

The White Muslim Converts in Australia: Socio-Religious Reality and Identity Formation

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Kata kunci

Mualaf, realitas sosial keagamaan, pembentukan identitas, Muslim Australia

Abstrak

Menjadi seorang mualaf tidak hanya dilihat sebagai perubahan teologis dalam keyakinan dan perilaku seseorang, tetapi perubahan sosial budaya yang mempengaruhi pembentukan identitas. Kajian ini dilakukan secara kualitatif dengan melibatkan sepuluh mualaf yang berasosiasi dengan orang kulit putih Barat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki formulasi identitas mereka tentang proses menjadi Muslim di konteks Barat di Australia, Sydney khususnya. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga untuk menemukan perbandingan pembentukan identitas mualaf laki-laki dan perempuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tantangan sosial memiliki peran terbesar dalam pembentukan identitas mualaf. Selanjutnya, penelitian ini menggambarkan pola tantangan sosial yang berbeda antara mualaf laki-laki vs laki-laki dan laki-laki vs perempuan yang mengarah pada pembentukan identitas mereka. Kajian ini menyoroti bahwa para mualaf di konteks Barat lebih banyak ditantang oleh realitas sosial-keagamaan daripada praktik-praktik yang terkait dengan keyakinan. Kajian ini menyarankan agar komunitas Muslim dan keluarga Muslim yang lahir di Australia didorong untuk membuat program untuk mengatasi ketegangan ini.

Keywords

Muslim convert; socio-religious reality; identity formation, Australia Muslim

Abstract

Conversion is not only observed as a theological change in someone's belief and behavior, but socio-cultural change that affects identity formation. This present study is conducted qualitatively involving ten Muslim converts who are associated with the white Western people. It aims at investigating their identity formulation on the process of becoming and being Muslims in the Western context in Australia, Sydney especially. Also, this research is to find the comparison between male and female converts' identity formation. Results show that social challenge has the biggest part of the Muslim converts' identity formation. Further, the study pictures different pattern of social challenges between male vs male and male vs female Muslim converts that leads to their identity formation. This study has highlighted that Muslim converts in the Western context have been challenged more by the socio-religious reality than faith-related practices. This study suggests that the Muslim community and the born Muslim family living in Australia are encouraged to set a program to address this tension.

Introduction

The 9/11 aftermath has put Islam into public attention for the reason that its discourse was popularly used by the mainstream media. Terror attack describing anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobia has been spreading over the world since then (Sirin & Balsano, 2007)). The increase of Islamophobia in the U.S has caused Muslims into high stigma, not only from out-group (non-Muslims) but also in-group (other Muslims) (Casey, 2018). Accepting one religion is supposed to bring benefit as religion is attached to identity. As it has been discovered, religion has become a powerful foundation for personal identification (Peek, 2005); however, when religion is very much confronted by the intergroup, it brings a negative impact to the holder of that religion (Ysseldyk, Matheson & Anisman, 2010).

However, of its stereotype on the teachings and symbols, Islam as a religious practice has been widely searched online in the West by many. Surprisingly, Islam is embraced and accepted in the act of religion that has ultimate and logical teaching, also to give a solution to one's life in the Western world. Today, the white, the blonde, the blue eyes, are leaving the church behind; yet converting to Islam in multitudes. In Britain, the early twentieth-century, the Liverpool Muslim Institutes (LMI) that is initially constituted by William Henry Abdullah Quilliam and his fellow of British Muslim converts have played an imperative function in the alliance of Islam (Gilham, 2015). Subsequently, PEW Research center has also projected that by 2040, Muslims will outnumber the Jews; and by 2050, the Muslim population in the U.S will peak to 8.1 million (2.1% of the country's population) (Mohamed, 2018).

"Convert" is a term popularly used to describe a new Muslim. Yet, the term itself does not really exist in Islamic convention believing that everyone is born in 'fitra' (pure) being, meaning that in its origin that everyone is a Muslim, parents are the ones that make a child become Jew, Christian, Majusi. 'No babe is born but upon *fitra*, it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Polytheist (Sahih Muslim, 2020). Thus, the supposed term used in the context is 'reversion' rather than 'conversion'. Conversely, for the sake of this study, *convert* is still used as a term that has been widely expended.

Being a convert in the Western society is not an easy deal, one's identity is vulnerable to the socio-cultural issue, let assume that Muslim has some restricted values while Western is often assumed as having a free culture. It has been revealed that about their Muslim identity development, six converts across Montreal, Berlin, and Copenhagen are very much affected by socio-political discrimination (Younis & Hassan, 2017). Furthermore, on their reflexive narratives about being converts, participants of a study have revealed the dichotomy of 'Sameness and Otherness' (Mossiere, 2016). Likewise, in Dutch society, being white then declaring shahadah as a Muslim convert is not an easy matter. So forth, a Muslim woman who converts amidst the society has to pertain to her being marginalized under the issue of emancipation, as it is how the society look at all women in the regime. Being 'emancipated' has become

the ideal position for all women, and this is what the Muslim women convert in Dutch culture have to live it up (Es, 2019).

Therefore, this present research uses a socio-cultural approach to see Muslim converts' identity formation. With statistical narrative data using NVivo 12 Plus, this research will illuminate the hierarchy chart of converts' identity formation and comparative pattern between male Muslims and male vs female Muslim converts identity formation.

The existence of Muslims in Australia has been there since the early establishment of the continent. Australia is not only about race and nationality, as people are proclaimed that Australia is a multicultural country which is indicated by the coming people from different regions and races. Not only that, the division of race and nationality is also a divide about religion. It is very widely discussed in the history that the first Muslims migrating to Australia were the Malays, Afghans, and Macassans (Ganter, 2008). The Afghans were the camelers landed at Port Melbourne (Deen, 2006) while the Macassan was the fishers landed in northern Australia. The Macassan was the first contact of Indonesian Muslims in Australian land, as there are number of studies exposing the contact of the Macassan Muslim fisherman with the Indigenous people in northern part of Australia (Yucel & Cook, 2018). This was all happened because of the regional approach that leads Macassan fishermen have a maritime trip from the island of Sulawesi to northern Australia. Afterward, it became a bilateral and marine cooperation between the Macassan and northern Australian whereby leave the footprint in the indigenous group's, the Yolgnu people, culture such as on the language they use (Ganter, 2008). Also, the contact history of Macassan Muslim journey to Australian history has been recorded in the Islamic Museum of Australia in Melbourne. The idea of this contact has been said in the history as the early cross-cultural exchange and interfaith dialogue between Islam and the indigenous people.

Along history, Australia has continuously proclaimed the country as a multicultural society that able to cater to the diverse range of cultural discourse. However, with the huge migration of Muslims from the Middle Eastern countries to Australia, the Australian government turns out to have worried. It is proven that in the 19th century, there was a new policy declared—it was the Australia Commonwealth and the White Australia Policy that has threatened the growth of Muslim numbers in Australia. In the colonial period, Muslims' number was 2,000-4,000 whereas during the 'White Australia Policy', it dropped significantly to only 2,000; however, later during the Multicultural period, the Muslim number peaks to around 300,000 in 2001 (Kabir, 2006). Other than this policy, the Islamophobia can also raised from inner Muslims' traits. Some Muslim extremists was the main cause to the fear of Muslim minority living in a country like Australia. It is recorded that the tragedy of September 11 2001, Bali Bombing in 2002 and 2005, Australian Embassy bombing at Jakarta in 2004, followed by London bombing in 2005 had caused Muslim minority to become the common enemy under the name of religion (Kabir, 2006).

Unfortunately, after the successful accomplishment of Muslim growth, the treats to Islam and Muslims were not that friendly as the 9/11 aftermath had put Islam as the biggest enemy for everyone in Australia. The engagement of Australian government to the 'War on Terror' movement has a rapid change in people's judgment toward Muslims wearing Islamic fashion such as hijab, headscarf, burqa, abaya, a man with a beard, *kurta*, cap, and *thawb*. Muslims with those indications will easily get abused verbally or physically as an impact of Islamophobia. Even worse, Muslim immigrants are often linked to terrorists whereby they have to get back to their country of origin, Middle East country. Interestingly, some Australian Muslims when they are asked to recall their life pre 9/11, they stated that life was normal. Their neighbors and friends were not really aware of what Islam and Muslim are and life was not that stressful, also far from public scrutiny (Barkdull, Khaja, Tajalli, Swart, Cunningham & Dennis, 2011). It soon becomes a global talk since the media portrayal of Muslim serves as one of the contributing aspects to the anti-Muslim sentiment in the Western world. Representation of Islam and Muslims in Australian media during 2001-2005 was in a great bias, it did not cover both sides. The media portray Muslims in the same way with all stereotype, violence, being uncivilized and barbaric, this bias has been confirmed its validity (Kabir, 2006).

If it is observed on the global Islamophobia, there is one same outcome of the issue, it is asking the Muslims to assimilate to the local culture (Western way of living) or 'clear off' their religion from public spaces (Poynting & Perry, 2007). As a result, the 9/11 aftermath has left major challenges for Muslim communities that they have to do public addresses, such as conducting interfaith dialogue and media engagement (Amath, 2013). These two examples of responses are now clear evidence on what actually the 9/11 tragedy projected on Muslim ummah, i.e. negotiating their Muslim identity in the Western world. A study on Muslims living in Sydney, Brisbane, and Melbourne presents that being a suspect community post 9/11 has an influence on their appraisals on their faith also on themselves (Cherney & Murphy, 2016).

However, even the 9/11 aftermath has successfully put Muslims into a stern opposition of the Western world, Muslim numbers experience a growing increase through conversion. The trend on Muslim conversion has been known to begin in the United States, the epicenter of the 9/11 tragedy. As it is likely portrayed by the media, people are curious about what Islam is that turns out into clicking away from the internet source and searching for its information. In Australia itself, the increased rate of conversion is observed among the indigenous people that historically have been in contact with Islam (Stephenson, 2013). According to the religion data census in 2016, Islam was one of the top religions spreading across Australia with a growth of 2.2% in 2011 to 2.6% in 2016 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

Identity is a state of being about what or who an individual is. The state of being is very much influenced by internal and external factor. What is meant by internal factor is an area of someone's upbringing such as his or her unique personality which may be

affected by his/her family upbringing. As for external factor, identity is closely linked to social life. In this notion, an expert envisaged that identity symbolizes individuals, yet individuals are also formed collectively (Kabir, 2012). For instance, as a Muslim convert, a woman feels that she is connected to the values on how Muslim woman should act. She would agree that speaking modestly and wearing a hijab is a rule eventhough she is not yet wearing a hijab herself. In a collective way, this woman identifies that she is part of the ummah who uplift the communal Islamic values, yet she is personally demonstrate her own definition of being a Muslim woman.

However, even though identity is part of an individual's being, it is likely structured under the influenced of society where someone is living. Some Muslim converts originated from Western culture will see Islam as it is practiced in the Western world by certain immigrant living in their neighborhood. In Australia, new Australian Muslims can perceive Islam based on what has been practiced by Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian, or Turkish. In addition, their identity can also be shaped following the prejudices they understand through the media before their conversion. Thus, identity formulation is fluctuated, it can be formed by how Muslims converts live their previous life, constructed through their social environment, and negotiated within themselves.

Method

An in-depth interview was implemented in this study. This research was qualitatively done to explore the white Muslim converts about their identity formation in Australian society. The participants of this study were recruited from Muslim communities, acquaintances, and web surveys. The ones who meet the research criteria and willing to participate in the study were nominated. There were 10 Muslim converts invited to participate in this study, 8 females and 2 males. The participants were varied in the origin of their previous religious background and family of origin. The research participants' selection were done through snow ball sampling that the researcher gathered the information from college friends, Muslim communities and even searched their data through news on internet. Before the interview session, all participants were contacted and explained about the purpose of the interview, it was to publish their reverts' story into a manuscript. Everyone participating in the interview session was willing to take part in this work and gave their consent. Eventually, 10 reverts were interviewed. The 8 participants were interviewed in face to face and voice-recorded for approximately 60 minutes, the meeting venues were their office (1 participant), their houses (4 participants), and cafe closes to their houses (3 participants). One participant chose to be contacted via email, while another gave her *YouTube* recording as she once had been interviewed to tell her revert journey asking similar questions.

The Demographic Profile of The Muslim Converts

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Table 1. Participants' profile

Participants' Pseudonym	Conversion Age	First encounter to Islam	Previous Religious Affiliation
AD	15	School Friend	Pentecostal Church
RS	22	College Friend	Christian
KR	22	Social Friend	Christian
JM	21	School friend	Christian
CT	19	Coworker	Anglican and Catholic (Jehovah Witness)
SI	24	South East Asian class	Christian
SJ	25	Friend	Christian
JL	28's	Husband	Christian
AS	50's	Converted Muslim daughter	Catholic
AA	16s	Malcolm X movie, School friends	Anglican

Hierarchy Chart of Interview Transcript Coding

The results of the research questions and objectives are highlighted below. It involves hierarchy charts and an analytical description of the corresponding section of interview data coding. The analytical description is presented based on the hierarchy chart. NVivo 12 Plus was utilized to capture the category of identity development based on its coding process, see (Fig. 1) that exhibits the frequency of theme coded from 10 participants' interview transcripts. The coding is presented based on the category of themes: past perception about Islam, introduction to Islam, turning point, family and friends' responses, and social challenges.

The hierarchy chart reveals that the social challenges were the largest aspect taking part in the Muslim converts' identity development. The identity development was also affected by their introduction to Islam that leads to their turning point of conversion, family and friends' responses, and strikingly their past perception about Islam and Muslims overall is less contributing to their identity as a new Muslim living in the Western society.

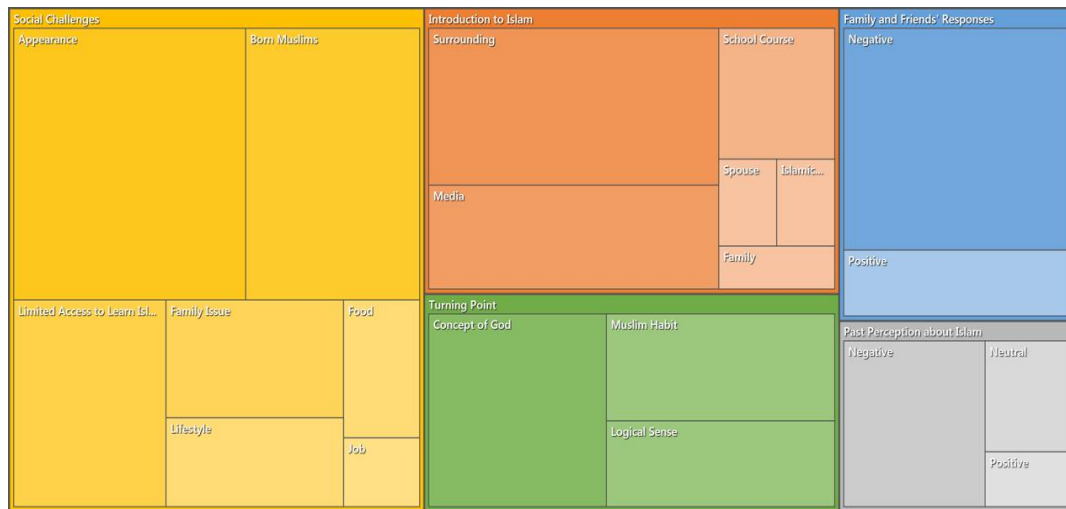


Figure 1. Hierarchy chart of Muslim converts identity development

In contrast to the born Muslim life journey, Muslim converts have many things to set after declaring their new faith. The challenges were not only in practicing their theological teaching, yet it was more about socio-religious reality in the public sphere. Moreover, the problem they faced may not only from the external stigma (non-Muslim and its society), but also from the inner circle.

Issues on Appearance and The Loss of White Legitimacy

The social challenges contributing to identity formation as new Muslims were about their changing appearance in public, such as wearing headscarves and other symbols that identify them as Muslims. This aspect has the largest portion among the other four aspects contributing to their identity development as Muslim converts.

In the first stance, the social challenge is discussed. In such a free culture like Australia, being Muslim women with a headscarf still have its own challenge. Muslim women wearing headscarf will be visible as public attention and look strange. It is often that the Muslim women walking down the public spaces will be scanned from top to toe of their appearance. People starring what they are wearing along with what is so-called as the widespread misconception about Muslims and Islam across the globe. Thus, the Muslim women cannot easily blend in the crowd anymore without being invisible, everything they do is watched. People will not remember the person who is wearing the headscarf or other symbols, but they will remember well that they are Muslims. After all, their action represents Muslim' images and become a standard of judgment.

Likewise, the converts have also been questioned for wearing headscarf, as it is perceived as being extreme in the culture in away. There are many Muslims from Australia, they called them new Muslims and they do not wear scarf because it can be sometimes less accepted, but for some converts, it is actually such a powerful role. They take it as an influence and even criticize the Muslims (born Muslim or convert) who do

not want to wear scarf by making up excuses. Stephani takes a stand as Muslim ambassador through her statement:

Every day, I have to handle this such question to people who never in contact with Muslims at all. I know this situation, they have many questions and then I have to break down the wall about what they think that someone wearing a scarf like me. I told them that they cannot stereotype people just because of what they are wearing. A lot of people have no idea what we are wearing. They just believe whatever they heard from the media. Even they portray us as not being friendly. People have that misconception. (SJ, interview)

However, the misconception about Muslim women's attire was also what many participants had been assuming before. As Adriana said that,

The topic of religion did not really come up in my mind, boys and friendship are more to my mind. But, if I come across women in a hijab in a public space, I would think that they were forced by their husband or parents to wear that and strange. (AD, interview)

Media influence has such a powerful role in portraying the images of Muslim women with headscarf. Let's assume that if the media does not do what they have done, people will not stereotype others only by judging what they are putting on their heads. As in individualistic society—commonly associated with Western culture, judging others' appearance does not seem to be their culture, it is the collectivism's culture—Eastern culture. Therefore, it is seen that what people mind is not what on Muslim women head but it is more than that, it is about the threat to Islam. It is indeed converting to be Muslim covers all aspects of life as Islam is not only a religion but it is also a huge civilization.

Likewise, it has been the concern that in Sydney, the performative aspect of race and ethnicity are labeled as 'Black, White, and Lebanese' (Gulson & Webb, 2013). The issue of appearance is also found on one white female Muslim convert. Chantelle has been discriminated by changing her appearance in the public sphere. Her difficulty is stated as follow:

I would have to say my identity. Unfortunately, people do not look at me as an Aussie anymore, they look at me as a foreigner that should go back to where I came from. They assume I am an Arab, and that I don't belong here. Yet, I was born and raised here, as a typical Christian Aussie girl, and my roots go as far back as the convicts. This would have to be my biggest struggle in Australia, not being welcome in my own country that I love. (CT, interview)

The convert feels that she has lost her exclusiveness of being white. By wearing a headscarf and Muslim dress, she has been judged as being others, not being Australian anymore. Furthermore, using Muslim dress is stereotyped as being Arab. Islam seems to be pointed at the Arab country. Yet, Islam has been reaching European countries through huge expansion decades ago. Although people are more educated and open-minded today, yet the prejudice is not yet easing.

Likewise, such tension is also experienced by six western converts in the U.S.

What happened to socio-political realities lead to race discrimination that finally has an impact on the process of conversion and afterward to the development of Muslim identity (Younis & Hassan, 2017). In a more serious case, Muslim converts in the west are not only experienced difficulties in their identity development in the level of being perceived negatively by the society but also face difficulty in relation to getting their national identity.

These all do not appear for no reason. The idea of whiteness is not simply talking about color or physical being, but it brings socio-cultural or even political notions. White means privilege, white means a Christian believer. When an individual is equally white to Western people, for instance, but his religion is Islam, he will never get that privilege. As it is proved, a racial slur was hurled to a white Muslim man putting his turban and *thawb* (particular dressing of Muslim) while he was on the street around Sydney's inner city (Alam, 2012). It is argued that during colonial history of Europe and America, 'Whiteness is about privilege and cumulative power' (Tourage, 2013). Thus, it is to highlight that the Western Muslim converts certainly have no more privilege after their conversion although they are attributed as white.

This phenomenon has been termed as the re-racialization process as the white convert has the privilege of whiteness before conversion but it then comes to be their disadvantage of being white after their being Muslims (Moosavi, 2015). The re-racialization occurs when a white Muslim convert called as being Pakistani upon their conversion or being a (dirty) Arab. In this notion, it is clearly seen that conversion to Islam can also entail a racial conversion.

A Stigma from Inner-Circle

Following after it was a problem with the inner-circle stigma, it is to deal with the born Muslims. Most of the Muslim converts do have a conflict with the ones who were born as Muslims living in Australian culture. They doubt about Muslim-ness because they look white and so Western. Converts can mean someone new to Islam and also has limited knowledge of Islam, according to their definition. Meanwhile, the Muslim converts also feel challenged with the born Muslims as they take Islamic teaching as granted, they occasionally mixed between culture and religion. This part has actually confused the Muslim converts in learning religious teaching in the first stance. In this regard, Rossie expressed her disappointment as follow,

Don't take Islam for granted and you stop studying. I also have a problem with the ones who born Muslim. Sometimes, they put culture before religion. It really annoys me. I find something that Islamically unacceptable. It is hard to get around that. They make up their own ideas. For instance, I saw Muslims wearing hijab taking the kids having a picture with Santa at the shopping center. See? If my parents know that, they will say why wouldn't you come home for Christmas when you know that those Muslims are fine taking photos with Santa!? What should I say then? (RS, interview)

Likewise, a similar notion has also been described by Kareema after she married to Lebanese born Muslim,

I don't know what the meaning of shahadah is, my life was just the same as the previous one. I lived a normal life. I didn't do my salah because no one told me, I often heard the word *Allahu akbar, MaasyaAllah, Na'udzubillah*, but I didn't really see something that is Islamic. My husband always talks about his family and family, while I want my deen and my deen. I was locked more into Muslim culture than to my deen, I feel so sad. (KR, interview)

In socio-reality, it is acknowledged that there seem to be different religious practices between the born Muslims and Muslim convert. Snook has made this phenomenon clearly explained, his study on the structure of Islamic practices between born-Muslim and Muslim convert revealed that there is a meaningful difference in the way that converts have—they perform more simple structure of practice than the born-Muslims (Snook, 2019). Conclusively, born-Muslims and Muslim converts believe then practice Islam in different structure.

Another challenge is that the converts' experience is the barrier to face the stigma of some Muslims judging that their Muslimness is not original. In his study, Moosavi uses the term 'authentic Muslims' to describe how British Muslim converts have been doubted by some lifelong Muslims to perform their being Muslims (Moosavi, 2015). He emphasizes that converting to be Muslims is not only a theological change but it is also a social process. Using Goffman's and Bourdieu's idea, the researcher suggests that identities are rooted deeply on the individual that is difficult to be reconstructed.

A stigma on Muslim identity is not only directed to Muslim convert. Muslims living in Western society, America, also being stigmatized by the inner-circle because they are too American, meaning that these Muslims are living the life of the Western culture (Casey, 2018). The mixing between religion and culture is possibly related to Islamophobia. Islamophobia that raised in Finlandia put born Muslims into a difficult position to separate between Islam and their culture (Malmirinta, 2017). However, still, this acculturation has built our understanding that indeed there lies a difference between Western and Muslim culture which some people strongly argue at this point.

Taking concern on the conversion process, the framework used by Rambo includes these steps: context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences. These steps explore more on pre-conversion stages (Rambo, 1993). However, the order can overlap one another as the conversion is a lifelong process. Here, the consequences stage will shed a light on what is being discussed in this paper. The consequence stage is portraying the converts stage when he or she has changed a new faith within the new religious community. The supposed conflict within the self is obviously there. It is the stage whereby one will negotiate new possibilities. This is actually one of the crucial parts that convert needs companion to strengthen his or her belief. If not taken into a serious account, such case of secularization, liberation, and what has been observed by Roald to be non-practicing Muslim will be chosen as a way (Roald, 2012).

I am trying to illuminate the reason why the converts are challenged by the one who born Muslim. Being a Muslim convert is a never-ending process, there are things that sometimes not acceptable done by the one who born-Muslim. Sometimes, born-Muslims do not practice their religion as the 'ideal' Islam, they are just normal human beings that also need to be in the learning curve even though bred and raised as Muslims. The study of the post-conversion process is done by Roald (2006) then later being updated (Roald, 2012). In 2006, Roald constructed three phases of post-conversion, namely 1) fall in love, it is when a convert is in an obsessed with every detail of religious practice in Islam that he or she wants to embody in herself along with the involvement to the Muslim community, 2) disappointment, it is when a convert sees that 'ideal Islam' is not there within the born bred Muslims, 3) maturity, it is when a convert can accept, and negotiate that there lies a gap between the real practice of Islam and the ideal of Islam. Later in Roald's study in 2012, she adds the fourth stage, it is 4) secularization, this last stage occurs when a convert has a conflict in stage 3, he or she will be critical on the idea of Islam as the one and only truth.

Referring to the previous conversion process, the second stage is where some of the converts have gone through. Nevertheless, the stage of conversion is not lenient to what has been described, it can be back and forth process. Therefore, it is concluded that the end process of conversion is the reformulation phase, whereby the Muslim converts change their perspective, feeling, and behavior, particularly how to deal and reevaluate the previous conflict (Sultan, 1999).

Family and Friends' Reaction Upon Conversion

In regards to family and friendship issues encountered by many Muslim converts, Kose (1994) stated, "Converting to Islam in a non-Muslim society may mean social suicide and boycott for some converts" (Kose, 1994). After their declaration of faith, becoming a Muslim does not stop there, it is the beginning of all. Here is another challenge appears. One suburb is not always Muslim friendly that put the Muslim converts into a stern opposition of him or herself and even opposition of others. The other thing, the biggest was about their family then social friends. This difficulty is also what commonly experienced by the global Muslim converts (Esseissah, 2011; Herbert & Hansen, 2018). Thus, being a new Muslim in Australian culture can be very lonely. About her parents' reaction, Silma described how she had been through all things as below,

It was really crazy from my point of view. My father found it very difficult as I wore a hijab, in the 70-ish none wore a hijab here. I understand the issue of wearing a hijab. People normally wear it only to pray and read the Qur'an but didn't really wore it properly. So, in 1977, I bought some long shawl scarf so it began to be sold here as Lebanese come to Australia. Yea, my father was very difficult finding me wearing a hijab, he was embarrassed. (SI, interview)

Also, a similar position has been experienced by Jamila, she responded that:

Three days after my reversion, I told my dad first. He was about to cry, but he didn't yell at me. He got upset because he didn't like Muslims once he was in Pakistan, he experienced bad interaction with Muslims. Meanwhile, my mom yelled at me and it took ages for her to accept it. (JM, interview)

Meanwhile, Ali on his pre-conversion had a different story to tell,

Days before my reversion, I told my mom that I wanted to be a Muslim, she was that shocked and worried. I thought she would be happy as I would change my bad habit. She was not happy at all, so I asked her the reason. Then, she told me about the negative images of Islam, mainly about the misconception so that she did not like Islam and Muslims. Anticipating that, I tried to explain to my mom about the misconception that actually had no relation to Islam. So, she slowly understood me. However, my mom knew me well, when I wanted to do a thing, I would do it even she forbade me to do so. (AA, interview)

All family responses that Chantelle, Jamila, and Ali encountered before have the same difficulties to accept their being Muslims. Parents need some time to finally accept their children's new way of life. No matter how hates the parents about the new religion embraced, they see a change in their children's daily habits. They still respect them as parents because Islam has obliged children to respect their parents even though they are not having the same religion. Respect is what every non-Muslim parent must deserve; however, there is no obedience to the disobedience to Allah. This acceptance process has proven the constructed category of family reaction after conversion, they are positive reactions, negative reactions, mixed reactions, and neutral responses (Neumueller, 2012). Finally, albeit there was a difficult period of acceptance, the family will at the end has the support from the in or outside.

Equally, friendship is another difficult part that many Muslim converts had to deal with. After being a Muslim, many converts have imagined that this issue will come out. Their relation with their social friends can fizzle out. Some converts want to have a complete change in their lifestyle in particular limiting the hangout and the 'fun' lifestyle like drinking no more alcohol and going to the pub. In this case, Stephani had lost some of her friends, she described that,

I lost some friends but I don't care. Some of them really surprised me because we had been friends for years. One of them said, "That's weird man, I didn't really think that your life will be that way". I personally never said anything to them that religion will make me disappear. I didn't say anything to upset them. So yeah, I didn't think too much about it. (SJ, interview)

In addition to this, Adam has different experience about his friend, he told us that, When I turned Muslim then I went back home (Brisbane), the only people I would meet were my friends in the pub. So anyway, when I got home, I went to my friend's place and I told them I am Muslim and they were okay with all that. Even, they said, 'well you can't drink anymore,' they knew that. They got friends that now Muslim. Another friend who is younger than me, one, in particular, I regard him as a very good friend, he just wouldn't talk to me. When I met him at my friend's place he just sat down and said nothing. he just wouldn't talk to me. It's a bad experience through himself living without religion. I understood that. I still don't talk to him to this stay. My daughter said to me that this issue

would happen. She said, ‘Dad, don’t be stressed.’ So, I was surprised that the people I didn’t think would turn against me, turn against me. Meanwhile, the one whom I thought would turn against me, embrace my religion. Like my family, I have a big family from my mother’s side. We got seventeen kids. They are all okay with it. They let me live my life the way I want to live it. I still have a good relation with them. (AS, interview)

To retain or end the friendship is not something that can be easily chosen. Most of the converts choose to end the friendship as there were different thoughts and interests after their conversion. This was mainly that the Muslim convert cannot compromise or adapt to the different day to day practice which affects their new lifestyle, as being Muslims is not only a change on a theological concept but also daily practices. However, it is not always from the Muslim convert’s side who decides the continuity of friendship, the non-Muslims friend has also a contribution to this aspect. If non-Muslim friends can compromise some ideological and practical facets, the friendship will continue. Thus, it is clear that strong friendship will last longer and superficial one will be easily drifted apart.

Anwaar, a German Muslim convert’s friendship experience is in line to this issue, he stated that 95% of his friends at the music industry had left him after he announced his conversion (Neumueller, 2012). Anwaar has the same conclusion to what he had been through his conversion journey that he is now blessed with better friends and real friends of the Muslim community. This is also what many participants in this present study had experienced in their post-conversion journey.

The change into a new religion, especially converting to Islam has been likely suspected as committing a crime. Interestingly, confrontation in family or friendship is never been found when one is converting to another religion, let’s say Christianity to Buddhism; however, the opposition is only loudly-heard when someone changes his identity to be a Muslim. Meanwhile, it has been discovered that religious practices will embody into a modern moral self (Winchester, 2008), unfortunately, Islam is not perceived as having the value. In short, it is factual that religion will actually make someone to have more moral selfhood, so does Islam.

A Pattern of Identity Formation: Male Vs Male and Male Vs Female

It is very intriguing how male and female converts construct their identity after their conversion. It shows different patterns between them, between males and between male vs female. The pattern of identity formation between one male to another has equal similarities and differences, Adam and Ali in this case share five similarities and so do their difference. The similarities lay on their limited access to study Islam, their neutral tense about Islam during their pre-conversion, they have no significant family issue, they have been negatively responded by their social friends after the conversion, and they have the same turning point to embrace Islam—it is about the concept of God. A clear pattern is detailed below:

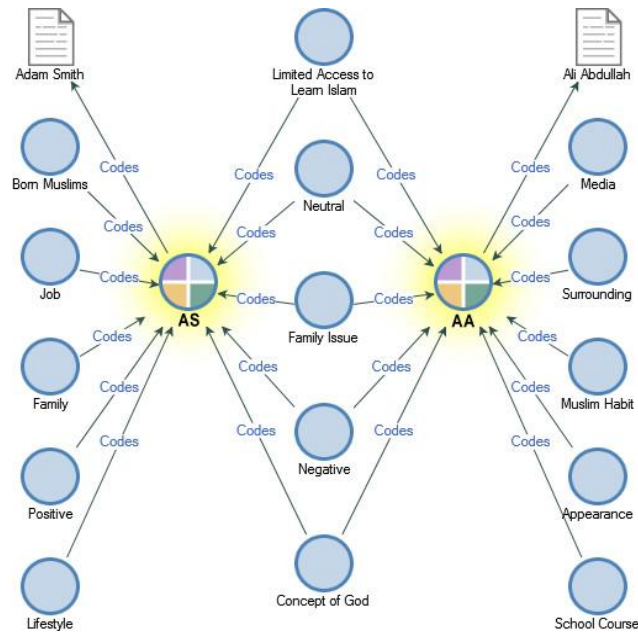


Figure 2. The pattern of male vs male converts' identity formation

In contrast to male vs male pattern, it is clear that difference lies in the pattern of male vs female Muslim converts identity development. Male and female pattern share 4 similarities with 6 different aspects. The pattern is shown below:

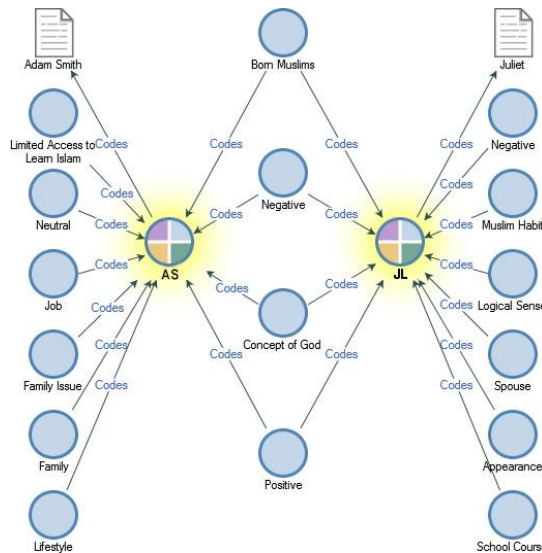


Figure 3. The pattern of male vs female converts' identity formation

The similarity is found being constructed around issues with born Muslims, previous negative perception of Islam, interest in the concept of God, and positive support from the family. It is seen from the male structure that job becomes one of the

challenges he found after being a Muslim as he has to adjust to the praying time during the day. Another is a lifestyle, this convert has lost his friends in the club that he used to go before. Meanwhile, in female structure, appearance—the issue of putting on headscarf, shows as an aspect that is contributing to female convert's identity development. Also, interestingly, the support of the spouse (husband) is what matters in female converts live after her conversion.

My mom and dad accepted but then were really upset. We just take a slow step, so I don't reveal everything to them. I don't want to break relationships. When someone doesn't believe in Allah the way we believe in, they are not going to understand why we do things". Married to Muslim family had reduced the tension between me and family. After getting married, I got a house and lived with my husband in a suburb where Muslims are around. (RS, interview)

In such a notion, Rao articulates that by converting to Islam, male vs female converts are not only changing their identity to be Muslims, but also changing their identity into Muslim male and Muslim female (Rao, 2015). She is trying to argue that conversion is not only 'doing religion' but also 'doing gender' that convert individually seeks to do religious observance which is morally acceptable. For instance, Muslim male is defined as having more responsibility than female, whereas the Muslim female is to have more submission on her husband. These all are directed to attain 'moral habitus' (Winchester, 2008) . After all, Muslim convert will accept what they believe to be true and their belief on the truth that can be developed during their journey as Muslims.

In addition, six female converts in Australia were discovered to have more social challenges related to family, friends, and lifestyle in the public spaces of their everyday social contact (King, 2017). Some challenges that the six female converts encountered post-conversion have been imagined previously; thus, the challenge was not that really matter in comparison to the strong desire that they have on conversion because they are convinced enough that they are on the right track.

Conclusion

Social-challenges is factually observed as the biggest constraint for Muslim converts living in a non-Muslim society like Australia. The Muslim converts have been challenged in terms of their loss privilege of being white, being stigmatized by the lifelong born Muslim, challenged by their family, and have to end their friendship with their non-Muslim friends because of the different theological and practical concept. This present study also captured different patterns of identity development between male vs male and male vs female converts in terms of their social challenges. It is to highlight that being Muslim converts in the West is a challenging process that the Muslim ummah and Muslim community need to pay this issue into a serious account. If not being addressed, the lonely way of living life as Muslim converts in the West can disrupt the images of Islam in Western society.

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