

**Conversion to Islam:**  
**The case of the Dusun ethnic group in Brunei Darussalam**

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## **Abstract**

### **Conversion to Islam:**

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A literature review on the conversion studies reveals that most models of religious conversion postulate Christian-centric and western-centric perspectives. One of these models is the seven-stage Rambo Model. This study's main objective is to critically engage the Rambo Model in exploring the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts in Brunei Darussalam and to answer the first research question that seeks to find out the actual definitions of the conversion stages as how they had been typically experienced by the converts. The model's framework is further tested by the second research question which aims to identify the determinant that explains the variations and similarities found in the stage sequence of the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts in comparison to those occurring in different religious settings.

Drawing on the qualitative data obtained through interviews and the utilisation of relevant literature, the case study of the Dusun Muslim converts confirms the cultural specificity issue inherent in the Rambo Model. Some theoretical changes were suggested where a new concept of contextual components and of culture-free definitions of the stages were added to the model's framework. This modified version of the Rambo Model was found to be effective in demonstrating that the actual definitions of the conversion stages of the Dusun Muslim converts are unique and distinctly specific, principally due to the effects of Brunei's majority-religion context. The theoretical changes of the model were also useful in explaining the variations and similarities in the stage order of conversion process occurring in different religious settings.

Thus, by presenting a non-Christian and non-western case study of religious conversion, this study concludes that a more generic version of the Rambo Model can actually be formulated and be utilised by future research undertakings.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

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### 1.1 Introduction to the Study

In Brunei Darussalam, the conversion of the non-Muslims to Islam is not a new phenomenon. Ever since Islam was declared as the state religion in 1959 through the promulgation of the country's first constitution, the number of non-Muslims who converted to Islam had been increasing each year, and by 2004, more than 16,000 cases of conversion to Islam were recorded by the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre, adding significantly to the accumulated number of the Muslim population, which is a strong 75% of the country's population (Pusat *Da'wah* Islamiah 2005:29).

Thus, as Islam established its foothold as the majority religion in Brunei, it will be of interest to explore how such majority-religion context affects and influences the conversion experience of the Muslim converts in the country. This study will specifically focus on the conversion process of the Dusun ethnic group, one of the non-Muslim ethnic groups in Brunei, and they are the second largest number of Muslim converts in the country. A rationale for choosing the Dusuns as the research subjects of this study is explained below.

### 1.2 Rationale for the Study

My interest in exploring this topic arose from personal experience. I am a Dusun who converted to Islam in 2003, following in the footsteps of my older siblings who converted much earlier. Islam was still a minority religion among the Dusuns before

1980 meaning that conversion was rather a rare occurrence. This pattern is reflected in the conversion pattern within my own family where two of my siblings converted in the 1980s, as compared to nine in the 1990s and beyond. I also observed this pattern in other Dusun families. I believe that the declaration of Islam as the state religion in 1959 and the changes that followed are inextricably linked to the increasing number of Dusuns converted. Personally, I found my schooling a key factor in my early familiarisation with Islam that made the religion more palatable to me, despite the fact that my parents still adhered to the Dusun religion at that time.

Out of this experience emerged a great interest in exploring the situation of other Dusuns to discover how typical the influences on my conversion were. In addition, there never have been any empirical studies of religious conversion conducted in Brunei from a social science perspective. Instead, the existing literature focuses on the practical goal of the *da'wah* (propagation of Islam), for example exploring strategies and methodologies to achieve conversion and creation of relevant institutions to support this (Adam 2003; Serbini 2001; Mail 2001; Yusof 2001). Such analysis is clearly different from the social science research presented here that seeks to understand (rather than simply promote) the conversion process. By examining the Dusun's accounts of their conversion process, this study aims to analyse the different stages of conversion and explore how these stages are intimately linked to the religious context within which conversion occurs.

Likewise, the significance of the study on religious conversion process is further accentuated as I encountered with a number of existing conversion studies to Islam that were carried out in religious contexts that are different from the majority-religion

context within which my conversion unfolded. What interests me is the fact that the nature of the conversion experience of Muslim converts in other religious settings is distinctive from the one that I had experienced. Furthermore, a thorough search of conversion literature involving religions other than Islam led me to a number of studies on conversion processes that reported findings that are either different from, or similar to, one another. Accordingly, I became more intrigued and interested in exploring what causes such variations or similarities in a conversion process.

### **1.3 Main themes of the Study**

There are two main themes of this study. Firstly, there is an examination of the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts, specifically on the definitions of the conversion stages involved in the process. Secondly, there is an investigation of the determinant of the variations and similarities in the stage sequence across different types of religious contexts. This study will employ the seven-stage model formulated by Rambo (1993) to provide the theoretical framework of the study and to carry out the examination of the above two main themes. In comparison to other conversion theories, this study believes that the Rambo Model is more comprehensive in its approach to provide a balanced understanding of a conversion process as it embraces all the possible factors and situations involved in the process. As Rambo considers the context of a conversion process as one of the stages in his model, it will allow this study to carry out a proper examination on this particular aspect of the process as I believe, even at the outset of this study, that the context plays a much greater and a more complex role than just being a stage.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

As this study aims to explore the conversion process to Islam in Brunei, and to other religions in various types of religious settings, the research objectives are as follows:

- 1) This study aims to critically engage the Rambo Model to enhance the potential of the model to be a general theory of religious conversion that cuts across different types of religious contexts.
- 2) To improve the existing knowledge on the issues of conversion phenomenon to Islam in Brunei through the examination of individual conversion accounts of the Dusun ethnic group in Tutong District.
- 3) To yield valuable insights into the consistencies and inconsistencies found in the stage sequence of conversion processes that occurred in religious contexts that are different from Brunei's majority-religion context.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

In relation to the above objectives of the study, two main research questions are asked:

- A) What are the characteristics and definitions of the conversion stages as they had been experienced by the Dusun Muslim converts?
- B) What is (or are) the determinant(s) of the variations and similarities in the sequence of the stages that occur in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim

converts, in comparison to those occurring in different types of religious settings, as illustrated by the findings of existing studies?

For the benefit of the reader, the first research question will be known as question 5A (Chapter 5 deals with question A) and the second research question as question 6B (Chapter 6 deals with question B).

### **1.6 Value and Importance of the Study**

A number of areas would benefit from this study. The potential values of the study are as follows:

- 1) The findings of this study will contribute to theory development of the Rambo Model. As the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts occurred in a religious setting that is different from the United States-setting in which the Rambo Model was developed, this study will provide a test of how culturally-specific the model is to the broader context. The findings of this study can help to extend the scope of generality of the model.

This particular importance of the study can also be seen as a response to Rambo's proposition "to broaden the data base" by exploring conversion processes to religions other than Christianity (Rambo 2010: 434). One of the religions emphasised by him is Islam, where he detects there has been some form of negligence in the field over the examination of conversion processes to Islam.

- 2) New knowledge from this study will help to add another dimension to the existing conversion research in Brunei which, as mentioned earlier, focuses solely on the *da'wah* or propagation strategies. This study will offer new insights on how the context shaped by Islam as the majority religion of Brunei influenced the conversion experiences of the Muslim converts in the country.

### **1.7 Chapter Organisation**

The first chapter of this thesis is the introductory chapter that contains different elements that provide an early framework for the research. These include, as can be seen above, the objectives of the research, the value of the research and the research questions. This section also justifies the selection of the subjects under study and thus provides the rationale for the research.

Chapter 2 is formatted to provide appropriate information on the research setting, which is vital in understanding the whole context of the research. Chapter 2 introduces the reader to the relevant social, cultural and religious developments that Brunei had undergone after the declaration of Islam as the state religion in 1959. Accordingly, the chapter provides a separate analysis on the influence of Islam in the country starting from 1959, right through the 1980s when Islam was set as one of three integral elements of the national philosophy of the country, *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay Islamic Monarchy). Consequently, the effects of the changes in the cultural, religious and social setting in the country on the Dusun ethnic group are discussed. This is to provide the basic understanding on how the effects later can influence the conversion process of the group to Islam.



Chapter 3 presents the literature review of the Rambo Model. The review is organised around the issues that the existing studies have raised, particularly those pertaining to some of the stages in the model, namely the quest, the encounter, the interaction, the commitment and the context stage. Such organisation of the review is to ensure the reader will be well-informed in advance of the issues pertaining to the stages that will be critically examined in the result chapters (Chapter 5 and 6).

The review also maps findings from previous studies in order to identify the different types of religious contexts that have been explored by these studies. This part of the review is valuable to support the analysis in Chapter 6 as the mapping of the findings of the existing studies helps to highlight the similarities and differences in the stage sequence of conversion processes across the different types of religious contexts.

Chapter 4 explains the researcher's choice of methods and strategies of analysis. The chapter firstly justifies the choice made by this study to employ a qualitative method of analytic induction to provide answers to the research questions. The procedures of data collection are then discussed including the structure of the interview guide used by this study, the purposive sampling method and the recruitment strategy. Another important discussion included in this chapter is on the various steps in data analysis which include transcribing, coding and interpreting the data. A discussion on the ethical issues is also included in this chapter.

Chapter 5 specifically deals with question 5A, which aims to explore the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts in Brunei. A detailed examination of every

stage in the Rambo Model is outlined in this chapter in order to explore the actual definitions of the stages as they were experienced by the converts.

To provide the answers to question 6B, Chapter 6 identifies the determinant(s) of the sequence of the conversion stages through a comparative analysis of findings from the existing studies, including the findings that this study has produced in Chapter 5.

The final chapter of the thesis is Chapter 7 where it firstly discusses the main findings of the study before proceed to discuss the potential contributions of the study in the field of religious conversion studies. It then explores the limitations that emerged during the production of this thesis which consequently points out several avenues of research that could be undertaken by future studies. The discussion on the prospects for future research also presents a review table of the recent works to illustrate untapped research areas and thus could be made as a guide for future research. The last part of the chapter is my final remark on this research.

## Chapter 2: About Brunei Darussalam and the Dusuns

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### 2.1 Introduction to the country of study: Brunei Darussalam

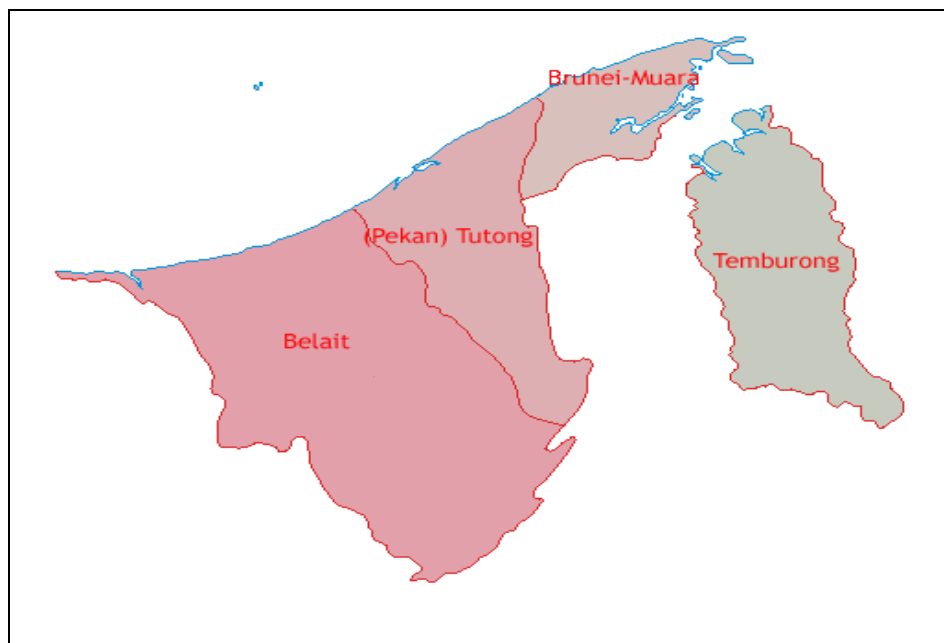
Brunei Darussalam is situated on the north-east coast of Borneo Island in Southeast Asia (Map I). With 5 675 square kilometres in size, it is a population of 398,000 (Department of Statistics 2008:7). The country has four districts namely Brunei/Muara, Tutong, Belait and Temburong, with Brunei/Muara as the seat of the government and where the capital city, Bandar Seri Begawan, is situated (Map II on page 10). The oil and gas industry has been the economic backbone of the country since its discovery in 1929 in Belait District.



**Map I Brunei in Southeast Asia**

([http://en.wikinews.org/w/index.php?title=File:ASEAN\\_countries\\_capitals-en.svg](http://en.wikinews.org/w/index.php?title=File:ASEAN_countries_capitals-en.svg))  
 (This map is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license)

It is worthwhile to note that Brunei society is traditionally characterised by social stratification. This hierarchy is illustrated by D.E. Brown where he suggests that Brunei's social hierarchy is based on nobility ancestry (Brown 1970:11) and such distinction remains valid to the present day. The different levels of social hierarchy are filled by the constitutionally-recognised seven ethnic groups in the country, namely the Brunei Malays, the Kedayans, the Tutongs, the Belaits, the Muruts, the Bisayas and the Dusuns. The Brunei Malays tops the hierarchical level as the nobilities, state elites and aristocrats are a significant part of this ethnic group. This makes the Brunei Malays as the most statistically, politically and culturally, dominant ethnic group. The detailed examination on the Dusun ethnic group, the research subject of this study will be provided in section 2.2 of this chapter.



**Map II Brunei Darussalam**

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Brunei.geohive.gif>)  
 (This map is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license)

Historically, Brunei was a British protectorate state from 1906 until 1959, during which the British Residential system was introduced in order to rejuvenate the country's ailing political and economic structure. A British Resident was appointed to act as an advisor to the Sultan (a Malay king) in handling all matters except those related to religion. However, despite the preservation of the monarchical system, the implementation of British-form of bureaucratic structure to handle the country's administration by the British Resident was far too obvious. This inevitably led to power clashes between the British Resident and the reigning king, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III, culminating in a plan for power retrieval which was carefully laid out by the Sultan to regain the executive power held by the Resident. This plan proved to be a success when Brunei promulgated her first written Constitution in 1959.

With the promulgation of the 1959 Constitution, the position of a British Resident had been abolished and replaced by a less-powered British High Commissioner whose jurisdiction was only over the external affairs of Brunei. What is equally significant about this first written Constitution, and is highly relevant to this study is that the promulgation of the Constitution places Islam as the official religion of the country, besides *Bahasa Melayu*, or Malay Language, as the official language. Such declaration clearly had significant implications on the development of the country for decades to come.

It is worthwhile to mention that, in relation to the 1959 Constitution, Nationality Law was passed in 1961. Apart from recognising the status of the seven ethnic groups as the indigenous people of Brunei, the Law also spelt out a new classification where all ethnic people were to be considered as Malays. In other words, the ethnic groups all

now belonged to a larger ethnic framework of Malay identity despite the cultural and social differences between them. This law is part of the state efforts, which can be identified as the Malaynisation strategy, to homogenise the seven state-recognised ethnic groups into the mainstream Malay society and accordingly into an image of a strong and cohesive nation, which over time, had essentially caused the ethnic boundaries of the Malay ethnic group to soften, allowing the integration of the different ethnic groups into the mainstream society.

The following discussion will focus on the observable changes after the promulgation of the Brunei Constitution and the passing of the Nationality Law, particularly the changes resulting from the position of Islam as the state religion of the country, as will be illustrated in Section 2.3. Discussion on the overall effects of the Malaynisation strategy on the population of the country, with supporting evidence taken from the interviews of the informants of this study, will be presented in Section 2.4. Such a plan of discussion is to ensure the relevant information on the Dusun religion and the impacts on the Malaynisation strategy on survival of the Dusun religion can be readily understood, as will be discussed in Section 2.5.

The following section 2.2 however will firstly provide the basic information about the main subjects of this study, the Dusun ethnic group as to set the scene for the detailed work in the later chapters. Besides the basic demographic information of the group, this section will also discuss the kinship system of the Dusuns and its significant value to the group. Such discussion is essential to support the understanding of the conversion process of the Muslim Dusuns in Chapter 5.

## **2.2 The Dusun ethnic group**

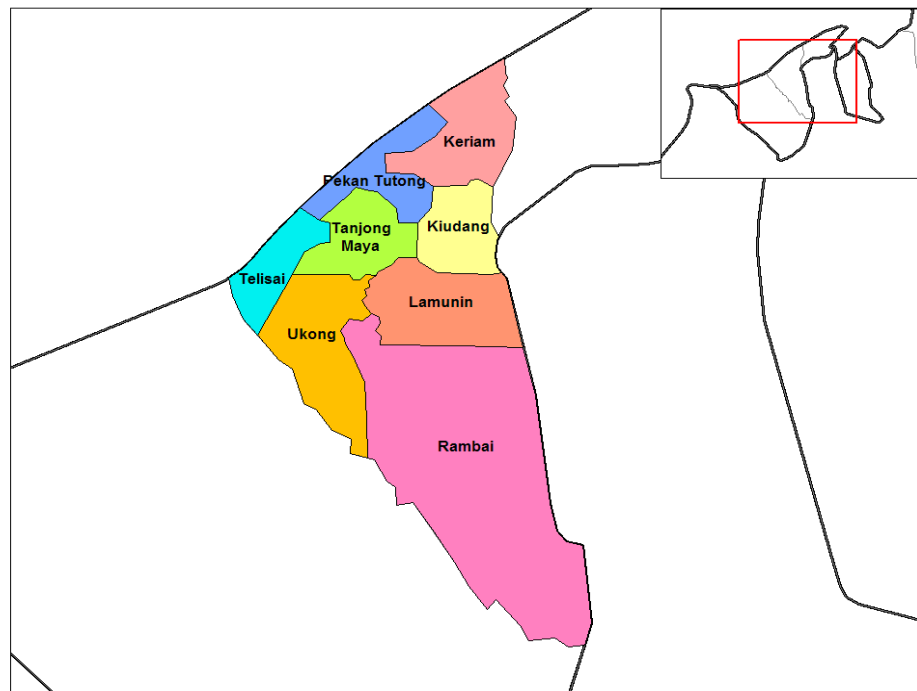
The Dusun ethnic group is most strongly represented in Tutong District, where this research was conducted, with a smaller percentage who live in Belait and Brunei/Muara District. There is no evidence that shows the Dusuns were also originated from Temburong District although the situation has changed today where there is a considerable number of Dusuns who have settled in the district due to employment and marriage. In Tutong District, several *mukim* (provinces) in the district namely Ukong, Rambai, and Kiudang are the original homeland of the Dusuns (Map III on page 14).

### **2.2.1 Demographic details**

It is worthwhile to consider the existing issues pertaining to the ethnic identity of the Dusun ethnic group as the confusion over the nomenclature of the ethnic group has been one of the core debates in the existing studies. The word “Dusun” is a Malay word which literally means the ‘people of the orchards’ and it was originally used to refer to the group of people living in the inland part of the North Borneo (Evans 1917: 151). In the case of the Dusuns in Brunei, it was their contact with the coastal Malays that led to the imposition of the “Dusun” ethnic label on the group, primarily because they lived inland, were cocooned by fruit orchards and coconut plantations, and were exclusively rice farmers and fruit growers (Yabit 1994: 9-10).

However, because the Dusuns demonstrated some similarities with other ethnic groups in the country, particularly the Bisayas, the Belaits and the Tutongs, the term “Dusun” was inevitably used interchangeably with the terms “Bisaya”, “Tutong” and the “Belait” (Penario 1972; Harrison 1958).

These multiple nomenclatures of the Dusuns, and the confusion caused by it, were effectively addressed by Brunei Constitution in 1959 and later, by the passing of the Nationality Law in 1961. The Nationality Law offers an authoritative classification that defines the Dusuns, the Tutongs, the Bisayas and the Belaits as four out of the seven separate ethnic groups (Government of Brunei 1961: 118-120).



**Map III Tutong District**

( [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tutong\\_mukims.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tutong_mukims.png) )  
 (This map is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share  
 Alike 3.0 Unported license)

Thus, for the purpose of recruitment, this research opts for the official usage of the term “Dusun” as outlined by the National Registration and Immigration Department of Brunei Darussalam. As the informants’ names were obtained from the data collected by the Islamic *Da’wah* Unit in Tutong District, the personal details and the ethnic



identity of informants have been verified by the Unit according to their registered details with the National Registration and Immigration Department.

### **2.2.2 Value of kinship system**

The Dusun community is a very close-knit society with kinship network relations are highly valued by the members of the community. The fundamental definition of kin relationship within the context of the Dusun ethnic group is not only among the immediate members of a family but it also includes relatives descending from patri- and matri-lineal lines (Chong 1996: 64). Thus, it is not unusual for a Dusun to be related to almost all who are within the person's environs either through consanguine or affine relationships.

In terms of family organisation, the Dusun society practises a patriarchal culture where in a typical Dusun household, the most prevalent male authority figure is the father, particularly when the father is the breadwinner of the family and if other senior male members in the family can no longer make substantial contribution to the family's income. In view of such authority and power structure in a Dusun family life, it is then understandable, as we will see later in section 5.8.2 of Chapter 5, why the converts believed it was essential to gain approval from their parents before they could convert to Islam. Moreover, the gestures of consulting parents and the elders in the family is a reflection of the extent of respect and honour that the Dusuns have towards their elders and the kinship system (Chong 1996: 65).

The recognition of family kinship can also be seen from the Dusuns' traditional residential patterns. In the past, the Dusuns used to dwell in longhouses that can house

several family units. However, the long-house dwelling patterns began to disappear in the 1950s as the Dusuns began to build individual houses during this period (Matusin 1986: 15). The changes in the dwelling patterns from longhouses to individual residence had inconsequential impacts on the living arrangements of the Dusuns where multiple families of different generations still live together under one household or in close proximity to each other's house. This indicates the fact that the kinship ties between the Dusuns of different generations have remained intact and even strengthened despite the changing preferences in dwelling style among the Dusuns. Moreover, as most Dusuns own land that they acquire through hereditary succession, building individual houses on their inherited acreage guarantees the preservation of their kin relationship.

The understanding on such strong kinship network relations is relevant to this study as this helps us to understand why the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts typically commenced within their immediate social networks. Also throughout the conversion process, there is a tendency for the Dusun Muslim converts to rely on the Muslims within their family network for guidance, support and advice. Thus, the role played by the kinship network is undeniably vital in shaping the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts.

Another element that is equally, if not more, influential in the conversion process of the Dusuns is the religion itself, that is Islam. As will be seen in the discussion in Chapter 5 later, the characters of the conversion stages of the Dusun Muslim converts had been essentially shaped by the impacts of Islam as the state and the majority religion of the country, in a way that such impacts became the impetus for the early

familiarisation process that the Dusuns had with their new religion before their conversion. Accordingly, it is necessary at this point to investigate the ways in which Islam in Brunei brought about the familiarisation process with the religion among the Dusuns. By providing the reader with the necessary information on what had occurred and what had been experienced by the Dusuns during the familiarisation phase, it will purposely set the scene for Chapter 5 in tackling question 5A which aims to find out the definition of the stages in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts. The discussion on Islam and its impacts as a majority religion is provided in the following section.

### **2.3 Islam in Brunei**

As mentioned earlier, Islam had been given a legal standing for the first time when it was declared as the official religion in 1959. Brunei Constitution states that, “[t]he religion of the State shall be the Muslim Religion” and “... that all other religion may be practised in peace and harmony...” (Perlembagaan Negeri Brunei 1959: 33). The Constitution also spelt out the Sultan as the head of the Islamic faith and this allowed the governmental machinery to employ Islam as the very basis of the legal and policy frameworks of the country. Consequently, the religion has been one of the main sources of legislation where Brunei has separate Islamic courts which apply *Syariah* laws to govern the Muslims’ family matters, particularly pertaining to marriage, dissolution of marriage and guardianship. Despite the amendments made to the Constitution (the latest amendment was in 2004), the status of Islam as the official religion has remained unchanged.

Another ‘flowering’ period for Islam in Brunei was when the religion was declared as one of the integral elements of the national philosophy, *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB), when Brunei gained her independence from Britain in 1984. As one-third of the MIB’s main pillars, Islam serves an ideological purpose which defines the way of life of Bruneians (the Muslims in particular) so that they are getting more and more arranged in ways that emphasised the teaching of Islamic ideals and values (Latif 2003: 67). This consequently means the education system, broadcasting organisation, civil service agency and banking system, among others, were organised to accommodate the state philosophy and to be in line with the principles and concepts of the state religion.

For instance, female police and army officers have incorporated the wearing of headscarves as part of their official uniforms since the 1990s. The Muslim dress code has also been imposed on Muslim female civil servants who make up fifty-five percent of the workforce in order to ensure the structure of the civil service is in line with government’s attempt to project Islamic image and identity. Islamic banking systems have also flourished in recent years as Brunei government is continuously striving for the development of economic and financial sectors which are compatible with the state religion. This resulted in the founding of *Syariah*-based financial institutions such as *Bank Islam Brunei Darussalam* (BIBD) and *Tabung Amanah Islam Brunei* (TAIB) in the 1990s (Azlan 2003: 1).

These developments have spurred the formation of a Muslim *ummah* or community which is much more solid in organisation and conspicuous in appearance than it had been decades ago. According to Brunei’s 2001 population census, 75.1 percent of the population of the country are Muslims whereas followers of other religions such as

Christianity constitutes 9.4 percent; Buddhism 8.5 percent and other religions 7.0 percent of the population (Department of Statistics 2001: 18)

Thus, in view of the religious development experienced by the country, it is fair to argue that the period from the 1990s onward is likely to be the period when Islam became the majority religion of the country. Further evidence to support this statement can be found in the discussion in Section 2.4 which looks at the concomitant social, cultural and religious changes experienced by the Dusun ethnic group following the incorporation of Islam into the institutional framework.

The following discussion will look at the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre, a government institution that has the responsibility to promote Islam to the population and is also one of the means which have been utilised by new converts to acquire their new identity as a Muslim after their conversion.

### **2.3.1 Islamic *Da'wah* Centre**

Since the establishment of the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre in 1985, there has been a remarkable increase in *da'wah* activities particularly in the forms of lectures and religious courses to ensure the accessibility of the Islamic knowledge to both born Muslims and new converts. The Centre, situated in Brunei/Muara District, is also responsible to ensure the Muslim population in the country adhere to Sunni branch of Islamic jurisprudence and subscribe to the As-Syafie school of legal thought or *mazhab*. Such adherence is also to ensure that religious information disseminated to new converts is from the source of As-Syafie *mazhab*, which should take precedence over any other sources of religious information.

To further ensure the uniform dissemination of religious information, Islamic *da'wah* units have also been established in the other three districts. These units have similar responsibilities as those in the Centre in propagating Islam within the milieu of the district they are located.

The *da'wah* activities, particularly in the form of religious classes, do seem to play a crucial role in supporting the community of new converts. As will be seen in section 5.9.2, the attendance to religious classes not only provides a means for new converts to deepen their religious knowledge but their participation in religious activities also reflects the establishment of a closer association they have with the Muslim community. Such association thus ensures the new converts of a successful attainment of religious identity after their conversion to Islam.

The close links that the Dusun Muslim converts have developed with the Muslim community could also be seen through their participation in the *da'wah* missionary activities as a *daie*. For more than twenty years, established *daie* have been making inroads into non-Muslim villages and actively preaching the ideals of the religion to the non-Muslim population. These *da'wah* efforts evidently attract a number of new converts to play similar roles in reaching out to the non-Muslims and this can be seen from the formation of convert organisations throughout the country. In the case of the Dusun Muslim converts in Tutong District, the Converts' Association of Tutong District has been providing support to the *daie* activities, extending the propagation of Islam into their own ethnic group. Although there is only a very small number of converts who integrate into the Muslim community through this way, what matters in this regard, as will be explained in section 5.9.2 in Chapter 5, is that such participation

equally illustrates a successful acquisition of a new identity as a Muslim by the converts.

It is worthwhile to note here that while the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre plays a vital role in supporting the acquisition of a new religious identity of the new Muslim converts, the *daie* activities however, have been the point of exposure to Islam that is least utilised by the Dusuns before their conversion to Islam. This is partly because, the incorporation of Islamic principles into the government's structure allows the non-Muslim population to be exposed to Islam in so many ways that accordingly undermines the significance of missionary activities in providing that crucial point of exposure. As revealed by the Muslim Dusuns who were involved in this study, among the means of exposure to Islam they commonly experienced before their conversion were the education system and the broadcasting media. These common ways of exposure are arguably the intended consequences of Islam being a state religion, and compounded with Brunei's MIB philosophy of governance and the Malaynisation efforts, it leads to a hands-on familiarisation experience with Islam among the Dusuns that later brought about significant changes in behaviour and outlook of the Dusuns. The examination on the above mentioned ways of exposure to Islam and their effects on the Dusuns are the focus of the following discussion.

### **2.3.2 Means of Exposure to Islam: Education System**

The development of education provision since 1959, and particularly after the independence of the country in 1984, has been greatly influenced by the articles of the Constitution which declare Islam as the state religion. Within the secular education system, religious subjects have been among the compulsory subjects included in

primary school curriculum, alongside secular subjects such as Mathematics, English and Science. Even with the introduction of the new education system, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century National Education System, in 2008, Islamic Religious Knowledge remains as one of the compulsory complementary subjects for Year 1 until Year 8. It is only in Year 9 to Year 11 that the religious subject becomes one of the elective subjects (Ministry of Education 2010). In addition to this, the Malay Islamic Monarchy subject is also included in the school curriculum for students in Year 7 and Year 11 inclusive as one of the compulsory complementary subjects that students can choose from. The teaching of the Malay Islamic Monarchy subject is also extended to a tertiary level where the state university, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, offers a compulsory 4-unit course on the subject to be taken by all university students, with an exception of foreign students. The course, run by the Academy of Brunei Studies, is a comprehensive course which discusses the main components of the state philosophy including Islam from a diverse range of perspectives.

Such incorporation of Islamic knowledge into the education system has resulted in a continuous and total exposure to Islam, as illustrated by 44-year-old male convert:

**[E1.Muslim Dusun.I33]<sup>1</sup>**

I learnt more about Islam during my secondary school years. Throughout those five years, I learnt about Islamic laws, the history of Islam such as the histories of prophets... [Trans.]

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<sup>1</sup> Code [E1.Muslim Dusun.I33] should be read as the interview excerpt No. 1 [E1], taken from the interview transcript of Muslim Dusun Informant No. 33 [I33] (refer to Appendix 1: Participant Profile Sheet for the informants' individual number). All interview excerpts included in this thesis have their individual code, each indicates the interview excerpt's number and the specific informant from whom the interview excerpt was derived.



Similarly, a Dusun broadcasting officer also acknowledged the extensive amount of exposure to Islam he received from school:

**[E2. Dusun.I47]**

Islam has never been something foreign in my life. I sort of grew up with the religion as I first learnt the basic things about Islam from my primary school. Then, the knowledge naturally grew when I took Islamic subjects during my secondary school... [Trans.]

The exposure to Islamic knowledge is even more apparent for the non-Muslim Dusuns who attended a religious school. This argument is in view of the fact that there seems to be a growing number of non-Muslim parents in Brunei since the 1990s who send their children to religious school, besides the latter's attendance to the government's secular school. There are about 110 religious schools established throughout the country with the school curriculum made of various core subjects, such as *Al-Quran*, *Ibadat* (Islamic rituals), *Tauhid* (divine unity), *Tarikh* (history), *Praktikal Sembahyang* (the practical teaching of the Muslim prayer), *Tajwid* (proper pronunciation in the reading of the Al-Quran), *Tasawuf* (Islamic spiritualism), *Muamalat* (Islamic laws in selling and buying activities), and *Munakahat* (Islamic laws of marriage). It takes six years to complete a religious education where the graduates will be given a Religious Knowledge Certificate upon a successful completion. Despite its comprehensive teaching of Islam, it does not deter non-Muslim parents from sending their children to receive religious education where by 2010, there are 116 non-Muslim students, adding to the existing number of 453 non-Muslims enrolled to religious school throughout the country (Al-Haadi 2010: 4)

Although the above number might appear rather small, the effects of this particular source of religious knowledge cannot be easily dismissed. An indication of the nature and the amount of exposure to Islam that can be gained from the religious education was revealed by a parent whose children attended religious school before their conversion to Islam in 1991:

**[E3.Muslim Dusun.I18]**

Every time the *Azan* for the *Maghrib* prayer was called out, they [the children] would go to the bathroom to take the ablution and then the girls would wear the *telekung*, preparing themselves to perform the prayer... [Trans.]

There is no doubt that the children of the above informant not only had a strong sense of recognition of Islam but they also seemed to have a general understanding of the religion even before their conversion.

Apart from the education system, a regular contact with mass media is another basis for familiarisation that the Dusuns have with Islam. The rapid development of mass communication in Brunei evidently broke down the religious barrier between the Muslims and the non-Muslims as the continuous dissemination of religious information through state-sponsored broadcasting agencies helped to create a uniform understanding of the religion among the population. The discussion on broadcasting agencies as a means of familiarisation with Islam is provided in the following section.

### **2.3.3 Means of Exposure to Islam: Broadcasting Agencies**

Broadcasting agencies in Brunei have been utilised to their optimum in order to spread the words of Islam. Radio broadcasting began in 1957 while a television network was

introduced in 1975. It was also in 1975 that the two forms of media integrated under one state-sponsored governing body of Radio Television Brunei (RTB). In the case of the radio broadcast, it has since expanded its service to several radio channels. The Malay-language service which has been broadcasted since 1975 is now known as *Rangkaian Nasional*, while an English-language radio service, *Pilihan Radio*, also broadcasts programmes in different languages including those in Chinese and Gurkhali languages. Another two channels, *Rangkaian Pelangi* and *Rangkaian Harmoni*, are to cater for younger generation and older generation respectively. What is interesting about these different radio channels is that, they broadcast several religious programmes in their daily schedules. *Rangkaian Nasional* for example, broadcasts *Kuliah Subuh* which is a daily 30-minute programme of religious lecture discussing various religious issues (*Rangkaian Nasional* 2009), where *Pilihan Radio* broadcasts a Chinese programme, 'Weekend Kaleidoscope', whose content includes an anecdote on Islam (*Pilihan Radio* 2009).

An introduction of another radio service, *Rangkaian Nur Islam*, in 1995 provides another means of exposure to Islam through the radio broadcasting service. Unlike other radio channels, *Rangkaian Nur Islam* is solely Islamic and broadcasts programmes which cover all aspects of the religion. This radio channel works closely with the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Brunei and the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre in order to ensure the quality of the programmes it broadcasts meets the needs of the population and in a language comprehensible to any generation (Yusof 2001: 8).

Similarly, in the case of television broadcasting services, RTB has also been producing many informative religious programmes since its establishment in 1975. At present,

RTB broadcasts at least one religious programme to be included in the daily broadcasting schedule (Radio Television Brunei 2009). In addition, RTB also broadcasts live celebrations of important events in the Islamic calendar so that they can be watched nationwide.

It is evident that broadcasting agencies provide the population with an easy access to an abundant amount of religious information which accordingly serves as another means of exposure to Islam. The following interview excerpts of Dusun Muslim converts reveal this fact:

**[E4.Muslim Dusun.I9]**

Since my retirement, I like to watch morning tv, and normally at that particular time of day, there would be some religious programmes, like a religious sermon or a program on how to recite *do'a*. I would sit through and watch them... [Trans.]

**[E5.Muslim Dusun.I26]**

It's a common thing to listen to religious lecture on radio or to watch it on the tele. But I tend to do that without opinion or judgement... [Trans.]

**[E6.Muslim Dusun.I29]**

It is hard to find someone in Brunei who has not been exposed to Islam. I, for one, knew all the basic info on Islam even without reading a religious book. I heard about Islam on radio all the time and from my friendships with Muslim friends... [Trans.]

Thus, as popular mass media regularly disseminates religious information, it seems inevitable for the non-Muslims to possess some knowledge about Islam which they can further explore at their own convenience. What is more, the extent of familiarisation with Islam through the means of exposure mentioned above was further stretched by the effects of the Malaynisation strategy.

As mentioned earlier, the Malaynisation strategy is the state's effort to promote the integration of the different ethnic groups into the mainstream Malay Muslim society for consolidation and nation-building purposes. Evidently, by the 1990s, it becomes increasingly clear that the strategy has led to the breakdown of religious, cultural and social boundaries between the different ethnic groups. One of the indications of such boundary breakdown is the infiltration of Islamic elements into the daily life of the non-Muslims. This includes the possession of solid understanding on Islam, as explained above. Other indications are the proficiency in *Bahasa Melayu*, the national language of the country, and the subtle emulation of Muslim way of life (Yabit 2007: 5; Saxena 2007: 152; Kershaw 2000: 194). Accordingly, and particularly in the case of the Dusun ethnic group, the Malaynisation strategy has transformed the ethnic group into a community that increasingly exhibits Malay-like behaviour and lifestyle. Some relevant aspects of the transformation in the Dusuns' way of life will be explored in the following section.

#### **2.4 Effects of the Malaynisation Strategy**

As mentioned above, one of the effects of the Malaynisation strategy is the emulation of a Muslim way of life among the non-Muslims. One feature of that Islamic lifestyle which is commonly adopted by the non-Muslims in Brunei is the Muslim dress code. In theory, such dress code is a useful index of identification that suggests the wearer is a Muslim. In the recent years however, the way the Dusuns dress and appear would not distinctly set themselves apart from the Muslims as there has been an apparent similarity in the way the Muslims and the Dusuns dress themselves. School uniform is one of the means that contribute to the mutual emulation of the Muslim dress code where female students are encouraged to wear headscarf. Whilst the working-age

Dusuns who are in the public service have been similarly accustomed to wearing Islamic-like dress sense because those within the workforce have been encouraged to adopt a Muslim dress sense so that the image of the national workforce is parallel to the government's effort to establish a strong Islamic image of the country. A twenty-three-year-old Dusun who converted to Islam in 2008 succinctly expressed her experience in the following interview excerpt:

**[E7.Muslim Dusun.I14]**

In the past, many of my friends thought I was a Muslim because I wore headscarf to school. Even my class teacher could not tell I was a non-Muslim. I remember on one occasion, she asked me to participate in the mass recitation of Al-Quran organised by the school. I know it took her by surprise when I told her that I could not to join the event because I was a non-Muslim... [Trans.]

This case of mistaken identity was also experienced by another Muslim convert who converted in 1995:

**[E8.Muslim Dusun.I36]**

I first wore headscarf when I attended the teacher's training centre. Although the Muslim dress code was only applied to the Muslim teacher trainees and the non-Muslims were only encouraged to wear them, I did feel comfortable wearing the headscarf. What I started to notice was that, those who met me for the first time would greet me with '*Assalamualaikum*'... [Trans.]

The above interview excerpts can be taken as illustrations of how the Muslim way of dressing has become the basic part of the social life of many non-Muslims in Brunei, and the cases of mistaken identity clearly demonstrate the minimal differences in the way the non-Muslims dress themselves vis-à-vis the dress manner of the Muslims. This observation is in line with King's (1994) argument that it is rather difficult nowadays to distinguish between those who are originally part of the mainstream

society, i.e. the Brunei Malays, and those who are recently integrated into the society, i.e. rest of the ethnic groups (King 1994:186).

The relevance of the above discussion to this study is that the breakdown of the cultural differences influences the characters and the definition of the stages in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts, as will be explained in Chapter 5. The early exposure to the Muslim lifestyle and dress sense becomes a handy tool in supporting the conversion process of the Dusuns, particularly during the stage where they underwent some preparations to break from the Dusun religion before they could proceed with their conversion.

What is more, the manifestation of such cultural similarities inevitably leads us to question the extent of attachment that the Dusuns actually have with their ethnic religion. The following section will explore this issue.

## **2.5 Dusun religion**

The Dusuns traditionally are animists. They believe in spirit beings which are the important forces in their universe and daily life. Any actions which could upset the spirit beings cannot be tolerated as a mistreatment of the divine powers may contribute to mishap, poor health and death. One of the divine spirits that the Dusun believe to have shaped the universe and directed the destiny of all its inhabitants is *Derato*, the main god in the Dusun cosmology. As the Dusuns are traditionally rice farmers, the *Derato* has the highest rank in importance in their life as the Dusuns believe it is *Derato* which provides them with a bountiful harvest year after year. According to one of the key informants, the Dusuns believe the rice seeds were brought down to earth by

the son of *Derato*. Thus, in order to show their appreciation for *Derato*'s consent to allow human beings to plant the rice seeds on earth, and to be thankful for the harvest and to ensure another good harvest in the next farming season, the *Temarok* ceremony is conducted by the Dusuns at the end of a harvesting season. In fact, the *Temarok* ritual can be considered as the heart of the Dusuns' animistic practices.

However, the Dusuns cannot carry out the *Temarok* ceremony by themselves. Only a *belian* can take the role as the mediator between human beings and *Derato*. The *belian* is a female Dusun who possesses special knowledge about the supernatural world which enables her to lead and conduct ritual and ceremonial acts of the *Temarok*. The *belian* is normally trained at a very young age where she is mentored by a senior *belian* and once she establishes her own spiritual identity, she will be allowed to conduct rituals and ceremonies on her own as a full-fledged *belian* (Kershaw 2000: 79).

The *Temarok* is not only a means to express the gratitude to *Derato* for the spiritual assistance in rice cultivation but it also acts as a healing medium for the ethnic group. As the Dusuns also believe that *Derato* has the divine strength to cure illnesses, they would seek healing from *Derato*, through the *Temarok*, for any illness that they may suffer, particularly the kind of illnesses that they believe have been caused by the offended spirit beings. This is where the *belian* would play a role as a mediator between the sick person, *Derato* and the offended supernatural powers, seeking for a peaceful end of the crisis and accordingly cure the illness (Kershaw 2000: 77-91).



Due to the relatively important roles played by the *belian* within the religious context of the Dusun community, the *belian* is perceived as a vital part of the community. However, as the Dusun community is patriarchal in nature, it is interesting to learn that the *belians*, who are normally mature-aged women, hold “the highest position in the Temarok political structure” (Pudarno 1988: 47). However, there is no particular answer as to why there was no male *belians*. The *belianship* fundamentally promotes egalitarian principles which accordingly suggest that there are no restrictive rules or customary taboos that disallow a Dusun male from becoming a *belian* (Kershaw 2000: 82). In fact, one of the key informants of this study mentions a male *belian* practicing the *Temarok* rituals back in the 1920s. It could be argued that there is most likely to be an unwritten law of division of labour in the *Temarok* rituals where men and women would play different roles, with men performing the role as musical accompaniment in the ritual and with women playing the role of a *belian* (Kershaw 2000: 16).

In addition to the above ritual practices, the Dusuns also believe that there are specific objects, animals and geographical locations which are ascribed with a spirit and divine power. These different beings must be treated with respect in order to avoid any actions that could offend the divine powers. For instance, the Dusuns place their fortune and destiny with omen birds as the former believe that the latter is the messenger of supernatural spirits. It is common for the Dusuns to briefly stop before stepping out of their houses if they hear the sound of an omen bird. To disregard the message sent by the omen bird is equivalent to undermining the power of the divine spirits and this may lead to bad luck and great misfortune, maybe even death (Bantong 1985: 108).

### 2.5.1 Loose adherence to Dusun religion

However, there have been many observable changes among the Dusuns, particularly among the younger generation of the ethnic group, where they have been increasingly pulled away from their ethnic religion. The dooming influence of the *belian*, however, is not because of the relation between gender and power within *Temarok* practices, but it is possibly due to the firm restrictions imposed on the *belians*. Accordingly to one of the key informants, the sacredness of the *belian*'s ritualistic knowledge and the *Derato* language means such special form of knowledge should not be put alongside secular knowledge, i.e. modern education. In other words, it is a taboo for a *belian* to attend school as this could be regarded as disrespecting the divine knowledge the *belian* has been conferred with.

However, such ritualistic taboo is not in line with the state policy where since the 1970s, the country has been putting forth efforts in promoting an equal access to school provision to all population. The eagerness of the Dusun parents to provide their children with the best education possible has inevitably pushed the Dusun religion to the sideline in the lives of the new generation of the Dusuns. In addition, with the passing of the Compulsory Education Act in 2007 which codifies nine years of compulsory education to children aged five to sixteen makes it even more difficult for the Dusun religion to survive. Any parents of compulsory school age children who fail to comply with the law are "liable to legal actions" (Zaim 2008: 1). Thus, the incompatibility of the *Temarok* ritual practices with secular form of knowledge is perhaps the main reason why it is extremely difficult nowadays to find a young Dusun who is willing to commit her time and life to learn the rituals and to master the craft of mediating humans and divine powers.

Moreover, with the Islamisation of the school system, educated Dusuns have been exposed to a different kind of religious belief from the one that is practiced by their parents. As a result, a considerable number of the Dusun Muslim converts involved in this study could only loosely acknowledge the Dusun religion and tradition before their conversion to Islam. Their interviews clearly illustrate the inadequate amount of knowledge on the Dusun religion they possess as many of them grappled with problems of explaining the essential functions of the *Temarok* ceremony to the researcher:

**[E9.Muslim Dusun.I12]**

Our family do not practice *Temarok*. I myself don't understand what *Temarok* is and I have never watched how it is done or performed before... [Trans.]

**[E10.Muslim Dusun.I19]**

I don't really know what the *Temarok* rituals are. I only witnessed the conduct of the rituals once when I was small and could no longer recall what they actually look like.

[Q: what about other Dusun *adat*?]

No, I don't know those either... [Trans.]

The evident lack of knowledge on the Dusun *adat* before conversion is also featured in the interview data of 18-year-old tertiary student who attended and completed religious school before her conversion in 2003. Talking about her experience during a funeral ceremony of her male relative, she was perplexed in the way the Dusuns carried out the funeral ceremony of the deceased:

**[E11.Muslim Dusun.I16]**

I was a little confused when I looked at my uncle [the deceased] and he was dressed in his favourite attire. Isn't it that the deceased should only be dressed in white cotton cloth? ... [Trans.]

What caused the informant to be confused with what she observed is because she could only relate to the way the Muslims conduct a funeral ceremony. In the Islamic funeral, the deceased is wrapped in a white cotton shroud after the deceased is bathed and before the congregational funeral prayer can be performed. Whilst the Dusun funeral ceremony is carried out a more elaborate way where the body of the deceased is bathed and prepared in a way desired by the family. The family will choose the kind of dress, hairstyle and perfume which would be worn by the deceased.

Thus, in view of the incompatibility of the Dusun religion with secular learning, and also the increasing Islamic influence within the ethnic realm, it is understandable why the Dusun Muslim converts were not able to identify themselves closely with the Dusun religion before their conversion. In fact, for the younger converts, Islam is the only religion that they have ever been exposed to. For the older converts, and as will be seen in Chapter 5, their growing knowledge about Islam led to an evaluation of the Dusun religion that inevitably caused them to question its viability and relevance. All in all, the discussion on what actually happened on the ground helps us to better understand how the contextual setting of the converts has had significant impacts on their conversion process, and accordingly influenced the characters of the stages involved in the process.

## **2.6 Summary**

This chapter introduced the readers to Brunei and the Dusun ethnic group, the main research subjects of this study. The discussion on the country and the ethnic group of study helps this research to put forth the fundamental understanding that supports the detailed examination of the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts in the

analysis chapters of this thesis. What we can conclude from the above discussion is that, as many aspects of life in the country are increasingly influenced by Islam, it is not uncommon for the Dusuns to have a constant contact with the religion. For the Dusun children, attendance at state school, both secular and religious, has brought them to be in contact with Islam through the school curriculum and their Muslim school friends. Adult Dusuns understand Islam via radio and television broadcasting agencies that transmit Islamic information through many religious programmes. The workplace can also become an effective means of familiarisation with Islam as it not only transmits occupational skills but also Islamic values through constant interaction. What is more, as the Dusun religion is deemed incompatible with secular knowledge and the country's commitment to modernisation, it is inevitable for the Dusuns to become less and less observant of their ethnic religion, demonstrating the declining role that the Dusun religion plays in the spiritual aspects of the Dusuns' life.

With such fundamental information on the research subjects of the study already in place, it thus helps facilitate the writing of the literature review of the research area, and in detecting the possible knowledge gap in the existing literature. The findings of multiple studies on conversion process will be put next to each other to reveal the areas of concern that have been raised by these studies, particularly those which are relevant to the focus of this study. A detailed examination of the literature of the research problem area is presented in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

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### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to examine the literature related to the main thematic concern of this research, that is the religious conversion process. The literature is mainly drawn from the existing studies pertinent to the Rambo Model which provides the theoretical framework of this research. This review will begin with section 3.2 with the definition of the term ‘religious conversion’ and will be followed by an overview of the theories of religious conversion upon which Rambo builds his model in section 3.3. Section 3.4 will examine the Rambo Model, focusing on the seven stages Rambo identifies as the crucial elements leading to a religious conversion.

Section 3.5 will provide an overview of the findings of the existing studies that employed the Rambo Model as their theoretical framework. The overview will be organised around the conflicting findings that have been generated by these studies pertaining to five of Rambo’s stages, namely the context, encounter, quest, interaction and commitment. Such plan of discussion is to ensure the readers will be well-informed in advance on the issues pertaining to these particular stages as they will be further analysed in Chapter 5.

The review of the existing studies will also be fully utilised in Chapter 6 to provide answers to question 6B which seeks to find out the determinant of the stage order in a conversion process across different types of religious settings. Accordingly, section 3.6 will map the existing research by identifying the different types of religious

contexts that have been explored by these studies. As can be seen later, this review identifies three separate types of contexts within which the conversion stages occur in a distinctive sequence from one type of context to the next.

### **3.2 Religious Conversion: Definition**

The definition of religious conversion has never been straightforward, and with the growing amount of studies on religious conversion to different religions in different settings has made it even more complicated to bring forth a precise definition of the phenomenon. Gillespie perceives a conversion as a dramatic change of religious experience (Gillespie 1991: 3) and this view represents the long tradition of acknowledging a religious conversion in such a way. The more recent works however reject such definition as they find a religious conversion does not necessarily take place in a dramatic and isolated manner. Rambo, for example, defines a religious conversion as “a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic field of people, events, ideologies, institutions and orientations” (Rambo 1993: 5).

In view of Brunei’s majority-religion context, particularly considering the impacts that Islam has had on the population since its declaration as the state religion in 1959, this study will adopt Rambo’s definition of conversion to explain the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts as being a dynamic process of religious transformation, rather than an abrupt or overnight kind of religious experience.

Studies on religious conversion also recognise the different conversion types and categories. As the Dusun Muslim converts changed their religious orientation from the animistic Dusun religion to the established religion of Islam, the religious conversion

process of the Dusun Muslim converts falls under the category of tradition transition type of religious conversion. Tradition transition is one of the five types of conversion identified by Rambo where this particular type of religious change is between two different religious traditions (Rambo 1993: 38). It is relevant to emphasise this fact because a religious conversion of a different type, for instance, an institutional transition type of conversion which can be exemplified by a conversion within Protestant denomination, is likely to generate a specific and different kind of religious experience. In the case of the existing studies which will be utilised by this review, with an exception of Kahn and Greene's (2004) study, all of them investigated the tradition transition type of conversion.

### **3.3 Stage Theories of Conversion: An Overview**

In reviewing the literature pertinent to the Rambo Model, it is necessary to discuss the earlier theories of religious conversion, primarily because the Rambo Model is built upon some of these earlier works (Paloutzian, Richardson and Rambo 1999: 1072). The following discussion, however, is not an exhaustive review of all conversion theories and it only focuses on the conversion theories which are in the form of a stage model.

One of the earliest stage model-like conversion theories is by Berkhofer (1963) who outlines the possible sequences in the Protestant missionary activities among the North American Indians in the nineteenth century. According to Berkhofer, the sequence in the missionary activities would normally start with an early contact with the Indian tribe and would end with either the extinction or the survival of the Protestant



missionary activities among the tribal members. Although Beckhofer did not exclusively deal with the details of the conversion process of the North American Indians at individual level, his work set a new trend in the field of conversion studies by utilising a sequence model to explain the conversion phenomenon.

Apart from Beckhofer, another widely-cited conversion model is that of Lofland and Stark (1965). In comparison to Beckhofer's sequential model, Lofland and Stark developed "a model of the accumulating conditions" that offers an understanding of a conversion process from the perspective of a potential convert (Lofland and Stark 1965: 874). Based on their study on the conversion experience of the Divine Precepts' converts, Lofland and Stark proposed seven conditions that were generally experienced by the converts where firstly, a person (1) must "experience enduring, acutely felt tensions", (2) consequently develop "a religious problem-solving perspective", (3) "which lead him to define himself as a religious seeker", (4) and due to his seekership, he encounters with the Divine Precepts' advocates "at a turning point of his life", (5) at this stage, the previous encounter enables the person to develop "an affective bond" with fellow Divine Percept's believers, and (6) "extra-cult attachment are absent or neutralised" which finally (7) brings the person to experience an "intensive interaction" with the religious group as a preparation "to become a deployable agent" (ibid.).

From the above list of necessary conditions to produce a religious conversion, it is apparent that a shift in social network is one of the central factors in the Lofland/Stark model, as can be seen from the establishment of a new social bond with the followers of the new religion (condition 5) and the elimination of any extra-cult control in the

existing social network that could refrain the individual from converting (condition 6). The conditions also recognise the need to control the countervailing forces that could affect the solidification process of the newly-budding link of condition 5.

The Lofland/Stark model has been empirically tested by a number of studies, however with mixed findings. For instance, using ten case studies to empirically test the model, Greil and Rudy (1984) conclude that the model fits some groups and circumstances better than others, and that there had been significant limitations in terms of the applicability and relevance of the conditions prescribed by the model to explain the conversion process of their research subjects. In other words, while some conditions are prerequisite to the conversion process of one group, the same conditions are not necessarily the decisive variables in the conversion process of another group (Hamilton 2001: 264). Likewise, the study on the conversion process of Dutch adolescents to Christianity by Kox et al (1991) conclude that their research subjects converted to their new religion despite the fact that they did not experience all seven conditions.

Snow and Machalek (1984) argue that the main limitation of the Lofland/Stark model is that it is not general enough where the seven conditions listed by the model fail to adequately explain non-cult typologies of conversion, primarily because “the natural histories of conversion patterns vary from group to group” (Snow and Machalek 1984: 184). This helps to explain why the testing of the model in different contexts has yielded conflicting results. What the findings of the testing also highlight is that, the conditions that Lofland and Stark considered as vital prerequisites for a conversion could vary in significance from one setting to the next. Applying this particular finding

to this study, the type of context within which a conversion occurs is one of the prime considerations to be taken into account in reviewing the existing studies in section 3.5.

Tippett (1992) also develops a model of religious conversion by emphasising the key points in a conversion process. Examining the transition of an old pagan society into a Christian context from an anthropological viewpoint, he identifies five key periods in a conversion process. Tippett suggests that a religious conversion should begin with a period of awareness and be followed by a point of realisation. A period of decision-making should be the third key point in a conversion process which should then be followed by a point of encounter. A period of incorporation is the final key point in the process of a religious conversion (Tippett 1992: 195).

Tippett's model visibly suggests a religious conversion as a process which involves different stages that culminates in a conversion to a new religion. As this study is already aware of the influence of contextual setting on a conversion process, as pointed out earlier, it is plausible to argue that the definition of the stages in Tippett's model and the sequence of the stages identified by the model could only be relevant and applicable to a religious conversion to Christianity. Moreover, as Tippett revealed that the model has been used by Christian missionaries in identifying the points "at which they must have strength, and the points where they can fail" (Tippett 1987: 76), the model is clearly a representation of Christian religious culture that might not be applicable to a conversion process to a non-Christian religion.

It would be worthwhile to point out here that, the Rambo Model is essentially based on Tippett's process theory, alongside that of Lofland/Stark, and this without doubt

indicates the strong Christian-centric perspectives that the model employs. Rambo however believes his theory is more heuristic and less constricting than the earlier process models of religious conversion in a way that he takes into account any possible factors and situations involved in a conversion process, not just from the anthropological, sociological and missionary perspectives as the earlier theories had stood for (Rambo 1999: 267). The following section will outline the Rambo Model, giving details of the model's seven conversion stages which lead to a religious conversion.

### **3.4 The Rambo Model**

Refining Lofland/Stark's and Tippet's process-oriented model, Rambo develops a seven-stage model that readily assimilates the main components of a religious conversion process, namely the cultural, social, personal and religious system, and integrates the different basic concepts that have been formulated from the sociological, anthropological and missionary understandings.

Rambo's data had been collected from a decade long investigation of religious conversion processes:

I also conducted numerous interviews with converts from a wide variety of backgrounds: men and women who had embraced the Unification Church, Jews who had become Christians and Christians who had become Jews, Japanese secularists who had adopted Christianity, and Chinese people with little or no religious background (because of official government discouragement) who had become Christians. I travelled extensively: to Japan and Korea to compare and contrast the experience and perception of conversion in those countries.... and to interview converts between Judaism and

Christianity (in both directions) as well as secular Jews who had adopted Orthodox Judaism (Rambo 1993: xi-xii).

Thus, unlike that of Lofland/Stark and Tippet, the Rambo Model is not based on a study of a specific group of respondents. What is also evident from the kind of data collected by Rambo is that, it confirms the earlier argument that a larger part of the theoretical framework of his model is based on Christian culture that essentially influences the exposition of the characters and definitions of the stages in the model.

The following conversion stages have been identified by Rambo as the fundamental stages in a religious conversion. The description of the stages given below is derived from Rambo's definition of the stages:

### **Stage 1: Context**

Context, according to Rambo, is an extremely influential stage as the factors, agents and forces which configure this stage can either facilitate or inhibit a conversion. Macro-context represents "The Big Picture" environment such as the state politics, religious and economic systems, while family, friends and neighbourhood of a person is considered to be the micro-context. Within these two kinds of contexts, Rambo identifies multiple factors – cultural, social, personal and religious – which can also influence one's decision to accept a conversion.

### **Stage 2: Crisis**

The crisis stage can be initiated by religious, political or cultural forces. Mystical, near-death experiences, illness and healing can also trigger the crisis phase for a

potential convert. The less overt catalysts such as the desire for transcendence to fulfil spiritual needs have also been known to be the catalysts of this stage.

### **Stage 3: Quest**

The crisis dimension is naturally followed by a stage of quest where a potential convert is in search of a better belief system to alleviate the crisis and a new means to deepen their religious commitment.

### **Stage 4: Encounter**

The encounter stage presents the point of contact between a potential convert and a religious advocate. An advocate, according to Rambo, can be any individual, ranging from a family member, a working colleague, a close friend, a community member, or the religious advocates themselves. There are two kinds of mode of contacts which can facilitate the encounter stage: firstly, public means of contact; and secondly, the face-to-face contact. The public modes of contact relay religious information through mass media whereas the face-to-face encounter disseminates knowledge through friendship and kinship networks.

### **Stage 5: Interaction**

The interaction stage allows a potential convert to experiment a new religious option under a controlled environment known as the encapsulation. The encapsulation strategy essentially limits the interaction of a potential convert outside the community of the prospective religion so the person can experience a closer relationship with the religious group and establish a sense of familiarity with the ritual practices. Successful

observation of the main elements of interaction (relationship, ritual, rhetoric and role) is crucial for the potential convert to be able to move to the next stage of commitment.

### **Stage 6: Commitment**

Successful encounter and interaction stages will culminate to a religious commitment. This is seen as “the fulcrum of the change process” (Rambo 1993: 124) and a religious commitment is illustrated through a public declaration. Such declaration is to validate the switch in religious allegiance and the consequent formal affiliation with the community of the new religion.

### **Stage 7: Consequences**

This stage embodies the ongoing process of changes and transformations in the new convert’s life after the public solemnisation. Profound or subtle psychological and theological changes will bring the convert to a new task of assessing the viability of the religion. The outcome of this assessment task either will lead the convert to experience positive religious transformation, or it will raise questions which could be potentially destructive to the new religious life of the convert.

From the above descriptions of Rambo’s conversion stages, his model of religious conversion seems to have a clear-cut sequence of stages. Rambo however insists “the order of stages is *not* universal and invariant” (Rambo 1993: 165), primarily because the employment of the stage-model approach is “a strategy for organising complex data” (Rambo 1993: 17). Nonetheless, as will be seen in the following review, it is inevitable for the existing studies to test and assess the stage sequence laid out by the model. Many found their findings are in contradiction with its propositions which

generate a general conclusion that the Rambo Model is restrictive that Rambo's definitions as well as his postulated sequence of the stages do not fully represent the conversion experience of their research subjects. Even the examination of a conversion process to Christianity fails to produce evidence that could support the stage sequence postulated by the model.

Thus, in view of the findings of the existing studies, it becomes clear that Rambo's insistence of his model as being not universal, but without providing concrete explanations as to why there should be variations in the stage order, operates more like a weak justification rather than a convincing hypothesis. As mentioned in section 1.4 in Chapter 1, this study will attempt to critically engage the Rambo Model and to offer plausible explanations as to why there will be variations in the stage order so that the propositions of the model can be exported across different types of religious contexts. A detailed examination of the existing conversion studies will be presented in the following section.

### **3.5 Literature review of existing research**

The Rambo Model has stimulated a number of research studies that employed the model in their examination of a conversion process. But firstly, it is perhaps worthwhile to discuss the independent reviews of the model where these reviews generally emphasise both the strength and the problematic aspects of the model.

Expectedly, and despite Rambo's insistence on the fact that his model does not possess sequential properties, the issues pertaining to the model's flexible stage order is one of



the main concerns that had been highlighted the most by many reviews. On the one hand, Schoenrade (1994) and Paloutzian (1996) concur that Rambo's stage model approach enables various dimensions, factors and processes that are closely associated to a religious conversion to be sufficiently examined (Schoenrade 1994: 502; Paloutzian 1996: 225).

On the other hand however, the critiques of the model perceive the flexibility of the stage framework as a reflection of the model's weakness rather than its strengths. This is because, as the model does not lay out the stages in a definite sequence, it allows too many possibilities and thus it is becoming too accommodating for studies to achieve concrete conclusions. Cusack argues that, because the conversion stages of the model can be arranged in any sequence in a conversion process due to the model's elastic framework, the model would tolerate "too many possible changes and transition" that inevitably reflects the model's failure to capture the true sense and complexities of a conversion process (Cusack 1998: 17-18).

Likewise, Lofland also argues that the "kaleidoscope of possibilities" that is inherent in the Rambo Model could paradoxically impose a severe limitation on the model's application. This is because it is not practical to "rest on an open-ended indeterminacy that says lots of things are possible" (Lofland 1994: 100). Thus, Lofland suggests that it is necessary for the model to "move on to specifications of when forms and aspects of conversion occur and when they do not" (*ibid.*). In other words, an emphasis should be placed on a functional and causal investigation of a conversion process so that the model, rather than sidestepping the sequence issue, can offer explanations for the variations in stage order or for any other conflicting findings to its propositions.

In terms of research findings, this study managed to draw together seven research studies that exclusively employed the Rambo Model as the theoretical basis of their analysis. These studies not only investigated the characteristics of the stages as how they were experienced by their research subjects but they also examined the order of sequence in which the stages had occurred in the conversion process of their research subjects. Four of these studies investigated the conversion to Islam from Christianity (Al-Qwidi 2002; Martinez-Vazquez 2008; Bowen 2009; Hawwa 2000), while Pitulac and Nastuta (2007) studied the conversion process of the Orthodox Romanians to Jehovah's Witness. Parker (2007) employs the model to explain the conversion process of the South Africans to Buddhism.

Putting these research studies alongside each other, this study has identified significant differences in the findings of these studies, particularly the findings pertaining to five out of seven stages in the Rambo Model, namely the context, the encounter, the quest, the interaction and the commitment stage. Thus, the following part of the review will examine these differences in findings as well as the issues raised by the studies in regard to the five stages. It is necessary for this research to discuss the findings and the conclusions the studies made so that the reader will have the necessary hindsight of the fundamental issues with the Rambo Model, as such hindsight is essential in understanding the arguments that this study will develop in examining the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts in Chapter 5 as well as in identifying the determinant of the stage order in a conversion process in Chapter 6.

The five ‘affected’ conversion stages will be discussed in the sequence proposed by Rambo. The findings of the existing studies pertaining to the context stage will be reviewed first in the following Section 3.5.1, and it will then be followed by the review on the findings relevant to the encounter stage in Section 3.5.2. Consequently, the review on the quest stage and the interaction stage will be presented in Section 3.5.3 and 3.5.4 respectively. Finally, Section 3.5.5 will discuss the commitment stage, focusing on the issues highlighted by the existing studies.

### **3.5.1 Context Stage**

The existing studies come to different conclusions pertaining to Rambo’s context stage. On the one hand, there are studies that assert the crucial role of the context in providing the understanding of the conversion process of their research subjects. For instance, Al-Qwidi acknowledges the vital role that the context plays in the conversion process of the British Muslim converts where she emphasised on the need to discuss the context stage first before the other stages as the context “covers the subject’s life history up to conversion” (Al-Qwidi 2002: 239). Similarly, in discussing the history of the conversion experience of the Catholic Irish to Anglicanism in the nineteenth century, Brown et al. (2005) argue that “of all the stages that he [Rambo] identifies, that of context can be considered the most applicable to Ireland because it assumed a coercive character and because it impacted upon all of the other stages that followed from it” (Brown et al 2005: 33).

On the other hand however, recognising the pervasive role that the context plays in a conversion process, some studies conclude that the context is not a stage as such. Bowen (2009), Parker (2007) and Martinez-Vazquez (2008) all perceive the context as

the background setting of the conversion process of their research subjects. Likewise, Pitulac and Nastuta (2007) also argued that the context “is not a stage per se; it refers to the medium in which religious change takes place” (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007: 84). Evidently, such an adjustment to the framework of the Rambo Model has enabled Pitulac and Nastuta to produce findings that represent the true picture of the conversion experience of their sample.

What is more, the pervasive occurrence of the context in the conversion process leads Kahn and Greene to conclude their findings on the context as the only stage that poses “the greatest measurement problem” (Kahn and Greene 2004: 256). This is because, as the study revealed, the context has multi-dimensional characters that the 97 questionnaires that Kahn and Greene used in their study fail to produce convincing evidence that could define the exact characters of the context stage in the conversion process of their sample (ibid.). Consequently, Kahn and Greene conclude “that a multidimensional approach to the measurement of this complex dimension may be required to assess this aspect of Rambo’s model” (ibid.).

Hence, it is unmistakable that the general conclusion that was drawn by many of the existing studies is that the context is more appropriate to be defined as the background setting against which a conversion process unfolds. Thus, in view of the all-encompassing impacts that Islam has on Brunei’s populations, it is perhaps wise for this study to adopt this particular conclusion, and to treat the context as the background setting of the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts, so that the true characters and definition of the stages in their conversion experience can be properly examined.

Moreover, along this line of argument, the nature of background setting of a conversion process should be shaped by the new religion of the convert. Kahn and Greene argue that a conversion experience of a convert is “bound to be shaped by the denomination she or he has encountered and is considering” (Kahn and Greene 2004: 255). Thus, in examining the existing studies in the following sections, this chapter will attempt to identify the different criteria or properties of a religion of the new converts as this will facilitate the identification of the specific type of context shaped by the religion.

It should also be worthwhile to mention here that, as Kahn and Greene’s study reveals the complexity and the multi-dimensional characters of the context, this study will therefore attempt to identify those multiple characters or components of context that are presumably facilitative and have relevant impacts on the conversion stages. The identification of these characters or components of context will certainly support the analysis in Chapter 5 of this thesis which will demonstrate how the components of context could have significant impacts in defining the characters and definitions of the other conversion stages. This will offer a convincing indication that a context is not a stage, but rather it is a background setting of a conversion process.

The next stage to be discussed in this review is the encounter stage, where the main issue that had been raised by the existing studies is Rambo’s narrow definition of the stage. Rambo defines the encounter as a meeting point between a missionary and a potential convert. However, the existing studies find that such definition can only be directly applied to certain types of conversion experiences. A detailed examination on this definition issue of the encounter stage is presented next.

### 3.5.2 Encounter Stage

As mentioned earlier, Rambo recognises two forms of religious encounter: the public mode of contact and the private encounter. In both forms of the encounter, Rambo emphasises on the pivotal role of religious missionaries, and thus downplaying the significance of the ‘advocate’ role that could be played by those who do not fit Rambo’s description of missionary and advocate. The emphasis on the missionary role is particularly obvious in Rambo’s definition the private type of encounter, where despite recognising the fact that “the most successful forms of [private] contact are via friendship and kinship networks” (Rambo 1993: 80), he nevertheless uses door-to-door missionary activities to exemplify such private kind of religious encounter.

Due to the huge emphasis on the role of religious advocate in the occurrence of the encounter stage, Rambo’s definition of the stage can only be straightforwardly seen as a meeting between missionaries and a potential convert. However, out of the seven existing studies, only one of them can employ Rambo’s definition of the encounter stage. The examination of the conversion of the Romanians to Jehovah’s Witness reveals the converts’ encounter with the Witness religious group that consequently led them to study the Bible and later directing them to attend weekly religious congregation (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007: 85).

Other studies however found it difficult to apply such definition of a religious encounter. For instance, Parker’s examination of the conversion of the South Africans to Buddhism fails to produce any evidence that could illustrate a meeting between Buddhist missionaries with potential converts (Parker 2007: 93). This is because, as Parker argues, and unlike Jehovah’s Witness, Buddhism is not a proselytising religion

that virtually no Buddhists in South Africa are engaged in any kind of preaching activities (Parker 2007: 93-94). What Parker discovers instead is the kind of religious encounter that “could occur in your sitting room” through personal contact with Buddhist friends and family members (Parker 2007: 94).

Considering the findings of the above review, it can be suggested that the characters of the encounter stage are defined by the proselytising property of the religion of the new convert. In other words, the encounter stage between a potential convert and a religious advocate is more likely to occur when the religion sought by the potential convert is a proselytising religion. In contrast, in a conversion process to a non-proselytising religion such as Buddhism, the encounter stage tends to occur between a potential convert and common individuals. This therefore suggests that the religious contexts defined by a proselytising-religion and a non-proselytising religion are the potential types of religious contexts that have critical impacts on one’s conversion process, particularly on the definitions of the stages, and perhaps also the sequence within which the stages appear and unfold in the process.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Qwidi’s (2002) examination of the Muslim converts in Britain also suggests the occurrence of the encounter experienced by the converts was not via their contacts with religious missionaries. Islam and the Muslim community in Britain is the minority religion and community respectively in the country, and “having faced prejudice, economic difficulties, cultural differences and other uncertainties, they [the

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<sup>2</sup> However it should be made clear at this stage that the proselytising properties of a religion are not fixed in a way that such properties could be different from one country setting to the next. For example, while Jehovah’s Witness is a proselytising religion in Romania, it is a non-proselytising religion in Singapore as the members of the religion “are not allowed to publish and distribute religious literature” (Fox 2008: 215).

Muslims] have tended to be defensive and to have rather limited interaction with the non-Muslim majority” (Al-Qwidi 2002: 161). Accordingly, Al-Qwidi revealed that a very significant 36 out of the 37 Muslim converts participated in her study had never been “introduced to Muslim organisations or groups in Britain during the process of conversion and their introduction to Islam” (Al-Qwidi 2002: 164-165). Instead, it was common for the British Muslim converts to have their first encounter with Islam, by chance, via written texts on Islam, particularly the holy book of Al-Quran (Al-Qwidi 2002: 166-167).

Al-Qwidi’s finding is congruent with the findings made by Roald (2004) in her study on the conversion process to Islam in the Scandinavian countries. Similar to the position of Islam in Britain, Islam also has a minority status in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, and thus consequentially is a non-proselytising religion in the country of the converts. Accordingly, the first contact that the Scandinavians normally had with Islam was through personal and marital relationships with Muslims. As the image of Islam they observed through their relationship with Muslim friends or a marital spouse was entirely different from the media image of Islam in their country, this had triggered the converts’ interest to learn more about Islam (Roald 2004: 98).

Martinez-Vazquez’s study on the conversion process of the Latina/o in the United States to Islam has also produced similar findings. All but one of his informants revealed that their first encounter with Islam was through the Muslims within their personal circle where their “relationships were established or strengthened after these encounters, and...became essential aspects of the process” (Martinez-Vazquez 2008: 64).



What the above findings demonstrate is the occurrence a different type of encounter that has been experienced the most by the converts to a minority religion. This type of encounter normally takes place within the personal social network of the converts and in the form of an encounter with friends and family members who practice the prospective religion. Accordingly, this study coins the term “personal encounter” to describe this type of encounter.

In view of the above findings, it is clear that Rambo’s strict definition of religious encounter cannot be applied to a conversion to a minority religion and a non-proselytising religion. The above findings have shown that the likelihood for an encounter with religious missionaries is almost non-existent in the conversion process to these types of religion, fundamentally due to the absence of missionary activities of the religion in the country of the converts.

The above findings have also indicated that, it is perhaps necessary for this study to de-culture Rambo’s definitions and identify the fundamental, culture-free definition of the stages. With such identification, it is then possible for this study to define the stages according to the type of the background context within which the conversion of the Dusun Muslim converts occurs. This is what Chapter 5 will attempt to do, i.e. to identify the culture-free definition of the stages so that the actual characters and definition of the stages in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts can be revealed and made evident.

Furthermore, the above discussion also suggests that a minority religion and a non-proselytising religion tend to have similar kinds of impact on a religious conversion

process. Further evidence to support this finding will be provided in section 3.5.5 which discusses the issues pertaining to the commitment stage.

Accordingly, the above examination of the findings of the existing studies on the encounter stage has identified three separate types of religious contexts that seem to have a considerable influence in shaping the characters of the encounter stage. Two of the contexts are identified by the proselytising, or non-proselytising, properties of a religion and the other type of religious setting is identified by the position of the religion in the country under study, i.e. a minority religion. The identification of the minority-religion context is essentially in line with Roald's argument who asserts the necessity for future conversion studies to recognise "whether the conversion happens within a majority- or a minority-context" so that a proper grasp of the conversion process under study can be achieved (Roald 2004: 79).

Thus, as Islam is a majority religion in Brunei, this will provide a negative mirror to the minority-religion context. This consequently leads to the identification of a majority-religion context as another separate type of context that can be explored. It will be interesting to investigate the actual characteristics of the encounter stage as it had been experienced by the Dusun Muslim converts, particularly in consideration of the abundant amount of religious knowledge disseminated to the population and the borderless interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in Brunei.

A review of the other conversion stages has also produced yet another significant finding pertaining to the context 'stage' where the context is also likely to have a profound influence on the existence of the stages in a conversion process. One of these

stages whose existence is determined by the type of religious context is the quest stage. The detailed review on the quest stage is presented below.

### **3.5.3 Quest Stage**

In reviewing the literature pertaining to the quest stage in various types of religious settings, this study once again finds that the background context of a conversion process has considerable impacts where in the case of the quest stage, the context determines the existence or non-existence of the stage. As the type of background context is specifically shaped by the religion the potential convert is considering (Kahn and Greene 2004: 255), it seems that the rarer the religion an individual is pursuing, the more imperative is the necessity for the religious quest to take place.

Evidence to support the above argument can be found in Khan and Greene's (2004) empirical testing of the Rambo Model. Using Batson and Schoenrade's 12-item Quest Scale to measure the quest stage, or the quest factor as Kahn and Greene call it, they found that the converts to non-Christian religions in the United States are likely to experience a high level of the quest factor than the converts to conservative or evangelical Protestantism (Kahn and Greene 2004: 254). This suggests that the converts to a non-Christian religion are more likely to quest compared to those who converted to Protestantism, which is the religion of the majority in the country. As the majority 61.8 percent of the population in the United States identifies with Protestantism (Fox 2008: 108), it is plausible to argue that potential converts to the religion have a low tendency to seek for religious information as they could have been exposed to Protestantism through their constant interaction with Protestants or through the easy access of information even before they have interest in the religion.

On the other hand, those in the United States who are interested in the religion of the minority and of the non-Christians, have to look for the relevant religious information primarily because of the rarity of such information available to the potential converts. Kahn and Greene's finding is fully supported by Bowen (2009) in his study of the Muslim converts in Denver, Colorado where he reveals that all his research subjects searched for information in their conversion process to Islam (Bowen 2009: 52-53). With Colorado has a large Catholic population and where Muslims only make up less than one percent of the population in the state (Bowen 2009: 44), it is inevitable for the Denver Muslim converts to carry out a religious quest in order to learn more about Islam.

The study on Muslim converts in Britain produces similar findings where the converts were an active agent of their conversion as they searched for religious information through written texts (Al-Qwidi 2002: 144-148). Al-Qwidi further points out that the main reason why the conversion experience of the British Muslim converts involved a religious quest is because "most of the converts, prior to conversion, either knew little at all about Islamic culture at home or abroad, or had negative perceptions of it" (Al-Qwidi 2002: 146). Thus, it is unmistakable that the very fact of the rarity of religious information has significantly led to the quest undertaken by the British Muslim converts.

Likewise, the study on the Romanians converting to Jehovah's Witness by Pitulac and Nastuta (2007) equally reveals the existence of the quest stage in the converts' conversion experience. However, what is significant about the quest stage of the Romanians is that their quest is directed by the Witness missionaries who brought the

potential converts to the study of the Bible after their initial encounter. Thus, it is worthwhile to point out here that, the proselytising properties of the religion which prioritise the promotion of religious doctrine to its potential converts determine the existence of the quest stage in the conversion process of the Romanians to Jehovah's Witness.

It is thus plausible to conclude from the above review that the potential determinants of the existence of the quest stage in a conversion process are, firstly, the position of the religion in the country, i.e. being a minority religion, and secondly, the proselytising properties of the religion under study. This study will utilise this finding to formulate the analysis of the quest stage in the conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts in Chapter 5, particularly in consideration of the fact that, as shown in Chapter 2, the non-Muslim population in Brunei has had a rather comfortable level of familiarity with Islam as they have been exposed to a regular flow of religious instruction and ideas from various means of information channels.

Apart from the quest stage, the existing studies also raised important conceptual issues in regard to the interaction stage, as many of the studies fail to apply Rambo's definition of the interaction stage to the conversion realities of their research sample. The following section will examine the findings of these studies and the ways they redefined Rambo's characterisation of the interaction stage so that their findings would represent the actual conversion experience of their sample.

### **3.5.4 Interaction Stage**

As mentioned earlier, Rambo argues the main feature of the interaction stage is the encapsulation strategy, where the strategy provides a platform for potential converts to have an intensified interaction with their prospective religion before they could be fully incorporated into the new religious community. The existing studies however found that not all religions employ a religious encapsulation strategy. Only Pitulac and Nastuta's (2007) analysis of the religious conversion of Romanians to Jehovah's Witness discusses the encapsulation experience of the converts. The study reveals that the missionaries of Jehovah's Witness in Romania would restrict the social relationship of the potential converts outside the sectarian to separate them from those who are not Witnesses, and thus enabling the advocates to provide a solid ground for an uninterrupted progress towards the prospective conversion (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007: 87).

Other studies however did not produce any credible evidence that could suggest the encapsulation strategy as the core part of the interaction stage of their research subjects. Studies on Muslim converts in Britain, the United States and Denver, Colorado for instance, reveal that the converts did not experience the interaction stage through the encapsulation strategy. Instead, the evidence for the interaction stage can be found in the voluntary experimentation of ritual practices, such as fasting during Ramadhan and performing the Muslim prayer (Al-Qwidi 2002: 174). Many of the British converts also decisively abandoned alcohol and started wearing modest clothes as they became more and more drawn towards Islam (Al-Qwidi 2002: 177).

Similarly, Bowen, in his study of the Denver Muslim converts in Colorado, also reveals the ritual practices that were carried out by his respondents before they formally converted to Islam. The Denver Muslim converts considered the ritual practices as a private experimentation of Muslim lifestyle which accordingly helped “to define the convert’s identity and role” (Bowen 2009: 58). In addition, and similar to the interaction experience of the British Muslim converts, Bowen’s research subjects also voluntarily wore *hijab* (for female converts), gave up drinking alcohol as well as removing pork and other non-*halal* products from their diet before their conversion to Islam (ibid.).

Parker’s study on the South African Buddhist converts also replicates these findings. Although Buddhism in principle does practice an encapsulation strategy upon its existing followers, the strategy however is not strictly imposed upon potential converts to the religion. Evidently, potential converts could experiment the practical ritual of meditation, prostration and chanting within the private confine of their homes. Relationships with fellow converts and their teachers could also be fostered through group meetings where such intensified interaction could lead to rhetorical changes as the potential converts would increasingly employ Buddhist terminologies, such as karma and dharma in their speech (Parker 2007: 112).

Thus, it is clear that Rambo’s definition of the interaction stage is too culture-specific that it cannot be applied to all types of conversion experience. What is clear from the above discussion is that, the interaction stage is solely about the changes in religious behaviour which is intended to prepare the potential converts to break from their current religion. Thus, in view of the fact that Islam in Brunei does not officially insist

on the encapsulation strategy of any kind, this study will instead examine the interaction stage of the Dusun Muslim converts through the observable changes in their religious behaviour before the conversion, so that the depiction of the characters of the interaction stage will precisely reflect the way the stage had been experienced by the Dusun Muslim converts.

Another conversion stage which also generates different findings is the commitment stage. It is evident that the studies which analysed a conversion process to a proselytising religion would highlight the occurrence of a public declaration of the religious conversion, and this signifies the existence of the commitment stage. However, studies on a conversion process to a minority religion and a non-proselytising religion fail to yield similar evidence. Such differences in the key findings pertaining to the commitment stage thus will be the central part of the discussion in the following section.

### **3.5.5 Commitment Stage**

As mentioned above, studies examining the conversion process to a proselytising religion reveal the palpable existence of the commitment stage. The conversion of the Romanians to Jehovah's Witness is one of these studies. As revealed by Pitulac and Nastuta, the ritual commitment of new converts to Jehovah's Witness takes place in the form of baptism which "is a purely public, formal dedication with the purpose of showing to the others the religious option of an individual" (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007: 89). In many ways, the commitment stage acts as an indication of the official break the convert has made from his or her old religion, and Pitulac and Nastuta's finding is in line with Rambo's definition of the stage.



However, the occurrence of the religious commitment in a conversion process to a minority religion and a non-proselytising religion is not as straightforward as the above example. Converts to a minority religion and a non-proselytising religion would not manifest outwardly their commitment to the new religion. For instance, British Muslim converts who participated in Al-Qwidi's study revealed that they already made their commitment to the religion during the interaction stage where they already felt like a true Muslim when they carried out the voluntary ritual practices such as fasting and the Muslim prayer (Al-Qwidi 2002: 186). In addition, such commitment was already formed so deep and in place that one of Al-Qwidi's respondents revealed that the formal testimony of *Syahadah* did not bring any meaning to her as she already carried out Muslim obligations before her conversion to Islam (Al-Qwidi 2002: 208).

Similarly, the study of the South Africans' conversion to Buddhism also illustrates the absence of the commitment stage in their conversion process. Parker reveals that the Buddhist converts had already declared themselves as the followers of the religion although they had not carried out *Boddhisattva* vows in a lay ordination ceremony which would have publicly demonstrated their conversion to Buddhism (Parker 2007: 126). In fact, none of Parker's respondents could recall any particular point in their conversion process that they could consider as a vital moment of their religious transformation from a non-follower to being a follower of Buddhism (Parker 2007:126).

Looking closely at the above findings, it can be argued that there is a tendency for a conversion process to a minority religion and a non-proselytising religion to sidestep the commitment stage, compared to a conversion to a proselytising religion, as shown

by Pitulac and Nastuta's (2007) study. Thus, it will be worthwhile to investigate the reasons for the absence of the commitment stage in the conversion process of the converts to a minority religion and a non-proselytising religion. It will also be interesting to see if the type of the religious context against which the conversion process occurs is also attributable to the above conflicting findings.

The reason why it seems plausible to suggest the argument that a religious context could have equally influenced the characters of the commitment stage is because, this review further detects another similar theme running through Parker's and Al-Qwidi's interview data pertaining to the absence of the stage. This similar theme is the blatant opposition from the converts' personal network towards their intention to convert to a religion that is unpopular among, and is stigmatised by, the majority of the population. For instance, the parents of one of Al-Qwidi's respondents rejected the respondent's intention to convert to Islam solely due to the negative portrayal of the religion in Britain (Al-Qwidi 2002: 219). Similarly, the foreignness of Buddhism among South Africans inevitably caused some of Parker's informants to lose friends and to become estranged from their family during their conversion process (Parker 2007: 136-140). Thus, the opposition against the intention to convert was evidently induced by the type of religious context against which the conversion experience took place, and this could be used to explain as to why converts to a minority religion and a non-proselytising religion have the tendency to sidestep the commitment stage.

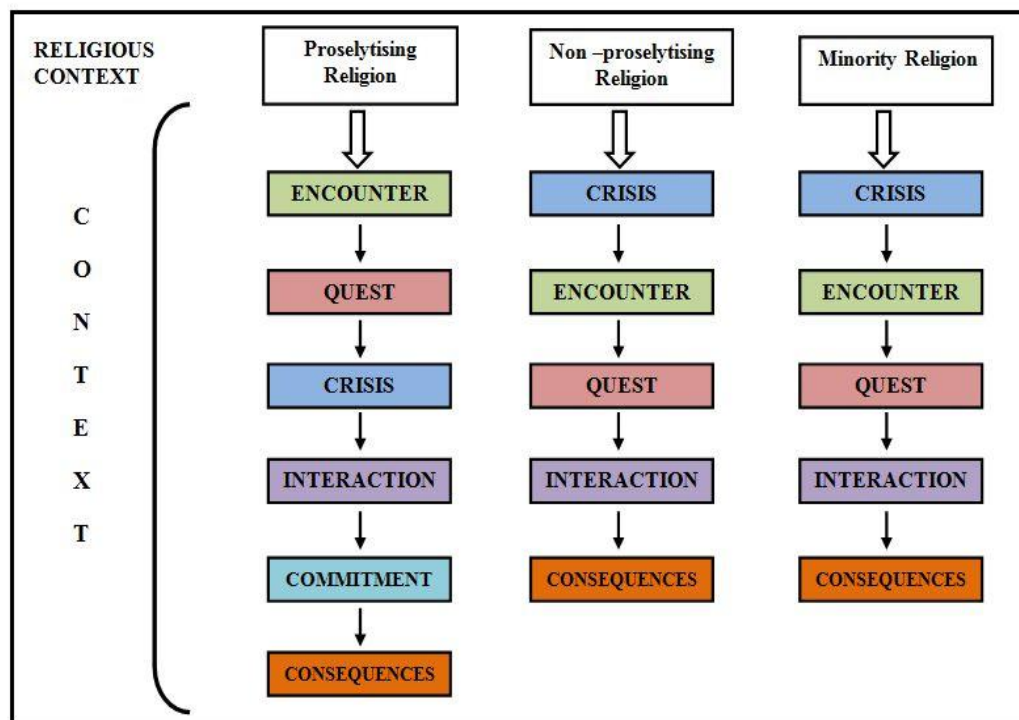
Thus, what can be derived from the above review is that, the absence of the commitment stage in a minority-religion and a non-proselytising-religion contexts, in contrast to the obvious presence of the stage in a proselytising-religion context, is an

early reflection of the decisive impacts that a religious context could have on a conversion process, not only in terms of shaping the characters of the conversion stages but also in terms of determining the order of the stages. Thus, the following section 3.6 will map and identify the separate types of religious contexts that have been explored by existing studies and to establish the specific stage order in each type of religious contexts, as revealed by these studies.

### **3.6 Mapping religious context and stage sequence**

Another purpose of this literature review is to identify the types of religious contexts that have a palpable impact on a conversion process as have been explored by the existing studies. The information will be of significance to the analysis in Chapter 6 in identifying the key determinant of stage order in a conversion process. The above review has identified three separate types of religious contexts that have a considerable impact on the conversion process: the minority-religion context, the proselytising-religion context and the non-proselytising-religion context. The following discussion, supplemented with Diagram I on page 66, will demonstrate the different stage sequence in a conversion process for the proselytising-religion context, and the minority-religion and the non-proselytising-religion context.

It is worthwhile to note here that, the following discussion on the sequence of the conversion stages intends to focus on the variation in stage sequence and how the type of religious context could possibly contribute to this variation. The detailed examination of the influence of a religious context on the individual stages will be presented in Chapter 6.



**Diagram I Effects of context on stage sequence (literature review)**

### 3.6.1 Minority-religion context

One of the types of contexts that have been identified by this review is the context that is shaped by the position of the converts' new religion. As shown above, potential converts who sought an affiliation with a minority religion have a considerably different and distinctive conversion experience. This finding is evidently in line with Roald's argument where, as mentioned earlier, there is a necessity to recognise "whether the conversion happens within a majority- or a minority-context" in order to gain a complete understanding of the process of a religious conversion (Roald 2004: 79). This argument was formulated from the findings of her own study on the religious conversion of Scandinavians to Islam where she concludes that the Rambo Model cannot fully explain the conversion experience of the Muslim Scandinavians. This is because the Rambo Model fundamentally represents a religious conversion to

Christianity in which Christianity is a majority religion in the United States, whereas Islam is a minority, defamed religion in Norway, Sweden and Denmark (ibid.). Thus, as the relationship between the Europeans and the Muslims is established on the “us” and “them” perspectives, and that there is a relatively high degree of segregation with only ‘few points of contact between Muslims and non-Muslims’, it is not possible to expect the encounter with Islam in Scandinavia to be through religious missionaries, as how Rambo defines the way a religious encounter should occur (Roald 2004: 344).

Roald’s finding is supported by the studies that explored a conversion process to religions with minority status in the country of the converts, where it is conceivable for the crisis stage to occur at the outset of such conversion process, followed by the encounter, as shown above in Diagram I. In the case of the quest stage, its occurrence is due to the rarity of information on the minority religion as the broadcasting and printed media do not adequately provide information on the religion in the country of the converts.

As explained in section 3.5.5, the commitment stage is absent in the conversion process to a minority religion. The status of the religion and the way the religion is being portrayed by popular media channels in the country of the converts has significantly influenced the perception of a majority of the population towards the religion. This accordingly leads to oppositions against the intention to convert to a minority religion and thus accordingly explains as to why the converts to such type of religion tend to sidestep the commitment ritual.

Given the significant impact that the minority religion has on the conversion process of its potential converts as shown above, it becomes essential to examine a conversion process to a religion that has a majority status in the country of the converts. Picking up from Roald's argument earlier where a religious conversion to a minority religion presents a unique conversion character and stage order, it will be of great interest and importance to examine the characters of a conversion process that have been influenced by a majority religion, as well as to investigate the distinctive stage sequence in a conversion process to this type of religion. This further justifies the significance of this study as Brunei is a good case study to represent the studies on a religious conversion to a majority religion.

### **3.6.2 Proselytising-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts**

The above review has also highlighted the substantial effect exerted by the proselytising, or non-proselytising, properties of a religion upon the sequence of the conversion stages. Take Jehovah's Witness as an example of a proselytising religion. As the only proselytising faith that had been examined by the previous studies, the conversion process to the religion is considerably different from the process of conversion to a non-proselytising religion. The potential converts to Jehovah's Witness are unmistakably "guided" by the Witness missionaries throughout the conversion process. Such "guidance" thus defines the characters of the encounter stage in a proselytising-religion context where the encounter is strictly between religious missionaries and a potential convert. What is equally important is the fact that, the encounter stage is the first stage to be experienced by potential converts to this type of religion, as shown in Diagram I on page 66. This is because, the proselytising nature of

the religion means that the religion actively seeks out potential converts rather than the other way round.

A different sequence was observed in the conversion process to a non-proselytising religion such as the sequence of conversion stages experienced by the Buddhist converts in South Africa and by the Muslim converts in Britain and the United States where both Buddhism and Islam are a minority as well as a non-proselytising religion in those countries. As can be seen from Diagram I, converts to a non-proselytising religion would be likely to experience crises, i.e. the crisis stage, before they encountered, mostly by chance, a subject that would trigger an interest towards the religion. Again, most existing studies justify the occurrence of the crisis stage as the first stage in the conversion process to these types of religions by arguing that the religion is rather unpopular and unknown to non-followers (Parker 2007:93; Al-Qwidi 2002: 31). Thus, it is unlikely for an individual to purposely get in contact with followers of the minority religion or the non-proselytising religion unless the person has been confronted with a substantial crisis and a conflict in his or her life.

On the other hand however, the potential converts of a proselytising religion rarely experience any religious crisis before they have the religious quest. This is because, after the initial encounter with the proselytising religion, the potential converts would be brought directly to the quest stage. For example, in the case of the potential converts to Jehovah's Witness, the missionaries directed them to attend Bible's study meeting in order to provide the potential converts with relevant information and knowledge that could help foster their familiarity with the religion. It is only when the potential converts evaluated and decided to accept the religious information they acquired

during the quest stage that they would experience a religious crisis (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007: 85).

For the potential converts to a non-proselytising religion however, the stages after the occurrence of the quest stage only consist of the interaction and the consequences stages. The commitment stage is absent in the conversion process to this type of religion. As explained in section 3.5.5, the converts sidestepped the formal commitment stage mainly because of the opposition within their personal circle against their conversion to a religion that is foreign to the majority of the population. In contrast, the converts to a proselytising religion could easily opt for a formal and public ceremony to officiate their religious conversion. Such public declaration of a religious conversion is made possible by the proselytising activities of the religion that create a sense of familiarity to many sections of the population including those within the immediate personal network of the converts.

Thus, the above review has demonstrated how the proselytising or non-proselytising aspect of a religion could significantly influence the sequence of the conversion stages. Specifically referring to Pitulac and Nastuta's (2007) study, it is their recognition of the position of Jehovah's Witness in Romania and the consideration of the proselytising properties of the religion that both authors assertively concluded that, the applicability of the Rambo Model could only be made by adjusting the stage sequence proposed by the model (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007: 83). Given the fact that none of the stage sequence postulated by the existing studies, as shown in Diagram I on page 66, is similar to what Rambo suggests, it is plausible to extend Pitulac and Nastuta's argument to the other two religious contexts (a minority-religion and a non-



proselytising religion contexts) and to propose that the patterns of stage sequence of a conversion process occurring in these contexts should also be distinctly different, in accordance to the specific nature of these two types of religious contexts.

### **3.7 Summary**

All in all, the above review has examined adequately the issues and concerns that were raised by the existing studies of religious conversion that employed the Rambo Model as their theoretical framework. Accordingly, the review pointed out, among others, the lack of sequential properties of the model which is inevitably viewed as a severe limitation imposed upon the model. This study thus aims to identify the determinant of the stage sequence in a conversion process so that the theoretical limitation can be removed and an explanation can be offered as to why certain pattern of stage sequence only occurs in one conversion process and not others.

As the literature review moved to section 3.5 to examine the issues pertaining to the characters and definition of the conversion stages, the discussion on the context stage reveals a crucial finding that complies well with the aim and the direction of this study. The review reveals that, due to the pervasive nature of the context throughout a conversion process, many of the existing studies concluded that it is rather unfitting to consider the context as a stage. Instead, this so-called stage should be seen as the background context, or the religious context, within which a conversion process occurs.

Evidently, in examining the issues raised by the existing research pertaining to four of the conversion stages, this review has successfully identified three different types of

religious contexts that have been explored by the existing studies. The identification of these types of religious settings provide the sense of contextualisation for this study within the existing research where a conversion process within a majority-religion context has not been extensively studied before. This highlights the apparent knowledge gap in the current body of literature and thus justifies the need for this study to be carried out.

Accordingly, by putting the existing studies under the appropriate category of a religious context they explored, it became evident that the conflicting findings produced by these studies were fundamentally due to the distinct and direct influence of the religious context within which the conversion process occurred. By mapping the different types of religious contexts in section 3.6 with an aim to identify the distinguishable pattern of stage sequence for each context, it can be suggested that religious context does have pervasive impacts on the stage sequence. Thus, if this finding could provide an adequate answer to what determines the stage order in a conversion process, then the existing limitations imposed upon the model by its own lack of sequential properties could possibly be overcome.

Thus, based on the above findings of the literature review, this study develops the preliminary answers to the key questions of this thesis where, for question 5A, this study will tentatively argue that the characters and definitions of the conversion stages of Dusun Muslim converts should be distinctive and individual, as in accordance to the influence of the majority-religion context within which their conversion process occurred. Accordingly, this study will tentatively suggest the preliminary answer for question 6B is that the religious context is most probably the key determinant that is

responsible for a specific stage sequence to occur in a specific type of religious context.

However, before we critically examine these preliminary answers in detail in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, it is vital, first and foremost, to deliberate on the research methods and approaches used by this study. A discussion of the research method will highlight, among others, the data gathering method and the sampling technique as to ensure this study has employed research methods that rightly suit the needs of this study. A discussion on the mechanics of coding will also be presented as such coding procedure is also an integral part of this study's research strategy to elicit the best data and information that will support the critical evaluation of the above preliminary answers. The discussion on the research design of this study is presented in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4: Methodology and Research Design

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One of the keys to a successful research study is to develop a research design that can process all relevant information and accordingly provide adequate answers to the research questions. Thus, it is crucial to identify the appropriate methods and strategies of analysis in view of the research goals of this study, the amount of time available for data collection, the ethical consideration and other potential factors which could impact the progress of the research. This chapter therefore aims to explain the choice made by this study in employing the following research methods and strategies.

### 4.1 Why the qualitative approach?

As this research deals with religious conversion phenomenon, it is best to employ a qualitative approach as this type of approach allows a researcher to position him or herself within the chosen phenomenon or activity to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people brings to them” (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 3). What this means is that, by having a direct experience within the research field, it defines “the personal nature of qualitative fieldwork” and accordingly deepens the “understanding of the very nature of what one is studying, especially where meaning-making and emotion are part of the phenomenon” (Patton 2002: 48).

In view of the research questions of this study, the qualitative design of case study has been chosen. The reasons for this choice are, firstly, the case study design allows a researcher to conduct an intensive investigation on a single phenomenon, with an

underlying assumption that the case study under observation is a part of a larger phenomenon (Creswell et al 2007: 245). The adoption of the case study design will therefore allow this study to intensively focus on the key subject of the study (the Dusun ethnic group) and to critically examine their conversion process to Islam. Secondly, the case study approach can also vary from focusing on a single case to multiple cases (Creswell et al: 246), which will then allow this study to shift its emphasis from the individual case of the Dusun Muslim converts in Chapter 5 to a cross-case study that compares the findings of different case studies presented by the existing literature and consequently provides answers to question 6B in Chapter 6 which seeks to identify the determinant of stage order in a conversion process. Moreover, as “the findings of a number of case studies may play a part in the inductive reasoning involved in the development of a theory” (Thomas et al 2011: 295), the case study design thus will support the objective of this study to critically engage the Rambo Model so that the potential of the model as a general theory of religious conversion can be developed and enhanced.

To further achieve the objective of this study to explore the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts in Brunei, the qualitative technique of analytic induction is employed, particularly to support the process of collecting and analysing data for this study. Analytic induction was first highlighted by Znaniecki (1968) where he defined the technique as seeking generalisation through abstraction where it “abstracts from the given concrete case characters that are essential to it, and generalizes them, presuming that in so far as essential, they must be similar in many cases” (Znaniecki 1968: 251). Over the decades, the technique has been revised and modified by researchers to effectively serve various research needs. One of the modifications of the analytic

induction technique is where a hypothesis produced by the analytic induction is no longer in tabula-rasa form at its initiation. Instead, the hypothesis is developed after a careful examination of the existing research and theory on the topic (Bogdan and Biklen 2007: 72-73). In essence, an analytic induction firstly begins,

deductively, by formulating propositions or hypotheses, and then examines a particular case in depth to determine if the facts of the case support the hypothesis. If it fits, another case is studied, and so forth, in the search for generalizations. If a case does not support the hypothesis, that is, it is a *negative case*, the hypothesis is revised (Patton 2002: 94-95). (emphasis in original).

Adopting Bogdan and Biklen's illustration of the procedure of the analytic technique (Bogdan and Biklen 2007: 71-73) as a guideline, this study has found that the technique is effective in generating relevant quality data to be utilised by this research. For instance, based on the findings of the literature review and the consequent preliminary arguments suggested by this study, the data collection process was commenced with an interview with an informant who represents the "effective" case for this study, i.e. an informant who had experienced the full impacts of Brunei's majority-religion context, which can be determined from the informant's strong sense of familiarity with, and understanding of, Islamic knowledge that is most likely generated by the education system and the borderless interactions with the Muslims, particularly those within the person's personal network.

The interview of this first informant was then analysed and coded where the findings were loosely defined, particularly those pertaining to the characters of the conversion stages. The next step is to choose several more informants whose conversion experience is more or less similar to that of the first informant in order to withhold the

initial findings. Thus, the snowball sampling technique is employed to identify these informants (the choice for this sampling technique will be explained further in section 4.2).

As the findings were defined more closely to fit the new cases, this study then deliberately picked cases that were different from the first ones in the hope that these new cases would provide examples of negative cases that did not easily fit the existing findings. For instance, older converts who were not familiar with Islam through the education system and might also still adhere to Dusun culture and tradition were chosen. The selection of these new and different cases was made through a purposeful sampling as this particular sampling technique allows the identification of *information-rich cases* (Patton 2002: 230, emphasis in original). Accordingly, as these negative cases could potentially produce different propositions, it could further modify the existing findings in order to fit these new cases. It was until the data collection reached its data saturation where negative or new sets of data no longer produced different findings from the existing ones that the sampling was concluded.

Thus, from the above explanation of the analytic induction technique, it is evident that the technique fits the needs of this research to provide an in-depth explanation of the conversion process and the sequences of the conversion stages as they were typically experienced by the Dusun Muslim converts, and thus to present the truest possible picture of the phenomenon.

#### **4.2 Sampling: Recruitment Strategy and Selection Criteria**

The informants of this study were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. As the target group has been defined (Dusun Muslim converts in Tutong District), the informants were purposively identified, firstly, by the decade during which the informants converted to Islam and, secondly, by the age at which their conversion took place. These selection criteria were made in consideration of the transformation of Brunei's context into a majority-religion context which approximately took effect in the 1990s onward. Thus, the selection of the "effective cases" at the beginning of the data collection is based on the above criteria where the first category of informants interviewed for this study is those who converted to Islam in the 1990s onward, and were in the age range of thirties and younger during the conversion as their lives prior to the conversion could have been influenced the most by the Islamisation of the education system and the pervasive dissemination of the Islamic information in the country.

In order to identify informants who have similarity to the category of the 'effective cases' which could support the findings produced from this category, this study employed the snowball strategy. The employment of this strategy is primarily due to its chain-referral tendency where the informants who are employed through this particular strategy are most likely to have homophilous characteristics that they share with those who recommended them to the researcher. Thus, the informants in the 'effective cases' would recommend those within their personal contact or within their own social network who they think are of relevance to the study.



Once the interviews with the informants within the above category no longer produced new findings, the data collection was extended to find negative cases that could challenge and refine the existing findings. Hence, the informants who converted at the older age (in their forties and above) but within the same period as the first batch of informants (converted in the 1990s onward) were selected through the purposive sampling, and the identification of other informants within the same category had been made through the snowball sampling. Similar to the earlier process of data collection, once the interviews of the informants in this group no longer produced additional insights to the existing findings, the snowball sampling were brought to an end, and based on the review of the preliminary data analysis, new negative cases were sought out to further justify the existing findings.

Accordingly, this study suspected the Dusuns who converted to Islam in the 1980s and earlier could possibly go through different kinds of conversion experiences as Islam had not become the majority religion in Brunei and that Islam could have possibly still been foreign to many Dusuns. Thus, a group of Muslim Dusuns who converted in the 1980s or earlier, and at the age of between the twenties and the fifties during their conversion were selected to provide evidence of negative cases to the existing findings.

One of the crucial findings produced by this group of informants is the adoption of a Muslim lifestyle after their conversion had not been as straightforward as those who converted in later decades. Moreover, the sense of social unacceptability towards this group was also rather evident, judging from the significant number of converts in this group who revealed the negative treatment they received after their conversion. Thus, with the support of the analytic induction technique, the identification of the

informants by age and time dimension as the selection criteria had effectively facilitated the collection of a voluminous amount of relevant data pertaining to the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts. In addition, the findings that were gained from informants who converted in different periods served as the basis for comparison that consequently enabled this study to point out the specific influence of Brunei's majority-religion context upon the conversion process and accordingly define more precisely the characters and the definitions of the stages in the process.

What is also significant about the purposive sampling strategy is that, it can effectively determine the appropriate sample size through data saturation. Data saturation is a concept or a point where a new set of data collected do not contain different findings from the data collected previously (Glaser and Strauss 1973: 61-62). Thus in the case of this study, towards the end of the data collection process, as there were no more new findings that emerged from the interview analysis of the informants and there were no more category of informants that could provide examples of negative cases, this situation was perceived by this study as an indication of data saturation and the sampling was accordingly stopped. At the end, this study gathered 46 interviews from the Dusun Muslim converts as the data collection process achieved its saturation point.

Apart from the Muslim converts, this study also recruited 11 non-Muslim Dusuns. Their recruitment was in view of the preliminary data analysis where there were issues that were remained inadequately explained by the Dusun Muslim converts. Amongst these issues were the reasons for the Dusuns' adherence to their religion where, despite being equally exposed to the same kind of social environment which led to the conversion of their fellow Dusuns to Islam, it inevitably raises questions as to why the

Dusuns adhere to their Dusun faith and do not follow the footsteps of the latter. Consequently, the data produced by the interviews with this group of informants helped to identify the factors that reinforce the Dusuns' faith in the traditional religion and simultaneously weaken the Islamic influence within their personal realm. There was also an issue related to the commitment ritual as this study needs to investigate whether or not the commitment ritual is seen by outsiders, i.e. non-followers, as irrational, as suggested by Rambo. The interviews with the Dusuns clearly shed light on this particular issue and thus facilitated the identification of the actual characters and definition of the commitment stage.

Key informants are another important source of data utilised by this study. They are however not just the source of general information as key informants should be knowledgeable enough to shed light on issues which other informants may have failed to clarify (Johnson 1990: 29-30). In addition to the 57 general informants, this study recruited 3 key informants where one of them had been identified by his long association with the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre in supporting the Centre's effort of propagating Islam since the 1960s, and thus his insights on the issues related to conversion process is valuable and relevant.

A senior religious official was also recruited to provide information on the missionary activities of the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre as well as the various types of guidance and assistance offered by the Centre to new converts and the whole Muslim community.

The selection of another key informant is based on the fact that she is a senior *belian*. Her knowledge on the Dusun religion and the changes within the Dusun community

and culture that she observed throughout her lifetime proves to be valuable to this study as the understanding of the Dusun religion from the eyes of a *belian* is considerably different from what is available in the written data. Thus, the interview with this particular key informant provides a new dimension to the data gathered by this study.

Appendix 1 provides profile of the informants participated in this study.

### **4.3 Data Collection: The Methods**

Data collection is one of the key components in a field research as the reliability of a research report critically depends on the quality of data collected and of its analysis. A researcher should develop a systematic way in collecting and organising his or her data so that relevant and quality data can be identified within the amount of time available for the study. The following data collection techniques have been identified as the most appropriate data collection techniques which meet the need of this research.

#### **4.3.1 Available sources**

The first step in the data collection process of this study is to locate the available sources pertaining to the research topic. One of the sources vital to this study is the data on the Muslim converts which has been routinely collected and updated by the Islamic *Da'wah* Unit in Tutong District since 1968. However, despite the annual publication of the data for statistical presentation, it has not been utilised thoroughly for research purposes. The significance of the information gathered from this data is that it effectively facilitates the purposive sampling for this research. As the data contains the necessary information of the Muslim converts, including their ethnicity,

date of conversion, education background, occupation, address and contact details, the process of identifying potential informants had been done with minimal difficulty.

Television documentary is another important source of relevant information which this research can utilise. For the past decade, the state-own broadcasting agency, Radio and Television Brunei, has actively filmed documentaries which explore the life experience of the Muslim converts in Brunei. These documentaries, which are normally aired during the fasting month of Ramadhan, give opportunity to Muslim converts to share their life stories and their conversion journey to Islam. The documentaries also include the interviews with the non-Muslim family members of the converts which accordingly offer some valuable insights on the effects of the conversion, particularly upon the personal network of the converts.

The information gathered from these television documentaries, although it is not included in the main analysis, provides this research with a profound overview of the conversion phenomenon to Islam in the country. Moreover, as this information was collected before the fieldwork, it assists this study to formulate the interview questions for the Muslim converts so that the questions could capture the essence of their conversion experience, and to gain the truest possible representation of the experience.

Another readily available source of data utilised by this research is the range of published works pertaining to Brunei and the Dusun ethnic group. This study has made use of the library service provided by the main library at Universiti Brunei Darussalam, particularly the Bruneiana Collection section, which gathers a voluminous amount of data on almost every issue pertaining to the country. The data, which has

been properly indexed according to their relevant categories, is substantial enough for this study to rely on and to serve as a foundation for Chapter 2 of this thesis which, as has been seen earlier, is designed to provide the background information on Brunei and the Dusun ethnic group.

#### **4.3.2 Interview**

Interviewing has increasingly become one of the key techniques to gather reliable information for a research study. The direct interaction between a researcher and a respondent has been seen as one of the advantages of the technique, as it not only allows both sides to give two-way immediate responses but it also presents an opportunity for any questions or answers in the conversation to be further explored by the researcher or by the respondent (Brenner et al 1985:3). Having said that however, an interview has been deemed as “a task of daunting complexity”, primarily because a researcher should possess good interpersonal skills, which is an essential requirement for a successful interview (Oppenheim 1992:65).

Good interpersonal skills however can be easily learnt and developed. Arksey and Knight suggest that one of the ways to develop such skills is by developing a good relationship with the interviewee (Arksey and Knight 1999: 101). By having such a relationship, any potential awkwardness and suspicion the respondents might have towards the interviewer that could significantly affect the quality of the interview data can be eliminated (ibid.).

In the case of this study, one of the early ways to foster a good rapport with the informants is by approaching the potential informants personally and explained to

them the purpose of the study, how the interview would be conducted and that their participation would be voluntary. An information sheet (Appendix 2) was given to the potential informants where it includes further details about the research and the contact number of the researcher for their further perusal.

At this early stage, it is perhaps necessary for a researcher to take into account the possible factors that could cause the invitation to participate to be declined by the potential informants. This study found that some potential informants refused the invitation primarily due to their fear of saying the wrong things in their interviews. This refusal is perhaps a measure of my rapport skills where I accordingly modified the way I presented my research to the potential informants by emphasising more on the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity in their participation.

Interested individuals were then given the opportunity to set the date and the place which they think convenient for them to have the interview. The ability of the researcher to meet the requirement of the informants is an early reflection of appreciation towards the informants' participation in the study and this further prompted a good starting point of relationship between the researcher and the informants. In the case of this study, many of the informants chose to be interviewed at their residence, except five of them who chose to be interviewed at their workplace. Evidently, the informants were at ease to talk about their conversion experience, which without doubt is highly desirable for the attainment of the interview's aim to elicit as much relevant information as possible from the informants.

I also found my status as a Dusun Muslim convert highly instrumental in developing a good rapport between myself and my informants, and thus facilitates further the acquisition of relevant information from an interview session. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that an interview session should begin with small talk where the topics “can range from baseball to cooking” (Bogdan and Biklen 2007:103). In this study, I tend to use my own conversion experience to be the main subject of the small talk where I talked about the events that brought me to Islam before my conversion. Evidently, the chat helped to encourage the informants to talk about their own experience presumably because, after hearing my conversion story, the informants believed I could understand and empathise with their situations and experiences.

Furthermore, the shared religious identity also influenced the informants’ perception towards me where, as the interview session progressed, they increasingly considered myself more as one of them rather than as a researcher. Such perception had been evident in their interview data where many of the informants used phrases such as, “you know how it was like...”, “I’m sure you can understand...” and “it was not that different from what you had or experienced”. Such non-hierarchical relationship is perhaps the reason why I did not come across with any gender issue as my identity as a Muslim convert had facilitated my favourable placing among the Dusun Muslim informants, both male and female. Accordingly, a good relationship between a researcher and the informants has firmly established.

This study chose face-to-face, semi-structured interview technique, mainly due to its recognition that religious conversion is a sensitive issue particularly for the informants whose conversion had considerable repercussions on their personal network. The face-



to-face interview technique thus would be useful in encouraging informants to share their personal feelings and insight that they might be reluctant to discuss in a group setting. Moreover, by having the interview in a semi-structured format, the informants evidently had enough space to adequately answer questions and to tell their conversion stories. The flexibility of the interview format had also benefitted the researcher where issues raised in the conversation that were of interest could be easily pursued and probed by the researcher.

Another benefit of face-to-face interview technique is that the interview session could be postponed when the informants were overcome with emotion while talking about their experience. This situation occurred during the interview of five informants of this study where their interview session had to be adjourned and only resumed with the informant's approval. Such interviewing manner is in line with the procedures suggested by Arksey and Knight in dealing with interview sessions that become emotionally challenging for the informants (Arksey and Knight 1999: 113).

This study also found that, such procedure in administering an emotional interview is an expression of concern which accordingly facilitated further trust that could improve the informant's easiness to continue with the interview session. Thus, there is no doubt the choice of having semi-structured, face-to-face interview is the most appropriate technique for this study as it allows the researcher and the informants to connect in a profound way that accordingly put the informants at ease to be engaged in a conversation. At the end, it enabled this study to elicit relevant information as much as needed by this study to adequately provide answers to the research questions.

In preparing the interview questions, the interview guide consists of broad and wide-ranging questions and it “is based on the key questions that the study is addressing” (Arksey and Knight 1999: 97). However, in order to ensure that the natural conversation flow was not disrupted during an interview, the interview guide needs to be “informant friendly” despite its semi-structured format. This means the questions in the guide were not asked to the informants in the strict linear order as how the questions appear in the guide. Instead, the questions were asked to the informants at the appropriate point during the conversation so that not only the informants were given the opportunity to tell particular stories that they perceived as important to them, but it also gave the researcher an equal opportunity to engage the informants in a discussion on particular aspects of their life stories that are closely related to the interview questions.

This study prepared two interview guides for the Muslim Dusun informants and the Dusun informants. The nature of the questions included in the interview guide for the Dusun Muslim converts is defined by the seven stages of the Rambo Model. The first draft of the interview guide for this research was tested during the pilot study which was conducted in December 2008. As the findings of the pilot study revealed the lack of evidence to demonstrate the occurrence of the quest stage in the converts’ experience, the interview guide was revised where questions that specifically address the existence (or the absence) of the quest stage were formulated and added to the guide. The revised interview guide for the Muslim converts can be seen in Appendix 3.

Whereas the questions that were included in the interview guide for the Dusun informants were defined by the issues that were raised during the interviews with the

Muslim Dusun informants that the Muslim informants could not adequately explain. The interview guide for the Dusun informants can be found in Appendix 4.

The interviews were conducted in a simple, everyday language. There are two dialects that were used in the interview sessions. As my mother tongue is Dusun Metteng dialect, the dialect was used in the interviews with the informants from the Dusun's Metteng group, whereas the country's lingua franca, *Bahasa Brunei*, was used to converse with other non-Metteng Dusuns. While it was perhaps more convenient to conduct all interviews in *Bahasa Brunei* as this could facilitate the transcribing task of the interview recording, the decision to use the Metteng dialect in interviews with the dialect's native speakers was to provide another sufficient basis that allowed the researcher to identify much closer with the informants. Evidently, it did facilitate the researcher's relationship and rapport with the informants, particularly with the non-Muslim Metteng Dusuns, who seemed to be equally comfortable talking about issues pertaining to Islam and conversion to the religion.

According to Whyte (1982), there are three ways to record data collected from interviews: (1) using audio-recorder; (2) note-taking during the interview session; and (3) note-taking after the session ends. Due to the voluminous amount of materials which could be gathered from 60 interview sessions, this study finds the note-taking method during the session and after the session are not the best way to record the raw data to the greatest extent. Thus, an audio-recorder, Edirol, was used to record interviews with all informants. Although there is always a concern that recording equipments could be intrusive to informants, modern voice recorders, like Edirol, are more "friendly-looking" than the traditional recording machines. Moreover, modern

equipment records interviews directly to memory cards which allow the recorded data to be easily transferred to a computer, and therefore facilitates the transcribing and coding tasks of the data.

#### **4.4 Research Ethics**

Similar to any kind of research involving informants, there are fundamental ethic safeguards which this study has taken into account in order to ensure the interviews were conducted with the least risk to the informants. A formal consent was firstly obtained from the informants before their participation in the study where the consent should give the informants a “choice about whether or not to take part” (Arksey and Knight 1999: 129). The informants could raise any concerns or to ask for more information about the research. Apart from the assurance that the anonymity of the informants were protected, the informants were also informed beforehand that the length of the interview session essentially depended on the amount of time the informants were willing to commit to do the interview and it should not be more than two hours for each session.

It was also made clear before the interview that the informants were free to reject any questions if they wished to do so. This is because, and as mentioned earlier, religious conversion experience can be a very moving experience and some might find it difficult to talk about particular events that have significant meaning to them. In such circumstances, the informants were given the right to decline any questions that they found uncomfortable or difficult to answer. Once the permission to voice-record the interview was given and that the informant had indicated his or her readiness to be interviewed, the interview session would therefore commence.

The translated consent form used in this study is presented in Appendix 5 of this thesis.

#### **4.5 Pilot Study**

A pilot study is the background work where a researcher carries out a preliminary study in the actual field situation and goes through the entire research procedure with a small sample. Janesick (2000) recognises a pilot study as an essential step in a preparation for the actual research fieldwork as it allows a researcher to identify potential problems in the design of the proposed research study. Accordingly, the identification of the potential problems would help the researcher to produce a more realistic work plan before the commencement of the actual fieldwork (Janesick 2000: 386).

Among the important components to be tested in the pilot study is the appropriateness of the research tools and to see whether they collect the information needed in a precise way. As interviewing is the main data collection technique employed by this study, the interview guide for the Dusun Muslim converts was thoroughly tested during the pilot study in order to check whether it would elicit relevant information and that the informants were at ease with it. The proposed technique of data analysis and the projected estimation of fieldwork timetable were also assessed.

The pilot study was conducted from 7<sup>th</sup> October to 7<sup>th</sup> November 2008 in Brunei where nine interviews were conducted. The sample of the informants involved in the pilot study had been purposively selected in order to test the selection criteria of the informants, against the interview guide prepared prior to the pilot study.

One of main findings of the pilot study is that it confirms the appropriateness of the simultaneous data collection and analysis, as this technique had effectively sorted out the considerable amount of interview data acquired during the pilot study into a manageable list of codes for further analysis. Moreover, the technique can also promptly highlight significant gaps found in the data collected where such gap was then addressed in the following interview session. This is how the interview guide was revised during the pilot study where, as the preliminary data analysis during the pilot study revealed that the religious quest was conspicuously absent in the converts' experience, additional questions which specifically probe on the issues of religious quest were added to the interview guide.

The pilot study also highlighted the need to have some flexibility in preparing the time schedule of the fieldwork. This is because one of the practical issues that emerged during the pilot study was that interviews could get postponed and rescheduled by the informants to a different date, and this significantly changed the original time schedule. In the consideration of such potential inevitability, it is vital to ensure the actual fieldwork has a true flexibility so that all the important fieldwork tasks could be properly carried out. Further details on the revised time and work schedule are presented in the following section.

#### **4.6 Fieldwork Research in Brunei**

The main fieldwork research was conducted in Brunei from 1<sup>st</sup> December 2008 until 15<sup>th</sup> May 2009. The main part of the fieldwork is to collect interview data and relevant archival materials. One of the major logistic considerations here is the length of time needed to obtain the data. At this stage, a time schedule becomes an absolute necessity

as it not only facilitates an orderly data collection plan but it also allows those concerned (research supervisor and informants) to incorporate this commitment to their time schedule.

As highlighted by the pilot study, the design of the time schedule should take into account several factors that could potentially affect the completion of the fieldwork tasks. One of the factors that were given a serious consideration is the realities of the local customs. In Brunei, the working days are Monday through Thursday and Saturday. Friday and Sunday are government off-days where social functions are very often held on these two days. Sundays have been known by the locals as Brunei's wedding days and this therefore means that, Fridays and Sundays may not be suitable to conduct any interviews. In addition to this, and as mentioned earlier, the time planning should also consider the possibility of unforeseen circumstances which could cause the interviews to be postponed or cancelled.

Thus, taking the above factors into account, the work schedule and the timeline was deliberately designed to allow some over-estimation in terms of the number of days required to conduct interviews. As this study recruited 60 informants, at least 65 days were solely allocated for interviews. Informants would be notified in advance of the scheduled time in order to better facilitate their participation and to minimise changes in the calendar of the interviews. Similarly, 65 days were also allocated for the tasks of transcribing, coding and interpreting the interview data which took place between the interview days, in view of the concurrent data collection and analysis technique. However, taking into account the situational factors and the possibility of unforeseen

delays, the amount of time needed was overestimated to around 160 days so that this study had the maximum flexibility for each task to be properly accomplished.

## **4.7 Processing and Analysing Data**

In view of the purposive sampling technique and the analytical induction technique of data analysis, there is no neat separation between data collection and data analysis. Data analysis is an ongoing process, starting from the time the research questions are framed until the report of the research is finalised. In the case of this study, the raw interview data was processed and analysed through three main steps before they were ready for perusal and detailed examination. These three main steps were transcribing, coding and translating the interview data, as explained in the following section.

### **4.7.1 Transcription**

The first step in data analysis is transcribing the interview recordings into written texts. The method of transcription has been refined over the decades, leading to the availability of different approaches for researchers to utilise. The disagreement over the best approach is also part and parcel of this development. On the one hand, verbatim transcription is seen as “the essential raw material for qualitative analysis” (Patton 2002: 441). On the other hand however, there are researchers who argue that verbatim record is no longer a must in every data analysis as a researcher should pay more attention to transcribe only relevant data where the length of transcription should complement the amount of research analysis needed:

If an analysis focuses on providing an in-depth description of knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, or experiences of an individual, a group of individuals, or groups of individuals, a greater



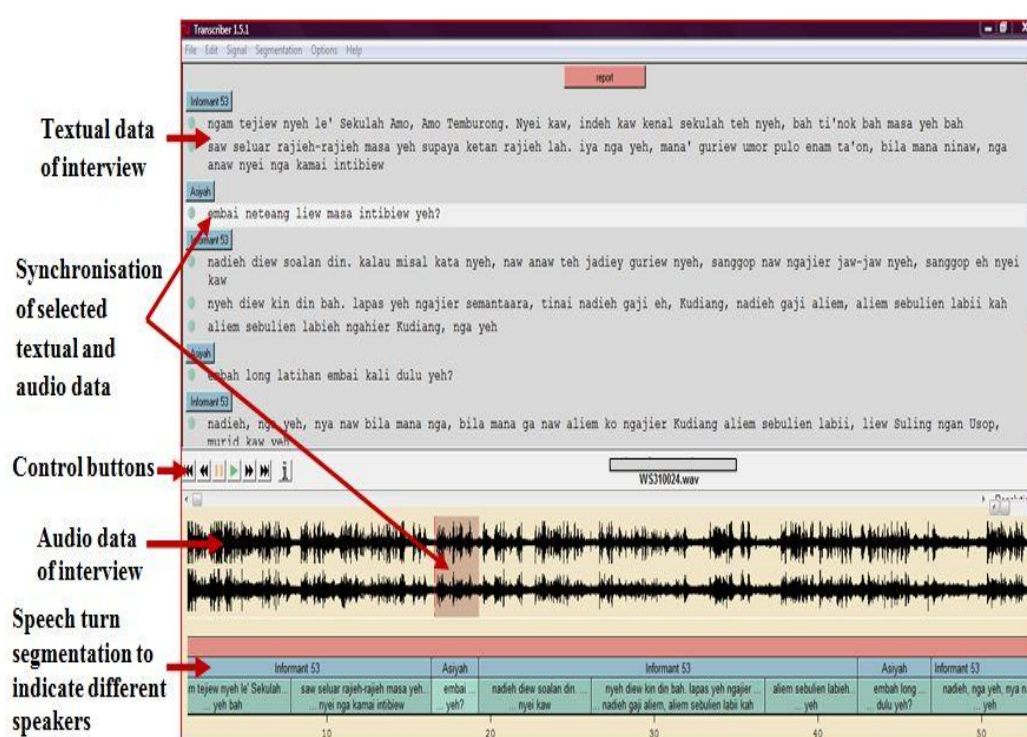
number and possibly lengthier units of text need to be included in the transcript. With this type of analysis, researchers are not only interested in identifying patterns and salient themes. They also want to demonstrate variations in how social phenomena are framed, articulated, and experienced as well as the relationships within and between particular elements of such phenomena (Mc Lellan et al 2003:67).

Given the above insights into the transcription issues, this study opts for verbatim transcription over the selective transcribing technique. This choice of transcription method is also made in view of the fact that this study employs a qualitative method of analytic induction. As the method of analytic induction seeks to refine the existing findings by taking into account negative cases (i.e. cases that do not support the existing findings), the transcription of the interview data should not be carried out in a way that only highlights parts of the interviews that are seemingly relevant. In contrast to the verbatim transcription, the selective transcription could cause this study to overlook any misfit between the new data and earlier ones.

Whyte recognises a transcribing process as “an exceedingly time-consuming task” (Whyte 1982: 118). At present however, there is a number of computer software available which can reduce the amount of time spent on transcribing raw data. One of these transcribing computer software is Transcriber.

This software has a number of benefits. Firstly, it enables the synchronisation of digital audio recordings and transcripts, a feature which ensures the accuracy of verbatim transcription. Secondly, the recording can be put into speech turn segmentation to indicate different speakers, and section segmentation to indicate new topics or specific events told by the speaker. These two features prove to be useful during data analysis

process as they facilitate the identification of sections of the audio recording that require re-listen for analysis or verification purposes. As can be seen from Screenshot I below, by clicking on a particular segment of the textual data or the transcript, a segment would simultaneously appear on the waveform of the audio recording, indicating the section of the audio data of the interview which corresponds to the selected section of the transcript.



**Screenshot I Transcriber software**

As mentioned earlier, the interviews were conducted in Dusun Metteng dialect and *Bahasa Brunei*. This means the data not only needs to be transcribed but selected parts of the transcripts which will be included in this thesis as quotations need to be translated to English. The process of converting the data into English text is not without challenges, as the literature on translating research data is very scant. Many

references on qualitative research do not include any entries on translation. If there is any, the entry on translation is crossed reference to interpretation which obviously brings to a totally different subject (Keeves 1997: 1052).

However, this study found one main reference that contains very useful advice on the ways to tackle the issues of translating interview data into a different language. Halai's (2007) interviews for a project in Karachi, Pakistan generated a bilingual data (English and Urdu). Equally recognising the lack of literature on translation, she "has to improvise and develop rules based on common sense" (Halai 2007: 347). One of her common sense rules is to make sure the translation retains "the spirit and manner of the original" and uses "natural and easy form of expression" (Halai 2007: 351). Secondly, in cases where there are words or phrases which cannot be accurately translated into the other language, those words or phrases are unchanged in the translation text and the closest translation will be given in brackets or in footnotes (Halai 2007: 352).

Halai's recommendation evidently works well for this study. Adopting her rules of common sense, this study has been able to translate the interviews which were originally in Dusun Metteng dialect and *Bahasa Brunei* into English. As the transcribing and translation tasks were carried out by the researcher, this study can assure that the translation of the interview data into English language remains within the original spirit of the recorded conversation. For the words that cannot be translated such as *belian*, *qiblat* and *Isya'*, they were remained unchanged in the translation and were written in italic, an indication that the closest translation of the words can be found in the glossary of this thesis on page 273 and 274.

#### **4.7.2 Coding and Data Interpretation**

The next stage in the data analysis process is the crucial task of sorting the transcriptions into relevant codes or themes. Theme discovery is crucial for research progress as it enables the transcription of a voluminous amount of raw data to be systematically organised according to important themes pertaining to the research. Without such thematic discovery, a researcher may not be able to move to the next major steps of analysing and interpreting the data (Boyatzis 1998:3). Relevant themes or codes can be identified from the researcher's "prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Ryan and Bernard 2003: 88). Therefore, as the Rambo Model provides the theoretical framework for this study, the "master codes" in organising the raw material for this study are the six stages of the model, namely the crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment and consequences stage, and a separate category on the context.

In order to ensure the coding process is in line with the analytic induction technique, a careful scrutiny of the data is extremely important so that researchers "are not finding only what they are looking for" (Ryan and Bernard 2003: 92). Thus, to prevent the unfortunate dismissal of data which seemingly do not fit into any of the established codes, topics unrelated to the established codes which repeatedly emerge during the coding process should be identified as new themes and to be noted and coded accordingly (Bogdan and Taylor 1975:83).

Each interview transcript was repeatedly read and coded. The first reading of the transcript was to develop the sense of the life story of the informant. To "map" the life journey of the informant is crucial because the informants, in sharing their conversion

stories, tended to jump from one story to another, as how a natural conversation normally develops. Accordingly, the transcript of the interview is not properly organised according to the informant's life course. Thus, the first read of the transcript would construct the whole picture of the informant's conversion experience so that a better sense of the experience could be obtained.

Moreover, it is vital for the first reading to grasp the meanings that are embedded in the events and situations described by the informants in their interview. By looking at how the informants perceived and made sense of these events, it can generate more details than had been verbally voiced by the informants. This becomes even more important as the literature review of the existing studies reveals that the definition of the conversion stages and the sequence of the stages significantly differ from one setting to another. Thus, although there were events experienced by the informants are seemingly identical to the events identified by Rambo, the way the informants made sense of the events could be different from how the event brings meaning to Rambo's theory. For example, the informant's contact with religious missionaries evidently did not bring any religious significance to the former, as illustrated by the following interview excerpt:

**[E12.Muslim Dusun.I9]**

I did have some contact with the *da'wah* people before my conversion and I also made friends with some of them as we always met in the religious events conducted by the department where I worked. We did sometimes talk about everyday life issues and about Islam as well but these talks were not in any way a religious dialog...  
[Trans.]

The meaning of the above quotation evidently contradicts to the way Rambo attaches an importance to a meeting with religious missionaries. Thus, by understanding the way in which the life events meant to the informants, it will ensure their conversion story were correctly interpreted and coded.

The second reading would code the transcript according to the master themes of the Rambo Model. The transcript was coded line by line where events, facts, and perspectives were coded under relevant themes. For an easy identification of the different codes, different colour schemes were used for different codes. When an event or a fact potentially represents two or more different codes, a memo was written at the left side of the transcript to note the potential linkage or overlapping between the different codes.

Saldana suggests that “coding is a cyclical process that requires you to recode not just once but twice (and sometimes even more)” because “virtually no one gets it right the first time” (Saldana 2009: 29). Thus, the third reading of the transcript is another round of the coding process to revisit the established codes as well as to identify new codes which are unrelated to the existing ones.

For example, one of the biggest non-Rambo themes that repeatedly emerged during this particular round of the coding process is observation (which was later brought under the ‘encounter’ master theme). Across different transcripts, the informants revealed that they often observed the way Muslims close to them lived their life and this observation gradually pushed the informants to gain a better understanding of Islam. Thus a new theme, ‘observation’ was added to the category tree with sub-

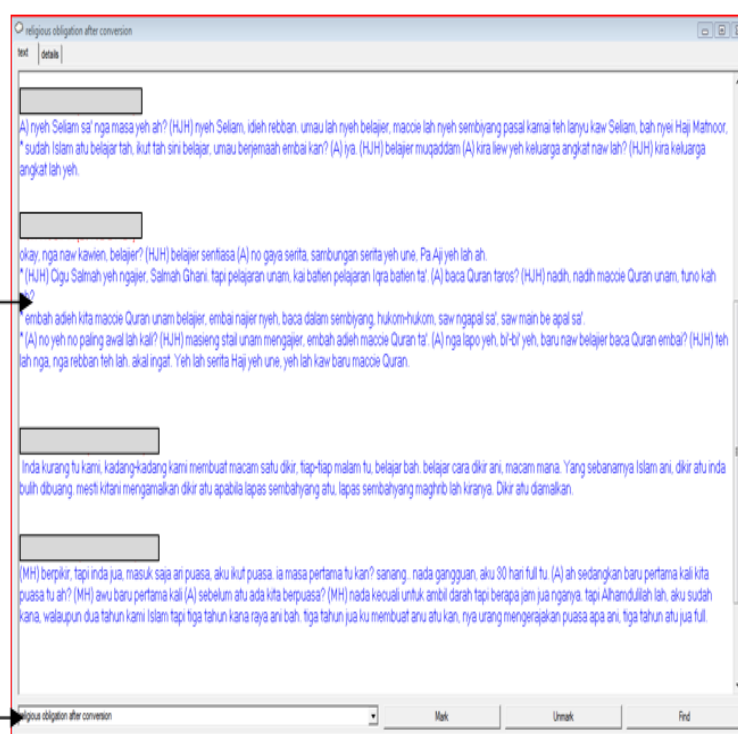
themes under it such as, observation of Muslim siblings, of children and of other close relatives of the informants. As more and more transcripts revealed a similar kind of experience, it later became clear during the data analysis that this ‘observation’ theme is indeed a social learning process that allows the informants to see the appeal of Islam. Such effects of the observation is very much similar to the effects of Rambo’s encounter stage and accordingly the ‘observation’ theme was brought and integrated under the master theme ‘encounter’ at the later part of the coding process.

As the themes expanded and grew in a hierarchical order, it became necessary for the coding process to employ an electronic coding or Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Software (CAQDAS). Saldana argues that “CAQDAS, unlike the human mind, can maintain and permit you to organize evolving and potentially complex coding systems into such formats as hierarchies and networks” (Saldana 2009: 24). Considering the needs of this study, Weft QDA had been chosen to electronically code the transcripts of this study, primarily due to its solid, yet uncomplicated, set of core features that work with similar effectiveness with other commercial CAQDAS packages. Essentially, interview transcripts can be imported into the software and coded under their relevant categories, as can be seen from Screenshot II on next page.

New categories or sub-categories that initially went undetected during the first round of the coding process but emerged during the second round of coding process can be easily added into the category tree. What is also equally important is that, as the categories and sub-categories expanded and grew larger, Weft QDA allows the reorganisation of these categories from their current position to the new position of better relevance, a feature that the manual coding cannot accomplish adequately.

**Relevant data transcript  
from different informants  
for the category**

**category**



**Screenshot II Weft QDA**

The final reading of the transcript is to establish the stage sequence of the conversion process for each informant. To lay out the pattern or sequence of conversion stages as they were experienced by the informants is particularly crucial for this study as this information will support the stage sequence analysis in Chapter 6. As the first reading of the transcript has ‘mapped’ their conversion stories, the second as well as the third reading have cut the transcript into relevant themes, it was becoming increasingly clear to see, in the fourth reading of the transcript, the sequence of the conversion stages as they were experienced by informants and which of the stages that were missing or skipped during the process. This fourth and final reading of the transcript consequently prepares the data for further utilisation and analysis. The outcome of the data analysis is presented in the following chapters.



#### **4.8 Summary**

The research techniques that were chosen by this study are seen as the most appropriate ones to assist this study to achieve its objectives. Supported by the existing corpus of literature on research designs, the suitability of these techniques in collecting, organising and analysing data have been critically examined in length in this chapter. As the issue of conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts in Brunei has not been widely explored before, interviewing is the most appropriate way to collect primary data from the research subjects. The interview guide was prepared and tested during the pilot study in order to ensure its effectiveness in providing relevant data to answer the research questions before it can be used in the actual fieldwork.

The methods of sampling, including the recruitment strategy and the sample size, are also under a careful scrutiny. The purposive sampling and snowball sampling were chosen as it is essential for the research sample to be identified by their age and time of their religious conversion so that different types of religious conversion experiences that are relevant for this study can be obtained and analysed accordingly.

The technical matters related to processing and analysing the data have also been discussed. This study prefers the simultaneous data collection and analysis for several reasons. It not only makes the transcribing and coding tasks of voluminous interview data to become more manageable, but the preliminary analysis of the data also helps to detect any gaps in the data which the study can address before it is too late to do so. Accordingly, the successive interviews in the data collection process would focus on certain issues which have been overlooked in the previous interviews and thus directed

the next action plan for data collection more effectively. Overall, the simultaneous data collection and analysis allows the researcher to keep in touch with the data collected and to make sure they do not stray from the main scope of this research.

While identifying suitable research techniques, it is also crucial for this study to set a proper timeline and work schedule so that the data collection process can be completed within a reasonable amount of time. This is also to ensure the data collection process does not affect the remaining time of the research degree which has been allocated for subsequent research tasks, such as the writing of the thesis. Practical limitations, such as custom realities, were taken into account, and the solutions to the limitations were thought over where they proved to be effective in minimising the impacts of the limitations on the data collection process of this study. The data that have been transcribed, coded and analysed are presented in the next two chapters.

## **Chapter 5: The Conversion Process of the Dusun Muslim Converts**

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### **5.1 Introduction**

The impact of Islam upon Brunei's nation-building efforts has been emphasised in Chapter 2. Islam not only impacts significantly the political, social and economic policies of the country, but it is also a vehicle for the advancement of the dominant Malay cultural and social life among the population. Accordingly, the advent and the further deepening of Islam into the society has considerably elevated the awareness among the non-Muslim population towards the religion. This development in many ways is conducive enough for the non-Muslims in the country to choose Islam as their new faith, replacing their traditional religion.

This study's examination of the religious conversion phenomenon in Brunei solely rests upon the analysis of the conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Rambo Model is employed to provide the theoretical framework for the analysis. To briefly remind the reader, the Rambo Model consists of seven conversion stages namely the context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment and consequences. Rambo generally allows sequential flexibility in the model as the stages are not stages per se; they are "clusters of themes, patterns, and processes operative in religious change" (Rambo 1993: 165).

The logic of employing the Rambo Model as the basis for the analysis is due to the fact that the religious conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts is intricately linked to the physical realities of the social, cultural and religious changes in Brunei.

Therefore it is crucial for this study to opt for a religious conversion model that recognises the nature of conversion as a multi-dimensional process, which the Rambo Model essentially postulates. Moreover, as the model includes the important components of a religious conversion, namely cultural, social, personal and religious components, it could theoretically provide a detailed examination of the subject matter and thus facilitate better explanations of the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts.

The above description of the Rambo Model provides the starting point for this study to explore the details of the conversion process of the Dusuns to Islam in Brunei's majority-religion context. This chapter will compare Rambo's description of the conversion stages with the details of the conversion experience of the converts in order to provide the answers to research question 5A that aims to discover the actual characters and definitions of the conversion stages as they had generally been experienced by the Dusun Muslim converts.

## **5.2 Key Arguments**

Based on the data collected in this study, I will argue that the actual characters and definitions of the conversion stages of the Dusun Muslim converts are unique and distinctly specific, principally due to the effects of Brunei's majority-religion context upon their conversion process.

This key argument will accordingly aid the fundamental understanding and clarification that the conversion stages should be defined contextually, where in the

case of the Dusuns' conversion process to Islam, what should and should not fall under the definition of a particular stage is defined by the majority-religion context.

Consequently, the above argument further postulates that the context within which the conversion process occurs is not a stage per se. Instead, the context will be redefined as the background setting of the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts. Such redefinition of the context is in view of the findings from the literature review that the characters of a religious conversion are defined by the context of the religion one is considering. Thus, it is sensible to still keep the context as being an important part of the theory but redefine its role in the conversion process so that this study will be able to define the characteristics of the stages specifically according to the type of context within which the conversion process occurs.

Accordingly, I will extend this 'the context is not a stage' argument by pointing out that the context should not be seen as a 'single thing' or "an undifferentiated "heap" of variables" (Chattoe-Brown 2010: 5) but multidimensional. This study will attempt to identify the different components of context that define the meaning of the events in the conversion process which accordingly define the characteristics and the definitions of the conversion stages specific to the kind of context within which the stages occur.

### **5.3 The Findings**

In order to provide evidence that supports the key argument of question 5A, the conversion stages will be analysed in the order the stages were typically sequenced in the conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts. This format of analysis is

considered as this study identifies the influence of the stages occurring in the early part of the conversion process upon the characters of the stages that occur later in the process. Thus, by discussing the stages in this particular format, the impact and influence of the early conversion stages upon the later stages would become more readily understood and thus facilitate a coherent analysis of the characters and definitions of the stages in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts.

Furthermore, by providing the reader with an all-encompassing picture of the conversion process experienced by the Dusun Muslim converts, it will enable the reader to further follow the arguments presented in Chapter 6 which specifically deals with question 6B on the stage sequence analysis. Therefore, this chapter will build a basis of understanding for the reason why the stage sequence of the conversion process in Brunei is either similar or different to the stage sequence produced in other research settings.

Because of the ‘direction’ taken by the key argument, this study will also attempt to develop the culture-free definition of the conversion stages to complement the identification of the different components of context which have strong bearing on the characters of the stages. As the nature of these different components of context is shaped, specifically in this study, by the majority-religion type of context, this study will demonstrate the ways in which the components of context formulate the culture-free definitions into the definitions that highlight the actual characters of the conversion stages of the Dusun Muslim converts. Accordingly, these particular findings will demonstrate how Rambo’s definitions of the stages are culturally specific and not as useful as they could be for a general theory of religion.

To begin the analysis of the characters and definition of the stages in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts, the following discussion will firstly examine the encounter stage which this study suggests to be the first stage in the conversion process of the converts. This study argues that the encounter stage of the Muslim Dusun converts is likely to occur between the converts and non-missionary individuals, and this essentially defines the actual characters and definition of the encounter stage in a majority-religion context.

#### **5.4 Encounter Stage**

Rambo defines the encounter stage as a stage that “brings people who are in crisis and searching for new options with those who are seeking to provide the questors with a new orientation” (Rambo 1993: 167). The stage can occur through many different modes of contact, as suggested by Rambo:

Public but mostly impersonal means of communicating the message include such as media as television, radio, mass rallies, and revival meetings. Face-to-face forms of contact, on the other hand, are more likely to be private and very personal. They occur through individual missionaries who come to one’s home to offer tracts, invitations to worship or study, and other forms of contact in which the advocate communicates personally with the potential convert. Probably the most successful forms of contact are via friendship and kinship network, which are obviously the most personal forms (Rambo 1993: 80).

Thus, according to Rambo, religious advocates are not only individuals who are part of organised missionary activities but they can also be in the form of family members and close friends.

However, similar to the findings of other studies which have been discussed in the literature review chapter, Rambo's definition of advocate is not effective in identifying a religious encounter in Brunei's majority-religion context. This is because, the context within which the conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts occurred, which is dictated by Islam, an encounter between an advocate (by Rambo's definition) and a potential convert could take place anywhere and at anytime across all segments of the population. For instance, those who receive state education must have, on numerous accounts, encountered religious teachers who, according to Rambo, can be considered as religious advocates. Those whose workplace regularly organise religious events and activities must have encountered religious officials on numerous occasions as well. Hence, such limitless number of encounters can make the encounter stage become too general as it can be applied to almost every situation resembles an encounter but does not offer an explanation that seems significant to a conversion process. Accordingly, without a proper examination, it is rather difficult to decide whether a meeting between a Dusun and a Muslim is actually a religious encounter or if it is simply a personal contact which does not implicate any religious motivations.

Thus, in providing evidence to support the argument that it is the majority-religion context that defines the actual characters of the encounter stage, this study will firstly illustrate how Brunei's majority-religion context significantly reduces the extent of responsiveness of the non-Muslims towards Islam due to the incessant exposure to religious information. This situation consequently explains as to why contact with the religion, through a regular flow of religious information, lack of persuasion and motivation components that otherwise can transform such contact into a meaningful



encounter that could have relevant bearings upon a conversion process. The details of this argument will be laid out in section 5.4.1.

Accordingly, section 5.4.2 will argue that the prominent character of an encounter stage in Brunei is a personal encounter which embodies a meaningful human contact and social learning. Such type of a religious encounter allows a potential convert to observe Muslim behaviour that accordingly contributes to the changing perceptions and views of his or her surroundings, an outcome that is similar to that of Rambo's encounter with religious missionaries.

#### **5.4.1 Context of Encounter**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the dissemination of the information on Islam in Brunei is through what Rambo regards as a public mode of contact, that is the mass media, as well as through education system and government agencies. This study however finds that a considerable number of the informants of this study have not seen mass media or Islamic subjects studied at school as the factors that triggered their interest in Islam, as shown in the following interview excerpts:

**[E13.Muslim Dusun.I33]**

It was during the secondary school years I began to learn about Islamic laws, the history of the prophets...

[Q: Had your perception on Islam changed do you think, because of what you learnt from school?]

No, I don't think so. I studied Islam at that time not because I was interested in it but because I had to; it was a part of the school curriculum... [Trans.]

**[E14.Muslim Dusun.I9]**

Since my retirement, I like to watch morning tv, and normally at that particular time of day, there would be some religious

programmes, like a religious sermon or a program on how to recite *do'a*. I would sit through and watch them... [Trans.]

[Q: Was there anything that attracted your attention at that time?]

No, nothing in particular really. I watched the programmes just to pass the time... [Trans.]

**[E15.Muslim Dusun.I19]**

I listened, watched and copied what my friends did during religious classes. When the teacher asked us to recite the Al-Quran verses, I would join the whole class reciting the verses. I did not feel any different because we all were doing the same thing... [Trans.]

Analysing the above interview excerpts, it becomes apparent that the informants' encounter with Islam through school and mass media do not represent a meaningful religious encounter. As revealed by the above excerpts, Islamic knowledge in school's curriculum has largely been seen as one of the school subjects by the school-age non-Muslim population in the country. Consequently, such constant exposure to Islam somehow reduced the extent of the informants' responsiveness to the religious value of Islam, and this finding thus helps to explain why such public mode of contact does not produce the intended outcome in motivating the informants to learn more about the religion.

What is equally significant about the impact of the constant exposure to a majority religion is that, it also critically impinged on the country's efforts in propagating Islam. Muslim missionaries, known as the *daie*, have been actively preaching the ideals of Islam to the population in different parts of the country. A meeting with missionaries, by Rambo's definition, should straightforwardly be seen as a religious encounter.

This study however does not yield similar findings pertaining to the so-called encounter between the Dusun Muslim converts and Muslim missionaries before their

conversion. Out of the 46 Muslim informants involved in this study, six experienced missionary encounters. However, despite the fact that the informants were well-acquainted with the missionaries, their encounter and acquaintance failed to interest the informants in Islam:

**[E16.Muslim Dusun.I23]**

I know Islam from the *daie* themselves. The first time they came to this village was in the 1980s and they needed someone to show them the way around the village. The village head then assigned me to be their ‘tour-guide’ and from then on, I have been friends with the *da’wah* people. I even joined their door-to-door visits to the Dusun homes. After several years working with them, they occasionally asked me whether I had the intention to convert. I just shook my head politely in response to the question... [Trans.]

**[E17.Muslim Dusun.I25]**

I lost count how many times the *daie* came to this village, and because I was the village head at that time, they would stop by my house before carrying out their duties. But despite the regular meeting with them, I had not had the slightest intention to know about Islam more than what I had read from the newspapers... [Trans.]

**[E18.Muslim Dusun.I31]**

On important Islamic dates, my workplace would hold some religious events to commemorate the date and the *da’wah* people would come to give lectures. I did go and attend these events but I am certain the interest towards Islam did not come from there... [Trans.]

The above excerpts evidently demonstrate the fact that the *da’wah* strategy can become ineffective if the impact of the advocacy does not produce effective persuasion and motivation. What probably happens here is that, the familiarity with Islam could have also affected the effectiveness of the *da’wah* strategy. As the non-Muslims have been constantly exposed to the exact kind of information disseminated by the *daie*, the *da’wah* activities have probably failed to trigger any real interest that could persuade the non-Muslims to see Islam in a different, more positive light. In other words, the

implication of having a contact with missionaries in a majority-religion context is rather similar to that of having a casual contact with ordinary Muslims at their workplace where such encounters do not necessarily leave any significant impression on the non-Muslims.

What we can deduce from the above discussion is that, the fundamental culture-free definition of the encounter should be a point of contact that a potential convert has with the prospective religion. This fundamental definition will allow one to define the encounter stage according to the kind of context within which the stage occurs. It is clearly shown above that while Rambo's study identifies the encounter as a contact point between the missionaries and a potential convert, such definition of the encounter cannot be applied to Brunei's majority-religion context because such contact point does not necessarily produce an outcome desirable and relevant to a religious conversion.

Equally significant, and related to the above finding, this study also finds that the key components of context that transform a point of contact into a meaningful encounter are persuasion and trust components. It is evident from the experience of the Dusun Muslim converts that the presence of the persuasion and trust components were significantly affected by the regular exposure to the state religion as the converts had not considered their constant encounter with Islam from school and mass media before their conversion to have a significant meaning in their conversion experience.

So, where did the Dusun Muslim converts experience the persuasion and trust component which led them to have a real religious encounter? This study will argue

that it is the personal encounter with Muslims within the converts' personal network that allowed the latter to experience social learning and interaction which accordingly generated the much-needed persuasion and trust to transform their contact with the Muslims close to them into a meaningful religious encounter. The following discussion will examine this argument in detail.

#### **5.4.2 Personal Encounter**

The findings of this study reveal that most informants had their religious encounter with the Muslims who have familial relationship with them. Muslim siblings and offspring tend to be the object of observation and thus the source which generates the persuasion and trust components. The informants' experience of this kind of encounter can be seen from the following interview excerpts:

**[E19.Muslim Dusun.I45]**

Three of my Muslim sisters lived with us before they got married. Although I was still quite small at the time of their conversion, after years and years living with them, I somehow looked up to my Muslim sisters more than I did to my non-Muslim siblings. The Muslim sisters were always attentive every time I had problems and they helped me with school, and I remember thinking, they were nice because Islam must have taught them to be so, and I wanted to be like them too... [Trans.]

Similar experience of living together with Muslim family members over time changed the view of 65-year-old security guard on Islam:

**[E20.Muslim Dusun.I31]**

I learnt, rather indirectly, about Islam from my workmates. Yes, I know Muslims have to pray five times a day and that they have to fast during Ramadhan and this did not even trigger my interest at that time. Who would want to complicate himself with such obligations? I wouldn't, that's for sure.

[Q: what then changed your perception?]

After living tens of years under one roof with my Muslim children and their families, that opinion gradually changed. I could see they lived good lives and noticed how Islam has helped them through difficult times. That was when I began to reflect on my own religious conviction... [Trans.]

Whereas the following 61-year-old female convert believes it was her Muslim children who brought her to Islam:

**[E21.Dusun Muslim.I24]**

My children continued living with us even after their conversion. Because I never went to school, I only know Islam from radio and television, and I always thought Islam sounds complicated. But having my children around me had shown me a different side of Islam. Islam is not that complicated. Of course, there are many religious duties to be observed, like praying, fasting and reading the Al-Quran but they are only to be carried out at a specific time of a day and in a very orderly manner. And for the elderly like me, there is no pressure for me to perform these duties to the utmost perfection. I should only do them according to my ability. That is what I like about Islam... [Trans.]

What did the informants gain from their above personal encounter? Because the source of the encounter is personal in nature, the informants had effective two-way communications with the “living examples” who in turn fed the potential converts with interactive and meaningful information about Islam. These “living examples” clearly enriched the people around them with what the latter actually needed to know about Islam, how to behave within the religion and how Islam had improved their lives. Thus, to notice that the Muslim family members are happier because Islam has helped them through difficult times is a motivation in itself and a definite source of persuasion for one to learn more about the religion at a personal level.

What is also equally significant about the personal encounter is that, such encounter can demonstrate how the conflicting religious values between the Dusun religion and Islam can actually be reconciled by having both the Muslim and the non-Muslim family members to be tolerant with each other's beliefs. It cannot be denied that some informants had faced rejection from the non-Muslim family members in the early days of their conversion. But over time, the new converts set real-life examples of the way of life according to Islam by practicing the religion in a way that it would not offend the non-Muslim members, particularly if they lived under one roof with their non-Muslim family. It could be argued that the crucial point of Islam as being able to facilitate reconciliation between Islam and the ethnic religion, as demonstrated by personal encounter, is what school subjects or public sermons cannot effectively convey and possibly hope to achieve. The impact of such personal encounter is illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

**[E22.Muslim Dusun.I29]**

My brother had already converted at that time, and I saw his relationship with our Dusun parents remained the same, if not better than before. He treated our parents with kindness and respect. Likewise his relationship with other Dusun relatives... [Trans.]

A similar observation was made by the following informants:

**[E23.Muslim Dusun.I37]**

The first one in my family to convert to Islam was my second elder brother who converted in 1972, and he continued to live with us after his conversion until he got married recently. He treated us similarly as how he did before his conversion. In fact, he probably respected and treated our elders more kindly than we did and I guess this is perhaps the reason why my parents were willing to accommodate his Muslim way of life into ours... [Trans.]

**[E24.Muslim Dusun.I9]**

As my children, one after another, converted to Islam, I really thought, this is it. There would definitely be a day when all my children would abandon us and prove the truth in the old saying that Islam breaks families up. But that day never came. My children strictly observed their religion but not at the expense of our relationship. They all continued to live with us and needless to say, the experience of having them around that was really an eye-opener for me as I all along thought Islam and Dusun just do not mix...  
[Trans.]

Thus, it is inevitable for the non-Muslims to observe the ways the Muslims close to them lived and arranged their life in accordance to the Islamic teaching. The way these Muslims displayed their religious commitment and the confidence they had in the religion, over time, changed the perception that the non-Muslim family members had on Islam. Accordingly, the new insight of Islam brought the non-Muslims' knowledge about the religion to a new level where they began to see the appeal and benefit of Islam as a religious system.

Furthermore, the knowledge gained from a personal encounter experience could hugely impact one's final decision to commit to Islam. This is because, it is one aspect to know, for example, that Muslims fast, it is another to know the proper way they carry out the fasting and yet another to know that they (the potential convert) themselves can fast. Finally, it is important to learn and recognise that, in deciding whether to commit, that the person can fast without falling out with the Dusuns within their immediate social networks. Thus, all these information are crucial in making decisions leading up to a conversion and they all clearly come from a personal encounter experience.



The persuasive power of a personal encounter had been mentioned by one of the key informants of this study who is actively involved in *da'wah* activities:

**[E25.Key informant.I58]**

I remember one case of a Dusun man who we repeatedly approached during our round of visit to his village for almost five years but our visit failed to produce the desired outcome. Then, about three years after our last visit, I received a phone call from him, inviting me to come over to his place. Without expecting anything, I responded to his invitation and went. After we spent a good half an hour talking about his paddy field, the weather and other mundane things, he suddenly said, "I want to convert". It took me rather by surprise because, after our failed visits, he was probably the last person I would expect to convert. But I later learnt that his experience of living with his Muslim son taught him a lot about Islam... [Trans.]

Thus, it could be strongly argued that, in the conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts, a personal encounter is clearly the main source of persuasion and trust for one to pay more attention to Islam and start to have confidence in the religion. To further strengthen the argument that a personal encounter is a religious encounter in the conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts, the following discussion will illustrate how the non-occurrence of personal encounter within one's family network will not transform a casual familiarity with Islam into a meaningful source of motivation and interest towards the religion.

Interviews with several non-Muslim Dusuns reveal this interesting fact. Robust Dusun personal environment is one of the reasons why many Dusun informants do not have the intention to learn more about Islam despite possessing a solid amount of religious knowledge. For instance, despite attending both a state school education and religious school in the past, a 22-year-old university student displayed no inclination towards Islam. His interview revealed that he is clearly content with his Dusun life and does

not see the point of observing another religion. Given his social background where his mother is a *belian*, he observes the Dusun tradition well. He participates actively in a Dusun association which helps him to maintain his personal contact with other Dusuns particularly those of his own age. Even the school environment mirrors his strong Dusun contextual surroundings:

**[E26.Dusun.I49]**

At school, I got along with my Dusun friends better than with my Malay friends. We do not fight among ourselves but the Malays can be hostile sometimes and like to pick fight for no reason... [Trans.]

The above excerpt thus illustrates the robust Dusun social circle around the informant, together with a strong family circle rooted in the Dusun tradition. This evidently minimises the possibility for an occurrence of a personal encounter within his personal network. Such minimal prospect for a meaningful contact with Islam to occur can also be found in the life experience of a 48-year-old Dusun school teacher who, despite of his constant socialisation with Muslims at workplace, he perceives Islam as a burdensome religion:

**[E27.Dusun.I62]**

One of my nieces recently converted to Islam but to be honest, I cannot understand why she wanted to burden her life. She is still young and even if she did not practice *Temarok*, she can still easily see that the Dusuns do not have complicated duties like the Muslims do... [Trans.]

Further analysis into his interview reveals that, within his family context, he only has an older Muslim brother who does not keep a constant contact with the informant's family. This demonstrates the fact that, without the observation opportunity within their personal circle, the Dusuns cannot extend their tolerance towards the religion. In

other words, the dissemination of Islam through the public mode of contact lacks of the understanding and motivation which otherwise comes with personal encounter.

Therefore, the above discussion on the encounter stage strengthens the argument for question 5A where the characters and the definition of the encounter stage in the experience of the Dusun Muslim converts is distinctive as the result of the effects of Brunei's majority-religion context. Because the dissemination of Islamic information is so widespread that virtually any individual in the country at some points should have encountered a decent amount of religious information, it is essential for this study to differentiate between a mere meeting with an actual religious encounter. Thus, due to the influence of the majority-religion context, the above discussion has demonstrated that the encounter stage of the Dusun Muslim converts should be defined as a personal encounter between the converts and Islam, in the form of the Muslims within their personal network. The later part of the examination of the encounter stage further suggests that the absence of such personal encounter could effectively hinder a Dusun from gaining a religious awareness beyond the facts and figures about Islam which he or she has learnt in school, or beyond the religion whose information is repeatedly transmitted through public means of contact.

A key point that should also be emphasised here is that the learning and evaluation of Islam through a personal encounter significantly affects the subsequent two conversion stages, namely the quest and interaction stage. In the case of the quest stage, the need for knowledge acquisition, which should be pursued by a potential convert in order to make an informed evaluation of the prospective religion, has been fulfilled by the personal encounter and thus leads to the absence of the quest stage in the conversion

process of the Dusun Muslim converts. This argument will be discussed in Section 5.6.2.

A personal encounter also defines the characters of the interaction stage as the Dusuns tended to rely on the Muslims whom they observed during their personal encounter stage for direction and advice as they experienced an intensified interaction with Islam before their conversion. Section 5.7.2 will explain further this argument.

The above discussion also suggests that because personal encounter starts from a casual familiarity with Islam before the stage could effectively trigger motivation, this study argues that the encounter stage is likely to be the first stage to occur in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts. The above discussion also reveals that the personal encounter inevitably leads the informants to evaluate their life situation where for most informants, the constant observation of the ‘living examples’ and to see how Muslims around them led good lives caused them gradually to question their religious upbringing. This is the outset of the crisis stage, which is discussed next.

## **5.5 Crisis Stage**

The occurrence of a crisis in an individual’s life is critical for a conversion process as this is the stage where one would raise fundamental questions about their existing religious orientation. Rambo identifies there are,

[t]wo basic types of crisis that are important to the conversion process: crises that call into question one’s fundamental orientation to life, and crises that in and of themselves are rather mild, but are the

proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back. It is easy that death, suffering, and other painful experiences can challenge one's interpretation of life, calling everything into question, but other events that appear to be rather insignificant may also eventually serve as triggers – crises in retrospect. Cumulative events and processes are often crucial to conversion (Rambo 1993: 46).

Based on the above description of the basic categories of crisis, this study identifies three types of crisis that were generally experienced by the Dusun Muslim converts. Two types particularly come under the category of dramatic crisis experience, namely the mystical experiences and illnesses, and the other type of crisis is the 'is that all there is?' crisis which is an accumulation of quieter crises and seemingly random life events which collectively induces this type of religious crisis.

The examination of the above types of crises will provide supporting evidence to the argument for question 5A that the characters and definition of the crisis stage are distinctively unique, in accordance to Brunei's majority-religion context. The following discussion will demonstrate the ways in which the possession of Islamic knowledge defined the interpretation of the mystical events as well as provided the potential solution to an illness crisis. Likewise, the majority-religion context also inevitably directs the Dusun Muslim converts to the solution to their 'is that all there is?' crisis, a crisis which is similarly triggered by the informants' existing relationship with Islam and by their personal encounter experience.

Analysing these crises alongside each other, this study will reveal that the culture-free definition of the crisis stage is an evaluation of the existing religious orientation of a potential convert.

Accordingly, the discussion will highlight the key component of context that supports and defines the characters of the crisis stage is the awareness component where this component would highlight and even magnify the weaknesses in one's existing religion that accordingly enables the person to perceive the prospective religion in a better light than the one they practiced. Section 5.5.4 will further provide evidence to this argument.

The different types of crises are examined in the following paragraph, starting off with the examination of the crisis in the form of mystical events and experiences.

#### **5.5.1 Mystical events**

The link between mysticism and religious experience has been studied extensively in the past, resulting in significant advances in the knowledge of mysticism itself. Scholars study autobiographical accounts of mystical experiences in order to have solid knowledge foundation on this particular dimension of human experience. The involvement of ethnographers and anthropologists in the study of mysticism also leads us to have an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon, as the "significance of institutional, social, and historical settings within which the mystic has their experiences" has been given a greater consideration than before (Hollenback 2000: 4).

While mysticism is a widely recognised phenomenon, different cultures however define mysticism in their own different ways, and attach specific meanings to the phenomenon. Western religions generally have a weaker tendency if compared to the Eastern religions to encourage pro-mystical attitudes (Edwards and Lowis 2008: 155).

Accordingly westerners rarely see mystical events as a motivation to perfect their religious orientation. Some might even dismiss such events as irrational and irrelevant (ibid.)

In the case of Southeast Asians however, mystical experiences are regarded as having a hidden realm that allows human beings to see dimensions beyond the reality of everyday life. Because of this perception, the Southeast Asians tend to treat mystical events as genuine and spiritual in nature, particularly when the events embody religious elements (Houben 2003: 157). The following interview excerpt of a 49-year-old female convert demonstrates how a mystical event had swayed her towards Islam:

**[E28.Muslim Dusun.I12]**

I slept in the same room with my sister. As the clock struck twelve midnight and we both had fallen asleep, I was suddenly woken up by the sound of the *Azan* which I initially thought came from my sister's radio. I woke my sister up and told her to switch off her radio. She said she had but as I was really sure the sound must have come from there, I pulled the batteries out of her radio. But as soon as I went back to bed, I heard the *Azan* again, calling "*Allahu Akbar*" [Allah is the Greatest]. There was no mosque nearby, so it was impossible the sound came from outside. I ruled out television because we did not have any at that time. I kept hearing the sound every night. Strangely, once I voiced my intention to convert to Islam to my sister, the *Azan* no longer disturbed my sleep... [Trans.]

A 37-year-old education officer also reported a mystical event which pulled her towards Islam:

**[E29.Muslim Dusun.I36]**

In the middle of my sleep, I suddenly felt like I was being tied down; I could not move my body. Then, out of nowhere, I suddenly heard a voice telling me to utter "*Allahu Akbar*". I uttered the words and miraculously I could move my body again. I don't know if that was a

sign from Allah but after that experience, I began to have somewhat faith in Him, and believed that His power does exist... [Trans.]

It would also be essential to mention here that, the contextual environment of the above informants have demonstrated to them that Islam is a religion worthy of respect. Thus, it was perhaps inevitable for the informants to define and interpret the meaning of their mystical events in accordance to their contextual surrounding, which led the informants to further acknowledge Islam as an eligible alternative religion. Out of the 46 Muslim converts involved in this study, nine experienced mystical events before their conversion and all strongly believed that it was this particular event that spurred them to question the rationality of the Dusun religion while becoming more inclined towards Islam.

### **5.5.2 Illness and Healing**

Another instigator of the crisis stage is illness and the search for healing. When confronted with health problems and a struggle to find ways for healing, it is common for the sick individuals to strive and to find the meaning of their illness experience. As this happens, they might tap into religious resources in order to shift the meaning of the illness and reduce the extent of their suffering. In the case of the Dusun Muslim converts, the failure of the Dusun religion to provide solution to their health problem had led them to look for a religious alternative. This is basically how illness and the search for its healing triggered a crisis in the conversion experience of the Muslim Dusuns.

In the Dusun religion, the *Temarok* ceremony, which has been discussed in section 2.5 of Chapter 2, provides the Dusuns with ritualistic means to solicit medical recovery by



relying on the *belians* to interact with the divine spirits and ask for a restoration of health. For instance, a 60-year-old male convert, who suffered from heart problem, had repeatedly sought healing through the *Temarok* ceremony. However, his condition instead rapidly become poorly despite receiving the treatment from the *belian*, and this frustrating situation caused the informant to compare the Dusun religion with Islam, a religion that he had learnt from school and from his observation of his Muslim relatives. Such comparison between Islam and the Dusun religion indicates the occurrence of a crisis in the conversion process of the informant.

Evidently, the outcome of the evaluation demonstrated the usefulness of Islam as an alternative way to cope with his illness, and as his health condition became more severe with the ongoing medical treatment, so did the acuteness of his need to convert to Islam to cope with the illness:

**[E30.Muslim Dusun.I21]**

My condition was worsened by day. I think my body rejected the medical treatment. When the doctor told me about sending me to Singapore for a heart surgery, it got me thinking. If I had the surgery, I had nothing to rely on. I didn't know how to pray and there was no Dusun *doa* which I could turn to for healing... [Trans.]

A similar encounter with a serious illness was experienced by 57-year-old male convert where he believed the unexplained illness suffered by his daughter had made him more determined to proceed with his conversion. When the informant found out the fact that his daughter's illness was caused by his mother's own practice of the Dusun religion, he decided to seek solace in Islam for his daughter's health problem. The following excerpt explains the reasons why he thinks Islam could have its buffering effects on his daughter's illness:

**[E31.Muslim Dusun.I28]**

According to the tradition, a Dusun *belian* would pass down her spirits to her daughter or granddaughter. My mother, who was a *belian*, chose my daughter as she took care of her since she was a small. However, the spirits caused my daughter to act erratically at times, as if she was being possessed. This often got her into trouble at school and affected her relation with her teachers. Before our conversion, we had tried to get the spirits out of her body but it had not been entirely successful. It was then I began to seriously consider Islam as an alternative religion. From what I know, my prayers would be heard as there is no barrier between me and Allah. I can always ask for the assistance of religious teachers, *imam* or someone knowledgeable to deal with this type of illness... [Trans.]

The excerpts above strongly suggest that, both informants inevitably see Islam as the source of healing for the illness they were suffering. Such a perception on Islam is partly formed by the after-effects of the encounter stage which had instilled the informants' trust in Islam. The trust component consequently precipitated the awareness component which caused the informants to evaluate the Dusun religion, and to compare the religion with Islam due to failure of the Dusun religion to offer a reliable solution to their illness. This is one of the essential characteristics of the crisis stage in the Muslim Dusuns' conversion experience.

### **5.5.3 Is That All There Is?**

Rambo defines the "is that all there is?" crisis as a less dramatic kind of crisis where "for some people the "opening" is made by a vague and growing sense of dissatisfaction with life..." (Rambo 1993: 50). This kind of crisis evidently exists in many informants' conversion experience. A 63-year-old male convert, for instance, had already started questioning and comparing his Dusun religion with Islam during his school years. However, such comparison and questioning had not been seriously entertained by him at that time because he was more preoccupied with achieving good

grades at school (where he not only excelled in secular subjects but also in Islamic subjects). As he entered working life, the crisis returned every time he observed his Muslim colleagues dutifully carried out their religious obligations such as performing the Muslim prayers and fasting during Ramadhan. This led him to once again question the viability of his ancestors' religion, as he never performed any ritual akin to that of the Muslim prayer or fasting. Such comparison and evaluation are clearly indications of the crisis stage, supported by the increasing level of awareness component of context. Yet again, this did not lead to a more serious crisis as the informant at that time thought his life was already fulfilling because he had a decent job and a young family.

However as he reached his forties, the informant began to seek beyond himself for meaning and purpose. Despite having good money in hand and a close family network, he somehow still felt empty and vague:

**[E33.Muslim Dusun.I4]**

It was not immediate but the feeling of vagueness started to creep in few years before the conversion. I did not know what it was initially. I compared what I had with what my neighbours had and I had everything they had: a family, a house, a car, a decent job. But I still sensed there was something missing in my life... [Trans.]

It was during the self-evaluation process that the informant then realised his spiritual need has been long neglected. His Dusun religion had been so marginal in his life that he seldom oriented his daily life in the direction paralleled to the religion. The informant, however, did not want to entertain the thought of rediscovering the root of his ancestors' tradition as he had long doubted its logic and reliability. At this stage, Brunei's majority-religion context clearly plays a vital part in defining the direction of

the solution to his crisis where, his familiarity with Islam since his school years convinced the informant that Islam is the right religious alternative for him.

This study also finds that, the “is that all there is” crisis is more likely to occur to informants who had done well and achieved their life goals. A 70-year-old male convert for instance, still remembers how he initially could not figure out the reason why his new job as an army officer failed to give him contentment and satisfaction when the fact that this is the job he had dreamt about since childhood:

**[E34.Muslim Dusun.I39]**

I was actually rather disappointed because the job did not give me the satisfaction I expected it would. I had been dreaming to be in the army since I was small. I even went against my mother’s wish who wanted me to be a teacher, like my uncles. Yet, after a few years working as an army personnel, I still felt something was amiss...  
[Trans.]

At the same time, he became familiar with Islam through his close friendship with Malaysian Muslims, many of whom he befriended during his years of army training in Malaysia. Upon his return to Brunei, he lived with the family of his mother’s Muslim sister, a life experience that eventually enabled him to identify the source of his inner discontentment, which was spiritual emptiness. It was this realisation that eventually led to his conversion to Islam.

As shown above, this kind of crisis catalyst does not sound dramatic but it was clear from the experience of the informants, the constant inadequate spiritual satisfaction inevitably led to a more severe and life-defining crisis. It should be highlighted here that, this is the type of crisis that was experienced by most informants of this study,

largely due to the fact that this type of crisis is triggered by their existing familiarity with Islam and by the effects of their personal encounter. Thus, it is inevitable for the informants to evaluate their Dusun religion vis-à-vis Islam, the very fundamental function of the crisis stage. Moreover, because the Dusun religion failed to provide satisfying solutions to ease the burden of stress caused by the crisis, such failure of the Dusun religion further highlights the severity of their crisis. Over time, the crisis had prompted the informants to increasingly question the feasibility of adhering to their ethnic religion as the informants started to lose confidence in the religion. This is how the 'is that all there is' crisis contributed to the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts.

#### **5.5.4 Context of Crisis**

From the above discussion, we can see how Brunei's majority-religion context provides the informants with an awareness towards Islam and this awareness can be seen in two main ways. Firstly, in the case of the 'is that all there is' crisis, the effects of the majority-religion context is not only the source of the crisis the informants were experiencing but it also acts as the 'magnifier' of those issues. It is evident from the above discussion that the weight of small, seemingly random life issues that the informants were confronting with would become heavier as they were exposed to the increasingly amount of information on Islam. Secondly, in the case of the informants who experienced the mystical events, the above discussion has demonstrated how the majority-religion context, through their existing familiarity with Islam, defined the interpretation of the mystical experience that accordingly convinced the informants of the viability of Islam as a religious alternative.

To illustrate further how the context influences the crisis stage, the occurrence of the mystical event on its own without the support of relevant contextual environment would not bring any significant meaning to the individuals. This is evident in the conversion experience of some informants where their interviews indicate that they did actually experience some mystical events long before they were confronted with a much more meaningful religious crisis. For instance, both 57-year-old retired army personnel and 60-year-old municipal staff once had a premonition where they saw themselves performing a Muslim prayer in front of the Ka'abah in the holy city of Mecca and joining thousands of Muslims in the Hajj pilgrimage.

However, because their context at that time was still imbued with the Dusun ideals and thinking, both informants dismissed the event as irrelevant. This is a clear example of how the absence of the awareness component of the context could decisively define the informants' interpretation of the events. In contrast, when their contextual environment over time was becoming conducive to Islamic, it triggered the recollection of the long-forgotten mystical event. Significantly, the contextual surrounding of the informants together with their constant personal encounter experience had enabled them to make a new interpretation of the mystical event and accordingly contributed to the occurrence of the crisis stage in their conversion experience.

Another important point of the crisis stage is that, as has been shown above, due to the religious situation in Brunei which 'implants' Islam in almost every aspect of the people's life, it is rather inevitable for the informants to perceive Islam as the solution to their religious crises. What this accordingly means is that, this situation decisively leads to the absence of the quest stage, which essentially embodies the information-

searching aspect of a conversion process that will assist a potential convert to identify the solution to a religious crisis. The discussion on the quest stage follows next where it explains further the factors that are responsible for absence of the stage in the conversion process of the Dusuns to Islam.

### **5.6 Quest Stage**

Rambo defines the quest stage as a direct consequence of the crisis stage where individuals would attempt to find meaning from the information and the experience they have acquired from the crisis stage by going on a search for a new religious option. In other words, the individuals would,

“seek to maximise meaning and purpose in life, to erase ignorance, and to resolve inconsistency. Under abnormal or crisis condition this search becomes compelling; people actively look for resources that offer growth and development to “fill the void,” solve the problem, or enrich life (Rambo 1993: 56).

Evidence for Rambo’s type of religious quest, however, cannot be found in the analysis of the interview data of the Dusun Muslim informants. None of the informants were questing for and finding a new religious option, as the ‘moulding’ of Islam into their contextual environment and their personal encounter experience had permitted them to establish a reliable sense of recognition of Islam as a religious alternative. Thus, the Dusun Muslim converts did not seek a new religious option after their crises, as Islam already presented itself to them as a viable religious option.

This argument provides more evidence to demonstrate how Brunei’s majority-religion context significantly affects the characters and, this time, the existence of the stages in

the conversion process of the Dusuns to Islam. The following discussion will firstly examine in detail the general effects of the majority-religion context upon the quest stage before it turns to examine the particular effects of personal encounter experience which caused the Dusun Muslim converts to sidestep the quest stage in their conversion process.

### **5.6.1 Context of Quest**

It has been mentioned repeatedly that, there is no doubt about the way the contextual surrounding of an individual living in Brunei to be instinctively imbued with Islamic influence and ideas to the extent that it would be surprising to come across with a non-Muslim local who never heard anything related to the religion. For instance, the inclusion of religious subjects in the school curriculum offers the non-Muslims an avenue for the ‘innocent’ acquisition of religious knowledge:

**[E35.Muslim Dusun.I46]**

I did not see Islam as a religion during my school days. I thought Islam was like any other school subjects, because when I had exams on Islamic subjects, I would memorise Al-Quran verse together with the translation, in the same way I would memorise the formula for areas of a triangle, for example... [Trans.]

**[E36.Muslim Dusun.I37]**

Islamic subject at school is quite an intensive learning of the religion, actually. I remember studying about the Muslim prayer during my secondary school. There are so many things involved in the prayer, like the body movements and the verses you need to recite for each movement... [Trans.]

The above excerpts demonstrate the exact ways the school system in Brunei feed the population with religious information. This situation however might raise questions on why Dusun children never objected to the subjects that teach them the religion they



were not born into or raised in. The reason for this is because, the Islamic subjects in Brunei's school curriculum is an "objective" religious education that emphasises more on the educational values rather than the theological aspect of the religion. To consider an Islamic subject in such an educational way is actually a parallel approach that is also employed by European countries where the teaching of religious subjects in public school is solely based on "text, events and personalities which may be given to study and learn" (Willaime 2007: 97).

Such educational approach in the teaching of Islamic subjects thus explains why the Dusuns rarely see the former as the theological representation of the religion. Rather, as illustrated by one of the above interview excerpts, the Islamic subjects are perceived as comparable to other secular subjects, which are similarly taught through the facts-and-figures approach. In fact, the Islamic subjects are regarded by many informants as among the subjects they can rely on in order to pass important school examinations for higher education or for promotion to higher occupational positions, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

**[E37.Muslim Dusun.I4]**

To gain a promotion, I needed at least 5 GCSE 'O' Levels. So, I sat for two exams where one of them was Islamic religious knowledge and the other one was Arts. I took these two subjects because it was relatively easy to pass their exams... [Trans.]

Thus, it is clear that the knowledge on Islam which the Dusuns acquired from the education system does not reflect their sense of belief in Islam and its teachings. Instead, such knowledge only serves for educational purposes, if not to add more information to their existing accumulated background knowledge for them to

understand the mainstream society and its religion. In addition, and as explained earlier, the familiarity with Islam also reduces the extent of the non-Muslims' responsiveness towards Islam and thus, it is very unlikely for the 'innocent' acquisition of religious knowledge to generate interest or curiosity without the individuals experiencing a personal encounter and the subsequent religious crisis.

Evidently, in an event where the Dusuns experienced a religious crisis, it was inevitable for them to see Islam, rather automatically, as the solution to their crisis and that the existing knowledge on Islam suddenly became a vital support to their intention to convert to Islam. Such reliance on existing religious knowledge was reported by all informants of this study, and consequently causing the quest stage to become redundant. The absence of the religious quest in the conversion process of the Muslim Dusuns is best illustrated by the following interview excerpt:

**[E38.Muslim Dusun.I14]**

[Q: did you seek any guidance before you converted?]

No, I did not. I remembered a few months before I converted, I saw a religious book that belonged to my Muslim brother lying on a table in our living room. I picked it up to read it. The book was about the Muslim prayer and reading it made me realised that I had not actually forgotten much of what I learned from school... [Trans.]

An interview with a primary school teacher also illustrates one of the reasons why she did not search before her conversion:

**[E39.Muslim Dusun.I36]**

I had been exposed to Islam in many ways. For instance, because the schoolchildren would recite the *Fatihah* verse every morning before their class started, and after listening to the recitation for many years, I could actually recite the entire verse even before my conversion... [Trans.]

Thus, given the above arguments, it is fair to suggest that the culture-free definition of the quest stage could arguably be the acquisition of religious knowledge. The above arguments also demonstrate that the key component of context that supports the quest stage is knowledge, in a way that if the context readily precipitates knowledge, i.e. religious information, the acquisition of the knowledge would therefore become unnecessary and accordingly leads to the absence of the quest stage, as in the case of the conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts cited above. Thus, no matter how innocent the acquisition of religious knowledge is before the potential convert looks for a new religious option, the knowledge would carry similar weight and value as the knowledge acquired from a proper religious quest once the potential converts embarks on a conversion process.

Apart from public dissemination of religious knowledge, personal encounter experience can also lead to the absence of the quest stage. This is because personal encounter, as explained in depth in Section 5.4.2, provides the Dusuns the opportunity to learn about Islam through observation before their conversion, and thus adding more information to the existing body of religious knowledge that the converts already possessed. The following section explains this argument further.

### **5.6.2 Personal Encounter Cancels the Quest**

Besides the casual familiarity one has with the religion, this study also finds that the inclination to see Islam as a viable religious alternative is detected in the conversion experience of the informants who were constantly engaged in personal encounters within their immediate network, as exemplified in the following interview excerpts:

**[E40.Muslim Dusun.I5]**

I was not really pulled towards Islam until my son converted ten years ago. As he still lived with us at that time, I watched how he slowly changed his way of life according to Islam. At the same time, respecting his new religion, my wife and I also arranged our daily life around my son's religious requirements, especially in terms of cooking, serving the right foods and so on. It was after some time I realised that it was not that difficult to live a life as a Muslim... [Trans.]

A 58-year old former civil servant also gained meaningful information on Islam through his personal encounter:

**[E41.Muslim Dusun.I29]**

I had been watching my brother fasting and performing prayer long before I converted to Islam. He did not face any problems in carrying out fasting during Ramadhan or waking up before dawn to perform the prayer. So I knew that I would be okay if I converted... [Trans.]

The following interview excerpt is another representation of the familiarity with Islam gained from personal encounter experience:

**[E42.Muslim Dusun.I6]**

[Q: once you had the intention, where did you go to learn about Islam?]

I did not seek for more information on Islam because at that time, living together with my Muslim son was enough to convince me that I had made the right decision to convert. Only after I converted that I sought proper guidance from the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre... [Trans.]

The above excerpts thus validate the key argument for question 5A that the majority-religion context influences the characters of the stages in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts. The prevailing encounters and borderless social interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims generated an abundant amount of knowledge that consequently prevented the quest stage from occurring. As has been shown above, the

personal encounter effectively promotes a sense of steady recognition towards Islam, and after experiencing the crisis stage, which is also triggered by the personal encounter, the informants' religious preference was even further swayed towards the religion, causing them to fall short of experiencing the quest stage.

The following discussion will move to the examination of the interaction stage, which this study argues as the next stage to occur after the crisis stage in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts. Similar to the earlier examination of other conversion stages, the following examination will demonstrate that the essentially different and distinctive characters and definition of the interaction stage is mainly due to the majority-religion context within which the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts took place.

### **5.7 Interaction Stage**

According to Rambo, a fundamental feature of the interaction stage is the encapsulation strategy where there are four operating components that he considers significant within the sphere of the strategy (Rambo 1993:103-104). These four components are roles, relationship, ritual and rhetoric. Through these four components of encapsulation, a potential convert will experience an intensified interaction with the religious group of the chosen faith:

[p]otential converts now learn more about the teachings, life-style, and expectations of the group, and are provided with opportunities, both formal and informal, to become more fully incorporated into it (Rambo 1993:102)

In other words, the encapsulation strategy will allow potential converts to learn more about the various aspects of their prospective religion while building new relationships with the members of the new religious community and they will be persuaded to adopt rituals and religious rhetoric of the community. Thus, through the encapsulation strategy, the interaction stage will essentially lead the potential converts through a process that is intended to break them from their existing religion.

However, as has been discussed in Section 3.5.4 in Chapter 3, Rambo's definition of the stage is clearly culture-specific. The encapsulation strategy that Rambo considers as the important feature of the interaction stage is not necessarily experienced by all potential converts as the strategy is not practised by all religions. Islam, for instance, does not rely on physical encapsulation, or any strategy akin to it, to intensify its interaction with potential converts and to separate them from the wider world. Thus, it is not plausible to evaluate the interaction stage from the employment of the encapsulation strategy in a conversion process. As stated in Chapter 3, the main feature that should be central to the interaction stage is the changes in religious behaviour that facilitates the preparation of the potential converts to change religion.

The following discussion will confirm that the interaction stage in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts also features some observable changes in their religious behaviour where, as will be explained in the following section 5.7.1, the informants of this study revealed their experimentation with Muslim rituals prior to their ultimate decision to convert to Islam. The section will also argue that, by adopting the religious behaviour of the Muslims, the Dusuns were preparing themselves to break from the ethnic religion. Accordingly, such preparation should

form the basic culture-free definition of the interaction stage where the preparation to break from the old religion can occur in many different ways, dependent upon the type of religious context the potential convert is in.

### **5.7.1 Preparing for Conversion: Changes in Religious Behaviour**

Religious rituals have a central role in any religion as the carrying out of the rituals will signify an allegiance to the religion. Hence, Rambo necessitates the inclusion of the ritual component in the interaction stage as it “fosters the necessary orientation, the readiness of mind and soul to have a conversion experience” (Rambo 1993: 114). The interview data of this study is generally in agreement with Rambo’s argument where the execution of the Muslim rituals is evidently present in the conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts. Many informants agreed that the ritual experimentation helped them to prepare their psyche for the conversion. In fact, the preparation to break from the old religion became even more necessary for the older converts, who had been having doubt over their ability to carry out the religious duties. What seems to fear them most is their lack of competence in performing religious obligations which could implicate failure to become a true Muslim. Thus, the ritual experimentation during the interaction stage was used by many older converts to deliver the proof of their actual competency to become a follower of Islam.

For instance, doubting her ability to fulfil one of the Five Pillars of Islam, a 55-year-old schoolteacher who converted to Islam in 2008 with her family, started to observe the fasting during Ramadhan before her conversion:

**[E43.Muslim Dusun.I26]**

For the first few days, I fasted without the *Niat*, simply to see how far I could go. It was definitely difficult but it felt like I achieved something when I managed to complete a day of fasting. So I carried on fasting until the Ramadhan ended... [Trans.]

A 44-year-old housewife also reported a similar experience before her conversion with her family in 2009:

**[E44.Muslim Dusun.I34]**

We were a month away from our conversion and it was Ramadhan. So we decided to fast and wanted to see how far we could stand. So my sister taught us how to recite the *Niat* and advised us on the restrictions we should observe before the fasting could be broken... [Trans.]

Similar doubt of ability is also reported in the interview data of a 78-year-old male convert:

**[E45.Muslim Dusun.I9]**

To utter the *Syhadah*, I think, was the easiest part of the conversion process. But what comes after worried me most. The Muslim prayer looked pretty complicated to me and to convert at this old age would definitely double the difficulty. Luckily my daughters were willing to teach me how the prayer is done... [Trans.]

What is more, the sceptical attitude of those within the personal network of the converts who questioned the latter's ability and knowledge to become a Muslim is also another reason why many converts carried out the ritual-testing before their conversion. For this particular case, the ritual experimentation acts as a means to remove the scepticism of those who doubted their ability, particularly those within the converts' family network. Moreover, to convert to Islam without the approval of family is one thing, but as Islam strongly discourages religious shifting among its followers, to convert to the religion and only to find out the religion is rather



incompatible with his or her values and interest is without doubt a daunting prospect. Accordingly, such concern triggers the need to ensure that they were making the right choice in life and in search of solid verifications that can give the converts further confidence to proceed with their conversion.

For instance, a 39-year-old female convert admits that one of the reasons why she carried out the Muslim prayer before the conversion is to convince her brother who doubted her ability to be an observant Muslim:

**[E46.Muslim Dusun.I35]**

I already had this urge to convert to Islam at that time but my brother kept reminding me of our Muslim relatives who were less than observant. He wasn't sure if I could carry out the Muslim duties. I felt there was no other way to convince him, and myself as well, other than to do the prayer... [Trans.]

Similar reason for carrying out fasting is experienced by a 47-year-old female convert:

**[E47.Muslim Dusun.I12]**

My family was generally against my intention to convert; my cousins and my uncles were all against it, and my dad completely ignored my explanation outright. Because the objections were everywhere, I felt I needed to make sure that converting to Islam was the right thing to do and so, I experimented with the prayer and fasting. I wanted to make sure they felt right, and they did... [Trans.]

Likewise, realising the need to convince the family in order to gain support for her conversion, a 56-year-old housewife also experimented with the Muslim prayer before her conversion:

**[E48.Muslim Dusun.I46]**

I could not think of any other way to convince my father. I remember thinking at that time, if he could see me doing the prayer, and if he could see how I never falter in carrying out the Muslim duty every day, five times a day, that probably could change his mind... [Trans.]

It is evident from the above discussion that, the ritual experimentation indicates the changes in religious behaviour which is the core part of the informants' preparation to break from the Dusun religion. What can be learned from the above examples as well is that, the ritual experimentation has utilised the knowledge the informants have 'innocently' acquired before. This indicates a natural progression in religious knowledge where the converts now developed new perspectives about themselves as such practical knowledge provides convincing evidence of their ability to be a proper Muslim. Thus, it is rather an educated decision made by the Dusun Muslim converts to break from their ethnic religion and to convert to Islam accordingly.

It is equally worthwhile to note the involvement of the Muslims close to the informants who offered the latter guidance and direction, and consequently supported the informants' ritual experimentation, as can be seen from the selection of the interview excerpts above. Such guidance and control is perceived by this study as the component of context that is vital not only for the existence of the interaction stage but it also significantly defines characteristics of the stage, specific to the type of context within which the stage occurs. The following discussion will demonstrate how the direction and control component of context in Brunei's majority-religion context define the unique characters of the interaction stage in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts.

### 5.7.2 Context of Interaction

As briefly argued above, there is a tendency among the Dusun Muslim converts to rely on their close kin and friends for guidance and direction during the ritual experimentation. Rambo himself acknowledges the experience and the knowledge of the followers of the prospective religion as an indication of qualification of the close kin and friends in providing guidance to the potential converts (Rambo 1993: 122). In addition, reliance on personal relationship as the main source of guidance and direction is primarily because such relationship provides better motivation and creates a more comforting learning environment. The following interview excerpts illustrate how a 62-year-old housewife had been offered guidance by family members before her conversion:

**[E49.Muslim Dusun.I7]**

Living with my Muslim uncle and his family really helped me to know Islam better. When I voiced my intention to convert to Islam to him, he encouraged me to join them attending Al-Quran classes... [Trans.]

Similarly, a 53-year-old education officer studied Islam under the guidance of his then prospective wife:

**[E50.Muslim Dusun.I27]**

I consider my wife as one of the individuals who taught me a lot about Islam. We were not yet married at that time but she helped me to understand better all the information about Islam I gained from school. She taught me the real meaning of being a Muslim so that I would not merely emulate the outlook and the behaviour of other Muslims... [Trans.]

The conversion experience of a 62-year-old retired policeman also demonstrates the guidance he had received from his friend network:

**[E51.Muslim Dusun.I2]**

My Muslim friends had been very supportive. Once they knew about my intention to convert, they spared their time to teach me how to recite some *doa*. They also taught me how to utter the *Syahadah*, so that I would not falter during my conversion ceremony... [Trans.]

A 39-year-old mosque official also recalled the guidance she received from her Muslim nieces before her conversion in 1997:

**[E52.Muslim Dusun.I35]**

It was my nieces who taught me how to perform the prayer. They taught me the body movements in the prayer and helped me with the recitations of the Al-Quran verses used in the prayer... [Trans.]

The above discussion illustrates that the guidance and direction given by the close kin and friends of the informants supported and defined the characters of their intensified interaction with Islam. It can be argued that all informants of this study relied on their kin relationship and friend network for direction and advice. This situation is rather inevitable to occur because, given the nature of Brunei's majority-religion context, it is not uncommon for non-Muslims to have a constant contact with the Muslim community, be it with their Muslim friends or with their own family members who have converted to Islam. Thus, the direction component of context is already readily available within their own personal network for the converts to utilise in accordance to their personal dispositions and needs.

Moreover, the interview data also reveals that the converts found it much more reassuring to seek an equally valuable direction and guidance from their own personal network, rather than seeking direction from the *daie*, who might not understand their personal situation, fears and apprehension of their prospective conversion. This further

explains why the informants had never sought proper guidance from the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre or the *daie* before their conversion. This situation is clearly in contrast to Rambo's interaction stage that emphasises on the role of religious missionaries in supporting potential converts' intensified interaction with the community of their prospective religion (Rambo 1993: 106). Thus, this analysis further supports the key argument of question 5A where the characters of the conversion stages of the Dusun Muslim converts are unique and specific, in accordance to the nature of the majority-religion context within which the converts' experience unfolded.

The impact of the majority-religion context on the interaction stage is perhaps more pervasive than what has just been mentioned above. As explained in Chapter 2, since the declaration of Islam as the state religion in 1959, coupled with the country's attempt to assimilate the population into the mainstream culture, aspects of life in the country have been seen as heavily influenced by the state religion. Islamic value-driven state policies dictate particularly the religious and social developments of the country where, for instance, the Government, through the censorship section of the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre, has been routinely censoring published materials which are deemed undesirable. Alcohol cannot be bought freely in local supermarkets since 1<sup>st</sup> December 1990 (Pelita Brunei 1990:1), and relevant authorities could confiscate alcoholic beverages brought by non-Muslims into the country which exceeds the quota limit of two quartz and twelve tins of beers (Timbang 1991: 6).

Restrictions are also put on non-*halal* products. However, non-Muslims can still have access to non-*halal* products in certain supermarkets in the country where the isles of these non-*halal* products are clearly marked and sufficiently distant from the isles

frequented by Muslim shoppers. Even the *halal* products have also been under the watchful eyes of religious authorities. Since 1997, restaurants and supermarkets have been closely monitored in order to ensure that the meat products they serve and sell are prepared according to the Islamic requirements, and that the products are properly certified. Thus, in consideration of these changing social and religious developments experiencing by the country since 1959, it can be argued that the direction and control components have always been present in Brunei's majority-religion context.

Another significant changing development experienced by the country is the breakdown of the social and cultural boundaries separating the Muslims and the non-Muslims. Evidently, a Muslim way of life, such as the adoption of Muslim dress sense and the restrictions of non-*halal* food items, have become the general norms of life not only of the mainstream Muslim society and are increasingly adopted by the non-Muslim population of the country, as reported in the following interview excerpts:

**[E53.Muslim Dusun.I35]**

I started wearing the headscarf more frequently after I experimented with the prayer. It felt like an obligation for me to do so because I had already carried out the Muslim ritual.

[Q: what was the reaction of your family or your friends?]

They had seen me wearing headscarf during my school days. So, I don't think I upset anyone when they saw me wearing the headscarf again... [Trans.]

Similar experience of adopting Muslim dress sense was also reported by a 44-year-old female convert who works as a teacher:

**[E54.Muslim Dusun.I37]**

The first time I wore headscarf was when I attended the teachers' training centre. It was not compulsory for the non-Muslims but I liked

wearing *Baju Kurung* with a headscarf on as I looked smart in them. After I completed my training and I was posted to the primary school in my village, I continued wearing similar attire when I went to work. But when my father voiced his intention to convert to Islam and the whole family agreed to it, I started to wear headscarf more often, not only when I went to work but every time I went out... [Trans.]

The effect of the majority-religion context is also evident in the conversion experience of a 51-year-old male convert who found *halal* food products much more palatable even before his conversion in 2003:

**[E55.Muslim Dusun.I15]**

I now find it rather odd that, even before my conversion, I would be looking for the *halal* certification logo on food before buying them. I remember my brother used to call me a picky eater because of this... [Trans.]

Similar experience was expressed by a 57-year-old former army personnel:

**[E56.Muslim Dusun.I17]**

Because of their social upbringing is in Malay- and Islamic-dominated surrounding, my children are aware of our food choices. So, you would not find any pork product or alcoholic beverages at home. Even my wife and I, over time, had gradually lost the appetite for those kinds of food... [Trans.]

Thus, as revealed by the informants cited above and by many other informants in this study, their way of life had already been arranged according to Muslim way of life even before they had the intention to convert to Islam. Such changes in lifestyle had evidently better facilitated the converts' preparation to break from their Dusun religion. This means to say that, the readily available direction and control components in Brunei's majority-religion context unmistakably provided early opportunities for the informants to gain a direct experience with Islam on their own accord and at their own

pace, even if they had no desire to know the religion better. As the informants embarked on a conversion process and reached the interaction stage, such experience clearly had become much more meaningful as it was now an integral part of their preparation to break from what was left of their Dusun lifestyle.

Thus, what can be generally deduced from the above discussion is that the precipitation of control and direction components influence the ways potential converts experience the interaction stage whose fundamental characters is the changes in religious behaviour as a significant part of their preparation to break from the existing religion. In the case of the Dusun Muslim converts, the direction and control components were sourced from personal network (close kin and friends) which was facilitated by the absence of social boundaries between the Muslims and non-Muslims in Brunei. Moreover, the inclusion of the majority religion as an integral part of the institutional framework promotes the advancement of religious observance and control in the lives of the population at large and hence, guarantees the availability of the direction component of context for the potential converts to utilise.

In addition, the above discussion also suggests that the interaction stage is a quasi-commitment stage as the ritual experimentation and the adoption of the Muslim lifestyle by the Dusun Muslim converts are without doubt an indication of their preparation for the *Syhadah*, which is an important ritual aspect of the commitment stage in a conversion process to Islam. The commitment stage is examined next.



### 5.8 Commitment Stage

The commitment stage is the turning point in a conversion process where a successful journey towards a conversion will be culminated in an official declaration of commitment to the chosen religion. Thus, this stage should be fundamentally defined as the official break from former religion.

According to Rambo, such break from former religion is manifested through the ritual enactment of the commitment stage:

[f]rom an institution's point of view, commitment ritual is designed to create and sustain loyalty to the group. From the individual's point of view, commitment ritual provides public testimony of the culmination or consummation of a process that may have been going on for a period of time. (Rambo 1993:128)

Thus, in order to solemnise one's conversion to a new religion, there should be an official testimony of the religious conversion and a public ritual would fulfil such need for an official recognition. Rambo's definition is perhaps already in its culture-free form, particularly in view of the fact that most religions have their own commitment ritual. For instance, a conversion of a Muslim convert is signified by the declaration of faith through the ritual *Syhadah*, which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam that declares the oneness of Allah, and it is read in the presence of religious officials. Whereas baptism is the public ritual act new Christian converts will carry out to formalise their conversion to Christianity. Similarly, new converts to Hare Khrisna will have to shave their head at their conversion ceremony and that the potential converts to Judaism will immerse in water before they could officiate their conversion to the religion (Rambo 1993: 129). For new Buddhist converts, Bodhisattva vows

should be made during the lay ordination ceremony in order for them to have a formal affiliation to Buddhism (Harvey 2003: 81). Thus, this demonstrates the necessity of a public commitment ritual in signifying one's commitment to a new religion and accordingly officiating his or her break from the old one.

Describing further the characteristics of the commitment stage, Rambo argues that "outsiders are sometimes offended or bewildered by the "absurdity" or irrationality of the rituals; such reactions help to define a sense of boundaries between the convert and the outside world" (Rambo 1993: 129).

In regard to this particular aspect of the commitment stage, I would argue the reaction of outsiders is dependent upon the type of religious context within which the commitment ritual is performed, because the effects of such ritual on the non-followers of the religion does not necessarily lead to the establishment of the sense of boundaries and distinctiveness that separate the new converts and the outsiders or the non-followers. For instance, the sense of mutual understanding towards the commitment ritual is evident in the interviews of the non-Muslim Dusuns who generally do not feel there is, or there should be, a personal barrier between them and the new converts emerging from the commitment ritual. Section 5.8.1 will explain this argument further.

Whereas section 5.8.2 will further examine the positive reactions of the Dusuns towards the commitment ritual by arguing that the availability of the support component of context (the vital component of context for the commitment stage) is equally responsible in eliciting such positive reactions from the Dusuns. The section will examine how the existing familiarity with Islam allows the converts to garner

support from their close personal network and accordingly makes it possible for the commitment ritual to take place.

### 5.8.1 Commitment Ritual

The ritual element of the commitment stage evidently occurs in the conversion process of the Muslim converts involved in this study. It is common that the *Syhadah* ritual to be carried out in a ceremony where the new convert's family, relatives and friends are invited to witness the solemnisation of the religious conversion.

However, in contrast to Rambo's argument that offence and sense of irrationality could be felt by outsiders during the ritual ceremony, such reaction is a very rare occurrence within the Dusun community. Analysing the interview data of the non-Muslim Dusuns who participated in this study, it is clear that the Dusuns generally can negotiate the distinctive feature of the commitment ritual in a conversion to Islam vis-à-vis their own religious belief. For instance, a Dusun father had allowed his children to have their conversion ceremony at the family residence because he believed the ceremony is not, in any way, in conflict with the Dusun traditions nor offensive:

**[E57.Dusun.I52]**

The principle is simple: if Muslims could practice non-Islamic traditions that are not conflicting with their religion, it is thus not wrong for the Dusuns to accept Islamic ceremonies that are not at odds with the *adat*. So why should I forbid my own children from having their conversion here [his home]? ... [Trans.]

A similar view had also been expressed by a 39-year-old Dusun:

**[E58.Dusun.I47]**

I guess the fact that we nowadays are familiar with Islam, the *Syahadah* no longer sounds foreign to us. It probably did cause offence to our elders in the past but I do not think it is still the case nowadays. Moreover, we also need to understand that, by converting, they [the converts] have left behind the Dusun religion and they no longer should adhere to the *adat*... [Trans.]

Likewise, and also in contrast to Rambo's argument, a 48-year-old Dusun teacher firmly viewed the conversion ceremony as a form of communal event for the Dusuns:

**[E59.Dusun.I60]**

Conversion ceremony to Islam is a common thing nowadays. We see it on TV and it is in the newspapers all the time. Just a couple of weeks ago, I was invited to a conversion ceremony of my wife's niece. We went and attended the ceremony, and it seems like a normal event to me. In fact, the way I see it, the ceremony is no longer just about celebrating the new convert, but it has gradually become a social gathering event for family and relatives... [Trans.]

The above excerpts demonstrate that the existing knowledge about Islam which the non-Muslims possess has amounted to their acceptance of the commitment ritual. Accordingly, with such acceptance in place, it essentially prevents the Dusuns from getting the impression that the conversion ceremony establishes a sense of boundary between the Dusuns and the new converts, as Rambo suggests. Moreover, as the Muslim lifestyle has also been adopted by a significant percentage of the non-Muslim population in the country, any changes in lifestyle that the new converts would make after the conversion would not be too different from the lifestyle of many Dusuns. This situation further removes the boundary markers that could distinguish the converts from the general Dusuns. Thus, it would be appropriate to argue that the effects of the

majority-religion context define these unique characteristics of the commitment stage of the Dusun Muslim converts, and they are essentially different from the way Rambo characterises the stage.

Moreover, such familiarity elicits support from the personal network of the new converts that enables the latter to publicly officiate their commitment to Islam. In view of this situation, this study will suggest that the key component of context which defines the specific characteristics of the commitment stage of the Muslim Dusuns is the support component. The following section will discuss this argument in detail.

### **5.8.2 Context of Commitment**

Rambo suggests that another feature of the commitment stage is the decision-making process where potential converts have to make a turning-point decision to break from the existing religion and affiliate with a new one (Rambo 1993: 125). The potential converts would critically evaluate the alternatives they have and the potential rewards of the prospective conversion. Rambo further suggests that,

[e]valuation of these possible rewards derives from the person's own life experience and values as well as those of friends and relatives. In addition, the potential convert weighs the social rewards (consisting of approval, respect, love, relief of fear and tension), and the cognitive benefits (ultimate meaning and solutions to practical problems). Decision making is thus not entirely an internal process but an experience of social interaction with friends and family (Rambo 1993: 126-127).

In other words, a potential convert has to decide between alternatives and as a decision-maker, the individual not only has to take into account personal attitudes,

feelings and values, but he or she also needs to consider the surrounding social forces such as family and friends before an informed decision to convert can be made.

However, this study finds that the decision-making process of the commitment stage of the Muslim Dusuns is not about the evaluation of the benefits and rewards of the conversion as Rambo predicts. This is because, such evaluation of benefits and rewards has been made by the converts while they were in the encounter and the interaction stage.

What replaces such evaluation is the importance of garnering support particularly from the personal network of the converts. Rambo does identify the vital importance of immediate personal network in shaping a conversion process (Rambo 1993:22). However, this study looks at this fact from another point of view, and accordingly suggests that the support resources, particularly those derived from the immediate world of the converts, are vital for the existence of the commitment stage in one's conversion process and thus facilitates the occurrence of the public solemnisation ceremony of the conversion.

One of the possible explanations as to why the support resources garnered from personal network is the sought-after support component for the Dusun Muslim converts is essentially because a break from the ethnic religion could be easily perceived as a break from the family network. Thus, the fact that the Dusun community, like any other Asian community, regards family as the most imperative and central in their lives, expecting and receiving negative reactions from their family would be an influence in making a choice to convert to Islam. The following excerpts

illustrate the critical events in which the informants came face-to-face with their family, asking for approval and support to proceed with their conversion:

**[E60.Muslim Dusun.I18]**

I was completely worried because I wasn't sure how my father would react. So, when I finally told him and explained why I wanted to convert, he did not show any obvious reaction but he was listening attentively to my explanation. Then I remember he said that he would not object my decision to convert but he didn't think he would be able to attend the conversion ceremony due to his poor health at that time. I couldn't say anything except to cry... [Trans.]

**[E61.Muslim Dusun.I34]**

After gaining enough courage, we decided to go to my parents' house and tell them about our intention to convert. I did find it hard to let my words out but my father was quick to figure out where the conversation went. He said, "you go on (with your conversion), I haven't got the intention (to convert)". Hearing that, I felt so relieved that I cried... [Trans.]

There is no doubt that the informants found it very comforting to receive support or simply approval from their personal network. The support and the approval means that the informants could now proceed with their conversion process based on the sense mutually agreed terms within the network. Moreover, such support also generated an emotional freedom that enabled the informants to advance to a decisive engagement with Islam and accordingly fosters a definite religious commitment.

Another significant source of support component that can be utilised by the converts is the religious community, where in the case of the Dusun Muslim converts, the support from the Muslim community could also be derived from their personal network in the form of their Muslim siblings, relatives and friends. I have explained in the examination of the interaction stage, of how Muslims within the personal network of

the Dusun Muslim converts is one of the sources of the direction and control components which facilitate the converts' experience of the interaction stage.

Likewise, the Muslims within the converts' personal network are also the source of the support component of context that reinforces the converts' intention to commit to Islam. It is also worthwhile to note here that this particular kind of support is normally sought by the converts who expected disapproval of their potential conversion to Islam within their personal network. Thus, as they talked through their fear and concern with Muslim family members and friends, the fear subsequently diminished, allowing the converts to make the ultimate decision:

**[E62.Muslim Dusun.I2]**

[Q: was there anyone else you turned to before your conversion?]

My Muslim brother. Because he no longer lived with us after his marriage, we did not see each other as much as we would have liked but when we did, he taught me few things about the Muslim prayer and fasting. But the one thing he repeatedly reminded me was not to get too caught up with the negativities and tension that could potentially come after the conversion... [Trans.]

Close friends within the immediate circle of the converts could also be the source of the support component, as evidenced from the experience of a 23-year-old female convert who pointed out how the solid support given by her Muslim friends had considerably eliminated her fear of making the commitment to convert:

**[E63.Muslim Dusun.I14]**

I was still unsure whether I really wanted to convert but it was a circle of good friends who convinced me that the fear I had of converting was groundless, and they were totally right about that.

[Q: why were you not sure about converting?]

Because of my family. My parents were not that fond of Islam and I was afraid that they might disown me if I converted... [Trans.]



The above interview transcripts illustrate the fact that a personal connection not only provides the converts with knowledge channels but it also creates a personal safety-net that offers them support and peace of mind. Such roles as the source of support resources and safety-net performed by the family and friend network have been highlighted by many informants where they believed that these roles have created a scenario which they called as “the bridge effect”.

In other words, religious conversion to Islam in Brunei has the tendency to occur within the same family circle. This can be seen from the patterns of conversion in Kampong Kiudang/Mungkom, the researcher’s home village, particularly in regards to the conversion patterns to Islam in the 1960s and 1970s. During these early decades, the Dusun community still upheld ethnic traditions and the daily lives of the Dusuns were still evolved around the practice of the Dusun religion. Thus, the Dusuns generally viewed a conversion to Islam as disgraceful and Muslim converts would be severely criticised for being disloyal to their religion and ethnic roots. This led to a situation where conversion to Islam tended to evolve into a family affair instead. Only those Dusuns who could garner support particularly from their personal network would be courageous enough to proceed with their intention to convert to Islam.

Thus, the above discussion clearly indicates the vital role of the support component in espousing the potential converts’ decision to change their religious conviction by ironing out the insecurities and the fear of the consequences that could potentially come along with their conversion. To further this argument, it can also be argued that the commitment stage is actually a ‘big jump’ in choice, and as a choice, the potential converts want to ‘get right’ and ‘do right’. To consider the reactions of parents and

friends, the fear of not being able to practice Islam and to make sure that the Dusun and Muslim lifestyles can fit together is essentially an assessment of the positive and negative sides of the choice. Thus, the support component of context becomes pivotal in backing up this choice, where the support resources effectively dealt with the informants' fear and insecurities which accordingly made it possible for their conversion to take place.

The above discussion also confirms the argument for question 5A that the characters of the stages are essentially defined by the context within which the conversion of the subjects of this study takes place. Brunei's majority-religion context has unmistakable impacts on the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts where the differences between the definition and characters of the commitment stage suggested by Rambo and that of the Dusun Muslim converts are significant and evident, as pointed out in the above discussion.

As the commitment stage indicates the break from the old religion, the next stage should be a stage that demonstrates the attainment of the identity of the convert's new religion, i.e. the consequences stage. The unique characteristics and definition of the consequences stage of the Dusun Muslim converts are discussed next.

### **5.9 Consequences Stage**

In the Rambo Model, the consequences stage is the final stage of the conversion process. According to Rambo, the consequences of the conversion could occur in the context of the individual convert or in that of the religious group which the convert is

newly affiliated to (Rambo 1993: 144-145). In outlining the characteristics of the consequences stage, Rambo suggests that,

[f]or some people the consequence is a radically transformed life. Their patterns of beliefs and actions are significantly different from what they were before. Others gain a sense of mission and purpose, and yet others acquire a very quiet sense of security and peace. (Rambo 1993:170)

Employing the above definition of the consequences stage as a starting point, this study has identified two main characteristics of the consequences stage which are generally experienced by the Muslim Dusuns after their conversion. These two main characteristics are the adoption of a Muslim lifestyle and the integration into the Muslim community through religious and communal activities.

Examination of the above characteristics consequently leads to the finding that the fundamental definition of the consequences stage of a successful conversion process should be an attainment of a new religious identity, whereas the key component of context that defines the specific characters of the consequences stage is the acceptance component.

### **5.9.1 Adoption of Muslim lifestyle**

Gillespie argues that a “[c]onversion is a major source of stability and strength and possesses roles and social mores which provide one’s identity itself” (Gillespie 1991:140). Such effect of religious conversion on one’s identity is particularly true in the context of a conversion to Islam, as a Muslim lifestyle is a highly regulated way of life with clear-cut religious duties which are dictated by the Five Pillars of Islam and

the Six Pillars of Faith. Thus, a conversion to Islam not only means an end to the practice of previous tradition and taking up a Muslim name, but it also means an essential adoption of a new way of life. Muslim converts must be prepared to observe religious duties as well as to fulfil other religious obligations such as adopting Islamic dietary laws or the *halal* diet, including abstinence from pork products and from alcoholic liquors.

Evidently, this study finds that one of the characters of the consequences stage of the Dusun Muslim converts is the immediate changes in their outlook and lifestyle where, for instance, they immediately subscribed to Muslim dress sense after conversion, particularly through the wearing of headscarf for women and the Muslim headgear for men. In addition, they had also readily abandoned ethnic customs and traditions, such as gambling, cockfighting and *Temarok* ritual practices, as these practices are in conflict with Islamic teaching.

It would be appropriate to point out here that, the adoption of Muslim dress code, the abstinence of prohibited food products and restriction on non-Islamic leisure activities is relatively easier for those who converted in the 1990s and beyond, in comparison to those converted earlier than that particular period of time. This is where the data generated by the date of conversion sampling is utilised. On the one hand, the early converts in the 1970s and 1980s had to take extra measures to reinforce their new Muslim way of life:

**[E64.Muslim Dusun.I43]**

At that time [1970s], alcohol and non-*halal* food could still be bought at convenient stores. Because of this, my father kept reminding my

mother to check with the storekeeper to ensure the food she bought was *halal*... [Trans.]

**[E65.Muslim Dusun.I22]**

Because I was a heavy drinker before I converted, there were still occasions where I was offered a glass or two of alcohol. I would politely refuse the drink. The same goes with gambling. I was invited quite a number of times to go back to the cock-fighting ring which I also politely but sternly declined... [Trans].

**[E66.Muslim Dusun.I12]**

I started to wear headscarf and modest dress as soon as I converted to Islam. I did realise at that time [the 1980s] that it was rather rare to see women in my village wearing headscarf but this did not stop me from wearing them... [Trans.]

On the other hand, such attainment of Muslim lifestyle became easier as Brunei experienced the breakdown of more and more religious, cultural and social boundaries due to the Islamic- and MIB-driven state policies. Such breakdown of boundaries evidently has created a situation within which the non-Muslims have been constantly exposed to the lifestyle of the majority Muslims. The Dusuns, for instance, have already become accustomed to a Muslim way of dressing, either by wearing or seeing it, and there is also a wider acceptance of the Islamic dietary laws among the ethnic group. Such act of acceptance is thus arguably the key component that is vital to facilitate the attainment of a new religious identity, as illustrated in the following interview excerpts:

**[E67.Muslim Dusun.I45]**

I had already started wearing headscarf long before my conversion, especially during my school days and also during my training at the teachers' college. But back then, I wore it because I liked wearing it. After converting however, wearing headscarf is no longer about my personal preference; it is solely about the duty of a Muslim, and because I had been wearing headscarf before I converted, I did not see it as a burden or a restriction... [Trans.]

**[E68.Muslim Dusun.I5]**

The changes have not been that noticeable. Of course, we had to accommodate religious obligations, like the prayer and fasting, but in terms of daily life, the adjustments have been rather slight. We had been buying *halal* food long before we converted and this meant there hadn't been any pork and alcohol in the house... [Trans.]

**[E69.Muslim Dusun.I23]**

I never have any concern with meals or drinks that are prepared by my non-Muslim relatives. I know they would not deliberately serve me with non-*halal* food or alcoholic drinks. In fact, I know most of them prefer *halal* meat over the non-*halal* one as they have Muslim children and grandchildren staying with them... [Trans.]

Thus, it is evident that the adoption of Muslim lifestyle, as demonstrated by the above excerpts, did not cause conspicuous differences from the way the converts lived their lives before their conversion. This clearly defines the characters of the consequences stage of the converts where it is rather straightforward for them to adopt the Muslim lifestyle primarily because of the fact that their former Dusun lifestyle had been very much streamlined towards the Muslim way of life. This resulted in an easy attainment of new religious identity for the Muslim Dusun converts, the very fundamental characteristics of the consequences stage.

Participation within the Muslim community is another characteristics of the consequences stage of the Dusun Muslim converts. As will be explained in the following discussion, the communal participation not only facilitates social contacts but it also further the converts' ties and networks with the members of the community, and therefore illustrates the latter's acceptance of the former. Such community's acceptance is without doubt desirable as they considerably contribute to a successful

attainment of a new religious identity. The discussion on the attainment of a new religious identity through the communal participation is as follows.

### **5.9.2 Integration through Communal Activities**

For the Dusun Muslim converts, the rituals in the commitment stage indicate their formal affiliation to Islam. However, whether this affiliation can lead to an integration into the Muslim community is dependent upon the individual convert. Brunei government has been focusing on efforts to generate and maintain the participation of the new converts into the mainstream Muslim community through the establishment of various religious institutions. Such government support of religious involvement, in itself, is a significant aspect of Brunei's majority-religion context that shapes the characters of the consequences stage of the Dusun Muslim converts.

One of the religious institutions that promote converts' communal participation is the mosque. In Brunei, as in many Islamic countries, mosques have been revitalised in order to realise its real role as a multipurpose educational and community centre (Saedon 1994:25). The interview data of the Dusun Muslim converts reveal that the converts' participation in religious classes organised by the mosque in their neighbourhood area has evolved from a learning tool that allows them to learn about Islam in-depth into a network tool which permits the converts to establish rapport with other Muslims in their area. This can be seen from the experience of a 51-year-old female convert who believed that she has benefited tremendously from her attendance to religious classes:

**[E70.Muslim Dusun.I18]**

After I finished the guidance courses conducted by the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre, I started to attend weekly religious classes at the mosque. The class is not only for new converts, and it was open to any Muslims who were interested to improve their religious knowledge. They taught us many things, such as the proper recital of the Al-Quran verses which are used in the prayer. If it was not for this class, I believe it would have taken me ages before I could do the prayer on my own. And also, I have made friends from the class, many of whom I had never talked to before although we live in the same village... [Trans.]

Similar experience of communal integration was also reported by a 57-year-old male convert:

**[E71.Muslim Dusun.I17]**

Soon after my conversion, I started to attend the mass prayers, especially *Maghrib* and *Isya'* prayers at the local mosque. I felt a bit awkward at first but the people there were really welcoming. I also met many other new converts who invited me to attend a class which was conducted by the *imam*. I found this class very useful. I only knew the very basic things about the Muslim prayers in my early days, but after regularly attending this class, my recital of the Al-Quran verses has improved a lot. The *imam* is a kind man as well, always asking how I was doing... [Trans.]

The communal involvement clearly gives the converts a positive sense of being accepted and of being a part of the Muslim community. As exemplified by the above interview excerpts, the new converts slowly developed connections with the members of the Muslim community, following the availability of the acceptance resources from the community. Subsequently this facilitates a successful attainment of the new religious identity as a Muslim by the new converts through direct instrumental and affective relationships that they have been gradually forging with the existing members of the Muslim community since their conversion.



There are also informants who utilise *da'wah* institutions as the basis of their involvement within the Muslim community. The number of informants who extend their communal involvement through this means however is very small (this study only identifies 4 out of 46 informants who have been actively involved in *da'wah* activities after their conversion), and yet, it does to some degree demonstrate their affinity with, and identification as part of, the Muslim community.

The Islamic *Da'wah* Centre of Brunei Darussalam is aware that ethnicity plays a pivotal role in designing effective *da'wah* programmes. As argued by one of the key informants of this study, in view of the fact that the target of the *da'wah* activities are the non-Muslim ethnic groups, the *daie* should be capable of promoting Islam to these particular groups. This is where one can see the voluntary participation of the Dusun Muslim converts in the Centre's missionary effort to cultivate an interest towards Islam within their own ethnic group, as told by a 63-year-old retired schoolteacher:

**[E72.Muslim Dusun.I4]**

It was in 1994 when I started to get involved in the *da'wah* activities. We were put into groups to visit new converts and to promote Islam to the non-Muslims. We found that the non-Muslims Dusuns would be more welcoming if they knew there are Dusun converts in the *daie* group... [Trans.]

The communal *da'wah* activities brought the above informant to a new level of involvement within the Muslim community by assisting the missionaries to propagate the religion within his own ethnic realm. As he has the advantage of being able to speak the Dusun language, it facilitates his dialogue with the non-Muslim Dusuns. Moreover, as Dusun community is a close-knit community where its members are more likely to be related by blood or by marriage to one another, meeting a 'relative'

*da'ie* could boost the possibility for such missionary meeting to be transformed into a more effective and meaningful kind of religious encounter.

Such kind of communal involvement without doubt is an illustration of the successful attainment of religious identity where, as mentioned earlier, such positive experience of the consequences stage is primarily due to Brunei's Islamic-laden context surrounding. In fact, the above discussion on the consequences stage generally contains positive description which could make the discussion appear similar to an advertisement for Islam although that is not the intention of the discussion.

Another equally significant finding of the above discussion is the identification of the key component of context for the consequences stage, that is the acceptance component. In the case of the Dusun Muslim converts, the availability of the acceptance component in facilitating the adoption of Islamic lifestyle and their involvement in the communal activities has been briefly pointed out earlier on, and to further suggest the connection between the influence of the acceptance component of context and the actual characteristics and definitions of the consequences stage in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts, the following discussion will look at the situation experienced by the early converts, and to compare those experiences to that of the later converts when the effects of Islam as the majority religion of the country is already deeply felt and manifested in every aspect of people's life.

### **5.9.3 Context of Consequences**

The above discussion in many ways points out the fact that the essential component of the context for the consequences stage is the acceptance resources, in the sense that the

specific ways in which the Dusun Muslim converts attained their new religious identity in the consequences stage depended upon the availability and the nature of the acceptance component.

To support this point of argument, this study has utilised the data that had been generated by the date of conversion sampling where the availability and the nature of the acceptance component is dependent upon either the Muslim Dusuns converted in the 1990s and beyond which Islam had become the majority religion, or before this particular period of time during which Islam was still a minority religion within the realm of the Dusun ethnic group.

Kose argues that new converts should expect negativity and hostility from their surroundings as a conversion would move them from a realm of social acceptability to that of social unacceptability (Kose 1996: 140). In other words, by converting to a new religion, new converts would be accepted by some and rejected by others.

To extend Kose's argument, this study argues that the intensity of the social acceptability versus non-acceptability differs, depending upon the type of religious setting within which one's conversion process takes place. For instance, although the Muslim Dusuns who converted between the 1960s and the 1980s were able to attain their Muslim identity, they nevertheless also experienced hostility and rejection from some Dusuns. The following interview excerpt of a 70-year-old former army personnel who converted in 1968 revealed the negative treatment he received after his conversion:

**[E73.Muslim Dusun.I39]**

I still remember an incident that happened not long after my conversion. I went to the neighbouring village to attend a family ceremony and there, I was served with alcohol. I politely refused the drink and my refusal clearly upset the host. They thought I had become arrogant now that I am a Muslim... [Trans.]

Whereas an interview with a 44-year-old school teacher revealed, firstly, the social acceptability with her family circle:

**[E74.Muslim Dusun.I38]**

Before my family converted, the way I dressed had never become a priority to me. But all that changed after I converted. I had to be careful and made sure my dressing was according to what Islam prescribed. I was lucky I had Muslim cousins who were willing to guide me... [Trans.]

At the same time however, she was aware of the sense of unacceptability within the realm of the broader Dusun community:

**[E75.Muslim Dusun.I38]**

Our neighbours just simply avoided us. They stopped coming around to visit my parents and even some of my school friends had suddenly stopped coming over to play or study with me... [Trans.]

Similarly, a conversion experience of a 57-year-old housewife who converted in 1973 illustrates the discriminatory attitudes within the ethnic realm despite the fact that her family generally accepted her conversion:

**[E76.Muslim Dusun.I30]**

I became the recipient of negative remarks and open ridicule from my Dusun relatives. My cousins kept telling me that my conversion was an ill-considered decision because they believed that Islam is a burdensome religion. It was really a hard time for me because all my relatives clearly resented my conversion. But I couldn't do anything to avoid this sad situation as I didn't want to abandon my family and

live somewhere else. The good thing was that, my family seemed to be able to accept my conversion, and attempted as much as they possibly could to accommodate my new way of life. My mother even bought new kitchen wares and cooking utensils to replace the old ones... [Trans.]

Thus, despite the fact that Islam was promulgated as a state religion in 1959, the implication of the state directives was yet to be felt in the 1960s and the 1980s. Islam was still a minority or even foreign religion within the Dusun ethnic realm that a conversion of the members of the ethnic group to Islam would noticeably play out the many differences between a Muslim lifestyle and that of the Dusuns in their everyday lives. This also indicates the practical cultural separateness between the Dusun Muslim converts and the ethnic group during this early period.

In this particular situation, the availability of the acceptance component of context to support the attainment of a new religious identity during this period was uneven and often restricted due to the marked social, cultural and religious boundary between the converts and the Dusuns. As a result, the uneven availability of the acceptance resources was likely to cause the new converts to experience discrimination in some forms or another, as evident in the above interview excerpts, and as explained by a 72-year-old male convert whose family in the past singled out their Muslim relatives solely because of the differences in lifestyle:

**[E77.Muslim Dusun.I22]**

When someone converted to Islam especially in the 1970s or even the 1980s, the Dusuns could no longer consider the convert as one of them and this view is mainly based on the grounds on differences between the two. The Dusuns were clearly not keen with the fact that the Muslims have these strict Islamic laws to observe which the Dusuns considered as burdensome and too difficult to accommodate. Porks and alcohol are not permissible for Muslim consumption and

the Dusuns used to consider this particular dietary law as ridiculous. How can a religion bans its followers from enjoying such good food and imbibing good wine? The Dusuns in the past simply could not understand why on earth someone wanted to convert to Islam... [Trans.]

It is clear from the above interview excerpt that the tendency among the Dusuns to fend off the Muslim converts through discrimination and exclusion is primarily because of the oppositional nature of Islam and the Islamic lifestyle, versus the Dusun religion and the Dusun way of life. What possibly made such differentiation to further provoke the unpleasant treatment is the fact that the opposing Dusun and Islamic cultures are in a close proximity to one another, because a “clash is seen most clearly at the interface between cultures and during the interaction of individuals from the different cultures” (Mohammadi et al 2007: 12). Moreover, as the Muslim converts were seen as emulating the lifestyle of the born-Muslim ethnic groups and abandoning many aspects of the Dusun way of life, it is inevitable for the Dusuns to think that the converts had turned their back on their ethnic roots. This further explains the ill-feeling and resentment that were engendered by a conversion to Islam.

By the 1990s however, the implementation of the Islamic- and MIB-driven state policies for the past twenty years or more had led to the breakdown of many cultural and social boundaries. The cultural distinctiveness between different ethnic groups have become less obvious as the cultural and many religious elements which were previously exclusive to the Malay and Muslim ethnic groups have infiltrated and significantly influenced the daily life of the population, irrespective of their ethnic background.

In the case of the Dusun community, its assimilation into the mainstream Malay culture and knowledge has produced a community that exhibits Malay-like behaviour and lifestyle, although these could be somewhat superficial in some ways. As a result, and unlike in the earlier decades, a religious conversion no longer causes a convert to appear exceptionally and conspicuously different from other members of the ethnic group. There is still, of course, cultural aspects that essentially indicate the differences between the Dusun Muslim converts and the ethnic group. For example, the prohibited food items such as pork and alcohol and gambling activities remain off-limits to the converts. However, in general the Dusuns have already become accustomed to, for example, the Islamic way of dressing and there is even a wider acceptance of Islamic dietary laws by the ethnic group.

Thus when one analyses the consequences stage of the Muslim Dusuns who converted in the recent decades, the differences between their experience of the consequences stage and that of the early converts are unmistakable. Almost all informants who converted during and after the 1990s did not report events that indicate ill-feeling or discriminatory treatment which they could possibly receive after their conversion. Examples of this positive experience can be detected in the interview data of a 61-year-old housewife who converted to Islam with her family in 1998:

**[E78.Muslim Dusun.I24]**

I am certain that there is no ill-feeling between us, and I don't see any reason why they should feel that way towards us. During *Hari Raya*, I would invite all my relatives, neighbours and friends to this house to celebrate the event together. Many of them are non-Muslims but I don't think there was anything that could make them feel differently. We are all the same in one way or another... [Trans.]

Similarly, the family and relatives of a 59-year-old former custom officer who converted to Islam with his wife and son in 2004 also accepted their conversion positively:

**[E79.Muslim Dusun.I5]**

I still go and visit my relatives, just like I did before my conversion, and they do not seem to have any problem of hosting me at their home. I believe, if we genuinely respect our family and maintain good ties with them, that will give them an assurance that we have not changed. What I notice now, they do not just accept me but also my religion. For instance, every time I go and visit my non-Muslim brother, he would prepare a room in his house for me to perform the Muslim prayer. He even knows the direction of the *qiblat*... [Trans.]

The above interview excerpts illustrate the availability of the acceptance component of context, both within the converts' personal network and the broader realm of the Dusun community. This accordingly defines the distinctly positive characters of the consequences stage experienced by the recent generation of Dusun Muslim converts.

In addition, the availability of such acceptance component, together with the evident emulation of a Muslim way of life among the Dusuns, leads to a successful attainment of the Muslim identity with relative ease. The following interview excerpt of a 62-year-old housewife who converted in 2006 provides the evidence to support this argument:

**[E80.Muslim Dusun.I32]**

I got asked a lot after my conversion, how does it feel now I am a Muslim? I believed the reason why they asked this question was because they couldn't see any difference between the way I looked before conversion and afterwards. I often wore headscarf even before I converted especially when I attended Muslim functions... [Trans.]



Whereas a 51-year-old welfare officer who converted in 2003 revealed his involvement in the religious activities in his workplace is a natural extension of his voluntary participation in the same activity before his conversion:

**[E81.Muslim Dusun.I15]**

I used to attend the weekly mass recital of Yasiin verses before my conversion. No one forced me to be there; it was completely a voluntary participation on my part because I liked listening to the sound of the recital. Then, after my conversion, I still go and attend the event but now, I can feel my Muslim colleagues accepted me even more... [Trans.]

Likewise, a 60-year-old male convert continues his participation in *da'wah* activities which he was already involved in before his conversion where he now perceives the participation as a religious duty:

**[E82.Muslim Dusun.I23]**

My *daie* friends were more than happy to see me joining them again after my conversion. The routine remained the same but I did feel different. I slowly accepted the fact that the rounds of visit to non-Muslims were no longer solely to accompany the *daie* group but I myself am the *daie* now... [Trans.]

The above interview excerpts clearly demonstrate how the high level of social acceptability in Brunei's majority-religion context provides the Dusun Muslim converts with better means to attain their Muslim identity. The familiarity that the Dusun community has with Islam and the fact that the existing Dusun lifestyle already emulate some aspects of the Muslim lifestyle evidently define the rather positive characteristics of the consequences stage of the Dusun Muslim converts. As shown by the excerpts, it is no coincidence that the main features of the consequences stage of the Dusun Muslim converts are the adoption of Muslim lifestyle and the simultaneous

integration into the Muslim community through their involvement in communal activities. In fact, such consequences are perhaps obvious and almost inevitable in view of the life experience of the Dusuns as non-Muslims who live in a country with Islam as its state religion.

This argument therefore confirms the key argument of this chapter where the actual characters of the consequences stage are defined contextually. The influences of the majority-religion context ‘directed’ the adoption of the Muslim lifestyle and the simultaneous integration into the Muslim community to fall under the definition of the consequences stage of the Dusun Muslim converts. These findings provide substantial evidence to support the findings of the literature review in Chapter 3 in demonstrating that the differences in the conversion process is rooted in the religious context within which the process occurs. The summary of the findings of this chapter is as follows.

### **5.10 Summary**

This chapter is set out to provide evidence to the key argument of question 5A which suggests that the characteristics and definitions of the conversion stages of the Dusun Muslim converts are distinctly specific as the result of the effects Brunei’s majority-religion context.

Examination on all the conversion stages provides strong evidence which all suggest the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts is heavily influenced by the majority-religion context within which the process occurred. Although the conversion stages which occurred in the conversion process of the Muslim Dusuns have all been identified by Rambo, the detailed analysis of the stages reveal unique and distinctive

stage characters which are clearly shaped by Brunei's majority-religion context. For instance, the prevalent occurrence of personal encounter but not missionary encounter, the absence of the encapsulation strategy, and the fact that the Muslim Dusuns generally side-stepped the quest stage are all convincing indications of the effects of Brunei's majority-religion context which determines what characteristics should or should not fall under the definition of each stage.

Realising how culture-specific the characteristics of the stages in the Rambo Model can be, this study has attempted to de-culturalise Rambo's definitions and suggest more fundamental and culture-free descriptions of the stages. After a thorough analysis of the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts vis-à-vis Rambo's definitions of the stages, this study suggests the following culture-free definition of each conversion stage:

<b>Conversion stage</b>	<b>Culture-free definition</b>
Crisis	Evaluation of the existing religion
Quest	Acquisition of knowledge
Encounter	Point of contact
Interaction	Preparation to break from the existing religion
Commitment	Official break from the existing religion
Consequences	Attainment of new religious identity

**Table I Culture-free definition of the conversion stages**

This study has also successfully identified the different components of context which this study argues as having specific influence on a specific stage, as shown in Table II below. In other words, the different components of context will construct the culture-free definition of the stages into a definition that is distinctive and parallel to the type of religious context within which the conversion process occurs.

What is equally significant with this finding is that it validates the argument that the context is not one of the conversion stages. By redefining the context as the background setting of a conversion process, it has enabled this study to identify the different contextual components, and accordingly to specifically define the characteristics of the stages and the manner in which they had been experienced by the converts. Thus, Chattoe-Brown is correct to argue that the context should not be seen as a single thing or a single stage (Chattoe-Brown 2010: 5), as the components of context are multiple and distinctive, depending on the role and function of the stages they are associated with.

<b>Conversion stage</b>	<b>Component of Context</b>
Crisis	Awareness
Quest	Knowledge
Encounter	Persuasion, Trust
Interaction	Direction, control
Commitment	Support
Consequences	Acceptance

**Table II Components of context relevant to conversion stages**

To further validate the above findings, Chapter 6 will utilise them to support the analysis on the variations and similarities in the sequence of the conversion stages across the different types of religious context identified by this study. This will not only test the extent of the usefulness of the findings in this chapter, but it will also illustrate the influence of the context in determining the sequence of the stages in a conversion process. The full analysis on the causal relationship between the type of religious context and the specific stage sequence is the main emphasis of the next chapter.

## Chapter 6: Stage Sequence Analysis

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### 6.1 Introduction

The literature review in Chapter 3 highlights the fact that the conversion stages essentially occur in a different sequence from one religious situation to the next. In view of this finding, this study considers the possible determinants of the stage sequence in a conversion process are the position of a religion in the country of the converts and the properties of the religion. The position and the properties of the religion accordingly shape the specific type of religious context within which the conversion process unfolds.

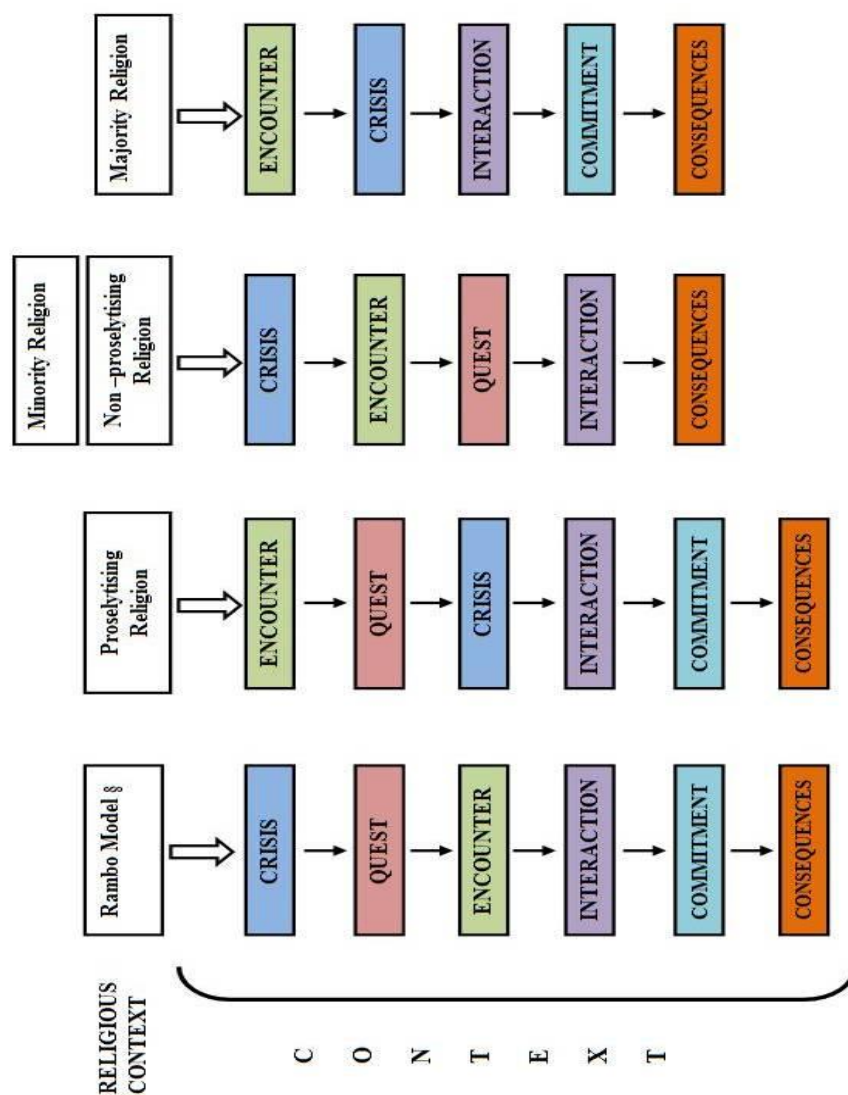
The pervasive influence of religious context on the conversion process has been demonstrated in Chapter 5 where the analysis of the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts has revealed the ways Brunei's majority religion context influences the definitions of the conversion stages as experienced by the converts. The identification of different types of components of context helps to explain why the definitions of the stages occurring in Brunei's majority-religion context are unique and different from Rambo's definitions of the stages.

In view of the findings of the literature review and the findings made in Chapter 5, this chapter aims to identify the determinant(s) which can explain the variations and the similarities found between the stage sequence that occurs in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts and those occurring in different settings, as illustrated by

the findings of existing studies. This is the second research question of this study, which is referred as question 6B in this thesis.

## 6.2 Key arguments

Before the identification of the determinants of stage sequence in a conversion process can be made, special attention should be given to the following Diagram II which illustrates the possible typical patterns of stage sequence in different types of religious contexts.



**Diagram II Effects of context on stage sequence (analysis)**

§ Context is purposely removed from Rambo's sequence in order to provide uniformity to the postulated sequence of conversion stages under different types of religious contexts.

A distinctive feature about the stage sequence patterns in the diagram is that four of the stages, namely the crisis, the encounter, the quest and the commitment stage vary in their sequence of occurrence across different contexts, where as there is a constant presence pertaining to the interaction and the consequences stage in all types of religious contexts identified by this study.

Taking into account such patterns of variation and similarity in the stage sequence, this study identifies religious context within which a conversion occurs as the key determinant of the stage order. As has been explained in Chapter 3, the types of religious contexts which have been identified by this study are chiefly defined by the status of the religion in the country of the converts (majority or minority religion) and by the properties of the religion (proselytising or non-proselytising religion). This identification will provide vital support to the analysis of this chapter in identifying the ways a religious context can determine the stage sequence and thus provides answers to question 6B as to why the sequence of the stages occurs in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts is similar to or varies from the stage sequence in the conversion process in other research settings.

Going into further details of the argument, this chapter will suggest that the religious context affects the sequence of the conversion stages through the absence or presence of the key components of context. This argument is based on the findings made in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 where the literature review in Chapter 3 has revealed that the rarity of the relevant religious information (i.e. the knowledge component of context) had set the converts to a minority and a non-proselytising religion off to quest. Whilst Chapter 5 has demonstrated how the ready availability of the knowledge component in

Brunei's majority-religion context has caused the need to quest for information to become redundant and unnecessary. Based on these findings, this study proposes that the variation and similarities in the stage sequence are primarily due to the existence, or indeed the absence, of the key components of context across different types of religious settings.

### **6.3 The Findings**

Keeping in view the objective of this chapter in identifying the determinant of the stage sequence in a conversion process, the findings in Chapter 5 will be carried forward to this chapter. The identification of the culture-free definition of each conversion stage (Table I on page 177 of this thesis), and the component of context relevant to the conversion stages (Table II on page 178) will be used in the comparative examination of the findings of this study and those of the existing conversion studies. By focusing on the availability of the different components of context in each religious context, the following analysis will demonstrate the causal relationship between these components of the context and the specific stage sequence. This accordingly will provide evidence to support the key argument of this chapter which suggests that the religious context within which a conversion process occurs is the main determinant of the variations and similarities in the order of the conversion stages across different types of context.

### **6.4 Determinant of Stage Sequence: Religious context**

The following discussion is divided into five parts. The first part entails an analysis of the encounter-crisis sequence, a sequence which is likely to occur in majority-religion and proselytising-religion contexts. A conversion process in these types of religious



contexts tends to set out with the encounter stage as the first stage. In the case of individuals whose conversion process unfolds in the minority-religion and the non-proselytising-religion contexts, they are more likely to firstly experience the crisis stage before any other stage. Section 6.4.1 will specifically look at this argument and examine how the absence or presence of the components of the context (persuasion and trust for the encounter stage, and awareness for the crisis stage) determine the variation in the encounter-crisis sequence.

Section 6.4.2 will focus on the second part of the discussion which analyses the nature of the quest stage across different religious contexts. The analysis of the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts in Chapter 5 has revealed that the absence of the quest stage is predominantly due to Brunei's majority-religion context which crucially exposed the non-Muslim populations in the country to religious knowledge through various channels of information. In this section, the discussion will suggest that the knowledge component in other religious settings is not disposed in the same manner as in Brunei's context which therefore creates a necessary condition for the quest stage to be a vital part of the conversion process in those contexts.

The third part of the discussion examines the interaction stage. Diagram II on page 180 demonstrates the almost parallel occurrence of the interaction stage across the different types of contexts identified by this study. Section 6.4.3 will explain that it is the presence of the key components of context for this stage (direction and control components) in all types of religious contexts that determines such parallel occurrence as well as the sequential position of the interaction stage. Along the line of this argument, this study also makes an interesting finding where the utilisation of the

different components of context has been made in an orderly manner. This further determines the sequence of the conversion stages, specific to the nature of the context within which they occur.

The analysis of the commitment stage will be provided in section 6.4.4 of this chapter. The literature review in Chapter 3 has already identified the commitment stage as another point of variation in the stage sequence across the different types of contexts. By employing the identification of the support component of context as the vital component for the commitment stage, section 6.4.4 will suggest how the lack of support resources in minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts lead to the absence of the commitment stage, and thus, causing the stage sequence in such types of contexts to be different from the one in majority-religion and proselytising-religion contexts.

Section 6.4.5 will analyse the final stage of the conversion process, the consequences stage. This section will argue that the availability of the acceptance component effectively prevents a new convert from changing the direction of the whole conversion process and opting for a religious reversion instead. The presence of the acceptance component helps to explain the parallel occurrence of the consequences stage as the final stage across the different types of religious contexts, as shown above in Diagram II (page 180).

### **6.4.1 Encounter-Crisis Sequence**

As explained in section 5.4 in Chapter 5, this study has demonstrated that the Dusun Muslim converts generally experienced the personal encounter, which represents the encounter stage, at the outset of their conversion experience before they could experience a religious crisis. This determines the sequential position of the two stages as the first and second stage in their conversion process. However, this study is also aware that this particular finding does not replicate the findings of some of the existing studies and thus indicates the important fact that the sequential occurrence of the encounter and the crisis stage is not consistent in all religious situations. The following discussion will explain why there is a difference between Brunei's case and the other conversion cases in different religious settings.

By analysing the availability of persuasion and trust, and awareness, which are the components of context for the encounter and the crisis stage respectively, the following discussion will argue that individuals who convert within majority-religion and proselytising-religion contexts are more likely to have the encounter stage as the first stage in their conversion process, in contrast to those who convert to a minority and a non-proselytising religion who would experience a religious crisis before they could have a religious encounter.

#### **6.4.1.1 Encounter as the first stage**

As has revealed by the findings in Chapter 5, the Dusun Muslim informants generally experienced what this study refers to as the personal encounter at the very beginning of their conversion process. The term 'personal encounter' is coined by this study to refer to a type of religious encounter that occur between a potential convert and non-

missionary individuals. The findings in the same chapter have also demonstrated that the implications of the personal encounter are similar to those of Rambo's encounter stage. The limitless amount of religious information available to the non-Muslim population in Brunei minimises their level of acceptance and their sense of sensitivity towards the majority religion. After examining the personal network of the Dusun Muslim converts, it has been revealed that the persuasion and trust component, which is vital to transform a point of contact into a meaningful religious encounter, is sourced from their contact with Muslims who are within their personal network. Through their observation and constant interaction with these Muslims, they gradually became aware of the appealing side of Islam. This changing perception on Islam inevitably led to the evaluation of their Dusun religion, which is the very essence of the crisis stage.

By relying on the outcome of the above evaluation process, the awareness component of the majority-religion context relevant to the crisis stage has generated a certain tendency in preference for Islam. The once-ignored information now became essential for the Dusuns to compare the Dusun religion with Islam. Accordingly, as the outcome of the comparative evaluation of the two religions, i.e. the crisis stage, highlighted the contrast of being a Muslim and a Dusun, the Dusuns no longer saw their ethnic religion as an attractive religious alternative:

**[E83.Muslim Dusun.I34]**

Long before I had interest in Islam, I always thought there was something wrong with the Dusuns' *adat* of mourning. Traditionally, relatives of the deceased would come over to the house of the latter to mourn together with the family for forty-days. Over time however, such period of mourning has become an avenue for the Dusuns to get together with lots of drinking and gambling activities. This tends to be carried on for forty days non-stop, causing a real inconvenience to the family of the deceased. At the same time, I started to learn about

Islam from school and I learnt that Muslims would hold a *Tahlil* recital to pray for the deceased. Unlike the Dusuns's way of mourning, there is no huge celebration or party-like atmosphere during the Muslims' period of mourning, and I am convinced this is how mourning should be done... [Trans.]

**[E84.Muslim Dusun.I1]**

During *Hari Raya*, my sister and I would join our Muslim brothers to celebrate this big event. But over time I started to feel there was something not right because I know I should not be celebrating someone else's religion. But why do the Dusuns have nothing similar to this kind of celebration? ... [Trans.]

**[E85.Muslim Dusun.I31]**

It is inevitable for me to compare the Dusun religion with Islam especially when I was surrounded by Muslim children and their families. The most obvious thing I saw was how the Muslims have clear directions and life map to follow. Take Friday afternoon, for example. While the Muslims would go to mosque to perform their religious duty, I would be at home, most likely wasting my afternoon by sleeping until later in the day. In the past, I tend to justify this situation by saying that I practised a different religion but over time, I found myself repeatedly asking the same question as to why my Dusun religion does not provide me with specific instructions that are equally deserving of rewards as Islam does? ... [Trans.]

To further illustrate how the majority-religion context determines the encounter-crisis sequence, a study on religious conversion process from Islam to Christianity in Denmark produced a similar finding. Similar to the position of Islam in Brunei, Christianity is constitutionally proclaimed as the official religion in Denmark where 87% of the Danish population practises Christianity and belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the country (Mogensen 2004: 293). Accordingly, Christianity is integrated into the teaching curriculum in all public schools but parents have the choice to opt their children out of religious classes (Fox 2008: 115).

It should also be noted at this point that the Christian converts in Denmark, according to Mogensen's study, are mostly the refugees from Iran and Iraq who had been seeking political asylum protection from Denmark (Mogensen 2004: 303-304). This fact will explain the rather negative perception that these converts have towards Islam where they were convinced that they could not rely on Islam for the assurance of salvation.

Thus, due to the majority-religion context within which the conversion to Christianity took place, it is interesting to see how comparable the experience of the Christian converts in Denmark has been to the experience of the Dusun Muslim converts. Similar to the Dusuns, the Iranian and Iraqi Christian converts in Denmark also had their initial exposure to Christianity through the education system and voluntary participation in religious events and activities (Mogensen 2004: 305). However, such early exposure did not directly trigger their interest in Christianity. Instead, they seemed to be more persuaded to learn about the religion through their personal encounter with the Christians within their personal social circle, and their constant observation of mundane activities which contributed significantly to their changing perception on Islam and Christianity. The Christian converts that participated in Mogensen's study described the Christian people that they had constantly encountered before their conversion as "quiet and nice people" and "friendly and welcoming" whereas, others who experienced voluntary participation in religious events described them as "warm" and "attractive" (Mogensen 2004: 307). Thus, these positive circumstances had significantly elicited persuasion and trust components which accordingly transformed the point of contact between the Iranians and the Iraqis, and Christianity to be meaningful and relevant to the former.

The implications of the above personal encounter on the Christian converts in Denmark were palpable. One of these implications is that it became inevitable for the converts to evaluate Christianity against Islam, the religion they grew up with. Given the political situation in their birth country, which in many ways was the main reason why they sought political protection from Denmark, Islam was increasingly seen by the Christian converts before their conversion as the source of political oppression and life misery. This perception has been in contrast to the one they had on Christianity where the converts perceived Christianity as giving them the assurance of salvation which Islam could not provide them. One of Mogensen's participants stressed the fact that "when I pray to Allah, I do not receive answer, when I pray to Jesus I receive help" (Mogensen 2004: 306).

The above comparative evaluation between Christianity and Islam by the Christian converts in Denmark essentially represents the occurrence of a religious crisis. The dissatisfaction with Islam which the Iranians and Iraqis had before their conversion was clearly magnified by the precipitation of the awareness component of the majority-religion context, which accordingly portrayed the majority religion, Christianity, in an increasingly positive image that gave the converts hope and trust.

Thus, based on the above discussion, it can be argued that the conversion process of the Christian converts in Denmark confirms the key argument of question 6B where the religious context (in this case it is the majority-religion context) determines the encounter stage to occur before the converts could experience a religious crisis, as illustrated in Diagram II on page 180.

Apart from the majority-religion context, another type of religious context which determines the encounter stage to occur before other conversion stages is the proselytising-religion context. It however should be noted here that the encounter stage occurring in this type of context is different from that occurring in the majority-religion context or in any other context for that matter, because the converts in the proselytising-religion context are likely to experience their encounter with religious missionaries and preachers, instead of with common individuals such as family members and friends.

For instance, we have discussed in Chapter 3 the conversion process of the Romanians who converted to Jehovah's Witness, a proselytising religion in Romania (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007). According to this study, the Witness converts firstly had the encounter with the Witness' missionaries before they could experience the quest and crisis stage. Conversion studies on other proselytising religions also reveal similar findings. Christianity is one of the examples of the proselytising religions that have been frequently investigated by the existing conversion studies. For example, the studies on the conversion to Christianity among the Kelabits in Sarawak, Malaysia (Amster 2009) and among the Javanese (Mujiburrahman 2001) reveal that the encounter stage is the first stage in the conversion experience of these Christian converts.

It should be pointed out here that the proselytising properties of Christianity essentially outweigh the minority properties of the religion. This is primarily because many of the components of context vital for the existence of the conversion stages are rather readily available in a proselytising-religion context, in comparison to the limited availability of similar components in a minority-religion context. Thus, if the religion is allowed to



proselytise in the country of the potential converts, the proselytising properties of the religion will gain the 'upper hand' which accordingly put the religion to be under the proselytising religion category, as in the case of Christianity in Sarawak and Java despite the fact that Christianity is a minority religion in both countries.

Hence, Christian missionaries have been active in their preaching activities to spread the religion in Sarawak and Java where the locals were rather receptive to such religious activities in their areas. Through words of persuasion and courteous acts, the Christian missionary activities attracted the attention of the locals to join the Bible study group. Moreover, the superiority of the western background of the Christian missionaries evidently facilitated the tendency among the locals to accept the invitation to explore Christianity although many actually had no serious issues with their animist religion. As a result, Amster's and Mujiburrahman's study on the conversion experience of the Kelabits and Javanese Christianity respectively reveal that the first contact that the Kelabits and Javaese had with Christian preachers directly represents the meaningful religious encounter with their new religion (Amster 2009: 316; Mujiburrahman 2001: 33).

As illustrated in Diagram II on page 180, the encounter in the proselytising-religion context does not directly lead potential converts to experience the crisis stage, is the case of the encounter-crisis sequence which is experienced by potential converts to a majority religion. Instead, an encounter with religious proselytisers would be followed by a religious quest. The details of the quest stage in a proselytising-religion context will be provided in Section 6.4.2.3 of this chapter, but it should be made clear at this point that it is only after the quest stage (which is the Bible study) that the crisis stage

will occur. This quest-crisis sequence can be seen from the experience of the Christian converts among the Forest Tobelo community in Indonesia, as illustrated by the following interview excerpt:

I did not start believing until [I heard the story about how] Jesus was crucified and resurrected. In all of the stories I had ever heard about spirits from my parents and grandparents, no one had ever come back from the dead like they said they would. But Jesus Christ had said before He died that He would come back in three days and then He actually did. He did not die and then never return as others do, He came back and that show that God's word is true and caused my thinking to walk towards God (O Feredi's interview, cited in Duncan 2003: 319).

It is clear from the above excerpt that the exposure to a different religious alternative through the encounter and the quest stage had inevitably caused the convert to compare the stories about his religion which he heard from his elders with the story about Jesus told by the Christian missionaries. Such comparison between two religious alternatives thus illustrates the presence of the awareness component of the context which supported and intensified the evaluation process of the crisis stage. As a result, O Feredi was convinced of the ideals of Christianity which, according to his evaluation, made more sense than the explanation offered by his existing religion.

The above discussion demonstrates two important facts. Firstly, the nature of the encounter stage in the proselytising-religion context where the persuasion and trust component in this type of context determines the encounter stage to occur at the outset of one's conversion process. As a proselytising religion, the main target of the preaching activities is the non-followers of the religion and the intensity of persuasion is more likely to be exerted upon this group so that the non-followers can be directed

to experience the quest stage. Thus, there is a tendency for the proselytising religion to have found potential converts, rather than the potential converts to find the religion themselves. This is another reason why the proselytising properties outweigh the minority properties of a religion.

Secondly, the direct encounter-quest sequence in a proselytising-religion context rather than the encounter-crisis sequence, as how the stage sequence is in the majority-religion context, is a convincing evidence to support the key argument of the chapter where a particular stage sequence can only occur in certain religious contexts and not others. As suggested by the above discussion, the crisis stage can only be experienced after a potential convert to a proselytising religion acquire the necessary information about the religion. This is mainly because the quest for religious information is vital to support the very function of a crisis stage, which is an informed evaluation of the proselytising religion vis-à-vis his or her existing one.

Also to provide support to the main argument of this chapter is the findings of the existing studies which examine a conversion process in minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts. Potential converts whose conversion process took place in these types of contexts are likely to firstly experience the crisis stage before any other conversion stages. A detailed discussion on the crisis stage as the first stage in minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts is presented below.

#### **6.4.1.2 Crisis as the first stage**

Section 3.6.2 in Chapter 3 has discussed the findings of the existing studies which demonstrate the occurrence of the crisis stage as the first stage in the conversion

process of the Muslim converts in Britain and the United States. Looking further into these studies, a general trend can be detected where the crisis stage is more likely to occur as the first stage in a conversion to a religion with a minority status in the country of the new convert, i.e. in a minority-religion context. Accordingly, this study finds that the minority status of the religion could ‘relegate’ its proselytising properties and thus become a non-proselytising religion instead. Because of this, the religion is rather unpopular to, and largely unknown by, a larger part of the population, and as will be seen later, such properties of the religion and the context it shapes will explain the occurrence of the crisis stage as the first stage in minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts.

Take Islam as an example. Islam is a minority religion in most western countries. The Muslim community in Denmark for example, is only involved in religious discussions by invitation because they “never engage in mission” and that their goal “is not to convert Danes to Islam” (Mogensen 2003: 298). Likewise, the *da’wah* movements in Britain choose not to proselytise outside the Muslim community in the country and are more “concerned with reforming the belief and practice of existing Muslims rather than addressing non-Muslims” (Al-Qwidi 2002: 31). In many ways, this fact suggests the lack of interaction between the followers of a minority religion and those outside the religion.

Likewise, Buddhism in South Africa is another typical example of a non-proselytising religion. However, unlike Islam in the western countries where it relegates its proselytising properties due to its minority status, Buddhism has no inherent proselytising properties where in South Africa for instance, “there is no major effort by

temples, centres or Buddhist groups to advertise or even acknowledge their existence” in the country (Parker 2007: 93).

A limited scale of interaction between the followers of a minority and a non-proselytising religion indicates two important things. Firstly, the lack of interaction with these types of religion means the majority population not only barely possess relevant information about the religion but one also cannot expect the non-followers of the religion to have a decent level of interest towards the religion. Thus, it is very unlikely that a common individual would perceive the religion as a possible religious alternative, let alone to search for it, without the person experiencing substantial religious crisis.

Secondly, the low frequency of interaction level also reduces the possibility for the encounter stage to occur as the first stage in a conversion process. This is because, the low intensity of interaction paralyses the modes of persuasion and trust, the very component of context that is vital to transform a point of contact between a potential convert and the prospective religion into a meaningful religious encounter. If we look back at the discussion on the encounter stage in the majority-religion and the proselytising-religion context, it is evident that the persuasion and trust component only operates if there are direct and constant contacts between potential converts and the advocates or the followers of the prospective religion.

The above discussion thus provides convincing support to the argument that the crisis stage should be the first stage to occur in the conversion process in the minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts. The non-occurrence of any

meaningful encounter with the prospective religion before a crisis stage can be further seen through the characters of the crisis stage in the minority-religion and the non-proselytising-religion contexts, where the evaluation of the existing religion of the potential convert is made vis-à-vis their life condition. Such characters of crisis evaluation are essentially different from the evaluation made by potential converts to a majority and a proselytising religion where there is a focus on evaluating their existing religion against the prospective religion, a reflection of the occurrence of an encounter with the prospective religion prior to the crisis.

Such characteristics of the crisis stage in the minority-religion and the non-proselytising-religion contexts accordingly reflects the attributes of the awareness component of these particular types of contexts which directs the crisis evaluation solely on the existing religion of the potential converts, as they are yet to have any knowledge on their prospective religion which they otherwise could utilise to mediate the evaluation process in the crisis stage.

For example, in his study on the Latina/o Muslim converts in the United States, Martinez-Vazquez argues that the converts generally experienced “a sense of disenchantment that leads to spiritual anomie” as they increasingly perceived the failure of their existing religion, Christianity, in resolving their theological issues (Martinez-Vazquez 2008: 63). Similar evaluation which solely focuses on their pre-conversion lives can also be found in the experience of the British Muslim converts in two different studies. One of the informants participated in Kose’s study pointed out the fragile condition of his society:

In the West, we are living in the Post-Enlightenment period. We have environmental problems, Aids, and so many things, and scientists are not coming up with any solutions. I think the quality of life isn't improving, people are becoming more and more disillusioned, life is becoming more insecure for people... (Nick's interview, cited in Kose 1999:307)

Kose's finding is supported by Al-Qwidi's (2002) study which also examines the conversion process of the British Muslim converts. Similar critical evaluation that solely directed towards the existing religion during the crisis stage is also detected in the conversion process of Daud Talbot, a British Muslim convert who was one of Al-Qwidi's respondents. At the age of twenty, Talbot began to feel spiritually empty as he was increasingly dissatisfied with his lifestyle and had become more and more uneasy with the drinking culture (Al-Qwidi 2002:289). Whereas Martin, a Muslim convert in Denmark whose interview excerpt is provided below, is another example of the characters of the crisis stage occurring in a minority-religion and a non-proselytising-religion context:

Martin seems to have been in a spiritual crisis before he became a Muslim. He would spend much time alone, sitting in his room and staring into the air while he thought over the meaning of life. It did not make sense to him that he had been planted on the earth by accident without any purpose (Morgensen 2003: 312)

Likewise, Parker also reveals that South Africans who converted to Buddhism experienced the loss of confidence in their traditional religion as the religion could not effectively alleviate their personal crisis such as illness, death of loved ones or general unhappiness in their lives (Parker 2007: 90).

The above examples demonstrate two important points. Firstly, it is evident that the crisis stage is the first stage to occur in a conversion process in minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts. Secondly, given the above evidence, it is also safe to argue that the crisis stage in these types of religious contexts is not directly followed by the quest stage, as proposed by Rambo. Because the prospective religion is unknown to the potential converts due to its non-proselytising property and minority status, it is very unlikely the religion could spark one's interest and desire to quest for more information than what they already know about the religion.

Instead, it is more feasible to argue that the crisis stage in minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts is more likely to be followed by a religious encounter. However, unlike the characters of the encounter stage in a proselytising-religion context, the encounter in minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts tends to occur coincidentally and is not by choice or on purpose (Al-Qwidi 2002: 178). Such chance encounter could be the side effect of the scarcity of the followers of a minority and a non-proselytising religion that an encounter with such types of religion is not as inevitable as in a majority-religion context, nor as directed as in a proselytising-religion context. Nick, whose interview has been mentioned earlier, describes his chance encounter with Islam during his trip to Iran:

I remember when I went to Iran I was living in a rural community and the most striking thing I noticed was that the people seemed more content. I still feel strongly that the more simple the life the more content the people. If you look at this society, it is more and more complex, more problems and it is less content (Nick's interview, cited in Kose 1999: 307).



Similarly, Daud Talbot, whose crisis experience has also been mentioned earlier, also revealed that his encounter with Islam had been by chance, which was during his trip to Papua New Guinea. While browsing books in a library, he stumbled upon a book on Islam in which he saw pictures of Muslims praying and other details on the basic religious duties of the followers of the religion (Al-Qwidi 2002: 288).<sup>3</sup>

Whereas in the case of the Buddhist converts in South Africa, their religious crisis did not lead to a quest stage not only because Buddhism is largely unknown in South Africa but also due to the strong emotional attachment the South Africans had with their traditional religion (Parker 2007: 91). Thus, the non-sequence of the crisis and quest stage in South Africans' conversion process means the encounter with Buddhism also occurred by chance, either through family members who profess to Buddhism or through the converts' travelling experience that led them to discover the religion. For example, one of Parker's respondents believed that her interest in Buddhism actually cultivated after "she kept bumping into people who were Buddhist and all of a sudden she was getting on with and enjoying being around people who were Buddhist" (Parker 2007: 105).

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<sup>3</sup> It would be appropriate to point out here that, an encounter with simple objects, such as a book, in a minority-religion context could become as persuasive as having an encounter with religious missionaries in a proselytising-religion context or a personal encounter in a majority-religion context. This is because, unlike in a majority-religion context where a constant exposure to religious information could reduce one's attraction towards the majority religion, a rarity of information in a minority-religion context, however, could easily render an individual to be at least curious, if not fascinated, by a piece of information they had recently encountered. In other words, the different nature of the knowledge components in different religious contexts could help to explain why simple written materials could easily trigger an interest in a minority-religion context but fail invariably to be a persuasive tool in a majority-religion context in transforming such a basic point of contact into a meaningful encounter with significant religious implications.

Up to this point, we have examined two of the conversion stages, the encounter and the crisis stage. It is evident from the above discussion that the sequence of these two stages is dependent upon the type of the religious context within which the conversion process occurs, particularly in terms of the availability of the persuasion and awareness components of context that respectively support the encounter and the crisis stage. The persuasion component of the majority-religion context surfaces through the dynamics of constant observation and social learning which leads to the occurrence of the encounter stage in this type of context, whereas proselytisers create scenes of persuasion in the proselytising-religion context to bring non-followers within their reach. All these circumstances thus determine the encounter stage to firstly occur in a conversion process in the majority-religion and proselytising-religion contexts.

In contrast, the absence of constant contact between the non-followers and a minority religion and a non-proselytising religion accounts for the non-occurrence of the encounter stage as the first stage in the religious contexts shaped by these two types of religion. Instead, it is more likely for the crisis stage to occur first in a conversion process in minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts as it is necessary for one to first experience sense of disenchantment towards the existing religion before the person has the desire to seek for a religious alternative. To further support this argument, this study highlights the nature of the crisis stage occurring within these contexts where the critical evaluation of the existing religion does not involve any comparative examination with other religions as the potential converts solely evaluate their existing faith vis-à-vis their less satisfactory life conditions.

Different characters of the crisis stage are detected in the conversion process in a majority-religion and a proselytising-religion context. In the case of the majority-religion context, the crisis stage follows directly after the occurrence of the encounter as the awareness component can only emerge following the previous encounter with the prospective religion. Whereas in the proselytising-religion context, the awareness component emerges after the occurrence of the quest stage which provides a concrete amount of knowledge about the proselytising religion to the potential converts. Thus, the potential converts in the majority-religion and the proselytising-religion contexts would lay their existing and the prospective religion next to each other and draw conclusions from their comparative evaluation of the two religions.

The availability of religious choices would lead potential converts to become acquisitive as they search for more evidence and information on the potential religious alternative. This directly leads the potential converts to experience the quest stage. As a stage of knowledge discovery, the quest stage embodies the role where potential converts search for relevant religious information which later functions as a solid support to their ultimate decision to branch out from their existing religion. The quest stage is discussed next.

#### **6.4.2 Quest Stage**

The quest stage is one of the conversion stages which have been discussed in the literature review chapter, as the existing studies raised few interesting issues with regard to the nature of the stage. For example, Al-Qwidi's (2002) study on the British Muslim converts finds that the converts carried out the quest stage mainly because they only possessed a vague idea on Islam which was inadequate to support their intention

to convert to the religion. Whereas Kahn and Greene (2004) argue that the position of the prospective religion in the country of the converts can affect the existence of the quest stage. In examining the religious conversion phenomenon in the United States, Kahn and Greene reveal that the tendency to quest for religious information is higher among potential converts who sought a non-Christian religion compared to those who are interested in Protestantism which is the majority-religion in the States (Kahn and Greene 2004: 254). This finding essentially demonstrates the fact that the tendency to carry out a religious quest among potential converts could vary across different religious settings where, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, the tendency to quest among the Dusun Muslim converts in a majority-religion context was markedly absent.

Apart from the majority status of the prospective religion in the country of the converts, the literature review on the conversion studies also reveals that the proselytising properties of a religion can also determine the existence and the sequential position of the quest stage in the conversion process. The study on the conversion process of the Romanians who converted to the proselytising religion of Jehovah's Witness provides evidence for this finding where the potential converts of the Jehovah's Witness experienced the quest stage through the study of the Bible conducted by the proselytisers of the religion (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007).

The following discussion will further examine the influence of a religious context on the existence and the sequential position of the quest stage in a conversion process, however from a different analytical angle. By employing the finding of Chapter 5 that identifies the relevant component of context for the quest stage, that is knowledge (as illustrated in Table II on page 178 of this thesis), the following discussion will show

how the free flow of religious knowledge is accountable for the absence of the stage in a conversion process that takes place in the majority-religion context. In contrast, a religious quest is generally experienced by potential converts in the minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts, primarily due to the rarity of religious knowledge within these types of contexts. Likewise, the quest stage also exists in the conversion process in a proselytising-religion context as the stage is a necessary step taken by religious missionaries to introduce interested individuals to the religion through designated religious classes.

It should also be highlighted here that this study makes an important finding about another aspect of the quest stage. This study finds that the quest is not solely about the search for religious information but it also embodies a critical turning point in a conversion process. As potential converts make further evaluation of the prospective religion based on the information they acquire, it brings them to an important point in the process where they have to decide either to proceed or to opt out from the conversion process. Given the evidence presented below, this study will suggest that the end of the quest stage could be considered as a ‘crossroad’ point in one’s conversion process.

#### **6.4.2.1 Quest stage in majority-religion context**

Section 5.7 in Chapter 5 explains the reasons for the absence of the quest stage in the conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts in Brunei. It is clear from the section that none of the Dusun Muslim informants searched for more information on Islam as the religion was already present within the informants’ context. Such familiarity with Islam is further intensified by their own experience of having constant

encounter and social interactions with Muslims within their immediate circle that, over time, had allowed them to gain a better understanding of the majority religion, as illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

**[E86.Muslim Dusun.I36]**

Because I was enrolled into a secondary school in Brunei/Muara District, I stayed in the school hostel throughout my secondary years and there, I shared a room with four Muslim girls. My roommates would normally perform the daily prayer together in our room, and after five years staying with them, I somehow learnt through observation how the daily prayer is done... [Trans.]

**[E87.Muslim Dusun.I24]**

It is rather inevitable for me to listen to religious programmes on radio especially on my way to work and from work. The programmes are quite informative and I guess that's where I gained some knowledge about Islam... [Trans.]

**[E88.Muslim Dusun.I32]**

I know about fasting or prayer even though I never read any books on Islam... because Islam is everywhere in Brunei; there are sermons on radio, there are religious programmes on the tele, newspapers discuss about religious issues all the time... [Trans.]

What is significant about the above existing familiarity with Islam is that it would cancel the necessity for a religious quest in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts. All informants involved in this study revealed that they tended to conveniently rely on their existing religious knowledge, as shown by the following interview excerpts of the Dusun Muslim converts:

**[E89.Muslim Dusun.I25]**

I did not actually make any conscious evaluation, I suppose. But over time I somehow felt Islam fits me and my life expectations better. The way of life that Islam promotes and the way my Muslim siblings lived their lives are already enough to illustrate what Islam is about. So there is nothing more to seek... [Trans.]

**[E90.Muslim Dusun.I20]**

Why do I need to search for Islam? I was brought up in a Muslim neighbourhood, my friends are all Muslims and I went to religious school until I graduated... [Trans.]

**[E91.Muslim Dusun.I45]**

I don't know anyone who actually has to search for Islam in Brunei because the religion is virtually everywhere. I remember I used to question the Dusun religion a lot before I converted. I asked what happens to a deceased after a funeral? Or does the Dusun religion have its own prophet? Or how does the Dusun God create the earth? But every time I had those questions in mind, I seemed to find the answers in Islam instead, because I learnt about funeral in Islam at school, I also studied about Muslim prophets and how this world was created from my Islamic subjects... [Trans.]

Likewise, Mogensen's study on the conversion to Christianity in Denmark yields similar finding that points out the absence of the quest for a new religious option. Section 6.4.1.1 already highlighted the fact that Christianity is the religion of the majority in Denmark, and this accordingly means that a large section of the population inevitably experience Christianity either through the education system or through casual interaction with the Christians within their immediate milieu. For example, many of the Christian converts voluntarily attended the confirmation class even before their conversion, as exemplified by the following excerpt:

I did not understand the Bible text, because it was in Danish, but I understood that they sang about God and talked about Jesus... Nobody asked what religion we had. Nobody advertised Christianity or encouraged us to convert. People were just friendly and welcoming (Habib's interview, cited in Mogensen 2003: 306).

The familiarity with Christianity was gradually conceived within a majority-religion context, a similar kind of setting against which the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts took place in Brunei. Furthermore, and as mentioned earlier, since the

Muslims in Denmark are mostly from Iran and Iraq who considered their birth religion, Islam, as the source of the political oppression and their life misery and the main reason why they left their home country, it became inevitable for the Muslims in Denmark to make a critical evaluation on their religious belief which they increasingly perceived as repressive, vis-à-vis the images of tolerance which the Muslims now have of Christianity. Such positive image and the existing familiarity with Christianity without doubt presented the majority religion to the Muslims as a much more reliable religious alternative to Islam.

Accordingly, Mogensen's study on the conversion process to Christianity in Denmark reveals the apparent absence of questing activities where the Christian converts had not sampled any other religion (Mogensen 2003: 306). Instead, they relied on their prior knowledge on the majority religion and their newly-formed perception of Christianity as a sufficient precondition that enabled them to make an informed evaluation of the religion. This caused them to fall short of sampling other religions that otherwise would also illustrate the existence of religious quest in their conversion experience.

Thus, in view of the above discussion, it further validates the argument of this chapter that the occurrence of the conversion stages is significantly determined by the religious context within which the conversion process occurs. The readily availability of the knowledge component to the potential converts in a majority-religion context leads to the apparent absence of the quest stage in this type of religious context. This is also to say that the absence of the quest could be detrimental to a conversion process occurring in other types of religious contexts particularly in the type of context where the component of context for the quest stage (information and knowledge) is rare, as in



the case of the minority-religion and the non-proselytising-religion contexts. Thus, a quest stage is a necessity so that relevant religious information could be attained to support the conversion process. The existence of the quest stage in a conversion process in minority-religion and non-proselytising religion contexts is discussed below.

#### **6.4.2.2 Quest stage in minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts**

As mentioned earlier, the existence of the quest stage in these types of contexts is due to the rarity of religious information on the religion. Unlike the potential converts to a majority religion who have been already exposed to the religion and have also developed some sense of recognition towards it before their conversion, the potential converts to a minority and non-proselytising religion only have a vague idea about the religion or might possibly have never heard anything trustworthy about it. As a result of such limited dissemination of information, it prevents the potential converts from making an informed evaluation on the religion which is necessary to support their decision either to proceed with, or to opt out from, the prospective conversion.

Previous studies that explore the conversion in these types of contexts support the above argument and reveal that potential converts to a minority and a non-proselytising religion normally experience an active search for information on their prospective religion before their conversion. It is also worth repeating here that many minority religions are simultaneously non-proselytising and this helps to explain the similar stage sequence in a conversion process to a minority and a non-proselytising religion, as illustrated in Diagram II on page 180.

For instance, the Danes who converted to Islam generally experienced their religious quest through reading the holy book of Al-Quran, and from which “they got logical answers to their questions” (Mogensen 2003: 315). One of the Danish Muslim converts named Aishah, a devoted Jehovah’s Witness before she converted to Islam, had studied the Bible in great depth but she had certain issues with the text about Muhammad in the Bible. These issues were the impetus of the religious crisis in her experience, and after she carried out an intensive study on the Al-Quran, she concluded that the Bible contains corrupted passages (Mogensen 2003: 315). Thus, in Aishah’s conversion experience, the intensive study of the Al-Quran represented the quest stage as it provided her with relevant information that allowed her to make an informed evaluation on Islam and Christianity. The evaluation accordingly provided her with the answers to the issues that she had been having and thus led her to proceed with her intention to convert to Islam.

Likewise, it is the rarity of the knowledge on Islam that led the British Muslim converts to their quest in their conversion process. Section 6.4.1.2 of this chapter mentions the conversion experience of Daud Talbot, a British Muslim convert who participated in Al-Qwidi’s study. After having a chance encounter with Islam in Papua New Guinea, Talbot had been searching for a Muslim community on his return to Britain that eventually led him to Leeds where he spent time with the community and attended religious talks before he made the decision to convert to Islam (Al-Qwidi 2002:289).

It would also be appropriate to mention here, the possibility that the dissemination of the knowledge component occurs in different stages throughout a conversion process.

The first stage of the knowledge dissemination can be considered as the dissemination of frame knowledge which consists of the broad outline and general principle of the religion in question. This type of knowledge is normally disseminated during the encounter stage, as the persuasion component of context that supports the encounter stage should consist of some information value so that the persuasion component can be as influential and persuasive as it could be to transform a point of contact between a potential convert and the prospective religion into a meaningful religious encounter.

As the initial interest in the religion has been cultivated by the dissemination of the frame knowledge during the encounter stage, the distribution of detailed knowledge becomes vital in order to feed the interest of the potential converts. This is the type of knowledge that forms the knowledge component of context that supports the quest stage in a conversion process. The detailed knowledge component will fill in the information gaps within the frame knowledge and thus will provide the necessary relevant details of the religion to the potential converts.

Thus, the above discussion contributes further evidence to the stage sequence analysis. The necessity to have the frame knowledge before the detailed information indicates how the encounter stage should occur prior to the quest stage. Moreover, the above discussion can also explain as to how and why an individual can be motivated to learn about a religion that the person has no knowledge about before he or she embarks on a conversion process.

Apart from the minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts, another type of religious context that also has a quest stage as a crucial stage in conversion is the

proselytising-religion context. As mentioned earlier, a proselytising-religion can also be a minority religion and in this particular case, the religion would fall under the proselytising-religion category as the effects of the proselytising properties can outweigh the effect of the minority properties of the same religion. Accordingly, the proselytising property of the religion not only defines the exact nature of the quest stage but it also determines the position of the stage within a conversion process. Therefore, potential converts to a proselytised minority religion will experience the conversion stages in a sequence which is essentially different from the one experienced by those who convert to a non-proselytised minority religion. The characters of the quest stage and its sequential position in a conversion process in a proselytising-religion context are examined in the following section.

#### **6.4.2.3 Quest stage in proselytising-religion context**

One main example of a religious quest in a proselytising-religion context that dominates the conversion literature is the quest for Christianity. For example, the conversion process to Christianity among the native group of Forest Tobelo in Indonesia had been carried out in the encounter-quest-crisis sequence and the quest experienced by this native group had been directed by the missionaries in the form of the study of the Bible. The study “accompanied by a set of pictures that portray various stories in the Bible, lasted approximately seven months with three meetings a week” (Duncan 2003: 314). The Bible’s Study represents the detailed knowledge that was provided by the missionaries.

Similarly, interested Kelabits in Sarawak, Malaysia who converted to Christianity attended a Bible School organised by Christian missionaries after their first encounter

with the missionaries (Amster 2009: 316). In view of the slightly slower but increasing number of Kelabits who converted to Christianity, the missionaries operated on a broader scale in their preaching activity after the end of the Second World War and directed more and more Kelabits to attend the Bible School that was set up in a coastal town of Lawas (ibid.).

Thus, the above examples demonstrate that in a proselytising-religion context, it had not only been the persuasion and trust (component of context for the encounter stage) that is sourced from the proselytisers in order to encourage outsiders to have a meaningful first contact with the religion, but the proselytisers were also responsible in disseminating the knowledge component that accordingly allowed potential converts to acquire knowledge, the very role of the quest stage.

Consequently, with the acquisition of both the frame and detailed knowledge on the proselytising religion, it is natural for the potential converts to evaluate the proselytising religion with their existing religion and it is the outcome of such evaluation that dictates whether or not potential converts will experience a religious crisis. In other words, a religious crisis could only occur if the potential convert could tolerate the contradiction found between their existing religion and the potential religion, and thus were willing to accept the outcome of the comparative evaluation, as illustrated in Section 6.4.1.1 earlier.

This is also to say that not all religious quests will lead to a religious crisis. While some found themselves experiencing a religious crisis as explained above, others however dropped out of the Bible study or any kind of religious quest if they dismissed

the outcome of the quest as irrelevant and incompatible with their religious expectations. Examples of such dropping-out of religious quest can be seen from the study on the conversion of the Romanians to Jehovah's Witness where "those who do not perceive the immediate benefits of the Witnesses' group (making friends, receiving answers to questions related to one's religion, etc.) or who consider the costs of attending the group to be too high usually leave the Bible study" (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007: 85).

Similar opting-out behaviour was also detected in the conversion experience of the Forest Tobelo ethnic group in Indonesia to Christianity where there were attendees to the Bible Study who opted out of the religious lessons when they found the teaching failed to recognise their existing lifestyle such as their fetishes (Duncan 2003: 314). Others stopped their attendance simply because "they were content with the ones they had, [and so] they saw no need to add yet another to their pantheon..." (ibid.).

Thus, given the above discussion, it can be argued that the proselytising-religion context has a considerable influence upon the sequence of the conversion stages. This is where we can see the property of the religion is being translated into an important element of the religious context where the proselytising property of the religion determines the quest stage to take place between the encounter and the crisis stage, as depicted in Diagram II on page 180.

An equally important fact highlighted by the above discussion is that the quest stage is a turning point in a conversion process that presents an individual with two important options: either to carry on with the process or to entirely opt out from it particularly

upon learning the incompatibility between the prospective religion and one's religious expectations. However, it is rather interesting to point out that, as far as the religious conversion literature is concerned, only conversion studies to Christianity and Jehovah's Witness, both are a proselytising religion, that highlight the occurrence of such turning-point in a conversion process.

The above point thus begs the question: can we predict similar behaviour of opting-out of religious quest to occur in other types of religious contexts? It is tempting to answer "yes" to this question as a potential convert could actually leave the conversion process during the religious quest, or at any other point during the process for that matter. However, there is a lack of evidence to support this assumption mainly because the existing studies focus more on successful conversion stories across different religions and cultures. Such trend in the existing literature consequently and inevitably overlooks the failed conversion stories that otherwise can illustrate individuals detaching themselves from the conversion process due to incompatibility or other factors. Thus, if future studies could give an equal consideration to failed conversion stories, a more complete analysis of the religious quest could possibly be achieved.

Throughout the first three stages in a conversion experience, namely the crisis, the encounter and the quest stage, potential converts generally have evaluated their new religious option where by the end of their quest stage, potential converts would crucially decide either to go on or to opt out of the conversion process. In a successful conversion process, the evaluation of the existing religion against the prospective one will lead the potential convert to choose the latter as a worthy replacement of the former. Subsequently, the potential converts will experience the interaction stage,

which is essentially a preparatory stage towards the break from the existing religion of the potential converts. The interaction stage is discussed next.

### **6.4.3 Interaction Stage**

As can be seen from Diagram II on page 180, the interaction stage exists in all types of religious contexts identified by this study. Such parallel occurrence of the interaction stage in a conversion process without doubt indicates the parallel presence of the direction and control components of context which have a relevant bearing on the interaction stage. What is more significant about the nature of these particular components of context is that, the direction and control resources can only be utilised in an orderly manner. This finding is highly pertinent to the stage sequence analysis as this will demonstrate the fact that, despite the direction and control components are readily available throughout a conversion process particularly in majority-religion and proselytising-religion contexts, they cannot be utilised prematurely or at any point of the process. As a result, this defines the position of the interaction stage and the unique stage sequence across different types of religious settings.

Section 6.4.3.1 will firstly examine the sequential position of the interaction stage in a conversion process in a proselytising-religion context, and will offer plausible evidence to support the above argument.

#### **6.4.3.1 Interaction stage in proselytising-religion context**

The interaction stage in a proselytising-religion context occurs in a way similar to that of the encounter and quest stage within the same context where all these stages are ‘aided’ and directed by the religious missionaries of the proselytising religion. Thus, it



is plausible to argue that the direction and control components of context that are vital for the interaction stage to function have always been readily available throughout a conversion process in this type of religious context.

However, this study finds that the components cannot be imposed on potential converts at any point along the conversion process, despite they are being readily available throughout the process. This is because the preparation to break from the religion, i.e. the fundamental role of the interaction stage, can only be made, as mentioned earlier, after the potential converts make an informed evaluation whether or not they would proceed with the conversion process. Thus, it is only after the utilisation of the awareness component that supports the evaluation during the crisis stage, and the potential converts have decided to carry on with the conversion process, that the direction and control components can be employed by religious missionaries to direct the potential converts to experience the interaction stage.

The religious conversion of the Romanians to Jehovah's Witness is one of the examples that illustrate how the direction and control components of the proselytising-religion context can only be brought into play after the utilisation of the awareness component. Only those individuals who chose to carry on with their conversion after their crisis stage would allow their existing social network to be replaced by the communal network of the Jehovah Witness through the encapsulation strategy (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007: 86). Hence, utilising by the direction and control resources, the Witness preachers prepared the potential converts for their prospective role and identity as new Witness converts by encouraging them to participate in communal

activities of the group such as singing, scripture recital and prayer, so that a closer relationship with the group could be established (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007:87).

Duncan's (2003) study on the Christian missionary activities among the Forest Tobelo in Java also provides further supporting evidence to the above argument. Despite being perceived by the Forest Tobelo as superior Westerners and as the preachers of a civilised religion, the Christian missionaries could not impose the readily available direction and control resources over the entire community of the Forest Tobelo. Only those who were convinced of the truth of the messages disseminated by the Christian preachers after evaluating the messages vis-à-vis their animist religion could be brought further to experience the religion (Duncan 2003: 315).

Thus, it is clear that the imposition and the utilisation of the key components should be made at an appropriate point along the conversion process. This demonstrates the necessity for an orderly utilisation of the components of context, particularly in terms of the readily available components. Such orderly utilisation of the components thus defines the sequential position of the interaction stage in a conversion process in a proselytising-religion context where the intensified interaction between potential converts and the new religion can only take place after the crisis stage.

A crisis-interaction stage sequence is also observed in a majority-religion context where, similarly, the ever-availability of the direction and control components cannot be prematurely utilised without the occurrence of the crisis stage. The discussion on the interaction stage in a majority-religion context follows next.

#### **6.4.3.2 Interaction stage in majority-religion context**

There is no doubt that the interaction stage in the majority-religion context exists due to the strong presence of the direction and control component of context. Unlike the missionary role in providing the direction and control components in a proselytising-religion context, the direction and control components of a majority-religion context are significantly conceived from the formal institutional framework of the country and the existing reliable relationship that potential converts have with the followers of the prospective religion within their personal network.

For instance, and as argued in section 5.8.1 in Chapter 5, the Islam-driven state policies have been found to impact and dictate the religious and social developments of Brunei in the past two decades that it has inevitably defined the way of life of the population in the country. The Muslim way of life, such as Muslim dress sense and the restrictions of non-*halal* food items, have been adopted not only by the mainstream Muslim society and also increasingly by the non-Muslim populations. Thus, Islam, as the assertive state religion of Brunei, has long been engendering direction and control components that can be utilised in preparing potential converts to Islam and to repudiate ties with their existing religion and form new ones with Islam during the interaction stage.

However, despite the omnipresence of the direction and control component, the interaction stage cannot occur at any point of the conversion process. This study finds that the necessity or the need to carry out the ritual experimentation was only considered and acted upon after the Dusun Muslim converts had made the decision to convert to Islam. Such decision to convert is likely to be made by the converts after

they experienced the crisis stage where the awareness component generated a critical examination of their Dusun religion, vis-à-vis Islam and their existing way of life, leading them to conclude that Islam is a better religion than their existing one.

It was only at this point in a conversion process that the ready-availability of the direction and control components could be utilised and played a significant role in the process as the Muslim Dusun converts started to view the existing religion no longer as an attractive alternative to them. The utilisation of the direction and control components thus indicates the occurrence of the interaction stage in their conversion experience. Moreover, the existing relationship and limitless interaction that the potential converts had with the Muslims within their immediate circle further reinforced the availability of the direction and control resources to support the converts' preparation to break from the Dusun religion. Such utilisation of the already available direction and control resources had been revealed by the Dusun Muslim converts:

**[E92.Muslim Dusun.I10]**

I decided to experiment with the Muslim prayer after I consulted my uncle about my intention to convert to Islam. He advised me to learn more about this particular Muslim duty because from his experience, the prayer had helped him to make the ultimate decision to convert. I basically know about the prayer but obviously, I never paid any attention to its details. So he was willing to guide me through the experiment and throughout the process until I finally converted...  
[Trans.]

**[E93.Muslim Dusun.I23]**

Being familiar with Islam is not similar to actually practising the religion. I learnt this fact when my wife and I tried to fast before we converted, simply to see how it actually felt to fast. It was definitely not easy especially at our age. But my daughters taught us how to deal with the thirst and hunger during the fasting, and *Alhamdulillah*,

we finally managed to fast one whole day after trying for almost a week... [Trans.]

**[E94.Muslim Dusun.I28]**

I remember a month before I converted, I asked my siblings to teach me the proper way to recite the *Syahadah*. I even asked them to teach me the Arabic alphabets and their pronunciation so that I could at least recite the *Syahadah* from the Arabic script rather than from its translation. Although I know *Jawi* writing from school and they are almost similar to the Arabic writing, I never had the intention before to further my knowledge and to learn the Arabic writing. I actually regret my ignorance because it took me a while before I could recite the *Syahadah* properly... [Trans.]

Examining the above interview excerpts, the strong presence of the direction and control components in Brunei's majority-religion context can be seen where the impacts of the components are demonstrated by the existing familiarity that the above informants already had with Islam before they even perceived Islam as a possible religious alternative.

However, it is also clear from the above excerpts that, despite the readily available direction and control components, the components nevertheless played a rather insignificant role outside a conversion process as the informants had taken the availability of these components for granted. In fact, the direction and control components had also been remained insignificant at the early part of the conversion process. The interviews of the informants demonstrate the fact that the ritual experimentation process could only occur after the informants were certain with their intention to convert. The certainty that the informants had before the ritual experimentation is the effects the awareness component which essentially led the informants to lose confidence in the Dusun religion (i.e. the crisis stage), which subsequently convinced them to pursue Islam.

Accordingly, the informants revealed that the only point during their conversion process where they received direction and guidance had been during the ritual experimentation process. Hence, this shows how the direction and control components could only be utilised after the awareness components and thus defines the sequential position of the interaction stage in a majority-religion context, where the stage should only occur after the crisis stage and not before.

This leaves us to examine the direction and control components of context in minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts where this study finds that, in these particular religious contexts, the direction and control components could only be derived from the knowledge component of context. This defines the quest-interaction sequence in a conversion process occurring in these types of religious contexts. The following discussion explains this argument further.

#### **6.4.3.3 Interaction stage in minority-religion and non-proselytising religion contexts**

Unlike the consistent and obvious presence of the components in the majority-religion and proselytising-religion contexts, the presence of the direction and control components within the minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts are less apparent on the surface. As mentioned earlier, potential converts to a minority religion tend to experience a low level of communication and interaction with the followers of their prospective religion, which otherwise is a vital source of direction and control components, as in the case of a majority-religion context. Similarly, missionary activities of a minority and a non-proselytising religion are rather restricted, if not entirely non-existent, which otherwise is the most obvious source that

emanates the direction and control components in a proselytising-religion context. Once again, this is where we can observe and examine the different ways a religious context influences a conversion process in a manner that is highly distinctive to the specific nature of the type of the context itself. Thus, it is of great interest for one to investigate the actual sources of the direction and control components in a minority-religion and non-proselytising religion context.

Further examination into the conversion experience of converts to a minority religion and non-proselytising religion reveals that the direction and control components were mainly derived from the utilisation of the detailed knowledge and information the potential converts had acquired during the quest stage. The knowledge component enabled the potential converts to establish direction and translated relevant information into rules and control pertaining to the norms of the religious group and the kind of religious behaviour that they were expected to adopt.

For instance, Al-Qwidi's (2002) study on the British Muslim converts reveals that the interaction stage of the converts was chiefly in the form of their interaction with the holy book of Al-Quran where "in all cases, a sort of relationship developed between the potential converts and the Qu'ran" (Al-Qwidi 2002: 178). They established direction and control from what they read and learnt from the Al-Quran that generated appropriate changes in religious behaviour of the potential converts. Al-Qwidi reveals that her respondents privately carried out the Muslim prayer, the fasting and made an effort to cut down on alcohol consumption, to adopt modest dress sense and to stop visiting nightclubs and bars (ibid.: 177-178).

Likewise, the American Muslim converts also experienced the interaction stage in an identical manner. Relying on the knowledge they gained during the quest stage, these Muslim converts voluntarily gave up porcine products, wore *hijab* (for female converts), and attempted to perform the Muslim prayer and fasting during Ramadhan before their conversion to Islam (Bowen 2009: 57).

Thus, it is evident that the presence of the direction and control components in a minority-religion context is mainly through the utilisation of the detailed knowledge and information they acquired during the quest stage which occurred earlier in the conversion process. The above discussion is therefore implying that, the reliance on the knowledge component as the source of the direction component of context determines the sequence of the quest-interaction stage in the minority-religion and the non-proselytising religion contexts, as illustrated in Diagram II on page 180. Only through the utilisation of the information gained during the quest stage that the direction and control resources can be generated in order to support the existence of the interaction stage and to bring the potential converts into an intensified contact with their prospective religion.

It however cannot be denied that the way the direction and control components exist in the minority-religion and the non-proselytising-religion contexts is somewhat less evident and explicit in comparison to the existence of the same components in the majority-religion and the proselytising-religion contexts where there seems to be no dispute in regard to the apparent availability of the components in these types of contexts.



In justifying the above statement, it is worthwhile to consider the delicate enforceability issue pertaining to the direction and control components in the minority-religion and non-proselytising religion contexts. Given the fact that the religion is a minority and a non-proselytising, and that the religion is rather foreign and unpopular in the country of the converts, the religion is likely to be in a weaker position in comparison to a majority and a proselytising religion which are likely to have the necessary means of enforceability and control over its potential converts. Thus, there are always risks involved for a minority religion and a non-proselytising religion in putting directives and enforcing decisions on individuals during what should be a voluntary-based conversion process. Potential converts could easily abandon the conversion process particularly if they were not yet prepared to put themselves under the control or the authority of the prospective religion.

What is equally significant about the interaction stage occurring in the minority-religion and the non-proselytising religion contexts is that, the interaction stage could coalesce with the commitment stage (Al-Qwidi 2002: 180). It is true that, as the prospective religion has now been evaluated through the experimental engagement in ritual practices, the lifestyle of the prospective religion is no longer an unknown territory of knowledge to the potential converts. They now understand the requirement of their prospective religion which facilitates the decision to convert and lead the potential converts to the commitment stage.

However, as pointed out in Chapter 3, the British Muslim converts had already established their commitment to Islam even when they were still in the interaction stage. This significantly affects the existence of the commitment stage as a separate

stage in the conversion process (Al-Qwidi 2002: 180), and this is what seemed to cause the variation in the stage sequence across different types of religious contexts identified by this study. The commitment stage is discussed next.

#### **6.4.4 Commitment Stage**

The commitment stage is one of the conversion stages that are examined to an extent in Chapter 3, primarily because of the different key findings that emerge from the existing studies. It is fitting to repeat here that the conversion studies which were conducted in a proselytising-religion context highlight the observable occurrence of the commitment stage where new converts to the proselytising religion normally experienced the public declaration of their affiliation to a new religion, as revealed by Pitulac and Nastuta's (2007) study on the Romanian's conversion to Jehovah's Witness.

Studies on a minority religion and a proselytising religion however yield different findings. One of the studies is Al-Qwidi's study which has been mentioned above. Another study is the examination of the conversion process to Buddhism in South Africa which reveals the absence of the commitment stage in the South Africans' conversion process to the religion (Parker 2007: 126).

While it has been made clear in Chapter 3 that the variation in the above findings pertaining to the existence of the commitment stage is generally sourced from the types of religious context within which the conversion process occurs, this chapter will further investigate how the nature of the religious context is responsible for the existence, or non-existence, of the commitment stage as a separate, individual stage in

the conversion process and thus affects the stage order. By employing the findings of Chapter 5 that identifies the support component of context as the relevant component for the commitment stage, as demonstrated in Table II on page 178, the following discussion will argue that the absence of the commitment stage in the minority-religion and the non-proselytising religion contexts is due to the absence of the support component of context which causes the different stage order to occur in these types of religious contexts. The details to support this argument are as follows.

#### **6.4.4.1 Absence of commitment stage in minority-religion and non-proselytising religion contexts**

As presented in the discussion of the stage in Chapter 3, this study has argued that the non-significance and the non-existence of the commitment stage are due to the nature of the minority-religion and the non-proselytising contexts. Because the religion is rather unpopular, it is plausible that the commitment towards such types of religion could have consolidated much earlier in the conversion process. This is because, without deep interest and commitment towards this type of religion, no one would be willing to seek for or to ‘interact’ with the religion which they were fully aware of the potential risks the potential converts would have to face as the consequences of their association with the religion.

Taking the above argument further, this study offers an explanation for the absence of the commitment stage by arguing that it is the absence of the support component of context that leads to the non-existence of the religious commitment in the minority-religion and the non-proselytising religion contexts.

There are two reasons for the absence of the support component in these types of contexts. Firstly, the potential converts to a minority and a non-proselytising religion could not garner support from the community of their prospective religion. As illustrated by Al-Qwidi's study, the British Muslim converts did not have any conscious guidance from any Muslims and had not even experienced any student-teacher rapport with individual Muslims (Al-Qwidi 2002: 175).

Secondly, in comparison to the conversion experience Dusun Muslim converts who would only convert if they had the approval and support from their immediate social networks as explained in Chapter 5, potential converts to a minority religion and a non-proselytising religion might not receive similar amount of support from their personal social circle. Once again, this is where we can consider the effects of the minority status that Islam has in Britain where the minority status of Islam in the country inevitably causes the lack of familial support towards their prospective conversion. Amaani, one of Al-Qwidi's respondents, believes the lack of support from her parents stemmed from the negative media portrayal of Islam in Britain:

Because of the negative image that Islam has and because it is so strict, well, compared to Christianity, my parents attitude was 'you should be getting out there enjoying yourself' (Amaani's interview, cited in Al-Qwidi 2002: 219)

Whereas, Suliman, another Al-Qwidi's informant who kept his conversion to Islam a secret for three months, talked about his parents' angry outbursts when he finally announced his conversion to them where his father demanded an explanation as to where he had gone wrong bringing him up (Al-Qwidi 2002: 219). Although the real reason as to why Suliman decided to keep his conversion to himself is not mentioned

in Al-Qwidi's analysis, such decision is a sufficient hint of the fact that Suliman must have forgone the public ritual enactment of his commitment to Islam. What is equally significant here is the fact that his father's angry reactions and demand for explanation for the conversion could be taken as a reflection of the lack of support that Suliman received from his family.

Thus, just as how the low degree of social interpersonal relationship between potential converts and the followers of a minority or a non-proselytising religion can paralyse the modes of persuasion and trust in the encounter stage, the absence of such relationship and the anticipation of potential disapproval and objection from family quarters of the potential converts can also easily disable the modes of the support resources of context, which otherwise is necessary for the commitment stage to occur and operate.

Further evidence to support the above argument is the conversion process of the South Africans to Buddhism. Similar to the conversion experience of the British Muslim converts, the Buddhist converts in South Africa also considered themselves as becoming practicing Buddhists even before they were formally declared as the followers of the religion (Parker 2007: 126) As already mentioned in Chapter 3, all Parker's respondents could not recall any particular moment that they considered as a pivotal point in their conversion process that could signify their transition from being a non-Buddhist to being a Buddhist (ibid.).

Parker's study suggests that the absence of the commitment stage in the conversion process of the South Africans is due to the absence of the support component of

context, particularly the support from their personal network. Although Parker does not examine the causal link between the absence of support component and the converts' decision to sidestep the formal ceremony of commitment, the interview excerpts of Parker's respondents are very telling in what they revealed. For instance, although one of Parker's respondents sidestepped the formal refuge ceremony that otherwise would signify his official commitment to Buddhism, the respondent made it clear that the absence of the official declaration of his conversion to Buddhism should not be taken as him deliberately undermining his commitment to the religion because "he considers himself a Buddhist and lives a Buddhist way of life" (Parker 2007: 117). Parker's interview transcript further reveals that the one reason for his decision to sidestep the formal ordination ceremony is because his family had found it difficult to accept him as Buddhist:

The main reason is his family whom he says are Christians and he "does not want to scare them off" as they already have problems with him being a Buddhist and he says they would have difficulty accepting such a formal ceremony (Parker 2007: 116).

Likewise, another of Parker's respondents had also not seen the necessity of having a formal declaration of the religious conversion. Instead she believed that her conversion to Buddhism was a natural religious progression that did not require a transformative moment of the conversion (Parker 2007: 120). It would appear that, because she had been living a Buddhist way of life long before she was truly becoming one, she had lost many friends and had also become estranged from her practicing Christian daughter (Parker 2007: 136). Whilst another respondent who also considered his conversion to Buddhism does not need to have a defining moment which could signify his formal conversion evidently could not elicit any considerable support from his

family circle. His interview excerpt highlights the fact that his family are devoted Christians who at one point, sent ministers to him in an attempt to talk him out of his intention to convert to Buddhism (Parker 2007: 140).

Thus, the above discussion demonstrates the clear causal link between the existence of the support component context and the existence of the commitment stage in a conversion process. The emphasis of analysis on the support component of context reveals that the potential converts to a minority and a non-proselytising religion are likely to have less support resources which they can utilise that could enable them to experience the commitment stage. As the above examples have demonstrated, the absence of the support component within these contexts denies the converts the opportunity of having a public ritual enactment of commitment, which otherwise is a significant feature of the commitment stage. This finding thus amounts to the cumulative evidence that support the key argument of question 6B which suggests that the religious context is the determinant that influences the stage order of a conversion process.

In contrast, the formal and public commitment is present in the conversion process in majority-religion and proselytising-religion contexts. The following discussion will analyse and illustrate that the potential converts to these types of religions are generally able to derive support resources which they then utilised to provide them with the opportunity to formally affiliate to the new religion.

#### **6.4.4.2 Commitment stage in majority-religion and proselytising-religion contexts**

The discussion in section 5.9 in Chapter 5 explains in length the characters of the commitment stage in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts specific to the nature of Brunei's majority-religion context within which the process unfolded. It has been made clear from the discussion that the presence of the support component of context is extremely crucial for the commitment stage to exist and to be experienced by the converts. The support component for the Dusun Muslim converts was mainly sourced from the same circle of personal network that provided the converts with the persuasion and trust component, and the direction and control component which are crucial for the respective encounter and interaction stage to occur and operate, as illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

**[E95.Muslim Dusun.I28]**

So we told our family about our intention to convert to Islam; not just my family but also my wife's family. We were very fortunate because my siblings and my wife's sister have supported us all the way through, guiding us to learn the Muslim prayer and teach us the do's and the don'ts when fasting during Ramadhan. So, they were happy for us when we made the final decision and to set the date for our conversion... [Trans.]

**[E96.Muslim Dusun.I31]**

Honestly speaking, my wife and I never had any second thought about converting. All my children had already converted several years before we did, and since most of them live with us, I can say our life had been arranged according to the Muslim way. In fact, we did not have to prepare much for our conversion, apart from learning how to do the Muslim prayer. It was definitely a steep learning curve because of our old age but it is comforting to know my children were always there to support and look after us... [Trans.]

Apart from the close kin relationship generating the support component of context, it is also the existing familiarity with Islam that equally engenders such support from the



converts' personal network and thus empowered them to commit and convert to Islam. The availability of such support is evident from the interview of the Dusun Muslim converts, particularly those who converted from the 1990s onward where on average, they had their declaration of faith within their personal circle, in a ceremony attended by their Dusun family and relatives. This illustrates how the existing familiarity with Islam has helped to foster support and understanding from the Dusuns that consequently allowed the converts to have their commitment ritual to be performed in a public domain.

To further this argument and to appreciate how vital the support component of context actually is in supporting the commitment stage, the following interview excerpts will illustrate how an absence of family support could effectively impede converts' initial intention to commit to a new religion and thus prevent the commitment stage from occurring. These interview excerpts are part of the data that were obtained from the date of conversion sampling where they are the interviews of the converts whose conversion took place before the 1990s, during which Islam was yet to be a majority-religion of the country.

For instance, the conversion experience of a 60-year-old male convert demonstrates how his family's objection delayed the pace of his conversion process:

**[E97.Muslim Dusun.I21]**

I actually wanted to convert in 1980 but my mother strongly objected to my intention. I understood why she objected. I was the eldest son and she didn't want my conversion to bring shame to our family. So there I was, feeling frustrated and yet, I didn't dare to go against my mother's wish... [Trans.]

Whereas in the case of 37-year-old female convert, the fear of disapproval from her family impeded her from progressing further towards the commitment stage in the 1980s:

**[E98.Muslim Dusun.I36]**

The desire to convert was already there but I was still in college at that time. If I decided to carry on with my intention to convert back then, my parents might have disowned me because that was what normally happened to new converts during that period... [Trans.]

Similar experience of family's rejection of the intention to convert was revealed by the following informant:

**[E99.Muslim Dusun.I15]**

What kind of human being would that make me if I still went on with my intention to convert when my mother seemed to well up at the slightest mention of Islam?... [Trans.]

From the above excerpt, we can see how the lack of support could effectively prevent a potential convert from realising their intention of converting to Islam. Conversion to Islam has been seen, particularly by the hard-lined family members, as an act of betrayal which violated the rules within family relationships. Even worse, as revealed by one of the key informants of this study, there had been Dusun parents who went all the way and resolutely cut off the familial relationship with the converted offspring, inevitably turning a religious conversion to become a factor in long-standing family feuds.

Because of this, many informants who could not elicit an adequate amount of support from their family circle were left with no options but to delay their conversion to a

much later time. Thus, unlike those converts whose family network supports their intention where it took them a maximum of a year to finally convert to the religion, the informants who were deprived of the support resources had to delay their conversion until such resources could be garnered for their utilisation. For instance, a 56-year-old housewife took eight years before she finally converted to Islam while there is a 10-year lapse between the first time a 47-year-old female clerk learnt about Islam and the day she finally became a Muslim. However, of all Muslim Dusun who participated in this study, it was a 55-year-old female teacher who took the longest time to finally convert to Islam where she waited for 35 years before she had the support from her personal network and thus finally converted to Islam in 2007.

Given the above understanding on the effects of the support component onto the commitment stage, it reinforces the argument that has been put forward in section 5.9.2 in Chapter 5 which argues that the commitment stage is a ‘big jump’ in choice. Without the support resources, the potential converts do not have the necessary means to iron out their fear and insecurities about making the ‘big jump’ and converting to a new religion. Thus, the absence of support resources will effectively delay the occurrence of the commitment stage.

What can also be added to this argument is that, the role of the interaction stage is therefore to lessen the gap of the big jump to a new religion by preparing the potential converts to experiment with the ritual practices of the prospective religion. It is clear from the discussion on the interaction stage of the Dusun Muslim converts and to put it alongside the above discussion on the characteristics of the commitment stage, the ritual experimentation of fasting and the Muslim prayer as well as to dress modestly

helped the converts to be less fearful of the choice or the prospective big jump they were about to make. This argument also effectively defines the interaction-commitment stage sequence in a majority-religion context.

Likewise, the above argument could also be extended to explain the interaction-commitment sequence in a proselytising-religion context. In his study of the Taiwanese converting to Christianity, which is a proselytising religion in the country, Chao (2006) reveals that many Christian converts he interviewed “appreciated the psychological comfort, emotional support and acceptance” which they gained from their affective bonds with the pastor and members of the church they frequently attended before their conversion (Chao 2002: 199). Accordingly, Chao finds that the new converts who had “developed affective bonds” with church staff were more likely to proceed to the commitment stage within six months after their first active participation in church activities, in comparison to those who had not. The latter would take a considerable two years and more to make the decision to finally convert and commit to Christianity (Chao 2006:199).

This therefore confirms that the intensified interaction with church members experienced by the Taiwanese serves as a mode to lessen the gap for the ‘big jump’ to the new religion as it erased the fear that the latter might have before the conversion.

It is also evident from the above discussion that, without the support resources derived from the members of the prospective religion, it can effectively delay the decision to commit to the new religion. The positive relationship with religious missionaries and the church members, forms the solid basis for social and mutual support, from which

the Christian converts could derive the sense of security and thus were confident enough to make the formal commitment to the religion. In contrast, without having a constant contact with the support component, a conversion process of a potential convert would be delayed in reaching the commitment stage. This is perhaps what happened to the Taiwanese who took more than two years to finally convert as they were slower in gaining an affirmation that could convince them they were making the correct course of action to convert to Christianity.

We now come to the final stage in a conversion process, that is the consequences stage. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the consequences stage is experienced by new converts in all types of religious contexts. The following discussion will argue that, it is the existence of the acceptance component of context that ensures the sequential position of the consequences stage as the final stage in a conversion process, and the following discussion will explain this argument in detail.

#### **6.4.5 Consequences Stage**

In the case of the consequences stage, the intuitive way to explain the consequences stage as the final stage in the conversion process is possibly to suggest that the occurrence of the consequences stage is simply due to the logical arrangement of the stage. In other words, it is natural to expect new converts to acquire a new religious identity to replace the one they have abandoned following their conversion. This already defines the logical function and the sequential position of the consequences stage in a conversion process, irrespective of the type of the religious context within which the stage occurs.

There is no reason for this study to reject the validity of this logical presupposition. However, this does not mean that the examination of the consequences stage cannot be carried out in the same way as the examination of other stages as presented earlier. The following discussion will offer an equally significant explanation as to why the consequences stage is the final stage in a conversion process by examining the stage from the standpoint of the relevant component of context for the consequences stage, the acceptance component, as illustrated in Table II on page 178.

The following discussion will argue that the presence of the acceptance component of context not only will allow new converts to adopt new religious behaviour and outlook but more significantly, the availability of the acceptance resources will prevent a conversion process from reverting a new convert to his or her old religion, causing the consequences stage to fail to occur as the final stage in a conversion process.

Utilising Kose's argument that a conversion would move new converts into a realm of social unacceptability from their comfort zone of social acceptability (Kose 1996: 140), this study finds that the conversion studies on a minority religion and a non-proselytising religion provides clear evidence to support this contention. The examination of the consequences stage occurring within the context of these two religions is provided below.

#### **6.4.5.1 Consequences stage in minority-religion and non-proselytising- religion contexts**

Examining the findings of the existing studies, this study discovers that the level of social unacceptability is higher than that of the social acceptability in the minority-religion and the non-proselytising-religion contexts. New converts in these two types of contexts were more likely to be rejected by, and receive negative treatments from, their immediate social circle largely because the latter had been against the conversion. Such level of social unacceptability without doubt affects the availability of the acceptance component which new converts could utilise in their conversion process.

For instance, the Latino Muslim converts in the United States to Islam immediately found themselves experiencing “challenges, questioning, confrontation, even ridicule” from the Latino community (Martinez-Vazquez 2008: 67) as well as from their family who they tried to convince that their conversion to Islam was an educated decision. The Latino converts participated in Martinez-Vazquez’s study revealed that they were induced to “work harder on their transformation” as their family had grown suspicious of Islam as they really thought the converts were being manipulated by the religion (Martinez-Vazquez 2008:69). Sonia, for instance, received constant criticism from her father as she began to wear *hijab* after her conversion. Another female convert named Iris had to explain to her family, who could not accept her conversion, as to why Islam requires its followers to cover up (ibid.).

Likewise, British Muslim converts who participated in Kose’s study also experienced a high degree of social unacceptability particularly within their immediate social circle

after their conversion. There were converts whose parents considered their conversion to Islam as 'social death' because the latter were convinced that their children "had turned their back on everything they had given them" (Kose 1996: 137). Al-Qwidi's informants also revealed a similar experience. It has been mentioned earlier in the discussion of the commitment stage about the lack of support the British Muslim converts received from their parents that caused them to sidestep the commitment stage. Such lack of support received by the converts also translated into the lack of acceptance of their conversion as they faced rejection from their families. Kate, one of Al-Qwidi's respondents, revealed that her conversion severed her relationship with her father as the latter resolutely cut off all communications with her for ten years after her conversion to Islam (Al-Qwidi 2002: 218-219).

The conversion case of the Filipino Muslim converts in Hong Kong however presents the extreme case of the social unacceptability within their social realm. Unlike the other conversion cases in the minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts, the conversion case of the Filipino domestic workers to Islam in Hong Kong presents a rare illustration where the social unacceptability component clearly, by and large, outweighed the social acceptability component. This leads to the total absence of the acceptance component of context that could support the role of the consequences stage and permit the Filipino Muslim converts to attain a new religious identity.

The non-existence of the acceptance resources caused the converts to fail in observing even the basic Muslim duties. Many converts revealed that they could only perform the Muslim prayer "during the absence of their employers or during their leisure times, instead of praying at the designated times" (Hawwa 2000:363). Others felt the pressure



to externalise their Muslim identity because wearing headscarf and performing the Muslim prayer could easily invite ridicule and verbal abuse, as shown in the following interview excerpts:

*Kathy:* I don't want to wear *hijab* outside because I am afraid my relatives in Hong Kong might come to know and inform family in the Philippines.

*Joanna:* You know, my friends make fun of me. I am Muslim now, my sister is a Catholic and my mother is a born-again Christian. They tell me that I will go to *sujud* (one of the stages of the Muslim prayer), my sister will hold the rosary and my mother would sing and dance.

(Kathy and Joanna's interviews, cited in Hawwa 2000: 364).

Hawwa's study finds that such absence of the acceptance component in the conversion process of the Filipino Muslim converts has caused some of the converts to opt for religious reversion, primarily to remove the religious burden and to avoid further detrimental criticism and mockery from their personal circle and the mainstream society (Hawwa 2000:365).

The above finding seems to imply that, the successful attainment of new religious identity, the main role of the consequences stage, can only be achieved with the presence of the acceptance component. The lack of the acceptance component can fail the whole process of religious conversion as a new convert could opt for religious reversion in order to alleviate the negative effects caused by the absence of the acceptance components. Hence, in this particular case, as the main role of the

consequences stage cannot be attained, the stage cannot be seen as the final stage in the conversion process.

Having argued the above however, this study also finds that social unacceptability is not necessarily permanent and there are ways and chances for the social unacceptability component to transform into a much more tolerant kind. The transformation of social unacceptability into social acceptability evidently occurs in the conversion experience of some new converts. For example, the father of Sonia, a Latina Muslim convert, who constantly criticised her wearing *hijab* in public, over time had become tolerant towards Sonia's new religion. According to her, his father's and her family's acceptance of her religion was manifested through the way her family refrained themselves from eating in front of her or inviting her for meal in daylight hours during Ramadhan (Martinez-Vazquez 2008: 68).

Kose and Al-Qwidi also found similar kind of transformation into social acceptability within the converts' personal circle. The parents of Alex, one of Kose's respondents, who were initially extremely worried with his decision to convert to Islam had become appreciative and reacted positively towards the changes Alex had been making since his conversion as they noticed he "was still normal, healthy and not doing anything crazy or not dressing differently" (Kose 1996: 138). Likewise, Al-Qwidi's study also reveals that the parent of one of her respondents finally came around and accepted the fact that his son now is a Muslim despite his angry outburst after being told about the conversion (Al-Qwidi 2002: 219).

It can be argued that the transformation of the social unacceptability component into the social acceptability is perhaps because the converts chose to manifest inwardly their new religious identity. Kose argues that the British Muslim converts “do not make their new identity central to all interactions in society...” (Kose 1996: 134). For instance, Rebecca, one of the British Muslim converts participated in Kose’s study, argues that she “does not see a scarf as necessary and she concentrates on changing herself ‘inside’” (Kose 1996: 131). Similarly, Al-Qwidi’s study also finds that her respondents had not seen the necessity of adopting the Muslim dress sense as they believed that “Islam is for all people and that cultural traditions like style of dress were not necessary to be a Muslim” (Al-Qwidi 2002: 210).

Looking at the above findings, this study further suggests the emphasis on the inward manifestation of their new religious identity is plausibly due to the minority-religion context within which the conversion of the above converts took place. Analysing Rebecca’s conversion experience further, Kose revealed that her non-emphasis on observing Muslim dress code after her conversion is because of the restriction imposed by the accepted norms of the society she lives in. As wearing headscarf is not a part of the accepted norms of the British society, Rebecca believed it could elicit unwanted attention if she wore a scarf in public (Kose 1996: 131). This viewpoint is echoed by Rachel, Al-Qwidi’s respondent, who equally believed that Muslim dress sense could inevitably change people’s perception towards her:

I do not feel I need to wear *shalwar kameez* and *hijab*. I feel that because people have a negative impression of it, every time you say you are a Muslim, you have to explain everything (Rachel’s interview, cited in Al-Qwidi 2002: 210).

Kose argues such non-emphasis on the outward manifestation of new religious identity is part of the careful negotiation between the expression of their identity and the type of religious context they are in. This study will expand this argument by suggesting that the inward manifestation of new religious identity is an effective way to relieve the pressure and the negative treatment which had brought some of the Filipino Muslim converts to revert to their old religion. Such careful negotiation with the religious context they lived in, is clear when Kose argues that his respondents only made their new religious identity “central in their interaction with the Muslim community” (Kose 1996: 134). In other words, Muslim converts will only express their identity more visibly once they crossed over into the Muslim community where they understand there will be a strong presence of social acceptability of their new religious lifestyle, and accordingly will be able to avoid the negative treatment and remarks from the mainstream society.

Similarly, Parker’s study on the South African Buddhist converts also yields similar findings. A considerable number of Buddhist converts participated in Parker’s study preferred to carry out meditation and other spiritual practices at the Buddhist centre they are associated with, rather than in the private of their homes. Examining further the conversion experience of these South African Buddhist converts, Parker finds out that such choice was driven by the apparent opposition of their family and friends towards their conversion to Buddhism and that they would feel safer and could fully perform their religious duties as a Buddhist when they were within Buddhist-friendly social circle (Parker 2007: 136).

Thus, it is evident that the Buddhist converts in South Africa tended to conceal their new religious identity when they were within the social realm which they could detect some sense of social unacceptability, such as opposing family members and friends, solely to avoid confrontation and negative treatment. This therefore reflects the conscious decision to only externalise their new religious identity when they are within social circle that could ensure them of acceptance resources.

It is now clear how the existence of the acceptance component of context provides a plausible explanation for the sequential position of the consequences stage as the final stage in a conversion process in the minority-religion and non-proselytising-religion contexts. The availability of the acceptance resources in a conversion process reduces the tendency for religious reversion and apostasy which otherwise illustrates a change in the direction in a conversion process, which will effectively prevent new converts from attaining a new religious identity, the essential role of the consequences stage.

Possibilities for religious reversion is however rather minimal in proselytising-religion and majority-religion contexts. This is primarily because the availability of the acceptance component is secured in part through the community of the new religion, and the mainstream community, as in the case of new converts in the majority-religion context. Fundamentally, the presence of the acceptance component allows the new converts in these two types of religious contexts to successfully attain a new religious identity and thus determine the consequences stage as the very final stage to occur in their conversion process.

#### **6.4.5.2 Consequences stage in proselytising-religion and majority- religion contexts**

As mentioned above, the community of the new religion of the converts can ensure the availability of the acceptance component. Gillespie argues that “the obvious organizational affiliation of the conversional change provides a new sense of belonging and acceptance” (Gillespie 1991: 73). The existing conversion studies support Gillespie’s argument where these studies reveal that it is natural for new converts to forge quality relationship with the existing members of the community of their new religion after the conversion. Such social interaction without doubt generates a sense of acceptance and belonging that accordingly support and encourage the new converts to adopt new religious behaviour and identity. In other words, the affiliation between new converts and the community of their new religion guarantees the presence of the acceptance component that accordingly facilitates the religious transformation of the new converts.

One type of religious context that naturally allows new converts to establish a social bond with their new religious community is the proselytising-religion context. If we followed closely the discussion on the conversion process to a proselytising religion, we can see how the new converts to this type of religion have already formed a coherent social interaction and had already been able to identify themselves with the religious community of their new faith throughout the conversion process. In many ways, this guarantees the presence of the acceptance component of context for the new converts to utilise.

For instance, the assimilation process of the Romanians who converted to Jehovah's Witness into the Witness community had started as early as during the interaction stage of their conversion process. Pitulac and Nastuta's study reveals that the unconditional acceptance of the Witness community towards the potential converts evidently has a critical influence on the decision made by the latter to carry on the conversion process until they reached the official commitment stage (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007: 89). Significantly, as the converts experienced the consequences stage, such unconditional acceptance had clearly outweighed the associated costs and negative consequences in terms of, as Kose characterises, the social unacceptability as it is rather inevitable for the new Witness converts to endure criticisms of non-followers particularly those of their own family and friends (*ibid.*). However, because the converts had been well received by, and developed a solid social bond with, the community of their new religion, the social unacceptability that exists within their family circle had inconsequential impacts on their conversion. Accordingly, the outweighing of the social acceptability against the social unacceptability allowed the Witness converts in Romania to experience the consequences stage as intended at the end of their conversion process.

Likewise, new converts to a majority religion also earn acceptance and approval from the religious community. However, in the case of these converts, because the religious community is the mainstream society, it is plausible to argue that there is a larger spectrum of social acceptability than that of social unacceptability which accordingly means the new converts to a majority religion can easily find many points along the spectrum of acceptance of the mainstream society that they can utilise to ensure a successful acquisition of a new religious identity.

The conversion experience of new Christian converts in Denmark provides supporting evidence to the above argument. According to Mogensen, his study on these new Christian converts “does yield much information about how converts feel accepted by Christians (i.e. ethnic Danes) after their conversion” (Mogensen 2003: 308). Although Mogensen does not specifically discuss on the correlation between the acceptance of the mainstream Danish society and the converts’ adoption of new identity as Christians, Mogensen nevertheless points out that the acceptance attitudes of the mainstream Christian community towards the converts facilitates the converts’ incorporation into the community which accounts for the remarkable increase in the number of participation in church congregations in the recent years (*ibid.*). In other words, as to align the above evidence to the key argument of this chapter, the availability of the acceptance component of context clearly does not deny the new converts of a successful acquisition of new religious identity where their participation in church activities is a clear indication of the converts’ ability to practice their new religion and to comfortably celebrate their new religious identity.

Further evidence to support the argument that it is the religious context that determines the position the consequences stage as the final stage is the argument that the converts to a majority religion and a proselytising religion do not have to negotiate the manifestation of their religious identity. Unlike the new converts to a minority and a non-proselytising religion, the apparent outweighing of the social acceptability against the social unacceptability in majority-religion and proselytising-religion contexts allows the new converts to emphasise the physical expression of their new religious identity.



Moreover, the fact that the religion of the mainstream society is not that foreign to the non-followers of the religion further facilitates the occurrence of the acceptance component. The conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts proved this is the case. It has been explained in Chapter 2 and later in further detail in Chapter 5 that a considerable number of the Dusun Muslim converts had already been accustomed to the Muslim way of life long before their conversion to Islam. The argument that it is not only the new converts that are familiar with the mainstream society's way of life but also the larger non-Muslim population further guarantees the presence of the acceptance component of context which allows the converts to comfortably externalise their new religious behaviour and identity.

Such physical manifestation of a new religious identity is more evident in the conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts who converted to Islam in the 1990s and beyond, where the availability of the wider acceptance component in a majority-religion context allows the converts to easily observe their religious duties and other religious restrictions, while maintaining good relationship with the non-Muslim Dusuns:

**[E100.Muslim Dusun.I10]**

If I could understand and accept my relatives' adherence to *Temarok* and the Dusun *adat*, I hope they could also accept my religion too. *Alhamdulillah*, I can see they have accepted my conversion especially when I visit them during Ramadhan and they will not serve me with any meal or drink... [Trans.]

**[E101.Muslim Dusun.I14]**

I started to notice that every time I was about to pray at home, my father would turn down the volume of the tele or the radio, and my younger siblings would stop playing outside my room. It seems like they gradually accepted me as a Muslim... [Trans.]

**[E102.Muslim Dusun.I25]**

I still go to Dusun funeral feasts and I still donate food to the family of the deceased. For the Dusuns, they believe that the food would reach the deceased family members and relatives but for me, as a Muslim, I consider my donation as charity that can help to lessen the burden of the family of the deceased in preparing the funeral feast. So far, my donation has never been rejected by any Dusuns. So I guess they understand my intention... [Trans.]

Similar evidence of the attainment of a new religious identity through the outward manifestation of transformation is also revealed by the findings of conversion studies on a proselytising religion. For example, among the key manifestations of religious transformation experienced by the Romanians who converted to Jehovah's Witness is their participation in the preaching activities. It is a common practice for the Witness converts to be coached as a preacher before they could officially commit themselves to the religion (Pitulac and Nastuta 2007: 89). Thus, it is plausible to assume that the new Witness converts would be obligated to sustain their religious participation within the host community after their conversion through the preaching activities. What is significant about this finding is that such fervent participation in communal religious activities not only symbolises their allegiance to their new religion but more importantly, and relevant to the argument of this chapter, indicates the physical manifestation of the successful adoption of new religious role.

All in all, the discussion in this section has shown just how essential the acceptance component of context is in order to ensure the sequential position of the consequences stage as the final stage in a conversion process. The absence of the acceptance component could create a potential for religious reversion and apostasy, evidence that could illustrate the changing direction in a conversion process which would prevent for a new religious identity to be attained and for a consequences stage to take place. This

finding without doubt is in line with the findings of the examination of other conversion stages where the presence, or absence, of the key components of context essentially accounts for the similarity or variation in the sequence of the conversion stages across different types of religious context. The full summary of the discussion and the findings of this chapter is provided in the following section.

### **6.5 Summary**

The type of religious context within which a conversion process occurs, as the key determinant of stage sequence, has been analysed in detail in this chapter and the relevant issues pertaining to the determinant have also been discussed adequately. One of the important findings of this study is that the existence of the components could vary from one type of context to the next, and it is this variation in the existence of the components that produces a different stage sequence for a different type of religious context. This study also reveals an interesting finding pertaining to nature of the component of context where these components should be utilised in an orderly manner throughout the conversion process. This fact further determines the stage order in a conversion process across different religious contexts.

Having explained the key arguments of this thesis as a whole, a few issues and concerns remain outstanding, which this study cannot address adequately. For instance, the mapping and sequencing of the conversion stages are far from complete. The relatively small number of conversion studies that employ the Rambo Model as their theoretical framework restricts the extent to which the sequence of the conversion stages can be generalised, as well as the extent to which the quantity of the types of religious contexts can be identified.

These are among the limitations that I have encountered during writing the result chapters, and I believe a discussion on these limitations will be of use for future research. Thus, the discussion on the limitations of this study, together with a discussion on the prospects for further research are among the main contents of the conclusion chapter of this thesis, which is presented next.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

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This conclusion chapter has five sections. Section 7.1 reports the main findings of this study. It was made clear in Chapter 1 the objectives that this study aims to achieve and the research questions that it seeks to answer. This section revisits these objectives and research questions and illustrates how they have been achieved and answered adequately. Based on the findings of this study, potential contributions to the field of religious conversion are considered in Section 7.2. One of the vital contributions that this study could potentially achieve is to move the Rambo Model beyond its present bounds and to suggest it as a theory that can explain a wider range of conversion cases. The limitations encountered by this study are discussed in Section 7.3 where these limitations are partly entailed by the rarity of relevant data that could further support the comprehensive examination of conversion processes across different religious settings. The limitations however are not necessarily damaging in their consequences. The identification of these limitations can be a useful guide for future works on religious conversion and to point out the possible direction that future studies can take. The prospects for future research are thus discussed in Section 7.4. The last Section 7.5 is my final remark on the study.

### 7.1 Main Findings of the Study

In discussing the main findings of this study, it is perhaps worthwhile to revisit the objectives and the research questions of this study. As stated in section 1.4 in Chapter 1, the first objective of the study is to critically engage the Rambo Model and to enhance the dynamic potential of the model to cut across different religious contexts

and situations. Considering the findings made in the result chapters, i.e. the answers to questions 5A and 6B, it is perhaps fair to say that this study has achieved this objective.

One of the significant findings produced by this study that has helped to achieve the above objective is the evidence that support the argument that the context is not a conversion stage. This study argues that the context should be treated as the background setting within which the conversion process transpires and unfolds. Consequently, having redefined the context, this study has identified the different components of context where each of these components influences a specific conversion stage. Alongside this finding is the identification of the fundamental and culture-free definition of the conversion stages which consequently allows the components of context to construct these culture-free definitions of the stages into the definitions that represent the actual characteristics of the conversion stages as how they have been experienced by the research subjects under study.

The way in which these findings can help to improve the dynamic potential of the Rambo Model can be seen from, firstly, the findings in Chapter 5 where it is revealed that the actual characteristics and definitions of the stages in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts are unique and distinctly specific, principally because of the effects and influences of the majority-religion context have on the conversion process of the converts. For instance, the encounter stage in the conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts should be defined as a personal encounter where this type of encounter tends to occur within the immediate social network of the converts. The constant observation of, and communication with, Muslims close to the converts

have transformed the seemingly common everyday conduct into an instrumentally influential behaviour that embody a greater sense of persuasion component (component of context relevant to the encounter stage) than the structured and authoritative dissemination of information.

Another example is the definition of the interaction stage. In the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts, the definition and the actual characters of the interaction stage is the changes in religious behaviour through the experimentation of Muslim rituals and lifestyle as the converts were preparing to break from their Dusun religion. The availability of direction resources from kin relationship, in addition to the existing constant contact with the Muslim community, aided the converts' ritual and lifestyle experimentation without the need to seek guidance from religious missionaries. Thus, by having the context redefined as the background setting, it is clear that the answer to question 5A is that the definition of the stages in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts are distinctive in character, essentially due to effects of Brunei's majority-religion context.

What is also significant is that, the answers to question 5A helps to achieve the second objective of this study where the analysis of the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts has generated refreshing new insights and understanding of the conversion phenomenon to Islam in Brunei Darussalam.

The findings of the different component of context further supports the analysis to question 6B that seeks to identify the determinant of the variations and the similarities in the stage sequence that occur in the conversion process of the Dusun Muslim

converts in comparison to those conversion processes occurring in different settings. Thus, by analysing the findings of this study against the spread of results of the existing studies in Chapter 6, the analysis has demonstrated how the different components of context are at work at each point or stage. If the relevant component does not exist or is not available, the function of the stage could not operate and thus the conversion process could not go forward.

For instance, within the context of a proselytising religion such as Christianity, the interaction stage will not be properly experienced by an individual who is interested in the religion if there is no church within his immediate vicinity that can precipitate direction and control, the component of context relevant for the interaction stage. Whereas in the minority-religion context, there is a tendency that the potential converts to a minority religion to solely rely on the knowledge component, which defines the existence of the quest stage, as their source of direction and control components to support their intensified interaction with the new religion. This unique situation is primarily due to the low level of communication that the potential converts have with the community of the minority or the non-proselytising religion, which otherwise is a vital source of direction and control component in proselytising-religion and majority-religion contexts. This accordingly defines the quest-interaction sequence in the minority-religion and the non-proselytising-religion contexts.

All in all, the comparison of the findings across different case studies has identified the context as the main determinant of the stage order of a conversion process. As the existence of the components of context essentially varies from one type of context to the next, it is plausible to argue that there should be a different sequence of conversion



stages for a different type of religious context. The careful examination of the findings of this study alongside the findings of the existing studies has enabled this study to achieve its third objective to yield valuable insights that are beyond a simple description of inconsistencies between the sequences of the conversion stages.

The findings of this study has collectively revealed that the Rambo Model possesses the potential to be developed and reformulated so that it could be applied to a wide range of conversion processes to different religions in different kinds of religious and country settings. As shown in the literature review chapter, Rambo's definitions of the conversion stages are unmistakably culturally specific and they are less useful to explain the conversion process that occur in a religious and country context which is not influenced by Christianity or western culture. The findings of this study of redefining context as a background setting and the identification of the different components of context could help to reconstruct the model so that it could become an empirically testable and a general theory of religious conversion. The opportunity to explore the theory-building dimension of this study is one of the implications of this study to the field of religious conversion studies. The implications and contribution of this study is discussed next.

## **7.2 Implications and Contributions of the study**

This study has both theoretical and literature implications. The most significant theoretical implication of this study is that it has created opportunities for theory building for the Rambo Model. It is true that the model does not claim universality but Rambo falls short of explaining concretely why there will and should be variations in the conversion process. Thus, by choosing a case that yields data very unlike the

Christian and Western data that Rambo based his model on, this study has addressed the cultural specificity issue of the model by identifying the different components of context relevant to the conversion process and the culture-free definition of the stages. By adding these new findings to the framework of the Rambo Model, this study has shown that the culture-free definition of the stages and the different components of context are functionally useful in formulating the definition of the stages that are relevant and represent the actual conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts. Thus, the argument that the redefinition of the context allows the Rambo Model to be applied to Brunei's majority-religion context illustrates the potential of the model to extend its range of applicability across diverse types of religious contexts and experiences.

The findings of Chapter 6 provide further opportunities for the Rambo Model to be improved. Utilising the findings of the existing conversion studies, the analysis in Chapter 6 has made the framework of the model to be more sensitive to a wide range of case studies. The investigation of these case studies in search for patterns of stage sequence in a conversion process allows this research to "reconcile evidence across cases, types of data and different investigators" so that similarities in concepts and patterns across different settings can be identified (Eisenhardt 1989: 546). The addition of the new concepts of the different components of context and the culture-free definition of each conversion stage to the model allows this study to present an exploration of how the sequence prediction of the conversion stages is likely to be achieved by laying out the possible typical sequence of conversion stages to occur in different types of religious contexts, as illustrated in Diagram II on page 180. This has

consequently generated a more robust version of the Rambo Model that is potentially more generic in scope from its existing form.

It however should be borne in mind that the sequence of the conversion stages as presented in Diagram II only involve a limited number of conversion studies and thus the prediction is rather crude and there is still so much to be done. But it does essentially identify the opportunities for an improvement in the body of theory. With more studies of this nature to be carried out in the future, new perspectives and concepts that challenge the existing ones can be derived and consequently contribute to the rebuilding of the theoretical framework of the Rambo Model. This is one of the potential literature implications of this study where future studies will not only further support, substantiate and improve the findings of this study and of the existing studies, but it may also start a new trend of comparative analysis of religious conversion processes and thus offers a significant shift in emphasis away from Western-centric and Christian-centric approach on the topic. All in all, the theoretical improvement can provide a promising avenue of research, as will be pointed out in detail later in Section 7.4.

In regard to the research setting, this study has its importance in making new contributions to the existing literature on the conversion to Islam in Brunei. As discussed in Chapter 1, the existing literature pertaining to the conversion to Islam in Brunei solely focuses on the strategies and methodologies of the propagation of Islam. This study produces a completely different type of literature that helps to generate an understanding of the conversion process as well as the complexities and the dynamics behind the process.

Moreover, by putting the perspectives of the Dusun Muslim converts on paper, this study also contributes to the body of literature on the Dusun ethnic group. The different experiences and perspectives of Dusuns, which are the integral and essential part of this study, are the insiders' views that the non-Dusuns might not be able to embrace or understand. Although these views do not necessarily represent the general mainstream thought of the Dusuns, their interpretations of the social, religious and cultural development in the country, as how they had been experienced by the ethnic group are without doubt honest and deserving of thorough consideration.

Having said the above however, this study encountered some limitations that affected the data collection process and the writing process of this thesis. The following section will discuss these limitations in detail.

### **7.3 Limitations of the Study**

This study has several limitations. One of the limitations arose from the lack of data that affects this study's attempt to revise the conceptual schema of the Rambo Model and establish the sequence of the conversion stages. Diagram II on page 180 illustrates the possible, typical sequence of the conversion stages according to the type of religious context within which the conversion occurs. However, the mapping and the sequencing of the conversion stages are far from complete. The relatively small number of studies that employ the Rambo Model as their analytical framework has restricted the extent to which the sequence of the conversion stages can be generalised. For instance, as already mentioned in Chapter 3, none of the studies were conducted in a majority-religion context and as far as this study is concerned, the analysis of conversion process of the Dusun Muslim converts is the first case study to be carried

out in such type of religious context. Such paucity of the existing data has critically caused the stage sequence predicted for a majority-religion context, or any other stage sequence predicted by this study, to be not at all conclusive.

Dealing with an ethnic group that is not fully acquainted with research culture also poses a limitation on the process of data collection. It has been mentioned in Section 4.3.2 of Chapter 4 that there were potential informants who refused the invitation to participate, primarily because of their fear of saying the wrong things in their interviews. Despite the explanation given and the repeated assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, twelve individuals declined the invitation to participate in this study. Ten of these individuals were aged 60 and above. One main reason that seems to be causing their fear of saying the wrong things is because of my occupation as a civil servant. They were not confident in discussing their conversion experience, in fear of bringing up controversial issues that could be interpreted as criticisms of government policies and actions. The other two potential informants had not shown up on the interview day despite their initial consent to take part in the research. The reason for their refusal to be interviewed is not known as they could not be contacted on the day and afterwards.

Such decline to invitation should not be taken lightly as it essentially means that the sampling process needs to be restarted to identify new potential informants. Delays in the sampling process and schedules in many ways means the imposition of critical delays on the entire fieldwork process, where such delays in a sampling process which significantly affected the data collection process means longer time than originally anticipated was needed for the fieldwork to be completed properly. This is where the

overestimation in the amount of time allocated for the data collection period becomes practically useful in dealing with such hold-up in the sampling process and schedules. As mentioned in Chapter 4, this study over-estimated the amount of time that was required to accommodate all the tasks of data collection and preliminary analysis to 160 days to ensure all tasks were properly accomplished during the fieldwork period. This study confirms the usefulness of time over-estimation as the entire fieldwork schedule of this study was completed within the time allocated, allowing the remaining duration of the research course to be solely devoted to data analysis and the writing of the thesis.

It might not be possible to adequately address the above limitations within the context of this study, particularly in terms of the paucity of the relevant data. However, such rarity of evidence to support the findings of this study can suggest the scope and direction that conversion studies should take in the future. A detailed discussion on the directions and prospects for future research is next.

#### **7.4 Prospects for Future Research**

There are several avenues of research that can be undertaken by future studies. One of them is to examine the process of religious conversion that has not been studied before. In view of the small number of existing works of religious conversion that employed the Rambo Model as theoretical framework, as reviewed in Chapter 3, there is certainly a lot more that can be explored in this area of research. By looking at the conversion process not only from the perspective of the religious context within which the process unfolds but also taking into account from where the shift in religious

affiliation begins (the former religion of the converts), it can offer us more potential and promising prospects for future research to consider.

Table III below gives us some sense of the patterns of existing and recent religious conversion studies, and the countries that have been explored and studied so far. Thus, it would be of interest to address the gaps on the table which indicate the combinations of religion, or religious contexts, that have not been researched before. For now, the main focus of the existing conversion studies is mainly on the ‘new religion’ column, primarily because conversion experience is defined by the religion that the potential convert is considering (Kahn and Greene 2004:255).

It is worthwhile to note that we have a somewhat considerable amount of reliable information on religious conversion from a majority religion to a minority religion or a proselytising religion, as can be seen from the table below. Yet, the information on a religious conversion to a majority religion is clearly lacking. This situation further establishes a case for the distinctiveness and the significance of this study in the realm of religious conversion studies as it illustrates the relatively untapped area of research, and thus points out the fundamental importance, particularly from a comparative point of view, for future studies to explore a religious conversion to a majority religion from any type of religion.

Poland is perhaps an interesting case study of religious conversion in a majority-religion context as the country has 92.2% of its population who observe Catholicism (Fox 2008: 141). The suggestion that the majority religion is taught within the education system and that the country’s television and radio broadcasting can only

operate under the licence issued by the Catholic Church (Fox 2008:157) could be taken as predictive cues that Poland's religious context possibly resembles strong similarities to that of Brunei in the recent decades. Thus, future studies that consider a conversion process to Catholicism in Poland as a case study could help to confirm and support the findings made by this study in defining the conversion stages as well as in determining the sequence of those stages in a majority-religion context.

Former Religion New Religion	Majority Religion	Minority Religion	Proselytising Religion	Non-Proselytising religion	Traditional/ Ethnic Religion	Various
Majority Religion	NOT POSSIBLE				Asiyah (Dusun to Islam, Brunei)	
Minority Religion	Al-Qwidi (Christianity to Islam, Britain)  Martinez-Vazquez (Protestantism to Islam, the United States)				Hawwa (Chinese to Islam, Hong Kong)  Parker (African religion to Buddhism, South Africa)	Bowen (Various religions to Islam, the United States)
Proselytising Religion	Pitulac and Nastuta (Orthodox Christian to Jehovah's Witness, Romania)					
Non-proselytising Religion	Al-Qwidi (Christianity to Islam, Britain)  Martinez-Vazquez (Protestantism to Islam, the United States)				Parker (African religion to Buddhism, South Africa)	Bowen (Various religions to Islam, the United States)
Traditional/ Ethnic Religion						
Various	NOT POSSIBLE					

**Table III Summary of recent works employing the Rambo Model  
as theoretical framework**



As mentioned earlier, the illustration provided by the above Table III is still crude and preliminary in nature due to the paucity of relevant data. The categories of religion are clearly not exclusive where a religion can be, for example, minority proselytising or majority proselytising. Thus, with more conversion studies involving different types of religions in the future, the categories of religion can be refined and further distinctions between different types of religions and religious contexts can therefore be made.

Moreover, what about countries which are politically and religiously divided where there are no minority or majority groups but instead, two or more religiously divided groups? In this particular case, Bosnia and Herzegovina should be a potentially interesting case study to be explored as the country does not have one particular majority religion, although the percentage of Muslims living in the country is at a slightly higher 44% of the population (Fox 2008: 141). Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism and Islam are the three dominant religions in Bosnia and despite the seemingly increasing level of acceptance towards one another in recent times, the synonymity between ethnicity and religion in the country inevitably leads to perpetual religious divisions and conflicts among the population (Fox 2008: 151). Thus, it will be of great interest to examine a religious conversion process, for instance, of a Catholic to Orthodox or to Islam and to see either the first stage in the conversion process would be religious crisis (in consideration of the possibly limited level of interaction between the different religious groups, as in the case of the minority-religion context) or the encounter stage, (in consideration of the availability of religious information within the education system, as in the case of the majority-religion context), or some other new findings that indicate a totally different type of conversion process in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It would be also perhaps worthwhile to go back to the roots of the Rambo Model itself, and carry out a similar type of research study in the United States where the model was first formulated, specifically by taking into account the stage sequence postulated by this study. As mentioned in Chapter 3, a larger part of the theoretical framework of the Rambo Model is based on Christian tradition, and yet, as can be seen from Table III on page 262, none of the conversion studies that employ the model that were conducted in the United States focuses on a conversion to Christianity. This particular observation provides another avenue that could be pursued by future studies in order to see either the conversion stages in a conversion process to Christianity in the United States occur in the sequence suggested by Rambo, or in the sequence for a majority-religion context, as argued by this study. In many ways, this kind of studies will boomerang the model where future studies will 'go back' to the United States and to see whether or not the improved understanding of the model can reveal the original conversion story to Christianity and to test Rambo's postulated stage sequence in its own backyard.

Studies on a conversion process to Christianity could also offer more prospects for future research. This is because a conversion to Christianity not only involves the tradition transition type of religious conversion, i.e. a conversion between different religious traditions, but Christianity also permits the institutional transition type of conversion where the convert's new religious option is within the same religious tradition as the previous religious option (Rambo 1993: 39). Thus, a case study on a conversion process, for example, from Mainline Protestantism to Roman Catholicism, without doubt will lay out a different stage sequence from what have been postulated

by this study, in view of the fact that the existing studies utilised by this study primarily fall under the category of tradition transition type of religious conversion.

On a local scale, it will also be interesting to analyse the conversion process of other ethnic groups in Brunei. Such conversion studies however should not only be carried out in the context of a religious conversion to Islam but also in the context of a conversion process to other religions, such Christianity or Chinese religion. It will be of interest to see how the patterns of stage sequence set out, for example, in the conversion process of the Murut ethnic group to Christianity, particularly in view of the fact that Christianity in Brunei, by law, is not allowed to proselytise within public domain. Thus, with these questions framing the potential scope of future research, it can provide the existing literature with different perspectives on conversion process from what has been presented by this study.

### **7.5 Final remarks**

This study has confirmed that the addition of the new concepts of contextual components and of the culture-free definitions of the stages to the framework of the Rambo Model helps the model to transcend its theoretical limitation of being culture-specific. One, of course, cannot entirely fault the fact that the model is an essentially Christian and Western model, and is based on the assumption of Christian and Western society and culture of the model, because whatever the perspective that the model put forward is nevertheless legitimate in view of the data the model is based on.

However, this study also suggests that the reformulation of the model is possible and it could effectively reinforce the usefulness of the model in its domain of expertise. By

reformulating the model, this study has shown that it can successfully facilitate a good understanding on the conversion process of the Dusuns to Islam despite the fact that this particular case study is very unlike to the conversion cases that Rambo originally formulated his model from. The modification of the model also supports the comparative analysis of the different case studies, which also produced interesting findings that essentially illustrate and support the argument that the sequence of conversion stages can actually be set out and explained adequately, and thus perhaps suggesting Rambo's disclaimer of universality is no longer valid.

The hope is that the inherent shortcomings of the model will not be carried forward into future research undertakings, bearing in mind however that the modification suggested by this study could be a double-edged sword. New challenges and limitations could nevertheless emerge from the employment of the modified model, particularly when investigating the previously untapped areas of studies and conversion types. However, these new theoretical limitations should not be taken to imply hindrance. Instead, they should be seen as a reflection that the future studies have moved into the right direction as they do not merely squeeze their findings into the existing findings and body of literature. This type of study without doubt will help cement this right direction to where the ultimate destination of a critical but constructive examination of the model's framework can be reached.

## Appendices

**Appendix 1 Participant Profile Sheet**

No.	SEX	AGE	YEAR OF CONVERSION	EDUCATION	JOB
<b>DUSUN MUSLIM CONVERT INFORMANTS</b>					
1	F	59	1972	Primary	Housewife
2	M	64	1965	Primary	Ex-policeman
3	M	61	1963	Secondary	Agriculture
4	M	63	1989	Secondary	Retired teacher
5	M	59	2004	Secondary	Retired custom officer
6	F	54	2004	Secondary	Housewife
7	F	62	1960	Secondary	Housewife
8	M	75	1958	Primary	Teacher
9	M	78	2004	Primary	Retired foreman
10	M	58	2003	Secondary	Retired army personnel
11	F	29	1991	Tertiary	Educ. Officer
12	F	47	1982	Secondary	Clerk
13	F	57	1968	Secondary	Agriculture
14	F	23	2008	Tertiary	Student
15	M	51	2003	Secondary	Welfare Officer
16	F	18	2003	Tertiary	Student
17	M	57	1991	Secondary	Retired army personnel
18	F	51	1991	Secondary	Housewife
19	F	26	1991	Tertiary	Educ. Officer
20	M	25	1991	Tertiary	Educ. Officer
21	M	60	1985	Secondary	Municipal staff
22	M	72	1986	Secondary	Retired policeman
23	M	61	1998	Secondary	Self-employed
24	F	61	1998	-	Housewife
25	M	55	2007	Secondary	Village Head
26	F	55	2007	Secondary	Teacher
27	M	53	1987	Tertiary	Education Officer
28	M	57	1990	Tertiary	Retired army officer
29	M	58	1985	Tertiary	Retired civil servant
30	F	57	1973	Secondary	Housewife
31	M	65	2006	Secondary	Security Guard
32	F	61	2006	Primary	Housewife
33	M	44	2009	Secondary	Municipal staff
34	F	44	2009	Secondary	Housewife
35	F	39	1997	Secondary	Religious officer
36	F	37	1995	Tertiary	Education Officer
37	F	44	1986	Tertiary	Education Officer
38	F	57	1968	Secondary	Housewife
39	M	70	1968	Secondary	Retired army personnel

40	F	54	1977	Primary	Janitor
41	M	46	1972	Secondary	Clerk
42	F	77	1972	-	Housewife
43	F	50	1972	Secondary	Clerk
44	M	56	1967	Secondary	Retired army personnel
45	F	32	1986	Tertiary	Teacher
46	F	56	1981	Secondary	Housewife
<b>DUSUN INFORMANTS</b>					
47	M	39	-	Tertiary	Broadcasting officer
48	F	26	-	Tertiary	Student
49	M	22	-	Tertiary	Student
50	M	77	-	Primary	Retired
51	F	68	-	-	Housewife
52	M	60	-	Secondary	Retired civil servant
53	M	60	-	Secondary	Retired teacher
54	M	51	-	Tertiary	Teacher
55	F	49	-	Secondary	Janitor
56	M	48	-	Tertiary	Teacher
57	M	62	-	Primary	Retired municipal staff
<b>KEY INFORMANTS</b>					
58	M	71	1959	Secondary	Member of Legislative Council
59	M	52	-	Tertiary	Senior religious official
60	F	77	-	-	<i>Belian</i>

## **Appendix 2 Information Sheet**

### **(translation)**

**Title of the Study:** Conversion to Islam: the case of the Dusun ethnic group in Brunei Darussalam  
**Researcher:** Asiyah az-Zahra Ahmad Kumpoh  
**Contact Information:** 4230243  
 asiyahazzahra@yahoo.com

### **Introduction and the Purpose of the Study**

You are invited to participate in a study which is to explore the conversion process to Islam in Brunei Darussalam with a main focus on the conversion experience of the Dusun Muslim converts in Tutong District. The research is aimed to conduct an in-depth analysis of the intricate links one's conversion process have with the social, cultural and religious milieu within which the conversion takes place.

### **Interview Participation**

Interview participation for this research is voluntary. The interview will take place at the time and place of your choosing. In the interview session, I will ask you to describe your experiences before and after your conversion to Islam and this will last two hours, at the most.

### **Privacy, Confidentiality and Disclosure of Information**

Interviews will be recorded. Any information you give during this research project, including all personal information, will be kept confidential and your identity will be strictly anonymous in all materials.

### **Interested?**

If you would like to be part of this research, my contact details are as above.

Thank you.

### Appendix 3 Interview Guide for the Dusun Muslim Converts

- How do you come to Islam?
- Before you learn anything about Islam, what was your opinion on the religion?
- Many converts consider their school experience as an important starting point of their interest in Islam. What about you?
- Apart from school, where else did you learn about Islam? (media, social events, workplace, siblings, *daie*)
  - What did you learn from them?
- Some individuals have friends or a family member who led them to Islam. What about you?
- Can you explain to me what *Temarok* is?
  - Any other Dusun *adat* that you are familiar with?
- What aspects of Dusun religion that made you to move away from the religion?
- Tell me about the event(s) which propelled your decision to convert.
- What aspects of Islam that you had already been familiar with before your conversion? (dress sense, *halal* diet)
  - Where did the familiarity with these aspects of Islam come from?
- Some converts attempted to fast during the month of Ramadhan before their conversion to Islam. What about your experience?
  - Who guided you through your experience?
- I still remember the moment I told my parents about my decision to convert. What about you?
  - How did they react to your intention?
- What were your feelings during the conversion ceremony?
- What were the immediate changes you made after the conversion?
  - How difficult was it to make the changes?
- Where did you seek religious guidance after your conversion?
- How do you see yourself now that you are a part of the Muslim community?
- How did the Dusuns around you react towards you after the conversion?



#### Appendix 4 Interview Guide for the Dusuns

- Explain to me what *Temarok* is.
  - What other Dusun *adat* you know about?
- How well do you know Islam?
  - From where did you learn about the religion?
  - What aspects of Islam have you been familiar with the most?
- From my experience, it was rather inevitable for me to compare Islam with the Dusun religion after learning about Islam at school and from my surrounding. What about you?
  - How do you treat both religions in your everyday life?
- When someone in your personal network converts to Islam, what would be the general reactions of your family and relatives?
  - In the case of opposition against (or approval for) the conversion, what are the reasons behind such reaction?
- Among the members of your family or personal network, how many of them have converted to Islam?
  - Describe your relationship with your Muslim siblings/relatives.
- How do the Dusuns generally perceive a conversion ceremony?
- It is essential for new converts to adopt a Muslim lifestyle after their conversion, especially in terms of adhering to Islamic rules and obligations. What do you think are the common consequences that these changes have on the Dusuns around them?

## Appendix 5 Informed Consent Form

### (translation)

1. I give my consent to be interviewed for the research study on the topic of **Conversion to Islam: The Case of the Dusun ethnic group in Brunei Darussalam**. The interview will be conducted by **Asiyah az-Zahra Ahmad Kumpoh**, who is a research student in the Sociology Department at Leicester University.
2. I understand that the objective of this research study is to explore the conversion process of the Dusun ethnic group to Islam.
3. My consent for participation includes an assurance that my personal identity should be made anonymous.
4. The length of this interview depends on the amount of time I am willing to commit to do the interview and it should not be more than two hours.
5. I am free to reject any questions that I find uncomfortable to answer without negative consequences.
6. I am also aware that the interview will be recorded and I give my consent for the researcher to do so.

.....

Informant's Signature

.....

Date

-----

I have explained adequately the research and interview procedure to the informant and assume that the informant has understood the procedures correctly.

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date

***Adat***

Unwritten customary laws of an ethnic group which govern the group's conducts pertaining to, among others, their kinship system, agricultural activities, ceremonies of birth, funeral and marriages. *Adat* also governs the group's relationship with the supernatural world.

***Alhamdulillah***

All praise is due to Allah.

***Azan***

Call for prayer, normally to indicate the starting time of the obligatory Muslim prayer.

***Baju Kurung***

A traditional dress of Muslim Malay women. *Baju kurung* is a knee-length loose long-sleeved tunic which is worn over a similarly loose long sarong.

***Belian***

A female individual who possesses special knowledge about the supernatural world and plays a central role in ritual acts in *Temarok* (see entry) ceremony.

***Daie***

Muslim missionaries or preachers.

***Da'wah***

The propagation and preaching of Islam.

***Derato***

The chief god in Dusun' divinity, which bestows prosperity during the paddy plantation and harvesting seasons, and heals sickness. A *belian* (see entry) would chiefly communicate with *Derato* during *Temarok* (see entry) ceremony.

***Do'a***

A prayer to call upon, and seek help from, Allah.

***Halal***

Arabic word for lawful and generally denotes animal meat that has been slaughtered and prepared in the permissible way according to the Islamic laws.

***Hari Raya***

Malay words for Muslims' festival which marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadhan.

***Hijab***

A head covering worn by Muslim women.

**Imam**

1. A religious expert.
2. A person who leads a congregational Muslim prayer.

**Isya'**

One of the obligatory Muslim prayers. *Isya'* prayer is performed between night and dawn.

**Jawi**

A writing system for the Malay language, which was once a dominant script in Brunei before the language adopted the Roman writing system. The letters of the *Jawi* scripts were derived from Arabic alphabets.

**Maghrib**

One of the obligatory Muslim prayers. *Maghrib* prayer begins at sunset and ends at the start of *Isya'* (see entry).

**Niat**

A statement of intention. All Muslim practices, for instance, the Muslim prayer, fasting, and an ablution, have their specific *niat* which should be recited before the commencement of the practice.

**Tahlil**

A Muslim ceremony to pray for the deceased, which includes the recital of the *Tahlil*, (*La illaha illallah* [There is no god except Allah]) and the reading of the Al-Quran verse of Yasiin.

**Telekung**

A head covering for Muslim women which is larger and longer in size than that of the *hijab* (see entry). *Telekung* is worn by Muslim women during the prayer as it covers their *aurat* (the privacy and modesty) which is all parts of the body with an exception of the face and the palm of the hand.

**Temarok**

1. A Dusun ceremony which is performed at the end of the paddy harvesting season to show appreciation to *Derato* (see entry) for bountiful harvest.
2. A healing medium for the Dusuns to seek remedy for illness they suffer, particularly the types of illness they believe have been caused by offended spirit bring.

**Qiblat**

Arabic word for direction, and generally refers to the direction of Ka'abah, the holy place in Makkah, towards which Muslims should face when perform the Muslim prayer.

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