

A CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF INFLUENCES ON THE IDENTITY CHOICES MADE BY BELIEVERS WITH A MUSLIM BACKGROUND IN THE UK

By David Combes

Abstract

Identity has been seen as one of the major challenges BMBs (Believers in Christ with a Muslim Background) face as they progress in working out their new faith.¹ In order to better understand this complex issue and the relationship between experience and subsequent choices of identity, four BMBs who all attend one church in England were interviewed. Through the inductive process of a naturalistic research approach these case studies were explored in light of the nature of identity, culture, and community. The culmination was in three proposed hypotheses which investigate the influences of attitude towards Islam, persecution, and community acceptance. Some understanding was achieved in the variety of identities chosen. One unifying element was that all, despite these variables, had chosen to lose their Islamic religious identity in favour for either a Christian label or neutral equivalent. A critical factor in cultivating this change was seen to be the influence of the post-modern pluralistic English society in which they now live. Although generalised rules for identity construction were not formulated, it was possible through the use of sociological and theological insights to understand the challenges faced by these BMBs. The findings of this research are seen as paving the way for future research into the challenges faced by BMBs living in the UK today.

1 Introduction

1.1 BMB Reserach

Over the last twenty years the issues surrounding how a Believer in Christ who has a Muslim Background (BMB) should live and express their new devotion has been under great scrutiny and debate

¹ See footnote 2 for an explanation of the term BMB, 4

within the missiological world.² From this hive of activity has sprung, in some circles, new fervour for the BMB to continue identifying with and integrating into their existing culture and religious society as advocated by the Insider Movement (IM).³ Other Christian practitioners within the Muslim world have seen weaknesses in this view and swung to an opposing method of extractionism out of Islam.⁴ Yet within these discussions there continues to be a central concern of identity which remains as significant today as it was two decades ago. In 1998 John Travis wrote:

If perhaps the single greatest hindrance to seeing Muslims come to faith in Christ is not a theological one (i.e. accepting Jesus as Lord) but rather one of culture and religious identity (i.e. having to leave the community of Islam), it seems that for the sake of God's kingdom much of our missiological energy should be devoted to seeking a path whereby Muslims can remain Muslims, yet live as true followers of the Lord Jesus.⁵

Today a BMB's primary concern once they commit to following Jesus is often more related to issues of identity and community rather than style of worship.⁶ This dilemma has been echoed in the limited but significant Islamic ministry I have had the privilege to experience. Therefore, the aim of this research is to probe these concerns of identity and community and their mutually dependent relationship. This is not with the desire to produce a fundamental or generalized solution, but to assist in the researcher's and reader's

² BMB will be used as the most current term for a Believer in Christ with a Muslim Background. However, much of the literature from the last twenty years uses an alternative form of Muslim Background Believer (MBB).

³ The Insider Movement is essentially a believer who remains within and identified with their Islamic community, see, Kevin Higgins, 'Inside What? Church, Culture, Religion and Insider Movements in Biblical Perspective', St Francis Magazine, 5.4 (August 2009), 74

⁴ An advocate for extractionism is found in, John Span, 'The Outsider Movement of Hebrews 13', St Francis Magazine, 6.4 (August 2010), 716

⁵ John Travis, 'Must all Muslims leave "Islam" to follow Jesus?', EMQ, 34.4 (October 1998), 414

⁶ Green, Tim. Forthcoming. "Conversion in the Light of Identity Theories", in David Greenlee, (ed), Longing for Community, Pasadena, Calif., USA: William Carey Library

appreciation of the complex nature of the issues faced by a BMB today.

The structure of this thesis is different from the conventional social science model and is more akin to the naturalistic and inductive style within qualitative research.⁷ By utilising this approach the structure mirrors the same research process as conducted by the researcher where field work and literature study happen simultaneously. The aim is to give the reader a similar 'discovery' moment to that experienced by the researcher as the BMBs' experiences and choices are unpacked.⁸ To this end the Chapter structure closely follows that advocated by John W. Creswell for a naturalistic case study thesis.⁹ This introduction is followed by the research approach and the results summary, Chapters 2 & 3. Then the primary focus of the paper follows as each BMB story is unpacked and compared to others and contemporary literature, Chapters 4 & 5. The culmination of this process is seen in Chapter 6 where I propose three hypotheses which are evaluated against the experiences of the BMBs interviewed.

1.2 Linking Research With Contemporary Literature

This research focuses on examining the identity choices of BMBs who now live in the UK. However, it is important to note that there is very little literature available on the experiences and theology associated to BMBs in this context. The focus over the last twenty years has been with those who remain within their Muslim majority countries and subsequently which identities they chose. However, this research will still utilise the literature available despite this disparity, but will attempt to explore how these assertions and patterns translate to the UK setting. It is my hope that through this I will be able to add to the ever growing depth of resources available

⁷ Bill Gillham, *Case Study Research Methods, Real World Research Series*, London: Continuum, 2000, 96

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See section 2.1 for further justification for a naturalistic case study approach, 6, John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among five approaches*, 2nd ed., London: Sage Publications, 2007, 80

to those who have the opportunity to witness and disciple Muslims in this country.¹⁰

2 Research Approach

2.1 Research Philosophy

The goal of this research is to understand from the BMB's perspective what identity choices they face today and what contributes to their decision making. Therefore, the best match to this orientation is the 'case study' as written through the naturalistic approach.¹¹ This gives greater opportunity to reconstruct in detail the BMB's experiences and understand their choices at a level which a widely focused quantitative survey may not offer. Supporting this approach are the foundational assumptions of qualitative research and ideographic knowledge. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the individual's perceptions of the world around them.¹² Indeed the fact that individuals look for meaning as they interpret these interactions lies at the heart of this research approach.¹³ The individual's story of how they became a believer and what reactions they perceived from those around them is an important source of information for us. Judith Bell writes:

It is therefore not enough simply to naively observe what a person is doing or how they are behaving within any given situation. In order to understand what is actually going on within that situation it is necessary to understand the meanings of the actions, the way the situation is being interpreted by those performing within it and the reasons behind the ways individuals and communities act in the particular ways that they do.¹⁴

¹⁰ Horst B. Pietzsch, *Welcome Home: Caring for Converts from a Muslim Background*, Nairobi: SIM, 2010, 61

¹¹ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, London: Sage Publications, 1985, 359

¹² Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project*, 5th ed., Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010, 5

¹³ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, London: SCM Press, 2006, 29

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 38 (emphasis original)

As the BMBs share their story they are incorporating their understanding of meaning and purpose into their experiences, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to listen and unpick this meaning in order to formulate research data.¹⁵

The second foundation is ideographic knowledge. Unlike quantitative research, which relies on provable and repeatable experiments in order to make generalizations, this qualitative research embraces the concept that ‘meaningful knowledge can be discovered in unique, non-replicable experience’.¹⁶ Through the BMB’s story we are able to better understand the world and how God reveals himself, sometimes uniquely, to individuals. Fitting with these research philosophies a semi-structured interview technique was adopted for this study.¹⁷

Within the naturalistic approach chosen for this research are a few more important characteristics which have been incorporated; the principles of inductive analysis and constant comparison. There was no overriding theory or hypothesis which was externally brought to the table at the start and then subsequently tested, but through analysis one was inductively formed.¹⁸ This does not deny that any researcher approaches their study with previous knowledge or opinion, but importantly these do not govern the course of the research.¹⁹ As the research was conducted each case study was compared to the others and to the growing literature study which developed as the researcher’s knowledge in the topic increased. As a theory emerged and became delimited a series of proposed hypotheses was constructed against the BMB case studies, see Chapter 6.

The desired impact of this research is to inspire change from the reader through a wider appreciation of the complexity of BMB life through their resonance with the experiences described.²⁰ As the

¹⁵ Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project*, 19

¹⁶ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 43

¹⁷ See section 2.3 for a further discussion, 9. See John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 63

¹⁸ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 333

¹⁹ Louis Cohen and Lawrence Manion, *Research Methods in Education*, 6th ed., Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, 173

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 47

reader appreciates the stories of each BMB they might identify with a particular circumstance or issue which either provides some help or comfort for their situation.

2.2 BMB Group Selection

In order to gain focus a selection of BMBs were chosen for interview who are attached to one particular church in England. It proved difficult to reach this goal as many other churches around the UK were reluctant to 'release' their BMBs to external parties over fear of confidentiality and security.²¹ However, despite this challenge a sympathetic church was located.

2.3 Interview Ethics

2.3.1 Sampling method

From this group of believers a selection according to 'purposive sampling' was chosen who would provide some level of diversity.²² Rather than accepting any BMB who was available for interview, the group was reduced using a series of criteria to both protect them and the integrity of the research.²³ This can be found in full in Appendix A, but here is a summary of some of the key points. Firstly, all the interviewees must have been born and raised as Muslims within a Muslim dominant country before they came to live in the UK. This ensures that their Islamic heritage had sufficient time to permeate their behaviour and worldview. Secondly, their English language ability must be sufficient so that they can understand the researcher's questions and formulate answers which express their stories and emotions. Thirdly, the church worker would vouch that their professed faith was genuine and would be a link for the researcher.²⁴ The next set of conditions allowed for some controlled variety.²⁵ Firstly, either men or women were considered; secondly,

²¹ See section 6.2 for some discussion around the issues that contribute to these fears, 29

²² Ibid., 69

²³ See Appendix A for a summarised list of the Sampling Criteria, 43

²⁴ Speaking with one experienced asylum worker false conversion for the sake of enhancing their asylum case is common.

²⁵ With data collection being focused to four BMBs the extent of variety is admittedly limited in itself.

the BMB could originate from either Iran or Afghanistan;²⁶ thirdly, they could be from either Sunni or Shia branches of Islam;²⁷ and fourthly, the length of time in being a BMB could vary.

2.3.2 Suggested interview questions

Before the interviews took place, in order to ensure informed consent, the Interview Outline sheet was sent electronically to each volunteer.²⁸ This introduced the researcher, the research goal, levels of anonymity, and suggested topics for the interview. These topics were carefully designed to remain as open as possible, not leading or presumptuous.²⁹ In following the approach of inductive research these topics had the primary aim of sparking discussion about the BMB's life story. At times these prompts were either not needed or were followed in a different order just as the interviewee wished.

The level of power held by the interviewee was an important consideration. To follow a naturalistic case study approach it was important to allow them freedom in describing their experiences in a way that seemed both natural and helpful for them. This follows the 'focused interview' technique described by Judith Bell and relies on the researcher to judge when to listen and when to probe further.³⁰ This was found to be very successful as it allowed the BMBs to decide the level of detail to provide given the sensitive nature of the subject.³¹ For example, Jon found discussing his family life from when he was a child too painful and after some time declined to comment further. Professionalism was maintained as much

²⁶ These countries are of personal interest to the researcher.

²⁷ See section 6.1 for a discussion of the impact the Shia background had on three of BMBs interviewed, 25

Throughout this paper Shia will be used as it is the original Arabic word, but alternatives are Shiite or Shiah, see Ian Richard Netton, *A Popular Dictionary of Islam*, rev ed., Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997, 230

²⁸ See Appendix B for Interview Outline sheet given to each volunteer prior to discussion, 44

²⁹ Judith Bell, *Doing Your Research Project*, 162

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 165

³¹ See section 2.3.3 for a discussion on confidentiality, 11

as possible during the interviews and the temptation to fall into a counselling role in situations like these was avoided.³²

2.3.3 BMB Confidentiality

Another important aspect was in agreeing to sufficient confidentiality with the interviewees. For many BMBs their past association to Islam can cause great suffering for both them and their families if identified by fellow countrymen even in England.³³ Therefore, ensuring they cannot be sufficiently identified throughout this paper was essential for their peace of mind. To that end each BMB chose a false name at the start of their interview which they are thenceforth referred by. Even though two were happy to be identified as living in the particular town, others were not, and so all are identified as simply residing in England. All were happy for their ethnic and Islamic heritage to be identified given that the above two conditions were met. It was the original intention that the interviews would be recorded, audio only, and subsequently destroyed. However, when permission was requested all declined for fear of future identification. Despite this, sufficient notation was made to enable subsequent analysis of their stories.³⁴

3 Results Summary: BMB Profile Table

Name	Country of Origin	Previous Islamic branch	Previous Attitude as a Muslim	Chosen Internal Religious Identity	Chosen External Religious Identity	Chosen Cultural Identity	Length of time being a BMB
Jon	Afghanistan	Shia	Hatred of Islam	Follower of Jesus	Various depending on situation	Afghan with some English cultural practices	6 yrs
Steve	Iran	Shia	Hatred of Islam	Heaven Foreground Believer (HFB)	Heaven Foreground Believer (HFB)	Iranian, 'member of planet Earth'	2 months
Pauline	Afghanistan	Sunni	Indifferent, not strict	Christian	Christian	Hybrid of Afghan and English	33 yrs
James	Iran	Shia	Dislike of Islam, strict follower	Christian	Christian	Mixture of Iranian and English	2 yrs

Figure 1 – BMB profile summary from interviews

³² John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 66

³³ See later discussions in section 6.1 and 6.2 regarding the impact of persecution on identity, 25, 28

³⁴ See Appendix D for the notes taken during each interview

Figure 1 is a summary of the key aspects of the background and chosen identities of the BMBs interviewed as understood by the researcher.³⁵ They display an interesting amount of variance between their experiences and subsequent choices. They will now be discussed further in the following sections focusing on aspects of identity and culture (community).

4 Case Study Exploration: The Nature Of Identity

4.1 Levels And Types Of Identity

We will now begin to unpack aspects of each case study and compare them with the findings and assertions found in literature. This is with the desire to improve our understanding of the challenges facing BMBs in England today.

At a spiritual level the identity of believers is rooted in their creator God and with Christ the head of the Church.³⁶ However, despite each BMB being on their own individual journey in discovering this reality, the concept of identity this paper examines is more related to social science. With many variations of definition available a social-psychological understanding has been adopted due to its particular relevance for Islamic religious and cultural identity. Under this definition, identity results from a combination of psychology, the individual personality; and sociology, the label others place upon you.³⁷ The interaction between these occurs when a person looks both internally and externally in asking the question, 'Who am I?'. Their internal opinion is influenced by how they understand the people around them, and also how these people in turn view the in-

³⁵ See Appendix C for the full table and Appendix D for the researcher's interview notes, 47, 48

³⁶ For examples of a spiritual source of identity see, Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Children of God, Life in Christ: Volume 3: Studies in 1 John*, Nottingham: Crossway Books, 1993, 9-20; and, Selwyn Hughes, *Christ Empowered Living*, Farnham: CWR, 2002, 27-42, and 173-191

³⁷ Green, Tim. Forthcoming. "Conversion in the Light of Identity Theories", in David Greenlee, (ed), *Longing for Community*, Pasadena, Calif., USA: William Carey Library

dividual.³⁸ This interaction is also influenced in how individual uniqueness is matched against collective similarities. The differences an individual has would naturally produce a unique self-identity if left unchallenged. However, the bonds shared by a community who, for example, are all Muslim provides a connection which unites them under one group identity.³⁹ Through this we can see that self-identity is made not given, constructed not simply passively absorbed.

There are different ways of describing the concept of self-identity, two of which are presented here as most relevant for BMBs.⁴⁰ Giddens and Sutton separate identity into primary and secondary levels.⁴¹ The former is constructed in early life as they socialise and create identities of gender and ethnicity, and they become quite rigid. The latter is formed further on in life and is built upon their primary identity but linked to social status, job, or achievements and therefore is more fluid. From the interviews, see Figure 1, ethnic (not Islamic) identity in each case was retained to some degree, even in Pauline's case where she has lived in England for thirty two years and still considers her identity to be part Afghan and part English.⁴²

Although religion is not mentioned in Giddens' and Sutton's model whilst ethnicity is, when examining the identity of a Muslim religion it would seem to be an important consideration for their primary identity.⁴³ Constructed from birth surrounded by their Muslim family and society it is likely to become at least as fundamental to them as their nationality, proving perhaps a challenge to change. However, despite this convincing logic, all the BMBs interviewed had in a substantial way chosen to change their religious

³⁸ Anthony Giddens and Philip W. Sutton, *Sociology*, 6th ed., Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009, 256

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 257

⁴⁰ For a survey of a variety of approaches to self-identity which are not presented here see, Harold W. Noonan, *Personal Identity*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge, 2003

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² See Appendix D, section 3.5, 53

⁴³ Damian Emetuche, 'The Challenge of Discipling Muslim Background Believers', *Global Missiology*, 2.7 (January 2010), 4

identity to become more ‘Christianized’ or alternatively neutral, see Figure 1. For James a complete shift has occurred towards the former, perhaps influenced by his decision to never return to Iran and hence distance himself from his Islamic roots.

Tim Green adapts a three tiered model of identity from work by Beit-Hallahmi, see Figure 2 below.

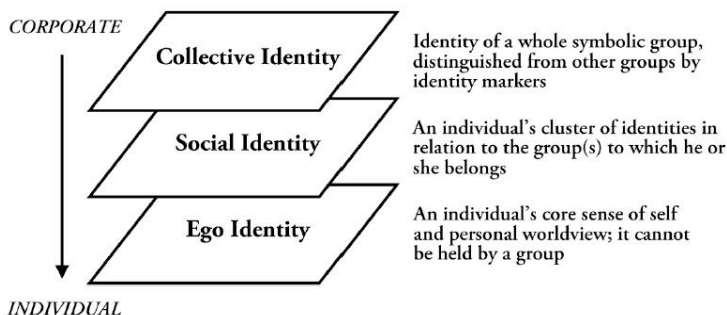


Figure 2 - Model of Identity ⁴⁴

Helpfully Green goes on to apply this model for Muslims.⁴⁵ The ‘collective’ identity is that shared by the worldwide ummah of Islam which they were born into, a type of primary identity.⁴⁶ The ‘social’ level is lived out in daily life and can include religious customs which the community shares and which create a strong bond.⁴⁷ Finally, the ‘ego-identity’ is found in the personal commitment and emotional attachment the Muslim has to their faith.⁴⁸ This can be subconscious in early life and evolve into a more purposeful and

⁴⁴ Green, Tim. Forthcoming. "Conversion in the Light of Identity Theories", in David Greenlee, (ed), Longing for Community, Pasadena, Calif., USA: William Carey Library

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ummah is the Islamic term for their united global community.

⁴⁷ Green, Tim. Forthcoming. "Conversion in the Light of Identity Theories", in David Greenlee, (ed), Longing for Community, Pasadena, Calif., USA: William Carey Library

⁴⁸ Ibid., reference located under the ‘The "Ego Identity" Layer’ section

chosen attitude later. Green's model has proven to be particularly helpful in understanding the challenges faced by the BMBs interviewed. Aspects from both models will be discussed further in the proceeding sections as we continue to explore the case studies.

4.2 Conversion As a Time Of Identity Transition⁴⁹

According to Green's model in Figure 2, religious conversion normally begins by the Gospel targeting the 'ego-identity' of a Muslim.⁵⁰ This was certainly the case for the BMBs interviewed, but equally seen at the 'social' level when they emigrated out of their mono-religious Islamic society and into the multicultural atmosphere of the UK. Both James and Steve, who became believers once they entered England, described how their religious identity drastically changed after this move. James is happy to be identified as a Christian, but Steve adopted a more neutral concept which I liken to a Heaven Foreground Believer (HFB) as described by John Span.⁵¹ It is an inclusive label for all believers worldwide irrespective of ethnicity or previous religious association. Steve wanted to drop his identity and association with Islam but equally was not comfortable to adopt a 'Christian' label which he associates with Western society and the negative history of Christianity.⁵²

Research by Lori Peek into religious identity formation of second generation immigrant Muslims in the USA has offered a useful three stage process which is applicable to the BMBs interviewed.⁵³ 117 out 127 Muslims interviewed grew up in a Muslim family in the USA and had a Muslim identity 'ascribed' to them.⁵⁴ However, they passed through a 'choice' stage as they grew up and became aware

⁴⁹ For the sake of simplicity 'conversion' is understood here as the BMB's acceptance of Jesus as their Saviour, and their on-going commitment in following his teachings.

⁵⁰ Green, Tim. Forthcoming. "*Conversion in the Light of Identity Theories*", in David Greenlee, (ed), *Longing for Community*, Pasadena, Calif., USA: William Carey Library

⁵¹ John Span, '*The Outsider Movement of Hebrews 13*', 716

⁵² See Appendix D, section 2.4, 50

⁵³ Lori Peek, '*Becoming Muslim: The Development of a Religious Identity*', *Sociology of Religion*, 66.3 (2005), 223

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

of the options but decided to remain Muslim.⁵⁵ Finally, as they began to feel secure in their choice they would openly 'declare' their religious identity when asked.⁵⁶ The interviewed BMBs underwent a similar process within their own context, but they resulted in a variety of external religious identities.⁵⁷ Steve became a believer after he had moved to England, but he did not tell anyone of this change for some time. Even if he was asked he was not happy to advertise this change.⁵⁸ Only after several months once he had become comfortable in his HFB self-identity did he move to this third stage. Interestingly, from the interviews there does not seem to be a clear correlation between the length of time in being a BMB and their stage of identity development. Pauline, a BMB for thirty three years, developed a strong Christian religious identity with a well-established hybrid cultural identity blending both Afghan and English aspects.⁵⁹ However, a similarly strong religious identity is expressed by James, a BMB of only two years. For him his attitude and experience of Islam in the past were very negative and so perhaps he was more ready to lose them.⁶⁰ However, I also feel that the freedom associated with the post-modern culture in which they now live has provided the cushion they needed to progress to this final 'declaration' stage. Jon remains the exception who has lived in England for four years and been a BMB for six but still refrains from admitting this change to strangers.

5 Case Study Exploration: The Influence Of Culture

5.1 Pluralism And Post-Modernity

The Western culture in which the BMBs now live is dominated by aspects of pluralism and post-modernity.⁶¹ Radically different to

⁵⁵ Ibid., 226

⁵⁶ Ibid., 230

⁵⁷ See Appendix C for a summary of their identities, 47

⁵⁸ Steve translated the persecution he thought he would have received from Muslims onto people living in the UK which also kept him silent.

⁵⁹ See Appendix D, section 3.5, 53

⁶⁰ See Appendix D, section 4.2, 54

⁶¹ Ajith Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love*, Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 2001, 18

their mono-religious Islamic culture they are now faced with a variety of religious and cultural options which are generally acceptable to the majority of English society.⁶²

Post-modernity resulted as a reaction against modernity and its trust in science and the set knowledge of reality. 'Because truth is individual and subjective, there is no aim for consensus.'⁶³ Everyone's opinion is just as good as everyone else's; what is important is if you are satisfied with it. Due to this lack of universal truth Western society has seen the rise of post-modern pluralism.⁶⁴ Through this no faith can have the absolute truth, and so all are tolerated as equal within a diverse community of race and religions. Gary Phillips argues that society has always had this diversity within it, but that in recent times the magnitude of these divergent worldviews present in one culture is unprecedented.⁶⁵

To understand Phillips' opinion we must consider the concept of globalization. A difficult term to define, Jeannine Fletcher offers useful phrases like 'compression of the world', and the 'intensification of consciousness of the world', all driven through the explosion of media and migration.⁶⁶ Prior to the end of the twentieth century religions were considered to be bounded sets defined through race and geography.⁶⁷ But since then, globalization has threatened these neat identities as people of many different cultures migrate and intermix. The result is 'hybrid identities' where the culture, religion, and associated identities of an individual are fluid and change as they move within a multicultural society.⁶⁸ This impact of globalization challenges the rigid definitions of primary and secondary

⁶² Islam as both culture and religion has not been hugely impacted by modernity or post-modernity, see, Mark Sedgwick, *Islam & Muslims: A guide to diverse experience in a modern world*, London: Intercultural Press, 2006, 38

⁶³ Gary Phillips, '*Religious Pluralism in a Postmodern World*', in David S. Dockery (ed.), *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000, 255

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 258

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 259

⁶⁶ Jeannine Hill Fletcher, '*Religious Pluralism in an Era of Globalization: The making of modern religious identity*', *Theological Studies*, 69 (2008), 395

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 401

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 407

identities which Giddens and Sutton offer. The town where this research was based is a typical contemporary British town which has become increasingly multicultural and multiethnic in the last century. Today BMBs regularly mix with a variety of nationalities and religious groups.⁶⁹ For example, Jon and James, who are full time students, have many friends consisting of English and non-English people.

The impact of post-modern pluralism provides BMBs with the freedom from external expectation to choose a particular identity.⁷⁰ Previously in their Islamic community changing identity would have been unthinkable, but living in England they are faced with untold opportunities and a society which generally avoids judging change.⁷¹ The community which the BMBs now live in is a strong contributing factor in choosing an external 'Christianized' identity. An exception is found in Jon who became a believer whilst living in Afghanistan but still prefers not to externalise a 'Christian' identity in the UK. He is still influenced heavily by the fear of persecution which he avoided at all costs in Afghanistan.⁷²

5.2 Islamic Community

It is important to understand the difference between community found in Islamic countries and England. We shall be discussing in more detail within Chapter 6 the impact this difference has on identity.

Belonging to the global Islamic community is as important to the Muslim as their religious doctrine.⁷³ Members of the ummah consider themselves distinct from other communities around the world through following the way of life which Allah endorses.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Nicholas Abercrombie, et al., *Contemporary British Society*, 3rd ed., Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000, 226

⁷⁰ Peter Sedgwick, 'Who Am I Now? - Theology and Self-Identity', *Theology*, 104.819 (May/June 2001), 197

⁷¹ The exception is the portion of society which consists of orthodox Muslims.

⁷² See Appendix D, section 1.3 and 1.4, 48, 49

⁷³ Phil Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992, 26

⁷⁴ See Sura 3 ayah 110, 'You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind.', Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, rev. ed., Birmingham: I.D.C.I, 2004, 43

This fuels their incredible sense of ‘collective’ identity which is not restricted by race or ethnicity, see Figure 2. It is a collectivist society where group identity is considered an important part of everyday life, whilst in contrast Western culture is more individualistic. Damian Emetuche writes:

Both the family and society serve to give identity to a Muslim. It is almost unthinkable to do anything without the sanction or approval of the community or to take an action that will bring disrespect to one’s family or community.⁷⁵

As a new believer wrestles in deciding to remain within their Islamic community they enter a difficult liminal stage full of confusion and doubt.⁷⁶ Jon faced this when he became a believer through his mother and an American missionary whilst in Afghanistan. However, all of the BMBs experienced some liminality caused by the immigration process and associated change of community.⁷⁷ It is understandable that their sense of identity was deeply shaken.

5.3 Islamic Religion And Culture

5.3.1 C-Spectrum and Identity

The on-going discussion surrounding the Insider Movement (IM) has produced some well needed analysis on the nature of culture and religion in relation to theology.⁷⁸ Both impact behaviour and provide input to a person’s worldview.⁷⁹ Some argue they are so interconnected that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to separate one

⁷⁵ Damian Emetuche, ‘*The Challenge of Discipling Muslim Background Believers*’, 4

⁷⁶ Edward Evans, ‘*Discipling and Training for Muslim background Believers Part 1: A Growing Need*’, St Francis Magazine, 2.3 (September 2007), 3

⁷⁷ Adis Duderija, ‘*Factors Determining Religious Identity Construction among Western-born Muslims: Towards a Theoretical Framework*’, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 28.1 (December 2008), 372

⁷⁸ Rebecca Lewis, ‘*Insider Movements: Honoring God-Given Identity and Community*’, IJFM, 26.1 (2009), 16-19

⁷⁹ Kevin Higgins, ‘*Inside What? Church, Culture, Religion and Insider Movements in Biblical Perspective*’, 82

from the other and so a complete change is necessary.⁸⁰ However, not all agree with this, Timothy Tennent comments:

Those who say that Muslims cannot separate religion and culture are ignoring over thirty years of successful C4 contextualization throughout the entire Islamic world which has proved that BMB's new identity in Christ is so powerful that it does, in fact, provide a new religious identity without one having to sever their former cultural identity.⁸¹

C4 is part of a spectrum, depicted in Figure 3, which contrasts the types of 'Christ-centred communities' observed in the Muslim world and can be closely associated to the 'social identity' layer in Figure 2. It was originally published by John Travis in 1998 but has since been eagerly utilised as evidence for those endorsing the IM.⁸² The critical difference between C4 and C5 is that of identity and this is the real advantage of using this model within this research.⁸³ Both retain cultural expression of their faith, but with C4 they identify themselves as a follower of Isa.⁸⁴

Muslims view C4 believers as a strange kind of Christian and C5 followers as a strange kind of Muslim; there is a danger that neither is accepted by either community. For Steve and James, who became believers whilst in the UK, they have never needed to face these challenges set in a Muslim dominant community. However, for Jon

⁸⁰ John Span, 'The Critical Kingdom Question: Can one be identified with the Kingdom of God and with Islam at the same time? (Part 1 of 2)', St Francis Magazine, 6.2 (April 2010), 324

⁸¹ Timothy C. Tennent, 'Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 "High Spectrum" Contextualization', IJFM, 23.3 (Fall 2006), 106

⁸² The terms C5 and Insider Movement (IM) are considered by most to be interchangeable. For original article see, John Travis, 'The C1 to C6 Spectrum', EMQ, 34.4 (October 1998), 407

⁸³ For an alternative model of cross-cultural church which does not emphasise identity see Saturation Church Planting (SCP), Jim Montgomery 'His Glory Made Visible: Saturation Church Planting', in Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (eds.), Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A reader, 4th ed., Carlisle: Pater-
noster, 2009, 660-662

⁸⁴ John Travis, 'The C Spectrum', in Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (eds.), Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A reader, 4th ed., Carlisle: Paternoster, 2009, 664

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
<i>Christ-Centered Community Description</i>	A church foreign to the Muslim community in both culture and language	C1 in form but speaking the language used by Muslims, though their religious terminology is distinctively non-Muslim	C2 using non-Islamic cultural elements (e.g., dress, music, diet, arts)	C3 with some Biblically acceptable Islamic practices	C4 with a "Muslim follower of Jesus" self-identity	Secret Believers, may or may not be active members in the religious life of the Muslim community
<i>Self-Identity</i>	"Christian"	"Christian"	"Christian"	"Follower of Isa"	"Muslim follower of Jesus"	<i>Privately:</i> "Christian," or "Follower of Isa," or "Muslim follower of Jesus"
<i>Muslim Perception</i>	Christian	Christian	Christian	A kind of Christian	A strange kind of Muslim	Muslim

Figure 3 - C1 to C6 Spectrum: Christ Centred Communities

and Pauline who did, both decided to initially keep their new faith a secret (C6).

From a cultural perspective, all the BMBs interviewed made a distinct break from a cultural identification with Islam. They all emphasised their ethnic identities and associated cultural practices which has subsequently become blended with English habits.⁸⁵ This disparity between these observations and Travis' model might be because it attempts to generalise trends over a wide variety of expressions of Islam across the world. But, as the BMBs interviewed come from such a focused ethnic group and being primarily Shia, it is perhaps understandable why they do not easily correlate.⁸⁶

5.3.2 Assessing Culture and Religion

Once a Muslim becomes a BMB they can react in three ways in how they choose to continue with their Islamic cultural and religious practices. They can completely reject them, attempting minimal contextualization and usually adopting the culture and religious practice of a foreign missionary, typically characterised as C2.⁸⁷ Conversely, they can uncritically accept and continue with their Islamic practices believing that there is some good in them, but run

⁸⁵ See Appendix C for a summary of the BMBs cultural identities, 47

⁸⁶ See section 7.1 for a further discussion surrounded further research opportunities which include expanding the ethnic and religious scope, 35

⁸⁷ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985, 184

the risk of falling into syncretism.⁸⁸ Paul G. Hiebert describes the best option to be critical contextualization of their practices and retention of what they consider to be biblically appropriate.⁸⁹ Only one BMB interviewed seemed to have maintained any of his Islamic religious heritage.⁹⁰ Steve held his Bible whilst praying, kissed it, and placed it on his forehead in a ritualistic manner.⁹¹ It is unclear from the interview if this practice used a 'local form' and 'local meaning' from Islam, or if he has changed the meaning to be 'Christian'.⁹²

5.3.3 Biblical Worldview and Culture

Supporters of the Insider Movement utilise the Jerusalem council's verdict (Ac 15) and relate BMBs with Gentiles saying, 'Not only are Gentiles not required to become culturally Jewish, they are not required to become religiously Jewish either'.⁹³ Rebecca Lewis, an advocate for the IM, claims that a person's religious and cultural framework into which they are born is not random but divinely appointed (Ac 17 v 26), and therefore they can and should remain within it once they become a believer.⁹⁴ However, critics like Dick Brogden offer an interesting response by interpreting the verse to confirm God only as the creator of culture.⁹⁵ Both opinions are fraught with difficulties.⁹⁶ For Lewis' view many, like Brogden, feel

⁸⁸ Ibid., 185

⁸⁹ Ibid., 186

⁹⁰ It is recognised that the limited amount of time during an interview is not evidence of an absence of Islamic practices from the other interviewees.

⁹¹ See Appendix D, section 2.4, 50

⁹² Kang-San Tan, 'Can Christians Belong to More than One Religious Tradition?', ERT, 34.3 (July 2010), 262

⁹³ Kevin Higgins, 'Acts 15 and Insider Movements among Muslims: Questions, Process, and Conclusions', IJFM, 24.1 (Spring 2007), 32

⁹⁴ Rebecca Lewis, 'Insider Movements: Honoring God-Given Identity and Community', 17

⁹⁵ Dick Brogden, 'Inside Out: Probing Presuppositions among Insider Movements', IJFM, 27.1 (Spring 2010), 34

⁹⁶ The meaning of the Greek used in Acts 17 v 26 is under on-going debate and proves to be inconclusive, see I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, Leon Morris (general editor), Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Nottingham: IVP, 1980, CD edition

she is advocating Islam as a 'value neutral' religion and culture, and hence it does no harm remaining within and being identified with it. Lewis responds by saying that all culture is equally fallen; Islamic, the West, even 'Christian' culture has syncretism.⁹⁷ Conversely, for Brogden's interpretation of Acts 17 v 26 we need to be careful not to place too much weight on God as the creator of all culture if indeed we understand all religions, even pagan, to be part of that culture. A solution is proposed by Rick Brown. He defines culture as those social conventions which are specific to and shared by the society.⁹⁸ Worldview however is related to the core beliefs and values a person has within the society, which can vary from person to person.⁹⁹ He asserts that the purpose of the Gospel is to change the worldview of an individual to become Biblical and theocentric whilst equally supporting diversity in cultural expression.¹⁰⁰ At the heart is the assumption that there is good within each culture which can be retained without conflict with the Bible, a similar understanding to IM supporters and the Lausanne movement.¹⁰¹ However, the opinions of all the BMBs interviewed were that the Islamic portion of their culture and religion contained no good to retain. For all of them it was associated with persecution and suffering in varying degrees, and hence they chose to relinquish it.

6 Proposed Hypotheses

Through exploring the BMBs' stories and identity choices I now propose three hypotheses which attempt to illustrate the relationship between them and the key factors of worldview and community. Each hypothesis utilises assertions found in literature and were

⁹⁷ Ibid., 33. It is worth noting that Lewis appears to come from an inclusivist outlook as she frequently asserts that the Gospel can and is indeed 'designed' to save people within any cultural and religious framework. See, Rebecca Lewis, 'The Integrity of the Gospel and Insider Movements', *IJFM*, 27.1 (Spring 2010), 44

⁹⁸ Rick Brown, 'Contextualization without Syncretism', *IJFM*, 23.3 (Fall 2006), 127

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 128

¹⁰¹ See item 7 in the Cape Town 2010 Commitment, The Lausanne Movement, The Cape Town Commitment, <http://www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment>, accessed on 12 Apr 11

identified to a greater or lesser degree within the interviews. But this literature is based on studies from Muslim dominant countries, and so a secondary aim is to shed light on the relevance and power of these writings to the BMBs interviewed in the UK.

6.1 Hypothesis 1: Past Association And Attitude To Islam

If a BMB's past association and attitude were lax or negative towards Islam they are more likely to relinquish them and become more 'Christianized' in their religious and cultural identity.

Joshua Massey has proposed a chart examining Muslim attitudes towards their faith; see Figure 4. Despite the variety found within Islam, Massey believes that all Muslims can be located within three major groupings: Disillusioned, Ambivalent, and Content. Within his chart he also places some ethnic groups, but he admits they are only applicable at the macro level and freedom must be given to individual variance.¹⁰² He created this chart from his extensive knowledge and experience working as a cultural anthropologist in the Muslim world. I have found little evidence of this model being used or evaluated in literature, yet I believe it to be extremely useful. His goal is to move beyond merely understanding the Muslim, but to link their attitude to an appropriate 'Christ centred community'.¹⁰³ Again, Massey admits this correlation is a generalization.

For disillusioned Muslims, Massey argues they are 'ripe for conversion to "Christianity" and desire to be "extracted" from their Muslim communities'.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, a highly decontextualized form of Christianity would appeal to them. 'Christ centred communities' in the C1 - C3 range have varying levels of imported religious expression normally from a foreign source, but importantly their identity both internally and externally is understood to be 'Christian'.¹⁰⁵ Massey argues from his contact with Iranian BMBs that their experience with Shia Islam has been so negative due to fanaticism that they do not understand why any BMB would want to hold onto

¹⁰² Joshua Massey, *'God's Amazing Diversity in Drawing Muslims to Christ'*, 13

¹⁰³ See Figure 4 where Massey's correlation to the C-Spectrum has been added, 26

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 13

¹⁰⁵ See Figure 3 for a summary of C-Spectrum groups, 21

it.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, not only are they motivated to change their religious practices to become more ‘Christian’, but they also no longer wish to be identified with Islam. This strong motivation for a ‘Christian’ identity was seen with James during the interview, but not with Steve.¹⁰⁷

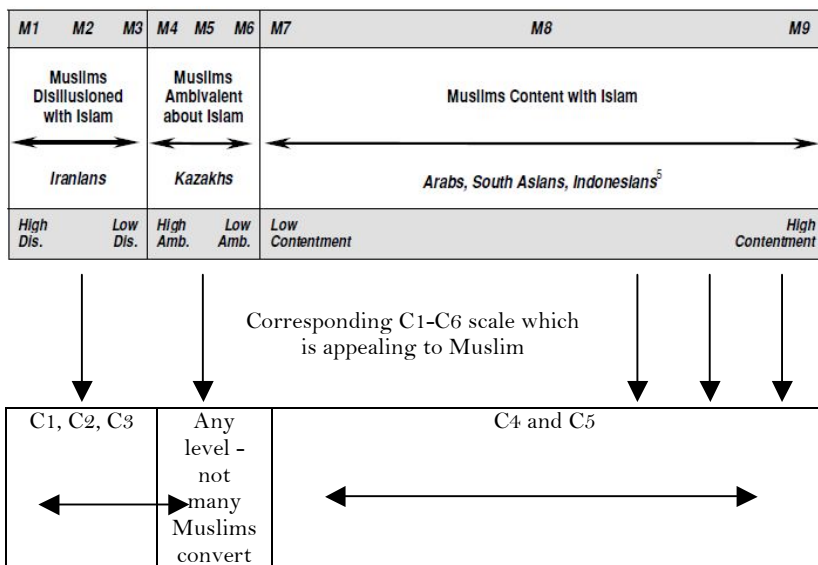


Figure 4 - M1 to M9 Spectrum: Muslim attitudes about Islam¹⁰⁸ (adapted to include corresponding C-Spectrum groups as described by Massey)

Both Jon and Steve (ex-Shia Muslims) have had considerably bad experiences with their Islamic family and friends which seem to have pushed them away from their Islamic identities.¹⁰⁹ Jon expresses multiple religious identities as he is hesitant to incorporate a full ‘Christian’ identity either internally or externally. He prefers the internal label ‘Follower of Jesus’ which straddles both ‘Christian’

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 13

¹⁰⁷ Both James and Steve originate from Iran, and reasons for their disparity will be discussed below.

¹⁰⁸ Joshua Massey, *God’s Amazing Diversity in Drawing Muslims to Christ*, 12

¹⁰⁹ See Appendix D sections 1.2 and 2.2 for a description of their individual stories explaining this hatred towards Islam, 48, 50

and 'Muslim' labels and can be associated closely with C4. However, his external identity is more fluid as he switches between a Muslim label amongst Afghan Muslims out of fear of persecution, and Christian when amongst English Christian friends. To this extent he demonstrates a basic characteristic of 'multi-religious belonging'.¹¹⁰ This flexibility is not dissimilar to that observed by Bernard Dutch, a church planter amongst Muslims, where BMBs expressed a multi-faceted concept of identity, one which Dutch says is hard for 'Western' people to understand.¹¹¹ A similar neutral label has been chosen by Steve as he prefers both internally and externally to be known as a 'true follower of God'.¹¹² However, James closely followed Massey's disillusionment correlation as he quickly relinquished his Islamic heritage and adopted an 'English Christian' identity.¹¹³

Pauline (ex-Sunni Muslim) falls under the Ambivalent category. Interestingly, after being a secret believer (C6) for a while she quickly developed a full Christian identity both internally and externally after immigrating to England.¹¹⁴ It is probable that as she moved out of her Islamic community and into a post-modern pluralistic culture she found it easier to project her new faith via a label which is already in use by the English Christians she met.

None of the BMBs interviewed fell into the Content group or C4 - C5 range. John Span, a critic of C5, presents a convincing argument to those who believe it is possible to remain in practice a member of the Kingdom of God and the community (or kingdom) of Islam.¹¹⁵ He argues that both 'kingdoms' demand complete loyalty

¹¹⁰ 'Multi-religious belonging' - where individuals publically identify themselves as followers of more than one religion, see Kang-San Tan, 'Can Christians Belong to More than One Religious Tradition?', 252

¹¹¹ Bernard Dutch, 'Should Muslims Become "Christians"?', IJFM, 17.1 (Spring 2000), 15

¹¹² For explanation of the HFB identity see, John Span, 'The Outsider Movement of Hebrews 13', 716

¹¹³ See Appendix D, section 4.4, 54

¹¹⁴ See Appendix D, section 3.4, 52

¹¹⁵ It is worth noting that Span seems to come from an exclusivist understanding of salvation and ecclesiology. His preferred Kingdom analogy has the Church as a fundamental prerequisite and therefore must influence his Outside approach. See,

and have similar goals in global mission. As such it is impossible to be a 'patriotic citizen' of both at the same time.¹¹⁶ His choice of words is interesting as it suggests that it is possible to feign loyalty to both, as a BMB might if they were C6, but crucially in their hearts there can only be one master (Mt 6 v 24). For this reason Span endorses 'lower' spectrum expressions of faith which incorporate a distinct 'Christian' identity. Although this argument sounds viable on paper it does come in direct conflict with other missionary experiences.¹¹⁷

What we have seen by exploring the relationship between past association and attitude towards Islam and BMB identity is that Massey's chart, although useful in theory, does not always follow the patterns shown by the four interviewees. Despite this, an influence does seem to exist and it is a useful aspect to consider in any future Islamic ministry.

6.2 Hypothesis 2: Islamic Community Reaction To The BMB

If there is a strong negative reaction by the Islamic community against the BMB after their profession of faith in Christ, it is more likely that they will embrace and even seek out a new identity and sense of belonging amongst Christians.

As a development of Hypothesis 1, this section will examine the specific influences of persecution, loss of community, and extractivism over a BMB's identity.

Once a BMB starts to externalise some change in their faith Muslims can react very negatively. This is primarily due to the Islamic teaching of shirk (idolatry through polytheism) and ridda (apostasy from Islam) as being terrible sins which bring great shame not only to their family but also the whole community.¹¹⁸ A key factor is the misunderstanding of the 'Christian' label as being nega-

John Span, *The Critical Kingdom Question: Can one be identified with the Kingdom of God and with Islam at the same time?* (Part 1 of 2), 316

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 326

¹¹⁷ For example of testimony supporting C4 communities see, Timothy C. Tennent, *Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 "High Spectrum" Contextualization*, 106

¹¹⁸ Ian Richard Netton, *A Popular Dictionary of Islam*, 214, 231

tive and relating only to the lax morals witnessed in the West's media.¹¹⁹ Bernard Dutch observes from his work in the Middle East:

To the average Muslim here, "Christian" means someone who worships three gods, believes Jesus is the product of a sexual liaison between God and Mary, drinks wine, eats pork, defiles himself with ritually unclean habits, betrays his cultural heritage, and uses religion to procure assistance from Westerners.¹²⁰

There is no divine mandate for believers to use the 'Christian' label, but it was originally adopted by society as a nickname for the first believers (Ac 11 v 26).¹²¹ Dutch continues to argue that if accepting the 'Christian' label results in rejection and suffering, why do it? ¹²² But this is exactly what John Span would encourage any BMB to do. In his counter offering to the IM ¹²³ entitled the 'Outsider Movement', Span utilises the example of Christ to signify the importance and even requirement of persecution as part of our identification with Christ (Heb 13 v 12 – 14).¹²⁴ He spends considerable time carefully relating these verses to the Old Testament sacrificial system which was enacted through Jesus being crucified outside the city gate just as animals were. He writes:

Just as Jesus had suffered outside of the city gate with a purpose, now his followers are also called with a purpose to leave their campground of comfort, the place of privilege, the security of their old religion.¹²⁵

It is certainly probable that the original readers of Hebrews were in need of escaping their moral lethargy, but Span's ideology needs further assessment if it can be universally applied as he claims. Firstly, he does not engage in a comparison with the remainder of

¹¹⁹ Phil Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization*, Waynesboro: Gabriel, 2003, 177

¹²⁰ Bernard Dutch, 'Should Muslims Become "Christians"?', 16

¹²¹ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, CD edition

¹²² Bernard Dutch, 'Should Muslims Become "Christians"?', 16

¹²³ See footnote 3 for explanation of the IM term, 4

¹²⁴ John Span, 'The Outsider Movement of Hebrews 13', 726

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 724

scripture in light of these few verses as he creates his theology.¹²⁶ His scriptural focus in the article is particularly limited which he then proceeds to apply universally to modern day Islamic contexts. Secondly, it is reliant on forging a link between Christ's purpose on the cross, as he understands it, to the BMB's need to leave their old religion and identity. This link does not seem to tally as neatly as he would like. The purpose of Jesus' death was primarily propitiation which, Span infers, meant he needed to be crucified outside Jerusalem to parallel Old Testament law. However, the BMB's purpose in leaving the 'city' of their old religion in order to identify with Christ seems not to be equally related to the Old Testament sacrificial system. A BMB does not have to leave his Islamic religion and culture in order to experience suffering.¹²⁷

None of the BMBs interviewed had directly received persecution as a result of their new faith. For Jon and Pauline, who became believers in their Muslim homelands, they kept their faith a secret to avoid such suffering. However, Pauline is a good example of how the development of a mature faith can help produce a secure 'Christian' identity later in life. She has since been back to Afghanistan and visited family in Pakistan, and at each time she declared that she was a Christian irrespective of what their reaction could have been.¹²⁸

A second element to consider is the relationship between identity and community. As already described in Chapters 4 and 5, self-identity is strongly rooted in the relationship the person has with their community, something which is especially important in Islamic societies. If the Muslim community reacts very strongly against the BMB's new faith, it is likely that the believer is rejected from that community. This happened to Mazhar Mallouhi, a famous writer in the Arab world, as he chose to become religiously

¹²⁶ Example passages which the IM often use and would be useful for Span to engage with are 2 Kings 5, Acts 17 v 26, Acts 15.

¹²⁷ See the example of Mazhar Mallouhi who received just as much rejection from Christian circles and Muslim circles when we was an outsider then an insider respectively. See Paul-Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path Between Two Faiths*, Plymouth: Cowley, 2007, 107

¹²⁸ See Appendix D, section 3.4, 52

and culturally 'Christian' after his conversion. As he e 'became alienated from his family and all his former friends, he faced a profound crisis of identity'.¹²⁹ This is typical of a rejectionist approach to conversion from Islam where none of the old religion or culture is considered good enough to retain (practice or identity) and hence a foreign expression is adopted.¹³⁰

The impact of community towards the BMB's identity should not be underestimated. Once rejected by one community it logically follows, according to a social-psychological understanding of identity, that they should want to join another community in order to retain their self-worth and identity. For BMBs in Muslim countries an alternative community may not be available or may have to be sought in secret, as was the case for Jon. His mother secretly met with Western Christians who helped them through the early stages of their faith. But for Pauline in Afghanistan no such support was available. It was not until she emigrated to the UK and joined a local church that she was able to forge her 'Christian' identity.¹³¹

We have seen through exploring the impact of rejection by the Islamic community how the BMB's identity can be affected and in some cases pushed towards a more 'Christianized' label.

6.3 Hypothesis 3: Acceptance Into The 'Christian' Community

If the 'Christian' community accepts and nurtures the BMB it is more likely that their identity will become more 'Christianized' both internally and externally.

Again this hypothesis is a development from Hypothesis 2, but shall specifically examine the response of the Church community in the UK towards BMBs.

From Kathryn Kraft's PhD study exploring the influence of community on Arab BMBs, it is interesting that not all churches

¹²⁹ Paul-Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path Between Two Faiths*, 105

¹³⁰ Duane Alexander Miller, 'Reappropriation: An Accommodationist Hermeneutic of Islamic Christianity', *St Francis Magazine*, 5.3 (June 2009), 6

¹³¹ See Appendix D, section 3.6, 53

welcomed them despite the BMBs specifically seeking them out.¹³² It would seem that within churches in the Arab world there still lies a distinction between believers who are 'born Christian', and those who covert from Islam.¹³³ However, in the church where this research took place this certainly does not seem to be the case. All were welcomed in despite them being immigrants and Steve is an asylum seeker.

Public opinion of immigration and asylum seekers has continued to deepen in the last thirty years in the UK, becoming a hot topic in any political debate.¹³⁴ Numbers of asylum seeker applications rose from 4,223 in 1982 to 110,700 in 2002, with over half of new applications being from Muslim countries.¹³⁵ This dramatic increase in the numbers of Muslims entering the UK is likely to cause some backlash in public opinion regarding Islam in general.¹³⁶ However, it does not seem to have significantly impacted the particular church where this research is based. The parameters of this study did not allow for an investigation into the attitudes expressed directly by church members, but through the BMBs' testimonies we are able to understand the general situation. All of them felt welcomed into the church despite the fact that the ethnic makeup of the congregation is overwhelmingly 'white-English'.¹³⁷ In fact, Steve has been given the task of helping to serve drinks at the end of church meetings, a sign, for him at least, that he has been accepted into the church community. This church's attitude supports Peter Riddell's opinion that the general view of Christians in the UK has swung since World

¹³² Kathryn Kraft, 'Faith is Lived out in Community: Questions of New Community for Arab Muslims who have Embraced a Christian Faith', St Francis Magazine, 6.6 (December 2010), 964

¹³³ This is Kraft's opinion, Ibid, and is also echoed by Mazhar Mallouhi's experience. See, Paul-Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path Between Two Faiths*, 107

¹³⁴ For examples of the current attitudes towards immigration and asylum seekers see blogs on, The Guardian Newspaper, 'Immigration and asylum', The Guardian, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/immigration>, accessed on 05 Jan 11

¹³⁵ Home Office statistics quoted in, Peter G. Riddell, *Christian and Muslims: Pressures and potential in a post-9/11 world*, Leicester: IVP, 2004, 55

¹³⁶ Ibid., 55

¹³⁷ This is how the BMBs described the makeup of the church.

World War II, and under the influence of globalization they are becoming more inclusivist than exclusivist.¹³⁸ They see more in common with those who follow a religion, particularly a monotheistic faith like Islam, and hence are more sympathetic to converts.

Kraft's comments on the influence community has over identity were strongly echoed in the interviews:

As people join Christian groups, they find their new identities reinforced in community. People who have close regular contact with other converts find this to be especially true, and they work hard to reinforce their identity by seeking opportunities to be with people who share their background and their faith.¹³⁹

For Jon, Steve, and James, the home group which the church runs specifically for international believers remains their favourite meeting each week. There they are able to socialise amongst a variety of nationalities and believers who have a range of religious backgrounds. In fact, James was introduced to the church by Jon whilst he was a Muslim, and they have since become great friends.¹⁴⁰ Through her research Kraft recognised a connection between BMB identity and the person who led them to Christ. If they were led by a foreign missionary it is likely that their chosen identity will mirror that of the missionary; they would join a C2 church and leave their Islamic community.¹⁴¹ However, we must be careful to clearly discern in each situation what influences the BMB to make this choice. In the past missionaries have commonly expressed an exclusivist view and encouraged the BMB to step out of their Islamic heritage.¹⁴² In this research when asked if any experienced this influence directly all the interviewees said no. It would seem that as they now reside in the UK they feel the freedom to choose for themselves an 'English' church with which to be identi-

¹³⁸ Peter G. Riddell, *Christian and Muslims: Pressures and potential in a post-9/11 world*, 33

¹³⁹ Kathryn Kraft, 'Faith is Lived out in Community: Questions of New Community for Arab Muslims who have Embraced a Christian Faith', 958

¹⁴⁰ See Appendix D, section 4.3, 54

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 963

¹⁴² Damian Emetuche, 'The Challenge of Discipling Muslim Background Believers', 7

fied.. Perhaps this is because there are no C4 - C5 options for them, or perhaps it is because they view joining a 'white-English' church as a step towards becoming more culturally 'English'.¹⁴³ This certainly seems to be the case for James who commented that he is consciously attempting to do this.¹⁴⁴

Through this section we have explored how acceptance into a church community can influence the construction of a new identity for BMBs. However, it is not a guaranteed catalyst for a 'Christian' identity. Although it seems to have this effect on Pauline and James, Jon is decidedly mixed in his internal and external identities despite being accepted into the church. The desire to retain his Afghan cultural identity, in contrast to James, has perhaps limited how much religious identity he adopts as 'Christian' which he associates so closely with the West.¹⁴⁵

7 Conclusion

We have seen through this paper that the concept of religious and cultural identity is complex and often results in a variety of expressions. With the BMBs interviewed there seems to be a distinct motivation to lose as much as possible of their religious and cultural association to Islam. This desire spans those who did express significant negative associations with Islam, but also those who were indifferent about their Muslim faith. It would seem that a critical influence on the development of their new identity has been the freedom associated to living in a post-modern pluralistic society. Within this society individual expressions of religion and culture are not judged harshly or interpreted as an insult, unlike their previous Islamic communities. The acceptance into the Christian community, which is predominantly a 'white-English' expression, has helped to reinforce their new faith and provided a support struc-

¹⁴³ This pattern seems to contradict the popular Homogenous Unit Principle which would assert that the BMBs would prefer a church containing other BMBs. See, Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed., revised and edited by C. Peter Wagner, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 163

¹⁴⁴ See Appendix D, section 4.5, 55

¹⁴⁵ See Appendix D, section 1.4, 49

ture for some to alter their religious identity to become more Christian, and over time their cultural identity to become more English. Although it must be asserted that theologically Muslims are not required to pass through a foreign religious or cultural expression of Christianity in order to receive their salvation, it is certainly an option for them if they would desire it post conversion. Therefore, according to this research, other 'white-English' dominated churches in the UK need to ensure they are consciously open to integrate BMBs into their community, rather than assume they would prefer a different expression of Church.

This small scale piece of research has only provided a window into understanding the challenges faced by the four BMBs. There is now a great impetus to continue onto further study and aspire to create a more generalized model. The first exciting step could be to begin with the three hypotheses proposed in this paper and engage in a more widespread study perhaps utilising both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. This could be centred on BMBs from different areas around the UK, perhaps those who live in a more Muslim dominated community. It would be interesting to explore if this situation would result in a greater reluctance to externalise a 'Christianized' identity amongst this majority. Other areas for consideration could be to further isolate one particular branch of Islam or even one particular ethnic group. Massey, as discussed from Figure 4, proposes some distinct correlation between ethnicity, attitude towards Islam, and their subsequent new faith in Jesus. Further research could investigate if this correlation is valid within the diverse ethnic BMB population living in the UK. A final development could be to expand the investigation to include Muslim converts who were born and still live in the UK. As the population of Muslims in the UK ever increases they are an important pool of potential BMBs who hold perhaps a unique challenge regarding their future identity choices.

It has been the goal of this paper that through the exploration of sociology and theology the BMB case studies might have resonated with the reader, and thereby provided some knowledge or wisdom for today's ministry amongst Muslims and BMBs in the UK.

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Appendix A - Sampling Criteria

1. They must be linked to this particular church in England.
2. They must be born and raised as a Muslim in a Muslim dominant country before they came to the UK.
3. They must be able to speak and understand the English language sufficiently, to be judged jointly by the church worker and the researcher prior to the interview.
4. They must show genuine faith in Jesus, to be judged by the church worker prior to the interview.
5. They can be either man or woman as both will provide a different perspective to the research question.
6. They can be from any Muslim dominant country in the Middle East or Southern Asia.
7. They can be from either 'denomination' of Sunni or Shia within Islam but not Sufi or other splinter groups.
8. The length of time being a BMB can vary in order to illustrate any impact on identity development.

Appendix B - BMB Cultural and Religious Identity – Interview Outline

Who I am

My name is David Combes. I am final year undergraduate student at Moorlands Bible College in Dorset studying a degree in BA (Hons) Applied Theology, specializing in Cross Cultural Studies.

What is the purpose of this interview?

As part of my final academic year I am undertaking a dissertation research project which aims to investigate the complex issues involved in a Believer with a Muslim Background (BMB) working out what cultural and religious identity they should adopt whilst living in the UK. Specifically, how much of their Islamic practice and identity have they chosen to retain and how much has changed to become more 'Christian', and why. After studying the available academic literature available on this subject my aim is to see how in practice this issue has been resolved, for better or for worse, in real life situations through interviewing a selection of BMBs.

Interview Confidentiality

I understand the sensitive nature that this research presents to any BMB who is willing to participate. I would like to record the interview, audio only, only for my personal use whilst I am writing up the report. All recordings will be deleted once this has been done, by May 2011 at the latest. However, if you specifically do not wish to be recorded we are still able to continue with an interview, but please inform me beforehand. I will ensure that nobody will be able to identify you, by using a pseudonym and, if you wish, I will not be referring to personal information, such as where you are from or where you have studied.

Suggested Interview Topics

The interview will be semi-structured allowing for free discussion about any relevant issue the BMB feels is important to their situation. However, to assist with the development of the conversation I

have compiled a list of topics below which can act as a guideline or a prompt to ensure that all the main issues identified from my literature research have been covered in some way.

- Confirm level of confidentiality the BMB is happy with for the written report and if audio recording is possible during the interview.
- Details of the BMB
 - Which area of the UK do you live in?
 - How long have you been in the UK?
 - How long have you been a BMB?
 - What were the circumstances of your commitment to Isa?
- MBB's previous Islamic life
 - How would you describe your Islamic religious commitment before becoming a BMB?
 - Was this previous Islamic lifestyle similar to that of your family or community?
 - What were your impressions / feelings about 'Christianity' before you became a believer?
- New religious identity of the BMB
 - What do you call yourself now - for example: a Christian, a Muslim, a Follower of Isa, or another?
 - Why did you choose this?
- Challenges the BMB faced after becoming a believer
 - What difficulties did you face once you became a believer?
 - How did your family and the surrounding Muslim community react to your new belief?
- Cultural or religious changes made
 - Was there a sudden change in your lifestyle, or a slow progression, or nothing?
 - Did you continue attending the Mosque? Do you still now?
 - Did you start attending a 'Christian' meeting - for example a church or specific BMB group?
 - Did you start to eat pork? Do you now?
 - Others...
 - How did you come about to make these choices?
- Support and Advice from other Believers

- Did you have regular contact with other believers after your commitment to Isa?
- Were they BMBs or 'English Christians'?
- What advice did they give you in regard to changing or keeping your cultural or religious identity?
- Did you find this useful or confusing?
- Thoughts about 'English Christian' practices and beliefs
 - Have you attended an 'English Church' since being a BMB?
 - What were your feelings regarding the style of Church this is?
 - way of singing and the music
 - mixture of men and women in the Church building
 - the way the Bible was used
 - Communion / Lord's Supper / Eucharist
 - Baptism
 - Were you accepted by this 'English Church'?
- Any other factor or detail the BMB wishes to contribute

Appendix C - BMB Profiles

Name	Approximate Age	Country of Origin	Ethnicity	Previous Islamic branch	Previous Attitude as a Muslim
Jon	19 yrs	Afghanistan	Hazara	Shia	Hatred of Islam
Steve	mid 30s	Iran	Persian	Shia	Hatred of Islam
Pauline	mid 50s	Afghanistan	Tajik	Sunni	Indifferent, not strict
James	19 yrs	Iran	Persian	Shia	Dislike of Islam, strict follower

Name	Chosen Internal Religious Identity	Chosen External Religious Identity	Chosen Cultural Identity	Length of time being a BMB	Other
Jon	Follower of Jesus	Various depending on situation	Afghan with some English cultural practices	6 yrs	Full time student
Steve	Heaven Foreground Believer (HFB)	Heaven Foreground Believer (HFB)	Iranian, 'member of planet Earth'	2 months	Asylum seeker
Pauline	Christian	Christian	Hybrid of Afghan and English	33 yrs	Lived in the UK for 32 yrs
James	Christian	Christian	Mixture of Iranian and English	2 yrs	Full time student

Appendix D - BMB Interview Summaries

Section 1

Name - Jon

Age -19 years old

Ethnic Origin - Afghanistan, Hazara people group

1.1 Length of time living in the UK

- 4 years living in the UK, since the age of 16 years
- Came to UK to flee from the violence and trouble in Afghanistan, not specifically because he is a BMB, but this did contribute

1.2 Attitude and Practice of Islam previously

- Shia branch of Islam, as are 90% of Hazara people groups in Afghanistan
 - religious practice was more lax than an orthodox Sunni, for example they prayed only 3 times a day not 5
 - as Shia, community expectations are they don't need to attend Mosque weekly unlike the Sunni members of his society
- Islamic hypocrisy
 - He believes that Muslims in fact do not love their neighbour as they claim
 - Sunnis kill Shias
 - Shias do not look after other Shias, they are all selfish
 - Family branded by Sunnis as Kafir or infidels for being Shia - this means not a Muslim, loose morals, a real insult
- The Taliban (Sunni) killed his father for being a Shia, so Jon hates Islam as it seems to advocate such behaviour and division

1.3 Circumstances of their 'conversion'

- Became a believer whilst in Afghanistan through Western aid workers who were Christian

- His mother became a believer first, and then she shared the Gospel to Jon and his siblings
- His mother secretly worked in the aid worker's office and they kept their belief a secret for fear of persecution or death
- They secretly attended an underground 'church' run by the aid workers. They were the only non-Western people there
- Was secretly baptized by aid workers whilst in Afghanistan

1.4 Changes in their religious practices and identity

- Previously labelled as a Kafir or infidel by the Sunnis for being a Shia
 - This is the same label given to apostates, so he already had it
- A secret believer with his family in Afghanistan from both Sunni and Shia for fear of persecution and rejection
- As Shia they weren't expected to attend the Mosque regularly. Therefore as believers in Afghanistan they stopped going with the exception of community wide festivals which would expose their absence if they didn't go
- Not told Afghan friends in the UK that he is a believer
- Self identity - very much a 'Follower of Jesus' rather than 'Christian'
 - he knows English people understand what the term 'Christian' means, but for him it relates too much negative understanding from his past
- External identity - various
 - amongst his Afghan friends in the UK he remains a Shia Muslim (expected as he is ethnically Hazara)
 - amongst English 'Christian' friends or other BMBs he is happy to say he is a believer, but always cautiously

1.5 Changes in their cultural practices and identity

- Cultural identity will always be Afghan even if he gets a British passport
 - born an Afghan, so always one
- Considers England to be his home now, no intention to return to Afghanistan

- Current identity - a mixture of Afghan and English as he grapples to keep hold of Afghan (e.g. food), but can't help but absorb some English customs, e.g. music, language, clothes
- Is happy to separate Islamic and Afghan culture as he attempts to hold onto Afghan part

1.6 Support and acceptance of the 'Christian' community in the UK

- Attends particular church in Southern England
- Happy in this church, was accepted by members and feels welcome there
- Goes to Sunday services, but prefers the house group style meetings held during the week
 - member of the particular house group which specialises in multi-cultural believers
- Does not know of any other Afghan BMBs, so all of this 'Christian' discipling done by English people

Section 2

Name Steve

Age -mid 30s

Ethnic Origin - Iran, Persian people group

2.1 Length of time living in the UK

- 2 years, travelled to the UK in 2008 as an asylum seeker

2.2 Attitude and Practice of Islam previously

- Shia Muslim
- Raised by very strict Shia parents, considered fanatical Muslims
- Abused as a child by a Muslim and is now homosexual
- Family found out about sexual orientation and attempted to kill him; he fled home at the age 21 years old
- As a result he hates Islam

- generally, because of the fanatical attitude of his parents which he likened to the Taliban with whom he didn't agree
- specifically, their unloving attitude to his abuse situation
- Admits that most Shia Muslims in private still 'sinned' by having alcohol, illicit sex
- Very cautious about making friendships with Muslims in UK

2.3 Circumstances of their 'conversion'

- It is fair to say that Steve gave up his Muslim identity whilst in Afghanistan after he fled from his family. Then he had a period of liminality where he had no secure identity
- In October 2010 he met the church worker in this particular town who showed Christ's love to him
- He received a Bible in Farci, his native tongue and so read about Jesus
- Considers now Mohammed to be a good teacher, but a liar
- Became a believer through the work of this particular church
- Relies heavily on Jesus' provision for his food and accommodation each day
- Pursuing healing from the abuse of his past

2.4 Changes in their religious practices and identity

- Wanted by Iranian community as an Apostate from Islam and as a homosexual (considered a great sin)
- Self identity - doesn't like being labelled as a BMB, or as a Christian.
 - He is just a true follower of God like all other believers across the world
 - The term 'Christian' is too heavily linked to Western believers, and BMBs are associated too much with Islam. He prefers to lump everyone together in one unified identity - is he trying to replicate the great ummah identity he felt as a Muslim?
 - I have likened this identity to Heaven Foreground Believers (HFB)

- External identity - Since being in the UK he knows many Iranian and Libyan Muslims, but avoids religion and is a secret believer.
- An Islamic religious/cultural form retained
 - When praying together at the end of the interview he insisted on having his Farci Bible in hand, kissed it and pressed it to his forehead, a sign of respect as shown in the Islamic religion and culture. However, interestingly, he was happy to store the Bible on the floor going against Islamic tradition in this way

2.5 Changes in their cultural practices and identity

- Conscious effort to give up all Islamic culture as it is all related to Islamic religion which he considers 'stupid'
- He considers that anyone can become a believer from any culture or religion - a radical change from previous attitude whilst he was a Shia
- Self identity - very much Iranian, however prefers to consider himself a 'member of planet Earth'
 - a similar attempt by him to unify all peoples under one identity, to link himself to everyone so as not to be divided
- Practically however he seems to have given up most of his cultural practices since being in the UK, e.g. food, clothes
 - Food example - linked to new religious understanding that God has made all food clean including pork

2.6 Support and acceptance of the 'Christian' community in the UK

- Attends particular church in Southern England
- Happy in this church, was accepted by members and feels welcome there
- Goes to Sunday services, but prefers the house group style meetings held during the week
 - member of the particular house group which specialises in multi-cultural believers
- Helps out in serving drinks and setting up chairs in church meetings

Section 3

Pauline

Age -mid 50s

Ethnic Origin - Afghanistan, Tajik people

3.1 Length of time living in the UK

- First visited in 1976 but settled in 1978, so 32 years

3.2 Attitude and practice of Islam previously

- Sunni Muslim
- She and her family were Sunni, but were not fanatic or strict in their observance
- As a result it was common for her and her family to not attend the Mosque each week
 - this was accepted by the local community as specific to her family, not a general expectation of the whole Sunni community
- Indifferent attitude, neither love nor hate, just the way of life she was taught as 'natural'
- Did think that Islam was the only 'true' religion

3.3 Circumstances of their 'conversion'

- Whilst attending University in Afghanistan she met an American couple who sowed the seeds of the Gospel message
- She then visited UK for the first time during her course in 1976 and attended a Catholic church for the first time
- When she returned to Afghanistan in 1977 God worked in her heart so that she became a believer. She says it was all God and not people who guided her
- She was given a Bible of her own and the Spirit spoke to her through particular verses.
- In 1978 she moved to live in the UK and has been here ever since
- She kept it a secret from her family until 1992
- She has been a believer for 33 years

3.4 Changes in their religious practices and identity

- Once she had become a believer in Afghanistan she kept it a secret
 - she was still living with her parents who were from a well-educated and respected family
 - she feared if they found out they would have married her off quickly to a Muslim and her new faith would have died
 - motivation of parents was rooted in shame
- After she became a BMB in Afghanistan, she no longer participated in the 'shrine prayers' in the street which is normally expected - after God's prompting for her
- Other Islamic practices she didn't perform anyway, so it was easier for her new faith to go unnoticed
- She kept her 'conversion' from her family for some years believing it was God's will
- Eventually in 1992 she returned to Afghanistan to visit her family and told them she was a Christian
 - The family's reaction was not too negative as the country was at war and their concern was more on survival than shame
 - She had to explain what the label 'Christian' meant as they understood it to relate to Western values and infidels
- Pauline's understanding of the label 'Christian' changed after she was living in the UK and met some good Christians. She was then happy to use it as a label
- External identity - now it is fully Christian, but this has taken time to develop
- Self identity - fully Christian
- Rejected all Islamic culture and religion in order to avoid syncretism

3.5 Changes in their cultural practices and identity

- Despite living in the UK for 32 years, she still has a mixed cultural identity of Afghan and English
 - she picks the best of both to create a hybrid
- She has kept her native language, and eats both types of food

- Self identity - she still considers herself to be Afghan when people ask her 'where are you from?'
 - So within this hybrid identity, internally her Afghan part is dominant, whilst externally it is more of a mixture
 - She considers her Afghan cultural identity to be God given (like Rebecca Lewis)

3.6 Support and acceptance of the 'Christian' community in the UK

- Importantly, she married an English Christian man which has helped her considerably in feeling secure in this identity
- Before coming to the particular church in England, she attended other churches in the early part of her BMB's life
 - no mentor during this phase; she just passively observed
 - she did have a stable environment as several churches welcomed her in
- Now part of the research's church's life, she has been welcomed and accepted for some years

Section 4

James

Age -19 years old

Ethnic Origin - Iran, Persian people group

4.1 Length of time living in the UK

- Two and a half years as a full time student
- Reason for coming to the UK is unclear, but his father is a Mullah and wanted him to study the Qur'an in order for him to become one also. James did not want this.
- He fears for his life if he should return to Iran now

4.2 Attitude and practice of Islam previously

- Shia Muslim
- His father is a Mullah and wanted him to study the Qur'an in order for him to become one also. James did not want this.

- Hypocrisy – he saw this in the lives of Muslims around him - mostly in the lack of love
 - his father divorced his mother and they all got socially rejected
 - his father regularly beat him, not showing any kind of love or mercy

4.3 Circumstances of their ‘conversion’

- After being in the UK for a short while a BMB invited him to this particular church where they prayed for him to stop having bad dreams (traumatised from the beatings by his father)
- He was healed and saw the power in God
- Was baptized soon after by the church and felt a real sense of cleansing

4.4 Changes in their religious practices and identity

- Previous understanding of ‘Christian’ label was very negative as fuelled by Islamic teaching
- When arrived in UK this label was reinforced by English society, but eventually challenged when he visited this particular church
- He has given up most of the Islamic religious and cultural past as closely associated to his father
- Self identity - Christian
- External identity - Christian, even with Muslim friends in the UK
 - he is happy to use the ‘Christian’ label externally as he knows that in the UK people understand what it really means
- Actively witnesses to Iranian and Muslim friends telling them about his healing and inviting them to church

4.5 Changes in their cultural practices and identity

- He has given up most of the Islamic religious and cultural past as closely associated to his father
- Iranian cultural identity still very strong in him
- If he gets a British passport in the future he might consider calling himself ‘English’

- ultimately, he is happy to and considers it possible not to be Iranian, but English
- Considers 'Christianity' to be the English religion, and so he is one step closer to becoming culturally English
- Now enjoys a mixture of international foods and music
- Importantly - he has a stable English girlfriend
 - although not a Christian, she is interested after James introduced her to Christianity
 - this relationship provides a link with English culture

4.6 Support and acceptance of the 'Christian' community in the UK

- Attends particular church in England
- Happy in this church, was accepted by members and feels welcome there
- Goes to Sunday services, but prefers the house group style meetings held during the week
 - member of the particular house group which specialises in multi-cultural believers