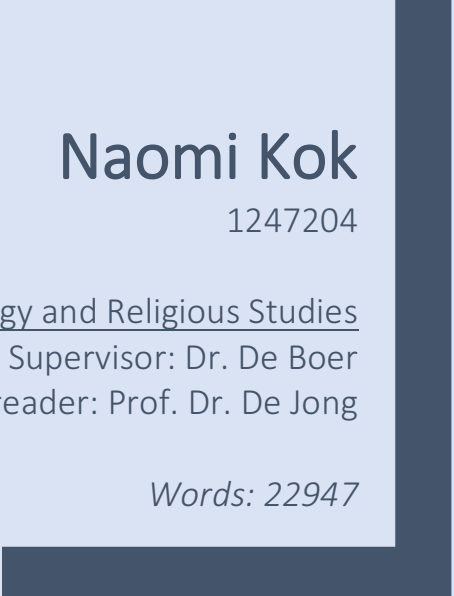# RELIGIOUS CONVERSION COMPARED

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*Holding to religion out of hope of its truth is no less justified, psychologically and rationally,*
*than rejecting religion out of fear it is in error.*
-William James-

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# Preface

It was not until I started my bachelor Middle Eastern Studies at Leiden University that I met people who had converted to Islam. The conversations we had during the long hours in between classes were fun and very informative. Through the years, more people converted to Islam among my fellow students and because of the conversations we had I was able to follow the conversion process of some of them. I realized that the conversion processes of the converts to Islam I spoke with were not so very different from some of the conversion processes of some of the converts to Christianity I knew. Even their behavior after the conversion showed some similarities: their enthusiasm, their need to convince other people of their truth, the way they formed their whole life around what they believed and the way some of them viewed the world in a very black-and-white manner. This raised a question for me, namely, does it matter to which religion you would convert or are the process and effects the same? Of course there were also a lot of differences in their stories. I started, for example, to see differences in the conversion process of women and men among my fellow students.

But above all, my observations proved to me that even in the Netherlands, a country that prides itself on being a secular state and is wary of public displays of religion, religion is very much a reality for many people. In a time where churches lose their members and Islam is a controversial subject, people still find their way to faith. And when they do, it often changes their lives radically. All of the converts walked their own unique path, often searching for something. It is easy to find the differences, but is a bigger challenge is to find the similarities. Where do the conversion processes of the converts meet? In a time where polarization and division are the order of the day, I want to look at what connects one individual to another.

# Introduction

Although every conversion process is unique, the observations described in the preface and other research show that it is very likely conversion processes also show similarities. What this research tries to find out is, first of all, whether there are any similarities in the conversion processes of individual converts and, if so, what these similarities are. After establishing what the similarities are, we would like to find out if the potential similarities in the conversion processes of individuals are attributable to the religious tradition the individual converts to. What we ask ourselves is: do the converts to Christianity show certain similarities in their conversion processes that are specific to the converts to Christianity, and do the converts to Islam show certain similarities in their conversion processes that are specific to the converts to Islam? We do not want to look solely at the religious tradition, but we would also like to find out if the potential similarities in the conversion processes of individuals are attributable to the gender of the converts. In other words, are there similarities in the conversion processes specific to female converts or to male converts?

Eventually we want to establish if the similarities are either more attributable to the religious tradition or the gender of the convert. If the similarities are mainly attributable to gender, this would mean that there are bigger differences in the conversion processes between male and female converts then between converts to Islam and converts to Christianity. If the similarities are mainly attributable to the religious tradition he converts convert to, this would mean that there are bigger differences in the conversion processes between converts to Islam and converts to Christianity than between male and female converts.

- Are there similarities in the conversion processes of individuals who converted to Christianity and Islam, if so, what are these similarities?

- Are the potential similarities in the conversion processes of individuals who converted to Islam or Christianity attributable to the fact that they converted to Islam or to Christianity?

- Are the potential similarities in the conversion processes of individuals attributable to the gender of the individuals?

- Are the potential similarities in the conversion processes of individuals more attributable to the gender of the converts or the religious tradition they converted to?

In order to answer the questions, this research will use a comparative and qualitative approach. This means that converts to Christianity and converts to Islam will be interviewed about their conversion process and their accounts of the process will be compared to each other in order to establish the similarities in their conversion processes. The qualitative approach will give us the chance to go into the details of the conversion process of the respondents. Details are essential in this research, because it will distinguish it from other research that tends to focus on the more general patterns and do not leave much room for individual differences. Therefore, Lewis R. Rambo's stage model is used in this research. His model is a good tool to go into the details of the conversion process of every individual and at the same time to structure data obtained from prior empirical research done by others and our own empirical research, so that it is possible to structurally analyze the data.

We are interested in the similarities and differences in the conversion processes of the converts we are going to interview. Other research tends to look at just one part of the conversion process for these similarities and differences; for instance a crisis experience that leads to conversion, or only the context in which the conversion took place (e.g. the religious milieu). We will, with the help of Rambo's stage model, be able to look at all the different stages in the conversion process for similarities and differences. Rambo strived to include all the theories and typologies in conversion studies of the past 100 years in his stage model, and came up with a very rich, detailed and at the same time flexible framework to study the conversion process. In order to show in what tradition Rambo's stage model and this research belongs, an introduction into the major research, theories and typologies in the study of conversion will be given in chapter 1. This overview will be followed by a description of the stage model introduced by Rambo, in which all of the theories and typologies are incorporated.

In chapter 2 we will try to already (partially) answer the questions asked above by comparing recent research on conversion to Christianity and conversion to Islam. There will also be attention for research on gender and conversion. The similarities in the conversion processes found in this chapter are structured on the basis of Rambo's stage model and will later be compared to the findings of the empirical part of this research. Chapter 3 will go into the definitions and methods used in this empirical research. Some special attention is paid to the conversion narratives and influence of already existing religious models. This will be followed by a description of the sample used in this research and the way data was collected and analyzed.

In chapter 4 the results will be discussed. The findings are systemized by structuring the data according to the stage model by Rambo. Per stage the major differences and similarities between the respondent's conversion processes will be treated, using examples from the interviews. In chapter 5 the results will be discussed and compared to the results of other recent research discussed in chapter 2. The questions will be answered and the hypotheses re-examined. There will also be attention for the limits of this research as well as recommendations for future research.

# Chapter 1
# The study of conversion

## Defining conversion

Defining conversion is not an easy task. Several scientific disciplines like psychology and sociology have been struggling with this problem, because how do you define a very abstract and personal religious experience or process of change? Throughout the 20th century several academics in the field of psychology came up with a wide range of definitions, approaches and typologies of conversion, all trying to include the wide variety in religious traditions as well as individual variability and historical conditions (Paloutzian et al. 1999, 1052). At first conversion was seen as the event where an individual came to a point of faith, ideally a dramatic moment preceded by a crisis. This idea was based on a Christian idea of conversion, where the conversion of Paul, described in chapter 9 of the book of Acts, was seen as the 'best' type of conversion, the ideal prototype. However, at one point, scientists started to realize that conversion was much broader than that. If they wanted to include other contextual, religious, and personal variables they had to redefine conversion (Paloutzian 2014, 211).

One of the first persons to write about conversion was Edwin Starbuck. He saw conversion mainly as the solution to a psychological crisis. The moment the individual converted, the crisis was resolved and a new self would appear. This new self included "a sense of completeness, wholeness, and personal peace" (Paloutzian 2014, 212). William James came to similar conclusions, but diverged from Starbuck with regard to his approach. Drawing on a qualitative database of biographies and such, James said that there are people who are healthy-minded and people who are sick-souled. This sick-soul was a temperamental disposition. In contrast to the healthy mind, which is optimistic and deliberately minimizes evil, the sick-souled person is someone who maximizes evil and sees evil as the essence of live (James 1902/2002, 103). Pehr Granqvist describes some of the characteristics of the 'sick-soul': "(…) a discordant personality or divided self, a sense of lost meaning, dread, and emotional alienation, a preoccupation with one's own limitations and sinfulness, as well as with the evil inherent in the world" (2003, 174). James studied the accounts of extreme religious or mystical experiences and came to the conclusion that the intense conversion experience will only be experienced by the sick-souled (Paloutzian 2014, 212). However, he did not pay attention to the conversions which were not as extreme and intense but more gradual and subtle, less based on experience and more on ratio (Paloutzian 2014, 212).

Albert Coe and James Pratt did pay attention to this process. Coe saw the moment of conversion, or 'event', as just one moment within a process of growth. Here the developmental psychology starts to play a major role in the study of conversion. According to Coe "(…) conversion is self-realization or self-reorganization, in that one adopts or finds a new self" (Hood, Hill and Spilka 2003, 211). It is thus clear that conversion is here not inherently religious. When it comes to religious conversion, the religious framework or social medium in which the process takes place, is clearly very important (Hood, Hill and Spilka 2003, 211). His idea and analysis of conversion, based on empirical research among adolescents, became leading in most empirical studies of conversion. Pratt did research among adults and extended the idea of Coe. He claimed that gradual conversion was more important than the moment of conversion, in the "process of development of wholeness in adulthood" (Paloutzian 2014, 213).

Jung and Freud were even more radically different from their contemporaries and colleagues in the past in their approach of conversion. They almost exclusively emphasized the unconscious mind

as the "'real' root of the motivations for conversion" (Paloutzian 2014, 214). According to Freud the unconscious motivation was based on unconscious and irrational needs and anxieties which were relieved by a belief in a God who protects and forgives you and promises you eternal life. Jung, who was a student of Freud, saw, unlike his former teacher, more 'positive' motivations for conversion. He saw God as an archetype, an unconscious psychic reality, and humans were born with the tendency to look for and find God. Or in Paloutzian's words: "(…) for Freud, conversion served human need, whereas for Jung, conversion fulfilled them" (2014, 214).

As can be seen, the study of religious conversion was very diverse and developed quickly. However, according to James Richardson (1985) the conversion research was guided "by a traditional paradigm assuming a passive subject being converted by external powers over which no control is possible" (Richardson 1985, 163). This 'classic' and 'passive' paradigm is based on the ideal Christian Paulinian prototype of conversion: it is intense, there needs to be a high level of distress or crisis and it is highly self-transforming (Granqvist 2003, 172). It is therefore also called the 'Pauline Paradigm'. It is clear that in this paradigm scientific views are intermingled with religious views on conversion (Zock 2006, 43).

Ralph Hood, Peter Hill and Bernard Spilka therefore preferred the contemporary or active paradigm. Because, although change must occur in conversion, "the nature of that change must carefully be delineated" (Hood, Hill and Spilka 2003, 211). Since the new interest in conversion with the rise of New Religions in the 1960's, recruitment studies had introduced a new paradigm, the 'contemporary' paradigm. This paradigm "posits a more active, meaning-seeking subject who exercises volition in deciding to convert to a new religion" (Richardson 1985, 163). The conversion is more gradual and there is not as much self-transformation as with the classic paradigm (Granqvist 2003, 172). This new paradigm also fitted the humanistic Christian view that combatted the passive paradigm, in which the active role of the Christian in conversion was stressed. Because of the new ideas about conversion, there occurred a partial paradigm shift, according to Richardson, which means that the classic paradigm has, at least partially, made way for the contemporary paradigm. This does not mean that the old paradigm completely disappeared, or will disappear in the near future. On the contrary, they are competing against each other in the same scientific field (Richardson 1985, 176).

Hood, Hill and Spilka fully agree with Richardson on this chasm between the two paradigms. In the table below they contract the ideas that dominate the paradigms.

**TABLE 8.1. The Classic and Contemporary Paradigms Compared**

| Classic paradigm | Contemporary paradigm |
| --- | --- |
| Conversion is sudden | Conversion or transformation is gradual |
| Middle adolescence to late adolescence | Late adolescence to early adulthood |
| Emotional, suggestive | Intellectual, rational |
| Stern theology | Compassionate theology |
| Passive | Active |
| Release from sin and guilt | Search for meaning and purpose |
| Emphasizes intraindividual psychological processes | Emphasizes interpsychological processes |

*Table from: Hood, Hill and Spilka 2003, 216.*

However, they also acknowledge that it is hard to empirically compare the two paradigms, since the research methods as well as the religious groups studied are so different from each other (Hood, Hill

and Spilka 2003, 216). According to them, the actual empirical issue can be found in the conditions where each type, gradual or sudden conversion, occurs. The distinction between sudden and gradual conversion is for a large part due to the fact that "temporality is confounded with two different definitions of "conversion"- one that we define as "religious conversion," and the other that we define as "spiritual transformation"" (Hood, Hill and Spilka 2003, 217). Spiritual transformation is related to the many New Religious Movements and is no longer attached to the classic dominant protestant conversion model (Hood, Hill and Spilka 2003, 217). Therefore, the gradual conversion or spiritual transformation is often linked with the contemporary paradigm, since this paradigm came with the rise of NRMs. This does not mean that the classic paradigm did not pay any attention to the gradual conversion, but that they were more focused on the extra intense and dramatic cases of sudden conversion. The narrowed focus even had as a consequence that the contemporary paradigm was able to come into existence since it filled up a research gap. Researchers started to encounter subjects that did not fit the idea of conversion present in the classic paradigm. On the one hand this made them narrow their focus on the conversions that did fit the idea, on the other hand they started reshaping their concept of conversion model (Hood, Hill and Spilka 2003, 217). This also explains the major contrasts between the two paradigms. It seems that the contemporary paradigm started out as studying types of conversion that were not studied by the classic paradigm because they were seen as almost the opposite of what conversion was assumed to be.

Pehr Granqvist wants to show in his research on attachment[1] and conversion (2003), that individual differences in attachment could help to *overcome* the controversies between the 'classic' paradigm an the 'contemporary' paradigm. Granqvist is convinced that scientists in either of the two traditions have been studying different forms of religious conversion. He finds it very likely that the 'classic' paradigm has focused "more on those (previously) insecure in attachment, whose religiosity is based more on regulation of distress," whereas the 'contemporary' paradigm has focused more on those (continuously) secure in attachment, whose religiosity is based more on socialization processes" (Granqvist 2003, 182). This conclusion is based on several of his empirical studies, which show that people with secure attachment characteristics experience a gradual religious change, not triggered by distress, whereas individuals with insecure attachment characteristics are more likely to experience a sudden religious conversion process (as is normative in the 'classic' paradigm) (Granqvist 2003, 179). Thus by considering the individual differences in attachment, the controversies between these partly artificial paradigms can be resolved (Granqvist 2003, 182). The sudden process of conversion does not exclude the gradual process of conversion, and the idea of the existence of two paradigms can partially be explained by saying that the scholars adhering to one of the paradigms focused on mostly one group with specific attachment characteristics.

According to Lewis Rambo, conversion is *always* a complex process "that takes place in a dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations" (Rambo 1993, 5). This notion of conversion as a process is one of the fundamental ideas that characterizes the field of the study of conversion. All the fundamental issues named above, identified from the start of the study of conversion, still characterize the contemporary study of conversion (Hood, Hill and Spilka 2009, 207). Raymond Paloutzian tries to combine all these issues, ideas and approaches in his definition, in which he combines the notion of religious conversion with those of spiritual transformation:

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[1] "(in psychology) the process of developing the first close selective relationship of a child's life, most commonly with the mother. The relationship acts to reduce anxiety in strange settings and forms a base from which children develop further relationships" (Concise Medical Dictionary, 2010).

[Conversion is defined as] a more distinct process by which a person goes from believing, adhering to, and/or practicing one set of religious teachings or spiritual values to believing, adhering to, and/or practicing a different set. The transformative process in conversion may take variable amounts of time, ranging from a few moments to several years, but it is the distinctiveness of change that is its central identifying element. In contrast to someone arriving at a point of belief through the process of socialization and other developmental mechanisms, the convert can identify a time before which the religion was not accepted and after it was accepted. (Paloutzian 2014, 211)

Paloutzian's definition completely fits the contemporary or active paradigm which sees conversion as "active self-transformation with cultural means" (Zock 2006, 54). The concept of change is central in this definition. This focus on change refers to the tendency of psychologists to focus on personality change when it comes to religious conversion (Hood, Hill and Spilka 2003, 211). Paloutzian, Richardson and Rambo identified three levels of personality, after reviewing the literature on personality change. They combined this literature with the literature on conversion and found that on the third level, the level of self-defining personality functions (purpose in life, meaning, identity), the most profound change took place after conversion. On the second level, the attitudes, feeling and behavior of an individual, the effect of conversion was significant change. Basic functioning, the first level, was almost not affected by conversion. These results are constant, as in that it did not matter whether the conversion is sudden or gradual and whether the conversion is to a Western or Eastern religious tradition (Hood, Hill and Spilka 2003, 212).

According to Hetty Zock, there is also a third paradigm, namely the biographical-narrative paradigm. There is a recent trend in social sciences in which narratives are seen as having an important role with regard to identity construction. Zock sees this new emerging paradigm as an elaboration of the contemporary or active paradigm. In this paradigm "the convert is seen as an active individual seeking transformation of life and the self through religious-cultural models presented in conversion stories" (Zock 2006, 55). The focus on social and psychic problems as determining factors in conversion, shifts to people who are actually dealing with these problems actively in "identity construction, using the conversion model of a religious group as an integrating element" (Zock 2006, 55). According to Zock, the interaction between the narrated life, and the lived life should be central in psychological biographical conversion research" in order to make conversion a topic for "interdisciplinary cultural studies". Psychology has therefore much to contribute to conversion studies (Zock 2006, 56).

## Typologies

Based on their theories and definitions, some of these scientist shaped typologies of conversion. Some even build their theory on specific typologies. William James, for example, came up with a typology based on the speed in which the conversion takes place: sudden vs. gradual conversion (Paloutzian 1999, 1052). This was the basis of the 'classic' and 'contemporary' paradigm theory described above. Another very influential, and still used, approach/typology of conversion is delineated by John Lofland and Norman Skonovd (1981). They introduced a descriptive system to study religious conversion in which they also bridged the chasm between the 'classic' paradigm and the 'contemporary' paradigm

(Köse and Loewenthal 2000, 101). They identified six conversion motifs: intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist and coercive (Lofland & Skonovd 1981, 373). The motifs are made up out of "salient thematic elements and key experiences combined with objective situations" (Lofland & Skonovd 1981, 374). Lewis Rambo also pays attention to the motifs of Lofland and Skonovd in his book *Religious Conversion*. He appreciates the emphasis on how the study of conversion is complicated by scientists who see conversion as a single, universal process (Rambo 1993, 16). He builds on, among others, the approach of Lofland and Skonovd when he introduces his own heuristic/holistic model. His typology and approach of conversion is still widely used and can also be found in the definition of Paloutzian.

Rambo introduced a descriptive typology in which he stresses the difference between changing from one religious tradition to another and within a religious tradition (Paloutzian 1999, 1052). This typology, he claims, "portrays the nature of conversion in terms of how far someone has to go socially and culturally in order to be considered a convert" (Rambo 1993, 13). He distinguishes five types of conversion and describes them as follows: *Apostasy/Defection* is the rejection of the religious tradition or beliefs by former members, without acceptance of any other religious traditions or beliefs. This usually means the acceptance of certain nonreligious system or values. *Intensification* is the renewal, the intensification, of the faith the individual already had a formal or informal affiliation with. *Affiliation* is different from intensification because it is not really about faith and more about involvement in an institution or religious community. The affiliation type of conversion is a change in this regard: the individual or group moves "from no or minimal religious commitment to full involvement" in an institution or religious community (Rambo 1993, 13). Intensification can also be seen as the 'twice-born', as James would call them. These are the people who were "compelled through crises to accept or realize their faith within an instant" (Hood, Hill and Spilka 2009, 207). This is just one category within this type of conversion, since intensification can also be the result of a longer process. *Institutional transition* is the change from one community to another community in the same major religious tradition like Christianity. An example is a conversion from a Dutch reformed church to an evangelical church. A *Tradition transition* is a conversion from one major religious tradition to another one. Both Islam and Christianity have started and profited from massive tradition transition in the past (Rambo 1993, 14).

What becomes clear in Rambo's typology, as well as in the other typologies and the definition of Paloutzian, is that *change* is the keyword. Conversion always has something to do with religious change. Although the origins of the notion of conversion can be found in Christianity, or at least what it was understood to be by the researchers in the first half of the 20th century, conversion has come to "refer to the general notion of religious change" (Rambo and Farhadian 1999, 23). Yet, conversion is above all "malleable" (Rambo 1993, 170). There certainly are some general patterns, but no single convert goes through the same process. Therefore, conversion is what the converted individual says it is. This does not mean that all the knowledge about conversion gained so far, is lost. Lewis Rambo was one of the scientists who strived to get the whole picture and came up with a holistic/heuristic model in the 1990s (Rambo 1993, 17).
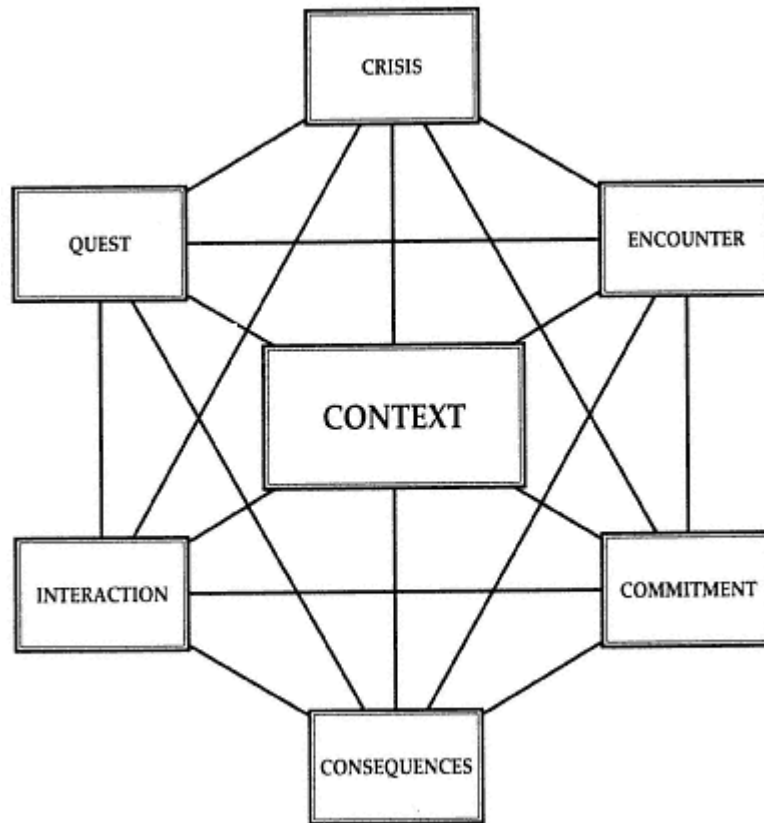
## Lewis Rambo's stage model



*Figure from: Rambo 1993, 216.*

Rambo introduced his stage model in order to integrate different disciplines in the study of conversion. It is a heuristic construction that will help studying the process of conversion but does not claim to cover everything or to eventually lead to a perfect understanding of conversion. According to Rambo, as long as conversion is a complicated interaction between a Higher Power and a human being, science will never be able to fully understand the process of conversion. However, Rambo's model gives the scientific tools to get a step closer to a better understanding of conversion. Although he presents the stages in a certain order in his book, he stresses that the order of the stages is not the same for everyone, the model is not "universal or invariant" (Rambo 1993, 165).

Rambo starts with stage **'context'**. He does not see this as just a stage, but also as the total environment in which the whole conversion process takes place. It overarches all the other stages. Rambo distinguishes three spheres that are connected: macrocontext, microcontext and mesocontext. With the macrocontext he means the total environment, the country one lives in. Microcontext on the other hand "(…) is the more immediate world of a person's family, friends, ethnic group, religious community, and neighborhood." (Rambo 1993, 22). With the mesocontext he means the aspects of context which mediate between the other two contexts, like local governmental or religious institutions (Rambo and Farhadian 1999, 25). The cumulative effects of macro, meso and microcontext all have an influence on a potential convert. They all have an immense amount of influences that form the background of a conversion process as well as the "catalyst for further searching, leading eventually to commitment to a religious orientation" (Rambo 1993, 165-166).

A 'crisis' could be the igniter for a person to start the search, according to Rambo (Rambo 1993, 167). Features of the crisis stage which should be considered are intensity, duration, scope, and source of the crisis (Rambo and Farhadian 1999, 26). The crisis, either caused by external or personal factors, often poses a problem the individual experiencing the crisis wants to find a solution for. The active search for a solution or fulfillment brings us to the next stage, namely: 'quest'. In this quest for fulfillment, the potential convert is as much as other people driven by the "desire to experience pleasure and avoid pain, maintain a conceptual system, enhance self-esteem, establish gratifying relationships, and attain a sense of power and transcendence" (Rambo 1993, 167). According to Rambo, the motivation of the convert is an important factor in understanding this stage. Of course human motivations are very complex, however, the motivation often shapes the quest stage (Rambo and Farhadian 1999, 27).

At one point, during the quest stage or even precipitating the conversion process, the convert will come upon people who will try to provide the potential convert with a new orientation, an advocate or proselytizer (Rambo and Farhadian 1999, 28). This is the 'encounter' stage. Important in this stage are the advocates themselves and their strategy; the potential convert and what he/she sees as the benefits of a conversion; and the setting of the encounter which delivers the background for the conversion (Rambo and Farhadian 1999, 28-29). Encounters do not lead to conversion most of the time but both the advocate and the potential convert are skillful in getting what they want. If the interests of the potential convert and these advocates are congruent and certain circumstances are there, the encounter stage can move into the 'interaction' stage. Here the (potential) convert decides to continue with the religious group and starts to go beyond the mutual interest to "more intense levels of learning" (Rambo 1993, 167). Relationships, rituals, rhetoric and "playing a role that conforms to reciprocal expectations in a social setting" give the convert the tools to restructure the idea of him or herself in his/her new 'role' as a convert within the religious group (Rambo 1993, 168).

First of all, relationships are the networks of this transformation. Often it is the case that the closer the relationship between the advocate and the potential convert is, the greater the chance of religious change. Secondly, participating in ritual practices facilitates the more intense levels of learning and brings it beyond the solely intellectual level. Thirdly, the converting person will start to use the rhetoric which is used in the religious group, "thereby incorporating into [his/her] lifeway the language of transformation inherent to the particular group" (Rambo and Farhadian 1999, 29-30). Eventually this use of specific rhetoric will start to transform the worldview of the convert. Finally, the converting person will learn to conform to a certain role that is expected from him by the rest of the religious group. The change that takes place on different levels of the personality (self, behavior, values and attitudes) (Rambo and Farhadian 1999, 30). When the expected change has come about, 'commitment' is often expected and is therefore seen as the next stage by Rambo. He sees commitment as the "consummation of the conversion process". In this stage the new convert learns how he or she should behave and think as a new person (Rambo 1993, 168). A very important aspect of the process is the reconstruction of the convert's "biographical memory" and using a new "system of attribution" in his or her life. The new convert is often expected to give a public display of the decisions to convert, a Christian testimony for example, in which the new attribution system becomes clear. This, in combination with participating in the rituals of the religious group, helps the convert to consolidate his/her beliefs and involvement in the group (Rambo and Farhadian 1999, 31-32).

Eventually this process of conversion has an impact on the life of the new convert. In the stage of 'consequences' it is about the effects of the conversion process. These effects differ from individual to individual. Whereas for some converts it led to a radically transformed life, for others it just means

a new sense of purpose or a sense of security and peace. However, there are not only positive effects when it comes to the conversion process. Sometimes the conversion process can have a destructive effect when, for example, the convert does not find what he or she searches for. Conversion needs "community, confirmations, and concurrence" or the effects will not last (Rambo 1993, 170). When conversion receives these three c's, the convert will develop spiritually and get a better understanding. At the same time, they will start to "review, reinterpret, and revalue their experience" (Rambo 1993, 170). In order to actually assess the conversion process in the right way, there should be attention for the aspects affected by the process, therefore the consequences stage is an important one with regard to the study of religious conversion or spiritual transformation, according to Rambo.

Rambo's theory on conversion is often mentioned in overviews of the study of conversion and handbooks on the subject. They see Rambo's model as one of the landmark theories in the study of conversion and the stage model as a model that tries to combine all the other prominent theories in his time. Although the field is relatively young, there is already a long tradition of conversion theories and typologies ahead of Rambo's research and ones that came after his model. From the overview it becomes clear that the field has developed itself and is still evolving and that it leaves a lot of room for researchers to develop their own theories and typologies. The prior empirical research treated in chapter 2 builds on the research dealt with within this chapter. In order to show that the field of the study of conversion is still in full motion, the next chapter will use the research done on conversion to Islam and Christianity and gender and conversion in the last ten years in order to find out if there are similarities in the conversion processes of individuals that are attributable to the religious tradition and/or gender of the converts.

## Chapter 2

# Recent empirical research

This chapter will give an overview of relevant and recent findings on the subjects treated in this research. In the months April and May 2016, the researcher used the search terms "conversion to Islam", "gender and conversion", "religious conversion", "conversion to Christianity" and several variations on these terms, in the catalogue of the Leiden University Library as well as Google scholar. Presented in this chapter is the research that is written in the past ten years[2] and seemed relevant to the researcher in the context of this research.

Finding recent and relevant research on conversion to Christianity in the West has been problematic. Most of the earlier research on conversion to Christianity are historical accounts of conversion to Christianity and much of the recent research is about conversion to Christianity in non-western countries. The opposite is true for conversion to Islam. There has been a lot of attention for conversion to Islam in the Western world recently, especially for Western women converting to Islam. However, there is just one recent study, by Ines W. Jindra, that actually compares conversion processes among converts to several different religious traditions. With regard to gender and conversion, not much is written from a comparative perspective either. The few studies of gender and conversion that have been done tend to focus on women, and do not pay attention to gender specific similarities in the conversion processes.

Despite the lack of recent research on the subject, this chapter will try to establish if there are any similarities in the conversion processes of individuals and what these potential similarities are and if these similarities are attributable to the religious tradition or the gender of the convert. The similarities and differences between the conversion processes of converts to Islam and Christianity found in the literature are subdivided along the stages of Rambo's model. Not all the stages are used, since they were not all present in the literature that is reviewed here. As said, there is just one research reviewed here that actually compared the two groups. All other comparisons are done by the researcher herself.

## Similarities in the conversion processes

### *Context |Background*

There are several similarities found in the backgrounds of converts to Islam and Christianity. In 2008 Karin van Nieuwkerk published an article in which she used the rational-choice approach in order to understand female conversion to Islam in the Netherlands. She interviewed three Dutch female converts to Islam and analyzed their life stories. She used a biographical approach and attempted to "bring the history and identity of the actors and the content of their faith into focus without denying the 'rationality' of their choice" (Van Nieuwkerk 2008, 431). One of the conclusions Van Nieuwkerk draws is that religious pluralism in the environment the women grew up in, is an important factor that facilitates the conversion process (Van Nieuwkerk 2008, 445). This religious pluralism also plays an important role in the conversion process of the converts to Christianity in the research of Joshua Iyadurai on "individual conversion experiences to Christianity from different religious traditions in

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[2] An exception to this is the article by Ali Köse en Kate Miriam Loewenthal *Conversion Motifs Among British Converts to Islam.* Their research is very relevant for this research and still relatively recent.

India" (Iyadurai 2011, 505). Iyadurai collected 165 accounts of conversion experiences of converts to Christianity from different religious backgrounds, by using a qualitative survey, in-depth interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis (2011, 505-507). One of the patterns he found with regard to the background of his respondents is that they all had a period of exposure to other religions than the one they were brought up with, mostly through lessons about different religions at school (Iyadurai 2011, 516).

Similarities with regard to the background of converts of a totally different nature is what Patrick D. Bowen found when doing research among converts to Islam in Denver. Bowen interviewed thirteen converts that attended the Denver Sunni mosque. He points out that his respondents had been moving around a lot before and during their process of conversion. Bowen goes on describing a pattern with regard to the religious background of his respondents. Most of them were raised in a Christian family. The reason his respondents gave for eventually not attending the church of their youth was because they saw "the membership and/or leadership of that church as hypocrites, not because they rejected all their former beliefs" (Bowen 2009, 47). This disenchantment with the religion of their birth is a pattern that is found more often among converts.

### Crisis | *Disenchantment with religion of childhood*
Iyadurai also found that his Christian respondents experienced this disenchantment (Iyadurai 2011, 516). However, it is also something many Islamic converts experienced in their conversion process, according to Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad. She did research among American female converts and analyzed their life stories. In her article she concludes that negative experiences with Christianity were an important factor in a lot of the female converts' narratives was. Many had been very confused by the theological notions of Christianity. Other mentioned that their questions and doubts as young people were never acknowledged or were avoided by people within the religious community. It is thus not strange that many of them pointed at the theological superiority of Islam over Christianity as an important reason for their conversion (Haddad 2006, 30-31).

A theme that recurred often in the stories of the converts, and can be seen as a consequence of these struggles with Christianity, was the "notion that all theological answers could be found in Islam" (Haddad 2006, 30-31). However, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr cannot find any evidence in her data that "conversion to Islam results from inner religious conflicts" (Sahr 2006, 76). Sahr interviewed converts to Islam in Germany and the United States, focusing on the function of conversion in a person's biography (Sahr 2006, 75). Although Sahr does not deny that there is a possibility that there are converts who converted to Islam because of theological problems with Christianity, she finds these cases to be rare" (Sahr 2006, 76). The reason for this discrepancy in the findings of Haddad and Sahr is unclear. That aside, there are also other 'crises' that play an important role in the process of conversion.

### Crisis | *Life problems*
Ines W. Jindra finds that converts to Islam as well as converts to Christianity experience problems or crises that heighten the structural availability. Heightened structural availability in this context means that the potential convert puts him or herself in a situation where it is very likely to get in contact with a religious group/tradition. Jindra analyzes and compares 50 conversion narratives to different religious groups across the Midwestern United States. Two of the groups she studies are converts to Islam and converts to Christianity. Jindra shows that these two groups have the most pronounced

predisposing background experiences and unhappiness because of these 'crises'. More than half of the respondents of both groups said that they had short-term crisis events before their conversion, and connected to these crises a "certain amount of structural availability" (Jindra 2011, 297).

Jindra finds that in a majority of the stories problems like familial problems, relationship problems and/or loneliness and depression were reported prior to conversion (Jindra 2014, 60). However, the nature of the problems sometimes differed per group. The converts to Christianity experienced problems with regard to family relations and self. They experienced "inadequate nurturance" during childhood and/or adolescence, which means that they experienced a somewhat milder form of familial disorientation than experienced by converts to Islam. The converts to Islam, on the other hand, experienced "cultural, social and/or familial disorientation" which led to a search for connection to either their cultural background or a clear social structure (Jindra 2011, 294). Patrick D. Bowen also found that converts to Islam in Denver experienced problems or stressful life changes, as Bowen calls them, that played an important role in the conversion process. According to him these stressful life changes can be divided into six categories: spiritual confusion, interpersonal, character (drugs/alcohol, temper), material (job, school, incarceration), physical, moved to a different city" (Bowen 2009, 51). Among Bowen's respondents the stressful life events that occurred most fell into the 'interpersonal' and 'moved to a different city' category.

Monika Wohlrab-Sahr goes deeper into the problems the converts to Islam may face. Using biographical analysis, Sahr finds that there is a close relationship between problem and problem solution between religious conversion and "processes of biographical crisis" (Sahr 2006, 76). Based on this idea of problem and solution, Sahr distinguishes three types of conversion, which she found among converts to Islam in both Germany and the United States. The three types refer to "three different realms of experience and characteristic problems associated with each". The process of conversion to Islam made it possible for the converts "to articulate these problems and find specific solutions" (Sahr 2006, 79). The first sphere of problems indicates "issues of sexuality and gender relations". Characteristic experiences that belong to this sphere are experiences of "devaluation and stigmatization" or more general issues of sexuality and gender like the distinction between manliness and womanliness (e.g. being not perceived as 'manly' enough) or homosexuality and heterosexuality (Sahr 2006, 81-83). The second sphere refers to "issues of social mobility". The characteristic experiences in this sphere are, in the words of Sahr: "failed attempts to move up socially and economically and the loss of personal acknowledgement associated with such failure" (Sahr 2006, 84). The third sphere of problems is about issues of nationality and ethnicity. What Sahr means with this is mainly problems of belonging and distinction (Sahr 2006, 87).

With regard to life problems of Christian converts, David Smilde, says that they are "neither necessary nor sufficient cause of religious conversion" (Smilde 2005, 789). He draws this conclusion in his research on reasons for conversion of Venezuelan men to Evangelical Christianity in Venezuela. Smilde used qualitative comparative analysis to analyze 55 life history interviews he held with men from two churches. Although he thus did not find enough evidence to say that life problems were either necessary or sufficient to explain religious conversion, he does acknowledge that life problems play a role when it comes to structural availability. Often problems, according to Smilde, "result in structural availability when addiction, violence or inconformity creates conflict in the home" (Smilde 2005, 789). This is also what Fenggang Yang found when he looked at conversion to Christianity in China. Yang did participant observation and interviews at Protestant churches in China and concludes that individualistic and institutional approaches (proselytizing churches) are inadequate to account for conversion to Christianity in China. According to him, it is important to look not only at the micro- and

meso-level factors, but also at the macro-level, since the other levels are situated in this level. Yang claims that "the crucial context for Chinese conversions to Christianity in China today is the globalizing market economy under political repression" (Yang 2005, 439). This leads to problems in the individual lives of the Chinese. They either struggle with "various kinds of jobs in the emerging market" or became "disillusioned with the repressive politics, and bewildered by conflicting values" (Yang 2005, 439). These problems led to existential anxieties which led eventually to a search for certainty, clarity and the absolute. Because of this, the interest in religion was heightened and some Chines started to actively search for a religious worldview, which heightens the structural availability. A good example of the consequences of a heightened structural availability is that these religious seekers start to seek out Christian churches to get to know the religion, and thus put themselves in a situation where it is very likely to get in contact with a religious group or tradition (Yang 2005, 439).

### *Encounter | Contact with Muslims/Christians*
One of the most reoccurring patterns in the conversion process of converts to Christianity as well as Islam is the encounter with a member of the religious group they will eventually convert to. Karin van Nieuwkerk found in her research on female conversion to Islam in the West, for example, some recurring factors with regard to facilitating conversion such as "living in a multicultural environment, marrying a Muslim partner or raising children together with a Muslim father" (Van Nieuwkerk 2008, 446). Monika Wohlrab-Sahr finds, just as Van Nieuwkerk, that Muslim partners are very important in the conversion process of female coverts to Islam, since they are often the ones to bring the potential convert in contact with Islam (Wohlrab-Sahr 2006, 79). This is confirmed by Ali Köse and Kate Miriam Loewenthal, who interviewed 70, both male and female, British born adults to find out about the conversion motifs among British converts to Islam. They found that the affectional motif was one of the most often reported motifs. This affectional motif means that the convert adopted Islam to "(…) develop, maintain, or improve a relationship with a key figure in the person's life who is Muslim" (Köse and Loewenthal 2000, 105). Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad concludes in her article on American female converts that encounters with Muslims in their environment like classmates, friends, partners etc. "who took the time and had the patience to explain, to mentor and guide", were essential for many converts (Haddad 2006, 27). Patrick D. Bowen shows that the interest of the respondents in Islam came after they met a Muslim and gained relationships with Muslims. Most of the respondents either became friends with or started dating a Muslim (Bowen 2009, 54). Bowen's and Köse and Loewenthal's research shows that this pattern cannot only be found with regard to female converts but that relationships with Muslims also play an important role in the conversion process of male converts. And Ines Jindra shows that this pattern is also not limited to converts to Islam. She writes that besides converts to Islam converts to Christianity mention a connection to a member of an already existing religious group as well. However, the nature of this connection differed widely from person to person (Jindra 2011, 297).

Also Smilde shows how important network ties are to the conversion process of Christians. Smilde sees network ties as "(…) culturally constituted, frequently contested, sites of interaction" (Smilde 2005, 767). Within these sites of interaction, network influence will sometimes lead individuals in the "direction of evangelical participation" (Smilde 2005, 767). With regard to network influence, there are some sub-factors that eventually lead to conversion. Central is social conformity, especially in an asymmetric relational context (when, for example, the majority of the family already converted to evangelicalism). Another factor is structural availability. As discussed above, this has everything to do with life problems or crises in the lives of the potential converts.

***Quest | Active searching***

Regardless of the nature of the problems or crises, they lead in both groups to an active search for meaning or active seeking of Islam or Christianity. In order to find a solution for a difficult situation or to "move forward in their spiritual quest", the potential converts start to look for more knowledge of a new religion and "test its workability" (Iyadurai 2011, 516). Most of the respondents in Bowen's research, after meeting Muslims or hearing about Islam in class, contacted a mosque and started to go to the classes about Islam and Arabic this mosque offered (Bowen 2009, 56). All his respondents were actively searching for something and eventually they all started to seek out Islam actively. In this searching period they were free to choose a new religion and more than half of the respondents temporarily participated in other religions than they were brought up with (Bowen 2009, 52). By many of the converts to Islam the search for knowledge about Islam was either initiated by curiosity or a quest for knowledge or spiritual fulfillment (Haddad 2006, 27). Yang shows that also a lot of Chinese converts to Christianity start actively seeking to fill the spiritual void they experience because of the problems they face (Yang 2005, 439). This search for solutions or fulfillment takes on different forms.

For example, intellectual activities relating to Islam, like reading and religious debate, are popular among converts to Islam in the West (Bowen 2009, 55-56). Also Köse and Loewenthal see among the British converts to Islam that the intellectual motif is one of the most reported motifs of conversion. This means that there is a "search for meaning or direction in life, reading and discussion" (Köse and Loewenthal 2000, 105). Thus, it is not surprising that most of the converts to Islam in the West convert because of intellectual reasons (Bowen 2009, 56). Many of the converts studied by Haddad claimed that they found they had no choice but to convert when they encountered the intellectual evidence of Islam. This intellectual appeal is probably also one of the reasons why reading the Quran is seen as an important part of the conversion to Islam. Of course some of the converts had a solely emotional reaction to reading the Quran, but others were impressed by its' scientific aspects or found its clarity and logic intellectually appealing (Haddad 2006, 29-30).

***Consequences***

The religious content of Islam enables converts to deal with the disorientation and to gain structure in their lives. Emotions of peace, calm and clarity were connected with conversion to Islam (Jindra 2011, 290-291). The result of conversion to Christianity was the emotion of peace. Another emotion often reported was that of love. With regard to religious content, the converts got an improved sense of agency, felt better about themselves and felt increasingly at ease with others (because of their experience of a relationship with Christ) (Jindra 2011, 291). Joshua Iyadurai's Indian converts to Christianity all join a religious community and show in several ways their new status as a convert in the church (either by baptism or by participating in activities or church services). During the process of conversion converts to Christianity in India often have to face hostile reactions from their social environment, their family and their community, which is also a consequence of their process of conversion (Iyadurai 2011, 518-519).

## Gender and the conversion process

As said in the introductory paragraph, there is a lot of interest in conversion to Islam in the West in recent years. Much of this research focuses on women. Also when the topic is gender and conversion, research tends to focus on women. However, gender does not only indicate 'women'. Gender is about what it is to be a man or a woman and what as Eliza F. Kent says in her article *Feminist Approaches to the Study of Religious Conversion*:

It is important to remember that "gender" does not signify only "women". Rather, it refers to the norms, conventions, processes, and practices through which people come to understand, implicitly and more rarely explicitly, what it means to be a "man" or a "woman" and what is expected of the relationship between and among men and women (2014, 301).

Unfortunately gender is still a neglected topic in conversion studies. Henri Gooren points this out in his article *Reassessing Conventional Approaches to Conversion: Toward a New Synthesis* (2007). He writes that all the research and the influential theories on conversion drawn from this research lack attention for gender and its impact on several aspects of conversion. Ines Jindra nuances the claim of negligence of gender somewhat in her book *A New Model of Religious Conversion: Beyond Network Theory and Social Constructivism*. She says that there has been done research on gender and religion and how gender has an impact on conversion in general. However, there is no research on the impact of gender on the conversion to different religious groups or on whether and how female and male converts to the same religious tradition differ from each other (Jindra 2014, 161 & 186).

Jindra compares in her own research 52 conversion narratives of converts to several religious traditions. She argues that "both background experiences related to gender and converts' way of dealing with them are linked to and interact with religious content" (Jindra 2014, 161). For example, many of the stories of women who converted to Islam are centered "on contemporary gender roles and the associated ambiguities" (Jindra 2014, 162). Jindra reports that gender-related background experiences were chiefly central for women, compared to men. Jindra distinguishes two groups of women within this group: the ones who were looking for structure with regard to gender roles and the ones that were looking for freedom and independence (Jindra 2014, 178). Jindra shows that gender matters with regard to the conversion process. Therefore, gender-related experiences should be taken into consideration when studying conversion processes. And this, as well as the differences between conversion to different religious groups, should be looked at in future studies (Jindra 2014, 186).

Although there has not been a lot of research directly into the differences between male and female conversion processes, research sometimes does offer insight in gender specific characteristics of the conversion process. Patrick D. Bowen, for example, found that one of the most prominent characteristics of conversion processes of female converts to Islam is that they have been introduced to Islam by their husbands. Several other studies also show this phenomenon. Often the husbands are nominally Muslim and do not pressure their wife to convert. What seems to happen a lot is that, when the women convert, their husbands start to increase their religious participation (Bowen 2009, 54-55).

Ali Köse and Kate Miriam Loewenthal also touch upon this in their research on British converts to Islam. But there is a more important conclusion, also connected to gender, they drew from their research. Köse and Loewenthal wanted to establish with their research if the conversion motifs of Lofland and Skonovd (1981) were feasible, reliable and valid with regard to religious biographies of British converts to Islam. What they saw was that two broad groups can be distinguished among converts to Islam. These two groups can also be drawn along gender lines. The members of one group are more likely to be "men, non-Sufi, not married to a Muslim at the time of conversion and reporting intellectual and experimental motifs and a generally world-affirming conversion history" (Köse and Loewenthal 2000, 109). And the members of the other group are "more likely to be women, sufi, or both; married to a Muslim at the time of conversion; and reporting affectional and mystical motif and a more world-rejecting conversion history" (Köse and Loewenthal 2000, 109). These findings show a connection between gender and conversion motif. The conclusions that can be drawn are that men

are more likely to be searching for meaning by reading and having discussions about Islam, as well as experimenting with Muslim religious requirements (Köse and Loewenthal 2000, 109). Women, on the other hand, are more likely to search for meaning through relations with Muslims (friendship and marriage) or through experiences that are out of the ordinary and are often a turning point with regard to the conversion process (Köse and Loewenthal 2000, 105). These findings suggest that there are some gender specific characteristics in the conversion processes of individuals.

## Conclusion

After reviewing the prior empirical research on the conversion processes of converts to Islam and Christianity it is safe to say that similarities have been found between the conversion processes of individuals. All of the themes treated above can be found in the conversion processes of *both* groups. This means that there are a lot of similarities in the conversion processes of *all* the converts, not just the converts of one specific group. However, more attention for details uncovers similarities specific to converts to Christianity or converts to Islam. Some of these specific similarities can already be seen when looking, for example, at the life problems prior to conversion. Some problems were only found among converts to Christianity or converts to Islam. This seems to show that there are similarities that are attributable to the religious tradition the converts converted to. Unfortunately, many of the similarities discussed in this chapter are based on research among converts to Islam alone. This makes it impossible to be certain that the similarities are specific to Islam, because there is no comparative data. Although it is likely that some of the similarities found among the converts to Islam are attributable to Islam, as long as these conversion processes cannot be compared to those of converts to another religious tradition, in this case converts to Christianity, it is still possible that the similarities can be found in other groups as well. This would mean that the similarities may not be specific to Islam, but that other variables, such as gender, may account for similarities between individual converts.

Also with regard to gender specific similarities it is hard to draw far-reaching conclusions. The research presented above shows a limited amount of gender specific similarities. Because of a lack of research into gender and conversion and a lack of comparative research, it is hard to get a full and clear image of all the similarities and differences in conversion processes of men and women. Despite the lack of comparative and detailed research, so far the findings presented in this chapter seem to suggest that the similarities in the conversion processes are mainly attributable to the religious tradition the converts converted to. A comparative approach and a more detailed look into the conversion processes of individuals might shed a new light on the similarities and differences between the converts. Looking into the details will show more nuances in what first seems to be a similarity in the conversion processes of all converts. Take for example the concept of life problems discussed earlier. At firsts sight life problems in the 'crisis' stage seem to be a similarity in the conversion processes of the converts to Islam and Christians. However, when looking in more detail at what these life problems are, it becomes clear that the life problems in the conversion processes of converts to Christianity are different from the life problems the converts to Islam experience. The converts to Christianity experienced problems with regard to family relations and self and the converts to Islam, experienced "cultural, social and/or familial disorientation" (Jindra 2011, 294). This example shows that by looking at the conversion process stage by stage it is possible to gain more information about the conversion process then when sticking to broader concepts such as 'life problems'. Rambo's stage model is a very useful tool since it enables the researcher to go structurally, stage by stage, into the details of the conversion process. And apart from looking into the details, the comparative aspect of

this research also plays an important role in gaining more information about the conversion process. Namely, by comparing the conversion processes of one group to the other (male/female, Christian/Muslim), it will be easier to see if certain similarities are specific to Islam or Christianity or to male or female converts.

Based on the research presented above, it is expected that the more detailed and comparative look at the conversion processes of converts to Islam and Christianity in the following chapters will show that the similarities in the conversion processes are mainly attributable to the religious tradition the converts converted to. It is very likely that the  similarities attributable to either Islam or Christianity can be found in all the stages of the conversion process. However, the empirical research discussed above mainly focuses on the stages 'crisis', 'encounter' and 'quest'. This raises the question if there are certain stages where the conversion processes of converts to Christianity and converts to Islam will differ more from each other than in other stages, since these stages will show most clearly which similarities are attributable to Islam or and which similarities are attributable to Christianity.

# Chapter 3
## Definitions and Method

<u>Definitions</u>

In chapter 1 an overview of the most important theories and typologies in the study of religion has been given. As explained, there are several paradigms in which research was and still is conducted. Hetty Zock pointed out that, apart from the classic/passive and contemporary/active paradigm, there is a third emerging paradigm, namely the biographical-narrative paradigm. In this third paradigm, the respondents are seen as individuals who actively seek transformation of their life and the self, as well as solutions to their problems (problems being important in the conversion process, as became clear in chapter 2). Their conversion stories are the way by which this search for transformation and solutions can be studied. At the same time, as Zock pointed out, the converts already integrate existing religious models in their stories.

A religious tradition has certain "ideas, images, methods and metaphors" which have a large influence on the nature of the "conversion experience" (Rambo 1993, 34). Christianity and Islam are both exclusivist religious traditions, one cannot adhere to any other religion when adhering to either one of them. This certainly has an effect on the conversion experience (Rambo 1993, 34). Take, for example, the concept of conversion within Christianity. The concept is very much influenced by the idea of the "Pauline conversion". The main features of this conversion, a bright light and surrendering to God's authority, are still present in conversion narratives today. This shows how important a religious tradition is in "developing, framing, legitimizing, and, finally, shaping conversion among its affiliates" (Gooren 2010, 95). Since the conversion experience as well as the conversion process are very much connected, the religious tradition not only influences the conversion experience, it also has a substantial influence on the account the new converts give of this conversion process or experience. The experience itself is thus influenced by religious tradition. And on top of that, the longer someone 'belongs' to a certain religious tradition, the more the interpretation of their conversion process will be influenced by the religious paradigm of conversion. This means that the conversion narratives will very likely be shaped by the ideas about conversion present in the religious tradition in general, and the religious community the convert is part of in particular.

The focus of this research will not be on the way the conversion narratives are formed or on the interaction between the actual lived conversion process and the narrated conversion process. However, it is important that it is considered here. The approach in this research, analyzing the narrative about an experience, is not without difficulties and theoretical questions. In his article *When Acceptance Reflects Disrespect: The Methodological Contradictions of Accepting Participant Statements*, Steven Ramey touches upon these difficulties. He makes a distinction between 'three different levels of separation of subject from the object they [scholars] perceive and describe are relevant in research focusing on particular experiences and practices identified as religious" (Ramey 2015, 60).

1) "Putting an experience in words defines the experience rather than simply reflecting the experience."
2) "Those being interviewed or making public statements, choose how they represent themselves and their experiences to another."

3) The researcher creates the third level by selecting which topics to research generally, which then influences whom he/she interviews, what data he/she collects and which parts he/she includes in his/her representation of the research object. (Ramey 2015, 61)

In order to be able to identify what is actually analyzed, the narrative or the experience, it is important to be conscious of the levels presented above. In the context of this research, the narrative or the definition of the experience is being analyzed, not the experience itself. When using this approach, it is important to find a balance between respecting the individual's statements and taking their statements at face value. This balance can be found when the distinction between 'an object and its cognition' is made (Ramey 2015, 78). Being aware of this distinction allows the researcher to be respectful towards the narrative of the individual about the process he or she experienced, while at the same time realizing the individual is already defining and analyzing the experience in the narrative. Although this approach has its limitations, when the researcher is aware of the limitations it can provide an insight in the experience of the process towards conversion.

To make the analysis of the conversion process easier, the stage model by Rambo is used in this research. Rambo never claimed that his stage model can universally be applied or that the order of the stages is the same for every conversion process. On the contrary, Rambo is fully aware of the fact that often people go back and forth between stages. However, his model is a helpful tool to study the interesting but very complex process of conversion. It is thus not the goal of this research to prove Rambo's stage model. This research uses the model as a framework, or analysis tool, to structure the interviews and analyze the data obtained from the interviews. Of course using the model in this way, enables the researcher to look in a systematic way whether the stages can be applied to the narratives of the respondents. Therefore, the researcher will pay some attention to the limits of the model in the discussion of the results.

## Method

### *Data collection*
The data used in this research has been collected through a short questionnaire with questions about the background of the respondents (Appendix A) and interviews about their conversion experience in real live or via Skype. All of the correspondence took place in Dutch.

### *Respondents*
The respondents were found through the personal network of the researcher. All of the Muslim respondents followed classes with the researcher at the Middle Eastern studies department of Leiden University. The researcher knew three of the Christian respondents from the church she attended at the moment, and three of them she did not know prior to the interview. The researcher either approached the respondents herself or contacted people in her network with the question if they knew people between 18 and 35 years who converted later in their lives to Christianity or Islam. The fact that all the respondents were either known by the researcher or by family and friends of the researcher has, without doubt, influenced the sample of respondents. Converts in her network who were not comfortable with talking to the researcher would not have agreed to participate in the research. The converts who did participate, were probably comfortable with talking to the researcher. It also influenced the stories they told to the researcher in some cases, since she knew most of the respondents, and in some cases she also knew (a part of) their conversion narrative. Because the

respondents are also known by other members of the social network of the researcher, the information given about the respondents below is limited in order to guarantee the anonymity of the respondents.

*Converts to Christianity*
The group of converts to Christianity consists of two males and three females between the ages of 22 and 37. They all have a Dutch nationality. The educational level of the respondents is either MBO or HBO and they came from middle to higher class families. Three of have had partners, all of them are Christians as well. The respondents are either raised in a Christian family or a non-religious family. The respondents all attend a church attend several different denominations. The ones who were raised religiously are all now attending a different denomination than they were brought up in. Their conversion processes are the intensification type or institutional transition type of conversion, as described in chapter 1. The conversion processes of the respondents who converted from a non-religious background to Christianity belong to the tradition transition type of conversion. With the exception of one respondent, all the respondents are actively involved in their church.

*Converts to Islam*
The group of converts to Islam consists of two females and three males between the ages of 21 and 36. They are or were students at Leiden University (Middle East Studies). They all have a Dutch nationality. The respondents come from middle to higher class families. Three of them have a partner who is Muslim as well.  The respondents were either raised in a Roman Catholic or non-religious family. This means that their conversion processes are the tradition transition type of conversion. All of the respondents indicate that they see themselves as non-denominational Muslims. None of the respondents are actively involved at the local mosque or within the local Muslim community.

**Questionnaire**
After the respondent indicated that he/she wanted to participate in the research, the respondent was send an email with some information about the thesis and a short questionnaire. The questionnaire contained questions about the age, gender, educational and religious background, as well as the current socio-economic situation and religious affiliation and activities of the respondent. In the beginning of the research, the researcher was planning to also look at other factors that influenced the conversion process, and therefore collected this information from the respondents. However, the researcher decided to focus on gender, and the other factors will not be addressed in this research. The questionnaire was adapted to the religious tradition the respondent identified with.

**Interview**
In the same email the respondent was requested to give a date and place for the interview. The respondent was free to choose a location, and was encouraged to find a place where he/she would feel comfortable and that was suitable for an interview. Some of the respondents chose to do the interview at the university, some others preferred at home or at work.  Since two of the respondents were either abroad or could not find the time to travel for the interview, the interviews were done via Skype.

Before the interview started the researcher had a more casual conversation with the respondent. When the researcher already knew the respondent she would ask about his/her studies and personal life. If she did not know the respondent yet, she first asked some questions about what the respondent does in his/her daily life etc. Following the casual conversation, the researcher explained the context of the interview. The respondent was told that the research in which he/she

participated was about the conversion process. The information given to the respondent prior the interview was limited, since the researcher did not want to steer the interviews. After the interview the respondent was free to ask more questions more about the research.

Before the recording was started, the researcher asked the respondent if he/she agreed with the interview being recorded. If the respondent agreed the researcher told the respondent that he/she was allowed to stop the recording anytime, and that they could refuse to answer if they were uncomfortable answering a question. The researcher informed the respondent the interview would be anonymized and that the information given by the respondent, would be treated confidentially. The respondent was told that the researcher was going to ask the respondent one 'big' question and give the respondent the freedom to tell his or her story. The researcher only interrupted or asked questions if she needed clarification or wanted to go deeper into a certain topic brought up by the respondent.

The interview was a semi-structured interview. The researcher made a topic list (Appendix B) based on the stage model by Rambo. Every stage had a certain amount of questions related to the features of the stage. However, these topics were not directly used in the interview session. The researcher started with the following question:

'Tell me about in what kind of family you grew up in, if you were raised religiously, and how, from there on, you eventually came to the point that you started to identify as a Muslim/Christian'.

The goal of the researcher was to give the respondent enough space to tell his or her story. The questions on the list were used when needed. The amount of questions asked during the interview depended on the information given by the respondent in their answer to the first question.

### Data capture
The interviews were recorded on the researcher's telephone and were literally transcribed afterwards. The researcher sometimes left out unfinished sentences and expletives. Relevant information given by the respondents before or after the recording were written down from memory by the researcher but was not used in this research.

### Analysis
Based on the *Richtlijnen voor kwaliteitsborging in gezondheids(zorg)onderzoek* of the AmCOGG[3] and Neuman's *Social research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches and* a method of analyzing interview transcripts introduced by Philip Burnard (1991), the data was analyzed. The interviews were coded by both the researcher and a second researcher in order to enhance the validity of the categorization of the data. The second researcher was unfamiliar with the subject and content of the study. Before the analysis started, the researchers discussed the way they were going to analyze the data. Both researchers coded the interviews separately from each other. The researchers used an inductive approach, which means they did not know what categories they would encounter. They were aware, however, they were looking for categories that were part of the conversion process of the respondents. The coding started with 'open-coding', or generating categories. The categories generated were then grouped together under higher order categories. These themes were compared with each other. Eventually a final list of themes was drawn for every respondent. The lists were discussed and some adjustments were made. The researchers strived to

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[3] Amsterdams Centrum voor Onderzoek naar Gezondheid en Gezondheidszorg

keep the wording of the categories close to or even the same as what the respondents had reported in their interviews. Then the respondents' categories were put in an overview divided among the stages of Rambo's model in excel. The categories of the converts to Islam and converts to Christianity were put in different overviews. The researcher worked with colors to establish which categories were reported multiple times within the two groups. The researcher then made an overview of how many times the category was reported. The overview was divided in the two groups, and the groups itself were divided in male and female respondents. In the next chapter the results of the analysis will be discussed.

# Chapter 4
# Results

In this chapter the results of the data collection described in chapter 3 will be treated. The categories derived from the interviews with the respondents are placed in the stages of the conversion process introduced by Lewis Rambo. It was not always entirely clear in what stage a certain category belonged. The choice was eventually based on the description of the stages by Rambo and the topic list used during the interviews. Some of the categories in the tables are literally what the respondents reported. Other, often higher order categories, were named by the researcher. This also influenced in some cases in what stage the categories were placed. The category 'unusual/religious experience', for example is, included in the 'crisis' stage. However, the category was not named as such by the respondents, and not all the respondents reported the experience as a 'crisis' moment that shaped their conversion process. The researcher saw a pattern in the experiences the respondents reported and also interpreted them, based on the literature, as part of the crisis stage. The more specific reasons for including categories in certain stages will be more extensively explained per stage.

The tables shown below are ordered according to the total amount of reports of a certain category. The categories reported by both groups are highlighted. Some of the tables are quite detailed, in order to keep the categories as close to the reports of the respondents as possible. At the same time, it is the goal of this research to give a more detailed idea of the conversion process and the similarities and differences between the conversion processes of individuals. Most of the attention in this chapter will thus be paid to the categories which are reported more than once. The categories are an indication of what the respondents deemed important enough to tell the researcher and/or saw it as an important factor in their conversion process. It is important to be aware that it does not always mean that a respondent did not experience or encounter a certain category if he or she did not report it.

## Context

Lewis Rambo explained the context stage as the total environment in which conversion takes place. In this research the 'context' stage does not include macro and mesocontext, but it focuses on microcontext. Rambo understood this to be the "(…) more immediate world of a person's family, friends, ethnic group, religious community, and neighborhood." (Rambo 1993, 22). Most of the categories placed in this stage relate to the microcontext during the youth and adult life of the respondents. It also includes the beliefs of the respondents in their youth and adult life, since these were influenced by the microcontext of the respondents. The categories treated here can thus be seen as the framework in which the conversion process of the respondents started and developed.

| | Converts to Islam | | | Converts to Christianity | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female (2) | Male (3) | Total | Female (3) | Male (2) | Total | TOTAL |
| **Context** | | | | | | | |
| Christian primary school | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 7 |
| Non-religious upbringing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 |
| Contact Catholicism through extended family | 2 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Always believed in god | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| Christian upbringing | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| No religious friends | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Supportive family | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Always interested in religion | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Stops attending church | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Party lifestyle | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Parents different nationalities | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Islamic grandparents | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Religious friends | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Unsupportive family | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Non-religious partner(s) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Happy youth | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Always searching for something | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Outspoken non-religious | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Dad not present during youth | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Drug abuse | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

### *Categories reported by both groups*

Most of the respondents went to a Christian primary school. The converts to Islam often reported they recognized the Bible stories they learned in school when they read the Quran later in their lives. Nevertheless, more than half of the respondents reported being raised non-religiously. The other respondents all reported having a Christian upbringing. However, there should be made a distinction here between the Christian denomination they were raised in. The converts to Christianity who had a religious upbringing, were brought up within the Protestant tradition. The converts to Islam who had a religious upbringing were raised within the Roman Catholic tradition. This brings us to the next notable finding: all of the converts to Islam came into contact with Catholicism through their (extended) family. One of the respondents, for example, had Catholic grandparents. The respondent's story shows how much impact the religious beliefs and practices of family can have on a child.

> [Respondent 7] I went to my grandfather and mother now and then, they live in Monster, and they were always very Catholic. So, when we were dropped there for two weeks because the school holidays had started, then, you know, my grandmother always prayed, before she started eating, and before she went to bed, and she always went to church. So when M. and I came there, we were Catholic, so to speak. Then we prayed, so it was always when we came back home, M. and I had the urge to still do that, and then it was like, what are you doing?[4]

Another notable finding that might be related to the contact with religion in childhood, is that most converts to Islam reported that they have always believed in God, from their youth on. One of the Converts to Christianity reports this as well.

There are also some categories that have been reported by both groups, however not as much as most of the categories treated above. A small minority of the respondents reported that they had no religious friends during their youth. Another category that has been reported by both groups is having a supportive family. What is meant with a supportive family is that the family reacted positively to the conversion as well the conversion process. For example, one of the converts to Christianity who reported having a supportive family, told the researcher her mother even bought her a Bible when she noticed the respondent's interest in Christianity.

### Converts to Islam

Categories multiple times reported by the converts to Islam only, are that they have always been interested in religion and that they have parents with different nationalities. Both respondents who reported the latter, had a Dutch mother and a father who had a different nationality. This also influenced the nature of the 'crisis' they reported, which will be discussed later. Only one of the converts to Islam reported having Islamic relatives.

### Converts to Christianity

Two categories that have multiple times been reported only by the converts to Christianity, are leaving the church of their parents in adolescence and that they had a 'party lifestyle' before their conversion. The latter is often reported as 'living the worldly life', which includes partying, drinking, using drugs etc.

> [Respondent 5] Well then, I have kind of lived a life of the world, a lot of partying and doing a lot of stuff.[5]

### Gender

There seem to be no categories that are clearly connected to either the male of the female converts.

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[4] *Ik ging weleens naar mijn opa en oma, in Monster wonen die, en die zijn wel heel erg katholiek altijd. Dus als we daar in de zomer twee weken werden gedropt omdat de schoolvakantie was begonnen dan, weet je, mijn oma die bad altijd wel, voordat ze ging eten, voordat ze ging slapen en die ging ook gewoon naar de kerk. Dus zodra M. en ik daar kwamen dan waren we ook katholiek zeg maar. Dan gingen we ook bidden enzo dus dan was het altijd als we terugkwamen thuis dan hadden M. en ik altijd de neiging om dat nog steeds te doen en dan was het echt zo van waar zijn jullie mee bezig?*

[5] *Nou goed toen heb ik best wel een leven in de wereld geleefd gewoon veel feesten en veel dingen doen.*

## Crisis

Lewis Rambo says that a crisis can be the igniter for a person to start the conversion process. It often poses a problem the individual wants to find a solution for. In the crisis stage the reported categories are very diverse, since the experiences the respondents describe are very personal. The categories included in this stage, are experiences that were either the igniter of a conversion moment or the start of a conversion process. All the experiences treated here were the type of experiences that, in retrospect, were important in the conversion process. Rambo also places extraordinary/mystical experiences in the crisis stage, and just like the other categories in the crisis stage, the unusual/religious experiences reported by the respondents eventually motivated conversion. Therefore, the unusual or religious experiences are also placed in this stage.

| | Converts to Islam | | | Converts to Christianity | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female (2) | Male (3) | Total | Female (3) | Male (2) | Total | TOTAL |
| **Crisis** | | | | | | | |
| Unusual/religious experience | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Relationship problems | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| Identity questions | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Insecure over self | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Disillusionment with Christianity | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Both grandfathers die | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Becomes aware of corruption financial system and world | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

***Categories reported by both groups***

Respondents in both groups reported having identity questions during their adolescence. An interesting detail is that the same two respondents who reported having parents with different nationalities, were also the ones who reported having identity questions during their adolescence. These identity questions also related to their cultural background and led to a search for answers.

> *[Respondent 9] And in high school, yes, I was rather a difficult adolescent, so then all the identity issues come up and all of those things play a part.[6]*

> *[Respondent 4] It was kind of a weird period. Yeah, where I really started to think a lot, I realized that afterwards. That I started to think a lot about who I was, where do I come from, where am I going, and all those choices and life really pressed on my shoulders.[7]*

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[6] *En op de middelbare school, ja, ik was best wel een moeilijke puber, dus dan komen al die identiteitskwesties en al die dingen die spelen mee.*

[7] *"Het was een beetje een gekke periode. Ja waar ik echt heel veel ben gaan nadenken realiseerde ik me achteraf. Dat ik heel veel ben gaan nadenken over wie je bent, waar kom ik vandaan, waar ga ik naartoe en al die keuzes en het leven dat drukte echt op mijn schouders."*

Also relationship problems are mentioned in the stories of respondents from both groups. Relationship problems refer to problems that eventually lead to a breakup. But the most notable category that has been reported by both groups is the unusual/religious experience. All of the converts to Christianity reported this category. Unusual/religious experiences are experiences that are explained by the respondents as such. The experiences varied from experiencing God's love to healing from a sudden illness. In the examples below it becomes clear how diverse the nature of the experiences were.

[Respondent 1] And I also already experienced God's love with me, without me having to do anything for it. It did not depend on me, on what I had to do, that I had to change. And I thought that was really cool, to experience this kind of love there, and be fully accepted, if I would lay there on the ground and started crying, it would have been alright.[8]

[Respondent 2] But then one night I became really ill. Really ill and then I left my bed and crawled to my host parents room over the floor. And I said: I am dying. And at that moment I really felt like I was dying. I don't know, it was in my belly. I was probably…I don't know what it was. Then they said, okay go back to your bed. And I thought, hello I am dying, be worried or something. Then they asked my host sister to come lie with me. And she said, M. I don't think you are ill. And that made me really angry because I thought I am going to die. And she said like no yes, I think yes that it is actually just the time for you to let God into your life. And I looked at her and thought okay. And then the pain suddenly left, and I still don't understand. Because for me it is still like, did it really happen. It is a little bit weird. But at that moment I just knew it was alright or something.[9]

[Respondent 6] And I remember that one time, yes that was very strange. That I laid in bed one night, and that I really thought, yes I want it very much, but I don't dare to. I was just praying to God a little bit, I don't know what to do and that I…somewhere I felt an energy flow in my body and that I suddenly saw things much clearer, like that I would tell my father and that it everybody would actually take it very lightly, and that everything would be okay and that I was worrying about nothing. And I drew so much strength from that moment.[10]

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[8] "En ik ervaarde ook al wel ook al Gods liefde bij me, zonder dat ik er iets voor hoefde te doen. Het was niet afhankelijk van mijn, wat ik moest doen, dat ik moest veranderen. En dat vond ik zo gaaf om te ervaren dat ik daar zo'n liefde voelde, en me helemaal geaccepteerd, al zou ik daar op de grond gaan liggen en huilen, dan was het prima geweest."

[9] "Maar toen werd ik op een nacht echt ontzettend ziek. Echt ontzettend ziek en toen ben ik van mijn bed naar mn hostouders kamer gekropen over de grond. En toen zei ik: ik ga dood. En op dat moment voelde het ook echt alsof ik doodging. Ik weet niet het was in mijn buik. Het zal wel gewoon… ik weet niet wat het was. Toen zeiden ze okay ga maar terug naar je bed. En ik dacht hallo ik ga dood, doe even bezorgd ofzo. Toen hadden m'n host-zus gevraag om bij me te liggen. En die zei, M. ik denk niet dat je ziek bent. En toen werd ik echt heel boos want ik dacht ik ga dood. En zei ze van, nee ja ik denk dat je eigenlijk dat het gewoon tijd is voor jou om God toe te laten in je leven. En toen keek ik haar aan, en toen dacht ik okay. En toen was die pijn in een keer weg, en ik snap dat nog steeds niet. Want voor mij is het nog steeds van, is dat echt gebeurd. Het is een beetje gek. Maar op dat moment wist ik gewoon dat het goed was ofzo"

[10] En ik weet nog dat ik toen een keer, ja dat was heel apart. Dat ik s avonds een keer in bed lag, en dat ik ook echt dacht, ja ik wil het heel graag maar ik durf het niet. Gewoon dat ik een beetje tot god aan het bidden was, ik weet niet wat ik doen moet en dat ik toen…ergens een soort van energiestroom in mijn lichaam voelde en dat ik

The last example is from the interview of the only convert to Islam who reported having an unusual experience. Contrary to the respondents of the other two examples, the convert to Islam does not define the experience as a religious experience. Not only were it chiefly converts to Christianity who reported an unusual/religious experience, they all attributed this experience to God. The only convert to Islam who reported an unusual/religious experience did not attribute this experience directly to God.

### Converts to Islam
There were no categories reported multiple times by the converts to Islam alone. One of the converts to Islam reported an interesting turning point in his life, namely he became aware of the corruption of the (financial) world, which would lead to the search for a solution. Another convert to Islam reported being disenchanted with Christianity.

### Converts to Christianity
Among the Christian respondent's insecurity over oneself was reported.

### Gender
There are no major results with regard to similarities in the conversion process that seem to be connected to gender. The respondents who reported identity questions were all men. The respondents that reported insecurity with regard to themselves were female converts to Christianity. The same female converts reported finding acceptance and security with God later in their lives.

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*gewoon dingen opeens heel helder zag, van dat ik het mijn vader zou vertellen en dat het allemaal eigenlijk dat ze het heel luchtig op zouden nemen en dat het allemaal okay zou zijn en dat ik me eigenlijk druk maakte om niets. En toen dat moment daar heb ik toen zoveel kracht uit kunnen putten.*

## Encounter

The 'encounter' stage is explained by Rambo as the stage in which the potential convert meets a proselytizer or advocate of the religious tradition the potential convert will eventually convert to. This person or these persons try to provide the potential convert with a new religious orientation. Rambo sees the advocate as someone who is actively trying to provide this new orientation and has tactics in order to reach his or her goal (Rambo 1993, 97). This research does not assume that all the advocates reported by the respondent were actively proselytizing. The definition of advocate is thus somewhat broadened and now also includes Muslims or Christians who influenced the respondent's conversion process without actively trying to convert the respondent.

In Rambo's model the stage 'encounter' is placed after 'quest'. However, almost all the respondents encountered an advocate of the religious tradition they would eventually convert to before they started the quest. It was often the advocate that actually triggered the quest. The same table is divided in two parts. The first part shows what the nature of the relationship between the advocate and the respondent was. The second part shows the role of the advocate in the conversion process of the respondent, or in what way they brought the respondent into contact with the religion the respondent would eventually convert to.

| | Converts to Islam | | | Converts to Christianity | | | |
| | Female (2) | Male (3) | Total | Female (3) | Male (2) | Total | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Encounter** | | | | | | | |
| Friends | 2 | 2 | **4** | 2 | 1 | **3** | 7 |
| Family | 1 | 1 | **2** | 1 | 1 | **2** | 4 |
| Partner | 1 | 2 | **3** | 1 | 0 | **1** | 4 |
| Strangers | 0 | 0 | **0** | 1 | 1 | **2** | 2 |
| First contact with religion | 2 | 2 | **4** | 2 | 1 | **3** | 7 |
| Discuss religion | 1 | 2 | **3** | 1 | 2 | **3** | 6 |
| Converts | 2 | 0 | **2** | 1 | 1 | **2** | 4 |
| Inspiring attitude to life | 1 | 2 | **3** | 0 | 0 | **0** | 3 |
| Answer questions | 1 | 0 | **1** | 2 | 0 | **2** | 3 |
| Give study material | 1 | 1 | **2** | 0 | 0 | **0** | 2 |
| Involved in personal life | 0 | 0 | **0** | 2 | 0 | **2** | 2 |
| Encourages to do Alpha course | 0 | 0 | **0** | 1 | 1 | **2** | 2 |
| Take to church | 0 | 0 | **0** | 1 | 1 | **2** | 2 |
| Teach about religion | 1 | 0 | **1** | 0 | 0 | **0** | 1 |
| Friends start practicing | 0 | 1 | **1** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Contact with classic teachings | 0 | 1 | **1** | 0 | 0 | **0** | 1 |
| Asks if person is Muslim | 0 | 1 | **1** | 0 | 0 | **0** | 1 |
| Help understand Bible | 0 | 0 | **0** | 1 | 0 | **1** | 1 |
| Spontaneous meeting | 0 | 0 | **0** | 0 | 1 | **1** | 1 |
| Tell about conversion experience | 0 | 0 | **0** | 0 | 1 | **1** | 1 |
| Try to convince to convert | 0 | 0 | **0** | 0 | 1 | **1** | 1 |

***Nature of relationship with advocate***

With regard to the nature of the relationship of the advocate and respondent, the respondents reported that the advocates are mostly friends and family. Respondents from both groups also

reported having a partner who is Muslim or Christian during their process of conversion. Having a religious partner was more often reported among converts to Islam than converts to Christianity. One of the Muslim respondent reported no encounter with anyone at all. Only after he converted he met Muslims and got Muslim friends. His conversion process existed mainly out of studying Islam for himself. Two of the converts to Christianity met strangers who discussed Christianity with them. One of the respondents describes meeting random strangers who told him something about Christianity:

> *[Respondent 4] I had a lot of encounters with people, that was very special. Also spontaneous encounters, like I was sitting in the cinema and then next to me someone was sitting who turned out to be a Christian, and I had that a few times in a row. And they told me something, or showed be something, or told me something about their own experiences.[11]*

### Role of the advocate in the conversion process

Not all the advocates of Christianity or Islam had the same role in the conversion process. Both groups reported that the first time they came into contact with Islam or Christianity was through meeting someone who was a Muslim or Christian. Both groups reported having people in their lives, or meeting people they discussed the religious tradition with. Many of the respondents came into contact with someone who already converted to Islam or Christianity. People who answered questions about the preferred religion were also reported by both groups. For the converts to Christianity, people who encouraged them to do an Alpha course, took them to church, and/or who were involved in their personal life were important in the process of conversion. This involvement in the personal life of the converts took on different shapes. Often it was about help or being a sympathetic listener in difficult times, like in the example below.

> *[Respondent 3] And N. has a cousin who also converted, and he visited me a lot at the moment I was alone. He said, you shouldn't go to Greece, you should do an Alpha course, then you will feel good and then you won't feel alone anymore.*
> [Researcher] And that cousin, did you have a lot of conversations about religion with him?
> *Yes, well more like I was searching for what I should do with my life. And that he often gave faith as an answer, and what it had done for him.[12]*

Muslims who inspired them with their attitude to life were reported by a majority of the converts to Islam. These people triggered something with the potential converts, and enhanced their curiosity in

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[11] *Ik had heel veel ontmoetingen met mensen dat was heel bijzonder. Ook spontane ontmoetingen gewoon dat ik ergens was in de bioscoop en dat ik naast iemand zat en die bleek een christen te zijn, en dat had ik een aantal keer achter elkaar had ik dat. En die vertelde me dan iets, of die lieten iets zien, of die vertelde iets over hun eigen ervaringen.*

[12] *En N. heeft een neef die was ook toch geloof gekomen en die heeft mij toen heel veel opgezocht op de momenten dat ik alleen was. Hij zei, je moet niet naar Griekenland gaan, je moet een Alpha cursus gaan doen, dan voel je je pas goed en dan voel je je niet meer alleen.*
Researcher: En die neef, had je daar ook veel gesprekken mee over het geloof?
*Ja, nou meer dat ik zoekende was naar wat ik nu moest met mijn leven. En dat hij dan vaak als antwoord kwam met het geloof en wat dat voor hem had gedaan.*

Islam. Also Muslims who gave them study material about Islam after discussing Islam with them, were reported several times. Other categories are only reported one time, but are very important in the conversion process of the respondent who reported it. For example, one of the respondents reported that a classmate asked him if he was a Muslim. This was a turning point in the conversion process of the respondent. He started identifying as a Muslim and also started to think if he actually deserved the title 'Muslim'.

> *[Respondent 9]  And then, after such a debate  during social science or history someone came to me one time and he said…I think it was about a war in Gaza, and then this guy… yeah are you actually a Muslim or not? And I think that really was the turning point like yeah, how about that, am I or not? And I think that at that point the actual turning point came, like okay, yes maybe I am culturally, but do I deserve the title? Because yeah, that means something, it is not just, yes I am a Muslim. You know that…you have to fast, you know that you have to pray. So I think that it was set in motion then.[13]*

Furthermore, it is important to notice that the majority of the categories in this stage is reported by the Christian respondents.

### Gender
Again, there were not many gender specific similarities. A few things stood out: the respondents who reported advocates answering their questions were all female converts. At the same time, the converts who had discussions about Islam or Christianity with Muslims or Christians were predominantly male converts. It were only female converts to Christianity who reported advocates who were involved in their personal live and who supported them in difficult times.

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[13] *En toen na zo'n debat maatschappijleer of geschiedenis kwam er een keer iemand naar me toe en die zei… het ging volgens mij over een oorlog in Gaza, en toen zei zo'n jonge… ja ben jij nou eigenlijk moslim of niet. En ik denk dat dat voor mij echt het keerpunt was van ja, ben ik het eigenlijk of niet?*
*En ik denk dat toen echt die omslag kwam van okay, ja misschien cultureel maar hè verdien ik die titel, want ja dan betekent dat toch wat, het is toch niet alleen ja ik ben moslim. Je weet toch dat je.. je moet vasten, je weet toch dat je moet bidden. Dus ik denk dat toen het balletje is gaan rollen.*

## Quest & Interaction

Lewis Rambo describes the 'quest' stage as the quest for fulfillment or solutions for problems created in the 'crisis' stage. In the 'interaction' stage the potential convert decides to continue with the religious group he or she is interested in and starts to actively interact with the religious group and its religious beliefs and practices. The categories included in this stage are the ways the respondents shaped their search for fulfillment, peace, solutions and information about Islam and Christianity. It also includes some of the emotions and feelings that were caused by this quest. The stages 'quest' and 'interaction' are not always very well discernable in the stories of the respondents. In the process of some respondents the two stages blend into each other, and often the actions of the respondents are very much alike in both stages. Therefore, they are dealt with together here.

The reader is presented with three tables, in order to make a clear overview of the large amount of categories in this stage. The first table contains all the categories reported more than once. The second table shows the categories reported once by converts to Christianity and the third table contains the categories reported once by converts to Islam.

| | Converts to Islam | | | Converts to Christianity | | | |
| Quest/Interaction | Female (2) | Male (3) | Total | Female (3) | Male (2) | Total | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Prays | 2 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 8 |
| Reads the Bible | 0 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 6 |
| Goes to church | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 5 |
| Follows Alpha course | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 5 |
| Becomes part of Christian youth group/bible study group | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| Watches YouTube videos about Islam | 1 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Goes to the Middle East | 2 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Finds Islam most logical choice | 1 | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Reads the Quran | 1 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Reads Christian books | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| Goes to khutbah | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Studies Middle Eastern studies | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Goes to lectures about Islam | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Conversations about Islam with Muslim friends | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Reads books about Islam | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Sees Quran superior to and a correction of the Bible | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Feels a need for change | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Goes to Christian events | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Conversations about religion | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Disappointment about having no religious experience | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

### Categories reported in both groups

What becomes clear from the tables is that the two stages have a very diverse range of categories. One of the most reported categories in general is prayer. Almost all respondents said they started to pray at some point in their process. In this case a distinction should be made between the Islamic prayer (salat) and praying as 'talking to God'. The converts to Islam all started to do their Islamic prayers after they started to identify as Muslims. However, some of them already 'talked to God' before they identified as Muslim or had even started their 'quest'. All the converts to Christianity already prayed before they started to identify as Christians. In both groups, becoming part of a Christian youth group or Bible study group was reported. Respondents from both groups also reported reading the Bible and books about Christianity.

| | Converts to Islam | | | Converts to Christianity | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Female (2) | Male (3) | Total | Female (3) | Male (2) | Total | TOTAL |
| Quest/Interaction | | | | | | | |
| Follows lessons about Quran | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Searches for mistake | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Feels compelled to convert | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Believes religion to be perfect | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Participates in Ramadan | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Learns more about Mohammad | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Reads about the Middle East | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Does research on the internet | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Reads philosophical and historical books | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Friends start praying | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Felt strong affinity with Islam | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Irritated by strictness friends | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Feels attracted to Middle Eastern culture and religion | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Feels more attracted to Islam than Christianity | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Becomes very critical | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Sees contrast between grandfathers and decides that she believes | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Watches debates between Christians and Muslims | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

### Converts to Islam

Only converts to Islam reported reading the Quran and books about Islam. The converts also reported watching YouTube videos about Islam in order to gain more information. For one of the respondents, watching a documentary about Islam was what led to the respondent's conversion moment.

*[Respondent 8] Subsequently you see a documentary, I can send it to you if you want me to, it is called Islamica, and there in a matter of 3 hours and 13 minutes it is al made very clear. But at a certain moment, I had built all of that up in three years, and at a certain moment I see that documentary, with every…because I really spend hundreds of hours watching these kind of things. But yeah, at a certain moment I concluded that, after the documentary ended… Okay it was so logical at the given moment, like okay, this is just…I believe in God, I believe in his prophets, I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe in everything, I believe in the Quran, whether I want it or not, I believe that what it says is the word of*

*someone who is beyond this planet, beyond this earthly existence. Of God, only God can know this and tell it to humanity.[14]*

Apart from reading and watching videos about Islam, going to the Friday prayer (this prayer includes a sermon) having conversations about Islam with Muslim friends and going to lectures about Islam were also reported. All of the converts to Islam studied Middle Easter studies at Leiden University but only two respondents reported it as being important in their conversion process. Some of them were not yet converted before they started studying Middle Easter studies, and got a lot of information about Islam and made (more) Muslim friends there. Almost all of the respondents eventually came to the point that they saw Islam as the most logical choice. What they found when they researched the religion made sense and was very logical in their eyes. The two converts to Islam who also read the Bible found the Quran to be superior to the Bible, among others, because of the more coherent and logical message of the Quran. One of them also reported being disillusioned with Christianity after learning more about it.

Furthermore, the majority of the categories in these stages is reported by the converts to Islam. Most of the categories in these stages have only been reported by one respondent. Many of these categories show a way of gaining more information about Islam. Some of them are about what made the converts start identifying as a Muslim or why they started to look into Islam. One of converts to Islam talked about how the moment that his friends started to pray regularly was a turning point for him.

*[Respondent 9] And I noticed at a given moment that there were boys in my environment who went beyond just talking about it, and actually started to pray, and actually started to go to the Friday Prayer, and all those things. And then I was touched. That was, so to speak, the most logical next step. Because I was at certain moment…maybe I was done or something, the whole time to…that whole talk was nice and sweet. But at a certain moment you also have to do something. I realized that there were five pillars and that you have to do something in return. And I think that that the turning point was at that moment.[15]*

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[14] *Vervolgens zie je, een documentaire, die kan ik je wel sturen als je wilt, die heet Islamica, daar wordt dus zeg maar alles in een kwestie van 3 uur en 13 minuten, wordt het haarfijn uit de doekjes gedaan. Maar op een gegeven moment, ik had dus zeg maar, ik had dat allemaal opgebouwd over drie jaar, op een gegeven moment zie ik die documentaire, met alle..want ik heb echt aan honderden uren aan dat soort dingen gekeken. (…)Maar ja, op een gegeven moment, concludeerde ik na afloop van die documentaire. Oke, het is op een gegeven moment zo logisch, van oke, dit is gewoon, ik geloof in God, ik geloof in zijn profeten, ik geloof in Jezus Christus, ik geloof in alles, ik geloof in de Quran, of ik het nou wil of niet, ik geloof dat wat daar staat het woord is iemand die boven deze planeet, boven dit aardse leven staat. Van God, alleen God kan dit weten en aan de mensheid zeggen.*

[15] *En ik merkte op een gegeven moment in mijn omgeving dat er jongens waren die het praten erover overstegen en ook daadwerkelijke gingen bidden en ook daadwerkelijk naar het vrijdagsgebed gingen noemt het maar op. En toen ben ik inderdaad aangeraakt. Dat was zeg maar de logische volgende stap. Want ik was er op een gegeven moment wel… misschien wel klaar mee ofzo om het zeg maar de hele tijd… Dat hele praatje was leuk en aardig. Maar op een gegeven moment moet je ook wat doen toch. Ik besefte me wel dat je 5 zuilen had en dat je daar ook wat tegenover stond. En ik denk dat dat het keerpunt op dat moment was.*

|  | Converts to Islam | | | Converts to Christianity | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Female (2) | Male (3) | Total | Female (3) | Male (2) | Total | TOTAL |
| **Quest/Interaction** | | | | | | | |
| Listens to Christian songs | 0 | 0 | **0** | 0 | 1 | **1** | 1 |
| Follows Bèta course | 0 | 0 | **0** | 0 | 1 | **1** | 1 |
| Change in attitude | 0 | 0 | **0** | 0 | 1 | **1** | 1 |
| Starts thinking about practical consequences conversion | 0 | 0 | **0** | 0 | 1 | **1** | 1 |
| Thinks it is not for him/her | 0 | 0 | **0** | 1 | 0 | **1** | 1 |
| Looks for the truth | 0 | 0 | **0** | 0 | 1 | **1** | 1 |

### *Converts to Christianity*

All of the converts to Christianity reported going to a church and following the Alpha course[16]. Some of them reported visiting other Christian events like a concert of a Christian singer. Also conversations about Christianity were reported. Two of the converts to Christianity were disappointed that they did not have a religious experience after they prayed. And two of the respondents reported feeling a need for change in their lives, which made them look more into Christianity. The converts to Christianity also have relatively more in categories in common than the converts to Islam in this stage. Most of the categories reported by the converts to Christianity were reported multiple times, while most of the categories reported by converts to Islam were only reported once.

### *Gender*

In this stage there appear to be more gender specific similarities than in other stages. Having conversations with people about religion, either Islam or Christianity, is more often reported by female converts than male converts. And a need for change was only reported by female converts to Christianity. Reading books about Christianity has only been reported by male respondents. The categories that have only been reported once, are predominantly reported by male converts.

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[16] Alpha is a series of sessions exploring the Christian faith, typically run over eleven weeks. Each talk looks at a different question around faith and is designed to create conversation. (source: www.alpha.org)

## Commitment

Rambo describes the 'Commitment' stage as the stage in which the conversion process in consummated. Part of this stage is that the convert gives a public display of his or her changed status as a convert. The categories included here are about the converts making the conversion 'official' for themselves as well as for their environment and religious group they now belong to.

| | Converts to Islam | | | Converts to Christianity | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Commitment** | Female (2) | Male (3) | Total | Female (3) | Male (2) | Total | TOTAL |
| Active participation in church/mosque | 0 | 0 | **0** | 3 | 2 | **5** | 5 |
| Says shahada | 2 | 3 | **5** | 0 | 0 | **0** | 5 |
| Says shahada in private | 1 | 2 | **3** | 0 | 0 | **0** | *3* |
| Says shahada in mosque | 2 | 2 | **4** | 0 | 0 | **0** | *4* |
| Tells environment | 2 | 0 | **2** | 1 | 1 | **2** | 4 |
| Gets Baptized | 0 | 0 | **0** | 2 | 1 | **3** | 3 |
| Prays in Mosque | 0 | 1 | **1** | 0 | 0 | **0** | 1 |
| Did not tell parents | 0 | 1 | **1** | 0 | 0 | **0** | 1 |

In this stage, the only category reported by both groups is 'telling the environment of their changed status'. The majority of the converts to Christianity report being baptized, and all of the Muslim respondent report saying the shahada[17], however not all of them reported doing this in the mosque, some of them only said the shahada in private. Three of them said the shahada first in private, and saw the saying the shahada in the mosque as a formality.

> [Respondent 10] Yes, I said the shahada at home. That was a month or two after I came back from Argentina, so that summer when I was looking into it. And after that I did it again…then it was said you have to do it again. There was a really sweet Imam…then I said okay then, I will do it again in the mosque. But that was more something like, after prayer, there were maybe twenty or thirty people, and then I did it. But I already felt before that moment that I was a Mus…I already said the shahada.[18]

None of the converts to Islam actively participate in the local Mosque, one them reported praying in a mosque nearby. The converts to Christianity all actively participate in the church they attend, often after being encouraged or asked by fellow believers to take on a task in the church.

### Gender
There are no gender specific similarities found in this stage.

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[17] The shahada an Islamic creed declaring: 'There is no god but God. Muhammad is the messenger of God'.

[18] *Ja ik heb de shahada thuis gedaan. Dat was toen ik een maand of twee nadat ik uit Argentinië kwam, die zomer toen ik me dus daarin aan het verdiepen was. En daarna heb ik dat nog wel een keert…toen werd erg gezegd je moet het nog een keertje doen. Toen was er een hele lieve Imam die…toen zei ik van, nou dan doe ik het ook nog wel een keer in de moskee. Maar dat was meer iets van, na het gebed, er waren misschien 20 of dertig man ofzo, en toen heb ik dat gedaan. Maar voor mijn gevoel was ik daarvoor als mos…had ik de shahada al gedaan.*

## Conversion moment

There is not always a discernable conversion moment in the conversion process of the converts, and if there is one, it is not always in the same stage. Therefore, an extra heading is added to get a clear picture of who did have a discernable conversion moment and who did not. Only if the respondents clearly reported a discernable conversion moment it was seen as such. Sometimes the researcher distinguished a moment of conversion in the account of a converts, but did not include it because the convert denied having such a moment.

| | Converts to Islam | | | Converts to Christianity | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female (2) | Male (3) | Total | Female (3) | Male (2) | Total | TOTAL |
| **Conversion moment** | | | | | | | |
| No discernable moment of conversion | 2 | 2 | **4** | 1 | 0 | **1** | 5 |
| Discernable moment of conversion | 1 | 0 | **1** | 2 | 2 | **4** | 5 |

With a discernable conversion moment is meant that there was a clear moment at which the convert started to identify as a Muslim or Christian. What becomes clear from the table is that most converts to Christianity did have a discernable moment of conversion, and most Converts to Islam did not.

### *Gender*
There are no gender specific similarities found in this stage.

## Consequences

It was made clear in the beginning of this research that the focus is on the conversion process itself, and not on the consequences of conversion. Therefore, there was not much attention for the consequences of conversion in the interviews. However, some of the reported categories reported by the respondents clearly fit in this stage. Therefore, there will be a brief description of the results in this stage. The 'Consequences' stage is, according to Rambo, about the effects of the conversion process. These effects differ from individual to individual. The categories included in this stage are the ones reported by the converts as things that happened after they started they started to identify as a Christian or Muslim. Choices they made, the reaction from their environment and emotions and feelings.

| | Converts to Islam | | | Converts to Christianity | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female (2) | Male (3) | Total | Female (3) | Male (2) | Total | TOTAL |
| **Consequences** | | | | | | | |
| Experiences peace | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Negative reaction parents | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Loses friends | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| People in environment convert | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Initially: very strict for herself | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| In conflict with herself | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Feels satisfied | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| God now very important in life | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Stops drinking | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Made him a better person | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Positive reaction parents | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Finds herself better weaponed against difficulties | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Relationship with partner becomes better | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Gets assurance from god | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Jealousy disappeared | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Dreams and ambitions change | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Breaks with everything | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Feels he has nothing left/does not know what to do with his life | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| All questions are answered | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Lives in a daze for 6 months | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Feels happy | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

*Categories reported by both groups*

Again, there is only one category in this stage that has been reported by both groups. As a consequence of conversion, two of each group experienced more peace. Furthermore, only among the converts to Christianity were some categories reported twice, and they were all connected to the reaction of their environment: negative reaction from their parents, losing friends, and people in their environment (friends and family) also start to convert to Christianity. The rest of the categories are mostly about the consequences in the personal life and feelings of the converts. Some of the converts from both groups had first a difficult period as a consequence of their conversion. This difficult time

was connected to the choices they made after their conversion. One of the converts to Christianity reported breaking with everything, which led to a period in which he felt somewhat lost.

> *[Respondent 5] But then, after I came to faith, my expectation and hope were really big. God would take care of everything. I was probably going to serve [God] somewhere, I felt like there were going to happen extraordinary things. But what I actually experience, because I broke with everything from my old life, I actually kind of fell in a hole, where I had nothing. I did have any Christian people around me or anything, and I already burned all the bridges behind me. Yeah, so although I was in a daze, I had for six months something like what am I going to do with my life now.*[19]

*Gender*
There are no gender specific similarities found in this stage.

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[19] *Maar daarna toen ik tot geloof was gekomen, toen was mijn verwachting en hoop echt ontiegelijk groot. God zou alles voor me regelen. Ik zou me werk ik zou vast ergens in de bediening gaan, er gingen hele bijzondere dingen gebeuren volgens mijn eigen gevoel. Maar wat ik vervolgens ervaarde was omdat ik brak met alles van mijnoude leven, viel ik eigenlijk in een soort gat, waarbij ik gewoon niks had. Ik had nog geen christelijke kring opgebouwd ofzo en ik had al mijn schepen al achter me verbrand. Ja dus ik heb echt ondanks dat ik in die roes zat, heb ik echt wel daarna een half jaar gewoon zoiets gehad van wat moet ik nou met mijn leven.*

# Chapter 5
# Discussion

In chapter 2 we ended with some hypotheses based on the research presented there. We expected that the potential similarities found in the conversion processes of the converts to Islam and Christianity would be mainly attributable to the religious tradition the converts converted to. We also asked ourselves in what stages the biggest differences between the two groups can be found, or in other words, what stages will show the similarities attributable to Islam or Christianity most clearly. In addition, we expected, based on our review of prior studies, that gender of the converts would not play a very important role. A more detailed and comparative look into the conversion processes of the converts to Islam and Christianity should reveal if these hypotheses are right. The results in chapter 4 have already shown that there are many similarities across individuals in the conversion processes. This chapter will look into the main similarities per stage, and whether these similarities are found among all the converts, or only among the converts to Islam or converts to Christianity. In addition, we will consider the similarities that do not seem to be attributable to the religious tradition but to the gender of the converts; the similarities that are only reported by male or female converts regardless of the religious tradition they converted to.

## Context

Looking at the categories mentioned in the 'context' stage, contact with Christianity seems to be of importance for both converts to Islam as well as converts to Christianity. Most of the converts came into contact with Christianity when they were young; they were either raised in a Christian family or came into contact with Christianity through their extended family. This familiarity with Christianity has for many of the converts been vital in their conversion process in multiple ways. It is among the converts to Islam that this pattern is most present. One of the consequences that seem to be related to this contact is belief in a God throughout their lives. Patrick Bowen found the same pattern in his research among converts to Islam in Denver. Many of his Muslim respondents were raised in Christian families, and left the church later in their lives, not because they rejected the beliefs of the church, such as the belief in God, but for other reasons like seeing the leaders of the church as hypocrites (Bowen 2009, 47). With regard to the converts to Christianity, the contact with religion is also an important factor, but it does not show the same consistent pattern as among the converts to Islam. Not all of the converts to Christianity were raised religiously, and only one reported a belief in God throughout her life. The converts to Christianity who were raised in a Christian family left the church, just like the respondents of Bowen, and lived a 'party life'. Other religions do not seem to play an important role in the conversion processes of both converts to Islam and converts to Christianity.

The converts did not report religious pluralism in their environment when they grew up, although Karin van Nieuwkerk and Joshua Iyadurai both found that religious pluralism in the environment of the converts to Christianity and Islam when they grew up was very important. But the converts in this research did not encounter any religion, other than Christianity, and the converts to Islam only encountered Islam later in their lives, except for one of the respondents who had Islamic grandparents. However, this does not mean that the converts did not encounter other meaning systems like atheism or agnosticism. It is very likely, since they grew up in the Netherlands, that they encountered people who were not religious at all, which might have influenced their conversion process. So, although religious pluralism is not reported by the respondents, it is likely that it did play a

role in their conversion process. Something else that played a significant role in the conversion processes of some of the converts to Islam was a kind of cultural pluralism in their environment, namely parents who had different cultural backgrounds. This mixed cultural background led in its turn to specific categories reported in the crisis stage.

## Crisis

Prior empirical research discussed in chapter 2 focused often on life problems as a very important factor in the conversion process. In the diverse range of problems they found were also problems that were only part of the conversion processes of converts to Islam or converts to Christianity, just as in this research. The converts to Islam report having identity questions in their adolescence. Their questions seem to be connected to the fact that they have one parent with a nationality other than the Dutch nationality. They started to look for their roots and question who they were in terms of nationality and religion. This corresponds to what Ines Jindra and Monika Wohlrab-Sahr found in their research among converts to Islam. They concluded that converts to Islam often had identity problems related to cultural identity. One of the converts to Christianity also reported having identity questions, however his identity questions did not relate to his cultural identity but to his study and choice of occupation. Other problems reported by both groups were relationship problems. Ines Jindra also writes that for the majority of the converts to different religious traditions she researched, relationship problems were what triggered their conversion process.

According to the research in chapter 2, life problems heighten the structural availability of the potential converts. Structural availability being the potential convert putting him or herself in a situation where it is very likely to get in contact with a religious group or tradition. This heightened structural availability is somewhat visible in the conversion process of, for example, the converts who reported identity questions. The questions were leading in the 'quest' and 'interaction' stage, since the questions made them go on a search for answers. This heightened the structural availability of the potential converts because it led them to open up to finding answers in religion. However, often the converts had already been in contact with the religious group or tradition, and this had already triggered the identity questions. So contact with the religious tradition/group rather triggered the 'life problem' that should lead to a heightened structural availability, than that the life problem led the potential convert to the religious tradition/group. So although structural availability plays a small role, it does not seem to play a very important role in the conversion processes of the converts in this research.

Something that does play an important role in the conversion process of the converts to Christianity is the unusual/religious experience. This also seems to be the most important difference between the converts to Islam and Christianity in this stage. As said in chapter 4, the convert to Islam who reported such an experience did not attribute it to God, or called it a religious experience, whereas the converts to Christianity all attributed the experience to God. The fact that almost all the converts to Christianity reported a religious experience means that this is an important similarity in the conversion processes of converts to Christianity. This might be explained by the idea of conversion present in Christianity, or at least in the Christian tradition (a form of evangelical Protestantism) the converts came into contact with. This tradition tends to focus on the "born-again" experience, which entails a sudden conversion after crisis (Hood, Hill and Spilka 2009, 207). The idea of conversion present in these traditions may have influenced the converts' idea of conversion, and created a certain expectation. Some of the converts to Christianity reported being disappointed because they did not have an unusual/religious experience, which seems to show this certain expectation. Anne Taves says

that, even if the convert's experience is real to the convert, "the epistemological value of the experience is dependent upon discursive meanings that entail public interpretations". Only then the experience gets the label of a 'religious experience', according to Taves (Hood, Hill and Spilka 2009, 289). This would mean that the religious experiences the respondents had, were only *religious* experiences because they were interpreted as such by their religious environment. The convert to Islam did not have a *religious* experience, because the religious environment did not see it as such. If the *occurrence* of an experience also dependents on "discursive meanings that entail public interpretations" is hard to say. The heightened expectation for a religious experience was very likely created by the religious environment of the converts to Christianity, and this might explain why they had such an experience. At least it explains why they saw their experience as a religious experience, and the converts to Islam did not give it the same label. Thus, people in the environment of the converts play an important role in the conversion processes of the converts as will also appear in the next stage.

## Encounter

Just as many converts in the research discussed in chapter 2, many of the converts in this research met people or had people in their lives who played an important role in their conversion process. Often they are people who are close to the respondents: family, friends and partners. Only the converts to Christianity also reported meeting strangers who discussed Christianity with them. All of the people who were important in the conversion process of the converts, adhered to the religious tradition the potential converts would eventually convert to and they were often converts themselves. The most important role the advocates played for both converts to Islam and Christianity, was bringing them into contact with Islam or Christianity for the first time. This was often not done purposefully, but rather by 'just being' a Muslim or Christian in the environment of the potential convert. This corresponds with the findings of Patrick Bowen among converts to Islam. Most of his respondents reported becoming interested in Islam after meeting a Muslim and building a relationship with this person (Bowen 2009, 54). His findings seem to apply to converts to Christianity as well. As is the case with another important role of the advocates among converts to Islam. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad concludes that people who took the time to "explain, mentor and guide" the potential converts were essential in the conversion process of the converts to Islam (Haddad 2006, 27). The same is found in this research for both converts to Islam and Christianity. Many of the converts reported that the advocates they met informed the potential convert about Islam or Christianity through discussions with the potential converts, or by answering questions of the potential convert. Again, it was often not the advocates themselves who initiated the discussions, but the potential converts, and it were the potential converts who asked the questions.

For the converts to Christianity specifically, it seems that the roles the advocates had in their conversion process also were more active. They reported several times that the advocates took them to church, encouraged them to do the Alpha course, or were actively involved in the personal life of the potential converts during a difficult time. Also the categories that were only reported once by converts to Christianity, implied a more active role of the advocate in bringing the potential convert into contact with Christianity. This might also explain why the majority of the categories in this stage is reported by Christians. This probably does not mean that advocates were more important in the process of conversion of the converts to Christianity then of the converts to Islam, but it means that the advocates had a more active role in the conversion process, and were therefore mentioned more often. The advocates in the process of the converts to Islam do not seem to take on the same active

role. As said before, 'just being' a Muslim is an important role of the advocates in the conversion process of the converts to Islam. The fact that being inspired by the attitude to life of Muslims in their environment was reported often, proves this; as does the fact that study material was only given if the advocate knew the potential convert was interested. Also the other categories seem to show that he potential convert had to take the first step, whereupon the advocate would react to the interest of the potential convert. The advocates thus often triggered the search for answers, solutions and information and played an important role during the search as well. Which form this quest took will be discussed in the next chapter

## Quest & Interaction

The quest and interaction stages is where the differences between the converts to Islam and Christianity are most visible. Although some categories are reported in both groups, these categories actually point towards a big difference between the converts to Islam and the converts to Christianity in the path they take in their quest. Namely, converts to Christianity as well as converts to Islam reported looking into Christianity. For the converts to Islam this means that they first looked into another religion before they started to study Islam. However, to the converts to Christianity, there does not seem to have been another religion that interested them. Not one of the converts to Christianity looked into other religions. Some have been raised with Christianity and 'return' to this religious tradition without considering other religions, others came into contact with Christianity later in their lives and started researching it without considering researching other religions.

For the converts to Islam, the conversion process takes a different path in these stages. As can be seen, two of the respondents first read the Bible and three of them looked Christianity in other ways. It is likely that this is connected to the fact that they came into contact with Christianity in their youth, and when their 'quest' started they first looked into the religious tradition they were already familiar with. There is a pattern present here. The converts to Islam who encountered Muslims in their adolescence and built a relationship with them, turned to Islam almost right away. The respondents who either did not meet Muslims during their adolescence, but later in their lives or after the conversion moment, looked first into the religious tradition they were familiar with. The latter group thus started with looking into Christianity and were somewhat disenchanted with Christianity or just thought that Islam had a more appealing message. They started looking into Islam, either at the same time, or after they looked into Christianity and read the Quran. They eventually concluded that the Quran is superior to the Bible and found its message more logical and coherent. When they encounter the intellectual evidence of Islam, they see conversion to Islam as the most logical thing to do. This was also found by Yvonne Yazdeck Haddad among the converts to Islam she researched. Many of them pointed out the theological superiority of the Islam over Christianity, and how the intellectual evidence gave them no choice but to convert, just as some of the respondents in this research reported (Haddad 2006, 29-30).

The fact that the majority of the categories in the quest and interaction stages were reported by the converts to Islam might also point at this difference between the converts to Islam and converts to Christianity. It might mean that the converts to Islam had more diverse ways of gaining information about Islam and that in some cases it took the converts to Islam longer to get to Islam then the converts to Christianity, to Christianity. When looking at the categories reported by the converts to Islam and comparing them to the categories of the converts to Christianity this idea is confirmed. The latter do not have a very vast array of different categories, and most of the categories they reported are reported multiple times. All of them did an Alpha course and went to Church, but

there does not seem to be many other things they undertook in order to learn more about Christianity. And because they did not learn more about other religions the converts to Christianity did not take as long as some of the converts to Islam to eventually convert. They also do not seem to have such a diverse array of ways to learn about Christianity as the converts to Islam had to learn about Islam.

This, and the fact that in the 'encounter' stage the converts to Islam were the ones who reported more categories, suggests that for the converts to Christianity, advocates are more important in their conversion process than gaining knowledge about Christianity, and that it is the other way around for converts to Islam. However, this does not take away the importance of advocates in the conversion process of converts to Islam. Patrick Bowen confirmed the importance of advocates, but he also found that intellectual activities relating to Islam are popular among converts in the West (Bowen 2009, 55-56). The choice to convert seems to be based more on intellectual reasons than is the case with converts to Christianity. As shown in the crisis stage, the unusual/religious experience was what for most of the converts to Christianity immediately led to the conversion moment, or the start of their conversion process. Added to that is the importance of advocates in the conversion process of the converts to Christianity. These two factors also seem to point toward a less intellectually based choice to convert than the converts to Islam show.

## Commitment

Often the converts started to identify as a Muslim or Christian in the 'quest' and 'interaction' stages. At one point the converts want to make their new status of 'convert' clear to their environment and the religious community, the commitment stage. The lack of similarities in this stage is for a large part connected to the cultural differences between the two religions. At first sight, saying the shahada and getting baptized are totally different things. However, they are both the 'official' way for a convert to show his or her new status as a convert to the religious group he or she is now part of. The difference in active participation might also be explained by the cultural differences. It is probably part of the culture of the church the converts started to attend to actively participate in the church. The converts were often encouraged by fellow believers to take on a certain task at the church they started to attend. Active participation does not seem to be part of the culture of the mosques the converts to Islam attend, if they attend a mosque at all. Active participation is thus specific to the conversion processes of the converts to Christianity.

## Conversion moment

An other interesting difference between the two groups can be observed with regard to the conversion moment. The majority of the converts to Islam does not have a discernable moment of conversion whereas the majority of the converts to Christianity do have a discernable moment of conversion. Since a discernable conversion moment is often connected to the religious experience in the reports of the converts to Christianity, it seems logical to conclude that the difference has something to do with the idea of conversion within Christianity. Besides that, the difference also has to do with the difference in the quest and interaction stage between both groups. Since the converts to Islam seem to have made a more intellectual choice and often took longer to convert to Islam, it seems a logical consequence that they do not report a discernable conversion moment.

## Consequences

As said at the start of this research, there will not be much attention for the consequences of the conversion, since the focus lays upon the conversion process itself. Therefore, it is touched upon only

slightly. An interesting similarity is that both groups experience more peace in their lives after conversion. This finding is confirmed by the finding of Ines Jindra, who writes that for both converts to Islam and converts to Christianity, the emotion of peace is connected to conversion. With regard to the other categories mentioned in this stage, the focus of the converts to Christianity seems to be more on the reactions of the environment, while the converts to Islam mainly report consequences for their personal life. Since there was no equal attention for this stage in all the interviews, it is not possible to draw any conclusions with regard to the effects of conversion.

## Gender

The stages that showed some gender specific similarities in the conversion processes were the 'crisis', 'encounter' and 'quest'/'interaction' stages. The similarities in the 'Crisis' stage seem to be about what the respondents searched for when they started to look into Islam or Christianity. It were only male converts who started to look for answers to their identity questions. It were female converts who were insecure about themselves and found acceptance with God. However, the latter were only converts to Christianity which implies that it can also mean the similarity is connected to the fact that the converts converted to Christianity, not to the gender of the convert. This uncertainty is also present in the other stages. Often a category is reported by only female or male converts of just one of the religious traditions. It is then hard to say if the similarity is a matter of gender or religious tradition. It can also point towards a difference between men and women *within* Christian and Muslim groups. Because the number of respondents is limited it is hard to draw any far-reaching conclusions.

In the 'encounter' stage the converts showed some gender specific ways of interacting with advocates. First of all, it were only female converts to Christianity who said that advocates who were involved in their personal life and who supported them were important in their conversion process. Secondly, it were female converts in general who reported having conversations with the advocates. This comes back in the 'quest'/'interaction' stages, where it are mainly female converts who reported having conversations with people about religion as an important part of their conversion process. The male converts all regarded having discussions with the advocates as an important part of their conversion process. These gender specific similarities seem to be confirmed by the findings of Ali Köse and Kate Miriam Loewenthal. They only looked at converts to Islam, but their findings also appear to apply to converts to Christianity. They concluded, among others, that female converts were more likely to search for meaning through relationships with Muslims and that male converts are more likely to search for meaning by having discussions about Islam. Although not very clearly, the conversations with Muslims and Christians and the involvement of the advocates in the personal life seem to point at the importance of relationships with Muslims or Christians in the conversion process of female converts. Also the importance of discussions in the process of conversion of the male converts is also confirmed by the research of Köse and Loewenthal. Nevertheless, the number of major gender specific similarities in the conversion process of male or female converts were limited.

## Limitations and Recommendations

The qualitative approach used in this research was chosen to be able to get a substantial and detailed idea of the unique conversion process of the converts. This made it possible to go beyond the general similarities that other research found in the conversion process, like life problems in the 'crisis' stage or, the encounter with a member of the religious group in the 'encounter' stage. We were now able to show that when going more into detail, we can find within these broad concepts that there are more

specific problems or ways of encountering advocates that are specific to Islam or Christianity. And only by comparing the two groups we were able to find out if these similarities were actually specific to Islam or Christianity. Because, it is most likely that the similarity is attributable to the religious tradition at the moment that we are able to conclude that just one of the two groups show a certain similarity, and not both groups. And only when we are able to compare male and female converts, we are able to say with certainty when a similarity is attributable to the gender of the convert. The qualitative and comparative approach gives us thus a better understanding of the conversion process and what factors influence these conversion processes. At the same time, it also has some limitations and weaknesses that should be considered here.

With regard to the internal validity, the composition of the group is a weakness. Some of the differences in the conversion process might (partially) be a consequence of the differences in the composition of the groups other than the religious tradition they adhere to. For example, the difference in educational level. All of the Muslim respondents are University students, while the Christian respondents' educational level was either MBO or HBO. The converts to Islam seem to have a more intellectual approach in their quest for solutions, answers or fulfillment than the converts to Christianity. This difference might be related to the fact that they are all University students. We do not mean to say that the converts to Islam are more intelligent or rational. But the respondents could have had the feeling that they had to give a more rational account of their conversion process, because the researcher was a fellow University student.[20] This could imply that this similarity specific to conversion processes of the converts to Islam is not attributable to Islam, but to the educational level of the converts to Islam. This leads us to the next weakness of this research: the limited amount of factors connected to the similarities considered here. As we described in the example above, the similarities found in this research can possibly (also) be attributed to other factors like socio-economic background or status, educational level, cultural background or macro and mesocontext (e.g. the town or city the respondents grew up in, or the status of religion in the Netherlands).

Something that helped increase the validity instead of decreasing it, was Rambo's stage model. The model is a very convenient tool in order structure the similarities and differences we found, as well as the interviews. It is a flexible model that can be somewhat adjusted to the research, and at the same time enables the researcher to structurally treat the results and draw conclusions. On the other hand, the model can also work somewhat limiting. It was, for example, sometimes hard for the researcher to find a suitable stage for a category, since some of them were very specific or it was not clear in what stage of their conversion process something took place. Nevertheless, Rambo's model seems to leave enough space to get a complete idea of the conversion process of the respondents and at the same time create consistency in how the data is treated. But it is clear that this research still leaves enough room for improvement and its weaknesses also give way for some interesting angles and opportunities for future research.

*Future research*

One of the things future research should certainly look at are other factors that might have an influence on the conversion process. Cultural background, for example, seemed to be of importance in

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[20] As said in chapter 3, the fact that the researcher knows most of the respondents has without a doubt influenced the sample of respondents as well as the content of their conversion stories. However, it is hard to say if and how it influenced the results of this research. The respondents might have left things out because they knew the researcher or felt more comfortable and therefore were prepared to discuss more than if they da not known the researcher.

the conversion process of the converts to Islam in this research, since it made them search for answers to their identity questions. Among the converts to Christianity there were no respondents with a mixed cultural background. It would be interesting to know if these identity questions would appear in the conversion processes of converts across different religious traditions with a mixed cultural background. Are some of the similarities attributable to the mixed cultural background of the converts? This question can also be asked for other factors like educational level or socio-economic background. Maybe looking into this other factors will show that the religious tradition does not always play such a big role when it comes to similarities in conversion processes. The examples of the influence that the educational level and cultural background of the converts might have on the conversion process show that other factors certainly must be considered. Nevertheless, despite the limitations of this research, we can draw some interesting conclusions.


## Conclusion

This research came into being because of a personal fascination with the similarities in the conversion processes of people who were prepared to share a little bit of their story. Based on the prior empirical research among converts to Islam and Christianity the expectation was that the religious tradition would play a more important role in the conversion process than gender would. This expectation proved to be true. Although there were some gender specific similarities, the similarities often did not transcend the religious tradition which made it hard to tell if the similarities were specific to the gender of the converts, or the religious tradition they converted to. Even religious experiences and the importance of a religious partner were not categories that were connected to a certain gender, as some of the prior empirical research described in chapter 2 suggested. The similarities specific to the religious tradition the converts converted to were much more present and clear than the ones connected to gender. It is thus safe to say that similarities in conversion processes are mainly connected to the religious tradition the converts eventually converted to.

The main similarities and the biggest differences in the conversion processes were found in the stages of 'crisis', 'encounter', and most of all the 'quest' and 'interaction' stages. Having a religious experience distinguished the converts to Christianity from the converts to Islam, and the role of the advocates in the conversion processes proved to be different for converts to Islam then for the converts to Christianity. But where the two groups differed most and the similarities *within* the groups were most visible, was in the path they took in their quest for answers or fulfillment. The converts to Islam seemed to have more intellectual reasons for conversion then the converts to Christianity. All these observations could be made because of the attention for the details in the conversion processes of the converts.

This leads us to another conclusion that can be drawn from this research: paying attention to the details makes it possible to find new relevant and interesting results, without dismissing the personal and unique conversion process of every individual. By structurally going into the details of all the stages of the conversion process, we were able to go beyond the broader concepts used in the prior empirical research, such as 'the importance of advocates', 'life problems' and 'active searching'. As we could see, for example, in the encounter stage, on first sight all of the converts had people in their lives that played an important role in their conversion process. We could have stopped there and conclude that advocates play an important role in the conversion process of both converts to Christianity and Islam. However, this would not bring any new insights since other empirical research already concluded this as well. Therefore, we looked into the details and found that who these people

were and what their role was in the conversion process of the converts differed per religious group. For example, the converts to Islam encountered advocates that were less active in propagating Islam than the advocates the converts to Christianity encountered.

Comparing the conversion processes of the different groups and individuals made it possible to see the differences in the conversion processes. Without comparing the different groups, we could not have concluded, for example, that the unusual/religious experience was something that is specific to the conversion process of converts to Christianity alone, or that having identity questions because of a mixed cultural background is only reported by converts to Islam and is therefore seems to be specific to their conversion process. In short, the qualitative and comparative approach used in this research combined with the stage model of Lewis R. Rambo led to new insights into the conversion processes of converts to Islam and Christianity. These new insights should be seen as an encouragement for future research to pay more attention to the details of the conversion process and to start doing more comparative research in the field of conversion studies.

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# Appendix A

<u>Questionnaire Muslim respondents (with English translation)</u>

Naam *(Name)*:

1) Wat is uw leeftijd?
   (What is your age?)

2) Wat is uw geslacht?
   *(What is your gender?)*

3) Wat is uw nationaliteit?
   (What is your nationality?)

4) Wat is uw huidige woonplaats?
    *(What is your current place of residence?)*

5) Wat is uw beroep?
   *(What is your profession?)*

6) Wat is uw meest recent genoten opleiding?
   *(What is your level of education?)*

7) Heeft u een partner? (bij nee, ga door naar vraag 8)
   *(Do you have a partner?)*

8) Is uw partner religieus? Zo ja, met welke religie identificeert hij/zij zich?
   *(Is your partner religious. If so, with what religion does he or she identify?)*

9) Identificeert u zichzelf als moslim?
   *(Would you identify yourself as a Muslim?)*

10) Behoort u tot een specifieke stroming binnen de islam. Zo ja, welke stroming?
    *(Do you belong to a particular movement within Islam? If yes, what movement?)*

11) Bent u actief betrokken bij de moslimgemeenschap in uw omgeving?
    *(Are you actively involved with the local Muslimcommunity?)*

12) Bent u religieus opgevoed? Zo ja, met welke religie bent u opgevoed?
    *(Were you raised religiously? If so, with what religion were your raised?)*

13) Wat is/was het beroep van uw vader?
    *(What is/was your father's profession?)*

14) Wat is/was het beroep van uw moeder?
    *(What is/was your mother's profession?)*

## Questionnaire Christian respondents (with English translation)

Naam *(Name)*:

1) Wat is uw leeftijd?
   (What is your age?)

2) Wat is uw geslacht?
   *(What is your gender?)*

3) Wat is uw nationaliteit?
   (What is your nationality?)

4) Wat is uw huidige woonplaats?
   *(What is your current place of residence?)*

5) Wat is uw beroep?
   *(What is your profession?)*

6) Wat is uw meest recent genoten opleiding?
   *(What is your level of education?)*

7) Heeft u een partner? (bij nee, ga door naar vraag 8)
   *(Do you have a partner?)*

8) Is uw partner religieus? Zo ja, met welke religie identificeert hij/zij zich?
   *(Is your partner religious. If so, with what religion does he or she identify?)*

9) Identificeert u zichzelf als christen?
   *(Would you identify yourself as a Christian?)*

10) Bent u aangesloten bij een kerk of gaat u regelmatig naar een kerk? Zo ja, bij welke kerk bent u aangesloten of gaat u regelmatig naartoe?
    *(Are you affiliated with a church, or do you attend a certain church regularly? If so, what chuch are you affiliated with or do you attend regularly?)*

11) Bent u actief betrokken bij de kerk?
    *(Are you actively involved with the church?)*

12) Bent u religieus opgevoed? Zo ja, met welke religie bent u opgevoed?
    *(Were you raised religiously? If so, with what religion were your raised?)*

13) Wat is/was het beroep van uw vader?
    *(What is/was your father's profession?)*

14) Wat is/was het beroep van uw moeder?
    *(What is/was your mother's profession?)*

# Appendix B

Interview Questions

*Tell me about in what kind of family you grew up in, if you were raised religiously, and how, from there on, you eventually came to the point that you started to identify as a Muslim/Christian?*

Context
Waar ben je geboren en opgegroeid?
*(Where were you born and raised?)*
Kunt u mij wat vertellen over het gezin waarin u opgroeide? Had u broers of zussen, werd u *opgevoed door beide ouders?*
*(Can you tell me something about the family you were raised in? Did you have siblings, were you raised by both your parents?)*
Speelde religie een rol in uw opvoeding?
*(Played religion a role in your upbringing?)*
Ja: Welke vorm nam dit aan?
*(Yes: In what way?)*
Nee: Wat was de houding tegenover religie in het gezin waar u in bent opgegroeid?
*(No: What was the attitude towards religion in the family you were raised in?)*
Wat was ongeveer je leeftijd toen u zich bekeerde?
*(What age were you when you converted?)*
Had u veel christelijke/islamitische vrienden?
*(Did you have many Christian/Muslim friends?)*

Crisis
Was er een aanwijsbaar moment of periode waar het proces begon volgens u?
*(Was there a clear moment or period in which the conversion process started according to you?)*
Wat veroorzaakte dit moment/deze periode? (external or internal)?
*(What caused this moment/period (external or internal)?)*
Kunt u omschrijven wat er op dit moment/in deze periode gebeurde?
*(Can you describe what happened at that moment/in that period?)*
Hoe ervoer u dit moment/deze periode?
*(How did you experience this moment/period?)*
Hoe lang duurde dit moment/deze periode?
*(How long did this moment/period take?)*
Wat voor effect had dit moment/deze periode of wat gebeurde er na dit moment/deze periode?
*(What was the effect of this moment/period or what happened after this moment/period?)*

Quest
Was er sprake een bepaalde zoektocht naar betekenis en zinvolheid?
*(Was there a certain search for meaning and meaningfulness?)*
Wat was uw motivatie om u meer te gaan verdiepen in het christendom/islam?
*(What was your motivation to start looking into Christianity/Islam?)*

Kunt u beschrijven hoe deze zoektocht of hoe dit proces vorm kreeg?

*(Can you describe the way this search or process took shape?)*

Zou u uw proces als actief of passief bestempelen?

*(Would you describe your process as active or as passive?)*


Encounter

Was er een bepaald persoon die u leerde kennen tijdens het proces die op dat moment al als christen/moslim identificeerde en u in aanraking bracht met het christendom/islam?

*(Was there a certain person you got to know in the process, who already identified as a Christian/Muslim who brought you into contact with Christianity/Islam?)*

Introduceerde hij/zij u aan andere christenen/moslim?

*(Did he/she introduce you to other Christians/Muslims?)*

Hoe heeft u deze persoon leren kennen?

*(How did you get to know this person?)*

Hoe zou u deze persoon omschrijven?

*(How would you describe this person?)*

Was deze persoon actief bezig met het uitdragen van zijn of haar religie?

*(Was this person actively propagating his or her religion?)*

Wat was uw eerste reactie hierop?

*(What was you first reaction to that?)*


Interaction

Hoe ontwikkelde de relatie met deze persoon zich verder?

*(How did the relationship with this person develop?)*

Sloot u zich op een bepaald moment aan bij een religieuze groep?

*(Did you become part of a religious group at a certain moment?)*

Ging u regelmatig naar een bepaalde kerk?

*(Did you go to a church regularly?)*

Ging u regelmatig naar de moskee?

*(Did you go to a mosque regularly?)*

Ging u regelmatig naar religieuze bijeenkomsten?

*(Did you go to religious events regularly?)*

Bent u op een gegeven moment de Bijbel/Koran gaan lezen?

*(Did you start to read the Bible/Quran at a certain moment?)*

Ging u veel om met mensen binnen de religieuze groep?

*(Did you interact a lot with the people from the religious group?)*

Was er een bepaald punt waarop u besloot dat u zich vanaf dat moment identificeerde als christen/moslim?

*(What there a certain moment where you started to identify as a Christian/Muslim?)*

Zou u dit moment kunnen omschrijven?

*(Could you describe that moment?)*


Commitment

Hoe heb je binnen de religieuze groep laten zien dat je je had bekeerd?

*(How did you show to the religious group that you converted?)*

Heb je je laten dopen? Wanneer was dat?

(Were you baptized? When was that?)

Heb je de shahada gedaan in de moskee? Wanneer was dat?

(Did you say the shahada in the mosque? When was that?)

Ben je lid geworden van een bepaalde kerk?

(Did you become a member of a church?)

Ga je naar een vaste moskee om te bidden?

(Are you going to the same mosque to pray?)

Heb je bepaalde taken binnen de religieuze gemeenschap?

(Do you have certain tasks in the religious community?)

Heb je bepaalde lessen/cursussen gevolgd om meer te weten te komen over de religie?

(Did you follow certain lessons/courses to get to know more about the religion?)

Consequences

Is er veel veranderd in je leven vanaf dat je je begon te identificeren als christen of moslim?

(Has there changed a lot in you life since you started to identify as a Muslim or Christian?)