

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
HOWARD COLLEGE**

SCHOOL OF RELIGION & THEOLOGY

**WOMEN WHO CONVERT TO ISLAM FOR THE
PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE: COMPULSION OR
FREE WILL?**

By

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**Submitted in fulfillment of the academic requirements for the degree
of Masters in Religion and Social Transformation**

ETHICAL STATEMENT

With the signature below I, Cherry Leigh (Shenaaz) Muslim, hereby declare that the work I present in this thesis is based on my own research, and that I have not submitted this thesis to any other institution of higher education to obtain an academic qualification.



C.L. MUSLIM

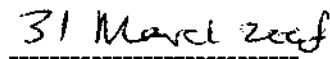


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As candidate supervisor I hereby approve this thesis for submission.



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ABSTRACT
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**Women who convert to Islam for the purpose of marriage:
Compulsion or Free will?**

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This study presents the complex situation of non-Muslim (Christian and Hindu) women converting to Islam for the purpose of marriage to Muslim men. It maintains that many of the women are compelled to convert and presents this argument within the structures of Islamic theory and traditions on conversion. The theoretical paradigms relevant to religious conversion and acculturation are discussed to provide insight into the processes of conversion.

It seeks to understand the reasons why the women convert, whether the conversion ritual is reflective of the tradition's orientations, the difficulties they experience and the effect it has on their lives. It serves to provide an insight into what it means to be an 'outsider' interacting with 'insiders' within a specific tradition and the necessity of providing an empathetic and understanding support base to facilitate the process of transformation.

The conclusion is a reflection of the implications of this study both to the academic literature and the Muslim community.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION	9
1.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	9
1.1 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY	9
1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	11
1.3 PURPOSES OF THE STUDY	11
1.4 KEY CRITICAL QUESTIONS	11
1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & APPROACH	12
1.6 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS & THEORIES	12
1.7 SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH	12
1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH	12
1.9 PRIOR RESEARCH	13
CHAPTER 2 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON RELIGIOUS CONVERSION	18
2.0 INTRODUCTION	18
2.1 DEFINING CONVERSION	21
2.2 CLASSIC RESEARCH PERIOD	23
2.2.1 AGE OF THE CONVERT	23
2.2.2 TIME OF CONVERSION: SUDDEN OR GRADUAL	24
2.2.2.1 Characteristics of sudden conversion	24
2.2.2.2 Characteristics of gradual conversion	26
2.2.3 REASON CONVERSION OCCURS	27
2.3 CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH	27
2.3.1 CONVERSION PROCESSES	27
2.3.2 LOFLAND AND STARK' MODEL & THE CONVERSION MOTIFS	30
2.3.3 LEWIS RAMBO'S SEQUENTIAL MODEL OF CONVERSION	33
2.4 CONVERSION TO ISLAM: ALI KÖSE'S FINDINGS	37
2.5 ACCULTURATION THEORETICAL MODEL (JOHN W. BERRY)	42
2.6 COMPLEXITIES OF INTER- MARRIAGES	45
2.7 CONCLUSION	49
CHAPTER 3 – ISLAMIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON CONVERSION	51
3.0 INTRODUCTION	51
3.1 ACCEPTANCE OF ISLAM	52
3.1.1 BAY'AH OR PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE	52
3.1.2 QUR'ĀNIC VERSES	57
3.1.2.1 Compulsion and a True Believer	57
3.1.2.2 Marriageable Women	59
3.2 COMPARATIVE EXAMPLES OF CONVERSION PATTERNS	62
3.2.1 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA & BRITAIN	62
3.3 CONCLUSION	66

**CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS OF A SURVEY ON WOMEN WHO CONVERT TO ISLAM
FOR THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE** **68**

4.0 INTRODUCTION	68
4.1 RESEARCH PROCEDURES & METHODOLOGY	68
4.1.1 AIMS & OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH	68
4.1.2. RESEARCH METHOD	70
4.1.3 DATA POPULATION & COLLECTION	71
4.1.4 DATA CAPTURING, EDITING & ANALYSIS	73
4.2 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA	74
4.2.1 OVERVIEW OF RELEVANT VARIABLES	74
4.2.1.1. Previous religion	74
4.2.1.2. Respondent & Spouse race groups	75
4.2.1.3. Time of conversion	76
4.2.1.4. Place of conversion	76
4.2.1.5. Age of marriage (indicating the age of conversion)	77
4.2.1.6. Year of marriage	78
4.2.1.7. Marriage type	78
4.2.1.8. Marital status	78
4.2.1.9. Highest qualification	78
4.2.1.10. Profession	79
4.3 MAIN ANALYSIS	79
4.3.1 CONVERSION: RITUAL	79
4.3.2 CONVERSION: PROCESS AND EXPERIENCE	88
4.3.3 CONVERSION: A POSITIVE QUEST?	92
4.3.4 ACCULTURATION	97
4.3.5 CONVERSION: SUPPORT GROUPS	101
4.3.6 ADVICE FOR FUTURE CONVERTS	104
4.3.7 CONVERSION: COMPULSION OR FREE WILL?	105
4.5 OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSION	112

**CHAPTER 5 – A SURVEY ON COUNSELLING & ADVICE ON MARRIAGE &
CONVERSION PROVIDED BY ISLAMIC ORGANISATIONS, SOCIAL WORKERS AND
IMAMS** **117**

5.0 INTRODUCTION	117
5.1 RESEARCH METHOD	117
5.2 METHOD OF GATHERING DATA	117
5.3 DURATION OF SURVEY	118
5.4 LOCATION OF SURVEY	119
5.5 ANALYSIS	119
5.5.1 COMMUNITY SUPPORT SYSTEMS	119
5.5.2 ACCESSIBILITY OF DETAILS	119
5.5.3 COUNSELLING SERVICES TO POTENTIAL CONVERTS	120
5.5.4 MARRIAGE GUIDANCE COURSES FOR FUTURE COUPLES	120
5.5.5 NECESSITY FOR A NON-MUSLIM WOMAN TO CONVERT FOR MARRIAGE TO A MUSLIM MAN	120
5.5.6 COUNSELLING FOR THOSE WHO HAVE CONVERTED, MARRIED AND EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS	121
5.5.7 NECESSITY FOR BOTH SETS OF PARENTS TO ATTEND COUNSELLING IN PREPARATION FOR THE CONVERSION AND MARRIAGE	121
5.5.8 KNOWLEDGE OF ANY ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROVIDE EDUCATION TO CONVERT WOMEN	122

5.5.9 PROVISION OF PERSONAL COUNSELLING	122
5.5.10 SUCCESS OF INTER-FAITH MARRIAGES	122
5.5.11 PREDOMINANT PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED?	123
5.5.12 NEED IN THE COMMUNITY FOR COUNSELLING SERVICES TO CONVERT WOMEN	124
5.6 OBSERVATIONS	124
5.7 CONCLUSION	126
 CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION	 127
6.1 DISCUSSION	127
6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS	134
 BIBLIOGRAPHY / REFERENCING	 136
 APPENDIX 1	 145
 APPENDIX 2	 149
 APPENDIX 3	 151
 APPENDIX 4	 153
 APPENDIX 5	 154

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1 : Rambo's sequential stage model	34
Figure 2 : Conversion in terms of marriage	76
Figure 3: Respondents age at marriage	77
Figure 4: Year of marriage	78
Figure 5: Respondents Professions	79
Figure 6: People present at Conversion	80
Figure 7: Respondents feelings on name change	87
Figure 8: Family & Friends feelings on name change	88
Figure 9: Commitment to Islam	93
Figure 10: Islamic Education	94
Figure 11: Transformation after Conversion	96
Figure 12: Feelings of respondents about converting	106
Figure 13: Reasons for Conversion	107
Figure 14: Factors determining Compulsion or Freewill	108

GLOSSARY OF TERMS & ABBREVIATIONS

Pbuh	peace be upon him – recited whenever the name of the Prophet is mentioned
RA	<i>Radī Allahu `anhā</i> (women) / <i>anhu</i> (man) – may God Bless her/him
<i>Ghusl</i>	ceremonial or ritual bath performed by Muslims
<i>Amānah</i>	trust
<i>Shahādah</i>	The first pillar of Islam (<i>Ash-hadu Allāh ilāha illallāhu wa ash-hadu anna Muhammad Rasūlullāh</i>) meaning “I testify that there is no God besides Allah and I testify that Muhammad is his Messenger/Prophet”
<i>Nikāh</i>	marriage contract/ceremony
<i>Ahl al-Kitāb</i>	People of the Book
<i>Halāl</i>	That which is permitted by Islam
<i>Harām</i>	That which is forbidden by Islam
<i>Ummah</i>	Muslim community – locally and/or globally
<i>Shirk</i>	Worshipping ‘others’ alongside the One God
<i>Mushrikūn</i>	Idolaters
<i>Masjid</i>	mosque
<i>Sunnah</i>	Actions of the Prophet (pbuh)
<i>Hadīth</i>	Sayings of the Prophet (pbuh)
<i>Salāh</i>	Prayer
<i>Da’wah</i>	Spreading the message of Islam
<i>Jihād</i>	To struggle (or fight) in the name of Islam
<i>‘Ulamā’</i>	Religious scholars
<i>Imām</i>	Leader of the congregational prayer (in a mosque)
<i>Divān</i>	Annual stipend
<i>‘Iddah</i>	Period of waiting
<i>Talāq</i>	Divorce

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background and Context of the Study

Conversion is a complex and multifaceted process involving dynamic religious, social, cultural and personal dimensions. It is a topic that has been researched by great religion and social psychology scholars such as Edwin Starbuck, Robert Thouless, George Albert Coe and William James. They each brought to the academic study vital concepts and models based predominantly on research from amongst the plural Christian communities. Religious conversion is a topic that transcends varying ideas of conversion, be it intra-faith conversion with heightened spiritual awareness within one's religion, transformation within one's self, an attachment to cult groups or an acceptance of a faith that one did not grow up with. Each of these forms of conversion has been studied in the social, psychological and religious contexts. Most scholars tend to use the Biblical conversion of St. Paul to Christianity as the original and most classic form of conversion and it is from this base that their models of conversion have been developed. This study explores conversion of women to Islam in the context of marriage.

1.1 Rationale for the Study

I partake in voluntary work at an Islamic organization which provides facilities specifically for women who have accepted Islam. In the fifteen years that I have been there (initially as a new Muslim who had married a Muslim man and then as a teacher!) I have seen many women pass through the doors who have hailed from various cultural and religious backgrounds. In the last couple of years I have been witness to numerous conversions. I was curious to know how these women experienced their conversion to a completely different "way of life".

Muslim organizations and the media in Britain, Europe and The United States have in the last five years professed an unprecedented increase in the number of converts to Islam, and cite the 9/11 bombings, and the Iraq and Afghanistan war amongst other factors as the catalysts. Furthermore, the majority of the converts tend to be women, despite the negative coverage women in Islam receive by the media. Within this milieu of converts exists the less researched category of women who accept Islam as a direct result of marriage to Muslim men.

In the South African context, Islamic organizations and newspapers often discuss the noticeable conversion of many African people to Islam, usually from Christianity, with African Traditional Religion influences. Townships have burgeoning Muslim populations and facilities are built to support their needs. Most of these converts are men and therefore the focus is in providing for them. They in turn bring women into the fold of Islam but unfortunately there are not always adequate social and religious programmes for the education of these women.

Similarly, there are Christian, Hindu, previously non-religious and Buddhist women from the Coloured, Indian and White race groups who accept Islam, predominantly through marriage. But again there are few organizations which cater for their needs. Most certainly there are organizations that provide a guide on conversion, the basic concepts of Islam and how to read their prayers but none that can specifically cater for the very different social, cultural and psychological needs of these women and men. Daoud Owen of The Association for British Muslims, in the book *Conversion to Islam*, very clearly depicts this problem in his criticism of Muslim organizations in Britain not understanding British converts:

“The problem has been that a lot of the organizations in Britain don't address the specific needs of converts who have particular problems. And also they don't understand the British culture. ...It is all very well belonging to these organizations, but nobody was helping somebody who had converted come to terms with the social consequences of it. And very

simple practical things of how to help somebody, say, stop drinking, eating pork, and why these things are necessary. As a result there are a lot of converts who are not getting the aftercare that they need.”

(Köse1996: 24)

I believe that very similar circumstances exist in South Africa. There is, therefore, a need to study the circumstances of women who convert to Islam because of an impending, or during the course of, marriage to a Muslim man.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study will be a valuable contribution to the genre of literature on conversion. It will be of importance to scholars researching the field of conversion in general, but also to those specifically interested in conversion to Islam. Since this is the first study in South Africa dealing with the experiences of women who convert to Islam primarily for the purpose of marriage, its significance is considerably enhanced.

1.3 Purposes of the Study

The aims of the study are to:

- (a) determine whether women who convert to Islam for the purpose of marriage do so voluntarily;
- (b) identify the major challenges they face as converts;
- (c) assess the support systems in the Muslim community for these converts.

1.4 Key Critical Questions

The key critical questions that this study will attempt to answer are the following:

- (a) Do women who convert for the purpose of marriage do so voluntarily?
- (b) What are the major challenges they face on conversion?
- (c) How do they deal with these challenges?

(d) What support systems are in place for these women converts?

1.5 Research Methodology & Approach

This study is based essentially on literature on conversion (see Appenix 5) and on questionnaires. Follow-up interviews using the questionnaire were also conducted with five (5) of the respondents. Details of the research methodology and approach used in the questionnaires are given in chapters 4 and 5.

1.6 Research Hypothesis & Theories

My hypothesis is that there is a form of compulsion involved in the case of women who convert for the purpose of marriage, whether it is subtle or overt, thereby preventing the women from converting entirely of their own free will. This surely would have dire consequences for the acceptability of these conversions within the theoretical framework of Islamic conversion. The findings of the research will either support or negate my hypothesis.

The research theories which provided the framework for this study are contained in the next chapter dealing with religious conversion.

1.7 Scope of the Research

The research was confined to the greater Durban area. However, I believe that the findings are applicable to women in similar circumstances anywhere in South Africa.

1.8 Limitations of the Research

In the South African context conversion to Islam is not commonly researched or well documented. The Muslim community tends to be more concerned about how many converts Islam is attracting, rather than concentrating on how they can be empathetically facilitated through the conversion process. As such my concern is threefold as:

1. My sample of respondents is not as large as I had intended and therefore may not have the desired impact within the community;
2. The spouses of the respondents were predominantly of Indian descent and although it does represent the Durban-Ethekwini Muslim community and culture, the responses may have been different if there were more spouses of Malay and Black origin and;
3. The *'ulamā'* tend to have an authoritarian ownership on religious issues and often view academic work with wariness which could detract from the importance of this research.

Therefore the institutions which should benefit from the research may in fact be *highly critical* over some points raised in the discussion and findings.

1.9 Prior Research

Although copious amounts of conversion research have been conducted in relation to Christianity in particular, very little research has occurred amongst the Muslim converts. Most Christian–convert literature deals with intra-faith conversion i.e. conversions within the faith whereby individuals attain a heightened spiritual growth. The rest covers inter-faith missiologic types of conversion where groups of people accept Christianity at the hands of missionaries. When one speaks of Muslim converts, the imaging is of those who have accepted Islam from another faith and seldom of intra-faith conversion, although Al-Ghazzālī is a self-confessed intra-faith convert. Lewis Rambo (1993: 175) indicated that there is a need to address “the nature of conversion in the formation and transmission of religious traditions” by connecting the conversion process with the experience of the founders of the tradition. Moreover, one needs to ascertain if there has been a change in the conversion orientation and whether it has become normative within the contemporary context. He also indicated that a gap existed in understanding women’s conversion experiences. Focus should be given as to whether they experienced conversion differently to men and if they did, what accounted for this, especially as the majority of the descriptive experiences are male dominated as are the academic works on religious conversion. I completely agree with Rambo whose opinions have also

been alluded to by various female scholars (van Nieuwkerk and Roald) especially in terms of gender issues. My interest, at present, lies more specifically in the context of conversion to the Islamic tradition, its requirements in relation to marrying non-Muslim women, their conversion experience and the consequences thereof.

Contemporary scholars (Ali Köse, Poston, Murad, Roald and Alleivi - scholars mentioned in literature) have provided comprehensive research on *daw'ah* and converts in Britain, Europe and the United States, but the studies are all-encompassing and therefore do not provide detailed research on specific reasons for accepting Islam. Although they acknowledge that many female converts accept Islam through their involvement or marriage to a Muslim man, they do not provide detailed research within this category of Islamic conversion. Traditional explanations for conversion to Islam include the age old usage of force or by the sword, the attractiveness of Islam to the poor and oppressed, compliance with political regimes, the influence of traders, privileges of Islamic political power and the message of Islam through monotheism. (Rambo 1999: 268) I acknowledge that research has been undertaken on converts to Islam predominantly within an historical context and Lewis Rambo has provided a detailed list of such work, but there are still gaps in the research that need to be filled.

This research must be contextualized within the existing conversion models and theories. Theorists such as Starbuck, Lofland and Stark, Rambo and Gillespie have provided frameworks such as the most likely age for conversion to take place, conversion motifs indicating six 'experiences' that initiate conversion and the seven step conversion process amongst others. Ali Köse, who has provided the best literature on the topic of conversion in Islam, has presented his research using the same models and has concluded, especially in terms of Lofland's seven step process, that none of his seventy respondents fell within the criteria of this model, nor did they match the age of adolescence that is considered the most common age for conversion. Köse's findings will therefore be covered substantially as they are significant for the basis of this dissertation. The above

models will be discussed in chapter two and the research analysis in chapter four will be viewed in context of the general and Islamic theory. It is important to determine whether the conversion process and experience of the women in this research are aligned with the models that have been advocated. It is relevant at this stage to also discuss Berry's model of acculturation in terms of the women adapting to their new cultural surroundings and to briefly bring into consideration Dr. Joel Crohn's research on couples who marry from different cultural, religious and racial backgrounds and how it affects the marriage, especially as Köse raises this issue in his research.

Chapter three contextualizes the references of conversion to the Islamic traditions in the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), how the Prophet (pbuh) conducted himself in the context of accepting allegiance from his followers and his requirements of the wives who were not Muslim. It reflects on verses from the Qur'ân that indicate there is no compulsion or coercion in Islam and it looks at the legalities of who is considered lawful for marriage. Thereafter there are comparative references of conversions within the British and American contexts so as to ascertain whether the South African context of Islamic conversion, through the initiation of marriage, is mirrored in other countries and cultures.

Chapter four will cover the research analysis and findings which will be observed in terms of the models discussed in chapter two. The aim of the analysis would be to answer some imperative questions. Do the women who convert to Islam for marriage do so without compulsion as they state at the conversion ritual, or do they feel compelled because of overriding pressures and influence? What are the effects they experience because of the conversion process? Has the conversion been a positive step in their lives? Did they get support or advice from an Islamic organization? Do they think that a support group would be beneficial for women such as themselves? What advice would they offer to other women who are considering converting for the purpose of marriage? Do they feel accepted by the social community? In addition, the outcome of the findings would be set against the framework of the models looking at criteria such as: the age of conversion,

time of conversion, the conversion experience and what conversion motifs were the catalysts for conversion.

Chapter five covers the findings of research in relation to the views of Islamic organizations, imams and social workers within the Durban community in regards to conversion and counselling of converts and couples who intend marrying. This is an important aspect of the dissertation, in that these organs of society are highly influential in assisting the decision making process of individuals through the advice that they offer. Furthermore it is important to ascertain whether the organizations would be representative of the converts that are accepting Islam or if their culture base would be seen as too foreign and inalienable for social identification.

Lastly, in chapter six I will conclude the findings of the research in context of the conversion theory and whether the conversions are through compulsion or free will. I will provide recommendations for future considerations that emanate from the findings of the research.

The fact that South Africa is a pluralist society in respect of the religions practiced in the country, and that it is no longer under Apartheid rule, means that religious, cultural and racial interfacing will naturally occur and as such religious understanding, tolerance, conflict and conversions will increase. Furthermore, many of the youth are no longer practising traditional culture as did their parents and grandparents, and are becoming more Western and secular in their activities and attitudes, including in choosing marriage partners. This presents social, familial and religious problems across the generations and the cultures which need to be addressed so as to prevent the crises the women tend to experience in the conversion process.

To an extent I think I am guilty of undertaking this research from a very specific mindset. Knowing the difficulties that I faced at times during my conversion experience makes me a somewhat emotionally attached and subjective researcher. Nevertheless there are scholars (Roald: 2001; Rambo: 1993) who

emphasize the empathy that is required to see and feel the point of view of the person being studied. My task is difficult as objectivity is the key to successful researching, but I do believe that it is my similar circumstances to the respondents that will enable them to feel comfortable in answering the questions as honestly as possible.

CHAPTER 2 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

2.0 Introduction

To be able to understand the conversion experience of the women in this research, it is essential to present a framework of the foremost studies within the context of religious conversion. Most research since the late 1800's has taken place within the boundaries of Christianity, nevertheless, the theories and models that have been established can, to some degree, be used in assessing religious conversion in most faiths. There is an enormous amount of literature on religious conversion and it is impossible to cover all the ideas, models and variations in this dissertation. I have therefore limited myself to that which set the framework for conversion studies and to the models that have become the basis for most scholars' research.

Research can be broadly categorized into the classic and contemporary periods of research, with the former being spearheaded by such scholars as Stanley Hall, E.D. Starbuck, William James, George Albert Coe, Wayne Oates and Robert Thouless. They concentrated on the 'cause' of conversion within a personal or individual context and although they agreed that conversion could be sudden or gradual, they focused on sudden conversions. They considered these to be far more interesting than gradual conversions which they felt were a rarity. Sudden conversions appeared to be a factor of the socio-historic period of American Protestant Revivalism where letters, confessions and statements in religious pamphlets were used in their research. (Spilka et al: 2003) The three most important factors these scholars concentrated on were: the age of the convert, whether it was sudden or gradual conversion and the explanations of the processes that account for the conversion. (James: 2002; Coe: 1979; Thouless: 1971) It was Thouless who categorized conversion in terms of moral, social and intellectual content in the manner that change occurred. He admitted that these three elements could not be clearly distinguished from each other as they interacted with each other at some point. (Thouless 1971: 104)

The latter period began in the mid-1900's with Lofland, Stark, Skonovd, Spilka and more recently Gillespie and Lewis Rambo, being at the forefront of research. This period minimized the use of source documents and focused predominantly on the conversion *process*. As such the contemporary period is characterized by its limited interest in the psychological concerns of conversion and an increased focus on the sociological explanations of the conversion process. There was however, a resurgence in the interest of psychological factors which, as in the classic period, appeared to focus predominantly on the sudden, crisis oriented conversions. (Spilka et al 2003:200) One of the most important models that emerged out of this period was that of Lofland and Stark with the filtering system of sociological factors which would ultimately lead to a full conversion. In addition, Stark and Skonovd presented what they termed the six *conversion motifs* or types which explained the conversion experience for a potential convert. (Gillespie 1991: 50)

Another model was that which Lewis Rambo (1993), offered in his book 'Understanding Religious Conversion'; a holistic model which he termed a 'sequential stage model' which comprised seven stages of conversion. It is significant that he claimed that the stages of conversion should always be studied within the framework of cultural, social, personal and religious systems. He advocated that his model is multidimensional and historical, but also acknowledged that conversion is an interactive and cumulative process over time. Conversion does not end once the convert has accepted the new faith but continues as a transformational process which evolves a new identity within the adopted social, religious and cultural systems.

Within Islam there are a few scholars, such as Larry Poston, Richard Bulliet, Sindre Bangstad, Karin van Nieuwkerk and Ali Köse who have contributed to the study of conversion to Islam. Most literature on Islamic conversion uses a descriptive approach. Books such as *Daughters of Another Path* by Carol Anway, *From My Sisters' Lips* by Na'ima Robert and *Even Angels Ask Why* by Jeffrey Lang are amongst a plethora of others that present their personal journey into the religion of Islam. There are numerous internet sites that provide a platform for

converts to present their conversion experiences and the reasons for them. Ali Köse has produced one of the most concise academic studies of conversion to Islam within the basic framework of conversion. His research has disputed some of the findings of the more classic scholars by proposing an older average age for conversion, the increase of the intellectual motif for conversion together with the affectional and experimental motifs, and that interfaith conversion is a prolonged and gradual process of developing a new identity. Köse raises the debate of culture and Islam, since the majority of the British converts he studied, felt that it was important to retain their Englishness/Britishness while still being practising Muslims.

The acculturation model of John W. Berry is more relevant to those who immigrate to a foreign country and the difficulties they encounter in adapting to their new society and its culture. It is significant in this discussion. In interfaith conversions the new faith is often culturally based as well, thus increasing the difficulties of the new identity formation and acceptance of the convert in society; especially in terms of inter-faith and inter-cultural marriages. Thus the probability of the convert being assimilated depends on the individual's adaptability as well as the social acceptance by the community and the religious institutions.

Consequently, the question of inter-faith, inter-cultural and inter-race marriages becomes an important category within the discussion of religious conversion. Scholars have indicated that such marriages have extra tensions, which normative marriages do not need to deal with. (Spilka et al: 2003; Crohn: 1995) The conflict between the marriage partners is not easily resolved as often they have internalized different social coping mechanisms which could depend on the context of their upbringing.

After defining religious conversion and the theories mentioned, it will be possible to place the research analysis in context and to ascertain whether the conversion processes and experiences of the women in this study, are concomitant with the conversion theories and models that are available in the existing literature.

2.1 Defining conversion

A discussion on conversion cannot take place unless it has been defined within the religious context. Scholars agree that conversion can take place in the economic, political, social and scientific contexts, but for obvious reasons limited their definitions to the religious, with either psychological, social, anthropological or theological determinants in their definitions. Generally, scholars tend to define conversion in terms of 'change', transformation', 'a turning about' or 'a growth of an identity of a new "self"' (James 2003; Coe 1979; Spilka et al 2003; Gillespie 1991; Rambo 1993). Most important is the idea that the convert moves usually from a less religious state in pre-conversion to a state of total commitment and heightened religiousness once conversion has occurred, thereby emphasizing the fact that a religious awareness or consciousness is the determining factor for the conversion. This then creates the space for the convert to develop a new identity of spiritual intensity and character which overflows into their social world.

Rambo (1993: 5) advocates religious conversion as a "process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations and orientations." Furthermore it is a process over time wherein relationships are influenced by the process and where the factors are cumulative, interactive and multiple that affect the conversion process. As such there is no one cause that triggers conversion, but a number of factors that subscribe to determining the conversion process and experience. According to Spilka et al (2003: 202), George Albert Coe has provided one of the best definitions in which he stated four criteria that were essential for conversion; first, conversion is a major change in the self, secondly this change is not only a matter of the maturing adult but is also identified with a decisive moment, whether sudden or gradual, where – thirdly - the individual accepts another perspective to life and their new self. Lastly, this transformation includes a complete change in all aspects of the individual's life whereby the transformation is a sense of freedom from the previous 'existence' that was filled with crises and problems. These definitions align themselves with Wahiduddin Khan's definition of conversion which states that it is:

“an event, which takes place in a person’s life as a result of intellectual revolution or spiritual transformation. It is not simply leaving one religious tradition for another. What is meant by conversion is that the individual has discovered the truth after an exhaustive search for it and then by his own choice, abandoned one religion for another.”

(Khan: 2006. Accessed in May 2006)

Conversion always takes place within a specific cultural-social context and religious tradition (intra-faith) or from one tradition to another (interfaith). As a result the type of conversion experienced by the convert depends not only on each individual, but also on the interpretation and expectations of each tradition and culture. eg: conversion to Islam may mean that with the declaration of the *shahādah* the convert is inducted as a Muslim, but depending on the cultural background of the community, the ritual and expectations may be very different from one community or country to another.

At this point it is necessary to state that definitions are categorized within normative and descriptive approaches. The normative approach would formulate conversion according to the theological convictions of a tradition. Thus conversion would reflect a very specific procedure or ritual and would require the convert to perhaps give up aspects that would identify them with their previous religion. On the other hand, the descriptive approach is associated with the process of transformation where the nature and varieties of conversion are reflected. It is for these reasons that Rambo (1993: 8) expresses the necessity of studying conversion within the cultural, social, personal and religious systems of the convert.

Ultimately there are numerous definitions of religious conversion, with St. Paul’s sudden, dramatic and mystical experience of being blinded by a light and miraculously being converted into a zealous and ardent propagator of Christianity, being the basis upon which religious conversion has been studied and promoted. Nevertheless, there is still room for more research, to rework the

framework of definitions and to provide other alternatives, especially in the Islamic framework.

2.2 Classic research period

Stanley Hall and Edwin Starbuck are accredited with being the initial researchers of religious conversion. They, along with many of the other classic scholars, concentrated predominantly on the psychological understanding of conversion procedures within a Christian context, using letters, confessions and interviews as their means of acquiring information. The most important considerations in their work focuses on the time it took to convert, the age of the convert and the reasons accounting for the conversion.

2.2.1 Age of the convert

Starbuck (James 2002: 199) presents conversion as an escape from sin and/or a time of uncertainty resulting in an identity crisis which typically occurred at the time of adolescence. He ascertained that the most common age (he acknowledged conversion could happen at any age) for this was usually at 14 years for girls and 16 years for boys; a time that is equated with difficulties in the maturation process from youth to adulthood and which involved a process of spiritual growth. He argued that the cause for conversion is crisis oriented, but the crisis faced by the convert is not necessarily a religious crisis but a social and moral one that is represented in a religious rebirth. Furthermore, the maturation process is sexually related as they become aware of their sexual feelings, so the religious conversion is a form of removing the guilt or sin felt by the convert. The convert goes through a period of anguish and depression and remains unfocussed until a religious 'happening' occurs, which is involuntary and sudden in nature, and re-orientates the individual within their religion and allows them to create an identity that has been washed of past wrongs where they are unified, happy, focused and confident, thus presenting a sense of self-surrender and spiritual growth. This event of identity development is closely related to Erik

Erikson's contemporary model of identity theory where he posits that an individual goes through a process of eight stages which represent crises that a person has in developing an identity. The first four stages occur in infancy and childhood and the resolution of the conflict results in an identity. The final stage occurs at adolescence where identity and role diffusion become important aspects for the individual. The crisis at each stage allows for the next process to take place thus building the identity of the individual and providing a dynamic context in which to do it. (Gillespie 1991: 145)

Thus Starbuck defined conversion by its 'cause' rather than the experience, where it was a movement away from sinning rather than a movement towards righteousness. (James 2002: 209) He concluded that sudden conversion shortened the period of storm and crisis and enabled the adolescent to reach a stage of regeneration and greater maturity. James supported Starbuck's findings on the age of conversion, but George Albert Coe argued that conversion was not just a maturation process but that a decisive decision was made at some point which could occur at any age.

2.2.2 Time of conversion: Sudden or Gradual

2.2.2.1 Characteristics of sudden conversion

The most well known form of conversion is that of St. Paul who had been an ardent enemy of Jesus and his followers. His sudden and miraculous conversion to Christianity on an outing, where he was blinded by a bright light and a 'presence', has become the format of which sudden conversions are studied. The classic scholars admitted that sudden and gradual conversions are a phenomenon, but tended to ignore the gradual conversions preferring to study the more dynamic and interesting sudden conversions.

Sudden conversions are a form of self-surrender to a higher spiritual state which are most often involuntary and occur unconsciously thus classing them as passive conversions. The classic scholars argued that sudden conversions are

the most frequent form of conversion and were usually an intra-faith phenomenon. They are typified by an individual who experiences a mystical happening, a dream or vision in which the convert becomes spiritually aware of a change within himself. They are spontaneous and instantaneous where for some it is a revival experience somewhat like a rebirth, for others it is a movement away from a wrongful social activity or giving up of vices e.g. drinking or swearing, towards a reformed way of living. This form of conversion is typically known as a moral conversion such as in the case of 'Swearing Tom' who suddenly stopped swearing after having a religious vision. (Thouless 1971: 106) These converts are usually so filled with the miracle of the event, ecstasy, love and awe of moving from darkness into the light that they become ardent proselytizers of the faith and have a need to help others who are considered to be straying off the righteous path. Their experience is an observable and thematic change in behaviour and is obvious by the content of their conversion. William James felt that it was a matter of being 'once born' and 'twice born' where the individual was born into the faith but later in life, predominantly at adolescence, experienced a second spiritual birth of understanding and fulfillment. James offers that the only witness to this second birth is the 'love of self-eradicated', which he admitted did not necessarily need a crisis for it to occur nor was it only found within Christianity (2002: 238). But, the fact that the conversion was preceded by such feelings of anguish, turmoil, despair, conflict and guilt resulting in feelings of inadequacy, literally presented a crisis within the individual. Thus the ensuing conversion towards a better way of living and a renewed more wholesome identity was indicative of a sudden form of conversion. William James states:

"To say a man is converted means...that religious ideas, peripheral in his consciousness, now take central place, and that religious aims form the habitual center of his energy."

(2002: 196)

John Kildahl (Gillespie 1991: 48) showed in his research that these converts tended to be 'less intelligent and more hysteric' and religiously more

conservative. Perhaps this is another opinion that could support the idea of sudden conversions as being classed as passive encounters, where the convert does not actively search for a reformed way of life.

Nevertheless, there are scholars who argue that even in a process of sudden conversion, there are elements of a linear or gradual process towards conversion in what can be termed the 'incubation period' before conversion. (Gillespie 1991: 17) Furthermore the conversion experience may be sudden, but the conversion transformation that continues thereafter is protracted and gradual.

2.2.2.2 Characteristics of gradual conversion

The characteristics of gradual conversion are given as those that are voluntary and conscious actions of the convert and can be termed as volitional as compared to the involuntary self-surrender of sudden conversions. (James 2002: 206) The individual makes an informed decision after building bit by bit a new set of moral and spiritual habits either through a process of intellectual research of a new faith or the faith they already belong to, as identified by Thouless (1971: 104). As such the individual is actively responsible and participative in their conversion by seeking meaning and purpose in their life. According to Spilka et al (2003: 17) gradual religious conversion is associated with a long and protracted process of religious change and is usually in conjunction with constructive maturational development as in comparison to crisis oriented sudden conversions. The convert continuously and progressively deepens in their new faith, with the actual moment of conversion not clearly identifiable.

This religious process is determined by an incubation period before conversion where the convert shows interest in a new faith and begins to adopt certain aspects and habits associated with it. A crisis at some point in the convert's life could have begun the process of the gradual conversion but is not usually the final motif for conversion. The moment of conversion can therefore be a conscious or unconscious happening which comes with a self-realization of change and fulfilment. (Gillespie 1991: 18)

Starbuck (Thouless 1971: 110) analysed conversion experiences and grouped them into successive stages of dejection and sadness, the point of transition and joy and peace. These stages are similar to those offered by the contemporary scholar Anne Sofie Roald (van Nieuwkerk: 2006. Accessed in May 2006), in her work on European converts to Islam. She identifies the phases of love, disappointment and maturity. In the first phase many converts tend to be obsessed with the new religion and want practice all precepts immediately. This is followed by disappointment with born-Muslim behaviour and ideas which at times drives converts away from Islam. The third stage entails the converts searching for new meaning of Islamic ideals within the cultural context they live in.

2.2.3 Reason conversion occurs

The classical researchers emphasized conversions as identifiable by the cause (volitional/self-surrender), nature (sudden/gradual) and content (social, intellectual or moral) of the experience where the individual undergoes a life changing process. People needed an organized framework in which to allow their life to take on meaning and purpose and the religious system provided such a system for spiritual growth and self realization. (Spilka et al 2003: 204) The general understanding amongst the scholars was that conversion was a result of a crisis in the life of an individual e.g.: a relative dying, near death experiences or illness. Experiencing such a crisis the individual questions life and its reasons.

2.3 Contemporary research

2.3.1 Conversion processes

The contemporary period focuses predominantly on the social effects on conversion rather than the psychological impact or reasons. Scholars accepted the classical findings that conversion could be sudden or gradual but felt that even in sudden conversions a period of unconscious incubation had taken place

over a protracted length of time. Their interest lay with the gradual conversions, especially as they constituted the majority of conversions.

It is generally accepted that conversion is a process over time and not a single event; that it is contextual therefore affects and is affected by a number of relationships, situations and expectations and, factors in the conversion process are multiple, interactive and cumulative. Gillespie proposes that conversion accounts are both anachronistic and apologetic; the former because the conversion experience is moulded by the context and the latter through the necessity of converts to defend their new faith to their prior group of allegiance (1991: 5). Rambo maintained that conversion had to be viewed with the components of the cultural, social, religious and personal systems so as to understand the complexities of the individual's specific conversion process. This supports those scholars who feel that no two conversion processes or experiences are the same as each process is affected differently by each of these systems. Furthermore, the historical context allows scholars to trace the conversion traditions over time which presents the possibilities of documenting conversion patterns. Historians such as Bulliet, have been able to prove that conversion, even within the same tradition, may be different in different times and places depending on the motives for conversion! Through his theory of innovative diffusion and the 'S' and Bell-shaped curves of logistics (Bulliet: Accessed in June 2006), he ascertained that the first converts to Islam were different to those who followed after a long period of time.

The cultural system is recognized by the symbols and rituals which provide the guideline for living and which are unconsciously adopted through the socialization of the individual and maintained by the social institutions and relationships of the individual within the community. As the classical scholars suggested, conversion is often preceded by personal crises that involve the individual's thoughts, feelings and actions displayed by anguish, turmoil, guilt or conflict and it is the religious system that enables the convert to form a relationship with the spiritual to create a new identity and sense of meaning and purpose in life. (Rambo 1993; Gillespie 1991)

Religious conversion can be interfaith or intra-faith, a shift in beliefs without necessarily being associated to a specific religious organization or a change in affiliation of faith because of something such as marriage or citizenship. From this five basic types of conversion have been detected: tradition transition, institution transition, affiliation, defection and intensification. (Rambo 1993: 12) Intensification is the increased commitment to the convert's faith and can be expressed through increased involvement in the community or making their faith the central focus of their life eg: born-again conversions. In contrast, defection is the rejection of a religious tradition. This change does not necessarily result in the convert accepting another faith but is a transition into accepting nonreligious or secular beliefs. Affiliation is the movement of an individual from little or no involvement or commitment to a faith to a strong following of involvement. Tradition transitions usually have the greatest effect on converts where they leave one major faith for another. They are typified by a change in worldview and very often reveal negative reactions from the prior society of affiliation. Institutional transitions on the other hand are usually less stressful and they are characterized by an individual moving from one community to another within a tradition eg: Roman Catholic becomes Anglican.

Gillespie suggests, as do other conversion scholars, that change is not necessarily religious. Therefore in order for conversion to be religious, specific elements need to be present to denote such a conversion. He considers the following definition of religion, as suggested by John Westerhoff III, as comprehensive:

"My understanding of religion refers to those concrete communal expressions of faith which are embodied in the life of a people - a community of faith. Religion is faith given shape, form and content."

(Gillespie 1991: 10)

Gillespie proposes that each conversion is unique as it is subject to the context in which it occurs. Those contexts could be political, social and economic, but

conversion can never take place outside of the cultural context. Thus conversion experiences are infinite and subjective which affects conversion literature. He is not alone in these suggestions as other scholars have offered similar theories of conversion. Gillespie posits that conversion that does not deal with a complete transformation in a person's life may not be a conversion at all. He implies that with the change of lifestyle one is abandoning what was an aimless and unsatisfying perspective in life for something more promising and meaningful, and most importantly, God is at the centre to which one is converting.

Scholars have used Lofland and Skonovd's conversion motifs to identify the various types of conversion, and Lofland and Stark's seven step model to understand how the individual gets to a point of religious conversion to such an extent, that they have clearly dominated other conversion process models. Their model indicates the difference between verbal and total converts. (Spilka et al 2003: 212) Criticism has been levelled at their model indicating that not all the steps are present in conversion processes, but Lofland and Stark emphasize that they never assumed that the model would be functional across all religions and religious groups.

2.3.2 Lofland and Stark' model & the conversion motifs

Based on a study of a religious cult, Lofland and Stark presented a model which described seven inter-related conditions that needed to be present in an individual's life in order for conversion to occur. An individual needed to (1) experience tension or some sense of dissatisfaction with their existing life situation and (2) interpreted within a religious perspective, this led them to define themselves as (3) an active religious seeker. Thus conversion would occur if they (4) encountered a religion or cult at this point of crisis; and (5) formed a bond with the participants or other converts; and (6) contact with people outside of the religion or cult is limited or absent through (7) increased interaction with people of the new group. (Köse 1996; Gillespie 1991; Rambo 1993; Spilka et al 2003) Most scholars disagree with the importance of the sequence of the model and they find that many of these steps do not appear in conversion processes. But they have

found that two elements are common and important in the conversion process: affective bonds and intensive interaction with group members. Köse (1996: 120-122) found that all seven conditions did not appear in even one of his subjects and that some conditions were more applicable than others.

This model could be viewed as a filtering system. Each step involves a filtering out of some people and a filtering or even funneling in of others. Those who have experienced the first six filters become verbal converts. They must go through the seventh step to become total converts. Total converts really believe the theology or ideology of the group whereas verbal converts feel committed to the members of the group and they verbally assent to the belief, but they are not quite committed at a moral level. This is an interesting point as many scholars claim that one is only a true convert when one's life is totally committed to the new faith or orientation as explained by Strickland (Spilka et al 2003: 210):

"The mere acceptance of a suggested idea and the relaxation of nerve tensions will not of themselves produce action for new ideals, nor changed habits of life. And if action from new ideals and changed habits of life do *not* follow, there has been no conversion."

Lofland added to this model, with the help of Skonovd, the six conversion motifs or types of conversion (intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalistic and coercive) that were identified from the seven step model. Each of the motifs are assessed in terms of five independent elements: (1) the degree of social pressure, (2) temporal duration, (3) level of affective arousal, (4) the affective content and (5) the belief-participation sequence. (Gillespie 1991: 50)

In the intellectual motif the individual becomes acquainted with a new ideology through active research by reading books, watching television or attending classes and a shift in allegiance occurs after a relatively short period. They go through a process of self-discovery and conversion which can occur in isolation, although very often there is social interaction with someone of the ideology they are researching, but with little social pressure from them.

Mystical motifs are highly emotional and cannot logically or coherently be expressed. It is usually a sudden occurrence when the individual is alone but is preceded by days or weeks of emotional turmoil before the event. These types of conversion are often referred to as 'Pauline', 'evangelical' or 'born-again' experiences. There is very little or no social pressure from others and it results in an intensification of belief.

Experimental motifs have curiosity as their motif where the individual participates in group activities in a tentative way. Social pressure is limited as the individual does not initially commit himself to the belief. Transformation in belief and identity occurs after a prolonged period of time and emotional arousal is not very high.

The affectional motif is driven by the attachment or strong liking for a practising believer of a group. The convert is influenced to a degree by the attraction of the individual and the support they are given, and social pressure is present even if in a small way. Participation in the behaviours and rituals of the group is experimental at first and increases over a period of time to complete transformation. This process would be relevant in cases of those who convert for the purpose of marriage as they are influenced by the relationship with their partner who is of another faith.

Revivalist motifs do not appear to be popular in contemporary times but can be found in evangelical movements. Its characteristics are that emotions and social pressures are high and intense and the conversion occurs in a relatively short period of time after participation.

The most controversial form of conversion is the coercive motif. This is rare but Lofland and Skonovd suggest that it is a phenomenon of new religions of the Western world. They indicate that two key factors need to be present; there is compulsion and secondly, the confession of guilt in sinning or the acceptance of an ideological system. Belief is not necessarily accepted by the convert although conversion takes place, thus could one say that the convert has actually been converted? (Gillespie 1991; Rambo 1993; Köse 1996)

Some scholars, such as Köse, suggest that the intellectual, experimental and affectional motifs are increasing but for others the idea of a purely intellectual conversion is still idealistic. Their model has value by emphasizing the social aspects of conversion in comparison to the classical study of the psychological framework and the fact that conversion processes are more commonly known to be gradual rather than sudden. But Lewis Rambo has presented an alternative to Lofland and Stark's seven step model by forming what he termed a 'holistic model' of sequential stages.

2.3.3 Lewis Rambo's sequential model of conversion

Rambo illustrates that there are a range of different conversions and no one type is normative. He does not dismiss Lofland and Stark's model of conversion processes, but feels that the model cannot be used to explain a large number of conversion processes. Therefore he presents an adaptation to their model in his sequential stage model, which he sees as a holistic approach to religious conversion, as it is not only multidimensional and historical but also incorporates the process. He indicates that a stage model is best suited to this form of study as:

"conversion is a process over time, generally exhibiting a sequence of processes, although there is sometimes a spiraling effect – a going back and forth between stages....Each stage has a cluster of themes, patterns and processes that characterize it."

(Rambo 1999: 16)

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5	STAGE 6	STAGE 7
CONTEXT	CRISIS	QUEST	ENCOUNTER	INTERACTION	COMMITMENT	CONSEQUENCES

Figure 1 : Rambo's sequential stage model

As with other scholars, Rambo (1990: 20) suggests that the conversion process takes place within a dynamic context, meaning the complete environment in which it occurs. Conversion is not only influenced by the objective external elements but by subjective internal forces as well and denying either of these forces would not present a holistic understanding of conversion. The context can be categorized into the macro-context which represents the total environment ie: the political, economic and social and pluralist forces and the micro-context which is the immediate world of the person's family, friends, ethnic group and religious community. Conversion would occur if a person has an affectional relationship with the religious community, when rituals are performed that allow experiences and action that are along the lines of their religious goals, when the system of interpretation of life is changed into a religious framework and when a person's role and purpose is determined and guided by religious sensibilities and structures (1990: 34). Therefore the nature of conversion is constructed out of the religious matrix where the religious tradition gives shape to the experience. Eg: Islam requires exclusivity as it demands complete rejection of all other religious paths and requires total allegiance. The context stage would incorporate types of conversion such as tradition transition, institutional transition, affiliation, intensification and apostasy and Lofland and Skonovd's conversion motifs.

The second stage of crisis is the process of understanding the sequence of events that leads to conversion. Most scholars agree that some form of crisis precedes conversion but it is the intensity of the crisis that differs in all conversions. The crisis could either question one's basic orientation to life or be a

rather mild event which becomes the last straw. The catalysts could be near death experiences, illness, mystical experiences or even altered states of consciousness or apostasy. Rambo posits that converts are active participants in their conversion, whereas other scholars suggest that in meeting an advocate of the religion the convert becomes a passive participant. Rambo does emphasize that one cannot say that a convert is only active or passive but rather that conversion has the probability of being both (1990: 44).

Apostasy is an important catalyst especially in reference to this thesis. Apostates leave their previous religion to affiliate completely with another. This creates grief over lost relationships, ideas, beliefs, rituals and connections with family and friends. Apostasy makes a person sad because it is so difficult to give up many aspects of ones past. Unfortunately, these issues of loss are not dealt with in the modern world. (1990: 54)

The quest of seeking the meaning and purpose in life becomes the third stage. The seeking is an ongoing process but is intensified by crisis and is affected by the response of the convert i.e. whether they are active or passive, the structural availability of being able to do the seeking e.g. various networks such as family or religious organisations may prevent or discourage the movement and the motivational structures. These structures delineate the reasons why the individual is doing the searching e.g. relief of guilt, compliance with pressure from family or conflict resolution.

The fourth stage is that of the encounter with the advocate of the religion. Very often the advocate is the missionary who has specific ideals, attitudes and persuasive strategies for encouraging one to convert. In Christianity the missionaries undergo training and are usually more interested in converting the pagan, but in Islam the missionary can be any believer of the faith as *da'wah* is, to most Muslims, one of the most important aspects of Islam. The advocate could therefore be a friend or colleague of the convert. Rambo (1990: 67) suggests that the process is not necessarily unidirectional but that the convert could have an influence on the advocate as well.

The strategies used by the missionary can be categorized as the degree of proselytizing, the strategic style, the mode of contact and the potential benefits for the convert in accepting the new religion. (1990: 76) Some religions have organized institutions which concentrate on the training of missionaries so as to ensure a concentrated mass of missionaries in the public arena to carry out proselytization. This would include immense amounts of literature to support their strategies, motivations and methods. The mode of contact is varied from house visits to impersonal communication such as radio and television and the benefits are usually subjective to the religion but ensconced in words of regeneration.

Once the stage of encounter is underway the process of the potential convert interacting with members of the new faith intensifies. In this stage the potential convert learns more about the ideology, the teachings, lifestyle and expectations of the group and is given opportunities in a formal and informal way to participate in the faith. The duration of this stage depends on the strategies of each religion and the activeness or passiveness of the potential convert. Here again the motifs of Lofland and Skonovd become important in determining the type of conversion process. An important factor is the affectional motif where relationships, particularly friends and family, are most effective in maintaining a potential convert on the course of learning and participating in the faith.

The sixth stage is that of commitment and is the process whereby the individual makes a decision to commit to the new faith. This commitment usually occurs when the person perceives the advantage in doing so e.g. beneficial, fulfillment, satisfaction or compulsion. The commitment is expressed through a ritual which reinforces the movement from what was wrong towards that which is right and better and reinforces solidarity with the group. Not all faiths have formal rituals but in Judaism the convert has to be immersed in water and if a male must be circumcised. The rituals mark the point of no turning back. The testimonies of the commitment are usually post-conversion confessions of the conversion ritual and process. According to Rambo (1990: 132) the point of surrender in committing to the new faith is the hardest to achieve and understand. To turn away from the old

towards the new is not easily achieved and in some cases may only occur in the transformation process after the conversion ritual through the process of self realization.

The consequence of religious conversion depends on the religious community's sense of evaluative criteria so as to determine whether the conversion was religious at all. It also includes determining whether the convert's life has changed, have they become committed adherents to their new faith, how their life has changed or did they remain in a state of stasis.

As such Rambo's model incorporates most of the theories that have been offered by scholars but he has aligned their theories and his suggestions to formulate a model that is more encompassing of conversion to all faiths and 'integrates the perspectives of anthropology, psychology, sociology and religious studies' (1990: 165). Furthermore the stages are not inflexible but can change according to the context of the conversion.

2.4 Conversion to Islam: Ali Köse's findings

Ali Köse (1996) in his doctoral research on 70 Native British converts to Islam has provided excellent research in this subject in relation to social and psychological conversion theory, thus providing a source of core theory and comparisons for this dissertation. He covered the pre-conversion, conversion process and post-conversion periods in great detail. The converts in his sample accepted Islam for a variety of reasons. Some had been studying it for a long time, some converted to be able to marry a Muslim or after marrying a Muslim, others felt it was through positive examples set by Muslims they knew. Thus social contact with a Muslim was a common factor amongst the majority of the converts, but according to Köse most were already oriented towards a religious quest at the time of their contact (1996: 193). His research does not provide an Islamic reference of conversion from historic traditions nor does it focus specifically on women who convert for marriage, thus indicating that the research in this thesis does fill a gap in Islamic conversion.

Köse's findings show that conversion to Islam is a slow, complex and gradual process and is volitional in nature. All the converts were adults with the average age being that of 29.7 years and 61% falling in the 23-45 years age group (1996: 47), thus differing with the classic research of adolescence being the age of conversion. But many of the converts indicated that it was in adolescence that they either left their religion of upbringing, came from families where there was little religious identification (85%), or they had troubled teenage years at home; therefore they tended to reject their parent's religion (1996: 46). Only 11% were practising their previous religion before conversion. Köse feels that the later age of conversion can be explained by Erikson's moratorium period in his theory of identity, where the struggling adolescent retreats for a while before committing to something valuable, so as to regroup or reorganize their life which occurs in their mid to late twenties (1996: 62). This indicates that the individuals were on an active quest for meaning in their life by searching for a new doctrine, thus emphasizing that the intellectual and experimental motifs from Lofland and Skonovd's model were a predominant factor for conversion. Köse proposes that the conversion process is therefore an active adoption of a new set of beliefs and principles to rebuild a new and satisfying lifestyle and belief system.

His research shows that many of the converts were looking for an alternative to the over-secularization of society as they were unhappy with the general moral degeneration and permissiveness of society which was being supported by their former religion. For them, Islam provided clear, strong values on these issues. Köse feels that this state of maturity and understanding can only be attained once a person has reached their twenties and is an indicator of a movement towards that which is spiritual and sacred (1996: 191). Furthermore his sample showed that 49% had emotional stresses e.g. broken marriages, in the pre-conversion phase which made them start thinking about religion. Some indicated that emotional turmoil from childhood had an effect on them, but it was not necessarily these crises that led them to convert. Certainly they may have led to a personality or identity change or even set them on the path towards the conversion process, but the final conversion depended on intellectual elements

rather than on the direct stimuli of the crises (1996: 192). The converts stressed that their conversion was not an overnight happening but took months of gradual learning, studying and questioning and skepticism was still a factor even in the days before converting.

When studying the British converts in context of the six motifs of Lofland and Skonovd, Köse found they predominantly fell within the affectional (66%), intellectual (71%) and experimental (60%) motifs. It appeared that the first two motifs tended to be accompanied by the latter. The mystical and coercive motifs did feature with the coercive motif being rare (4%); the revivalist motif did not feature at all (1996: 98). Köse indicated there were respondents who went through a purely intellectual conversion which is in complete contrast to Thouless' argument, that pure intellectual conversions are more common in literature and 'perhaps not to be found in real life'. (Thouless 1971: 107) He also found that no matter what the reasons were for the final decision of conversion, the majority of the respondents went through a time of experimentation which was marked by visiting Muslim countries, spending time with Muslim friends and/or families and by visiting mosques. The respondents therefore started implementing some basic Islamic practises into their lives before actually deciding on the final step of conversion. This obviously lends itself to the affectional motif where the majority of the respondents were influenced by Muslim people they knew. Furthermore, those people who were married to a Muslim before conversion were more likely to go through the affectional motif and women tended to be influenced far more than men (Köse 1996: 103). The respondents identified factors that were the most motivating for their conversion as: their response to the teachings of Islam, its moral and ethical standards and the spiritual aspect of Islam. Köse found that self-regarding motives such as wanting approval from others were not a factor in their motifs nor was there any form of social pressure from others; but he does reflect on the idea that psychological pressure in interpersonal relationships, from a Muslim partner, could present a form of coercion (1996: 109).

Only 20% of the sample were either married or engaged to a Muslim at the time of conversion. Of these the majority were female. It has been shown in studies that very often the spouse is directly instrumental in the change of their partner's belief system and according to Köse's findings, some of his respondents converted specifically so that they could marry as shown by the following quote:

"My first contact with a Muslim came about when I coincidentally met my first husband in Italy where we were both on holiday. He was an Egyptian staying in London and he was not practising Islam at all. And through him I had contact with several Muslims. Some months after we first met we got married and I *became Muslim in name for the sake of marriage.*"

[italics mine]

(Köse 1996: 115)

This social relationship transcends into the convert accepting and adopting the opinions and beliefs of the partner within that tradition. Unfortunately as Bulliet (2006) suggests, the role model that is having the greatest influence on the convert is not necessarily an authoritative figure on the faith and as such the convert could be receiving completely incorrect information. Furthermore, the information received could be littered with cultural interpretations rather than the basic teachings. Köse also found that many of the converts tended to follow the 'don't's' rather than the 'do's'. By this they meant they stopped drinking alcohol or eating pork which is forbidden in Islam, but the reading of *salāh* (prayers) or fasting in *Ramadān*, which are compulsory, came later. For many of the women the change in the style of dressing was a greater change to adapt to than the men. This is directly due to the physical nature of women who are required to cover their hair and be clothed modestly from their necks to their ankles. Most of the women indicated that they wore long sleeves and skirts but had difficulty in wearing the scarf.

Köse points out that conversion overcomes differences in religion but does it resolve issues of differences in tradition and culture? He found that intermarried converts in Britain did not usually live within a Muslim community and therefore there was no social necessity for conversion; furthermore the doctrines of Islam

accept any heritage or tradition as long as it does not conflict with Islam and its way of life. Within Islam conversion of a man is essential if he is marrying a Muslim woman as he is head of the household, according to Islamic teachings and the religious system; whereas in the case of a Muslim man marrying a Christian or Jewish woman, conversion is not a necessity for the woman. But in Islam religious identification is an important aspect of social religious relations and of necessity (attendance of mosque and *madrassah*) of location and therefore will have significant influences on the conversion process. Furthermore, the convert's in-laws would most likely expect her to convert, thus the woman could view conversion as a necessary way of achieving social identification with her husband. Moreover, a woman may decide that a religiously harmonious family would be the highest form of religious expression and family duty, or merely that she would convert for her future children's sake and to attain marriage (1996: 117). Only one of these converts had any close affiliation with her previous religion prior to conversion which led to Köse proposing that if they were marrying a partner who was strongly committed to their faith then the marriage partner would most likely convert, but would not necessarily be committed. This idea is supported by Albert Gordon (Schmidt 1988: 369) who studied structural converts (tradition transition) and found that they did not experience a radical shift in identity nor did they have an inner conversion. Most of the converts, who were indifferent or had fallen away from their tradition, were motivated by marriage and believed that conversion would help their marriages and family life.

Generally the converts felt the questions they had been asking about the meaning and purpose of life that related to the cognitive problems of their previous lifestyle were, according to the converts, answered by conversion to Islam and its philosophy in life. The British converts felt that Islam is a universal religion and transcends national, ethnic and cultural boundaries. Therefore they tend to be more dynamic and liberal in their interpretation of Islam than Muslim immigrants to Britain, who are oriented towards their cultural background. Many converts had difficulty in identifying with some of the established Muslim organizations in Britain because of the tendency to be culture based and what they termed the 'two-headed syndrome' as illustrated by the following quote:

“We all experience it sometimes – you walk into a mosque and every head turns slowly and blatantly to stare at you, suspicion oozing towards you. After checking your files, you realize that they are not looking at a fellow Muslim, they are looking at a white man who has been introduced on the Asian ghetto.”

(Köse 1996: 136)

It was for this reason that Daoud Owen started the Association for British Muslims. It is their philosophy that it is acceptable within Islam to retain their Englishness or Britishness and still follow the basic teachings and philosophies of Islam. Most of the converts in this study did not seem to change culturally, but adopted, via the Islamic teachings, moral and ethical codes that were conducive to their changing beliefs and identity.

2.5 Acculturation Theoretical Model (John W. Berry)

John Berry’s model of acculturation is the advent of plural societies; whether through immigration from one country to another, or from the country to the city or from one culture to another within the same geographic area. The model reflects the outcomes of cultural adaptation by the immigrating group and the effects that are displayed. The model is relevant to this discussion and runs parallel to the conversion models of Gillespie and Rambo, and in understanding the acculturation process of the converted women within their new religion and social community. Berry (1997: 7) gives the classical definition of acculturation according to Redfield, Linton and Herskovits as:

“Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both group.”

He indicates that acculturation can be viewed as a neutral process as change can occur in either group or both, but that it generally appears that one group is affected more than the other, thus becoming the acculturated group (1997: 7). Individual and group variables before and during the process are important in determining how successful the acculturation process will be. Factors such as: age, gender, the length of the process, the support base and coping strategies, the cultural distance between the place of origin and the new locality, education, the personality of the individual and societal attitudes have an effect on the psychological acculturation process of the individual or group.

Berry proposes that there are two basic strategies in acculturation: i) cultural maintenance where the individuals feel that their cultural identity is important to them and therefore strive to maintain it and ii) contact and participation, which involves deciding how much one wants to be involved in the new cultural group or whether one prefers to remain among those more like themselves (1997: 9). Unfortunately it is not as simple as it first appears as the forces of acculturation depend on whether there is prejudice or discrimination, positive attitudes from both parties or if there is a sense of attachment or identification with the dominant culture. Further constraints such as physical features may determine the acculturation process e.g. a white woman being accepted into an Indian Muslim community.

The model suggests there are four strategies of acculturation: integration, assimilation, segregation and marginalization. How individuals acculturate depends on the assumption that they have the freedom to choose the way they wish to acculturate, but this is not necessarily the reality of the situation. Very often individuals are forced into a specific form of acculturation which can lead either to segregation or complete assimilation. Assimilation occurs when individuals do not wish to (or is forced not to) maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with the other culture. Segregation on the other hand is when individuals have no wish to lose their cultural identity and do not seek interaction with the other culture. Integration is the synthesis of the first two strategies; here individuals maintain their cultural identity and integrity but also

participate in the larger framework of the other culture. This can only take place naturally if the dominant group is open to cultural diversity which allows mutual respect and understanding whereby the acculturated person's needs are provided for. Marginalization occurs when individuals have no desire to maintain their cultural identity often through enforced cultural loss, and they have no interest in interacting with the other culture for reasons of discrimination or exclusion (1997: 9). The adaptation of individuals depends largely on their response to the demands around them and can either be immediate or extended over a period of time. The shorter the period the more likely the changes will arise in conflict and be negative in nature, in comparison to a lengthier process where acculturation will be more positive and have less conflict.

Accompanying these strategies are the psychological implications of the cross-cultural behaviour that the individuals display. The outcome of acculturation, as with conversion, is highly variable depending on the social and individual moderating factors which affect the process. They may show signs of more than one acculturating strategy depending on their age, social environment and the time in the process. For example an individual may seek cultural maintenance within the family environment but once in the workplace this may not be as important. The aim of cross-cultural psychology is to analyse the effect that the cultural changes of acculturation have on the development and behaviour of the individual. The psychological changes may be apparent in various ways. Firstly, the changes, behavioural shifts or cultural learning may initially be fairly easy to accomplish. This would necessitate the unlearning of one's own cultural habits that are no longer appropriate within the new cultural system and is usually easier for the adolescent and the young adult to achieve. But, there is the possibility of this occasionally developing into a form of culture conflict where incomplete behaviours create problems. Secondly, some people would experience serious conflict in the difficulty of changing their behaviour, culminating in what is known as 'culture shock' or 'acculturative stress', which is a source of inter-cultural problems (1997: 13). Lastly, in a situation where the changes in the cultural context exceed the person's ability to cope through

reasons such as the extent of or the rapidness of change, major psychological problems develop e.g. mental disorders such as clinical depression.

Acculturation changes could be: physical in terms of differences between the dominating society and the individual; biological such as dietary changes; social changes because of the disruption to family and friends and cultural changes which involve superficial differences in foods eaten and clothes worn to more significant changes, such as the language spoken, religious conversions and differences in value systems (1997: 17). According to Berry, women find acculturation far more difficult and he associates this with their accorded status and the differing treatment of women within the two cultural systems. He argues that if the two systems have significant differences then the new roles the women are required to adopt may bring them into conflict with their own culture as the adaptation is more difficult and a greater amount of culture shedding is expected of them.

Berry's model is significant for this dissertation as the majority of the respondents' are not only changing their religious affiliation, but are also marrying into a different cultural community which directly relates to the acculturation process described above. Therefore, not only do they have to cope with their conversion process and experience but with the acculturation implications as well.

2.6 Complexities of inter- marriages

Inter-marriages are not the prime concern of this discussion, but are relevant to the extent that they form part of the complexities of the women who convert to another faith for marriage. Marriage is a complex institution often clouded by difficulties and conflict under normal circumstances; once other dynamics are introduced, as in the case of inter-marriages, conflict in the marriage is bound to increase making the marriage far more complicated. Mixed marriages could be inter-faith, inter-racial, inter-cultural or inter-ethnic. Each of these relationships bring with them dynamics and differences that alter the state of the marriage and

usually become obvious in times of conflict or in life-changing situations eg: birth and death. Interfaith marriages could be theoretically defined as inter-religious, yet in such a marriage one of the spouse's could have converted to the other's faith either nominally (which usually occurs for the purpose of marriage) or with true conviction. (Spilka et al 2003: 107)

As the world becomes more secularized and globalized, people tend to break old customs and taboos that existed overtime and are prepared to face challenges that in the past were best left alone. Scholars have argued that the smaller ones own religious group is, relative to others in a pluralistic society, the more likely mixed marriages will occur. This is also a factor of increased acculturation in society, as discussed under Berry's model of acculturation. But, according to Spilka et al (2003: 108), the more religious education one receives of one's religion the less likely one would marry out of it. Scholars have debated as to the reasons why people intermarry and have offered theories that include people choosing partners from another race or religion to distance themselves emotionally and literally from painful family situations, for self-fulfilment and meeting people who are like-educated no matter their background.

Nevertheless, intermarriages are increasing and with them come the related problems. Culture determines how each person interprets values, symbols, social behaviour and religion within their society. If two people of the same culture marry, their interpretation of events is more likely to be similar and conflict is less likely to occur. But, when two people of different cultures form a union even the most subtle differences in culture can make a mountain out of a molehill. What is normal to the one can be quite unusual for the other and this can be played out in numerous areas within the marriage eg: gender roles, family responsibilities, upbringing of children, discipline, anger management and religious systems.

Intermarriages are usually the result of love matches and are more common among younger people. Initially love clouds all the cultural, religious and racial differences and antagonism from family, friends and society can have the effect of uniting the couple even more. But very often the reactions of intolerance of

those around them can strain the best of relationships. And when children arrive religious and cultural differences that were put to the side as insignificant become bones of contention. Thus love takes a backseat when traditions become the focal point of dissent. (Crohn 1995: 28)

According to Dr. Joel Crohn (1995: 7) the importance of a successful intermarriage, is to separate 'the content of their differences about religious or cultural identity from the process of discussing them.' He states that the differences are a source of learning and creativity so as to recognize, appreciate and use the differences to enrich family life. Therefore it is necessary for those in intermarriages to decide what cultural and religious traditions are important and how they are going to implement them and deal with family reactions. Cultural codes are internalized from the time we are children and usually remain invisible until they have been violated. In order to create successful relationships, Crohn advocates five primary tasks that couples should consider in order to face the challenges within their marriage. First, they should face the issues of their differences so as to avoid the pitfalls in the future; secondly, they need to clarify their different cultural codes. As mentioned earlier, what is normal to one person could be abnormal to the other. Crohn (1995: 30) explains this point as such:

"Even when both partners in a mixed match are born in the same country, speak the same language, and are from the same class background, they may find themselves tripping over cultural differences in the meanings of words, behaviours and values. Regional, ethnic, racial and religious differences may lead two native-born partners from different subcultures to interpret the same action in very different ways. Differences in accents between one part of a country are usually obvious; contrasts in cultural codes often are not."

Third, the partners must sort out the confusion about their identity. They need to understand where they fit within the cultural milieu of society so as to be confident with their identity within their marriage. Fourth, they need to be aware of the social context within which their marriage is taking place. Societal attitudes

towards their marriage can have an enormous impact on the success of their relationship, especially when it comes to the acceptance of family and friends. Many people are adverse to intermarriages as they worry about the erosion of cultural traditions that could split a family apart, of losing face in the eyes of neighbours and friends or the racial solidarity that has been undermined. Lastly, once they have found a path of compromise and agreement they need to assist their children in finding theirs. Cross-cultural marriages face their biggest challenge in raising children as they grapple with the identity of biracial children or children from two different cultures or religions. The children of intermarriages have a number of challenges they need to deal with as they begin to understand the world around them and the differences between their family situation and others.

Inter-faith marriages are generally more successful if one partner converts to the other's faith. Typically in monotheistic religions it is usually the religion that is more ritualistic or has the greater dominance in the relationship that is adopted and it is generally women who do the converting. According to scholars, including Ali Köse, the person who converts is usually less committed to their previous religion and has the tendency not to be committed to their new faith either. (Spilka et al 2003; Crohn 1995; Köse 1996) Ultimately it is considered that there is less stability in inter-faith marriages and they are more likely to end in divorce. But religion is not the only factor that contributes to the failure of these marriages. As discussed, it is usually the younger people who partake in such marriages and once the excitement of love and idealism has worn off, marital breakdown is frequent amongst them. This is not to say that all intermarriages are doomed to fail. Many a mixed marriage has conquered and outlasted all prospects of conflict and failure.

2.7 Conclusion

The general consensus amongst the classic and contemporary scholars is that conversion is a change from a divided self experiencing some form of discontent or crisis, to a movement of self regeneration and a unified, happy and positive identity. This change in religious conversion occurs from a position of lesser religious commitment to one of greater or total commitment to the new faith. But there are those who argue that individual's who change their religious affiliation for convenience of marriage, are usually not committed to their previous religion nor do they become committed to their new faith.

The findings of the early scholars that conversion was an adolescent phenomenon, has been disputed by the contemporary scholars, such as Köse, who have found that the mid-twenties is the common age of conversion. Contemporary scholars have also suggested that conversion is a gradual process of change even in situations of sudden conversion because of the incubation period before conversion takes place. The fact that a crisis preceding the conversion is the catalyst for conversion is the generally held assumption by most scholars, except for Radcliffe-Brown who suggests that conversion to the new ideology becomes the crisis.

The debate about whether the converts are active or passive in the conversion process is ongoing but according to Lewis Rambo one cannot categorize them into an either/or framework as converts could be both within the process. Whereas the classic scholars saw conversion as an event and researched it from a psychological perspective, the contemporary scholars focus on the process from a sociological continuum. They suggest that conversion can be studied in a political or economic context but cannot be studied without placing it within a cultural context.

The model of Lofland and Stark has become the most widely used model for conversion in which it describes elements necessary for a verbal or total conversion. It has been criticized by scholars who feel that it not comprehensive

enough to reflect all processes of conversion as many levels are not evident in many conversions. The conversion motifs of Lofland and Skonovd have offered immense insight into the types of conversion that occur. Contemporary research has shown that the experimental, affectional and intellectual motifs have become the most common forms of conversion. This is despite Thouless stating that intellectual conversions are not a reality in life but only in theory.

I am of the opinion that Lewis Rambo's sequential model is the most encompassing model to date which clearly delineates the process of conversion incorporating the most effective and useful theories, motifs and contexts. He believes conversion to be a multidimensional and dynamic process and/or event which can transform the lives of individuals for the better or worse. The model is not inflexible and can be rearranged e.g. by replacing the crisis stage with the encounter stage, to accommodate the conversion process. An important aspect of religious conversion is that converts judge themselves from a subjective and emotional experience of their new life, whereas other people judge their change through their behaviour which is not necessarily better than it was before.

It is evident that the theory of religious conversion, acculturation and conflict in inter-marriages is necessarily linked for this thesis. The fact that religious conversion is often the result of intermarriages between people of differing religions, cultures and races, poses the necessity of adopting acculturating strategies by the convert and an understanding of the culture into which they married.

In the following chapter I will discuss the important symbols, rituals and injunctions for conversion to Islam by assessing the historical literature, *Qur'an*, *sunnah* and *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). In the context of Britain and the United States of America I will look at how marriages and conversion between Muslim men and non-Muslim women takes place so as to provide a comparative framework for the South African research.

CHAPTER 3 – ISLAMIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ON CONVERSION

3.0 Introduction

This chapter will focus on how the first Muslims accepted Islam through the process of *bay'ah* or Pledge of Allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Were there any specific rituals or requirements for the *bay'ah* to be accepted? It will take into consideration what it means to accept Islam by analyzing specific *Qur'ānic* verses and *Ahādīth* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) relevant to the topic. It will reflect on verses which relate to inviting people to Islam as well as those that indicate there is 'no compulsion in religion'. In relation to this theme, I will consider the Prophet's (pbuh) letters to leaders of countries inviting them to Islam and what was required of them if they accepted the offer, so as to reflect on the method of 'conversion' within the historical context.

The *Qur'ān* specifies who a Muslim man can and cannot marry. This *Qur'ānic* stipulation is significant to my research, as it lays down the foundations as to whether it is necessary for a woman to convert to Islam or not. Scholars differ in their opinion on the technicalities of these injunctions, which should be placed in the context of the Prophet's (pbuh) socio-religious attitude in relation to his marriages to a Jewess and a Christian Copt.

In assessing whether compulsion is an issue for women who convert for purposes of marriage within the local South African context, it is important to consider conversion processes of women from other countries and what is expected of them, in relation to the differing nationalities/cultures of their Muslim spouses. This would indicate whether women are compelled to convert generally throughout the Muslim world or whether differing attitudes prevail regarding conversion, depending on cultural influences within Islam. The most readily available and well-known source is the '*Daughters of Another Path*' by Carol Anway (1996) whose daughter converted after marrying an Iranian, and more recently, '*From my Sisters' Lips*' by Na'ima B. Robert (2005) who is a convert to

Islam and writes not only of her experiences but of women with whom she is acquainted, who have converted for numerous reasons.

3.1 Acceptance of Islam

3.1.1 Bay'ah or Pledge of Allegiance

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) received his first revelation from God in 610 C.E while in isolation and meditation in the cave of *Hirā'*. Anxious about his new role as a Prophet of God, within the paganistic Makkan community, he returned to his loving wife Khadīja bint Khuwailid (RA) to relate his experience. Having great respect and love for her husband, Khadīja (RA) became the first adherent of Islam by declaring her faith in his prophethood and believing in One God – the first convert to Islam! Thus began the conversion process of the pagans of Makkah to the monotheistic religion and way of life of Islam.

It appears that none of the early converts to Islam in the days of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) performed a specific conversion ritual. The most important act was declaring the *shahādah* which was set as an example by Khadīja's (RA) pronouncement to Muhammad (pbuh) that there is One God and that Muhammad (pbuh) is the Prophet of God. This declaration was made by converts directly to the Prophet (pbuh), if circumstances were conducive, whereupon they would receive instruction from him. (Haykal 1976: 83) There is no indication in the available literature, in any of the cases of Abū Bakr ibn Abī Quhāfah al-Taymī (RA), `Uthmān ibn `Affān (RA), `Umar ibn al-Khattāb (RA), Khadīja (RA) and the other converts, as to whether they were asked to perform *ghusl* in order to assure that they were physically and spiritually cleansed; except in the case of Usayd ibn Hudayr who became Muslim after hearing the Qur'ān being recited by Mus'ab. According to Martin Lings (n.d:109) who based his information on the writings of Muhammad ibn Ishāq and Muhammad ibn Sa'd of the eighth and ninth centuries, Usayd was told to "wash himself from head to foot in order to be purified, and that he must also purify his garments and then perform the prayer." This is the only reference to a specific conversion ritual that I have come across

in English literature but it is confirmed by Ibn Hishām (vol1: 436-7) the Prophet's (pbuh) biographer. The literature does not indicate that witnesses were a necessary function of the declaration, whether it was for a man or a woman. (Haykal: 1976; Al-Ismail: 1990; al-Mubarakpuri: 1995)

Furthermore, circumcision is not mentioned in the literature as a requirement of the conversion process. Interestingly, in her extensively researched book *Women in Islam: The Western Experience*, Roald (2001: 241) suggests that according to the *Mālikī* and *Hanaḥī* schools of law, circumcision for men is a *sunnah* and thus not obligatory, whereas for women it is 'noble'. The *Hanbalī* school considers it obligatory for men and 'noble' for women. In contrast, the *Shāfi'ī* school stipulates that it is obligatory for both men and women, although this rite is not practiced by all *Shāfi'ī*'s in respect of women. According to a *hadīth*, considered to be weak by most scholars (but strong by al-Albānī), circumcision was conducted on women in the Prophet's time by Umm Atīya al-Ansārīya, although it was not encouraged by the Prophet (pbuh), which is supported by the fact that there is no evidence of this practice being conducted on his daughters. All the schools take as their reference the *hadīth* that says, 'Circumcision (*khitan*) is *sunnah* for men and noble women', even though it is considered weak by al-Baihaqī. The *Shāfi'ī*'s also rely on other *ahādīth* pertaining to *male* circumcision found in the volumes of authentic *ahādīth*. (Roald 2001: 243) The debate on circumcision reflects the cultural context of the scholars. North African scholars encourage female circumcision whereas Middle-Eastern scholars do not support it. Generally, circumcision is seen as a *sunnah*, but for women it appears to be culturally based (Roald 2001: 252)

Presently, it is predominantly in the North African countries and Southeast Asia (Malaysia and Indonesia) that circumcision in women - to whatever degree - occurs. Interestingly, according to Shell (1983: 15), women who accepted Islam in the Eastern Cape in the late 1800's in South Africa, were expected to undergo circumcision so as to 'create a physical and intimate ritual of conversion to make the transition as dramatic as possible, and to spell out to the convert and the community that a cultural Rubicon had been crossed.' This area of South Africa

is predominantly populated by *Shāfi'ī* adherents and as such bears out the idea that *Shāfi'īs* consider circumcision for women to be obligatory.

In his letters written to the various emperors, kings and governors of his era, the Prophet (pbuh) invited them to Islam without forcing them to follow his council, as indicated by the following words from the letter to Negus, King of Abyssinia:

“...I invite you towards Allah the One who has no associate. Believe in Him and join me in obedience to Him. Follow me and accept my prophethood because I am the Messenger of Allah. I have wished you well in conveying the message of Allah in all sincerity. It is up to you to accept my sympathetic advice. Extend the same invitation to your subjects....”

(Qureshi n.d:59)

In a letter to 'Amr ibn Hazm al-Ansārī, the Governor of Yemen, the Prophet (pbuh) stipulated the tenets of Islam that were to be taught to the adherents of Islam, and included two paragraphs which indicated how Jews and Christians were to be treated:

“If any Jew or Christian embraces Islam of his own free will and with a sincere heart and accepts the way of Allah, he is a Muslim. His rights and duties shall be the same as those of other Muslims.

And whoever continues to adhere to his Jewish or Christian religion, should never be compelled to change his religion.”

(Qureshi n.d:91)

[italics mine]

Some of those who received letters did embrace Islam, as did As'hama, the Negus of Abyssinia, who stated in his response to the Prophet (pbuh) that “I bear evidence that you are a true Prophet of Allah. I have taken *bay'ah* at the hand of your cousin, for the sake of Allah and have become a slave of Islam”. (Qureshi n.d:64)

This again confirms that there is no written evidence that ritual cleansing, witnesses or any other specific ritual was expected of the Negus; the *shahādah* was sufficient to proclaim him Muslim. The simplicity of the *bay'ah* and the acceptance of Islam are confirmed by the *ahādīth*, in which various companions of the Prophet (pbuh) proffer their experiences of what was required of them.

At the First Pledge of `Aqabah in 621AD, twelve men pledged their allegiance to the Prophet (pbuh) by agreeing to believe in One God and associate none other with Him, to refrain from theft, fornication, killing their children or slandering others, and to obey that which was virtuous. This form of allegiance is supported by 'Ubāda ibn al-Sāmit who narrates:

"Allah's Apostle said while a group of companions were around him, 'Swear allegiance to me for: not to join anything in worship along with Allah, not to steal, not to commit illegal sexual intercourse, not to kill your children, not to accuse an innocent person and not to be disobedient (when ordered) to do a good deed.'"

(Islamic Scholar 1996)

The *bay'ah* for women followed similar wording, but according to Umm 'Alīyya women were also asked not to wail. This stipulation was not accepted except by five women. (Islamic Scholar 1996) This does not appear to have nullified their allegiance to the Prophet (pbuh) or to Islam.

The *hadīth* compilations of *al-Bukhārī* and *Muslim*, both great scholars and narrators of *ahādīth*, contain numerous reports describing a Muslim as someone who believes in the Oneness of God and in Muhammad as His Prophet and Messenger and is willing to follow the five pillars of Islam (*al-Bukhārī*: 50; *Muslim*: 9, 17, 20, 22, 24). According to the eminent scholar Sālih ibn `Abd al-Azīz ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Shaikh in his book, *Tamhād lisharh Kitāb al-Tawhīd* (2002), the confirmation of belief in monotheism and acceptance of Islam is the declaration of the *shahādah*, but this must be accompanied with the *total*

submission to the will of God. This statement is reiterated in the Wikipedia definition of conversion to Islam, with an elaboration that this is a 'personal process' and that one should familiarize herself/himself with the practices of Islam .

An important point to mention is that the Prophet (pbuh) was determined that all Muslims should have a good name! Those who entered Islam were given *hasan* (good) names and those whose names he did not like, he changed for better names, as narrated by Ibn 'Umar:

"The Prophet (SAW) changed the name of 'Asiya (rebellious) and said: 'You are Jamīla (beautiful).'"

(Al-Ma'sumi 1999: 36)

There is evidence in Islamic writings that the concept of a 'new beginning' once converted was important. In effect this meant that the individual's sins of the past were washed away by the acceptance of Islam as one started life on their new religious path. This is reflected in the conversion of Khālid ibn Khattāb, who had been a fierce warrior against the Muslims. He greeted the Prophet (pbuh) and then declared his faith in Islam upon which the Prophet is reported to have said that he was well pleased with Khālid's acceptance of Islam. Furthermore, he assured him of a 'totally new beginning' for Islam removes all that went before it. According to Rogerson (2006: 115) Khālid's turning could be celebrated in a similar light to the transformation of St. Paul to Christianity, considered to be the best of examples of conversion. As mentioned in Chapter 2, a new beginning is an important factor in the conversion experience.

It is evident from the above discussion, that although there is reference to a purification ritual upon accepting Islam, conversion rituals were not a requirement at the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and this formality only became of importance thereafter. The acceptance of *shahādah* was of primary importance and having a good name was considered necessary.

3.1.2 Qur'ānic Verses

3.1.2.1 Compulsion and a True Believer

At the outset it is important to note that there is no word or synonym in the *Qur'ān* to denote the equivalent of the word 'conversion' or 'convert'. But according to the Dictionary of Islamic Words and Expressions (2002: 191) the word *saba'a* (*yaSba*) was frequently used by the polytheists to 'refer to conversion to Islam, because they looked at it from the point of view of renouncing the religion of their forefathers'. There have been numerous debates among classical and contemporary scholars as to what the definition of a 'believer' is, especially in reference to a number of *Qur'ānic* verses. A few of these verses are listed below:

1. "And if thy Lord willed, those on earth would have believed, all of them together. So, will you (O Muhammad) then compel mankind, until they are believers?" (Q10: 99)
2. "There is no compulsion / coercion in religion." (Q2:256)
3. "The Bedouins say, 'We believe,' Say: 'You believe not but you only say, 'We have accepted Islam,' for the true Faith has not yet entered into your hearts..." (Q49:14)
4. "...those whose hearts are filled with awe at the mention of God, and whose faith grows stronger as they listen to His revelations. They are those who put their trust in their Lord, pray steadfastly, and spend of that which We have given them. Such are the true believers..." (Q6:2-4)

In reference to the verse Q10: 99, Allah (SWT) states that all people would have been 'believers' if He had willed, thus it is not up to Muhammad (pbuh) to compel or force people to become believers. It is a matter only for Allah (SWT) who:

'guides all those who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace, and He brings them out of darkness by His will unto light and guides them to a straight way.'

(Q5:16)

Ultimately it is an individual's choice through guidance to believe in One God or not. Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (Accessed in 2006) suggests that the acceptance or invitation to Islam was actually an invitation to a 'transformation in thinking' whereby the individual discovers the truth of Islam. Thus the conversion that occurs is an intellectual motif that entails a change in the mindset after much self analysis and soul-searching, resulting in the birth of a 'new' individual. It also alludes to the fact that the conversion is not just a ritualistic process and a proclamation of the *shahādah*, but an evolutionary process of spiritual realization and growth.

This statement links directly to the oft quoted verse in Q2:256 of there being 'no compulsion in religion'. In the article *Interpreting Qur'an 2:256*, S.A. Rahman provides a variety of circumstances from *Qur'ānic* commentators' opinions as to the reason for the verse's revelation. It is said to have prevented an *Ansārī* woman from compelling her Jewish son to accept Islam and an *Ansārī* father from compelling his Christian sons to revert ie: it permitted persons of the 'People of the Book' to retain their religion. (Madani n.d: 25) In reference to these examples, it is argued that people should not be forced to accept Islam as its signs and evidence are plain and clear within themselves; those who accept Islam should do so of their *own free will*. Thus there should be religious tolerance and no compulsion in matters of faith. (Maulana Wahiduddin Khan: Accessed in 2006)

On the other hand some scholars imply that the pagan Arabs i.e. the idolaters (*mushrikūn*) were compelled to accept Islam or face death, even though they secretly adhered to their own beliefs. This philosophy is supported, according to Ibn al-'Arabī, by a *hadīth* (Bukhārī vol1,2:24) that says: 'I have been commanded to fight people till they recite the declaration of faith...' There are other scholars who state that verses such as Q9:73 (O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites! Be harsh with them) abrogate Q2:256 thereby alluding to the permissibility of forcing non-believers to accept Islam! This then could relate to Q10:99 where Allah (SWT) asks the Prophet (pbuh) about compelling people to Islam, thus showing the Prophet's (pbuh) initial passion in converting those who

were non-believers to accept Islam. In my opinion this argument goes against the characteristics and personality of the Prophet (pbuh) who did not even compel Abu Sufyān, his ardent enemy, to accept Islam! But, if one did accept Islam under duress, there would be no guarantee that the person did not conceal doubt or was being hypocritical, as in the case of the pagan Arabs in Q49:14, supported by the *hadīth*:

"If somebody does not accept Islam truly but does so by compulsion or fear of being killed, (then that man is not a believer), according to Q49:14 ["The Bedouins say, 'We believe,' Say: 'You believe not but you only say, 'We have accepted Islam,' for the true Faith has not yet entered into your hearts..."]. And if they had embraced Islam truly (sincerely) their Islam would have been as is referred to in the statement of Allah (SWT): 'Verily, the religion in the Sight of Allah (SWT) is Islam.' (Q3:19)."

(*al-Bukhārī* vol 1:19)

The *Qur'ān* therefore does not approve of conversions that are a mere formality; there needs to be a process of psychological, emotional and spiritual change within the individual, wherein one becomes a 'true believer' (as in Q6:2-4) or adherent of Islam.

If one refers to the letters mentioned in 3.1.1, the Prophet (pbuh) did not compel any of the recipients to accept Islam and specifically stated that Jews and Christians should be left to practice their belief.

3.1.2.2 Marriageable Women

The *Qur'ānic* injunctions are explicit as to the exact nature of what characterizes a marriageable woman for Muslim men. Besides the verses (Q4: 23-25) which detail those women a man is prohibited from marrying from amongst the Muslim *ummah*, the following verses refer to women who are not Muslim in respect to marriage.

- “Do not marry idolatresses till they believe (i.e. Worship Allah alone)”

Q2: 221

- “(Lawful to you in marriage) are chaste women from those who were given the Scripture (Jews and Christians i.e. People of the Book) before your time when you have given them their due dowry, desiring chastity (ie. Taking them in legal wedlock and not committing illegal sexual intercourse.)

Q5: 5

- “...And hold not to the ties of marriage of unbelieving women...”

Q60: 10

The *Qur’ān* specifically forbids Muslim men from marrying women who are idolaters as they do not believe in Allah (God) as expressed in Q2: 221. In order for *mushrikūn* (idolaters) to be eligible for marriage, the women would have to accept Islam; indicating that it is *compulsory* for *mushrikūn* to convert. In contrast, permission is given to marry women who are ‘People of the Book’ (Jews and Christians) as they are considered ‘believers’ according to Allah. There are scholars who argue that this refers to Jews and Christians who lived at the time of the Prophet but not to contemporary Jews and Christians who are unbelievers (Q60: 10) as they either practice *shirk* (associating partners with God) or they do not follow the teachings of Allah in their true form. But, I do not agree with this view. For instance, at the time of the revelation of the *Qur’ān* the Christians had already developed the concepts of Trinity, Sonship and incarnation as is confirmed by the *Qur’ān*. Yet the *Qur’ān* declares that marriage is allowed to women who are of ‘The Book’.

This ruling is supported by a *hadīth* narrated by al-Tabarī according to which ‘Umar ibn al- Khattāb had stated:

“The Muslim man marries the Christian woman, but the Christian man does not marry the Muslim woman.”

(www.tafsir.com. Accessed in January 2007)

ʿUmar ibn al-Khattāb, one of the Four Rightly Guided Khalīfahs, disliked the practice of Muslim men marrying Christian women for two reasons: 1) he feared that Muslim men will eventually refrain from marrying Muslim women and 2) he was concerned that the men will marry the *‘whores from among them.’* Even though he disliked the concept, he agreed that it was permissible to marry Jewish or Christian women, as indicated in the *hadīth* (www.tafsir.com Accessed in January 2007) where Hudayfah married a Jewish woman and ʿUmar ibn Khattāb requested Hudayfah to divorce her.

We can deduce from the above that it is acceptable for Muslim men to marry women of ‘The Book’, and that it is not obligatory for them to accept Islam in order for the marriage to be blessed. This position is supported by the fact that the Prophet (pbuh) married Safīyya, a Jewess, and Maria, an Egyptian Christian Copt! The Prophet’s (pbuh) wives were not happy about him marrying a Jewess, but over time she was accepted into the household and she did accept Islam when the Prophet (pbuh) offered her the *choice* to remain a Jew or accept Islam. Maria, on the other hand, stayed separately from the wives and bore the Prophet (pbuh) a son, who later died. There is a dispute about Maria. Some scholars claim that she accepted Islam before being sent as a gift to the Prophet (pbuh) and that he married her. Others claim that she was a ‘hand-maid’. Mālik supports the former view (Mālik: 163). However, the Prophet’s (pbuh) biographer Ibn Hishām describes her as a *sarīyyah* (Saqa et al 1955: vol 1, 191). The term *sarīyyah* according to the Dictionary of Islamic Words and Expressions (2002: 205) is explained as ‘concubine, a slave girl treated as a wife by her master, so the relationship is a legal one, because her children will be legitimate’. The actions of the Prophet (pbuh), in a very specific socio-historical time period, prove that Muslim men may marry women from the ‘People of the Book’.

On reviewing literature of those who accepted Islam in the Prophet’s (pbuh) time, I have always been under the firm impression that all the Muslims (bearing in mind that they were all converts) were treated on an equal standing; a fact which I admired immensely considering the distinction drawn in contemporary times

between born Muslims and new Muslims. But interesting information was presented by Rogerson (2002: 221 & 360) that the amount of the annual stipend (*divan*) paid to the Muslims depended on the time that they accepted Islam, thus drawing a very clear distinction between the early Muslims of Makkah and the later Muslims of Madīnah and thereafter. Furthermore, in battle the early Muslims always fought in the middle and most strategic columns, with the later Muslims fighting on the sides. These examples tend to show that a certain sense of differentiation was awarded to the first converts.

3.2 Comparative Examples of Conversion Patterns

3.2.1 United States of America & Britain

In the United States of America there are a large number of predominantly Christian women who are marrying Muslim men from Middle Eastern regions who are either residing in the country while studying or who have immigrated. According to Carol Anway (1996), who undertook research after her daughter accepted Islam after marrying a Middle Eastern Muslim man, 63% of women who marry these men, convert **after** their marriage; thus indicating that there was no insistence or coercion to convert by their husbands, and the women were well aware that they were not Islamically compelled to do so.

None of the women indicated that they had any specific rituals to perform for the conversion process; but they all mention the proclamation of *shahādah* as the defining point in the acceptance of Islam. Some stated that the process towards conversion was long and gradual, most often a spiritual journey that was accompanied by their husband towards *practicing* Islam. A few mentioned that their future husband showed a sense of concern in terms of the religiosity of raising their children. Said one respondent:

“I was aware that although I was under no obligation to convert, he would not marry me without my committing to raise any children we would have as Muslims.” (Anway 1996: 22)

This was a common feeling amongst the women who nearly all reached the stage of conversion when children came into the picture and a decision had to be made on the education of those children. Yet other husbands expressed anxiousness when their wives converted as they felt conversion was not a requirement and their wives should be independently “convinced and not compelled.” (Anway 1996:28) The Middle Eastern men appear to closely follow the *Qur’ānic* verses of there being no compulsion in religion and that the ‘People of the Book’ do not need to convert, thus taking seriously and with caution the decision their wives make in converting.

Many of the women found that the religious transition from Christianity to Islam, on a personal and individual level, was easy due to the similarities between the two religious books, the Bible and the *Qur’ān*. But for others it was a form of *jihad*, a struggle in the path of God, to leave behind the old traditions and way of life. An important factor in assisting with the transition is that most of the women were young adults and therefore past the adolescent age given as the prime time for conversions. Thus they were mature and emotionally equipped to make informed choices. Even so, religious decisions, especially when they entail a conversion process, become extremely stressful and emotional at times. Very often families are separated and lost because of conflict caused through such decisions, and acceptance of the daughter’s decision by her parents is often not forthcoming. In some cases it takes years for the parents and family to move towards a position of acceptance whereas for others it often occurs when grandchildren enter the picture.

Many of the mothers’, of women who converted, who responded to the research, indicated that they found that there was a definite shift in the way that their daughters’ started doing things socially and religiously. For some it was very much a cultural issue where one mother said her daughter began cooking only Iranian food and was meeting new Muslim friends rather than Christian American friends. For most families it was the drastic change in their daughter’s style of dress, most particularly the headscarf, which became a far too blatant and

socially distinguishable religious statement of difference and thus, the greatest area of contention. Another contentious issue was that surrounding *halāl* food and Christian religious festivals. Many of the daughters would not eat in their parent's home because of *harām* foods and refused to partake in or visit their family at Easter or Christmas. The parents' lack of acceptance centred in their lack of understanding about their daughters' choice, and the refusal to understand that choice. This caused enormous divides within the family. Some women felt that their parents "just had to accept the change" (Anway 1996: 60) as they were not going back to Christianity or 'Americanism' just to please them.

Na'ima Robert (2005) wrote of her experiences and those of other women living in Britain (but not all of British descent) who have accepted Islam. The majority of these women were young adults in their university or post-university phases. She emphasized the point that many of these women's parents' felt that they had been brainwashed and coerced into proclaiming the *shahādah*, but the reality was that most of the women had studied the faith and therefore had made intellectual and informed religious decisions, thus falling in line with the intellectual motif of Lofland. Furthermore, although it is assumed that women accept Islam when they are involved with or marry a Muslim man merely to please him and his family, the women have actually researched and studied Islam independently.

Robert covers a woman's moment of declaration of the *shahādah* where the woman says:

"I want to take my *shahādat* now.' So they took me upstairs (within the *masjid*) and I took the *shahādat* and all the sisters were so happy – it was like one big party."

(Robert 2005: 51)

The significance of this example is that there is no reference to the woman having had a *ghusl* as a requirement for the declaration of the *shahādah*. She happened to be in the mosque for a lecture when she decided to accept Islam.

This aligns itself with the experiences of the American women that *shahādah* is the definitive principle of accepting Islam and not any other ritual. In relation to the *shahādah*, Robert (2005: 61) highlights seven conditions that extend from the declaration: *al 'ilm* (knowledge), *al ikhlās* (sincerity), *al-sidq* (truthfulness), *al-yaqīn* (certainty), *al-mahabbah* (love), *al-inqiyād* (submission) and *al-qubūl* (acceptance). Embracing Islam (conversion) is an emotional process reflecting various feelings of excitement, anxiety, happiness and anticipation. But as she so rightly expresses, many women do not completely understand the significance of the statement they are making (reference to the seven conditions), and for many it is after months or years that they attain a true understanding of what they had declared. This supports the view of Wahiduddin who said that complete conversion comes after a process of self realization and growth, which ultimately supports the intellectual motif.

A noteworthy point that Robert and Köse mention, is that the women who are converting are not what would be considered submissive, quiet and unassuming women as the West believe of Muslim women in general. On the contrary, the converts are Western women of varying races and previous religions, confident, educated and unafraid of challenges. They are not only housewives, but women who are part of the social and economic structures of society who have a powerful voice within their community.

Ali Köse in his book *Conversion to Islam* (1996) writes that most converts accept Islam through contact with someone they know, one such scenario being women who are involved with or marry Muslim men, particularly Arabs and Pakistanis in the British context. Köse emphasizes that the women 'do not necessarily have to convert since Islamic law permits Muslim men to marry *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book).' Köse notes that many of the women do not convert before marriage but, through everyday social and affectional contact with their husband, their interest in Islam increases and thus they make an informed, intellectual choice of accepting Islam. Furthermore the women were all young adults as shown by his research which set the age of conversion at 29.6 years and not that of adolescence as established by Starbuck et al.

Furthermore, he has established that the majority of converts accept an Islamic name at the time of saying their *shahādah*. He states that a name change is not required by Islam, except if the name does not have a good meaning as recommended by the Prophet (pbuh). Many converts have an Islamic name which they use in Muslim social circles but retain their birth names which they continue to use in the workplace, with family and friends. It appears therefore that most of the converts in Britain tend to have a choice as to whether they will assume an Islamic name, usually to help with the acceptance of an Islamic identity, or to continue with the name they have always gone by. Thus it can be inferred that a name change is not essential on accepting Islam as is often implied by those in Islamic organizations.

Perhaps it is the following quote from *Daughters of Another Path* that puts into perspective so clearly the transformation that occurs in all spheres for the female convert to Islam:

“The woman converting to Islam takes on a whole new way of relating to the world. She is accepting a set of practices that, although they may vary with cultural interpretations, are basically universal. She has the task of blending her Western upbringing with that of her husband's culture, that of the Islamic practices, and that of the *ummah* that is her support group. All this she must do plus rebuilding relationships with her family of origin.”

(Anway 1996: 91)

3.3 Conclusion

There is no doubt that there is considerable debate amongst the scholars about the specifics to the definition of *Ahl al-Kitāb* (The People of the Book). For some scholars all non-Muslim women, including Jews and Christians, must convert to marry a Muslim man, as according to them they are *mushrika* as they do not subscribe to the belief in One God in its pure form. Others disagree with this interpretation; they argue that though the *Qur'ān* claims that the Jews and

Christians strayed from the true teachings, it allows marriage to women of these religions.

Following the Prophet's (pbuh) example, the Middle Eastern men and it appears in the case of Britain, the Pakistani men, who marry Christian American and British born women do not ask their future wives to convert in order for the marriage to occur. In nearly every union, the wife accepts Islam after marriage and usually after an extended period of studying the religion. Thus conversion usually follows the intellectual motif and is a slow and gradual process without coercion or compulsion. All of the women tend to be young adults and not of the adolescence age that Starbuck and James state is the usual age for conversion.

Furthermore it is not expected that they change their name, although most converts do so for social identity within their chosen religion. Rituals performed for the purpose of conversion e.g. *ghusl*, are not mentioned as a specific requirement, although it has been established that in the time of the Prophet (pbuh) some potential converts were asked to cleanse themselves before declaring the *shahādah*.

An undeniable fact is that the defining moment of the conversion ritual is the declaration of the *shahādat*: *Ash-hadu Allāh ilāha illallāhu wa ash-hadu anna Muhammad Rasūlullāh*. This constitutes the final acceptance of Islam as one's new identity, but as has been argued not only by Wahiduddin, Robert and Köse but the *Qur'an* itself, full acceptance of Islam does not occur until there is an intellectual self realization, spiritual growth and understanding of that declaration.

Chapter four will present the analysis and findings of the research done in order to ascertain whether women in the South African context are compelled to convert when marrying a Muslim man, or if it is their own choice. It will also take into consideration what factors were the determinants for the conversion and how well the women and their families coped with the conversion ritual and process.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS OF A SURVEY ON WOMEN WHO CONVERT TO ISLAM FOR THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

4.0 Introduction

The Durban Muslim population is predominantly of Indian descent and is heavily influenced by the Indo-Pak culture and religious scholars. Many of the young Indian Muslim men are marrying women from out of their community and although this is not a new phenomenon in itself, it is becoming more widespread because of the abolition of apartheid, which has enabled a more pluralistic society. The young men, although they are fourth or fifth generation South Africans, are still bound to a large extent not only by their ancestral Indian culture and traditions but by the laws of Islam as well, which are carefully monitored by the *'ulamā* and religious organizations.

Sindre Bangstad (2004), in his research in the Cape community of Mekaar, found that marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims were common with or without conversion and that social status was usually the deciding factor for acceptance within the community. In the Durban community the situation appears to be completely different.

4.1 Research Procedures & Methodology

4.1.1 Aims & objectives of the research

The aim of the research is to ascertain why Christian and/or Jewish women convert to Islam when it is considered acceptable for them to marry the Muslim men without conversion. Furthermore it is imperative to establish for all the non-Muslim women who convert to Islam and marry, that they are doing so without being coerced or compelled, but that the choice and decision is completely fair and free. The outcome of the research will be interesting in comparison to the literature reviewed from Britain and America in chapter three where it appears that the women are not asked to convert by their prospective husbands, and most convert after marriage having done research on Islam.

The objective is to show that the women undergo enormous spiritual, emotional, social, psychological, familial and cultural changes throughout the conversion process. This has implications for the stability of the couple's relationship and marriage and for the convert's new identity where she could become integrated or marginalized not only in context of the Islamic ethos of living, but in the specific culture as well. Considering all these factors, it is important to establish what rituals the women performed for conversion, whether they sought help and advice from the '*ulamā*', Islamic organizations or social workers; has the conversion been a positive step in their lives, what advice would they give to other women who are considering the same path they have chosen and most importantly, do they think that a support group would be beneficial for women in the same circumstances as themselves?

A further objective would be to ascertain whether these findings support the models discussed in chapter two. Are the conversions gradual or sudden? What factors determine the onset of the conversion in the first place? What motifs are the most common for conversion? At what age does the conversion usually take place? Do my findings confirm those of Ali Köse in his research of the seventy British converts to Islam? And are they similar to those expressed by Carol Anway in the United States? How do they deal with the acculturation process?

The final step of the research would be the insight gathered of the feelings and experiences of these women which would enable the Muslim men and community to hopefully understand the enormous implications of bringing non-Muslim women, not only into a new culture, but most importantly into a new religion, and the *amānah* (responsibility) and consequences of such actions. It would also provide a benchmark from where to progress for the future generations of women who accept Islam for the purpose of marriage, on how to guide, advise and support not only them but their prospective husbands, on the best approach for dealing with the complexities of the conversion process for the individual, the couple, the extended families and the community at large.

4.1.2. Research Method

I chose an applied research methodology of an empirical/qualitative nature in the form of a non-parametric format. Part of the questionnaire was presented in the McNemar test of Yes/No answers (close-ended questions) whereas other questions were opened-ended to allow for the reasons substantiating the close-ended questions or merely to express their feelings and/or experiences. This was necessary so as to ascertain insight into the conversion process.

The variables were close-ended questions. The most important variables which were determined from existing literature were: the previous religion of the convert and whether they practiced it, the age of marriage and the related age of conversion, when the conversion occurred in relation to marriage and the racial marriage partnerships which would have an effect on cultural influences. I do admit that I made a couple of obvious errors in requesting this data. Firstly I did not give age groupings for their present age or the age they married, I asked for the exact age. To simplify the data analysis I created the age groupings into four year brackets starting from seventeen years of age and ending with seventy five years. Secondly, I did not request the age at the time of conversion but rather the date in comparison to marriage. This was an enormous mistake particularly as this is an important variable in conversion theoretical literature. The age of conversion can be calculated though by the ages and dates provided for other questions.

The questions asked were to determine important issues on the experiences and feelings of the conversion process and transformation that takes place and most importantly to ascertain, through varying ways of phrasing the question, whether the women were coerced or compelled into converting. Thus the questions may appear to be repetitive but this was for a specific purpose. The questions asked were relevant in terms of existing conversion literature.

Follow-up interviews were conducted with five (5) respondents, representing the four major race groupings in the country (Black, White, Indian and Coloured).

There was one respondent from the first three race groups but two from the Coloured group. All of the respondents were formerly Christian except for the Indian respondent who converted from Hinduism. The questionnaire was used as a guideline for the interviews. Candidates were selected for the interviews on the following criteria: they represented each of the racial and religious groupings within the research and they were easily accessible. None of the other variables were taken into consideration for the interviews. All interviews were conducted at the respondents' homes. The respondents are not necessarily representative of the whole of South Africa, but are to an extent representative of KwaZulu-Natal.

4.1.3 Data population & collection

It was my intention at the outset of the research to focus on the Overport, Berea and Westville suburbs of Durban. The reasons behind this were that they were the most accessible areas to me and secondly, the women that attended the Islamic organization I worked at, tended to live in these areas. Once the questionnaires were distributed I discovered that some of the respondents lived out of these areas and I therefore added, in the analysis stage, the option of 'Other'.

The respondents were all women who had been non-Muslim previously which led to their conversion to Islam. The sample range covered all race groups, age groups and previous religions. I did not set out to have an equivalent number of respondents in each category as that was not the objective of the research. Whoever responded to the questionnaire was accepted as long as they fitted the criteria of originally being non-Muslim and converting to Islam for the purpose of marriage.

I was positive at the outset of the research that it would be relatively easy to find women to participate but unfortunately this was not the case. The sample of respondents was selected and collected in three ways. Firstly, approximately a third of the sample was unknown to me ($x = 9$). They were respondents who were asked to fill in the questionnaire by people that I was acquainted with.

Secondly, there were the respondents who were affiliated to the Islamic organization where I do voluntary work. They made up the majority of the sample ($x = 15$). Some of these respondents I know fairly well whereas others were simply the students attending the *madrasah*. The rest were friends of mine that I have made over the years ($x = 6$). The total number of respondents was thirty ($x = 30$).

My intention was to have at least sixty (60) respondents. I handed out in the first batch, sixty questionnaires to various groups of respondents as mentioned above in the first week of March 2006. Some respondents took more than one questionnaire to hand to women they knew who filled the criteria as potential respondents. Each respondent received a questionnaire with a consent form attached explaining the purpose of the research including the confidentiality clause. Nobody was forced to answer the questionnaire and they were free to withdraw from the research at any stage. I indicated that they had three weeks to answer the questionnaires and gave them the deadline for returning them as 31 March 2006. I recorded the names of those who had taken questionnaires from me and the amount they had taken. All respondents were able to answer the forms in the privacy of their homes and in their own time, thus giving them the freedom to choose who was or was not present when they filled in the forms. This was an important factor given the emotional content of some of the questions.

Unfortunately most of the initial sample did not return the questionnaires even though I made numerous attempts through phone calls, going to their homes and reminding them at the *madrasah*, to retrieve the forms. A varied number of excuses were given such as: they could not find them, they will fill in the form and return it in a couple of days, they were afraid of their husband's reactions if they filled in the forms and some could not be bothered. Most did not return even the unanswered forms, although I did receive at least ten (10) or more that were returned. Many of the initial respondents who did return the forms (23 returned forms) did not do so timeously. Some forms were returned three months later. I

have noticed that time deadlines are not important to certain sectors of society and this causes snowballing problems.

As the response was so poor the first time I needed to distribute more questionnaires. The second batch consisted of twelve (12) more forms of which seven (7) were returned. This sample was done in June 2006. It was because of the apathy of the women that my sample size was only thirty (30) respondents and not because of the lack of women in the community who fitted the criteria, nor for the lack of effort on my part.

Once I started the analysis there were questions that were either not answered or not clear. These respondents I telephoned for clarification of their answers. The last question (no. 50) was misunderstood by most of the respondents, but fortunately does not have any major implications in terms of the findings of the research.

4.1.4 Data capturing, editing & analysis

Before capturing any of the data I read each of the questionnaires returned. Any questions that were left out I marked, and questions that needed clarification I highlighted so that I could telephone the respondents. Any errors that became evident in the construction of the questionnaire were noted e.g. the age variable, and corrected during the data capture stage for a more efficient analysis.

It took three full days of continuous data capturing to enter all answers on the Microsoft Access software package in the form of a table, where the questionnaire was replicated and designed to assist the effective and efficient analysis, by a query system, once the data was captured. Thereafter it was a matter of selecting the relevant variables in relation to the questions of the questionnaire and grouping them to inform the major questions asked within the thesis, and in context of the models within existing literature, to obtain the relevant reports. The process still involved careful reading to link factors such as intellectual or social motifs as types of conversion, as I did not code the answers

beforehand. In hindsight, where I minimized work on one hand I seem to have created more work in other areas. Since Microsoft Access is linked to Excel it was simple enough to link the data to create the charts and diagrams necessary to graphically support the findings.

The interviews were scanned to ascertain whether the responses to questions in the interviews matched those in the questionnaires. Where the responses were the same there was no need for analysis as it would have been duplicating the information. However, the open-ended questions which enabled the respondents to speak of their experiences revealed some interesting comments not found in the questionnaires. These have been analysed below.

4.2 Presentation and analysis of data

4.2.1 Overview of relevant variables

4.2.1.1. Previous religion

Of the thirty (30) respondents, twenty four (24 [80%]) were Christian and it included all the race groups i.e. Black, White, Indian and Coloured. The other six (6 [20%]) were of the Hindu religion.

Nineteen (19) of the Christians indicated that they practiced their religion prior to conversion, with most of them being 'staunch Catholics'. Five (5) did not practice Christianity. There were six (6) Hindus in the sample with five (5) of them practising their faith before conversion. In effect, 80% of the sample constituted practising followers of their religion of origin before conversion, which is in complete contrast to Ali Köse's findings where he had an 11% affiliation compared to 46% who were weak or nominal in their faith and the 23% who did not show any interest in religion. He, as did other scholars, suggested that conversion takes place where the convert does not have a strong affiliation with their previous faith and, in reference to those who convert for marriage, most do not form a strong commitment to their new faith. One does need to remember that Köse's sample was not based on women who had converted to Islam for

marriage, but was a general sample of any person who had converted for whatever reason. My research shows that the majority of the converts were practising believers of their faith and therefore disputes the findings of previous scholars. The outcome of this variable could possibly indicate that the women only converted because of coercing factors as they appeared content with the religion they were practising.

This variable is extremely important as part of this analysis as it sets the outline as to those who are *Ahl al-Kitāb* or *mushrikūn* and is therefore a crucial element of the thesis in terms of whether it is necessary for them to convert to Islam or not.

4.2.1.2. Respondent & Spouse race groups

The sample group of respondents falls into the following race groups: Black (3), Coloured (12), Indian (9) and White (6). The corresponding spouses are divided into the following: Black (3), Coloured (1), Cape Malay (4) and Indian (22). It is quite clear that most of the respondents married into the Indian race group and therefore a different cultural background. All the Black (African) respondents married Black spouses, one (1) being from Malawi, one (1) from Mozambique and the last categorized as Zanzibari but of local birth. Three (3) Coloureds married Cape Malays, one (1) White married a Cape Malay and one (1) Coloured married a Coloured. Those who married Cape Malays also had a different culture into which they had to be acculturated.

Twenty-one (21) respondents had a Western upbringing, three (3) had an African cultural upbringing although they were Christian, and six (6) had an Asian or Hindu cultural background.

These variables are significant in context of the questions that deal specifically with acculturation processes the women followed to cope with the differences and difficulties between their own cultures and that of their spouse.

4.2.1.3. Time of conversion

CONVERSION	TOTAL NUMBER	CHRISTIANS	HINDUS
BEFORE MARRIAGE	19	16	3
TIME MARRIAGE	10	8	2
AFTER MARRIAGE	1	0	1

Figure 2 : Conversion in terms of marriage

This is the most vital variable, together with that of the 'previous religion' variable, for the research paper. The table in Figure 2 clearly indicates that twenty-nine of the thirty respondents converted before or at the time of their marriage which implies that being Muslim was necessary for the marriage (*nikāh*) to take place. Moreover, sixteen (16) of the Christians converted before marriage and eight (8) of them at the time of marriage. In comparison, three (3) Hindus converted before marriage, two (2) at the time of marriage and one (1) after marriage. This respondent converted after she had given birth to both her children, and it was because of them that she decided to convert. This woman was a Hindu so her conversion to Islam after the marriage is contrary to the teachings of the *Qur'ān*.

The important corresponding findings in relation with this variable would be what influences and motifs prompted the respondents in their decisions to convert.

4.2.1.4. Place of conversion

Of the thirty (30) respondents, ten (10) were converted at an Islamic organization, three (3) in mosques, six (6) in a private home, one (1) at their workplace and ten (10) gave either the city or country as the place of conversion.

4.2.1.5. Age of marriage (indicating the age of conversion)

When entering the data I created age brackets into which I placed the respondents' ages.

RESPONDENT'S AGE	NUMBER 30	PERCENTAGE 100%
17-21 years	11	36.66%
22-26 years	14	46.66%
27-31 years	2	6.66%
32-36 years	3	10%

Figure 3: Respondents age at marriage

The analysis showed that twenty (20) of the respondents were the same age at the time of their conversion and marriage. Nine (9) of the nineteen (19) respondents who converted before marriage did so from one to four years before marriage but still fell within their marriage age bracket. The one Hindu respondent converted four years after marriage.

As the respondents had given their exact ages, the year of their marriage and year of conversion, I was able to calculate their age at conversion. In reference to the findings of the early scholars of conversion such as Edwin Starbuck and George Albert Coe the common conversion age is that of adolescence, 16 years for boys and 13 years of age for girls. Ali Köse (1996: 47) in his research disagreed with these findings indicating that his largest age group was that of 23-45 years with 43 respondents and the average being 29.7 years of age. My analysis supports his findings that conversion to Islam is not an adolescent phenomenon but that of adulthood, with my largest sample falling in the 22-26 years age group, which is 46.66% of the sample and the average age of conversion being 23.06 years, ten years later than that given by Starbuck. The youngest age was 17 years and the eldest was 35 years.

4.2.1.6. Year of marriage

In the South African context the year of marriage could be an important indicator in terms of the success of the marriage, particularly in relation to racial inter-marriage. The reasoning behind this is that the majority (20) of the marriages took place during the Apartheid regime. Admittedly, most of the respondents are non-white except for the six (6) white respondents, but these marriages still took place across the racial barrier, and even non-whites marrying non-whites from different racial groupings, was considered a cause for concern.

YEAR OF MARRIAGE	NO. OF RESPONDENTS
1961-1980	6
1981-1993	14
1994-2006	10

Figure 4: Year of marriage

4.2.1.7. Marriage type

Twenty (20) of the marriages were Islamic marriages (*nikāh*) only. Whereas nine (9) were Islamic and Civil marriages with all Islamic ceremonies taking place before the civil marriage. Only one (1) marriage was a civil marriage only.

4.2.1.8. Marital status

Twenty (25) of the respondents are still married to their spouses, with three (3) being widowed, one (1) separated and one (1) divorced. All of the women have maintained Islam as their religion.

4.2.1.9. Highest qualification

Education was a necessary variable in terms of the intellectual motif for conversion. Although educating oneself in a religion before accepting it as one's

chosen faith to follow, may not correspond to secular education, it is important as depending on one's education there will be an influence on how one approaches the process of conversion.

Ten (10) respondents had high school as the highest level, thirteen (13) indicated that matriculation was their highest education, four (4) had diplomas and three (3) had university degrees.

4.2.1.10. Profession

Once again I erred in this variable by allowing them to indicate exactly what they did rather than provide profession choices or categories. Their professions varied considerably, but fortunately were not difficult to group for the analysis.

Housewife:	7	Secretary:	3
Education:	3	Sales:	5
Administration:	4	Caterer:	2
Other:	6	(voluntary worker; daycare centre owner; machinist; speech therapist; customs inspector; domestic worker)	

Figure 5: Respondents Professions

4.3 Main analysis

4.3.1 Conversion: Ritual

The variable of where the conversion took place indicates that the conversion ritual does not necessarily have to occur in an Islamic institution. This reflects conversions in the time of the Prophet (pbuh) in that converts pledged their allegiance to the Prophet (pbuh) at any convenient place or time.

The Islamic theory does not specify the number of witnesses that need to be present or the gender thereof, in order for the conversion to be valid. All of the

respondents had witnesses, differing in number and of either or both gender. Some had just their husband and future-in-laws present, others had friends and their future husband, yet others included their family.

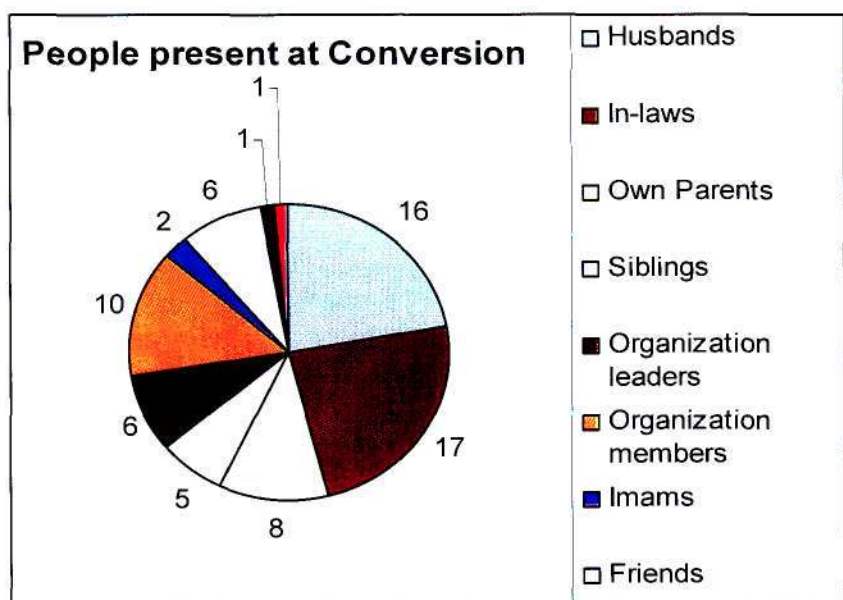


Figure 6: People present at Conversion

I wanted to know the reactions of those people who were present at the conversion. There were far more positive responses with people feeling happy and excited, supportive, welcoming, congratulatory and emotional. Some used the words solemn, upset and mixed feelings to describe the responses. I am of the opinion that as there were more Muslim people present at the conversions, it is natural that the responses would have been more positive.

Of the thirty (30) women, eight (8{26.6%]) had converted in secrecy ie: without informing their family. Of these one (1) was African, four (4) were Coloured, two (2) were White and one (1) was Indian (Hindu). Two (2) gave no answer to the question. As they were adults they did not require their parents' permission to convert, but the fact that they did not inform them suggests that their parents would not have been happy with their decision.

An important point to establish was their feelings at the time of conversion. The literature informs us that in sudden conversions the convert is euphoric,

experiences heightened emotions and is happy, unified and fulfilled. In gradual conversions similar responses are seen but not in such an exaggerated form. The respondents spoke of a number of emotions or feelings that they experienced. I grouped them into positive and negative reactions and positive/negative combined. The following is a list of the words used to describe the feelings:

- Nervous (11)
- Scared (3)
- Lonely and sad (3)
- Lost (2)
- Confused (3)
- Strange and foreign (2)
- Nothing much (1)
- Happy (3)
- Excited (3)
- Like a new person (1)
- Proud (1)
- Confident (1)
- Contentment, calm and relieved (3)
- Mixed feelings of happy and sad (4)
- Emotional with lots of tears (3)

A number of the women gave more than one feeling, but statistically the majority (23 [76.6%]) gave more negative feedback than positive. Only twelve (12 [40%]) had positive feelings, with four (4 [13.3%]) having mixed reactions. This suggests that the conversion ritual brought the converts to verbally pronouncing their commitment, but they were not total converts. They had not, even though twenty-five (25) had indicated their conversions were a gradual process, reached the point of total commitment nor were they changed people. But, twenty-five (25 [83.3%]) respondents said they were converting without compulsion. If this were true, why were there so many negative feelings during conversion?

Islamically this information would reflect the situation of the Bedouins in Q49:14 where Allah disagrees that they 'believe' as they are only claiming the fact but it is not in their hearts. Thus total commitment is lacking. This is also supported by the word *saba'a*, which I have indicated meant they were 'renouncing the religion of their forefathers' rather than accepting a belief they believed in. The evidence also validates Khan's statement that conversion should not be just a ritualistic process but an evolutionary process of spiritual growth.

According to the conversion theory, the convert should have a complete sense of contentment, be regenerated and have moved towards a new identity. Many of these women were divided, uncertain of their decision, scared, nervous and one said that 'she wanted to run away as she was sad, depressed and uncomfortable'. I propose that these negative emotions clearly indicate that the actual conversion ritual becomes the point of crisis for many of the converts, especially as twenty-four (24 [80%]) of them stated they were practising believers of their previous religion. This point was suggested by Radcliffe-Brown, and documented by Keith A. Roberts (1990:113), but he concluded that it was the new ideology that created the crisis and tension.

The descriptions of their conversion ritual are varied and reflect their feelings on the ritual. The quotes below are some of the answers provided in describing this process.

- "Scared. Was given a ghusl bath. They put clean clothes on me. Maulana came & told me to read after him. After reading they called for the witnesses. Husband then put ring on my finger and we had supper."
- "Lonely and sad. I was all alone. I did not want to involve my sisters and get them into trouble. I just repeated after Mr. Vanker what was required. Mr. Deedat gave me the English meaning. After that I went straight back to work. No one to share this momentous occasion with me."
- "Arrived at Gafsa Moolla's flat. Made ghusl. Asked if I wanted to convert. Asked me to read the shahādat. Felt happy and excited and knew that my

in-laws had nothing over me now that I had converted. It was a very moving and spiritual experience. Also asked if I was converting of own free will and not because I was coerced into doing so."

- "Told to have a ghusl bath and come to the centre. Read all the kalimahs and declared my faith. Also signed forms in case of death & Janazah procedures. Read salaah alone in English/Arabic. Felt like a new person. Was crying with joy. Felt special that guidance reached me and I asked myself what can I do to show gratitude to Almighty and answered to myself-Salaah."
- "It was a long time ago-24 years ago but it was like you had changed to a new person with a different identity and this is what made it so special."
- "Felt nervous-not knowing what to expect. Was taken to home of respected elderly woman in Malay community who performed conversions. She took me into a private room with only herself as a witness and then she made a small quick nip in my private part with a sharp scissors. After this I was asked to repeat the kalima shahada after my aunty-in-law with the rest of the ladies as witnesses."
- "I had a compelling feeling that my life was taking a new turn and at the same time a deep sense of loss seemed to overwhelm me, soon after everything was over I felt lonely and abandoned. This was not a happy or joyful event for my family, the ones most important to me. That was when I felt maybe this decision should be re-thought. It was then I started to feel really scared."
- "Was nervous and felt like a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders. The moulana made me read something in Arabic (kalimah) translated in English while I was holding a white piece of cloth."

- "It felt strange and foreign. Read kalimahs and was made to embrace the Qur'an. Rest escapes me."
- "Felt contentment and peace of mind because I believed I followed the right route by allowing myself to learn and understand the religion."
- "Mixed feelings. Felt saddened that I had betrayed my mother and let her down. But also happy and comforted with this new way of life. Felt inner peace after conversion as if a burden had been lifted off my shoulders."
- "Scared and excited. I must admit at one point I did wonder if I was doing the right thing. It wasn't that I had any doubts, it was more that I was making such a big decision and was afraid that I won't live up to everyone's expectations. As soon as Mrs Moolla began speaking to me and my boyfriend, everything became clear. Converting was what I wanted to do."
- "Proud, new energy within me, emotional, felt cheated because not born a Muslim and missed out on so much knowledge and pure life. Hoping process would not end."
- "I was informed that I would be forgiven all my sins. Then she asked me if I accept Islam without compulsion 3 times. Then I was asked to repeat the kalimah 3 times declaring that there is only one God. Whilst doing that I couldn't hold back the tears. It felt as if Allah himself was with me holding my hand, this was the most emotional and spiritual moment of my life."
- "I felt nervous and scared but once it was over & I started living as a Muslim I've found that it's something I can manage."
- "Confused. Wanted to just wake up and run away. Did not know if I was doing the right thing or wrong. Felt uncomfortable and sad. Mixed feelings. Felt depressed because I knew I was letting my parents down. It was like I

had to choose him or my parents and I chose him over my parents; felt very bad because my parents really loved me and relied on me and now I was letting them down. I just wanted to run, but how far can I run?"

- "1st time-lost. All lost. Done through ignorance. 2nd time-Felt so many things I will treasure. Felt like something being lifted off me and being recovered by a veil. Lump in my throat; cried, couldn't say the kalimah. Misty feeling in the room. Funny, could feel my mother's presence. Yes, I felt a difference. My conversion was recorded because we had an arwaag that evening. The most beautiful feeling in my life time."

The common points mentioned in most of the conversions were that they made *ghusl* and were asked to recite the *shahādah*. This supports the Islamic theory that the *shahādah* is the most important aspect of becoming a Muslim. The *ghusl* was mentioned in some but not all literature. Interestingly, some women mentioned aspects of their conversion that was not required from others e.g. embracing the Qur'an, holding onto a white piece of cloth, having someone else perform the *ghusl* on them (which is forbidden in Islam as nakedness in front of others is *harām*), signing *janāzah* (burial) papers and there was a significant mention of circumcision.

The woman who experienced circumcision converted in Port Elizabeth, which is *Shāfiʿī* oriented, in the 1960's. This supports White's article which mentioned circumcision for women converting to the *Shāfiʿī madhab* and the Islamic literature which indicates circumcision for *Shāfiʿī* women is regarded as compulsory. After speaking to a couple of elderly *Shāfiʿī* women from Port Elizabeth, I have discovered that this was practiced by female elders of the *Shāfiʿī* community but it is no longer practiced today.

Four (4) women were very worried about 'betraying' or 'letting down' their parents. They viewed their conversion not as something they were doing for themselves but in opposition to their parents' love and wishes. One respondent said it was a matter of choosing between her future husband and her parents.

Another respondent said she found she could 'manage' living as a Muslim. These comments suggest that converting to Islam became a matter of choice more than a transformational movement towards a reformed way of life. Scholars suggest that adolescents in particular convert so as to oppose the religion of their parents and to distance themselves from their family religion. These respondents felt the complete opposite.

Although the majority had negative feelings there were still 40% who had very positive comments about the ritual. Some mentioned they felt like a new person, others said they were happy and proud of their new identity another said she had a new energy, yet others mentioned that it felt as if a burden had been lifted and they had a sense of peace and contentment. The comments typically describe the experiences of converts who have made a movement of transformation and change.

There were two (2) women who mentioned mystical presences or feelings at the time of conversion. The one said there was a 'misty feeling in the room. Funny, could feel my mother's presence. Yes, I felt a difference'. The other stated: 'It felt as if Allah himself was with me holding my hand, this was the most emotional and spiritual moment of my life'. These are the kind of experiences sudden converts are noted for having but this sample all experienced gradual conversions as per the definition.

Although the majority of the respondents presented negative feelings about their conversion, twenty-five (25 [83.3%]) said they answered honestly when asked if they were converting of their own free will. Three (3) - two Hindu and one White - said they did not answer truthfully and one did not give an answer. The one respondent said 'nobody forced me as such but I knew it was a requirement for marriage'. Another said she was confused and torn between her future husband and her parents. These are strong indicators that the women were not converting for the religion but for the social relationship they were entering into. Thus the affectional motif was the dominant element in the conversion process.

In discussing how they and their family and friends felt about their name changing, the pie graphs (Figures: 6 & 7) below give a comparative view of the responses. Although it is not indicated on the graph the White and Hindu women had the greatest difficulty in dealing with the change of name. The family and friends were not as accepting of the change of name as were the converts and it is usually the mothers who are most adverse to the new name. The following quote sums up the feeling: "My mum was not happy as she feels that she gave me that name and that is the only name for me."

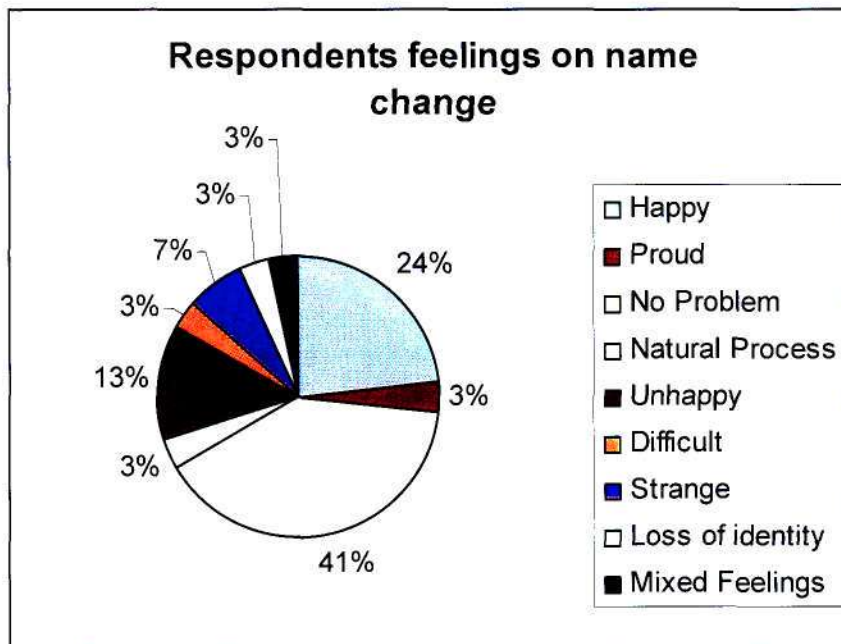


Figure 7: Respondents feelings on name change

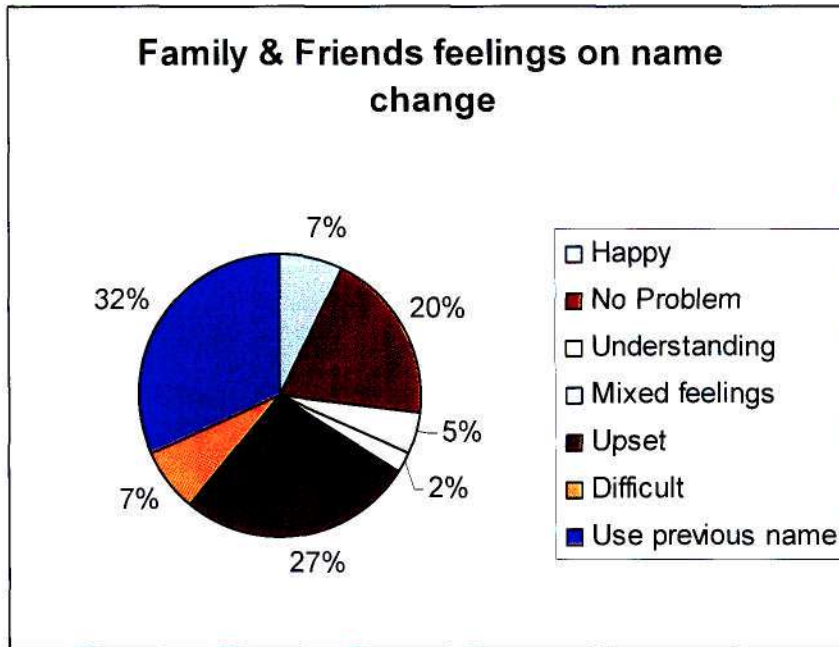


Figure 8: Family & Friends feelings on name change

It appears that most of the respondents went along with the name change because it was expected of them. None of them gave any indication that they knew the name change was not a necessity to accept Islam, unless it did not have a good meaning.

Previous religion and when they converted in relation to marriage were important variables but the others did not influence the data.

4.3.2 Conversion: Process and Experience

Besides the conversion ritual, the dynamic conversion process and experience is important in understanding the holistic sequence of conversion.

To gain an insight into how the convert dealt with the transformational process I asked whether they discussed the conversion with family, what their responses were, did anyone advise them against it and why, were they treated any differently by the those around them in their social context and did they experience any problems?

Twenty (20) respondents discussed their intention of converting with their family and/or friends. The twenty are made up of all the Christian Indians, five (5) of the Hindu women and eight (8) of the Coloureds. There were two (2) Blacks and two (2) Whites. Of the ten who did not discuss their intention, four (4) were White, four (4) were Coloured, one (1) Hindi and one (1) Black. Interestingly, all except one who were of Indian descent consulted with their parents which indicates the cultural closeness and respect of family elders. In contrast, most of the White respondents did not consult their parents (although one set of parents were deceased) which reflects the cultural Western upbringing of children and their independence from their family at a certain age.

Most (16) of the twenty respondents who told their parents received a negative response. The parents were disappointed, angry or upset. Some (3) were opposed to marriage with an Indian as it was across the colour bar and these marriages were in the Apartheid era. Many of the mothers found the concept of conversion very difficult as they considered their daughters to be good Catholics or Hindus. One set of parents said they were 'disgusted'. There were parents who were not happy, yet still supported their daughters' in their decision to convert. The other parents were supportive and understanding; one set of parents indicated that although they could not understand the necessity of the religion changing they felt it was important for the wife to follow the husband.

Twenty (20) respondents were advised against converting and marrying their future husbands. Nine (9) were not and one respondent gave no answer. Most of the reasons for opposing the conversion were cultural and religious. Parents and some friends felt that the cultural divide was too great as were the religious differences and therefore the marriages would not be a success. Other reasons given were that Islam is a 'bad' religion ('saw Islam as propagated on television'), that Muslims (Indians!) were heathens and that Muslims had more than one wife, therefore it would cause problems which their daughters would not cope with. A concern amongst the Coloured community was that the Indian men said they wanted to marry the girls but when it came to the final commitment it would not

happen, "mostly because that was the trend in those days and you were lucky if he did marry you."

Those who converted in secrecy (8) took varying lengths of time to inform their family and friends. The time period ranged from one week to eighteen months, with one respondent indicating that 'at no given time did I discuss anything with my parents'.

Eighteen (18 - 2 Black, 7 Coloured, 1 Christian Indian, 5 White, 3 Hindus) respondents were treated differently after their conversion but in both positive and negative ways. Once again there were more negative responses. Respondents felt like a stranger in their own family, one respondent said she was treated badly, teased and some of her family stopped talking to her and she was not invited to family functions; another's family distanced themselves from her and her in-laws did not accept her; another was ridiculed about her outward appearance (scarf) by colleagues at work; one respondent's ex-husband was disgusted with her and disowned his daughter because of the respondent's conversion and marriage. Two brothers vowed they would never associate with the respondent again and she has not seen them since.

Those who had positive reactions felt they were respected and admired for their decision to convert. The immediate family tended to be supportive but one respondent said that when they offered her alcohol or pork and she refused, they 'raised their eyebrows'.

The majority (21 - 1 Black, 9 Coloureds, 2 Christian Indians, 5 Whites, 3 Hindus) felt an immediate impact on their life after they converted. Interestingly, the way the respondents dressed became an issue immediately after conversion. It did not seem to bother the future husbands before conversion as to how the respondents dressed, but it was expected once they converted that they had to conform to a modest and Islamic form of dressing. Not all the respondents were expected to wear a scarf. One Coloured respondent mentioned that 'suddenly there were all these rules to follow. Not just the religion but my husband's as well.

Suddenly expected to dress, talk and think differently'. Reading *salāh* five times a day as against going to church on a Sunday became an enormous adjustment. The White women who married during Apartheid suffered snide remarks and one said she felt 'as if I lost my identity'.

Expectations after conversion differed from in-laws and husbands. The statistics evened out at fifteen who said 'yes' and fifteen for 'no' with respect to the in-laws; but the White respondents had the higher majority where they found the in-laws expectations did not change towards them. The expectations were more or less similar as they were expected to become 'perfect Muslims overnight'. Many indicated they were also expected to be the 'traditional Indian daughter-in-law by staying at home, cooking, cleaning and having babies'. In reference to her in-laws one respondent said she 'learnt not to take people at face value'. One Coloured respondent said: 'I had to make sure I didn't slip up on anything or else they'd think "What do you expect of a Christian girl?"' One respondent said there was no change from her in-laws as they did not accept her and were always openly hostile.

The husbands appeared to put less pressure on their wife with only twelve (12) expecting more from their wife. These husbands became more possessive (and jealous), they expected their wives lifestyle to change with less contact with males and less intermingling between men and women within general society. They expected their wives to dress Islamically and wear the scarf. A respondent stated her husband became more of an instructor than a husband. Another said her husband took her for granted and he was torn between his mother and her which landed him in hospital. Those husbands' whose expectations did not change were supportive and proud of their wives.

Seventeen (17) respondents did not experience problems from the general Muslim community. They were warmly accepted into the community, but one respondent indicated that the pious were more welcoming than the rich. The thirteen (13) respondents who did have problems faced problems of acculturation and racial prejudice. The respondents were 'bombarded' with culture and religion

and could not always tell the difference. Some respondents experienced criticism and provocation in public whereas another respondent felt she 'did not fit in and was not made to feel part of the group so she shied away and tried to stick it out'. A White respondent said she had great difficulty in registering her sons at Home Affairs and sent them to a Jewish school which was the only school which would accept them. Three respondents indicated that you are not accepted as a Muslim but are always referred to as a convert or revert. A Coloured respondent said the following to reflect her feelings on the cultural influences within the Muslim community:

"At first everyone thought I was Cape Malay or Mehmon and asked which family I came from. This used to annoy me because I am proud of where I come from."

The White respondents on a pro rata comparison experienced more difficulties especially with respect to culture. Even though many of the respondents had difficulties twenty-five (25) said they were given time and space to learn about Islam whereas three (3) said they were hurried and two (2) gave no answer.

The variables of race and culture influenced this section but again none of the others appeared to have any affect.

4.3.3 Conversion: A positive quest?

Conversion is identified as a positive movement of change and transformation of an individual, so it is necessary to determine if the conversion to Islam was such an experience for the respondents. An important point to remember is that the women are describing their experiences after the event has taken place and therefore give answers from a post-conversion context.

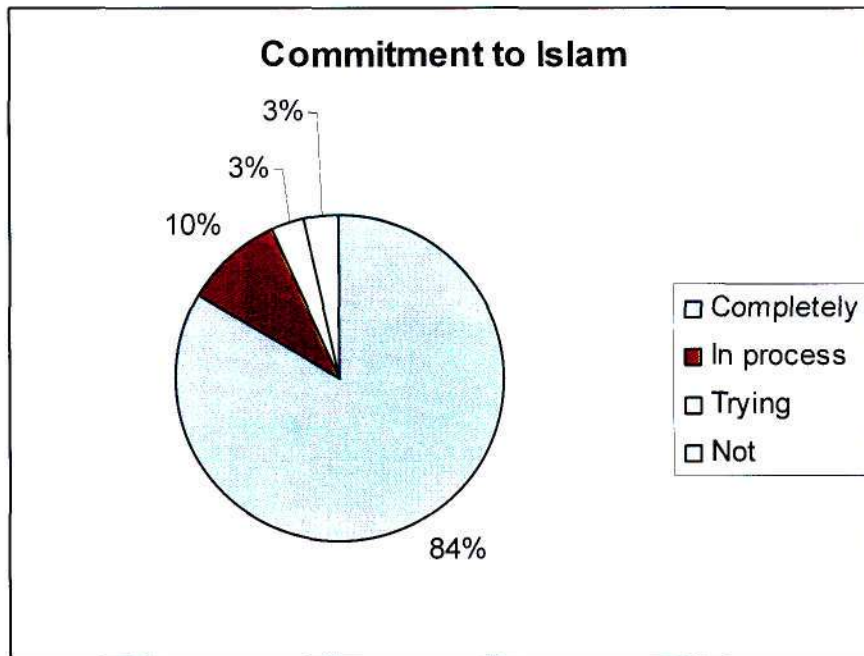


Figure 9: Commitment to Islam

As noted earlier, the majority of the respondents were committed to their previous religion therefore indicating they were not on a spiritual quest. Yet they all converted to Islam and twenty-nine (29) expressed their commitment to their new religion with it being at various stages of commitment. (see Figure:9) There was only one (1) respondent who did not answer this question.

Some of the comments on their level of commitment are as follows:

- Islam is part of my life now and in my heart;
- Sometimes it is hard to believe I was anything but Muslim;
- Difficult in the beginning, but realized that my full commitment will determine how successful my future will be;
- Committed but it is difficult at times, am still learning and growing. Could be more committed;
- Getting more committed with age;
- My life, soul and heart are for my Creator. Wish I was born Muslim.

This is an interesting observation as the conversion literature suggests that people who change their faith for the purpose of marriage are generally not

committed to their previous faith nor are they committed to their new faith. My research suggests that this would not be the norm in all conversion studies, although it may be the general pattern and is most likely to be the result of the socio-cultural context of the conversion as in this research.

Twenty-seven (27) respondents are educated in the rituals and practices of Islam. The three (3) who are not are all Hindu. The following graph (Figure:10) indicates where they received their education from with some getting it from more than one source. It is important to note that the only variable that had any significance was that of previous religion and culture.

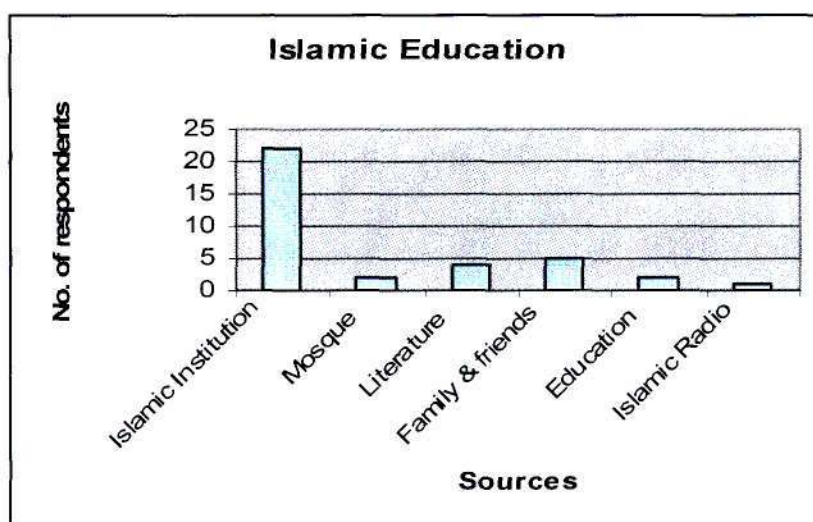


Figure 10: Islamic Education

In order to determine the positive aspects of converting to Islam, I asked the respondents if there were any advantages or disadvantages they experienced after the conversion. Twenty-five (25) answered 'Yes' to the question, but this indicated 'yes' to both advantages and disadvantages or either. The same applied to the five (5) 'No' answers. Thus these numbers are inaccurate. On closer examination, I was able to establish that fourteen (14) said there were advantages and fourteen (14) felt there were disadvantages. For advantages they listed such things as:

- They became better Muslims (people);
- It provided them with financial security;
- It gave them dignity, respect and cleanliness;

- It enhanced their spirituality;
- Wearing the scarf demanded respect as did the dress code and modesty;
- They felt unique and unity amongst the Muslims;
- The prayer ritual was so simple.

The disadvantages given were:

- They were regarded with suspicion;
- Dressing is not easy;
- Muslim women are oppressed;
- Social system is patriarchal;
- Men can have many wives;
- Outward appearance labels you;
- Brought up to voice opinions, but couldn't in new family because women do not partake in decision making.

Four (4) of the six White respondents only listed disadvantages; the Black respondents spoke of attaining dignity and becoming better people, the Hindus reported more disadvantages and the general response of the Coloureds was that they were now respected. These are interesting attitudes of the various race groups which generally describes the movement of change within a politico-socio-cultural and religious context.

The advantages tend to reflect a sense of greater dignity and respect, not only within the Muslim community, but within society as a whole. In addition, respondents' comments show that the spirituality they gained has made them better people which enhances the dignity they are awarded. In contrast, the disadvantages mirror quite closely the stereotypes that are frequently associated with Islam and Muslim women. This brings into question whether the husband and his parents and family expect his wife to fulfil her obligations in terms of Islamic law or whether cultural overtones take priority in the home.

The last information needed was to ascertain whether they had gone through a transformation morally, spiritually and socially. This would indicate if their

conversion had changed their 'self' into a unified, happy and confident individual with a positive and new identity. Twenty-seven (27) said they had changed with three (3) Hindus saying they had not. In illustrating (Figure: 11) the type of changes they had made it is important to note that eleven (11) did not indicate how they had changed whereas others provided more than one answer.

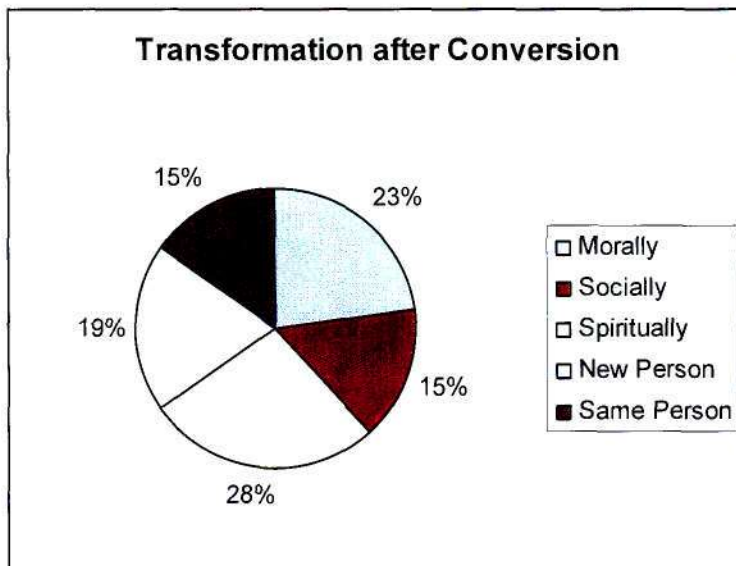


Figure 11: Transformation after Conversion

The conversions have predominantly been of the spiritual, moral and social types which indicate that, although the respondents did not seek a new way of life, they had attained such through the affectional motif. A number (3) of respondents made the distinction between retaining their personality and being transformed by the conversion. For them it was extremely important that their personality would not be affected even though they had become Muslim. One respondent said she "had made tremendous changes in all aspects. Life was unique and good. She was confident and happy." These words mirror Starbuck's definition of the converted unified self!

In reviewing all the above elements of this question it can be deduced that since 97% of the respondents were committed to their new faith and that the majority felt they had been morally, spiritually and socially transformed, their process of conversion had been a positive albeit unsought quest in their life. The fact that there had been an equal number of advantages and disadvantages does not

affect the positive outcome as so many had not provided explanations to the closed-ended question.

None of the variables had any significant effect, except that the Hindus felt that they had not changed.

4.3.4 Acculturation

It was important to determine the acculturation strategies the respondents and their husbands had adopted in order to cope with their inter-marriage. Did the women do all the changing to facilitate the conversion process and acculturation or did their husbands do anything to accommodate their intermarriage?

Twenty-three (23) respondents said they did not rely on their previous religious or cultural teachings in their marriage. This was because it was forbidden to do so, they felt the fundamentals were the same, that every religion has the same teachings and one respondent said her 'parents taught her values and to believe in herself and think positive'. Of the seven (7) who still maintained cultural identity, six (6) were Christian of which three (3) were White and there was one Hindu. They indicated that it was not the religion they maintained but the morals, manners, etiquette, respect and discipline within their Western upbringing that they held onto. They felt that the Muslim community lacked most of these attributes, especially in disciplining their children. One woman said she relied on her culture when it came to cooking as she used tips from her cultural learning in the kitchen.

There was an even distribution of the respondents who participated in rituals and festivals from their previous religion and culture. Of the fifteen (15) who did partake in the festivities, thirteen (13) were Christian and two (2) were Hindu. Most of them said they exchanged gifts and had family lunch at Christmas and Easter but they did not participate in the religious rituals that marked the occasion. Some attended family weddings and funerals out of respect and love.

Sixteen (16) respondents knew the difference between what was Islamic and that which was culture when marrying their husband. As shown in the variables all the respondents married someone who had a different culture to theirs and most married into the Indian culture. Of the sixteen, six (6) were Hindu, eight (8) were Coloured, two (2) were Christian Indians and one (1) was White. The majority who knew the differences were non-White, which clearly indicates that the divide and rule concept of Apartheid played a role in the lack of knowledge of the White respondents as only one knew the differences.

The majority of the respondents (17) felt that that they were expected to adopt their husband's culture. Three (3) respondents said the culture they adopted was Islamic, which was a necessity for their marriage. The others detailed the expectations of their husband and his family as follows:

- "At the beginning had to follow all traditional Malay customs-such as christening of first born-had to attend traditional Malay weddings (also implemented some of it in my daughter's wedding to a non-Malay)."
- "Gradually I learnt how to cook curries."
- "Had to cook like a surti and treat others differently. Amazed that I treated my maid like a friend. Couldn't invite my family home, it was a nightmare. I used to think up excuses..."
- "I took my husband's culture at my own will. I am not sorry."
- "Cooking has to be the same as his mom. The way they pronounce words has to be the same because that's their way. I was not allowed to attend any of my family members weddings..."
- "Father-in-law passed away a month after my marriage. My brother-in-law took his role in the family. Even though we were adults every decision had to be taken to him for his opinion."
- "I didn't know any better. Took his word for it that it was all Islam."
- "Husband does not partake in cultural activities but my method of cooking had to change to suit his Indian tastebuds. Also adjusted to qiwalis, Indian music and movies."

- “Husband’s family is very culture based so expected that the wife would follow in steps of mother-in-law and perform most functions she did.”
- “Expected by my husband’s family. I may have married an Indian Muslim and though I have accepted Islam, and obviously adopting his culture is inevitable, I won’t accept certain...”
- “Be a submissive Indian wife.”
- “Expected to adopt Indian cultural norms by his family.”
- “My husband is very aware of what is culture and what is Islam. However it was difficult to draw distinctions myself.”
- “Had to adopt his culture because he is the head. I had to follow his decisions.”
- “I was expected to especially when planning the wedding, but I made it clear to them that I know what is Islamically accepted and what is not.”
- “Had to follow the Islamic cultural trends eg: meelads and celebrations of martyrs.”

For most respondents the integration strategy appears to be the dominant outcome although for some it is assimilation. Integration includes maintaining some cultural integrity while at the same time participating as an important part of the social network of the new culture. Many of the women realized an adjustment was necessary especially in relation to cooking and their relationship with their mother-in-laws, but they were not all made willingly. They use the word ‘expected’ which infers it was not a choice given to them nor was there any compromise between the cultures.

One woman raises a contentious issue (“Father-in-law passed away a month after my marriage. My brother-in-law took his role in the family. Even though we were adults every decision had to be taken to him for his opinion.”) which is discussed by Crohn (1990: 214-220). The respect given to the older members of an extended family, which is still relevant to the “Indian” community, is extremely important. A younger brother would take cognizance of an older brother’s advice and wishes even if it were contrary to what he wished for himself. In a Christian and Western upbringing the nuclear, independent families do not request or

require the advice of older siblings or extended family members. They are the heads of their own households and thus make the decisions. It is such opposing issues that cause conflict in intermarriages which necessitates an understanding of each others cultures and thus behaviour.

Interestingly, twenty-three (23) respondents said their husband did not adopt any of their cultural rituals or behaviours. The reasons provided were: there was no need to adopt mine because Islam is beautiful, easy and interesting; he did not bother; no need because we were practising Muslims; I broke away from all; He wouldn't dare (meaning he wouldn't even consider it); follow one culture or identity to prevent confusion for the child; irrelevant to husband and me and lastly, he was proud and comfortable in his own.

The seven (7) spouses who did attempt to adopt the respondents' culture were those who were prepared to share meals at religious festivals such as Christmas, those who supported their wife at her family's weddings and funerals, one spouse learnt how to speak Xhosa so as to communicate with his wife's family and another spouse lit fireworks at Diwali. The other spouse brought a stricter form of discipline into his home. One respondent indicated that her husband learning from her made a difference in the home environment. Another respondent said she was most unhappy with her ex-husband adopting traits from her culture as he had spent years 'torturing her about being a 'Bushmen' but he has married another 'Bushmen' and is drinking drugging and partying' which is posing 'culture-shock' problems for her children. These spouses were from each of the race group categories as indicated in 4.2.1.2.

Sixteen (16) respondents were accepting of their husband not acculturating any of their cultural traits, but for seven (7) it did not sit well. They had problems in the beginning of the marriage over such issues, they argued over it and another was bothered by it. A respondent said she would have been 'more comfortable with him adopting her culture rather than she adopting his' whereas another felt that a compromise between the two cultures would have been far more preferable. The

White respondents appeared to have greater difficulty in accepting that their husband would not adopt or make a compromise in culture.

I asked the respondents if there was anything they gave up that was particularly important to them from their previous religion or culture when they converted. Unfortunately seventeen (17) respondents did not understand the question because of the wording, but eleven (11) said they did and two (2) said they did not. Those things given up were: ballroom dancing (5), attending church (1), the desire to be a nun (1), singing and laughing out loud (1), the odd glass of wine and strappy summer tops (1); gym and socializing with friends of both sexes (1) and her name (1).

Culture, religion and race were the deciding variables in this question.

4.3.5 Conversion: Support groups

I asked the respondents a number of questions to assess whether they were given any advice on Islam by the organization or individuals who had converted them, and to ascertain if they had any difficulties during the stages of the conversion process. If they needed help, did they actively seek out the assistance they needed or did they neglect it? Furthermore, were they aware of any groups, organizations or counselors who provided counselling for their specific needs?

Fifteen (50%) of the respondents said they were given advice at the time of their conversion. This included such things as: Islam must only be accepted out of her own free will (3), Islam is a way of life (1), they were given encouragement (1), they were explained the basic practices of being a Muslim such as *ghusl*, *wudū`* and *salāh* (2), informed about the punishment of apostasy from Islam (1), they were told to educate themselves about the *dīn* with one specifically being instructed to buy a book to assist the learning process (4), reminded they were entering a new life and should forget their past life (2), name change was discussed (1), one was asked whether her parents had knowledge of her conversion and another was given advice on the importance of marriage.

It appears therefore that the advice given was simple, not that informative and the persons performing the conversions were more concerned about the commitment of the convert to Islam. Nobody appears to have clearly and logically explained to the convert the consequences of conversion to Islam and what it means practically and theoretically to be a Muslim.

Twelve (40%) of the women indicated they needed to speak to someone about the difficulties they were experiencing, either in terms of the religious conversion or in associated problems of marriage into a new culture. Only seven (23.3%) of them actively sought out the help or advice required and this was through a variety of ways. One respondent joined a *madrasah* to learn about Islam, two spoke to friends (some indicated they would not speak to family members as they would not be able to understand their situation), two others said they fell back on morals and values they had learnt through their upbringing to cope with difficulties, eight (8 [26.6%]) said they studied Islam either through books or attending classes, three indicated they practised patience and tolerance to deal with their problems and another said she was determined that no one or nothing would get her down. Another eight (8 [26.6%]) said that communicating with other Muslims was an enormous help. They discussed issues and asked questions on ideology they did not understand. Three (3) of them indicated that they worked very hard at being 'good Muslims' so as to oppose the opinions of those in the community who were critical of their conversion. Two (2) said they took pride in

their new identity and therefore conquered any form of criticism and two (2) others said they withdrew from social participation to avoid the negativity that surrounded them.

Furthermore, only seven (23.3%) of the women knew of organizations that assisted with counselling for conversion and marriage. None of the twelve (12) women who needed advice or support approached any of the organizations for help. Those organizations named were: Islamic Guidance, Darul Yatama, Crisis Centre, IPCI, the Sunni Jamiat and Baitul Nur. The most important fact that emerged out of this question was that twenty-seven (90%) of the women indicated there was a definite need for support groups for women who had converted to Islam for the purpose of marriage.

What is most alarming is that 40% of the women experienced difficulties with their conversion and only 23.3% actively worked at solving the problems and not through the professional services that are available. Furthermore, only seven (23.3%) had any knowledge of organizations that could aid them. This certainly does not compliment the organizations in their ability to reach the new Muslim nor does it show any confidence in their counselling skills by the community. The fact that 90% of the women felt that a support group was necessary indicates that a very specific service is needed in the community and it is not being fulfilled. Köse indicated that many of his respondents had difficulty in relating to the Islamic organizations that were established in Britain as they were culture based and unable to empathise with the English-British Muslim. Although the women do not specify such sentiments, it could very well be a similar reason for them not approaching the Islamic organizations in the Durban Muslim community.

Culture could have played a small role in this question, but none of the variables seem to have any great influence on the outcome of the findings.

4.3.6 Advice for future converts

Even though 40% of the women had difficulties in the conversion process and 76.6% had negative feelings during the conversion ritual, twenty-six (26[86.6%]) said they would advise other women to follow the path of Islam. This is an interesting outcome and is typical of the process whereby the convert advises from a position of total commitment as in the case of 96.6% of these women. An important note here is that the commitment was a post-conversion transformation for the women as shown by the negative feelings expressed during the conversion ritual. This is an outcome of conversion that Starbuck and James claimed to be a form of proselytizing because of the happy, confident and unified self. This is also evident in the reasons they give for encouraging conversion. Listed below are only some of the reasons:

- ❖ I really do think that following Islam makes you a better person;
- ❖ Islam has taught me a woman's strength and influence that they have as a Muslim. Many non-Muslims do not understand this;
- ❖ Islam is not difficult; it's a way of life. A woman is protected and held in high esteem;
- ❖ It is a command of Allah and a teaching of Nabi Muhammad (SAW) to pray for guidance of all of mankind to Islam;
- ❖ The beauty of Islam as a way of life and its benefits must be highlighted rather than its do's and don't's;
- ❖ Self respect, dress code and behaviour, cleanliness;
- ❖ Provided every woman has a mind of her own rather than listening to people that make Islam complicated e.g. Moulanas;
- ❖ Islam has taught me to be a better person spiritually and socially. Taught me to respect myself as well as others. These lessons will help other women as well;
- ❖ To feel the way I do and to be treated with respect is so important for a woman's identity. Islam is beautiful in the way it treats and portrays women.

The four (4) women who said they would not advise women to convert gave their reasons as the following:

- "I don't think I could encourage someone to make such a life changing decision. I would give them advice and tell them my experience to make their decision easier;"
- "Depends on her support structure, family, husband and her strength and dedication with regard to Islam. Not knowledgeable enough in the deen to justify encouragement;"
- "I would not encourage as this is an individual's choice, but I would support and empathize;"
- "Not sure. It's up to the individual. It's not easy and a woman has to be prepared for this way of life."

This question was not affected by any of the variables.

4.3.7 Conversion: Compulsion or Free Will?

In order to judge whether the women felt compelled or coerced to convert it was necessary to ask them questions of similar content yet phrased differently, to gauge their responses. When asked if their future husband had discussed conversion to Islam as a requirement for marriage, eighteen (18) of them said 'Yes' of which thirteen (13) were Christian and five (5) were Hindu. The other twelve (12) answered 'No' of which eleven (11) were Christian and one (1) was Hindu.

Twenty (20 [66.6%]) respondents said they discussed the reasons and proceedings of the conversion. Converting for the sake of the future children and to establish a happy home environment where one religion would be practiced were the most common (12) reasons given for conversion. Three (3) respondents felt they had to convert or else they would not be accepted by their future in-laws as a suitable candidate for marriage (coercive motif) and one woman indicated she had no option as she was told it was a requirement for marriage (coercive motif). Four (4) spoke of Islam being a religion that they liked and found significant to their lives and two (2) others said that the name change arose in

discussion and that they were told that conversion was a choice. Although only twenty discussed the reasons for conversion, they all expressed how they felt about the idea of converting.

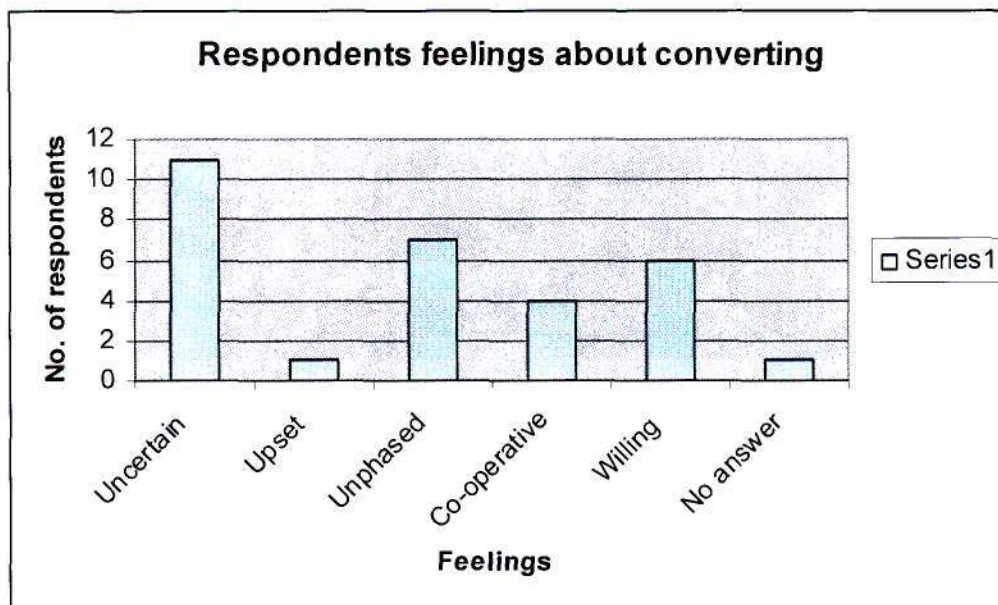


Figure 12: Feelings of respondents about converting

Twelve 12 [40%] women felt either uncertain or upset about the idea of converting whereas seventeen (56.6%) were unfazed, willing or co-operative. The positive feelings were generated by the Coloured, Black and White race groups whereas the Hindus had the highest concentration of negative responses. Although the idea of conversion was taken seriously the majority were not adverse to the concept. The fact that there were those who were unhappy about converting indicates that some of the women were not considering conversion as something that they intended on when entering the relationship with their partner. Not surprisingly, twenty-five (83.3%) women considered conversion to be of a serious nature whereas five (16.6%) thought it to be irrelevant. In addition, twenty (25 [83.3%]) said their conversion was a gradual process and five (5 [16.6%]) said it was sudden, but even these on examination are gradual.

The main criterion for the research was that the respondents converted to Islam, but I needed to determine what the reason was for the final decision to convert.

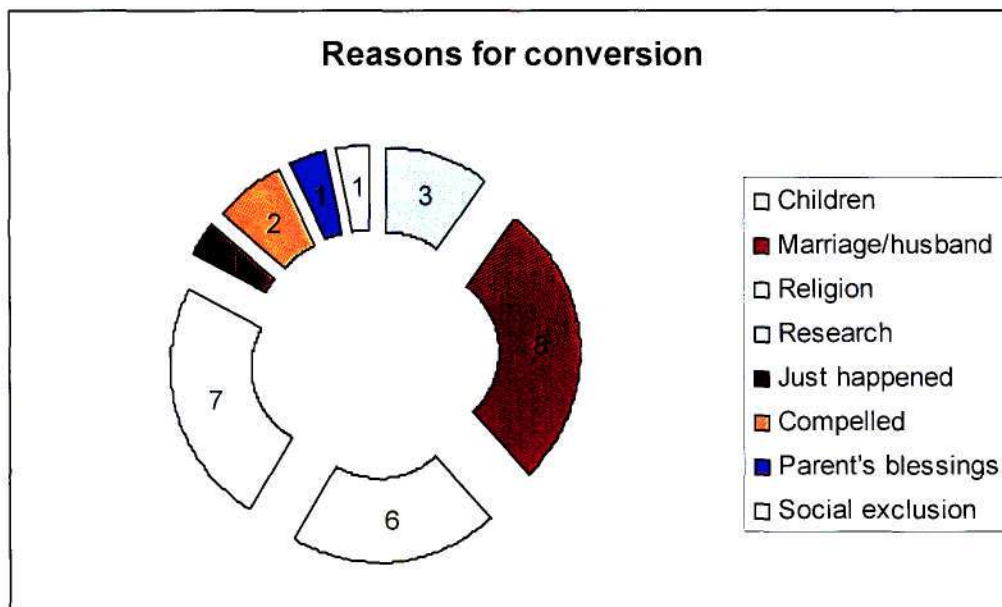


Figure 13: Reasons for Conversion

In Figure 13, it is evident that the greatest deciding factor was so they could marry their husband. This was followed by the factors of research on the religion and their acceptance that Islam was a religion they could associate with. These two reasons suggest the intellectual and mystical motifs. Twelve (12) respondents (in total) converted because of the social motifs of children and marriage and two (2: I Coloured and I Hindu) felt they 'had to' thus suggesting the coercive motif. One Hindu respondent only converted when her parents gave their permission. This demonstrates that of the twenty-nine (29) respondents who gave their reasons, only thirteen (13) say they converted for the benefits of the religion. One respondent said she was ostracized by her community because of her Muslim fiancé therefore she converted.

The pie diagram below (Figure:14) gives a comprehensive synopsis of the basic elements that are required to ascertain whether conversion was through compulsion or freewill.

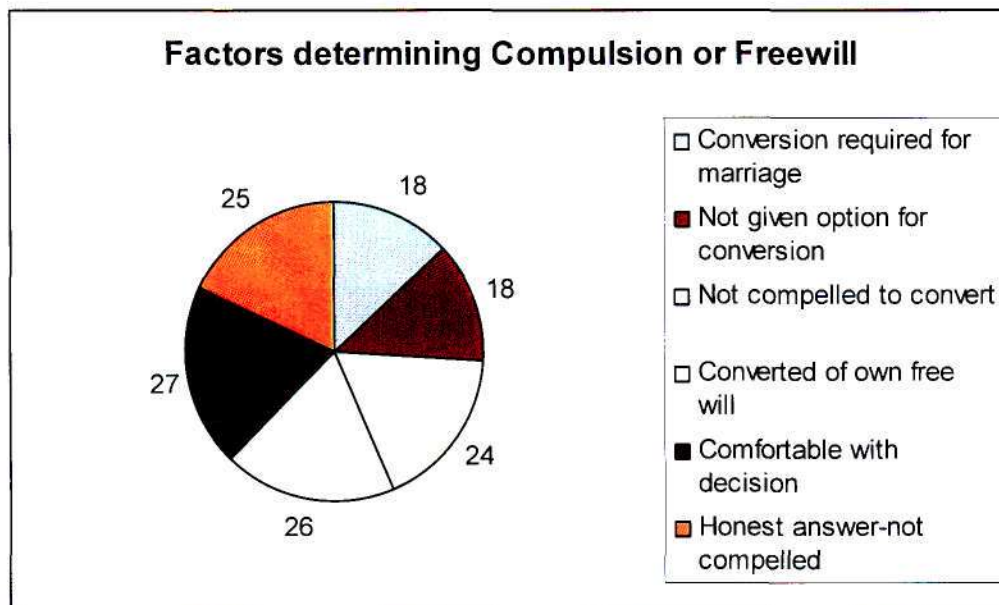


Figure 14: Factors determining Compulsion or Freewill

Of the thirty (30) respondents twelve (40%) were given the option of converting whereas eighteen (60% – 15 Christians and 3 Hindus) were not. Of these eighteen, thirteen (13) said they were not compelled and twelve indicated they converted of their own free will. But five (5) said they were compelled but also converted of their own free will. One respondent indicated she was not compelled yet she did not convert freely nor was she given an option to convert.

Twenty-four (24 [80%]) said they were not compelled to convert and twenty-six (26 [86.6%]) said they converted of their own free will. Of the four (4 [13.3%]) who did not convert freely, two (2) were White, one was Black and one Hindu. One respondent said 'it certainly was implied that without conversion we could not marry. But I was not forced.' The six (6 [20%]) who felt compelled gave the following reasons:

- continual pushing from the in-laws; (White)
- Wouldn't be married if I did not convert; (Coloured)

- Had no choice because: his mother would never have accepted me if I didn't convert and also to make my husband's life easier; If I did not convert would not be Muslim and would not be able to marry him. I felt I had to. (Both of these respondents were Hindu.)

There were twenty-five (25 [83.3%]) who said they answered honestly when asked if they were converting without compulsion, three (10%) who did not, one who said she answered honestly at the time but felt afterwards that it was not the truth and one was not asked.

The result of these comparisons show that although 60% were told that conversion was required for marriage and 60% were not given the option of converting, there were 80% who did not feel compelled, 86.6% converted of their own free will, 83.3% said they answered honestly and 90% were comfortable with the decision to convert. The statistics clearly show that conversion was definitely through free choice. But taking into consideration the first two figures there must have been coercion in some way to persuade the respondents to convert. The Oxford dictionary defines coercion as a form of persuasion and persuasion is to convince someone of something else. Therefore we can conclude that although approximately 60% were persuaded to convert the final decision was taken by the respondents, thus it was free will and not compulsion.

Twenty-seven (27 [90%])) respondents said they were comfortable with the decision they had made even though so many had given negative feelings about the conversion ritual. The postiveness is a subjective indication as they are making this assertion from a committed and transformed position. The entire twenty-seven indicated they had become more spiritually aware, closer to their Creator and had become better people because of Islam. Two respondents said they were not comfortable; one White and one Hindu. Their reasons were: 'I feel caged up and there are too many restrictions for Islamic women' and 'Mixed emotions because so much to adapt to. So difficult. My whole life has taken a 180° turn.'

The only variable of significance was that of the previous religion. It did not matter that the majority of the respondents were Christian and therefore People of the Book, they still converted before or at the time of marriage which is in complete contrast to the cases of Britain and the United States of America. This is an indication that the cultural context of conversion rituals and processes in South Africa is extremely important.

4.4 Findings of the Interviews

I was surprised to find that the interviews did not necessarily bring forth information that was more revealing or intimate. Some of the respondents answered their questionnaires in far more detail compared to their interviews and one respondent (whose first language is not English) needed some questions explained to her before she could answer them. Another respondent gave lengthier and more emotive answers in her interview.

I found that two (2) respondents in particular tended to answer a question and then ask me what I felt or if I experienced a similar situation. Although I had an empathetic ear as a researcher, I had to remind them frequently that I could not answer their questions and therefore they should refrain from asking them.

One interview was conducted in a respondent's home office. Halfway through the interview her husband came home and she became significantly uneasy. On asking whether she would like to continue the interview a little later, she replied that she was 'fine' and we could continue. She did not relax until her husband left for work again. Her unease was emphasized by the wringing of her hands and fidgeting with her fingers.

The most noticeable element of the interviews was that the respondents' husbands did not engage with them on the topic of Islam nor teach them the fundamentals they would need to know as Muslim women. The spouses either did not speak about Islam at all or only spoke of Islam in terms of future children. Furthermore, the spouses tended to speak of Islam from a male perspective

rather than just presenting the facts. Said one respondent: "Things told to me I found out later wasn't really Islam but the male version of Islam".

There was a definite overlying negative attitude towards Islam by the converts' family and friends who advised them against converting to Islam. They viewed Islam as a foreign religion and were unhappy that the respondents would not be going to church or 'burning the lamp' any longer. One respondent said her family was more against her marrying a man of a different race and culture rather than her conversion.

Most of the respondents felt that they were not sincerely accepted or welcomed into the Muslim community as they were always reminded of being converts/reverts. The overall feeling was that they did not quite 'belong', they were 'inferior'. This was particularly mentioned by the Coloured respondents who felt that the racial slur on Coloureds was the primary reason for the community not accepting them; a situation of 'us' and 'them'. This feeling is supported by responses in the questionnaires. This was the one issue that all respondents readily shared their feelings on. There was only one respondent who felt that she was accepted 'beautifully' into the Muslim community.

One of the Coloured respondents repeatedly mentioned her concerns about the Wentworth Coloured community. At the beginning of her marriage she resided in this community. Each time she was in hospital to have a baby she was surrounded by women who had Muslim names but were practicing Christianity. These women were born Muslims, had attended 'Malay school' (*madrasah*) when they were children but felt no connection to the teachings of Islam and thus were easy targets for the Christian missionaries who were preaching in the community. The respondent, who is a committed and practicing Muslim, felt powerless to be able to do anything to change the situation at the time. She indicated that if there was one thing she could do in her lifetime, it would be to go into the Wentworth community and bring these women back to Islam.

4.5 Observations and Conclusion

There are numerous observations that can be made from the research undertaken. It is important that not all the variables were necessary for this questionnaire, most particularly their age, residential area, profession, qualification, type of marriage and marital status at time of answering the questionnaire. The most relevant variables were: previous religion, previous culture, race group of both respondent and spouse, time of conversion and marriage and age at time of marriage and conversion. The last variable did not influence the answers but was important in comparison to similar research undertaken by other scholars. These were the critical criteria in order to ascertain the understanding of the respondents and their spouses in terms of Islamic teachings and requirements for conversion to Islam.

In hindsight it would have been preferable if I had interviewed the respondents rather than giving them questionnaires. There were answers which needed in-depth clarification but because of time constraints towards the end of the Masters year I was unable to 'unpick' some of the answers. If I had interviewed the women I would have been able to ask 'follow-on' questions to build on initial information already given.

The findings show that most of the women converted and married in the 22-26 year age group. This supports Ali Köse's findings that adolescence is not the common age for conversion as it was in the research of the classic scholars. A crucial finding is that the majority of the respondent's were practising their previous religion and not actively seeking a new faith. This disputes a number of scholars who suggested that people who convert for the convenience of marriage are not committed before or after conversion to either faith they were affiliated to. The respondents had a commitment of 80% before conversion and 90% after conversion. The conversions were all gradual (even though 5 said they were sudden) with the affectional, intellectual and coercive motifs playing a role.

All seven steps of Lofland and Stark's model did not apply to the respondents. Except for two respondents, one of which was ex-communicated from the Catholic Church because of her divorce and the other because of her discontent with Christianity's answers to her questions, none of the other respondents felt any dissatisfaction with their life nor were they thinking of religious problem-solving solutions. None of the respondents were actively seeking a religious or secular alternative to their lives as they were not experiencing any form of crisis. The two women mentioned above were provided with an alternative in religion when they met their husbands. The respondents (except one) encountered the religion through the bond they formed with their husbands. The turning point (the fourth step) in their lives was the fact that they had a relationship with their husbands culminating in the conversion and marriage and is therefore applicable to all the respondents. Preventing or neutralizing contact with others outside of the faith is not applicable to the majority of the respondents; but there were a minority who were either prevented from interacting with their families and friends especially in terms of religious festivities, weddings and funerals or chose not to. A number of the respondents had increased their participation within the faith before conversion and some had even started practising a few rituals. The participation generally involved family functions and discussions where one is easily introduced to the idea of Islam and its practices. Most of the respondents actively increased their participation in the faith after conversion. It can be concluded that Lofland and Stark's paradigm was only partially applicable to this sample. The most important deduction would be that the majority of the respondents were verbal converts, as suggested by this model, until they had attained commitment and increased participation after the conversion ritual.

For the conversion ritual all except one respondent converted before or at the time of marriage, whether they were Christian or Hindu. The majority of the respondents had negative feelings where they were nervous, uncertain and worried about their parents' feelings over them converting. The actual ritual was foreign and uncomfortable and they were asked to do things they were not sure of. Some had happy, exciting and emotional conversions with a couple reporting a spiritual presence. All the respondents had witnesses present but there was no

evidence that a specific number or gender had to be applied. Every respondent was made to recite the *shahādah* confirming that this declaration is essential for them to be Muslim. All of them changed their name, often under duress together with emotional conflict from their family and friends, especially their mothers. It appears that they had no knowledge that the name change is not an essential part of conversion. Not all the respondents mentioned *ghusl*, but it appears that for many the *ghusl* was an important element in the conversion. A few mentioned unusual procedures such as having to hold a white cloth.

A large number (66.6%) were advised against converting because of preconceived ideas about Muslim men and the type of husbands they make. The women appeared to have converted in most cases so that they could marry their husband indicating both affectional and social motifs. A handful indicated they felt coerced to convert. There were those who suggested that they had researched the religion while dating their boyfriends, were comfortable with the teachings of Islam and therefore willing to convert. Nevertheless, not all the respondents were educated about Islam at the time of conversion nor were they committed to the religion as such. This commitment came after a protracted transformation after the conversion took place.

The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents felt there was an immediate impact on their lives after conversion coming from both their in-laws and to a lesser degree from their husbands. The most noticeable changes included the change of dress that was required, the reminding of which foodstuffs can and cannot be consumed and being careful as to whom they associated with. Some mother-in-laws seemed to make their lives difficult either by expecting the respondents to fill the role of a good and submissive 'Indian' wife or by being hostile towards them. Some respondents felt they were treated with greater respect once they were Muslim but for others it was a time of intense distress with their own family and community.

The majority (80%) of the respondents did not rely on their previous culture or religious teachings once they had converted, but 50% indicated they participated

in festivals from their previous religion. Most of these were Christians who participated in Christmas luncheons or exchanging of gifts but did not partake in the religious rituals. Likewise, the Hindus who participated only did so by sharing in the food. Most of the husbands (80%) were not influenced by their wives culture which for some respondents (23.3%) was a problem as they had hoped for a compromise. One felt she would have preferred him accepting her culture. A large number of respondents knew the difference between culture and religion but the majority who did were non-white indicating the influences of Apartheid. Many felt they were expected to adopt their husband's culture; a few found this difficult and strange and at times unpleasant and humiliating. The respondents do appear to have integrated with success into the community. Some have been completely assimilated, whereas a minority have kept to themselves.

During the conversion process 40% of the women felt the need to talk to someone to help with their acculturating problems and their difficulties in understanding the religion. Unfortunately only 23.3% actually sought help but not from Islamic organizations, social workers or imams. Only 7(23.3%) respondents knew of such bodies which could assist with their difficulties which is a disturbing fact. 90% of the respondents felt there was a definite need for support groups for women in their situation. Though the women generally (not all of them) had difficult times through their religious conversion and acculturation, 86.6% said they would encourage women to walk the same path they had. This is a result of the protracted yet positive outcome of their conversions which is supported by the statistics which show that 90% of the respondents said they had definitely changed – morally, socially or spiritually.

Despite contradictory answers such as they were not given an option of converting and they were informed that conversion was a requirement for marriage, which indicates a covert operation of coercion, the majority of the respondents claimed that they were not compelled to convert but converted of their own free will.

The interviews did not offer much extra information, except on the one issue of whether they felt they were accepted by the Muslim community. The interviews clearly indicated that four (4) of the five (5) respondents were not readily accepted into the community and that they were constantly reminded of their inferior status of being a 'convert'. The matter of the "straying" of the Wentworth Muslim women from Islam was an interesting issue that arose out of the interviews.

The following chapter presents the findings related to research on the opinions and facilities of Islamic organizations, social workers and imams in connection with conversion, marriage and marriageable partners.

CHAPTER 5 – A SURVEY ON COUNSELLING & ADVICE ON MARRIAGE & CONVERSION PROVIDED BY ISLAMIC ORGANISATIONS, SOCIAL WORKERS AND IMAMS

5.0 Introduction

It would be an oversight if the opinions of the Durban *`ulamā`* and Islamic organizations on the issue of conversion for marriage were not considered especially as the newly converted women would turn to them if and when they required assistance or advice. It would be their advice that would be extremely influential when it came to the decision making process of the women before, after and most likely during the conversion process.

Bearing in mind that even in such a small Muslim society as Durban, there are numerous opinions when it comes to the interpretation of the *Qur'an* and what is acceptable and what is not, I tried to cover all options in order to allow for a true reflection of what advice would be given to women who approached these individuals and/or organizations.

5.1 Research Method

I used a qualitative research method so as to assess the attitudes and opinions of the respondents. This would act as a means to ascertain the understanding of the *`ulamā`* and the representative leaders of the Islamic organizations in respect of marriage between Muslim men and women of faiths other than Islam.

5.2 Method of gathering data

I visited and telephoned social workers, well-known *imams* within the Muslim society, and organizations in the community which deal specifically with issues pertaining to marriage and conversion. The *imams* were not only chosen because they are well known in the community and thus would be preferred

choices for advice, but also because they represented diverse trends or schools of thought. The organizations and social workers were selected on the basis of the work that their organizations dealt with and their influential standing within the community. I explained to all of them the purpose of my research and the importance of their input.

I handed out or faxed brief, structured questionnaires with both closed and open-ended questions relevant to conversion and marriage counselling. I did not include any questions that were too detailed as I wished to keep the answers brief and to the point. The closed-ended questions related to personal data of the respondents and to questions which required Yes and No answers. Other closed-ended questions were those that required specific responses which interviewees had to circle. The open-ended questions were extensions to the close-ended questions where reasons or opinions were required.

I handed out eight (8) questionnaires; two (2) to *imams*, two (2) to social work centres and four (4) to Islamic organizations. Three (3) of the respondents I do know on an acquaintance basis, but in all cases the research procedure was carried out on equitable terms. Six of the respondents were prompt in responding whereas two respondents had me waiting three weeks for their replies.

5.3 Duration of survey

The survey was conducted over a period of approximately four weeks in October. Some of the respondents replied immediately via the fax, others over a couple of days and yet others over three weeks. A friend of mine delivered and collected the questionnaire from two Islamic organizations. One *imam*, according to his secretary, tried to contact me to discuss the topic in more detail but unfortunately I missed his call and he thereafter went to Pakistan on business.

5.4 Location of survey

The respondents are located in Westville, Overport/Sydenham and central Durban thus representing the areas selected in the main research project, and being the predominant areas where Islamic organizations and social workers are situated. All the respondents answered the questionnaires on the premises of their organizations or mosques.

5.5 Analysis

5.5.1 Community support systems

I have maintained the anonymity of all the respondents to avoid reprisals.

Of the eight (8) respondents mentioned above, both *imams* were men. The social work organizations had women who responded as representatives whereas the Islamic organizations had three (3) men and one (1) woman who responded. Therefore there were a total of five (5) men in comparison to three (3) women who answered the questionnaires.

5.5.2 Accessibility of details

All eight (8) respondents indicated that their details were accessible in the telephone directory. Six (6) of the respondents could be contacted via the internet whereas only five (5) had their details printed in Islamic newspapers. Interestingly, the one organization that is specifically targeted towards women who have converted to Islam, is the only one that has its details in the telephone directory.

5.5.3 Counselling services to potential converts

Seven (7) of the respondents provide counselling services to women who intend to convert and one (1) does not. The organization that does not provide this facility is focused more on educational programmes for the community along such lines as: *Ramadhān* (fasting month), *Hajj* (pilgrimage), Arabic classes and the *Sīrah* (story) of the Prophet (pbuh).

5.5.4 Marriage guidance courses for future couples

Seven (7) of the respondents provide marriage guidance to couples who wish to marry, but one respondent (an *imam*) emphasized that his classes were always conducted separately for men and women. The one respondent who does not provide this service is the same as in 5.5.3.

5.5.5 Necessity for a non-Muslim woman to convert for marriage to a Muslim man

Of the eight (8) respondents five (5) indicated that it was necessary for the women to convert. Two (2) respondents, an *imam* and an organization, answered yes and no. The *imam* indicated that it should take place more often than not but did not give a reason for his answer and the organization provided the verses Q2:221 (for the idolatress) and Q5:5 (People of the Book) from the Qur'an as support in the first reference for the answer 'yes' and the latter reference for 'no'. There was one (1) respondent, a social worker, who said it was not necessary for the women to convert as there was no compulsion for them to be Muslim, as Islam was to be learnt and practiced on their own, although the future children would need to be brought up as Muslims.

There were a number of differing opinions as to the reasons why the women should convert to Islam. An imam indicated that it was only the *mushrika* (idolatress) who must convert, whereas in extreme cases (without indicating what

the extreme cases were) *nikāh* (marriage) could be performed with a woman from the People of the Book as long as she did not influence her husband in her religious following. Two (2) Islamic organizations strongly emphasized the fact that a Muslim (without specifying man or woman) cannot marry a non-Muslim as it is unacceptable in Islamic law, and furthermore it would result in social and religious complications as a non-Muslim mother cannot mould her children Islamically. Other reasons given were that it was 'imperative for *deen*' and that it was important for the purpose of attending Muslim funerals, for the benefit of the children and for a unified family through prayer.

5.5.6 Counselling for those who have converted, married and experience problems

Seven (7) of the eight respondents provide counselling services to those who are experiencing problems after the conversion and for marital problems. Again, the one respondent that does not provide counselling is as in 5.5.3 and 5.5.4.

5.5.7 Necessity for both sets of parents to attend counselling in preparation for the conversion and marriage

All eight (8) respondents were in agreement that both sets of parents should receive counselling. What differed were their reasons. Three (3) respondents felt that it would establish grounds for mutual understanding for both parties and be a precursor for removing any misunderstandings that existed about Islam. This in itself would promote peace and harmony between the families before marriage is entered into. Three (3) respondents stated that it would allow for the explanation of conversion, the future *nikāh* including the duties of a Muslim wife and would provide a good opportunity for doing *daw'ah*. Furthermore it provides a foundation upon which a successful marriage can be built and where parents can be supportive if problems occur. One (1) respondent indicated that through his experiences he found that many parents often disown their son or daughter when 'inter-faith' marriage occurs. Parents would therefore have to be 'open' to the idea of partaking in a counselling programme. One (1) respondent felt that it was

important for the parents to acknowledge that the girl (daughter) was making an informed decision and should as such receive their support and respect.

5.5.8 Knowledge of any organizations that provide education to convert women

Five (5) of the respondents said they knew of organizations that provided education for women who converted to Islam. Four (4) of them provided names. These were Moulana Yunus Patel's women's *madrasah* classes, Islamic Crisis Centre, Jamiatul Ulama and Islamic Guidance. A social work organization answered 'yes' and 'no', indicating that some organizations give education whereas others do not, but that the education received is 'scanty'. Two (2) respondents said they knew of no organizations that deal specifically with such education. One of these organizations that answered 'no' provides this facility but did not name itself.

5.5.9 Provision of personal counselling

Five (5) respondents have counselled cases of women who convert for an intended Muslim marriage. One (1) respondent did not answer the question and two (2) said 'no'. Again the same organization as in 5.5.8 that answered 'no' has counselled many women and couples of such marriages. Thus it appears that the woman who answered the questionnaire on behalf of the organization, switched to answering in her personal capacity.

5.5.10 Success of inter-faith marriages

Three (3) respondents felt that 'inter-faith marriages' were successful. But each of them added conditions to their answers. An *imam* indicated that there was usually a 95% success rate. One social worker felt they were successful if the preparation was adequate and if there was ongoing counselling. She also added that she had 'experienced much delight with this type of client'. The other social

worker stated that they are successful if the right approach was implemented from the beginning with clear understanding of responsibilities by both partners.

Two (2) respondents answered 'no', claiming that most couples face differences and adjustments and if there was no pre-marital counselling the marriage would not be successful. Three (3) respondents answered 'yes' and 'no'. They felt that each case was different and often depended on the commitment of the woman involved. The marriages that are successful are those where the woman accepts Islam and follows the teachings, thus becoming a firm and dedicated Muslim. Those that were not successful usually rested on the religious, cultural and social problems encountered by the converted woman. One respondent indicated that there were no specific statistics but that if professional and educative counselling courses/programmes were offered it would increase the success rate.

5.5.11 Predominant problems experienced?

The problems listed for the respondents to choose from were:

- Emotional and psychological problems of the conversion;
- The difficulty in the transition to Islam;
- The difficulty of fitting into a new culture system;
- Normal marriage issues;
- Race differences;
- Conflicting cultural, religious upbringings and responses to situations;
- Demands and expectations of the husband's family;
- All of the above.

Four (4) respondents indicated that all of the above problems were experienced. Of the other four (4) respondents there were some overlapping responses; one (1) respondent said all the above problems were experienced except race differences. Three (3) of the respondents felt that normal marriage problems were the main issue, whereas two (2) cited the demands and expectations of the husband's family as the major problem. Only one (1) indicated that the differences in the religious and cultural upbringing provided problems.

5.5.12 Need in the community for counselling services to convert women

All eight (8) respondents said there was a definite need in the community for counselling for 'inter-faith marriages'. Two comments given were: 'very much so' and 'badly needed including for born Muslims too'.

5.6 Observations

The organization that is only accessible through the telephone directory is the one respondent of all eight that caters specifically for women who convert to Islam. This immediately places this organization at a disadvantage compared to other respondents who promote themselves through advertising or the internet, and it does itself and the converted women a disservice by not having a proactive profile within the community.

Both of the *imams*, the social workers and three (3) of the organizations indicated that they provide marriage counselling, before and after marriage and they advise converts to Islam on what is expected of them. But only four (4) names were given as places to go to for counselling – Jamiatul Ulama, Islamic Guidance, the Careline of Moulana Yunus Patel and the Islamic Crisis Centre. An interesting observation is that two would be considered as 'Traditionalist' and thus conservative in thought, whilst the other two have reputations of being a lot more 'liberal' in their judgement while still following *shar'ah* (Islamic law). I found it astonishing that an imam provides marriage counselling but expects that the men and women should attend separately. How would he provide valuable insight and advice to the **couple**?

The most important question for this research segment was whether it was necessary for the women to convert in order to marry Muslim men. The fact that three different opinions were offered is indeed of much concern. This indicates firstly that there is no consensus amongst those people or organizations who are providing services to the community; secondly, if one woman was to go to one or more organizations, social worker or *imam* for more than one opinion, bearing in

mind she would be making a life changing decision, she would be completely confused as to what Islam requires of her and thirdly, it presents a poor reflection of the Muslim representatives of the Durban community to those who are seeking advice.

What is of enormous significance is that all respondents are born Muslims, and of Indian descent. Admittedly this information was not part of the questionnaire, but is informed knowledge prior to the research being undertaken. In my opinion this fact would definitely influence the opinions of especially the *imams* and the Islamic organizations when advising potential converts to Islam. I do think that the social workers would be able to maintain a far more objective approach because of the requirements of their profession. Furthermore, the empathy and understanding required in dealing with those who are very often of another race group, culture, religion and thus upbringing, would not necessarily be a factor that all the respondents would be able to relate to, particularly the Islamic organizations or *imams*. This in itself would present enormous implications for the individuals who are seeking advice.

The majority of the respondents felt that success of the marriages depended on the commitment of the women to Islam. In my opinion, the situation is being created where the responsibilities of a successful marriage lie solely with the woman, therefore inferring that it is the woman's obligation to hold the marriage together. This can be viewed as reflecting a patriarchal mindset which is not surprising considering that most of the respondents were male representatives. The respondents do not indicate that a practising Muslim husband who is supportive and empathetic will lend to a successful marriage, especially as it is through his direct involvement that the woman was introduced to Islam. This relates directly to 5.5.11 where one of the main issues tackled in counselling is the point that the husband's family's expectations and demands on his wife are too great. As mentioned earlier, I do feel that empathy and support are so important for the woman who is entering such a marriage, but very often this is not forthcoming from either the husband or the family.

Thus it is interesting to note that the majority (5) of the respondents indicated that all of the listed problems were issues for which counselling was provided. Considering that most of the problems involve the woman specifically shows that the woman/wife is not receiving the due support that she needs from all parties concerned despite the fact that she bears the burden of having to make the marriage work.

5.7 Conclusion

From the above observations it can be concluded that there are numerous avenues that a non-Muslim woman can follow in order to perform the conversion ritual. In addition, she, her future husband and both sets of parents can receive pre-marital and conversion counselling as well as post-marital counselling for any problems that may arise. But one needs to bear in mind that all parties need to be in agreement about attending the counselling programme in order for it to be successful. Far too often there are parents who disown their son or daughter for marrying out of the fold of their religion, culture or race group.

All the organizations, social workers and *imams* are accessible in one way or another, but the problem lies in the advice given to women converts by these respective bodies. As the research analysis shows, different organizations or individuals have diverse opinions on who should convert and why, thus not providing an assuring start to the woman's journey into Islam and her Muslim marriage. Is it any wonder then that the woman is faced with numerous problems, especially in the early years of her conversion and marriage? Unfortunately both sets of parents, the husband's family in particular, place far too many demands and expectations on the woman. Instead of viewing this as an opportunity of showing her the positive traits of the faith of Islam and themselves as a family unit, they become judgemental of the woman who has spent her informative years and young adulthood in a different culture.

The findings and recommendations that have been obtained from the research data in chapters four and five will be discussed in the framework of the conversion theory in the following concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

6.1 Discussion

To recall the aims and objectives of this thesis, the research undertaken was to determine whether women in Durban-Ethekeini (and by implication in South Africa) who convert to Islam for the purpose of marriage, do so of their own free will or under compulsion. I suggested in the introductory chapters that the women are compelled to convert which has been shown as contrary to Islamic teachings. Moreover, they experience psychological, emotional, social, cultural and religious trauma in the process of their conversion and very little empathetic support is given to them. This I believe is due to the lack of understanding from the husband, his family, her family and the community at large as to what the women are experiencing as their lives take on a whole new perspective to religion, culture and social identity within the new group of affiliation.

It has been shown that religious conversion is a dynamic and multidimensional process of change. It can occur to anyone and is usually associated with a catalytic crisis at a critical point in an individual's life. Yet many people experience crises without ever going through a process of conversion and others do not have a crisis but experience conversion. This is the paradox of conversion.

The women in this research had all come to a point where they had to make a decision on a life changing event – marriage. They were young adults (not adolescents) who had already developed their identity within the culture and faith they were practising. Therefore the marriage was not so much the crisis as was the decision to convert to Islam; thus the actual conversion is the catalyst rather than a preceding happening or event. The majority of the women were committed and practising followers of either Christianity or Hinduism and, except for two of them, were not looking for an alternative belief. These findings refute those of other scholars who claim that people who convert for marriage are not committed to a faith or are nominal followers of a faith. The fact that their future husbands

were Muslim brought them to a point of conflicting values, beliefs and culture which needed to be resolved so that the marriage could take place. The availability of Islam during the dating stage provided a period of incubation which would have been both a conscious and unconscious process. The respondents' favourable response over their co-operation to convert (albeit the negative feelings at the ritual) would have been a direct result of the incubation period and was the beginning of the protracted process in their gradual conversions. Their decision to convert is concomitant with Schmidt's research thus indicating that they were structural converts.

Within the Islamic traditions and theory of conversion it is evident that the defining ritual for conversion to Islam is the declaration of the *shahādah*. An allegiance pledged to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), to follow him and worship Allah (God) and Allah alone. But the *Qur'ān* asserts that commitment to Islam must come from the heart and with complete belief in the *shahādah*, otherwise the acceptance of Islam is a mere formality and not a commitment of spiritual growth and understanding. The research shows that all the women in this research declared the *shahādah* but not all of them were committed believers at the time of declaration. 60% felt they were given no option but to convert and that conversion was required for marriage to take place. As such they converted out of social pressure and convenience and to retain the man they loved. By no means is this a conversion of religious transformation and values, nor would it conform to the acceptance of Islam that God requires in the *Qur'ān*. It does not even fall in line with William James who had stated that a converted man was one whose religious ideas take central place in his life. In addition, the *Qur'ān* is emphatic that there is no compulsion or coercion in religion. No one should be compelled to accept Islam (or any other religion). The majority of the respondents indicated they accepted Islam voluntarily and without compulsion, yet they were not given an option or were told that conversion was a requirement for marriage. There is no doubt that the affectional motif was the dominant reason for conversion but there is definitely a subtle form of coercion or persuasion even if their final decision was theirs and theirs alone. I believe the coercive motif (subtle) is supported by the fact that so many of the respondents had negative

feelings at the time of conversion; a time when happiness and confidence should be the priority.

Furthermore, the *Qur'ān* – supported by *Hadīth* - is clear in its injunctions that Jewish and Christian women are acceptable marriage partners without conversion but that idolatresses would need to accept Islam before they could be married. Yet in the South African context, this research has shown that all the women converted to Islam before or at the time of marriage (except one) indicating that conversion was an implied prerequisite for marriage whether the women were Christians or Hindus. This is in direct opposition to the teachings of the *Qur'ān*. The imams and Islamic organizations in the Ethekwini community had differing opinions on this topic, yet predominantly supported the argument that the women must convert in order to marry, indicating the influence they have on the actions, thoughts and beliefs of the Muslim community. Women in similar circumstances in Britain and the United States do not as a rule convert to Islam before marriage as they are fully aware that it is not necessary nor is it alluded to by their Muslim husbands. The majority of these women do convert but only after a few years of marriage and intense research into the teachings of Islam which allows them to make an informed and active decision about their conversion.

The question of changing their name is accepted by the women in this study as something they have to do, but they are not all comfortable with the idea. Neither are most of their family and friends who continue to call them by their previous name, whereas their in-laws and the Muslim community identify with them in terms of the Muslim name. This is a way of indicating that the past is 'done' and there is a new beginning – a washing away of old sins. Köse's suggestion that the converts in Britain tend to accept a Muslim name so as to be identified within the Muslim community as Muslim, but continue to use their previous name in the workplace or in their previous social circle, is in keeping with the findings of this study only in as much that they all accept a Muslim name.

Conversion was not a term used in the time of the Prophet (pbuh) and the process of *bay'ah* was taken at any convenient time or place. Witnesses are not

specified as a necessity for conversion. In the event that witnesses are present there is no indication as to how many witnesses are required or what gender they should be. The ritual bath of purification (*ghusl*) is seldom mentioned in conversions and is not stipulated as being necessary. The respondents all had witnesses at their conversion but the numbers and genders differed. Furthermore, some mentioned they performed *ghusl* before the conversion while others did not. An interesting and lesser known anecdote within the South African context was the circumcision experienced by a respondent who came from the *Shafi'i* area of Port Elizabeth. Her experience supports literature on *Shāfi'i* circumcisions for women and White's suggestion of passing the rubicon!

Amazingly, all the respondents except one ex-Hindu, were committed to Islam although they were not all at the same stage of transformation. This indicates that their conversion processes were ongoing and continually intensifying as they became more involved within the religion and the social structures. All of them were active participants in their volitional conversions, even if they felt compelled to convert, as they had made the decision. Their commitment to Islam again refutes previous research which indicated that in such examples of conversion (conversion for marriage) the converts do not become committed to their new faith. I suggest therefore that since these respondents were practising their previous religion and Islam demands rejection of one's previous faith on conversion, the respondents had no choice but to become committed to their new faith if they wished to continue living a religiously meaningful life. So although the majority may have experienced indecision, fear, nervousness and anxiety during the conversion ritual, the transformation of the individuals translated into the positive commitment to Islam and the encouragement for others to follow the same path.

The above findings indicate that all seven steps of Lofland and Stark's model are not found in the respondents conversions. They did all have an encounter with Islam through their future husband but it was not as a result of a crisis. The majority had verbal conversions until increased interaction, participation and understanding enabled to become committed or total participants. Rambo's

sequential model which suggests a heuristic approach to conversion most particularly within a cultural context is expressive of these respondents' conversions. The cultural context within which they converted determined how they would experience their conversion.

The process of acculturation for the respondents was fraught with conflict at times and the majority felt obliged to adopt the new culture, except for the Black respondents. A few respondents felt the culture they adopted was Islamic, but many expressed they were expected to become good, submissive, 'Indian' wives who had to learn how to cook curries like their mother-in-laws and to suit the taste buds of their husbands. These issues were of concern not only as an acculturating process, but as intercultural and inter-faith marriage problems as well. Some respondents, especially the White race group, tried to maintain their cultural integrity while participating within the new cultural group. Most respondents appear to have adopted the integration strategy where they have kept their cultural identity or integrity but have participated and integrated within the new cultural group by adopting the necessary values and rituals that are essential for their acceptance into the community and religion.

The acculturating differences experienced included the physical, biological, social and cultural. Acculturating differences were physical for those who married across the racial line and biological for them all as they changed their dietary intake to conform to Islamic (and Indian) regulations and preferences. Dress codes, modest behaviour and the way they cooked their food incorporated the cultural differences. Social acculturation was a shock for those who had to deal with extended families and the hierarchy that went with them, especially as the majority of the respondents came from Western, nuclear families. The gender roles within their culture were different to the roles expected from them within the new society. Many respondents' social circles changed as friends and family members disowned or ignored them and they found others to replace those voids. It is the content of these differences that relates into conflict in the marriage. These behavioural shifts are reminiscent of the changes observed by the mothers of converted daughters in Carol Anway's book and is commented on

by Na'ima Robert in hers. A number of respondents emphasized that they knew numerous changes would have to occur but they would never change their personality. It was as if it was something they had to hold onto so that they would not acculturate or transform completely. This could also be the reason why so many accept a Muslim name in practice but do not alter their official documents.

The study found that at least half of the respondents (and their spouses) participated in previous festivities by sharing the day with their families but not participating in any of the religious rituals. This suggests the need to maintain links with their culture and to ensure they do not disappoint or lose their families. There were just as many respondents who indicated that Islam was their new faith and they had no need to participate in such festivities.

One couple found the acculturating process and intermarriage such a stressful encounter that the respondent's spouse had to be hospitalized. 40% experienced problems either with acculturation or the conversion process and felt they needed to speak to someone. But only a handful of them actively sought out the assistance they needed and not from the relevant services provided. Social and psychological problems are a consequence of acculturation; religious conversion should be a remedy for such problems. But the study shows the irony of this statement as the respondents' conversions were the initial cause of the conflict and distress. Islamic organizations, imams and social workers provide services in the community to assist with such difficulties, but most of the respondents did not know of them. Twenty-nine of the thirty respondents felt there was a definite need for support groups to facilitate the conversion process of converting women. The imams, social workers and Islamic organizations were of the same opinion, even though seven of them provided these services to the community. This is a strong indicator that either their services are not adequate or that specialized counselling is required for such cases.

As was suggested by Gillespie the conversions in this study were both anachronistic and apologetic. The conversions followed a basic set of traditions required by Islam for conversion and some of the respondents gave apologetic

descriptions of their conversion experience more out of easing their guilt in the eyes of their family and by defending Islam. This is evident by such comments as non-Muslims not understanding Islam or the fact that women are not oppressed as propagated by the media and the West. The apologetic descriptions I do not believe take precedence over those respondents who truly feel they have achieved spiritual and moral higher ground. The idea that respondents verbalise that they wish they could have been born Muslim or that being Muslim is the most important aspect of their life or that they would not revert back to their previous religion even if they divorced, suggests the total commitment, transformation and positive influence that Islam has had on their lives.

Research has shown that intermarriages are less likely to be successful yet this study has presented the opposite findings; only one marriage ended in divorce. I suggest that the commitment and practising of the new faith by the converting women is the key to the success of the marriages. I have shown that the conversions took place through subtle coercion via a strong affectional motif, that they did not all conform to the *Qur'an's* directive of a total commitment or surrender at the time of conversion, that they were predominantly uncomfortable during the conversion ritual and that their post-conversion process was fraught with acculturating and religious difficulties. Yet the respondents claimed they had converted of their own free will, which is definitively supported by their total commitment and positive feedback of their faith in Islam. Lewis Rambo perfectly encapsulates the respondents' experiences of conversion and all that conversion was, is and ever will be.

The interviews supported the above findings from the questionnaires. There was no conflict between the responses obtained from the questionnaires and those obtained from the interviews. As indicated in the research chapter, there was no new information offered by the interviewees except for the concern of one respondent about Muslim women of Wentworth who had abandoned Islam.

“Conversion is paradoxical. It is elusive. It is inclusive. It destroys and it saves. Conversion is sudden and it is gradual. It is created totally by the

action of God, and it is created totally by the action of humans. Conversion is personal and communal, private and public. It is both passive and active. It is a retreat from the world. It is a resolution of conflict and an empowerment to go into the world and to confront, if not create, conflict. Conversion is an event and a process. It is an ending and a beginning. It is final and open-ended. Conversion leaves us devastated – and transformed.”

(Rambo 1993: 176)

6.2 Recommendations

I suggest that it is extremely important that the Islamic organizations, imams and social workers have a consensus on the important issues in terms of non-Muslim women converting to Islam for marriage. I do realize that this is perhaps an idealistic position to take, but if the example and the *hadith* of the Prophet (pbuh) are practiced rather than dissected such issues would entail less conflict and more harmony. If there is disunity in the community it will reflect in the advice given to those embracing Islam and will present a context of confusion before the women have even begun their journey into Islam. The fact that the South African women are presented with a very different context of conversion and marriage from British and American converts in the same situation, suggests the conservative approach of the Muslim community and leaders in the South African context.

There is no doubt that support groups and counselling are an essential and necessary entity for the women who convert. I firmly believe that those filling such roles at present are so culture based –predominantly of Indo-Pak culture- and are all born Muslims and male dominated, that the required empathy and understanding necessary to counsel these cases is sadly lacking. It is absolutely necessary to have knowledge and understanding of the religions from which the converts are coming and of their cultural values, symbols, rituals and behaviours. If the service provider antagonizes or insults a faith that is or was held as dear to the convert and still is by their family, the potential convert will agonize over their

commitment to the new faith. Support and counselling from one viewpoint which is biased and skewed does not allow for empathetic and objective support and advice which is vital in counselling. As such I feel there is a gap in the community for such counselling which is demanding to be filled; preferably by a woman/women who have successfully traveled a similar path to these respondents and has comparative religious skills.

Furthermore, I do believe that pre-marriage counselling should include both families to the potential marriage so as to facilitate a sense of understanding between the two families, religions and cultures. Ultimately the children of the marriage will be functioning in a cross-cultural context as they have extended family from two cultures and religions; therefore an understanding between the families is essential for a happy marriage of the couple and their family. It is imperative that the Muslim men who are involved with non-Muslim women are aware of the enormous expectations and transformations required of the women. As Crohn explained, love may cloud all the differences in the beginning of intermarriages, but as life changing events occur the differences become more visible and need to be dealt with by ascertaining the content of the differences from the actual conflict.

The conversion of Muslim women to Christianity amongst the Wentworth community and the reasons for this conversion would make for an extremely interesting study. In as much as this issue was raised only by one respondent and quite incidentally, I believe that it deserves further investigation.

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APPENDIX 1
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
SCHOOL OF RELIGION AND THEOLOGY
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MASTERS RESEARCH

Previous religion: Hindi/ African Traditional/ Christian – Denomination?/ Other

Race group: Informant:

Husband:

Previous Culture:

Age:

Age married:

Year married:

Type of marriage: Islamic / Civil / Previous religious rites

Status: Married / Separated / Divorced / Widowed

Highest qualification: High School / Matric / Diploma / University

Profession at present:

Conversion: Where?

When? Before marriage / time of marriage / after marriage

Year?

Area reside in: Overport / Berea / Westville

1. Where did you meet your husband?
2. What was the length of your courtship?
3. Did your husband ever discuss Islam with you during this time? YES / NO
4. Did you practice your previous religion? YES / NO
5. Did your husband ever indicate during courtship, that conversion to Islam was a requirement for marriage? YES / NO
6. How did you react or feel about this at the time?
ANGRY / UPSET / OPPOSED / UNPHASED / WILLING / UNCERTAIN /
DEFENSIVE / CO-OPERATIVE
7. a) Did the two of you discuss the proceedings and reasons for conversion?
YES / NO
b) What points arose?

8. Did you discuss the matter with your family and/or friends? YES / NO
9. a) How did they feel about it?
b) What were their main concerns, if any?
10. a) Did anyone advise you against it? YES / NO
b) Why?
11. Did you view this (conversion) as a serious religious step in your life or was it something irrelevant? SERIOUS / IRRELEVANT
12. Were you given the option of not converting? YES / NO
13. At what point did you decide to convert ie: what was your deciding factor?
14. Was your decision to convert GRADUAL or SUDDEN?
15. a) Are you comfortable with your decision? YES / NO
b) Give reasons.
16. Did you at any point feel **compelled** to convert? YES / NO If yes, why?
17. Was your decision to convert entirely your own ie: **free will**? YES / NO
18. Who was present at the conversion?
19. Was your conversion undertaken with your parents' knowledge or in secrecy? KNOWLEDGE / SECRECY
20. If conversion took place in secrecy, how long did it take you before you confided in your parents?
21. How did you feel as the conversion ritual was taking place? Describe the process.
22. **cept Islam without compulsion.** In answering 'yes', you would be confirming that this was a decision that you came to without any form of influence or persuasion. Do you feel that you answered honestly and without hesitation?
23. Was any advice given to you at this stage? YES / NO
If yes, what advice?
24. How did those who were present react during the conversion?
25. How did you feel about changing your given name?
26. How did your family and friends feel about the change of your given name?
27. a) Once you converted, were you treated any differently by people eg: family and friends? YES / NO
b) Explain

- 28. a)** Did the conversion have any sudden impact on your life immediately after you converted? YES / NO
b) Explain.
- 29. a)** Did the expectations of the future in-laws change in respect of what they expected of you? YES / NO
b) Explain.
- 30. a)** Once you converted, did your husband's expectations or attitude change towards you? YES / NO
b) Explain.
- 31.** Since you converted, have you ever relied on your previous religious and/ or cultural teachings to make decisions within your home? YES / NO
 If yes, can you give an example.
- 32. a)** When important religious festivals take place in your previous religion (culture), do you partake in them with your family (your own or parents and siblings) or not? YES / NO
b) Explain.
- 33.** Are you committed to your new religion or is your adherence superficial?
- 34.** Are you presently educated in the rituals and traditions of Islam? YES / NO
- 35.** Where did you receive your Islamic education from?
- 36. a)** Did you experience problems after conversion and marriage in being accepted into the new religious community and culture? YES / NO
b) Explain.
- 37.** At any time during the process of conversion and marriage to and in a new religion, did you feel the need to speak to someone (a social worker, a psychologist, someone who has been through the same process) to share what you were feeling or to seek advice? YES / NO
- 38.** Did you ever act on this need? YES / NO
- 39.** Do you know of any organization/ social worker that handles these issues? YES / NO If yes, name them.
- 40.** Do you think there is a need for group sessions or individual counselling in respect of conversion and marriage in Islam? YES / NO
- 41. a)** Were you given space and time to learn about Islam and its way of life,
b) or, were you 'hurried' into being the 'perfect Muslim'?

42. Did you at all times know the difference between what is specifically Islam and what is specific to the culture-base your husband was from eg: Asian?
YES / NO
43. a) Were you expected to adopt your husband's **culture** in all its forms?
YES / NO
b) Explain.
44. a) Did your husband adopt any of your **cultural** identities? YES / NO
b) Explain.
45. Were you comfortable with this or did you have problems?
46. What coping skills did you use to facilitate your transition (or not) into Islam and the new community?
47. a) Do you feel that becoming Muslim has changed you spiritually, morally and socially, thus acquiring a new identity? YES / NO
b) Or do you think you are much the same as you were before the conversion and marriage?
48. a) Does being a woman in Islam have any difficulties/advantages that you did not experience before becoming Muslim? YES / NO
b) Explain.
49. a) Knowing what you know now (in relation to Islam and being a woman in Islam) would you encourage other women to follow the same path?
YES / NO
b) Explain.
50. a) Did you forgo anything that was of great importance/pleasure to you when you accepted Islam? YES / NO
(b) Explain.

APPENDIX 2
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
SCHOOL OF RELIGION & THEOLOGY
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS/SOCIAL WORKERS
FOR MASTERS THESIS

1. Are you an: Islamic Organization / Social Worker / Imam?

(Please state name for researcher's benefit! Anonymity will be maintained.)

2. Are your details easily attainable in the: telephone directory / internet / Islamic newspapers? Please circle appropriate answer(s).

3. Do you provide counselling / guidance for those who **intend** to convert to Islam? YES / NO

4. Do you offer 'marriage guidance' courses or counselling for couples who wish to marry? YES / NO

5. a) Do you think it is necessary, for a non-Muslim woman who is marrying a Muslim man, to convert to Islam? YES / NO

b) Give reasons.

6. Do you offer counselling to those who **have** converted and married within Islam and are experiencing problems? YES / NO

7. a) Do you think it is necessary for both sets of parents' to be counselled in preparation for their daughter's/daughter-in-law's conversion and marriage within Islam? YES / NO

b) Give reasons.

8. Are you aware of any organizations that provide a service of education on what is expected of the women as a Muslim, a Muslim woman and a Muslim wife? YES / NO. If yes, give an example.

9. Have you counselled any such cases as referred to above? YES / NO

10.a) In your professional opinion, do you think 'inter-marriages' are successful? YES / NO.

b) Give reasons.

11. What are the predominant problems experienced?

- Emotional and psychological problems over the conversion;
- The difficulty in the transition to Islam;
- The difficulty of fitting into a new culture system;
- Normal marriage issues;
- Race differences;
- Conflicting cultural, religious upbringing and responses to situations;
- Demands and expectations of the husband's family;
- All of the above.

12. Do you think there is a need/gap in the community for counselling services to be provided for such situations? YES / NO

APPENDIX 3
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
MASTERS IN RELIGION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION
FIELD RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

I, Cherry Leigh Shenaaz Muslim (St. No. 841841589), am currently undertaking my Masters Thesis in Religion and Social Transformation. My topic is:

Women who convert to Islam for marriage: Compulsion or Free will? And the associated effects of conversion.

The thesis involves field research by which I need to distribute questionnaires to female respondents who have converted to Islam as a 'condition' to marry their Muslim husband, to social workers and Islamic organizations.

The purpose of the study is to ascertain whether you, who have converted to Islam on the eve of marriage, do so voluntarily or if you are felt compelled to. The findings would incorporate the psychological, emotional, religious, social and cultural issues related to conversion.

Participation in the research is voluntary and with the understanding that:

- Questions asked may be of a sensitive nature and arouse stressful memories or feelings
- Strict confidentiality in respect of each individual will be maintained
- Anonymity will be respected and no names will be used in the finished thesis
- Any person who wishes to withdraw from the research may do so without fear of judgement or repercussions
- The research findings would be accessible to the respondents
- A professional conduct would be adopted with respect to the feelings and information shared between myself (researcher) and the respondents.

It is the requirement of The University of KwaZulu-Natal that a 'Consent Form' is signed by all respondents so as to maintain a professional code of ethics on the part of the researcher.

If any further information is required by the respondent, she may contact my supervisor: Mr. Suleman Dangor 031-2607488 (w).

I, _____, acknowledge that I have read the reasons and conditions presented for the Masters thesis being conducted by Cherry Leigh Shenaaz Muslim, and that I voluntarily participate in said research, with the express understanding of the sensitivities it may arouse.

_____	_____	_____
Name in print	Signature of Respondent	Date

Contact Number: _____

APPENDIX 4
NAMES AND CONTACT DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS

<u>RESPONDENT</u>	<u>PHONE NUMBER</u>
Nasreen Domingo	031 5630786
Alaika Allie	072 2657946
Shenaaz Gani	076 2508255
Aneesa Seedat	083 7856086
Nikath Osman	N/A
Khadijah Haffejee	031 2096803
Madina Pilliy	073 3142047
Zainub Moola	031 4005103
Kairoon Ebrahim	031 4051142
Ayesha Butler	031 2661141
Kanees	
Faiza Davis	072 7592337
Kaushika Zahra Kajee	083 7339167
Jehan Parak	031 2080509
Shenaaz Moosa	083 2275278
Shahida Samuels	031 2098922
Shenaaz Muslim	031 2669146
Samiyah Gounden	084 6789122
Yasmin Omar	
Ameera Kharwa	082 9251663
Yasmin Vaggie	083 7777313
Nadia Ismail	031 2661840
Soraya Kathrada	
Gehan Paruk	031 2667785
Rabia Sabat	
Michelle Sheikh-Yunoos	031 2621786
Latifa Gaffar	083 6680547
Parusha Naidu	083 5340047
Adila Boomgaard	082 4441653
Kulsum Khan	083 7039762

APPENDIX 5

LIST OF STUDIES ON CONVERSION IN ISLAM

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SYNOPSIS OF ABOVE REFERENCES:

Overview (see Levtzion, 1977 for a description of relevant issues).

Studies of conversion to Islam in various geographical areas include the following:

Africa (Horton, 1971; Ikenga-Metuh, 1985; Fisher, 1985),

Australia (Bouma, 1997),

South East Asia (Coatalen, 1981),

India (Eaton, 1993; Mujahid, 1989),

the Malay Archipelago (Hamid, 1982),

Britain (Köse, 1996b),

Europe (Allievi, 1998) and

the United States (Kepel, 1994/1997; Poston, 1992).

Few of these studies emphasize individuals. Most focus on Islamization, in other words, the creation of social, cultural, religious, and political environments in which individuals, families, communities, and societies flourish as Islamic.

Many studies are historical (see Arnold, 1896/1961; Bulliet, 1994; Dennett, 1950; DeWeese, 1994; Eaton, 1993; Watt, 1979). There are also examinations of the historical process of Islamic conversion using various interpretative models including the diffusion of innovation theory by Bulliet (1979). Eaton's (1985, 1993) splendid study of conversion to Islam in India makes a substantial contribution. His work is unusual in that it systematically tests the adequacy of various theories. In addition, Köse's excellent research (1996a) critically examines the usefulness of psychological and sociological theories of conversion.