. Both, like, in the Muslim community, and in kind of the society around you. So, like, Canadian society, then. Let's start with Canadian society. What were your positive experiences post-conversion? I'll type it in the chat too. It's a long one, so… Um, does anyone want to go first?
T: I could probably try. Um, I don't know if this is going to be a little bit, um, I don't know, abstract, but, um, for me, positive experiences would be that, for instance, I don't know, at work, right, or, like, um, I, I, I have built a reputation of, you know, like, I, I, I, I, I've made my mistakes, my mistakes without any problems. And the reason I do that is because, well, I try to abide to that rule of doing the best you can, you know, as a Muslim. Um, we must have integrity when you do, so, and that's kind of an observation that people do around me. They find it rare, like, it's very rare of people to accept that they have made a mistake. And, uh, I try not to have a problem with it, because, well, I did. So, that would be… Well, well, what I'm trying to say is that when you apply the principles, um, these are always welcomed. I mean, they are good principles. Any human can recognize the goodness of them. So, for me that's a positive.
H: Ok. Uh, Aliyah?
A: What I have experienced positively in Canada is, uh, is that I've, like, is that people have a little, but, not like a little bit, I mean, some sort of knowledge about how Islam is, and, uh, they at least have some Muslim neighbour, or friend, or are coworkers together. So that would be my positive experience, because as a Chinese, I don't grow up with people who have hijab on, and,

um, I, like, you know, for us, religion laws are man-made. Even, like, Christianity, or Buddha, or whatever, because, in China, our education, um, like we, they don't teach us, like, they don't give us the option that you can believe in God. So, basically, um, it's, uh, I, after I converted in the States, I went back to China for one or two years. Those times were very, very hard for me. Uh, because people see me like, like a very strange person. They would think I'm, I'm a foreigner. And a lot of people even don't know, like, what's going on. They would think I was bald. You Know? They didn't know that's part of the religion. So, I would say in Canada I feel very, um, comfortable. I don't, uh, I don't … People thinking I'm too strange or abnormal. Yah.
H: Ok, beautiful. Kristen, would you like to go next?
K: Ok, um, yah, so, I think, uh, I think, I think Aliyah was before me so she can go ahead.
C: I'm just worried because they're waiting for us. They called to tell me this.
H: Ciara, you're, uh, unmuted. Just a heads up, if people are unmuted… There we go. Um, Kristen, go ahead, or…
K: Oh.
H: Yah, Aliyah just went, so you're good.
K: Oh, oh, I'm sorry, sorry, sorry. Um, so, uh, ok. I haven't had that many positive experiences, and it was really tough to think of something, but, I guess, so far, because, um, my parents are very liberal and have this worldview that Canada is a liberal place, they've been accepting-ish, but they have some very distorted views of Islam. And while I was thinking, like, it's positive that we have halal food available, and, uh, that we're not openly persecuted for wearing hijab like what is happening in India. Like, you know, you see those videos of the girls, you know, like, um, that lady who said Allahu akbar, and, you know, she's being chased by a mob in India. So, that, I mean, that's not happening here, so that's a positive.
H: Ok. I think Amirah wanted to build on that.
AM: Um, yes. Also, it depends on what society you're referring to. So, if we say, like, for example, the Muslim society, um, because I look like another, just another brown person, um, and a lot of brown people are Muslim, I was never welcomed, I never had the support I needed when I first converted to Islam to teach me salah, and to teach me all these other things that I needed. Uh, but for the broader community, I think it was a huge relief for me because, especially in Ottawa, where there's so many Muslims. Uh, I remember when I started wearing my hijab, and I was like, wow, people are not staring at me. This is completely normal. I can just be Muslim and, uh, and I'm not gonna get dirty looks. Because we have this, like, I was raised with a stereotype, like, you know, wearing a hijab is bad and people will look at you, and you won't feel safe when you're by yourself. Um, but, yah, this is not the same experience when I was in, like, smaller towns where I would be the only Muslim standing there, but in itself, is its own jihad, and I feel like we're a representative of Islam. Um, yah, alhamdulillah for living in Ottawa. Ha ha.
H: Ok. Um, so the next question I actually have, I think, um, a few people had their hand raised also, um, but the next one will be about, like, the Muslim community. Like, the positive experiences, and then we're also going to talk about the negative experiences- both in the community and in, like, Canadian society in general. So, I'll let, uh, Tara, is your hand up from last time, or is this for this time?
T: I think it's from last time. I didn't…
P: Oh, sorry.
H: It's ok. Um, so then I'll let Prama go.

P: Um, actually, yah, I think Kristen and Amirah both touched on what I wanted to say as well. Um, I think we're really lucky in Canada that we, uh, we live in such a multicultural, diverse community that it was, um, easy to kind of integrate, um, and to find, you know, Muslim support and whatnot, but I actually find it very interesting that I have a very contrasting experience, and, um, Amirah, I think I, we are both Indian… Um, so I, I am born in Ottawa, in Canada, and so throughout my whole life, I have experienced a lot of, um, the racism that comes with just being, um, like, firstly, just brown, and I feel like, in my, like, twenty-some years, I've kind of, you know, come to terms with that, and I've noticed the community be more welcoming. And I think Ciara kind of mentioned as well that in Canada people are more tolerant of, um, first skin colour, right? So that, that sort of racism, but it's interesting when I first put on hijab last year in, wait, was it last year? Yah, I think it's been a year, uh, alhamdulillah. Uh, I started noticing, again, a lot of uh, staring and a lot of racism, and maybe because I work in a, the public sector, I was experiencing, uh, specific attacks from some, some clients and, um, so yah, I don't know. I just find it really interesting that, uh, you know, we both have had different experiences, and, um, yah, I just wanted to share that.
H: So, the next question then… Amirah have her hand up from last time? Um, the next question, then, would be, what were the positive experiences you had when, um, evolving in the Muslim community after your conversion? So, like the same on in chat, but Muslim community instead of society. Kristen?
K: I've had a lot of positive experiences. I haven't had any negative, actually. But I've mostly associated with reverts, but, um, you know, when I was, uh, the first time I, I met someone who was another revert, she was a hijabi-no, no, not a hijabi- a niqabi. And, uh, we all had a picnic, and, you know, like, people were coming and saying assalamu alaikum, and, you know, sister, brother, and it feels, like, so, well, welcoming and warm. And, um, you know, it's just been very positive. Um, but, I think, maybe it's because of where I am, um, because, um, you know, I've also associated mostly with the revert community in Ottawa, but I've heard from other reverts that their experience- I've been told explicitly not to go to any masjid because of how people will be treated, but I haven't experienced that personally. It's all been pretty positive.
H: Alhamdulillah. That's good. Does anybody else have any positive experience they want to share with the Muslim community?
P: I can add something. Yah.
H: Ok, go ahead.
P: So, I, I wonder if everybody, if anybody has seen that, uh, the Australian revert brother, um, I believe his name is Ruben, but he changed his name to Abu Bakr. He actually said something beautiful about, um, his, um, when he took his shahadah, he said something like, as soon as, you know, as I said my shahadah, I was in the masjid, and I had gained more brothers than I have ever had, and more sisters than I have ever had, and I, that's one of, um, one of the most beautiful things about Islam, is that, how we address each other by brother and sister, um, and we really, you know, love each other for the sake of Allah, and I just want to say, in, you know, in regards to this actual focus group, you know, it kind of, some participants came together very last minute, but I think that, that's very reflective about the ummah is that we're always willing to, um, help each other out. Um, and it's something that before I was Muslim, I never really experienced that. Maybe because in Canada it's, everyone's very individualistic about their, you know, about fulfilling their own needs, but, um, upon joining the, the ummah, I realized that, you know, there's so many sisters you can reach out to, and there's always going to be someone who's going to help you, and I think the beauty of that lies in that we don't do it to fulfill our

own, um, ego like, oh, I was able to help someone or whatever. We do it for the sake of Allah, and, um, yah, I think that's really beautiful, and it's very… Majority of Muslims reflect that in their everyday life. And yah, yah, it's great.
H: Ok. Um, Amirah?
AM: Um, I would like to make a distinction between, like, my experiences around certain, like Muslim societies in Ottawa, versus outside. So, when I was studying at the University of Waterloo, where I didn't look, I didn't have a public shahadah moment, so I didn't have, because I was too scared, um, of sharing with anyone that I was Muslim. Um, so I didn't have, like, you know, like, that group support that I was expecting or anticipating. Um, so, like, so, instead, when I would come to the masjid, and I remember, when I wasn't wearing the hijab, I, I just came and I was going to change into my prayer clothes, and this was my first day being Muslim, and a man scolded at me for not wearing the hijab when entering the masjid, um, when I was coming straight from work. Uh, versus, like, I, uh, I uh, work and I also participate, I volunteer a lot with Masjid Rahmah, and the environment and community some of the sisters have created- and they both are converts, sister Salma and sister Cindy, have made it so accepting for me to be present, and me to feel comfortable, and me asking for help. Um, I don't see that outside. I live very close to the SNMC masjid, and I don't see that kind of support outside of Masjid Rahmah. And, um, and it is because of these sisters who put in so much work and effort and to build that kind of kindness, that kind, that kind community that I do owe a lot of, um, gratefulness to.
H: Does anyone have, um, anything to add, or? I don't want to depress anyone, but, like, the next one is going to be about negative experiences, so, if anyone has anymore positives before we move on? Ok, well…
A: Can I, can I add something?
H: Sure, go ahead.
A: Well, uh, sister Prama had already covered that, but I just want to emphasize a little bit more that I realize people help, I get help for, from people that they don't look for any, um, benefit back from you, like, you know, they don't look for any return from you, like they're helping for, um, for the sake of Allah. That is something that I have never, ever experienced before. Um, it's always like, you know, people are looking for benefits and they, they, they have to have, find something like, like you have to return some, them something back if they help you. So, to make them feel balanced… Yup.
H: Yup. So, I've just noticed our time limit is down to ten minutes again. Um, I've taken more of your time than I've already initially planned for. So, the last question if we could just go through it, um, really quick, it's about negative experiences. So, you can all just answer kind of based on two factors: like, your negative experiences with the Muslim community, and then the negative experiences, like, in society in general after you converted. So, if Kristen can start us off…
K: Ok, um, so, um, Canadian community, I live in a relatively very white community, a kind of racist neighbourhood and, you know, it's just how, um, ok that's, that's minor, but the thing that, you know, now, like, um, well, people imply that I'm, um, a foreigner, um, I was, I was, not driving, but I was in an accident and, uh, like I was the second person and we were both white, uh, uh, reverts and, uh, this older white lady was like, we don't drive that way in Canada! Like, things like that. And, um, you know, um, somebody at work, uh, came and asked me if, uh, I was married, cuz now I was wearing hijab, and if I was being forced to wear the hijab, and I, I'm single, and, you know, small, dumb things, but it just, it adds up a little bit, and the stares and all that, cuz, I know other sisters, they are saying it's less, but for me it's been a lot more, cuz you know, I never experienced any kind of racism before- and it's not racism, it's just, they don't

understand, so they stare. Uh, for bad things in the Muslim community… It's not so much that, but it's really hard to make friends with other Muslims. Um, I mean, there's some really, really nice ones, but I'm, it's just because I'm new, right? And I don't go for jumuah. I only go for certain events, but I, and that's normal, so, but I, uh, it just feels a bit isolating at times, and so that's pretty much it. So, I… Thanks.
H: No, it's ok. It's good. Um, Prama, you can go next.
P: Yah, um, um, so, negative experiences, um, I think maybe a lot of revert sisters can experience this, so, I, um, so, I'm single, right? And it's interesting, because within the Muslim community, um, I didn't get this until I did start wearing the hijab, so, I was, uh, identifying as Muslim, for, um, maybe three to four years before, and, um, I, I never got these, this line of questioning. But as soon as I put on the hijab, right? When I, I'd go into a store or when I'd get into an Uber or things like that- and it's, and it's always men, it's always Muslim men- they always seem to ask about, um, my, my marital status, whether I'm single or married. And there's always this kind of connotation that, um, you know, as a sister, like, where's your mahram? Why are you alone, right? And I feel like it's so, um, like, a lot of sisters, they'll accept Islam, like, well into their lives, and maybe they're not married, or, or whatever. And, um, yah, so that judgement I feel that we get, right? With, like, because, yes, we all know you shouldn't do x, y, and z without a mahram, and this and that, but a lot of us, we don't have a mahram, right? Especially if our families, right? Our father, our older brothers or whatever, they're not Muslim, right? So that, that's a negative experience and I feel like the community needs to be just a little bit more, um, compassionate when it comes to that, and, uh, not questioning sisters all the time about why they're alone or what, things like that. And then, I find it interesting, as, as Kristen said, that on the other side of our Canadian, Western society, um, when people see you, I mean, they always assume that, um, oh, you did get married and someone did force you to do it. So, I feel like that clashes. It is very difficult, and, yah, brothers definitely do not go through. Um, but we have the Canadian society thinking that we are oppressed because of, we married a Muslim brother, and then you have the Muslim society, you know, kind of condemning us single revert sisters because they're single, and so, uh, yah, uh, it's, it's hard to, uh, find our way in that.
H: Does anyone else have anything to add for negatives? Like just in general, in society, in the Muslim community… I did a questionnaire on this before, and then people had, like, it was quite, it was quite sad, to be honest, um, so.
T: Yah, I could, I could add something to what Prama said, I felt. Uh, I think she's, uh, I mean, uh, I can relate. For me, uh, I have lived in France, here, and, uh, in London. And, uh, yah, I've experienced as a Muslim woman, I had that reflection as well, that basically, that you have all this judgement from the Muslim community in several aspects, and then you are also judged by the non-Muslim community in many other aspects. So basically, damn if you do, and damn if you don't, right? So, it's, uh, it's like, it's like you can never be a, you can never make anyone happy, or at least silent about who you are. That's why for me, for instance, when I came to live to Ottawa, I have been very careful to join the community, because I know, right, I know I'm a woman in my 40s, I am divorced, and I know what will happen. And I don't, I, I really don't want to go again through that, and I, cuz I've been through that, and I just keep my distance, basically. Cuz I, cuz, and then, I, I don't know. It's, uh, I wish more Muslims are, um, we, we wouldn't become more conscious about that, because I'm sure that there are a lot of women like me that we just stay a little bit that distance, because, uh, the welcoming is not there, or, uh, the, the help is not there, or, not help, or anything, but I just want to be able to go somewhere and don't ask me questions. Don't question me. Don't judge me. Don't, like, uh, I am doing my best,

and you are not paying my bills, and you are not finding me a husband, and you are not solving my life, so just shut up. Ha ha. You know? Let me just sit down here and do my thing, and you go on with your life and let me be. But that doesn't happen, right? So, I, I totally relate. And for me, that's a negative, basically. And I have a lot of anecdotes of, you know, going to mosque and then men telling you you can't be there, or women telling you that your hair is showing or that your skirt is not halal or, oh my God. And the list goes on. Then every city where I have been, I have installed myself, it's, it's like, I have been a revert for 20 years- over 20 years. So, every time I change places, It's like, I'm, I'm a new convert. And I'm like, no, I'm not a new convert. Do you know Al-Fatiha? Of course, I know Al-Fatiha! Of course, I know how to pray! You know, one time someone asked me, do you know what the adhan is? And I was like, oh my God. Do you think that you can be a Muslim for twenty years and not know what the adhan is? Like, do you think that's possible? Oh, don't get angry. I am not angry. You are an idiot. Like what can I tell you about it? You know, like what makes you think that someone can be a Muslim for 20 years and not know what the adhan is. If I had been a Muslim for a month, then maybe, yes, your question has some bearing, but right now it is just very insulting. So, all these experiences that, uh, for me, the conclusion is that I keep my distance, basically, and I'm going to leave it like that.
H: Um, so we have two minutes left on the timer. Um, so I'm going to stop the recording in a second and then I'll send out the link one last time, but it'll just be, like, closing remarks, if anyone wants to have any final say or anything.
K: What about Amirah? There's still two minutes, right?
H: Yah. Um, that's why I'm saying, like, I'll send the link again, and we can all rejoin, because it will go out.
K: Oh, oh, ok. Alhamdulillah. Ok.
H: Ok, ok, yah. No problems, if you don't have time to stay, you don't have to rejoin. Um, it's up to you, but I will send out the link one more time. So, I will stop the recording, and then end the meeting.

Start of third recording:

H: Ok. Ok. I think… How many people do we have? Six. Ok, I'm not sure if Ciara will rejoin. I know she was busy cuz her time difference is, um, she's in Saudi Arabia, not in Canada right now. So, let's continue then, uh, with Amirah's comment.
AM: Um, I just, I actually wanted to share, uh, my perspective and my husband's perspective, too. Uh, we visited my family in Dubai this past, um, fall and this is the first time that my husband has come to Dubai where he was not as a tourist. Um, and although he's a Muslim and, uh, he's had many positive experiences in Dubai before, he was shocked, because, although it's a majority-Muslim country, they see your colour first, uh, and then, and then the rest of your identity. So, he was shocked for the first time in his life, he had so much racism towards him, and he couldn't understand it, and he couldn't fathom it. Ha ha. Um, um, and he couldn't, like, especially because he's born and raised Canadian, and it was just, it was so strange for him to feel like, um, to feel like he's second-class. And, I guess, because it also tells you the privilege men have, um, in some places. Um, but, subhanallah. Um, and I can, I can, um, a lot of the things that Prama and Kristen were saying, it used to ring true to me when I was, when I was, like, working, when I had to go to work. I remember the day I put on my hijab, um, when I first went to work. Everyone was staring at me that day. They just could not understand it. The manager

was just, like, why are you doing this? Is someone forcing you to do this? Ha ha. They just could not understand why I was- what my choices were- why they were, why they were so. And it's been a very conscious effort on my part, and, unfortunately, as a result, I have made my circle much smaller, but in wanting to feel safe, I've created my, my circle is mostly Muslim. Um, which is different from university, where it was everyone. And, as a result, I was facing discrimination. Um, but yah, um, it just, um, goes to show, um, depending on where you are, you have you know the different circumstances you face, um, based on the society in which you are in.
H: Yah. For sure. For sure. It's very interesting, actually. Um, especially now, since I'm, like, living in Turkey, I realize, like, the difference in how people are treated, um, versus in Canada and elsewhere. Um.
AM: I also wanted to say, um, I know there's a friend of mine, she is, uh, she is a European convert. So, she has, you know, like, light eyes, etc. So, her, you know, when we both would walk, like you know, whenever she would walk into a shawarma shop, like, place, you know, she has a proposal. Uh, so like, the amount of attention she has, and she hates it, she hates the attention she gets. Um, versus, like, me, um, it's always like, um, like that's another aspect of, like, although you would think it's positive, oh, um, people are noticing you, but no, it's not, because you don't want to be noticed that way. You want to be known for your character. You want to be known for manners. Um, and all people see is, like, a blue-eyed girl.
H: Mmhmm. Um Prama, would you like to add something?
P: Um, I'll let Ciara go first. Um…
H: Go ahead Ciara.
C: Yah, sorry guys, I've been gone for a little bit. Um, I just, chiming in with what the others said, is that, you know, I, I always feel that the decision to wear hijab is, the reasons behind it are on a register that some of my non-Muslim family members, they just don't understand. So, it doesn't make any sense. And it's really hard when you've made this decision and other people can't understand it, because they, actually, their radar does not include, encompass the scope, um, where hijab actually exists. So, that's one thing. You know, we have to always remember that. That, like, we're doing things, in a, in the ghayb, like, we're doing things in reasons that lay in the ghayb, I guess you could say. Um, but, some, uh, you know, no matter what community we are in, there's always, the hijab is so polarizing. Um, you know, uh, I wanted to relate it also to race, because in, in Canada, when I started wearing hijab, um, even though I'm white, people started like, people would assume- I've been mistaken for Iranian, Pakistani, Turkish, Lebanese, Syrian- nobody thinks I'm Canadian, which is- it kind of reveals that implicit, but systemic bias in Canada. Like, everybody who wears a hijab is not Canadian kind of thing. And that's why I don't feel always at home in the country where I was born and raised. But something that was pointed out to me when I did a summer school in Grenada, Spain, on critical Muslim studies. There were people, um, from all over the world there, and they told me that a white convert poses some confusion in the community, because, um, our whiteness is indicative of our colonial background, and yet we are considered a sister in the deen. So, it's kind of conflicting for people. Um, I, I really take that to heart. Like, but, I also really want us to, like, I always try to remind myself that all of the social problems that we're facing in the world, we have, um, you know, we have an ability to help. And some of the battles that are being waged out there are not necessarily our battles. And, so, while I really do believe it's important to be aware of race and colonial baggage, in our deen, um, it's our taqwa that counts. It's not our skin colour. And so, while you don't want to whitewash that, we also don't want to get caught up in battles, and, you know,

things, uh- the other day one of my colleagues was talking about social justice as a Muslim, and I, I, I believe that social justice is a really important part of our deen, but I believe it goes beyond the social. It's not only social. It's like, we need justice to ourselves, to our society, to the animals in our world, to the plants, to the environment- like, it's much more than social justice. So, I always want to remind myself not, not to get caught up with the kind of buzzword of the day, we have a bigger perspective. And just to close, um, one of the teachers that I had learned from, um, described humanity as a sinking ship, and the Muslims are patching the holes as fast as they can. And so, I think, you know, we go through hardships in our communities, and we face discrimination, and we also have that colonial baggage. Like all of these things, but at the end of the day, um, we're Muslims, and we have, we have to help, and we have ways to help that are unique. So, I just wanted to share those thoughts. Thank you.
H: That's beautiful. Prama, do you have anything to add?
P: Um, no. I think, yah. I, yah, it's ok.
H: Ok. That's perfect. Um, does anyone else have any, any final thoughts, on that?
AM: Um, I, I just wanted to, um, mention about, like also the imposter syndrome where you're in the Muslim society, uh, where you consistently are made to feel like you're not, like, what are you doing here? You know, like, I can't read that many pages of Quran every day, or my tajweed is terrible. And you're constantly like, I think it was sister, um, someone earlier who mentioned it, but you're, you're constantly being evaluated. So, you just feel like as if you don't belong in that position, um, and you constantly feel like an imposter in a lot of these circles.
H: Um, Kristen, did you want to add?
K: Um, I guess my experience has been very limited because I'm a revert of less than a year, and so, um, all these other sisters have a lot more experience, and I've only gone to Masjid Al-Rahmah, which, like, like, um, sister Amirah was mentioning, is a very welcoming, uh, revert community. And, also, something else that's limiting, is that, like, I, I, I wear a black abaya, um, when, when I go, and, uh, oftentimes I'm mistaken as an Arab when I go. So maybe, and I was told by others that, like, because of that, that it's harder to interact with, with others, and, actually, you know what, I'm rambling here, so, uh, never mind. Sorry.
H: No, that's ok. And all thoughts here are valid and accepted here. It's an open space to discuss. Um, so, if you want to continue, you can. If you feel you, like you don't want to, you don't have to.
K: Well, basically, the point was just that, uh, what I mentioned before about how isolating it is, that, um, maybe that's why. Because they think that I already have a family, or maybe they think that I'm already established there. I don't know. So, um, yah. Never mind. That was it.
H: Ok. Does anyone else have anything?
P: Um, if I could just- I, I wonder if, this, this is kind of directly to Kristen. I, I'm just trying to understand like, Kristen, do you feel that, because sometimes, because you get, um, um, what's the word, uh, like mislabeled as being an Arab, do you feel-
K: Yah, exactly. And that, people are shocked, because they speak to me in Arabic and they're, they're shocked when I can't reply in Arabic. Um, so, I mean sometimes, like, it seems like, you know, families are, well, people who know each other, they stick together. And, um, because they, maybe, people think that, um, that I'm already a Muslim, um, I'm a Muslim Arab or something, that, you know, that, um, you know, they, they just don't interact with you, as much as if, if, if I was…
P: … Because they think that you already have an established, um, support system, so is, is that how it feels? That they don't need to…

K: A little bit.
P: …So much, because, um, oh, she's already a Muslim, like, like she's fine, is, is that kind of…?
K: Yah, because there's a, um, there's a, there's a woman there who, well, anyways, it doesn't matter, this is, this is rambling, but, um, yah.
P: Hmm… interesting.
H: Does anyone have any final thoughts? On any of the questions, in general, about what we've been discussing? If there's, like, last-minute additions…
P: I did- so, um, I want to say one thing, and I, I don't want to offend or anything. This is just based off my own kind of, um, observations. I find it really interesting, uh, as, you know, I mean, we're all reverts here, right? I find it very interesting, in that, um, the reverts that look ethnically Muslim, right? We're often seen- and Kristen kind of mentioned something- Kristen that, sorry, with the car accident, that we're seen as foreigners, and I just, based off things that I've seen, and, uh, conversations that I've had with white converts- I find it interesting that their experience- if they're not mistaken for an Arab or an Iranian, their experience is that, oh, they're this, you know, um, vulnerable, white, fragile girl that's being brainwashed by a scary Muslim man and I find it very interesting that kind of, uh, very, very contrasting experiences that, um, you know, I, uh, I, I am born in Canada, I do identify as a Canadian. You can tell by my voice, like, I, I, I have a Canadian accent, and, until I put on the hijab, um, you know, I mean, um, in the first 15, 20 years of my life I did have an othering experience, but now that we see a lot of multi-culturalism, I feel like I, I've, uh, been secure in my, uh, you know, identity as a Canadian-Indian, but then, when I put on the hijab, I'm often, and you know, I've never experienced this before, you know, people see me as though I don't know how to speak English, right? I've had someone come into my workplace, and they said, uh, very condescendingly, is English ok? And I just said, you know, English is fine, français is good as well, whatever language you want to speak, I'm from Canada, but, so I just want to, I wonder if anything can be done, right? Because I know outside of the Muslim community, when it comes to racism, there's often, you know, this pressure on, on white people to speak up for um, the injustices, because they have more of a voice and I wonder, um, maybe if a white convert in this focus group wants to add to that. Do you think that that's still applicable in the, uh, revert community? Do you think as white, you know, like, individuals, do you think that you have more of a, um, um, how do I say, like, people might respect your opinions more? Um, again just based on, you know, because I'm Indian I'm seen as a foreigner versus some white convert friends I have, they're seen as still, their status is still seen a little higher. Does that? Does that make sense? I hope I didn't offend. I just want, I was just rambling, I just wonder if anyone has anything to say about that.
H: Do you wanna open that up to either Kristen or Ciara? Before I get in. Cuz it's- I'm trying to get you guys to talk- not me. Ok, thank you, no problem.
K: Ok, I can.
H: No problem, Tara, and thank you so much for joining and I really appreciate it. Ok, go ahead.
C: I can, I can say something on that maybe. Um, you know, as I mentioned before, uh, wearing the hijab in Canada- it, uh, it takes you away from white to some degree, and I always feel this pressure in Canada to- I think it's unbelievable that, that's, that anecdote that you just shared about somebody assuming that you couldn't speak English because you wear the hijab. This is like- it, it makes me feel fire inside. Ha ha. Because- and it also makes me so convicted that we need to wear hijab in Canada. And, you know, I started wearing hijab when we were living in Jeddah, and, uh, it was quite easy to do that, and I was dreading going back to Canada and, and

yet when I went there I realized how important it is that I wear it, because, if I don't, a whole part of my identity is not visible for people, and I really felt like that would be dishonest somehow. So, you know, I do wear the hijab, and you know, it does kind of tilt me, people assume I'm a foreigner and all that stuff. So, what I find a lot- I do think that people- you know, there is that systemic racism, and people are going to say, ok, well, she is white and there are privileges that come with that. Um, what I have found, is that I always feel this pressure to speak confidently, to speak intelligently, to speak strongly, and to have people accept me as a Canadian. You know, with no accent- with a Canadian accent, or whatever you would call it- and I feel like, that's kind of sad, too, because it's like, you're kind of perpetuating this cycle of inequality. So, I don't want to think that white people have more of a voice in the Canadian-Muslim community, and yet, it's possible that that is still the case. But I, I really hope that every single one of us can contribute, in our tiny, daily, micro, um, social interactions to start to change this picture. But, you know, I've often wondered why is it? Why is there this islamophobia? And if you really go back in the history of, you know, way before colonization, there was a great fear of the power of the Muslim world. And one reason why, um, the explorers from Western Europe went West instead of East to try to find India was because they, they didn't want to have to cross the Muslim world, which was a powerful force to be reckoned with. And so, you know, if we remember the fact that all of these systems have risen and fallen, and risen and fallen- communism, capitalism is struggling. An Islamic system is one that has not failed. We've- yes, had some, over the course of our history, we've had some lower moments and some higher moments. But as a system, as a way of life, and what so much excites me about Muslim communities, especially in the West, and is this amazing kind of forward-thinking movement, and loving the deen, and sticking to the deen, and, again, contributing to the society, and from a- from the place of a Muslim, the, it gives me great excitement about this. And so, you know, I have left Canada and, like, we're not living there currently, um, but I want to say that all of that struggle and pain that we go through as minorities in Canada, is, is, is, is hopefully- I mean, it has to be worth it in the eyes of Allah, subhanahu wa ta'ala, you know? And I think that there can be an apathy in Muslim-majority countries sometimes. Not, not all the time, but I, I've been talking about this with some of my students, and I'm teaching a course on Islamic pedagogy, and we talk about this idea, why is it that in certain Islamic schools where everybody is a Muslim, there's less emphasis to rush to the mosque on Friday, where, whereas in a secular school, the, the teenagers are, are really, like, wanting to stake that space for themselves and they fight to get their room for Friday prayers, and everybody goes of the Muslim community. So, there is something about being a minority and I think sometimes that that, the pain that we feel, that we go through can be strengthening and purifying, in sha Allah.

H: Kristen, do you…?

K: Um, like, I kind of agree with, uh, with Prama, in that, you know, white people are treated differently. Like, when I first started wearing hijab, and, you know, when people realized that, that, like, um, I'm a white- like, I tell them my name, I'm a white Canadian or whatever, they treat me very differently compared to how they did before when they, when they assumed I was Arab. So um, I, I hope, in sha Allah someday, that, you know, I- especially cuz, you know, a lot of- Islam is relatively-speaking, new-ish to Canada on a larger scale. So, you know, in sha Allah, in the future generations I hope it's a lot less. Like, you know, that there's a lot more white people, and that we're not treated any differently than, like, you know, uh, anybody else. So, yah, you know, that was it.

H: Ok. I'm going to cut the conversation here, because, we have gone quite over time, which is fine for me, but I'm worried about you guys. Ha ha. Um, and I really appreciate all of your participation, and your valuable thoughts. So, my thesis is, um, I'm currently in the last stages of it, so, I really just needed the focus groups. Um, and then to complete the findings. So, I'm still looking for another focus group for men. Uh, I'm only doing one for men and one for women, so thank you for all being part of this. If you happen to know any men, uh, you can send them my email or, uh, my Whatsapp, and, um, that would really help. But, again, like, really thank you so much, and, uh, I'll be sure- I should, submit my thesis, uh, I need to submit it by like the end of June or like mid-July at the absolute latest. So, it should come out around September, and I'll be sure to share it with Prama and then she can share it around if you guys are interested as well.
K: Sounds great, thanks. Jazak Allah khair.
H: Thank you so much! I'll be here for a while longer if you have any questions for me. Um, and then, yah, have a good day. Enjoy the rest of your fast, and have a excellent Ramadan.
K: You too, and have a great night.
H: Thank you.
AM: Assalamu alaikum. Um, my husband said he could join the focus group. Um, he's a convert too.
H: Ok, perfect.
AM: Um, what time, uh, it, it depends on the time though.
H: Um, I'm going to stop the recording…

7.3. Informed Consent Forms

Informed Consent Form for "Translation as Self-Rewriting"[37] Focus Groups

Date: [To be determined]

Study Name: Translation as Self-Rewriting

Researchers: Hailey De Jong (Primary Investigator), University of Ottawa, --------@uottawa.ca
Salah Basalamah (Supervisor), University of Ottawa, ----------@uottawa.ca

Who May Participate: Please note that in order to participate in this questionnaire, you must be 18+ years old and a Muslim convert currently living in Canada or the United States. The focus groups will be conducted solely in English.

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research is to analyze the role that converts play as translators/mediators between cultures. Furthermore, the research also aims to determine how culture and identity play roles in a convert's life experiences, and to see where religion fits amongst either culture and/or identity. This investigation will feed into an attempt to demonstrate how the concept of translation can explain social dynamics of identity and/or cultural change.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: The focus groups will take place completely online via Zoom and will be comprised of 4-5 people each. Participants will be asked to keep their cameras on for the duration of the focus group. The duration of each focus group will be around one hour, depending on the level of discussion and participation from those involved. You will only be asked to participate in one time in a focus group. Questions in the focus group will mainly focus on your personal experiences as a convert and may also focus on issues relating to your understanding of the notions of culture and identity.

Risks and Discomforts: Some participants may feel regret for disclosing any personal information or experiences in this focus group. Should you feel any discomfort at any time during the focus group, you are free to withdraw your participation from the study or refuse to answer any questions.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: Through this research, participants may gain a better understanding of their identity as converts to Islam, as well as of how they interact with both culture and identity on an individual and societal scale. Additionally, converts may gain insight into the unique role that they play as translators/mediators between communities. Furthermore, this research will be of particular benefit to the Muslim community as it will serve to situate religion amongst either culture or identity (or both) and explain the role that it plays in each.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time and for any reason. You have the right to refuse to

[37] The title of the study at the time of the questionnaires and focus groups included "translation as self-rewriting." However, the title has since been revised to include "translation as self-transformation." For the sake of preserving the originality of the research-related materials in this appendix, the title has not been altered here.

answer questions without fear of any reprisal or ill treatment, either now or in the future. If you do choose to withdraw from the study, your data will still be used in the study, given the collective discussion of the focus group. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence your relationship with the researchers or the University of Ottawa. Additionally, as participants in this study, you have the right to know how your identities will be protected, both during the research and in the publication of the data. You also have the right to be informed of the limits of confidentiality.

Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will remain confidential and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The data for this study will be collected online, via Zoom. None of the videos, images, or audio will be used in any publications or presentations. However, video and audio recording of the focus groups will be used for analysis purposes. Transcripts of the audio will be recorded, and pseudonyms will be used for the participants. Furthermore, by signing this confidentiality form, you agree to uphold the confidentiality of all participants involved in the focus group. Despite agreeing to uphold the confidentiality of others by signing this informed consent form, the Primary Investigator cannot guarantee that other members of the focus groups will entirely preserve the confidentiality of the information shared during the focus groups. We do not foresee any hard copies of the data being created. However, in the event that such hard copies are created, they will be stored in a locked cabinet, which only the principal investigator will have access to. Soft copies of the data will remain on a password-locked computer, where it will remain archived indefinitely.

Questions About the Research? If you have any questions about this process, about your rights as a participant in the study, and/or to learn about the procedures for filing a complaint, please contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland St, Room 154, University of Ottawa (telephone 613-562-5387 or email ethics@uottawa.ca). You may also contact the Principal Investigator or Supervisor if you have any further questions.

Legal Rights and Signatures:
I *(fill in your name here),* consent to participate in the *Translation as Self-Rewriting focus group* conducted by *Hailey De Jong*. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent. Participants should print a copy of the consent form to keep for their personal records.

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Participant

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Principal Investigator

Questionnaire Consent Form:

Study Name: Translation as Self-Rewriting

Researcher and Supervisor: Hailey De Jong (Primary Investigator), University of Ottawa, --------@uottawa.ca
Salah Basalamah (Supervisor), University of Ottawa, ----------@uottawa.ca

Who May Participate: Participants must be 18+ years old and must be a Muslim convert currently living in Canada or the United States. The questionnaire will be presented in English, although participants may respond to the questions in French if they prefer to do so.

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of this research is to analyze the role that converts play as translators/mediators between cultures. Furthermore, the research also aims to determine how culture and identity play roles in a convert's life experiences, and to see where religion fits amongst either culture and/or identity. This investigation will feed into an attempt to demonstrate how the concept of translation can explain social dynamics of identity and/or cultural change.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: The questionnaire will be comprised of both open and closed questions, although the majority of questions will be closed. The questions will primarily deal with your identity as a Muslim convert, your relationship to your North American birth culture and will also include questions about your understanding of the notions of identity and culture. Participants will be asked to participate only once in one questionnaire. The questionnaire should take between 15-20 minutes to complete, depending on how much detail is put into the open questions. The questionnaire will take place completely online and will be submitted via Google Forms.

Risks and Discomforts: Some participants may feel regret for disclosing any personal information or experiences in the questionnaire. The utmost care will be taken to ensure a respectful and safe environment for all. Should you feel any discomfort at any time during the questionnaire, you are free to withdraw your participation from the study or refuse to answer any questions.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: Through this research, participants may gain a better understanding of their identity as converts to Islam, as well as of how they interact with both culture and identity on an individual and societal scale. Additionally, converts may gain insight into the unique role that they play as translators/mediators between communities. Furthermore, this research will be of particular benefit to the Muslim community as it will serve to situate religion amongst either culture or identity (or both) and explain the role that it plays in each.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time and for any reason. You have the right to refuse to answer questions without fear of any reprisal or ill treatment, either now or in the future. However, due to the anonymous nature of the questionnaire, it will not be possible to withdraw

your data from the study after you have submitted the questionnaire as researchers will be unable to retrace individual datasets. Data retrieved from this questionnaire will be stored indefinitely. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence your relationship with the researchers or the University of Ottawa. Additionally, as participants in this study, you have the right to know how your identities will be protected, both during the research and in the publication of the data. You also have the right to be informed of the limits of confidentiality.

Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will remain confidential and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The data for this study will be collected online, through Google Forms. We do not foresee any hard copies of the data being created. However, in the event that such hard copies are created, they will be stored in a locked cabinet, which only the principal investigator will have access to. Soft copies of the data will remain on a password-locked computer, where it will remain archived indefinitely.

Questions About the Research? If you have any questions about this process, about your rights as a participant in the study, and/or to learn about the procedures for filing a complaint, please contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland St, Room 154, University of Ottawa (telephone 613-562-5387 or email ethics@uottawa.ca). Participants may also contact either the Primary Investigator or the Supervisor should they have any further questions.

Do you agree with the above statements/information and consent to take part in this questionnaire?
□ I agree
□ I disagree

7.4. Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is Hailey De Jong and I am currently doing a research project for my master's thesis in Translation Studies, which is tentatively titled "Translation as Self-rewriting: Scrutinizing the Process of Religious Conversion Through Translation." The purpose of this research is to analyze the role that Muslim converts from Canada and the United States play as translators/mediators between cultures. Furthermore, the research also aims to determine how culture and identity play roles in a convert's life experiences, and to see where religion fits amongst either culture and/or identity. This investigation will feed into an attempt to demonstrate how the concept of translation can explain social dynamics of identity and/or cultural change.

In order to collect information for this project, I am conducting both surveys and focus groups. The survey will consist of questions dealing with converts' experiences, as well as with their understanding of the notions of culture and identity. The questions will be mainly closed questions, with some options for open responses as well. All information that participants provide will be kept anonymous. The questionnaire should only take 15-20 minutes to complete, depending on the level of detail put into the open questions. I am currently seeking 20 participants for the survey.

I will also be organizing a few small focus groups, who will review the data retrieved from the survey and then discuss it, along with their own experiences as Canadian or American Muslim converts and their understandings of the notions of culture and identity. The focus groups will take place on Zoom and will be recorded. However, participants will be asked to uphold the confidentiality of others (including by signing an informed consent form) and also to change their screen name to a pseudonym. Although participants' cameras will be on during the focus groups, no videos or images will be used in any projects, presentations, or research. I am looking to do two to three focus groups consisting of around four to five people each.

In order to take part in this project, you must be a Muslim convert who is 18+ years old and currently living in either Canada or the United States. The surveys and focus groups will be conducted solely in English. However, in the case of the surveys, you may respond to the questions in French if you prefer to do so.

If you would like to participate in either the survey or in one of the focus groups, or have any more questions about the project and data collection, please feel free to contact me at --------@uottawa.ca.

7.5. Focus Group Guide

Please note that in order to participate in the focus groups, you must be 18+ years old and a Muslim convert currently living in Canada or the United States. Focus groups will be conducted solely in English.

What is the aim of this project?
The purpose of this research is to analyze the role that converts play as translators/mediators between cultures. Furthermore, the research also aims to determine how culture and identity play roles in a convert's life experiences, and to see where religion fits amongst either culture and/or identity. This investigation will attempt to demonstrate how the concept of translation can explain social dynamics of identity and/or cultural change.

What will you be asked to do?
The focus groups will take place completely online via Zoom and will be comprised of 4-5 people each. Participants will be asked to keep their cameras on for the duration of the focus group. The duration of each focus group will be around one hour, depending on the level of discussion and participation from those involved. You will only be asked to participate in one time in a focus group. Questions in the focus group will mainly focus on your personal experiences as a convert and may also focus on issues relating to your understanding of the notions of culture and identity.

Some questions you should think about:
Please keep these questions in mind and think about them well before your scheduled focus group. These questions are intended to provoke your own thoughts and to engage with the thoughts of others in a respectful manner. This focus group is a safe space in which all thoughts and experiences are valued. Any judgemental or otherwise harmful behaviour will not be tolerated, and if you engage in such behaviour, you will be asked to leave. All participation will remain *confidential*, and you must uphold the guidelines of the informed consent form that you signed.

- What were the positive experiences you had following your conversion when integrating the Muslim community?
- What were the difficulties/challenges you faced when integrating into the Muslim community after your conversion?
- What were the positive experiences you had when evolving in society after your conversion?
- What were the difficulties/challenges you faced in evolving in society after your conversion?
- How has your relationship with your relatives and pre-conversion friends evolved since your conversion?
- How do you define "being a Muslim"?
- Do you consider conversion as a change of identity and/or a change of culture?
- Do you distinguish "culture" from "identity" and why/why not?
- When you think about Islam, what culture do you primarily associate with it?

- What are some examples of times in which you saw yourself acting (or wishing to act) as a translator/mediator between Muslims and non-Muslims?
- Do you feel like you acted as an effective mediator in those situations? Why or why not?

7.6: Dialogue Between Sarah and Rev. Thorne

- Thorne: Sarah, come on, what's the real reason you came back to the church?
- Sarah: It's hard to say. It's complicated.
- Thorne : No it's not! I mean, being Anglican, you simply need to believe in the thirty-nine articles, the sacraments – oh, and of course, the good old Nicene Creed.
- Sarah: You know something, I don't know what to believe.
- Thorne: Well, I'll make it easy for you. Believe in Jesus. Isn't that what brought you back?
- Sarah: I don't think so. I came here because I – I miss something.
- Thorne: Yes, well you clearly missed the point of the church.
- Sarah: You're right.
- Thorne: Yeah, I usually am. But about what specifically?
- Sarah: Maybe I'm looking for the wrong thing in the wrong place. I don't want to be Christian again. I'm sorry.
- Thorne: No, no, no, come on, don't be sorry. It's only your eternal soul. Kidding! Sort of. Eighty percent. (Rises.) It's your call. The church will always be here if you change your mind. Again.
- Sarah: Well, the church has really changed since I was a little girl.
- Thorne (with kindness): No, I think you've changed. But traditions have their pull.
- Sarah: They sure do! I used to love that brassy thing with the incense in it.
- Thorne: The censer?
- Sarah: Yeah.
- Thorne: I'll tell you what. (Picks up the censer.) If you decide to come back, I will light it up in your honour. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have some real Christians to tend to.
- Sarah: I'm just going to stay here for a minute and say my last goodbye.
- Thorne: Of course.

(Conway 2017, 117-118)