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AISHA JOHANNA

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**Getting to know Lithuanian Muslims:
A qualitative study on religious and national identifications
of a minority group in Eastern Europe**

MASTER'S THESIS

Supervisor: **Dr. Inga Vinogradnaitė**

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Abstract

Muslim communities as a minority group have been around in Lithuania for centuries, but discrimination against them still exists. This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena from the perspective of the Lithuanian Muslims. The goal is to know how they perceive their religious and national identities.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 Lithuanian Muslims to collect primary data. The thematic analysis method was used to determine emerging themes that explain the lived experience of Lithuanian Muslims. The results show that Lithuanian Muslims can have strong Muslim and Lithuanian national identities at the same time.

Confirmation

I confirm that I am the author of the submitted master's thesis: **Getting to Know Lithuanian Muslims: A Qualitative Study on Religious and National Identifications of a Minority Group in Eastern Europe** which has been prepared independently and has never been presented for any other course or used in another educational institution, neither in Lithuania nor abroad. I also provide a full bibliographical list which indicates all the sources that were used to prepare this assignment and contain no unused sources.

Aisha Johanna

Signature

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Introduction

As a country where the majority of its people are Catholics, it can be easy to overlook the minorities with different religions who are also part of the society in Lithuania. One of the smallest religious groups in this most southern Baltic country is the Islamic community. They only make up to 0.1% of the whole Lithuanian population, which means that less than 3,000 Muslims live here.¹

Muslims were first brought by Vytautas, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, in the late 14th century and early 15th. Tharik Hussain wrote: “So in 1398, returning from a military campaign near the Black Sea, Vytautas brought with him a large number of Muslim Crimean Tatars and a small group of Karaite Jews to help defend Lithuanian territory.”² This means Muslims have been around in Lithuania for more than 600 years. Augustinas Žemaitis stated: “The 20th century brought new Muslims to Lithuania, firstly from the Soviet Union and then after independence – from the volatile Middle Eastern and African lands. These new Muslims may be already outnumbering the traditional Tatar community. However, as of now, there is not even a mosque in Vilnius city since the Soviets tore down the old wooden Tatar one that until 1968 stood in the old district of Lukiškės.”³

The Vilnius Muslim community is planning to build a mosque, where the funding of 7-8 million Euros would come from Turkey, and probably Saudi Arabia or Qatar. The community does not expect the Lithuanian state to provide support other than the right to use the land in the Liepkalnis area of Vilnius. BNS reported: “At the moment, there are four operating mosques in Lithuania: in Nemėžis, *Keturiasdešimties Totorių Kaimas* (the Village of Forty Tatars) in Vilnius District, Raižiai near Alytus, and Kaunas. The Muslim community of Vilnius currently uses the Center of Islamic Culture and Education for prayer. Between 150 and 200 people attend prayers on Fridays. Under the plan, the new mosque would hold up to 600 people. Vilnius Mayor Remigijus Šimašius says the picked place is not the best site

¹ Rosita Garškaitė, „Integrations of Muslims in Lithuania and Europe.” Vilnius: Open Lithuania Foundation. <<https://olf.lt/en/rosita-garskaite-integration-muslims-lithuania-europe/>>

² Tharik Hussain, „The amazing survival of the Baltic Muslims.” Vilnius: BBC News, 2016. <<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35170834>> [2016 01 01]

³ Augustinas Žemaitis, „Sunni Islam in Lithuania.” Vilnius: True Lithuania. <<http://www.truelithuania.com/sunni-islam-in-lithuania-108>>

for a mosque. He believes the new mosque should be built near Lukiškės Square.”⁴

There are emerging trends in conversion to Islam according to Prof. Dr. Egdūnas Račius, Professor of Islamic Studies at Vytautas Magnus University.⁵ Despite the growing number of Muslims in Eastern Europe, surprisingly one of the reasons Lithuanians are emigrating to other countries is because of religion. This applies to the emigrants who declare themselves as Muslims. Rosita Garškaitė wrote: “In the last decade, the number of Muslims in Lithuania has fallen by a hundred. Interestingly, in the census of 2011, out of 2,727 people who identified themselves as Muslims, 400 claimed to be ethnic Lithuanians. It is even more intriguing that in England and Wales, in the census of the same year, 600 migrants from Lithuania declared Islam as their religion. This is the third-largest number of Muslim migrants from Eastern Europe. The conclusion was that not only Lithuanians but also Muslims flee Lithuania: ‘The capital of Lithuanian converts to Islam is the great London’.”⁶

This movement most likely is derived from the way Muslims are treated in the country. “The public opinion polls conducted by the Ethnic Studies Institute in 2016 and 2017 show that Lithuanians’ opinion of Muslims has recently worsened. More than 40% of people would not want to live in the same neighborhood with believers of Islam or rent them housing. According to the expert, male Muslims even go to meet potential tenants without their wives, so that the flat owners do not get scared by the hijab on the head,”⁷ as stated by Garškaitė.

As stated by Adas Viliušis: “Muslims in Lithuania are one of the least desirable groups of society, together with others such as the Roma, ex-prisoners, people with mental illness, homosexuals, or Chechens. The results of the study suggest that a third of Lithuanians would refuse to rent out their homes for Muslims or live in the Muslim neighborhood. Meanwhile, about a fifth would not like to work with Muslims in the same workplace.”⁸

An interesting social experiment in regards to the Muslim community was done by two female Lithuanian journalists from Veidas. Jurgita Laurinėnaitė-Šimelevičienė and Giedrė

⁴ BNS, „Vilnius Muslim community to build a mosque.” Vilnius: LRT, 2019. <<https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1092192/vilnius-muslim-community-to-build-a-mosque>> [2019 08 28]

⁵ Egdūnas Račius, *Muslims in Eastern Europe*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018.

⁶ Garškaitė, <<https://olf.lt/en/rosita-garskaite-integration-muslims-lithuania-europe/>>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Adas Viliušis, „Discovering the Islamic side of Vilnius.” Vilnius: DELFI, 2017. <<https://en.delfi.lt/archive/discovering-the-islamic-side-of-vilnius.d?id=75354947>> [2017 08 04]

Buivydienė dressed up in scarf, hijab, and niqab for 4 days — trying to appear in public, going to state institutions, shopping in a market, looking for a job, and renting accommodation. They said: “...Prof. Dr. Egdūnas Račius... states that, nowadays, it is undoubtedly not an advantage to be a Muslim. According to him, it was led by frequent bloody attacks related to Muslims, which were quite numerous during recent decades.”⁹

The two journalists experienced mixed treatment from the people. While they were walking down the streets and taking public transportation, a lot of people stared at them and even whispered to each other about their looks. They could sometimes hear what these people were saying about them. When they went to a clinic to get medical assistance, they were treated politely and professionally by the staff. They were asked for IDs but this was just a normal procedure for every patient in the institution. Shopping in the market and visiting potential accommodations for rent turned out to be a good experience as well even though in the beginning the sellers and landlords were rather curious, asking them a few questions about themselves. However, after an adequate conversation, they became understanding and welcoming. Their experience of trying to find a job was not as smooth. In short, most of the employers they visited seemed to avoid hiring people who dress the way they did.

“Milda Ališauskienė, the head of the New Religions Research and Information Centre, says that when talking about Islam and Muslims, we think immediately about the Muslim, having seized an airplane and participating in beheadings. Such an image of Muslims has been formed in the public space for some time in both Lithuania and other countries,”¹⁰ Laurinėnaitė-Šimelevičienė and Buivydienė wrote. Nevertheless, Ališauskienė concludes that attitudes concerning Muslims change when individual communication starts. It was approved by their journalistic experiment that sincere communication with met people helped them in search of accommodation and job, even though the overall reaction of surrounding people towards their appearance in public places was negative.

Zan Strabac and Ola Listhaug conducted a study that measured the unwillingness of citizens of the following 30 European countries to have Muslims and immigrants in general as their neighbors: Western Europe — France, Great Britain, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain,

⁹ Jurgita Laurinėnaitė-Šimelevičienė and Giedrė Buivydienė, „Discovering the Islamic side of Vilnius.” Journalistic experiment: what means to be a Muslim in Lithuania.” Vilnius: National Institute for Social Integration, 2015. <<http://www.media4change.co/investigations/journalistic-experiment-means-muslim-lithuania/>> [2015 08 13]

¹⁰ Ibid.

Portugal, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Greece, Malta, and Luxembourg; Eastern Europe — Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Russia, Slovenia, Ukraine, and Belarus.¹¹

According to the data, the mean percentage of Western Europeans not willing to have Muslims and immigrants as their neighbors are significantly lower than the mean percentage of Eastern Europe, which is around 4% difference for each. This shows that Eastern Europeans have more prejudice towards Muslims and immigrants than Western Europeans.

The common thing between these two regions in Europe is that both tend to be more unwilling to have specifically Muslims as their neighbors than just immigrants in general, except for a few countries: Great Britain, Czech Republic, and Bulgaria — whose results show the opposite. A few other countries have more or less the same percentage of not willing to have either Muslims or immigrants in general as their neighbors. For instance: Poland, Estonia, and Italy — where the difference between the percentage for Muslims and one for immigrants is less than 1%.

The data points out Portugal to be the most willing to have both Muslims and immigrants as their neighbors. Bulgaria appears to be the most unwilling when it comes to immigrants in general, while interestingly Lithuania makes it to the top of the list as the country with the highest percentage of unwillingness to have Muslims as neighbors (33.32%).

This particular research was published in 2007, using data from the 1999-2000 wave of European Values Study. It surprisingly proves that the non-Muslim Lithuanians' opinion of Muslims has worsened over the years. As mentioned before, according to the public opinion polls conducted by Ethnic Studies Institute in 2016 and 2017, more than 40% or one-third of Lithuanians claimed to be unwilling to share the same neighborhood with or rent out accommodations to Muslims.¹² It looks like the trend in Lithuania is to keep growing prejudice towards the Muslim community.

Islamic culture and traditions were banned during the Soviet era. Muslim religious leaders were either killed or sent to Gulag. Documents about Islam were burned, mosques were

¹¹ Zan Strabac and Ola Listhaug, „Anti-Muslim prejudice in Europe: A multilevel analysis of survey data from 30 countries.” *Social Science Research*, 27, 2008, 268-286.

¹² Garškaitė, <<https://olf.lt/en/rosita-garskaite-integration-muslims-lithuania-europe/>>

destroyed, and it was not even allowed to use Islamic names so the Muslims had to modify their real names to sound more Lithuanian or Russian. For example, Ramadan Yaqoob to be Romas Jakubauskas.¹³

Nowadays, Muslims in Lithuania have the right to practice their religion, but certain limitations still do not let them fully engage with their belief. Since there is still no mosque in Vilnius, the Muslim community in the city find it hard to attend the common prayer every Friday at the Center of Islamic Culture and Education as it cannot accommodate too many people at the same time. Ethnic Lithuanians who convert to Islam also do not feel free to follow the Muslim way of dressing or even to tell their friends and relatives about their decision as they are too afraid to be despised or ostracized.¹⁴ Many of them chose to emigrate to other countries to experience more religious freedom.

Given the results of these polls and social experiments, living in Lithuania as a Muslim might be inconvenient with the possibility that they do not feel belong to the nation and find it hard to identify themselves as Lithuanians, nationality-wise. Considering the difficulties and prejudice they still experience on a daily basis, how do they identify themselves in society? This brings me to the following research question: **How do Lithuanian Muslims perceive their religious and national identities?**

According to Maykel Verkuyten and Ali Aslan Yildiz who conducted a study in 2007 on how ethnic, religious, and national identities are associated with each other for the Turkish-Dutch Muslims living in the Netherlands, perceived discrimination correlates positively with Muslim and/or Turkish identification, while Muslim and/or Turkish identification correlates negatively with Dutch identification.¹⁵ This supports Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou's statement in their publication in 1993 on the second generation of post-1965 immigrants in the US that perceived social rejection and devaluation might not only result in increased minority group identification but also in decreased identification and increased disidentification with the national category.¹⁶ As stated by Borja Martinovic and Maykel

¹³ Hussain, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35170834>>

¹⁴ Dalia Markevičiūtė, *Internal Linkages and External Adjustment of Muslim People in Lithuania*. Kaunas: Vytautas Magnus University, 2009.

¹⁵ Maykel Verkuyten and Ali Aslan Yildiz, „National (Dis)identification and Ethnic and Religious Identity: A Study Among Turkish-Dutch Muslims.” *PSPB*, 33(10), 2007, 1448-1462.

¹⁶ Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou, „The new second generation: Segmented assimilation and its variants.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 53, 1993, 74-97.

Verkuyten in their follow-up research in 2012, national identification is negatively correlated with religious identification, ingroup norms, discrimination, and value incompatibility.¹⁷

Research by Jonas R. Kunst et al. in 2011, which examined and compared how Norwegian-Pakistanis and German-Turks affiliate with their respective nations by at the same time being Muslims, found that the Norwegian-Pakistanis experienced no conflict in identifying themselves as both Muslims and Norwegian nationals. This is due to the highly secularized state, while the German-Turks found it incompatible to be Muslims and German nationals at the same time since Christianity is a strong aspect of the German culture.¹⁸

Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute which published a review of survey research on Muslims in Britain in 2018 disclosed that religion plays an important part in the lives and identity of most Muslims in Britain, alongside a strong sense of British identity, particularly those who are UK graduates.¹⁹

Based on these studies, for the Norwegian-Pakistani and British Muslims, identifying themselves as a Muslim and a Norwegian/British national appears to be in harmony and forming a hybrid identity, while it unfortunately still seems to be in conflict for the German-Turkish and Dutch-Turkish Muslims. This brings us back to what we want to find from this research — how about the Lithuanian Muslims?

As far as I could find, there have been no studies on Lithuanian Muslims that explain how they perceive their religious and national identities. The contradictory claims from the existing research suggest that the Lithuanian case might stand somewhere in the middle between the Norwegian/British and the German/Dutch case. The four countries from these studies are in Western Europe, while Lithuania is in Eastern. Note again that according to the Anti-Muslim Prejudice in Europe research in 2007, Eastern European countries tend to have a higher percentage of prejudice towards Muslims and immigrants in general, compared to their Western counterparts. Not to forget that Lithuanians particularly rank the highest as the

¹⁷ Borja Martinovic and Maykel Verkuyten, „Host national and religious identification among Turkish Muslims in Western Europe: The role of ingroup norms, perceived discrimination and value incompatibility.” *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 42, 2012, 893-903.

¹⁸ Jonas R. Kunst et al., „Coping with Islamophobia: The effects of religious stigma on Muslim minorities’ identity formation.” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 36, 2012, 518-532.

¹⁹ Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, „A review of survey research on Muslims in Britain.” (16-074453-01) London: Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, 2018.

people that are most unwilling to have Muslim neighbors. The Gallup survey in 2008-2009 shows that 42% of Lithuanians put the importance of religion in their daily life.²⁰ According to the Human Rights in Lithuania 2018–2019 report, carried out by the Human Rights Monitoring Institute (HRMI), public discussions often uncover a very narrow understanding of what it means to be 'Lithuanian', which rejects any perceived "otherness".²¹ These might indicate that Lithuanian Muslims find it challenging to identify themselves as Lithuanian nationals, just like the German and Dutch Muslims. However, considering the Norwegian and British Muslims have a strong national identity, especially the Norwegian second-generation (compared to the first one) and the British born and bred ones, it can also be assumed that Lithuanian Muslims — especially the Tatars (born and bred in Lithuania with their community been around in the country for centuries) — would find it even easier to highly identify as Lithuanian nationals. This research is intended to be a contribution to the existing literature by filling the gaps where similar research on Lithuanian Muslims is still missing.

The purpose of this study is to understand how Lithuanian Muslims see their religious and national identities as well as their compatibility. My thesis aims to:

- construct a theoretical framework to explain how Lithuanian Muslims shape their identity
- employ the existing theories on minority group identity (including European Muslim identity) as the base to form my research hypothesis
- collect data through interviews and analyze them
- provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomena from the perspective of the Lithuanian Muslims
- make useful recommendations for future studies and policies

To answer my research question, I have conducted 20 interviews with Lithuanian Muslims in October and November 2020. Each interview consists of a research introduction, statement of consent from the participant, questions about personal demographic data, confirmation of Lithuanian Muslim category, background story, religious identity, ethnic identity, social network, perceived discrimination against Muslims, national identity, perceived value

²⁰ Steve Crabtree, „Religiosity Highest in World’s Poorest Nations.” Washington, D.C.: Gallup, 2010. <<https://news.gallup.com/poll/142727/religiosity-highest-world-poorest-nations.aspx>> [2010 08 31]

²¹ „Lithuanians reject ‘otherness’, human rights report says.” Vilnius: LRT, 2020. <<https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1188832/lithuanians-reject-otherness-human-rights-report-says>> [2020 06 16]

(in)compatibility, and additional comments. In the following chapters, theoretical framework, methodology, results, and discussion of the research are provided. Conclusion and recommendations, as well as the bibliography, appendices, and research summary, come after to complete the study references.

1. Theoretical Framework

The major theory for this study is the Social Identity Theory (SIT). SIT is formulated by two social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner, who endorse the definition of national identity as “a body of people who feel that they are a nation” by political scientist Rupert Emerson.²² It is a person’s identity or sense of belonging to one state or one nation.

SIT adopts this national identity definition and suggests that its conceptualization includes self-categorization and affect. Self-categorization refers to identifying with a nation and perceiving oneself as a member of a nation. The affect part refers to the emotion a person has with their identification, such as a sense of belonging or emotional attachment towards one’s nation. This theory suggests that individuals experience collective identity based on their membership in a group, such as racial/ethnic and religious identities. Social identity leads individuals to categorize themselves and other salient groups into “us” versus “them”.²³

Tajfel and Turner proposed that the groups to which people belonged were an important source of pride and self-esteem. They also mentioned that there are three mental processes or SIT stages in evaluating “us” and “them”.²⁴ Below is the order.

Social Categorization ⇒ Social Identification ⇒ Social Comparison

²² Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1960; Stephen Reicher et al., *The Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology*. London: The SAGE Handbook of Identities, 2010.

²³ Henri Tajfel and John Turner, *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986; Blake E. Ashforth and Fred Mael, *Social Identity Theory and the Organization*. Briarcliff Manor, NY: Academy of Management, 1989.

²⁴ Henri Tajfel et al., „An integrative theory of intergroup conflict.” Book: Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schultz (Eds.), *Organizational Identity: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 56-65.

The first is social categorization. People categorize people (including themselves) to understand the social environment. Words used for social categories include Muslim, non-Muslim, Catholic, Lithuanian, Tatar, European, Arabic, African, Asian, white, brown, black, etc.

The second stage is social identification. If one has categorized themselves as a Lithuanian, they will adopt the identity as a Lithuanian. They will act in the ways they believe Lithuanians act and conform to the norms of the group.

In the final stage, social comparison. People tend to compare the group they categorized and identified with, to other groups. One's self-esteem will be well maintained if their group compares favorably with the other groups. Once two groups identify themselves as rivals, the people are forced to compete in order to maintain their self-esteem and this is where prejudice normally occurs.²⁵

The other theories consist of statements or conclusions made in the similar studies detailed earlier, which I will use as the basis of my hypothesis. The first one goes to Maykel Verkuyten and Ali Aslan Yildiz (2007) who conducted their study as a response to the reported ongoing Dutch-Muslim cultural war.²⁶ The participants of this study are people with a father and a mother of Turkish origin, were born in the Netherlands or had moved into the country more than 15 years prior to the research, and have either only a Dutch passport, only a Turkish passport (with a legal residence permit in the Netherlands), or both (dual citizenship).²⁷

The result shows that the more or the higher the person identifies themselves as a Turkish (ethnic) and/or as a Muslim, the lower they will identify themselves or the less they will have a commitment as a Dutch (national). Turkish and Muslim identifications have a positive association, as well as both of them with perceived discrimination in Dutch society. The three of them have negative associations with Dutch self-identification. Perceived social rejection

²⁵ Ibid, 56-65; Saul McLeod, „Social Identity Theory.” Manchester: Simply Psychology, 2019. <<https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html>> [2019 10 24]

²⁶ Deborah Scroggins, „The Dutch-Muslim cultural war.” *The Nation*, 2005, 21-25.

²⁷ Verkuyten and Yildiz, 1448-1462.

and devaluation might not only result in increased minority group identification but also in decreased identification and increased disidentification with the national category.²⁸

The follow-up study by Maykel Verkuyten and Borja Martinovic (2012) stated that in Western Europe, Muslim identification is, above and beyond ethnic identification, predictive of national disidentification.²⁹ Perceived and actual value differences constitute the main boundary between Muslim minorities and West European majority members.³⁰ The Western and Muslim ways of life are considered to collide; they are defined as opposites that do not go together.³¹ Perceived incompatibility might also moderate the relationship between Muslims and host national identification. Groups that feel that their identity is threatened and undermined by the majority will turn away from psychological membership in the superordinate national category.³²

The study on Norwegian-Pakistanis and German-Turks in 2011 by Jonas Kunst, Hajra Tajamal, and Pål Ulleberg has shown varied results. The majority of these research participants were young adults, female, single/unmarried, Sunni Muslims, and belonged to the second-generation of immigrants. Most of the Norwegian-Pakistani participants were naturalized Norwegian nationals, whereas only about half of the German-Turkish participants were naturalized German nationals.³³

The following are the six variables measured in this study using varied Likert scales, along with a sample item from each scale: 1) National identity, e.g. “Actually, it is unimportant for me to be Norwegian/German.”; 2) National engagement, both in public and private domains, e.g. “I find it unimportant to follow Norwegian/German politics” and “How often do you inform yourself about Norwegian/German politics?”; 3) Religious identity, e.g. “Being a Muslim is a very important part of how I see myself.”; 4) Experienced religious

²⁸ Portes and Zhou, 74-97.

²⁹ Maykel Verkuyten and Borja Martinovic, „Immigrants’ National Identification: Meanings, Determinants, and Consequences.” *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 6(1), 2012, 82-112.

³⁰ Arun Kundnani, „Integrationism: The politics of anti-Muslim racism.” *Race and Class*, 48, 2007, 24–44; Paul Sniderman and Louk Hagendoorn, *When ways of life collide: Multiculturalism and its discontents in the Netherlands*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.

³¹ Mérove Gijsberts, „Opvattingen van autochtonen en allochtonen over de multi-etnische samenleving.” *Jaarrapport Integratie*, 2005.

³² Denis Sindic and Stephen Reicher, „‘Our way of life is worth defending’: Testing a model of attitudes towards superordinate group membership through a study of Scots’ attitudes towards Britain.” *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 39, 2009, 114–129; Martinovic and Verkuyten, 893-903.

³³ Kunst et al., 518-532.

discrimination, e.g. “How often have you been treated unfairly by coworkers or classmates?”; 5) Experienced negative representations in the media, e.g. “How often have you seen newspapers or magazines that make Muslims look bad?”; 6) Perceived Islamophobia, e.g. “Many Norwegians/Germans consider Islam to be an evil ideology.”

The results of this study exhibit fascinating findings where Norwegian-Pakistani second-generation participants have a significantly higher national identification than the first-generation ones. German-Turkish naturalized participants have it higher than the ones without German nationality/passport. All participants, minus one person, had experienced some sort of religious discrimination, where the effect size was larger in the German sample than in the Norwegian one. Except for how the religious identity negatively predicts the national engagement at a private level (the higher the religious identity, the lower the participants’ private national engagement would be), the two respondent groups actually differed on the other correlations.

The Norwegian results particularly show that religious identity somehow does not have any effect on participants’ national identity and public national engagement. The experienced negative representations in the media have positive effects on the Norwegian-Pakistani Muslims’ national identity and national engagement, both in public and private spheres. This means that the more they experience negative media representations about Islam, the higher their national identity and national engagement would be. The researchers assumed that when the Norwegian Muslims feel that their national identity is threatened, they might pursue counter-stereotypic behavior and attitudes to contest and confront what is being said about them in the media and public discourse. Otherwise, it could also have been explained contrastingly by reversing the direction of the variables’ paths. Participants with strong national identity and engagement might have simply informed themselves more frequently through the national platforms and therefore are exposed to more negative content about Islam in the media. On the other hand, perceived Islamophobia does not seem to have any effect either on their national identity, but negatively predicts their private national engagement. Overall, according to this study, Norwegian-Pakistani Muslims have quite a strong national identity.

The German results show that religious identity does have negative effects on national

identity, public national engagement, as well as private one. The same works for the experienced religious discriminations and negative representations in the media. Both are negative predictors for the German-Turkish Muslims' national identity and national engagement (public and private). Interestingly enough in the German case, the perceived Islamophobia indirectly and positively predicts the participants' national identity and both types of national engagement, while it also negatively predicts their religious identity. It seems like, given the high pressure for cultural assimilation of immigrants in Germany, perceptions of Islamophobia might have turned the German Muslims into decreasing their religious identity to be able to achieve national acceptance. The religious identity, that functions as a bridge between perceived Islamophobia and national identity or engagement here, is perhaps considered as a barrier for them to completely become a member of the German nation. This explains the chain of effects: the higher the perceived Islamophobia is, the lower the religious identity would be, then the higher the national identity and engagement would also be.

Private national engagement includes communication in the majority (Norwegian/German) language at home, socialization with friends belonging to the majority (Norwegian/German ethnic) group, and national cultural habits. Public domains include communication in the majority language in public settings such as socializing with colleagues or fellow students belonging to the majority group, use of national media, and interest in respective national politics.

Based on these results, Norwegian-Pakistanis experience no conflict in identifying both as a Muslim and a Norwegian national. According to reports by the European Commission in 2005 and Gallup International in the same year, believing in a religion and belonging to the nation are quite unrelated in Norway.³⁴ The country is a highly secularized state despite constitutionally being a Christian country. The Gallup survey also found that only 21% of the whole population in Norway thinks that religion is important for daily life. This puts Norway as the fourth country in Europe that has the least importance of religion after Estonia (16%), Sweden (17%), and Denmark (19%).³⁵

On the contrary, German-Turks find it challenging to identify themselves both as a Muslim

³⁴ Ibid, 518-532.

³⁵ Crabtree, <<https://news.gallup.com/poll/142727/religiosity-highest-world-poorest-nations.aspx>>

and a German national. The two identities are not compatible with each other. As said earlier, societies often demand that Muslims tone down their religious identity in order to integrate better in their new nation. In Germany, when values are being discussed, the politicians and the churches tend to stress the Christian aspect of German culture³⁶, making it unbearable for the Muslims (or even other religious groups) to find a place in society and truly feel like they belong to the nation.³⁷ According to the same Gallup survey mentioned above, 40% of the population in Germany feels that religion is an important aspect of life³⁸, almost exactly double the Norwegian percentage. According to a study in 2019 by Fenella Fleischmann, Lars Leszczensky, and Sebastian Pink, ethnic, religious, and national identities are either unrelated or positively related, but increased perceived discrimination would lead to lower national identification and higher ethnic and religious identification.³⁹

Another country in Europe with a significant number of Muslim communities is the UK. According to a report by the Muslim Council of Britain (2015), there are approximately 2.7 million Muslims in England and Wales, making them 4.8% of the total population in Britain. Almost half of them were born in the UK and 73% of them stated their only national identity is British. 68% of these British Muslims are of Asian ethnicity, while 8% are of white ethnicity.⁴⁰ Asif Aziz, the chairman of the Aziz Foundation, which commissioned another report with other institutions, said: “While British Muslims identify strongly with their religious identity, they are also staunchly British.”⁴¹

The same report indicated that more than half of British Muslims see being British as important, compared with 44% of the general population.⁴² They have a strong sense of belonging to Britain and of feeling part of British society. In a 2016 survey, 93% said that they belonged to Britain, with more than half saying they felt this “very strongly”. In another survey in 2015, 95% said that they feel loyal to Britain. The vast majority (94%) of Muslims

³⁶ Liz Fekete, *Integration, Islamophobia and Civil Rights in Europe*. London: Institute of Race Relations, 2008.

³⁷ Patricia Ehrkamp, „We Turks are No Germans: Assimilation Discourses and the Dialectical Construction of Identities in Germany.” *Environment and Planning A*, 38(9), 2006, 1673–1692.

³⁸ Crabtree, <<https://news.gallup.com/poll/142727/religiosity-highest-world-poorest-nations.aspx>>

³⁹ Fenella Fleischmann et al., „Identity threat and identity multiplicity among minority youth: Longitudinal relations of perceived discrimination with ethnic, religious, and national identification in Germany.” *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 58, 2019, 971-990.

⁴⁰ The Muslim Council of Britain, „British Muslims in Numbers.” (ISBN 978 1 905461 03 5). London: The Muslim Council of Britain, 2015.

⁴¹ Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, „A review of survey research on Muslims in Britain.”

⁴² Ibid.

feel able to practice their religion freely in Britain, and most believe that Islam is compatible with the British way of life. Religion is a more important part of life for most Muslims than it is for other people in Britain and is central to their sense of identity. However, Muslims do not feel that this is in conflict with their “Britishness”.⁴³

The majority or 64% of British Muslims are satisfied with the way democracy works in the UK. Interestingly, this makes them happier with the democratic process than the British public as a whole and more likely to express trust in democratic institutions. While some of them feel that there is prejudice and mistrust against them, 70% of them feel they are treated fairly by the government.⁴⁴ It is also noteworthy that the mayor of London since May 2016 is Sadiq Khan, London’s first Muslim and first ethnic minority mayor in history.

A few additional theories from a study conducted by Shi-Eun Yu et al. (2012) on North Korean refugees living in South Korea are also taken to support my research hypothesis. Based on this study, discriminatory experiences (experienced by the North Korean refugees) in South Korea and older age correlates to lower national identity (as a South Korean), while having more social networks in South Korea and somehow lower education in North Korea (before seeking refuge in the Southern counterpart) correlates to higher national identity.⁴⁵ This also supports the statement from B. Heidi Ellis et al. (2010) who conducted another study on Somali refugees in the US, that discrimination is reported to play an important role in making an individual’s identity.⁴⁶ Jean S. Phinney (1990) claimed that social identity may negatively impact an individual if society negatively stereotypes the group with which an individual identifies.⁴⁷

Assumed from the set of literature, similar studies, and existing theories, here is my hypothesis on how Lithuanian Muslims perceive their religious and national identifications:

1. Lithuanian Muslims perceive and experience discrimination against Islam in Lithuania.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Shi-Eun Yu et al., „The Factors Affecting the Development of National Identity as South Korean in North Korean Refugees Living in South Korea.” *Psychiatry Investigation*, 9(3), 2012, 209-216.

⁴⁶ B. Heidi Ellis et al., „Discrimination and mental health among Somali refugee adolescents: The role of acculturation and gender.” *Am J Orthopsychiatry*, 80, 2010, 564-575.

⁴⁷ Jean S. Phinney, „Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research.” *Psychol Bull*, 108, 1990, 499-514.

2. Lithuanian Muslims perceive strong Christian aspects in Lithuanian politics as well as value incompatibility between Lithuanian and Muslim values.
3. Lithuanian Muslims who have close relations with the majority group in Lithuania, either the Catholics or ethnic Lithuanians, highly identify themselves as Lithuanian nationals.
4. Lithuanian Muslims who study or have studied in Lithuania have a high Lithuanian national identity.
5. Lithuanian Muslims who were born and/or raised in Lithuania still strongly identify themselves as Lithuanian nationals and have a high sense of belonging to Lithuania.
6. Lithuanian Muslims see being Lithuanian national and Muslim as equally important.

I realized that in this study I was not able to test the theories but I used them and my hypothesis as guidelines to formulate my research/interview questions and to analyze the data. From there, I can see if the findings from similar studies are plausible for the Lithuanian Muslims case. My research is intended to be the foundation of future studies that will help to develop ideas on how further research can be done.

2. Methodology

This is qualitative research with a narrative and phenomenological approach, using one-on-one semi-structured interviews as the research method. I chose this approach/method in order to provide a deeper understanding and detailed information of a lived experience of Lithuanian Muslims. I would like for them to speak for themselves and add anything they wish to express during the interviews, in the hope to not frame them within fixed questions only and limited possibilities to answer and comment around.

I collected original or primary data for this study within October and November 2020. I conducted semi-structured interviews in-person and via online platforms, e.g. Skype, Google Meet, WhatsApp video call, and regular phone call. Interview audios were recorded using Olympus digital voice recorder (WS-760M model). Interviews conducted via Skype were also recorded using the Skype recorder in the form of video files. One interviewee refused to

have the interview recorded, so I took notes of her answers and stored them in the form of a Google Form document. One other interviewee preferred to answer the interview questions by filling out a form, so she herself submitted her written answers through the same Google Form. Another one had an in-person interview with me but could not finish it due to her next appointment, thus only managed to answer half of the questions. She needed to attend a Friday prayer at her local mosque and a meeting at her community house, which I ended up joining for the purpose of research observation.

I prepared the interview questions based on survey questions used in the similar studies mentioned in the Theoretical Framework. However, instead of applying them for Likert scales, I treated them as open-ended questions. I also added a few more questions that I believed would help me to gain more insights from the interviewees around the topic. Different interviewees might get different additional questions depending on their answers to the main ones. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.

The interviewees lasted between 30 minutes to 1.5 hours with an average of 45 minutes each. Prior to the questions, all of the interviewees had been informed about the purpose of the research and that their personal data (names and workplaces, particularly) would not be revealed in this research publication. They had also provided me with their consent to participate in this research.

The research interviewees are 20 people who hold Lithuanian citizenship and claim themselves as Muslims. This includes both the ones who were born in the country and the ones who moved in as immigrants or expatriates and got naturalized as Lithuanian citizens. The number of 20 was determined based on a recommendation of Creswell (1998) that suggested 5-25 interviews for phenomenological studies.⁴⁸ There is no specific Islamic branch/denomination selected for this research, all are included. One restriction is applied to the research interviewees: the minimum age of 16 years, which is the Age of Consent in Lithuania. As I conducted the interviews in English, all selected interviewees also speak reasonable or fluent English.

⁴⁸ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998.

The interviewees are put into 3 categories: Lithuanian Muslim converts, Lithuanian Muslims born and bred, and naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens. 45% or 9 of the interviewees are Lithuanian Muslim converts, the ones who experienced a change of religion but no change of citizenship. 40% or 8 of them are Lithuanian Muslims born and bred, never experienced a change of religion nor citizenship. 15% or 3 of them are naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens, people who experienced a change of citizenship but not of religion.

Of the 20 interviewees, 19 of them live in Lithuania, while 1 of them is currently abroad. Non-probability sampling (the combination of convenience, purposive, voluntary response, and snowball sampling methods) was used to select participants of this study. I got in contact with the interviewees through a Facebook group (Foreigners in Vilnius), Muslim communities in Lithuania (Vilnius Mosque & Islamic Center, Forty Tatars Village, and Kaunas Mosque), mutual friends, and recommendations from experts in the field (Dr. Ieva Koreivaitė from Vilnius University and Prof. Dr. Egdūnas Račius from Vytautas Magnus University). I had one in-person interview with Prof. Dr. Egdūnas Račius to gain insights from his expertise.

I posted on Foreigners in Vilnius, looking for research interviewees, as this is one of the Facebook groups I am a member of and I was completely aware that there are many Lithuanian nationals in it as well, even the ones who live outside of Vilnius. Most of the Lithuanian Muslim convert samples voluntarily contacted me and offered themselves to participate in my study after seeing my post on this Facebook group. I initiated contact with the mentioned Muslim communities above and made interview appointments with most of the Lithuanian Muslims born and bred from there. I got introduced or referred to the rest of the samples through mutual friends and the field experts.

The recorded interviews were transcribed into texts using Descript software. Summaries of these transcriptions were made and thematic analysis was conducted. This involved data familiarization, coding the data using MAXQDA2020, and generating 10 key themes from it: 1) Distinctive appearance, 2) Hijab, 3) Experienced discrimination, 4) International exposure, 5) Muslim customs, 6) Islam in media, 7) Negative image about Islam, 8) Family acceptance, 9) Witnessed discrimination, 10) Proud Lithuanian. I used these steps to produce a descriptive analysis of each Lithuanian Muslim category and make research conclusions.

Refer to Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 for sample demographics and interview transcriptions summaries. Interview recordings and full transcriptions are available upon request, limited to only some interviewees for privacy protection.

3. Results

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from each category as separate groups: Lithuanian Muslim converts, Lithuanian Muslims born and bred, and naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens. In the next chapter, I continue with the discussion of them all as an overall bigger group of Lithuanian Muslims.

3.1. Lithuanian Muslim Converts

While I believe some Lithuanian men converted to Islam, as informed by some of my interviewees who know them in person, I managed to only get in touch with Lithuanian women for this category. This might be a predictor that there are more women than men in Lithuania who convert to this religion. Almost all of them reached out to me voluntarily after seeing my post on Foreigners in Vilnius Facebook group, looking for research interviewees. They are in their twenties to thirties with a higher educational background, ranging from college or bachelor's degree to Ph.D.

There is this stereotype that women who convert to Islam are always those who marry Muslim men.⁴⁹ Although this is true in certain cases, that they first got introduced to Islam by their spouses, some other reasons and experiences lead them to their decision. From my research, I found that some Lithuanian women became Muslims after having been longing for faith for quite some time. They feel that Islamic teachings provide them with answers, guidance, and peace that they have been searching for. Some began to seek God after getting through a traumatic experience such as the loss of a loved one. They either come from a Christian or atheist family background, growing up with Christian customs or no religious practices at all. Those who grew up as Christians before

⁴⁹ Egdūnas Račius, interview with author, Vilnius, 15th of October, 2020.

converting to Islam expressed rejection of certain Christian aspects such as the Trinity. Although at the same time they mentioned that there are a lot of similarities between Islam and Christianity, the main concept of God is different. Muslims only believe in one God, while Christians believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three figures yet united as one God.

Some of these women converted to Islam when they were in their teenage years. Typically they would have the introduction to Islam through a Muslim friend or by doing independent research on the religion. Some were drawn to cultures and languages related to Islam, having studied fields such as Turkology and Persian language (Interviewee #05 and Interviewee #15), before becoming Muslims themselves. Adjusting their daily routine according to Islam can be challenging, but some parts can be easy. For instance, those who did not drink alcohol or eat that much meat (pork) even before the conversion (namely Interviewee #13), do not feel as if there was any huge change in their lifestyle.

Lithuanian Muslim converts from my sample are moderate when it comes to practicing Islam. Fundamentally, they believe in Allah and His existence as well as the Quran, having no doubts about them. They typically try not to skip a day without the daily prayers, with some being more devoted to it than the others. They also take the fasting month into account, claiming that being in the Ramadan period would improve their commitment to religion. These women do not usually go to Friday prayers as it is only obligatory for men. Overall, they do not belong or are not very active in Muslim communities, but they normally have Muslim friends, either fellow Lithuanian converts or Muslims from other countries. It is not common for them to read or speak Arabic, let alone having been to Mecca to go on a pilgrimage (Hajj or Umrah).

Among these Lithuanian Muslim converts I interviewed, all come from Lithuanian ethnic background except for one, who is an ethnic Russian (Interviewee #04). When asked what are the Lithuanian ethnic traditions, they all mentioned Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter. I then asked them if there are specific Lithuanian ethnic traditions that other ethnic groups or countries do not have. A few of them mentioned pagan traditions and they consider Lithuanian traditions to be based on a mix of paganism and Catholicism in general. These Christian or pagan traditions have somehow evolved into

cultural traditions in Lithuania. People do not necessarily see them as religious celebrations anymore, but more as social events for family and friends, and people who celebrate them are not always religious. As someone who comes from a country where ethnic and religious traditions are most of the time separated and distinctive from one another, I naturally became very attentive to this perspective. Because of this, Lithuanian Muslim converts usually would still celebrate Christmas and they feel that it is part of their roots. Even for the ones who stopped celebrating privately, they would still at least go to family gatherings and send Christmas greetings or presents. One interviewee (Interviewee #02) mentioned that it would be very hurtful for her and her family if she had to stop celebrating Christmas because of the change of her religion. Other than that, the usage of the Lithuanian language has a huge role in their ethnic as well as national identities.

I see that the Lithuanian converts from my sample have at least one Muslim person in their social network who is very close to them. This could be a spouse, a very good friend, or even a colleague that truly supports them for their religious choice. They usually have a certain degree of international exposure as well, meaning that they have special relations with people from abroad or even consider another country as their second home (for example Interviewee #16 feels that she also belongs to Egypt, despite not being an Egyptian national herself). In general, most people in Lithuanian Muslim converts' circle of family and friends in Lithuania are non-practicing Christians or atheists. They do not care, mind, or talk about religions between each other. When they do, it is usually a respectful, constructive, and non-judgmental conversation. One interviewee (Interviewee #02) who currently resides in the Netherlands mentioned the same about the people in her surroundings.

According to my Lithuanian convert interviewees, they do not get discriminated against in public because they do not look different from any ordinary Lithuanians. They indicated that when discrimination happens in the public sphere in Lithuania, it is usually based on looks (race, skin color, and/or attire) rather than religion. They would witness more discrimination against people who do not look typically Lithuanian, including their foreign spouses or friends, for instance. In short, more of racism or xenophobia. One interviewee (Interviewee #16) told me that once she and her Egyptian husband were

trying to help an old lady carrying her heavy bag when the lady started strangely looking at her husband and telling her that she would regret marrying him. Sometimes there are also things that they perceive as some sort of discrimination against religion even though they are completely aware that there is no intention to discriminate there, e.g. lack of halal or meatless food options in a conference (which might also cause vegetarians to feel excluded, as expressed by Interviewee #13) or Christian practices (daily communal morning prayers, etc.) in a workplace. Overall, Lithuanian Muslim converts do not feel publicly discriminated against as other people might not even assume they are Muslims from their appearance.

When it comes to attire, they mentioned that it is very challenging for women, regardless of their race or skin color, to wear hijab in Lithuania as they tend to either receive disrespectful comments, inappropriate jokes or at the very minimum get stared at. None of them wear hijab daily but when they do, once in a while when they go to the mosque or for an Islamic occasion somewhere, they would get one of these treatments from strangers. One interviewee (Interviewee #03) wore a hijab with a very bright color once in public and two men sitting next to her asked, in a mocking way, why her hijab was not black. Some say that they do not see it as discrimination as people might just be curious. When people see something uncommon, they would stare. It would apply to any other thing that is unusually seen in Lithuania, not just women in hijab. However, one interviewee (Interviewee #15) told me that young Muslim girls (refugees) who go to public schools in Lithuania often get discriminated against because of their hijab or scarf. Other students see it as some kind of special treatment or privilege while they are restricted to their regular uniforms, so they do not like it. Some teachers have also expressed their dislikes on the matter. The interviewee who lives in the Netherlands (Interviewee #02) stated that in terms of hijab, it is much easier for women to wear it there than in Lithuania. There is a much bigger Muslim community in the Netherlands that people generally already got used to seeing them.

On the other side, Lithuanian Muslim converts very often are subjected to discriminatory comments in the private sphere, especially their family environment. It is important to note that stories about rejection or negative reactions from family members are usually not mentioned immediately when I started the discussion on perceived discrimination. I

had to ask literal questions on how their families reacted to their conversion before they would start opening up. With a little digging, they also confessed how some of their family members stopped talking to them or pretended that they were just in some kind of phase that they would eventually pass. Some of these Lithuanian Muslim converts experienced receiving wounding comments from their parents when they shared their new religious identity. Comments or words such as ‘stupid’, ‘delusional’, ‘brainwashed’, or ‘traitor to Lithuanian ancestors’ were thrown at them by parents and/or grandparents. One interviewee (Interviewee #07) was asked why she would want to associate herself with ‘terrorists’. Their family members also expressed their concerns on how these women would get treated by Muslim men, saying that they would just end up being kidnapped, raped, beaten, or murdered. My interviewees mentioned that their family members had this fear, misconception, and negative image about Islam from what they see in the media, without actually knowing any Muslim in person.

Some decided not to talk about Islam anymore with their family members as they feel like they will not change their minds. A few of them also hide their Muslim identity and never actually share this information with their family in the first place as they already predicted such negative reactions. Those who hide their faith from the family choose not to do any Muslim customs (praying, fasting, etc.) when the family is around. Those who do not hide still prefer not to express their religious identity too much in front of the family, especially if the family is in denial and/or have voiced their negative opinions on Islam and that they would never accept it. Interestingly, some of them who have Muslim husbands, mentioned that their families love and accept their spouses but still would not want them to become a Muslim. One interviewee (Interviewee #05) was threatened that if she would start wearing a scarf or hijab, the family would disown her and not want her to come back home.

I could feel that sharing these personal experiences was quite emotional for these Lithuanian Muslim converts. Their facial expression and tone of voice changed when they entered the topic, from losing the smile on their face to lowering their volume of speaking. Even though they can still go by and live their life without full support from their families, I can imagine that family acceptance would be something that means a lot to all of them. I think family acceptance and support will encourage them to be more open

about their religious identity and truly express themselves the way they want to. Surely among these, there are also Lithuanian Muslim converts (especially Interviewee #09) who have accepting and supportive family members and they are truly appreciative of it.

The Lithuanian Muslim converts also spoke about the difference between the older and younger generations in Lithuania. They said that younger Lithuanians tend to be more accepting and tolerant of people with different religious backgrounds or foreigners. Older people tend to believe everything they see on TV without fact-checking. They also mentioned people in Vilnius, specifically, are more open than other places in Lithuania as the capital city is quite multicultural with increased exposure to international communities. The most common challenges they face when they want to practice Islam is the lack of halal food options as well as the limited number of mosques in the country.

One interviewee (Interviewee #07) expressed her disappointment with the perceived discrimination she experienced, done by non-Lithuanian Muslims who come from Islamic countries. Once she was in a country where Muslims are dominant in population and she was almost denied entering a mosque because she 'does not look like a typical Muslim'. She was asked to state the shahada (the Muslim declaration/testimony of faith, also a required statement when converting to Islam) before she could enter the mosque. She had one non-Lithuanian born-and-bred Muslim man approaching her in a mosque and asking her questions about Islam and Allah as if he was testing whether or not she genuinely understands the religion and believes in it. She does not feel comfortable at all with this kind of treatment as it makes her feel that she is not fully accepted in the Muslim community.

Another interviewee (Interviewee #15) who claimed herself as a Shia Muslim and holds double citizenship (Lithuanian and Iranian) through her previous marriage with an Iranian man mentioned that there is a conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims. She stated that Sunni Muslims sometimes do not see Shia Muslims as Muslims and vice versa. The main divide is their approach to whom they think should be the successor after the death of Prophet Muhammad. Prof. Dr. Egdūnas Račius confirmed that there is tension between the two Islamic main branches.⁵⁰ One example of their divided views he mentioned was

⁵⁰ Ibid.

that Aisha, the third and youngest wife of Muhammad's, is generally viewed as unfavorable for the Shias, while she has always been portrayed as scholarly and inquisitive by the Sunnis. This particular interviewee perceives this as some sort of discrimination within the Muslim community itself.

Despite embracing a minority religion, Lithuanian Muslim converts from my sample still strongly identify themselves as Lithuanian nationals. Some of them even stated that they are quite nationalist or patriotic. They are proud of their Lithuanian national identity and will always say that they are from Lithuania if they are not in their home country. They follow Lithuanian news and support civil events although they do not always attend them. When it comes to voting, they are quite divided as half would say that they do vote and try not to skip any voting events, but half said they do not vote as they do not think it will change anything. A couple of them (Interviewee #03 and Interviewee #07) said that politically, Christian values are still either embedded or dominant in Lithuanian culture, making them feel just a little less of a Lithuanian, excluded, or like an outsider because of that. However, most said that becoming a Muslim does not change anything in how they perceive their national identity because they see religion and nationality as two separate things.

This strong Lithuanian national identity might also be related to the fact that they are ethnic Lithuanians because one interviewee who is an ethnic Russian (Interviewee #04) expressed herself differently from the other converts. She mentioned that when she was younger, before converting to Islam, she always wanted to move abroad because she did not feel she belonged in Lithuania. The reason is that growing up, she has always sensed the dislikes from ethnic Lithuanians to ethnic Russians, because of what happened in the past. She completely understands this but at the same time, it was uneasy for her. Only after she met her best friend (a Muslim girl) in high school who introduced her to Islam, then she realized that all this time she never had the chance to move out because she had to be in Lithuania for a reason. She sees herself as a Muslim first before a Lithuanian national. Some other converts who are ethnic Lithuanians also see themselves this way as religion has no borders, while nationality does. Religion is more of a core of an

individual. Some others see themselves as both Muslims and Lithuanian nationals equally.

When asked whether they perceive Muslim and Lithuanian values compatible or incompatible, overall they believe the two are quite compatible. The reasons they say this vary, depending on what they think Lithuanian values are — do they think of them as more of Christian values or law-related values? From the perspective of Lithuanian values as Christian values, they think that Christianity and Islam are similar in many aspects. There are, of course, different customs, but both are about being a good citizen of society and valuing your family. Even scarf and fasting are, or at least were once, considered as Christian norms. From the perspective of Lithuanian values as Lithuanian national laws, they stated that it is free and legal in Lithuania to choose/practice your religion, including Islam, so they do not see a reason why the values should be incompatible. One interviewee (Interviewee #09) also mentioned that Lithuanian people, in general, are conservative and like to obey the rules, which are very similar to the values held by Muslims.

3.2. Lithuanian Muslims Born and Bred

Before getting in touch with the research participants and conducting my interviews, I categorized the Muslims born and bred in Lithuania as Lithuanian Tatars since I only had the Tatars in mind. They are highly featured in popular media for topics related to Islam in Lithuania. Along the way, I realized that this category of Muslims born and bred means a broader group that includes the Azeris, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and mixed-race people such as Tatar-Lithuanian or Syrian-Lithuanian people. People who, regardless of their ethnicity, have been Muslims and Lithuanian citizens since they were born and/or raised in Lithuania.

For this research, I managed to speak to Crimean Tatars, mixed Volga Tatar-Lithuanians, and mixed Syrian-Lithuanians. I contacted them through the Vilnius Mosque & Islamic Center (*Vilniaus mečetė ir islamiškas centras*), the Forty Tatars Village (*Keturiasdešimt Totorių kaimas*), the Kaunas Mosque (*Kauno mečetė*), and through mutual friends by

reference. They are in their twenties to forties and, similar to the Lithuanian Muslim converts, with a higher educational background, ranging from bachelor to master's degrees.

When people consider themselves born with a certain religion, this usually means that they were given the religious identity by others who raised them. In most cases, a child's religious identity is 'given' by their parents. Among these Lithuanian Muslims born and bred, not all of them have parents who are both Muslims. However, those who have parents who come from mixed religious backgrounds, e.g. Muslim and Catholic, all have a Muslim father and a non-Muslim mother, not the other way around. Perhaps it is because the Islamic law forbids a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man but allows a Muslim man to marry a non-Muslim woman as long as she is a Kitabia (believing in Christianity or Judaism).

Lithuanian Muslims born and bred from my sample are either highly practicing or almost not practicing at all. Those who practice Islamic customs at the minimum level perceive their religious identity as their heritage or legacy from parents/ancestors. One of them (Interviewee #18) stated that Islam is a basic presentation of himself, while another one (Interviewee #01) expressed how she thinks some of the Islamic teachings are outdated and feels that she is "close yet so far from the religion". Those who are highly devoted to praying five times a day, fasting, attending Friday prayers, as well as expressing their identity in public by wearing Islamic attire perceive their religious identity as both heritage and system that guides their life. One interviewee (Interviewee #19) mentioned that she usually plans her days around the five praying times and another one (Interviewee #08) said that she would not be able to imagine her life without Islam.

According to one of the highly practicing Lithuanian Muslims born and bred (Interviewee #11), to be a Muslim is to agree with all the aspects of Islam. Agreeing with some and not agreeing with the other ones do not qualify one as a Muslim. He claimed that he identifies himself as a Muslim not only because his parents are Muslims, but also because he truly believes in Islam. He sees Islam as a faith and a system, not just as a culture like many other people who identify themselves as Muslims often do. He does not believe in religious conversion. The way he sees it, people who are not Muslims just have not

returned to the right path (Islam). When someone ‘converts’ to Islam, he considers the person to be going back to Allah.

Another devoted Lithuanian Muslim born and bred (Interviewee #08) stated that she is more of a Muslim religiously than culturally. She comes from a Tatar family and community, but she has stopped doing some of the Tatar traditions some time ago. She did not specify which traditions to be exact, but she did so after learning that those are not aligned with Islamic teachings. She chose to let go of some of her ethnic traditions because she always tries to do everything that Islam asks her to do.

Growing up in a Tatar community in Lithuania gets the Lithuanian Tatars to experience many Tatar ethnic traditions from a very young age, not only the religious customs but from art events to cuisine as well. One interviewee from the Forty Tatars Village (Interviewee #10) said that she became aware that she was different from her friends since her first school years. She has also started going to the mosque since she was around four or five years old. Until today, she is still volunteering for the community to organize activities and gatherings. Another interviewee from the Tatar background (Interviewee #19) described how her children always perform and sing in Tatar annual events such as Sabantuy. This is a festival where Tatars from different cities or even countries would come together to celebrate. She explained how songs from Crimean Tatar and Volga Tatar communities are quite different from each other — Crimean Tatar songs are more melodious and melancholic, while Volga Tatar songs are more upbeat and lively.

The mixed Volga Tatar-Lithuanians (Interviewee #01 and Interviewee #06) used to attend Tatar/Muslim gatherings and summer camps as kids. However, they became distant from Islam after moving out from their parents’ house as well as after their Muslim father passed away. Similar to them, the Syrian-Lithuanians (Interviewee #17 and Interviewee #18) barely practice Islam thoroughly either. One tries to follow Muslim customs more than the other, e.g. fasting on Ramadan month or attending Friday prayers before the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, both of them consume alcoholic drinks occasionally.

When it comes to ethnic traditions, the Lithuanian Muslims born and bred also associate theirs a lot with Muslim customs, just like the Lithuanian Muslim converts associate

Lithuanian ethnic traditions with Christian customs. As mentioned by one interviewee (Interviewee #11), people in Lithuania usually think of Tatars as Muslims and of Muslims as Tatars, as if the two terms are the same thing. This is especially true in the Soviet era. At that time, any Muslim in Lithuania would be considered as a Tatar, even though the person is actually an Azeri or an Uzbek, for example. In reality, not all Tatars are Muslims and not all Muslims are Tatars. Another interviewee (Interviewee #08) also stated that many Tatars in Lithuania are Christians and they eat pork. Many Tatars lost their traditions around 500 years ago. Most of them do not speak Tatar languages anymore. They usually do not speak Arabic either, unless they are religious and intentionally learn the language for religious purposes. Nowadays, some Tatars barely practice their religion or mix Islam and Christianity, for instance burying corpses in an Islamic way yet using coffins. They might not even be interested in their ethnic origins anymore, as asserted by one of the Volga Tatar-Lithuanians (Interviewee #01). She finds it easy to blend in with the majority of Lithuanian society since she does not look different from common Lithuanians. She does not wear hijab as she follows European clothing standards and she hopes Allah would forgive her for not wearing it.

The non-Tatar mixed-race interviewees have a slightly different experience as people usually recognize they are mixed (or even foreign) from their names. While Tatars tend to have either Lithuanian, Russian, or Polish sounding names (at least on the ID), the Syrian-Lithuanians (Interviewee #17 and Interviewee #18) that participated in my research have (Lithuanized) Arabic sounding names. Coming from mixed family background, they would celebrate both Syrian and Lithuanian big days, which most of the time are associated with Muslim and Christian festivals. Events they put care into that are not related to Islam or Christianity are more of Syrian or Lithuanian national celebrations, rather than ethnic ones, e.g. Syrian Revolution Day and Lithuanian Restoration of Independence Day.

The monoracial and mixed Tatars typically speak both Russian and Lithuanian on the same level of fluency. They use the Russian language within their families, then Lithuanian to friends or colleagues outside their Tatar communities. Some of them might also speak Polish. The Syrian-Lithuanians speak Arabic and Lithuanian as their native languages, but they consider Lithuanian to be their first language as they use it more,

living in Lithuania. They use the Arabic language to communicate with their father and Middle Eastern friends.

The non-Muslim people in these Lithuanian Muslims born and bred's social network are usually not religious. One interviewee (Interviewee #06) said that he does not talk about religion to others as he does not want to 'agitate' them with the subject matter.

While the other Lithuanian Muslims born and bred express their identity as Muslim, one (Interviewee #01) hides hers from the public. Only her family and about five friends know that she is a Muslim. She prefers to not express or show this identity because of the discrimination that she experienced in her younger years. Her peers bullied her when they knew her religion. It happened that some people treated her nicely at first, but behaved differently after learning about her Muslim identity. They gave unkind comments to try to make her feel ashamed or disgusted with her own religion, for instance by saying that Islam is the religion of terrorists. These experiences traumatized her as a teenager. She also mentioned that people in Lithuania are very judgmental about women in hijab and this is why she does not want to wear it. She shared her opinion, "Lithuanians like to make fun of you, it is like a national thing. They laugh at you when you are in worse condition. When you laugh at other people, you feel stronger." She feels that Russians tend to understand Islam better since there are regions dominated by the Muslims in Russia, while there is no such area in Lithuania. She added that the younger generation in Lithuania is better at accepting the presence of Muslim people than the older people.

The other interviewees in this category do not hide their Muslim identity, although some are more open than the others as they work or are active in Muslim communities. All of them mentioned that there are misinformation and misconception of Islam in Lithuania because of non-neutral content in the media. They often portray Muslims, or Arabs, as 'bad guys'. According to one interviewee (Interviewee #111), the Tatars as an ethnic group have always had a great relationship with Lithuanians for centuries. Yet, people might perceive their Muslim side of the culture differently because negative stories about Muslims frequently come from other EU countries, starting in the early 2000s after the 9/11 tragedy in the US. A lot of people now associate Islam with terrorism. Many even misinterpret Islamic words such as "Allahu Akbar" as something to say before

committing terrorist acts, when in fact it is just an everyday phrase in Arabic which means “God is great”. This interviewee shared how irritating it is sometimes when he has to interact with a new person who is a non-Muslim. Because of the negative image of Islam in the media, he always has to prove that he is a good Muslim, and most essentially, a good person. He is expected to do this while the other person is not. He feels like they cannot start the interaction from the same level before him having to explain himself. Back in school, he also needed to get good marks and be good at sports so that his schoolmates would want to befriend him.

Being a woman in hijab, or even wearing a Muslim cap, is rather challenging in Lithuania. One interviewee (Interviewee #08) expressed her concern that people in Lithuania fear women in hijab as they associate the headcover with terrorism. When a woman wears a hijab, people tend to think she is a foreigner and will not even expect her to be able to speak Lithuanian. If Muslims stay silent and look just like the rest of Lithuanians, it will be fine. However, if they wear hijab or express their religion in other ways, people will not like it. Another interviewee (Interviewee #19) often gives tips to Muslim women who want to wear hijab in Lithuania: wear it in light or bright colors, not black. Somehow, she feels that Lithuanians, in general, dislike black hijab — probably because black is the color for funerals in the culture — but are more accepting of colorful hijabs. She stated that these women she gave her advice to have told her that it works. People become less judgmental when they wear hijab in light or bright colors.

Despite these, Lithuanian Muslims born and bred generally do not feel discriminated against or experience significant challenges when practicing their religion in Lithuania. People might have negative thoughts in mind but they do not usually attack verbally or physically. Muslims have legal rights in Lithuania to perform Muslim customs, e.g. wearing a hijab, getting a license for halal food production, and *nikah* (Muslim marriage). Some institutions provide their Muslim workers with a room to pray, while some others do not. Nevertheless, the situation is progressing. One interviewee (Interviewee #19) stated that on a political level, it is difficult to be granted permission on projects as mosque building if one would perceive it as discrimination. She said that, on an interpersonal level, when someone throws poor comments to others, she would choose to just have mercy for them instead of feeling insulted or discriminated against. People who

treat others this way usually have a hard life. They do or say bad things because they feel miserable and have so much anger inside them, not necessarily because they have hatred towards a certain religion.

Some other interviewees had a different opinion, saying that discriminatory acts that happen in Lithuania are usually not religion-based, but race/ethnicity-based. This is particularly applied to brown and/or black people. They also claimed that it really depends on where you are in Lithuania. As an example, people in Klaipėda are usually more discriminating than people in Vilnius. They believe that it is due to higher international exposure in Vilnius. It helped the people in the city to be more tolerant and accepting of others from different backgrounds.

The concept of what it means to be a Lithuanian has also developed throughout the years. One of the Syrian-Lithuanians' grandmother told him (Interviewee #17) when he was a child (in the 1990s) that to be a Lithuanian citizen is to blend in the society. People would not accept him if he would show his 'different sides'. She emphasized that he would need to lose those (in this case, his Syrian cultural traditions) to become a true Lithuanian. Nowadays, he feels that it is more acceptable in Lithuania to be different ethnically and religiously, so there is less discrimination. Having said that, he felt extremely disappointed in how Lithuania reacted to the mass movement of refugees in 2015. Lithuania itself suffered from Soviet occupation for half a century. The country restored its independence in 1990 and much appreciated the solidarity given to them by the US and Western Europe. However, when there were actual refugees fleeing from wars, Lithuanians in general (according to proven statistics as he mentioned) were against the idea of accepting them, principally Syrians. They explicitly remarked that it is because Syrians come from a different religious background and that they would never integrate in Lithuania. The interviewee thought that Lithuanian values are to stand up for the weak, but it seems like 25 years have corrupted this value that people somehow forgot the feeling of solidarity as human beings. This issue mattered a lot to him that now he prefers to avoid identifying himself with any specific ethnicity. Whenever he can, he will just specify his ethnicity as 'none'. He identifies himself as more of a Lithuanian citizen rather than an ethnic Lithuanian as a consequence of this disappointment.

Lithuanian Muslims born and bred typically strongly identify themselves as Lithuanian citizens as they were born and/or grew up here. Most of them claimed to be quite patriotic and always try to keep themselves updated with Lithuanian news. One Volga Tatar-Lithuanian interviewee (Interviewee #01) said that she is a proud Lithuanian, speaks Lithuanian as her first language, and refuses to follow Russian propaganda that she witnessed, growing up in Russian schools. Another interviewee (Interviewee #11) stated that if other nations would attack Lithuania, he would definitely protect his country. He feels that Lithuanian national rules are good rules and another interviewee added that Lithuania is still a good country for Muslims to live in. When it comes to voting, some from the sample always vote and some do not. Those who do not are normally not into politics at all and do not spend their time paying attention to political matters. They are proud of the progress in Lithuania, specifically in the technology field. However, they are not proud of the general image of Lithuanians in the western world, especially in the UK. One interviewee (Interviewee #18) mentioned that Lithuanians are known as thieves or drug dealers there. Another interviewee (Interviewee #19) said that there is this image of Lithuanian women being prostitutes, even though she does not know anyone in person working this type of job. They both think that most Lithuanian representatives abroad do not set a good example for the country's reputation.

One interviewee (Interviewee #17) thinks that as the acceptance of 'others' becomes better, the patriotism of Lithuanians decreases at the same time. In his opinion, the young generation now identifies themselves more broadly as a European rather than specifically a Lithuanian. Due to this, there is less stress on Christian values in Lithuania, significantly. He also sees this trend in the west, not only in Lithuania or Eastern Europe in general. "Identity is a fluid thing. When you change your identity, you change the way you look at things," he stated.

As for perceived value incompatibility, I would say that half of them see Lithuanian and Muslim values as incompatible and half as compatible. The ones who indicated the incompatibility are generally concerned about the different lifestyles and women's rights that the two values bring. For one interviewee (Interviewee #01), to feel more Lithuanian or European, she needs to repress her Muslim identity. She is concerned that following all Islamic rules will restrict her from her freedom to work and have a career for herself, to

be independent. While for another interviewee (Interviewee #08), Lithuanian values nowadays are more about being ‘modern’. This means accepting things like separating from parents, not getting married, not having children, and homosexuality as a norm — which are not aligned with Islam according to her. Those who think that the two values are compatible, view it from religious and national perspectives. If Lithuanian values are Christian values, then they see them quite compatible as Islam and Christianity have a lot of similarities. If Lithuanian values are citizenship values, then it is even more compatible as Lithuania allows Islam in the country and includes it as one of the nine traditional religions in the constitution. Besides, according to one interviewee (Interviewee #11), in Islam, citizenship is included. Based on the teachings of the religion, if you are a Muslim, you have to love and protect the country you live in. You must agree with your country’s rules and be a good citizen. He argued that there is more freedom to practice Islam and more possibilities for Muslims in Lithuania than in some Islamic countries. Nowadays, according to another interviewee (Interviewee #17), there are more people who do not drink alcohol and become a vegetarian for health reasons. Therefore, if the conflicting values are about alcohol and pork, this issue has sort of resolved itself.

3.3. Naturalized Lithuanian Muslim Citizens

I was able to get in touch with the naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens for my research through one friend who is a naturalized Lithuanian citizen himself (non-Muslim) and a Lithuanian Muslim convert who is also the research participant. I also met a few more Muslims who have been highly integrated into the Lithuanian society but I did not include them as interviewees as they are not (yet) naturalized citizens.

Contrary to Lithuanian Muslim converts, I only have male participants for this category. They are in their late thirties to late forties with higher educational backgrounds, ranging from bachelor’s to doctoral degrees. However, I do not know whether or not this could predict if there are more Muslim men than Muslim women from other countries obtaining Lithuanian citizenship. I do not have sufficient data or information from public sources or naturalized citizens themselves to make any assumption.

Two of them (Interviewee #14 and Interviewee #20) originally come from Syria and primarily moved to Lithuania for studies. The other one (Interviewee #12) is a Brazilian-Lebanese who grew up in several different countries, including Brazil and Lebanon. He first came to Lithuania to play football professionally. As of now, they have been living in Lithuania for the span of 17-27 years and have become naturalized Lithuanian citizens for 4-12 years.

Their approaches to Islam quite vary from one another. One (Interviewee #20) is highly practicing and expressive about his religiosity, one (Interviewee #14) claimed to have made lots of compromises of his Muslim customs to adjust better with the Lithuanian society, and one (Interviewee #12) keeps his religion as a private matter and never shares it with others. All of them come from Muslim families. For one of the Syrians (Interviewee #20), Islam was the only religion he knew when he was a child. He also grew up in a traditional family. For the Brazilian-Lebanese (Interviewee #12), as he often moved countries, he had already been exposed to multiculturalism and a global environment since a very young age.

As ethnic Syrians and half-ethnic Lebanese, these naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens speak Arabic as their mother tongue. For the Brazilian-Lebanese (Interviewee #12), he also considers Portuguese as his native language, as he lived both in Brazil and Lebanon. Having been living in Lithuania for years and naturalized as citizens, surely the three of them speak the Lithuanian language fluently. Today, they mostly use this language to communicate with friends and colleagues. One (Interviewee #14) even speaks Lithuanian to his children at home, even though the children's mother is an ethnic Syrian as well. Another one (Interviewee #20) came to realize that he is using Lithuanian more than Arabic as he spent most years of his life in Lithuania.

Outside of their families, these naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens have friends and colleagues from various countries and cultures. Most are non-practicing Christians or non-believers. The three feel very welcomed and respected by their social network in Lithuania even though others do not share the same religious identity. They do not choose their friends or value people based on religion.

The naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens acknowledged the negative image that Islam carries in society. They claimed that the media is not being neutral with content about Islam. It seems like it always emphasizes bad things related to foreigners. Media plays a big role in shaping a certain point of view for the Lithuanians, even though most of them do not know anything about Islam or know any Muslims in real life. One interviewee (Interviewee #20) said that the key between Muslim and non-Muslim is communication. Non-Muslims would understand Muslims better once they interact with each other and vice versa. He has some friends who would occasionally ask him about his religion. Some of them even converted to Islam after knowing him.

Another interviewee (Interviewee #12) emphasized the importance of speaking the Lithuanian language if a person from outside the country wants to belong here. Being able to speak with locals in their native language will open a lot of doors. They will accept you more as 'one of them' when you show respect and interest in their mother tongue. The other interviewee (Interviewee #14) has observed that, unfortunately, there are also some Muslims (non-Lithuanian nationals) in Lithuania who only mingle within their community and do not try to integrate with Lithuanian society. It is a pity and this creates a gap between them and the locals. He hopes that more non-nationals will put value and effort into learning the Lithuanian language.

All three agreed that when discriminatory actions happen in Lithuania, they are usually based on looks first. People with darker skin are more prone to becoming the subject of discrimination or an object of fear for their distinctive appearance. One of them (Interviewee #12) compares Lithuania to the Netherlands as he used to live there as well. Lithuanians are less open-minded than Western Europeans because society is less diverse with not much international exposure here. In the Netherlands, simply everyone, regardless of their ethnicity or religion, could be a Dutch national nowadays. There is much less assumption that you are not a citizen just because you are not Caucasian.

One of them (Interviewee #14) finds it irritating yet interesting when some people in Lithuanian immigration offices automatically switch to the Russian language to speak to him after seeing his face. He would make it clear that he has Lithuanian citizenship, speaks Lithuanian very well, and does not speak Russian. Sometimes he needs to insist

before they finally switch back to Lithuanian. When he travels abroad within Eastern Europe with his Lithuanian passport, at times he would get detained and questioned a lot for not 'looking Lithuanian'. For him, when you look a bit different from most Lithuanian citizens, you get treated differently.

The same interviewee chose to compromise between his religion and the lifestyle in Lithuania since the time he resided here for his studies. He told a story about a flatmate from the Middle East that he had back in the day. The friend was deeply devoted to Islam and tried to always apply all the Islamic customs while living in Kaunas. For instance, he would not shake hands with women and would never eat food that was not 100% halal. The interviewee came to realize that if his friend or himself keeps behaving this way, they would not have any friends. Therefore, he decided to be less tight about his religion. He does not drink alcohol, for example, but he will compromise if a non-Muslim friend brings it along when meeting him. He works in a non-profit organization (NPO) and one of the ways he tries to help other Muslims to integrate into Lithuanian society is by suggesting that the women do not wear hijab. Sounds quite extreme and strange in a way, cause why would a Muslim tell his fellow Muslims to quit their Islamic customs? In reality, it is because their NPO just does not have the capacity to always help or handle discrimination cases that happen in Lithuania caused by Muslim attire. Quite opposite of what one of the Lithuanian Muslims born and bred (Interviewee #01) has said about Russian-Lithuanians being more accepting of Islam than the ethnic Lithuanians, this interviewee (Interviewee #14) said that based on the data his NPO has, people in Lithuania who discriminate against Muslims are often the Russian-Lithuanians. He mentioned some Russian names as examples.

Still and all, in general, these naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens think that Lithuania is a good country for Muslims. They have a very positive image and feeling about Lithuanians and they love Lithuania. In terms of discrimination, they compare how Lithuania was back in the 1990s to today in 2020 — "It is like earth and sky," one of them (Interviewee #20) said. Although the situation could have been better, at least it is already progressing a lot. More people speak positively about foreigners and recognize them as contributing individuals as well.

These men professed their pride in being Lithuanian citizens. They had to give up their previous nationalities when they got naturalized and none of them regrets this decision. They were technically convinced by the immigration staff to apply for citizenship after years of living and contributing to Lithuania. One of them (Interviewee #14) received the decision of his application in just 27 days. They follow Lithuanian news and votes from time to time. They perceive value compatibility differently. One (Interviewee #12) completely separates religion from nationality and thinks that it is not important to compare the two, one (Interviewee #14) thinks that Lithuanian and Muslim lifestyles are incompatible and thus compromises are needed, and one (Interviewee #20) sees them compatible but just with their own specifics.

Naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens wish to see more diversity in Lithuania, as well as more food options. They want more foreigners or soon-to-be nationals to give more contribution to Lithuania and for Lithuanians to travel more so that they can also understand how life works in other countries.

4. Discussion

Based on the results, we can see similarities and differences between the 3 categories of Lithuanian Muslims. A strong belief in Allah and Quran is the core of Lithuanian Muslims' religious identity. This is what they all, in my sample, share in common, regardless of how practicing they are (such as praying 5 times a day, fasting during Ramadan month, attending Friday prayers, etc.) on a daily basis or how devoted they are to Islam. They do not consider themselves very knowledgeable of the history of Islam and only know a little of it. They feel that the more they learn, the more they realize that there is still a lot out there that they have not yet learned. I also noticed that it is very fundamental for them to not eat pork, but some would still drink alcohol occasionally. Whilst similarities are found, we can also see that there is no single or one-and-only definition to be a Muslim for the research interviewees. They give individual interpretation and meaning to their religion as well as how it shapes their identity as a person.

They all expressed that Lithuanians in general have misconceptions and misinformation about Islam because of the media. These Lithuanian Muslims think that discrimination in the public sphere is often based on appearance (race, skin color, clothing style, or attire), rather than religion. Ethnically and culturally, Lithuania is not as diverse as some countries in Western Europe such as the UK or the Netherlands, making it sometimes difficult for people who do not look typically Lithuanian or Caucasian. On the other hand, discrimination against religion (or Islam, in this case) is more likely to happen in a family or private environment, specifically for the Lithuanian Muslim converts. This finding supports the hypothesis that Lithuanian Muslims perceive and experience discrimination against Islam in Lithuania.

Despite the experienced or witnessed discrimination and in line with two of the hypothesis points, Lithuanian Muslims still strongly identify themselves as Lithuanian nationals because of their ethnic background and/or country of birth/residence. Even the naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens have a high sense of belonging to the country after living here for many years and speak the national language fluently. They see being a Lithuanian national and a Muslim as equally important. They love the country and are proud Lithuanians, and some even claim to be quite nationalist/patriotic. In terms of national laws, Muslims have the right and freedom to practice their religion in Lithuania.

From the sample, I can also say that Lithuanian Muslims who have close relations with the Catholics or ethnic Lithuanians (majority group) do have a strong national identity. This is especially true for the naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens, even though they were not born and raised in the country. Most of the research interviewees have also experienced studying for at least one higher degree in Lithuania which might have an effect on their strong national identity. Some of them explicitly stated that they see strong Christian (religiously non-neutral) aspects in Lithuanian politics. However, contrary to my hypothesis, most of the sample actually see Lithuanian and Muslim values as compatible and only a few think they are absolutely incompatible.

These key findings support the Social Identity Theory (SIT) which says that individuals categorize themselves into a group or groups and then adopt the identity of the particular group(s) they feel that they belong to. In this case, the research interviewees categorize themselves as both Lithuanian nationals and Muslims, then adopt the hybrid identity

(Lithuanian Muslim) that the two aspects form. With this identity, they act in the ways they believe the people in their groups act and conform to the norms of the groups. For instance, as Lithuanian nationals, the female Lithuanian Muslims prefer to either not wear a hijab or wear it in a bright color, as they believe this is more of the clothing norm in Lithuania. Some of the Lithuanian Muslims also drink alcohol occasionally as they consider drinking as one of the norms in the country. In the final stage of SIT, Lithuanian Muslims compare themselves with other groups in society. The ones who feel that their Muslim identity is unfavorable compared to other groups in Lithuania (e.g. Catholics, non-believers, etc), decide to compromise or repress this aspect of their identity to blend in or integrate better with others.

As I have predicted, the Lithuanian Muslims sample stands between the case of German/Dutch Muslims and Norwegian/British Muslims. They see the dominance of Christianity, not only in population but also in culture and politics, just like the German/Dutch case; but at the same time, having been born/raised or living in Lithuania for a long time and a high usage of Lithuanian language has built their sense of belonging to Lithuania, just like the Norwegian/British case. This supports the theory from Jonas R. Kunst et al. (2011) which indicates that place of birth and where a person grows up does have a correlation with one's national identity. Strong cultural assimilation can also have an impact on a person's behavior in society as to which identity one has to repress to feel more accepted or belonging with the other identity.

I consider the Lithuanian Muslims case to be unique compared to the similar studies reviewed, as not only it supports the existing theories, it also challenges some of them. As this research has a limited number of participants, I was not able to build any statistical or cause-and-effect relationship between the variables. However, the findings of this research might show that religious (Muslim) and/or (non-Lithuanian) ethnic strong identification does not always mean weaker (Lithuanian) national identification, contrary to the statement of Maykel Verkuyten and Ali Aslan Yildiz (2007) as well as Borja Martinovic and Maykel Verkuyten (2012). Perceived social rejection (discrimination) does not always result in increased minority group identification and decreased identification with the national category either, as opposed to the statement of Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1993).

The used methodology has helped me provide this comprehensive and in-depth analysis of how Lithuanian Muslims perceive their religious and national identities. I hope this research can also be the starting point and reference for future studies that will focus on similar topics. The generalizability of this research results is limited by sociodemographic characteristics of the participants, principally language abilities and city of residence. Due to my own limited skills in the Lithuanian language, I could only conduct interviews with people who speak English. From the ones I managed to reach out to, they all live in big cities as well. This means that the sample of Lithuanian Muslims who do not speak English and/or do not live in big cities is not covered. There is also an imbalance between the number as well as the gender variety of Lithuanian Muslims from each category that I could get for this study with the timeline and resources that I had.

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide numerical and correlation data between all the studied variables, if this could be another consideration for further research. It would be great if more studies are carried out to continue these research findings, preferably with hundreds of participants to produce quantitative data and results. This will provide more generalizable facts and representative results about Lithuanian Muslims as a whole group and the ability to properly test the existing theories.

Future researchers shall also include or conduct a separate study on Muslims in Lithuania who have been living in the country under a permanent residence permit basis and are not or not yet naturalized Lithuanian citizens. This study will be useful to see how Muslims in Lithuania who do not hold Lithuanian citizenship perceive their religious and national identities. A comparative study can also be conducted to see how the results between the citizenship holders and non-holders resemble or differ from each other.

Conclusion & Recommendations

By analyzing the primary data from a sample of 20 interviewees, this thesis has shown that Lithuanian Muslims can have strong religious (Muslim) and (Lithuanian) national identities at the same time. Within the framework of Social Identity Theory (SIT), they do perceive these identities by categorizing, identifying, and comparing themselves to others in Lithuanian society. Having been born or raised in Lithuania or living for a long time here, as well as the usage of the Lithuanian language, play a big role in their sense of belonging to the country. The research interviewees' opinions indicate that discrimination against Muslims in Lithuania exists in different layers, from a family environment to a constitutional level. However, the appearance of a person is likely more prone to discrimination than one's religion. By law, Muslims have the right to practice Islam.

The findings of this study both support and challenge the existing theories about European Muslim identity. They show that the place of birth/residence and the usage of national language do matter in one's sense of national identity. On the other hand, a strong minority religious/ethnic identity does not always lead to a weak national identity or vice versa. Quantitative studies are recommended to further this research in order to measure the tendency of Lithuanian Muslims in perceiving their hybrid identity.

In the long run, my interviewees hope that Lithuanians will be more open-minded, respectful, and welcoming to Muslims, or to people with differences or other backgrounds in general. Also for them to be more educated about Islam by getting to know and communicating with Muslims in-person and not only relying on what they see on the media. They hope that Lithuanian families will accept their children or family members' choice of religion/lifestyle and support them, making it possible for them to be their true selves and not have to move out of Lithuania because of an identity crisis. Lithuanian Muslims want Lithuania to be more diverse and international, as well as to show support for other countries in need such as Syria, Palestine, etc. despite not having the same cultural/religious/ethnic background. They have faith that it will keep getting easier for Lithuanian Muslims to live here, not only in terms of feeling accepted by society, but also in terms of finding jobs or careers to help build the

country. Lastly, they would like to have more halal food options and places in Lithuania to gather for the Muslims, especially a proper mosque in Vilnius city.

I would recommend that the Lithuanian government also make some national policy adjustments to make Lithuanian Muslims and other minority groups feel more included and acknowledged. Looking at it from my perspective as an Indonesian, what I can suggest is to add minority groups' important celebrations as national public holidays. I believe that having Eid al-Fitr as an official annual holiday will mean a lot for Muslims, just as much as Christmas means for Christians. I am aware that adding more public holidays might not be favorable for the economy. This is why I would also suggest that enterprises or employers in Lithuania grant the same number of annual public holidays that workers are entitled to, but with the possibility of selecting which ones they want to take according to their needs. This has been a best practice in my country for some time and I think Lithuanians can benefit from a similar policy in the future.

Considering the interviewees' comments about how speaking the Lithuanian language will significantly help foreign nationals to integrate better in the country, another suggestion I would make is for the Lithuanian government to fund more Lithuanian language course projects. I see that the existing ones are now provided for third-country nationals — usually the ones who have been granted a permit to reside in Lithuania. Funding free Lithuanian language courses in universities for foreign degree students will be the next step that the state should consider. This is a common practice in some other European countries that welcome international students.

My thesis has contributed to the field of Eastern European studies, specifically in the topic of Islam in Lithuania. It addressed the gap where research on Lithuanian Muslims was missing among other studies on the identity of European Muslim communities.

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Appendix 1. Interview Questions

Research Introduction

Before we begin the interview, I would like to re-introduce myself and my intention for this interview. My name is Aisha Johanna, you can just call me Misha. I am a master's student of the Eastern European & Russian Studies programme at Vilnius University. I'm originally from Indonesia and I've been living in Lithuania for over a year now. I am currently in my last semester and I'm doing this research on Lithuanian Muslims as my final thesis project.

The reason why I became interested in researching Lithuanian Muslims is that I noticed that you are from a minority group here, where the majority of the citizens here are from another religion. I myself come from a minority group in my country, so my interest here really comes from a place of empathy. I know how it feels to be a minority in my own country, and I would like to know how you feel about it as well. The goal of this research is to understand how the Lithuanian Muslims feel in Lithuanian society, and of course to have your voice heard.

Statement of Consent

May I know if we can begin the interview? If so, could you please read the statement of consent here? Thank you.

“My name is _____ (full name). I am a Lithuanian national and I identify myself as a Muslim. I confirm that I agree to participate as a subject or interviewee of the Research on Lithuanian Muslims conducted by Aisha Johanna from Vilnius University. I grant my permission for the researcher to use the content of this recorded interview for her research project, with my personal data being kept confidential for the research publication.”

Part 1. Personal Demographic Data

Could you please introduce yourself and let me know your name, age, origin, and current city? I will also need the information about your last education and current occupation, if you don't mind. Your name will be kept confidential and will not be mentioned in this research.

Additional question(s) for Naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens: When did you first move to Lithuania and what was the reason for that? When did you officially become a naturalized Lithuanian citizen?

Part 2. Religious Identity

How religious do you consider yourself to be? How important is Islam in your life?

Additional question(s) for Lithuanian Muslim converts: When did you convert to Islam? Could you tell me the story behind the decision you made?

Additional question(s) for categories: I have a set of questions related to this where you can just say yes or no, or add any comment if you like:

- Do you believe in Allah and His existence?
- Do you believe in the Quran?
- Do you usually have interests in finding out more about Islam, perhaps about the law, values, authorities related, etc?
- Do you belong to any Muslim community here? OR Are you active in your Muslim community here?
- Do you do the obligatory 5 times a day?
- Do you fast during Ramadan month?
- Have you done any pilgrimage or Umrah?
- Do you attend the Friday prayers?
- Do you know the history of Islam?
- Do you read/speak Arabic?
- Do you eat pork?
- Do you drink alcohol?

Part 3. Ethnic Identity

May I know from which ethnic group are you? How is your ethnic group different from others? Do you have special customs/practices different from other groups? Do you these things? What language do you usually use with the people around you?

Part 4. Social Network

How would you describe the people in your network - family, friends, colleagues? What's their background like?

Part 5. Perceived Discrimination

Since the majority in Lithuania are not Muslims, do you feel like Muslims are being discriminated against here - and why? Can you tell me your own experience where you felt like you were being discriminated against if you have any?

Are there difficulties/challenges when you want to practice your religion here in Lithuania?

Additional question(s) for Lithuanian Muslim converts: How does your social cycle react to your conversion to Islam (or when you're practicing Muslim customs)?

Part 6. National Identity

How do you see yourself as a Lithuanian citizen/national? If you're outside of Lithuania and you have someone asking you where you're from, what would you tell this person?

How active are you in Lithuanian civil events? Do you participate in Lithuanian politics? Do you follow Lithuanian news? Are you proud of being Lithuanian?

Additional question(s) for Lithuanian Muslim converts: Do you feel somehow less of a Lithuanian since you converted to Islam?

Part 7. Perceived Value (In)compatibility

Do you think Lithuanian and Muslim values/culture compatible or incompatible with each other, and why?

Do you consider yourself more of a Lithuanian citizen/national or of a Muslim?

Part 8. Additional Comments

Do you have anything you want to add? Perhaps you can tell me what you hope for the Lithuanian Muslims or Lithuania in the future?

Closing

Thank you for participating in this research.

Google Form

Research on Lithuanian Muslims

A master's thesis project by Aisha Johanna from TSPMI, Vilnius University.
* Required

1. Email address *

Introduction

Before we begin, I would like to introduce myself and my intention of this interview.

My name is Aisha Johanna, but you can just call me Misha. I am a master's student of Eastern European & Russian Studies programme at Vilnius University. I am originally from Indonesia and I have been living in Lithuania for over a year now.

I am currently in my last semester and I'm doing this research on Lithuanian Muslims as my final thesis project.

The reason why I became interested in researching on Lithuanian Muslims is because I noticed that you are from a minority group here, where the majority of the citizens here are from another religion.

I myself come from a minority group in my country, so my interest here really comes from a place of empathy. I know how it feels to be a minority in my own country, and I would like to know how you feel about it as well.

The goal of this research is to understand how the Lithuanian Muslims feel in the Lithuanian society, and of course to have your voice heard.

Statement of Consent

Hereby you confirm that you are a Lithuanian national and you identify yourself as a Muslim.

You confirm that you agree to participate as a subject or interviewee of the Research on Lithuanian Muslims conducted by Aisha Johanna from Vilnius University.

You grant your permission for the researcher to use the content of this recorded interview for her research project, with your personal data being kept confidential for the research publication.

2. If you agree with the Statement of Consent above, select Yes and we can start with the questions. *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

9. Current occupation *

10. Please let me know if there is anything else other than your name that you would like me not to reveal in my research publication.

11. Please categorize yourself into one of the following. *

Mark only one oval.

- You were born and grew up as a Lithuanian citizen and a Muslim
Skip to question 14
- You were born and grew up as a Lithuanian citizen and you converted or became a Muslim some time ago *Skip to question 12*
- You came from another country and now are a naturalized Lithuanian citizen
Skip to question 13

12. When did you convert to Islam or become a Muslim? Can you tell me the story behind the decision you made? *

Skip to question 14

Personal Data

This section is for demographic data. Your name will be kept confidential and will not be mentioned in this research written work or publication.

3. Full name *

4. Age *

5. Gender *

Mark only one oval.

- Female
- Male
- Other: _____

6. Origin (city/town where you were born or grew up) *

7. Current city *

8. Education *

13. When did you move to Lithuania and get naturalized as a Lithuanian citizen? Can you tell me the story behind the decision you made? *

Skip to question 14

14. How religious do you consider yourself to be? How important is Islam in your life? *

Skip to question 15

15. Do you believe in Allah and His existence? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

16. Do you believe in the Quran? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

17. Do you usually have interests in finding out more about Islam, perhaps about the law, values, authorities related, etc? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

18. Do you belong to any Muslim community? If so, are you an active member of the community? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

19. Do you do the obligatory 5 praying times a day? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

20. Do you fast during Ramadan months? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

25. Do you consider yourself knowledgeable of the history of Islam? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

26. Do you read or speak Arabic? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

27. Which ethnic group are you from? *

28. How is your ethnic group different from others? Do you have special customs/practices different from other groups? Do you these things? *

21. Do you eat pork? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

22. Do you drink alcohol? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

23. Do you attend the Friday prayers? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

24. Have you done any pilgrimage or Umrah in Mecca? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

29. What language(s) do you usually use with the people around you? *

30. How would you describe the people in your social cycle - family, friends, colleagues, etc? What's their background like (religion, ethnicity, and nationality-wise)? *

31. Since the majority in Lithuania are not Muslims, do you feel like Muslims are being discriminated here - and why? *

32. Can you tell me your own experience where you felt like you were being discriminated, if you have any? *

33. Are there difficulties/challenges when you want to practice your religion here in Lithuania? *

34. How does your social circle react when you're practicing Muslim customs (or when you converted to Islam, if you're a convert)? *

35. How do you see yourself as a Lithuanian citizen/national? *

36. If you're outside of Lithuania (imagine you're even outside of Europe) and you have someone asking you where you're from, what would you tell this person? *

37. How active are you in Lithuanian civil events? Do you participate in Lithuanian politics? Do you follow Lithuanian news? *

38. Are you proud of being a Lithuanian citizen/national? Please elaborate. *

39. Do you think Lithuanian and Muslim values/cultures are compatible or incompatible to each other, and why? *

40. Do you feel somehow less of a Lithuanian because you are a Muslim, and why? *

41. Last question, do you consider yourself more of a Lithuanian citizen/national or of a Muslim? Please elaborate in details on how you feel about your identity. *

42. Do you have anything you want to add? Perhaps you can tell me what you hope for the Lithuanian Muslims or Lithuania in the future? *

Thank you for participating in this project!

Please submit your answers and let me know once it's done :)

Appendix 2. Sample Demographics

Code	Interview Date	Category	Gender	Age	Origin	Current city	Ethnicity	Education	Current occupation
Interviewee 01	Oct 4, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred	Female	23	Klaipėda, Lithuania	Vilnius, Lithuania	Volga Tatar - Lithuanian	Bachelor in Multimedia & Computer Design, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University	Marketing/PR officer
Interviewee 02	Oct 7, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim convert	Female	27	Šiauliai, Lithuania	Eindhoven, Lithuania	Lithuanian	Bachelor in Psychology & Social Work, Vytautas Magnus University; Master in Neuroscience and AI in the Netherlands; PhD in AI in the Netherlands	PhD candidate
Interviewee 03	Oct 8, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim convert	Female	21	Kėdainiai, Lithuania	Vilnius, Lithuania	Lithuanian	Bachelor in History, Vilnius University	Customer support officer
Interviewee 04	Oct 9, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim convert	Female	23	Vilnius, Lithuania	Vilnius, Lithuania	Russian	Kinesiotherapy, Vilnius College	Customer support officer
Interviewee 05	Oct 10, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim convert	Female	24	Tauragė, Lithuania	Vilnius, Lithuania	Lithuanian	Musicology; Turkology (Middle Eastern Studies), Vilnius University	Transport coordinator
Interviewee 06	Oct 10, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred	Male	24	Klaipėda, Lithuania	Klaipėda, Lithuania	Volga Tatar - Lithuanian	Marine Navigation, Lithuanian Maritime Academy	University student, seaworker
Interviewee 07	Oct 11, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim convert	Female	24	Klaipėda, Lithuania	Vilnius, Lithuania	Lithuanian	Finance Studies, Vilnius University Kaunas	Financial data analyst
Interviewee 08	Oct 14, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred	Female	35	Nemėžis, Lithuania	Vilnius, Lithuania	Crimean Tatar	Master in English, Vilnius College; Master in Public Administration, Mykolas Romeris University	English teacher, Islamic lessons for women and kids teacher
Interviewee 09	Oct 16, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim convert	Female	30	Vilnius, Lithuania	Vilnius, Lithuania	Lithuanian	College	University student
Interviewee 10	Oct 16, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred	Female	38	Forty Tatars Village, Lithuania	Forty Tatars Village, Lithuania	Crimean Tatar	Bachelor in Interior Design, Vilnius College	Currently unemployed, volunteer at a Muslim community
Interviewee 11	Oct 21, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred	Male	42	Visaginas, Lithuania	Vilnius, Lithuania	Crimean Tatar	Law studies in Turkey	Head of a Muslim community

Interviewee 12	Oct 23, 2020	Naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens	Male	39	Brazil / Lebanon	Klaipeda, Lithuania	Brazilian - Lebanese	Business Economics and Engineering, studied in UAE and the Netherlands	Businessman
Interviewee 13	Oct 29, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim convert	Female	29	Panevėžys, Lithuania	Vilnius, Lithuania	Lithuanian	Bachelor of Social Work, Vilnius University	Social worker
Interviewee 14	Oct 31, 2020	Naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens	Male	36	Damascus / Latakia, Syria	Kaunas, Lithuania	Syrian	PhD studies, Kaunas University of Technology	NPO coordinator, engineering consultant
Interviewee 15	Oct 31, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim convert	Female	22	Vilnius, Lithuania	Vilnius, Lithuania	Lithuanian	Middle Eastern Studies, Vilnius University	NPO social consult and translator
Interviewee 16	Oct 31, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim convert	Female	38	Vilnius, Lithuania	Vilnius, Lithuania	Lithuanian	Bachelor of International Business Management, Vilnius University	Business owner
Interviewee 17	Nov 6, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred	Male	35	Lithuania (Born and grew up in Kuwait and Syria)	Vilnius, Lithuania	Lithuanian - Syrian	Political Science and Medicine, Vilnius University	NPO translator
Interviewee 18	Nov 6, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred	Male	36	Lithuania (Born in Vilnius, grew up in Kuwait and Syria)	Vilnius, Lithuania	Lithuanian - Syrian	Mechanical Engineering, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University	CEO of a fintech company
Interviewee 19	Nov 7, 2020	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred	Female	37	Kaunas, Lithuania	Kaunas, Lithuania	Volga Tatar - Lithuanian	Bachelor in Civil Engineering, Kaunas University of Technology	Website and project manager, secretary of a Muslim community
Interviewee 20	Nov 11, 2020	Naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens	Male	46	Damascus, Syria	Vilnius, Lithuania	Syrian	Medical Studies, Lithuanian University of Health Sciences	Medical worker, NPO translator

Appendix 3. Summaries of Research Interviews

Code	Interviewee 01
Category	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred
Demographics	Female, 23, from Klaipėda (LT), lives in Vilnius (LT), studies Multimedia & Computer Design (bachelor) at VGTU, works as Marketing & PR at a private company.
Religious Identity	<p>Not 100% Islamic, as she claimed. Islam is something that she grew up with. She used to read the Quran (never read the whole of it, and she read the Russian translation), and went to an Islamic summer camp. She's a bit distant from that these days. She doesn't really follow the Islamic lifestyle, as she thinks that some of the teachings are quite outdated, especially when it comes to the things related to women's rights. She doesn't wear hijab and she mentioned that she believes God will forgive her for not wearing it. "Pretty close, yet so far from the religion."</p> <p>Not part of any Muslim community. She still tried to celebrate Muslim big days with her family, though. At least to gather.</p>
Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes, of course.</p> <p>Believe in the Quran: Yes, words in the Quran are nice and thoughtful, but they were written a long time ago, and now some of the rules are strange. Some need to change as they're not fitting in our society now. Outdated.</p> <p>Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Earlier she dug more about it, but now stopped and she feels kind of far from it. Away from her family, her life and lifestyle changed.</p> <p>Belong to any Muslim community: No</p> <p>Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: No</p> <p>Fast during Ramadan months: One time, it was extremely hard for her body. In Lithuania, there's not much support to do that. Mentally difficult and stressful.</p> <p>Eat pork: N/A</p> <p>Drink alcohol: N/A</p> <p>Attend the Friday prayers: No</p> <p>Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No</p> <p>Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: Yes</p> <p>Read/speak Arabic: No. Not necessary to speak, it's nice if you can, I never had the chance to learn this.</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>Half Volga Tatar (from father), half Lithuanian (from mother). She said her father had a significant legacy as a Muslim Tatar. He used to be a part of a Muslim community in Klaipėda. They used to attend Tatar festivals and so on. However, after he passed away, she no longer had any interest in her ethnic group. She said nobody cares about her culture cause she doesn't look like a native Tatar. And she thinks her cultural difference doesn't make any difference anyway.</p>

Social Network	<p>She doesn't consider herself to have many friends. Only 5 friends (4 are Russian-Lithuanians and 1 is Lithuanian-Lithuanian). Possibly only these 5 and a few more others know that she's a Muslim.</p> <p>Her parents are Muslim. She went to Russian schools in Klaipėda before starting her bachelor's studies in Lithuanian in Vilnius. She used to consider her first language to be Russian, but since her father passed away and she moved to Vilnius, she's almost always using Lithuanian so she considers it more of her first language now.</p>
Perceived Discrimination	<p>She experienced being bullied because of her religion by her peers (both the Russian-Lithuanians and Lithuanian-Lithuanians), mostly in high school. It happened too that some people would treat her normally at first, but when they found out about her religion, they said things to her that are not so nice, tried to make her ashamed and disgusted with her own religion - saying that it's the religion of terrorists and stuff like that.</p> <p>Because of this, she felt quite traumatized, so now she prefers to hide her identity as a Muslim. She still considers herself a Muslim, but she doesn't share this information with people. Even if they ask, she would usually try to avoid telling the truth. She feels it's also quite easy for her to disguise herself in Lithuanian society as she doesn't look like the typical Tatar (with dark skin, dark eyes, strong jawlines). She has light brown hair, hazel eyes, and pale skin (as she's half Lithuanian). She doesn't wear hijab either and she knows that will be very hard for her to do that in Lithuania, but also because she follows more of Lithuanian/European clothing standards. She said people in Lithuania are very judgmental about women in hijab, for example. "Lithuanians like to make fun of you, it's like a national thing, they laugh at you when you're in worse condition. When you laugh at other people, you feel stronger."</p> <p>She said Russians tend to understand Islam more as in Russia, there are regions that are dominated by Islam. But Lithuania doesn't have this so they usually don't understand. Older generations tend not to accept as well, compared to younger ones.</p>
National Identity	<p>She considers herself a Lithuanian and a proud one. She follows news in Lithuanian and she considers that Lithuanian is her first language. She said there was propaganda in the Russian schools she went to, influencing people to follow Russian culture. But she doesn't feel Russian, even though she's technically half Russian and she speaks Russian, but she's never been to Russia and she feels like she's Lithuanian.</p>
Perceived Value Compatibility	<p>Definitely incompatible. She feels that to feel more Lithuanian, she needs to repress her identity as a Muslim. If she really follows all the Islamic rules, then she as a woman won't be able to go to work, have a career, and earn money on her own - to become independent, basically.</p>
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	<p>She sees herself as more of a Lithuanian than a Muslim.</p>
Additional Comments	<p>N/A</p>

Code	Interviewee 02
Category	Lithuanian Muslim convert
Demographics	Female, 27, from Šiauliai (LT), lives in Eindhoven (NL), working full time as a Ph.D. candidate in NL, finished her bachelor's studies in Psychology & Social Work (double degree) at Vytautas Magnus University Kaunas and her 2 master's studies in Neuroscience and AI at Utrecht University and Tilburg University. Moved out from LT in 2016 for studies.
Religious Identity	<p>She grew up as a Christian. Converted to Islam when she was already in NL. Not sure when exactly, maybe 2017. The main reason was because of her Muslim husband. He can marry a non-Muslim woman, but religion is important to him, so she decided to follow the same religion. Everything she knows about Islam is from her husband and later she also learned quite some things independently. She got married only recently, in 2019. So she converted 2 years prior to that. Her husband is from India. He also studied and works in NL.</p> <p>She never considered herself too religious, doesn't matter Christian or Islam. She follows lightly. She considers herself the liberal type. She doesn't think religion affects her daily life. It's more like a spiritual thing, but things on her daily basis are not influenced by religion. It's much more of a personal thing, even though I don't hide it, but I don't really express it either. If someone asks, she would still say she follows Islam, but she won't really make it a part of her identity really.</p>
Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes</p> <p>Believe in the Quran: Yes (read in English)</p> <p>Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes, mainly about Quran or statements about Allah, but she doesn't follow YouTube videos or stuff like that, and sometimes she has skeptical opinions about them. She tries to learn history as well from books. She doesn't really look for answers from Islam about things that happen in her life</p> <p>Belong to any Muslim community: No. She does follow some Muslims on social media or platforms with religious content. She does know some Indian Muslims and one of her teachers is from Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: Not 5. She does pray but not 5 times</p> <p>Fast during Ramadan months: Not always, but she does fast</p> <p>Eat pork: No (became vegetarian when she was 15)</p> <p>Drink alcohol: N/A</p> <p>Attend the Friday prayers: Her husband goes, she does it at home</p> <p>Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No</p> <p>Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: Just the basic, main events, perhaps there's much more to that, she doesn't know. Limited knowledge</p> <p>Read/speak Arabic: Can read but cannot speak. Very limited. She did Arabic lessons.</p>

<p>Ethnic Identity</p>	<p>Lithuanian. By default, it's kind of like if you're a Lithuanian, you're a Christian. So she still celebrates Christmas, for example. Religious things in Lithuania are more like cultural things. You have a Christmas tree, you give gifts to people. It's a family celebration. She can't remove that from herself or from her family. She said that even if her husband and she has kids, their kids will still celebrate Christmas. It would be so strange not to do these things. It's there from school, it's the default.</p> <p>It does feel like Lithuanian culture is more open/liberal in terms of clothing, she follows Lithuanian/European clothing style. She said that for some people, going to Islam might mean going backward.</p> <p>She speaks in Lithuanian to her family and English to her husband and people in NL.</p>
<p>Social Network</p>	<p>The majority of her Lithuanian friends are Christians, liberals, quite open. Also here (in NL), mostly atheist. Her husband's family and friends are mostly Muslims. She feels that from her side, even people are Christians, they're atheists - like non-practicing Christians. From her husband's side, they're more religious. Her husband is more religious than her but he's also quite liberal. Her husband is like 7 out of 10, and she would be like 6.</p> <p>Her mom is a Christian, she believes in God, but she's also open-minded. She cares about her happiness. Not for her grandma, it's painful for her. The others are quite skeptical about Islam. They have a negative image of Islam in their head. For example, if she would become a Hindu, everyone would be like "ok, cool", but not the same for Islam. They're concerned about women's rights, restrictions, etc. It comes a lot from the media, bad stories... they think women are very submissive, don't have rights, have to stay at home and wear hijab. Actually, some women do choose those things, and they do work, they have their own businesses, they care about their fashion.</p> <p>But she also understands why people have a bad image of Islam. She also didn't have a good image of it before. She didn't think much about it before, but stories from other places were just portraying it as something horrible. People doing bad things in the name of God. Actually not just Islam, Christianity also has many cases about brutality and all, but people don't really see these things because Christians usually don't really practice, compared to the Muslims.</p>

<p>Perceived Discrimination</p>	<p>In Lithuania, she's not discriminated against based on religion because she doesn't look like a typical Muslim or something. Perhaps, if she's with her husband because he looks different, then people would be staring, but then it depends where you are. More in smaller cities. She's sure if she would be wearing a hijab, people might even have verbal comments. But not doing anything, but perhaps saying something. Never had anyone addressed anything like that to her directly, but she's heard indirect comments about women in hijab, for example.</p> <p>When she converted to Islam and at the same time telling her family about her husband, their concerns were more about "is he treating you right?" because he's a foreigner and a Muslim. Maybe if he would be a German and an atheist, the comment would be different. But her best friends and mom are very supportive. But other people, like grandma, uncles, aunts, she thinks they have those concerns. Grandma expressed those concerns, but she's trying to accept, she feels like. She thinks the word of Islam/Muslim is always associated with terrorism and oppression. Grandma literally asked if her husband was going to beat her. She said the media always shows bad stories. Nobody shows stories about Muslim people just having a normal life.</p> <p>In NL, there's a bigger Muslim community, and they usually look more obvious (women do wear hijab, etc). So people in NL are more used to that. They have shops for halal food, many more mosques, students wearing hijab... much more open. But people usually don't assume she is a Muslim from her looks.</p>
<p>National Identity</p>	<p>If she's not in Lithuania, she would definitely say that she's from Lithuania. She's proud that she's Lithuanian and doesn't want to change her citizenship. If not her husband, she would go back to Lithuania and work there, with whatever knowledge she has. But she thinks it's very difficult for her husband to live in Lithuania. To raise kids, etc. She doesn't want to put him in this kind of condition, where it's difficult for him to just live. She wants her kids to be proud of being half-Lithuanians and for them to learn Lithuanian customs. But maybe just not to live there.</p> <p>She follows Lithuanian news. She votes. Maybe of course not everything since she moved to LT, but she would try to follow and discuss with her family. She feels that it's still her duty to care for her country. Might sound nationalist, but she feels that Lithuania is a big part of her life.</p> <p>She doesn't feel less of a Lithuanian citizen (like in terms of passport, rights, etc) since converting to Islam. But culture-wise, she does feel converting to Islam affects that. But she doesn't stop celebrating Christian days (e.g. Christmas) because it would be too sad for her and for her family. It's a part of her, and it's family values.</p>

<p>Perceived Value Compatibility</p>	<p>In Lithuania, many people are also spiritual, so in a way, they also choose a similar way of life. Maybe less in new generations. After all the technology and social media. Fundamentally, everyone is the same - they want to be happy, they care about their families. People teach their kids to be good citizens, in any religion. There are bad people in every religion. It's about being humans.</p> <p>Perhaps if you go to smaller details like ways of praying etc, you'll find differences between Islam and Christianity (Lithuanian), but fundamentally no. Even if you think about it, women back in the way wore some kind of scarf too, there's also fasting in Christianity, so there are lots of similarities.</p>
<p>More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Additional Comments</p>	<p>She doesn't think that the Quran or Islam teachings are something scientific that is very strict and cannot be changed. It's more like poetry and people can interpret the teachings differently. She doesn't think that women are being obliged to just stay at home, not work, or wear hijab according to the teachings she had.</p> <p>She hopes people in Lithuania would be more open-minded, and to have more good examples. She knows many women who converted to Islam but still feel like they need to hide this identity. It's like they can just be themselves when they go to London or places like this, but not in Vilnius, for example. It's easy for her as she lives abroad, and she hopes it'll also be easy for people who live in Lithuania.</p>

<p>Code</p>	<p>Interviewee 03</p>
<p>Category</p>	<p>Lithuanian Muslim convert</p>
<p>Demographics</p>	<p>Female, 21, from Kėdainiai (LT), lives in Vilnius (LT), studies bachelor in History at Vilnius University, working evening shifts as Customer Support Representative at a private company.</p>
<p>Religious Identity</p>	<p>She's highly practicing and trying to be devoted as much as possible. She converted to Islam when she was 14 after starting a friendship with some people over the internet. Her conversations with a Libyan guy made her realize that Islam is what she believes in. She always thought the Holy Trinity concept in Christianity is wrong and when she learned that in Islam there's only 1 God and Jesus is a prophet, she realized that it's something that she believes in. When she converted to Islam, she actually just finished all the first communion and confirmation in the Catholic system, then one month later she converted to Islam.</p> <p>It was quite a big shock for her because she needed to change her lifestyle, she needed to stop eating pork, she needed to dress modestly, etc. Islam takes all parts of your life, for example,</p>

	<p>marriage (even though it's for later). There are temptations in society, for example, to drink alcohol, and honestly, it's quite good to resist. She said she's not 'trying to apply' all Islamic values, but they're kind of applied by themselves.</p>
Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes Believe in the Quran: Yes Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes, Islam is huge and as much as she knows, not all parts of the Quran have been revealed Belong to any Muslim community: No. She tried to be a part of the community in Kaunas Mosque, but she felt some of the information they provided were wrong, so she felt a bit betrayed. She realized some of it was wrong from the Islamic teacher that she had from London. Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: Yes Fast during Ramadan months: Yes, not the first years, but now she's trying to always fast completely Eat pork: No Drink alcohol: No Attend the Friday prayers: No Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: No, she's learning more but the history of Islam is huge. You need to study for many years Read/speak Arabic: No. She knows prayers in Arabic, but she hasn't gotten the time to learn the language. There are no free Arabic courses, only paid ones.</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>100% Lithuanian. Lithuanians have a lot of traditions but they usually come from a pagan time so she feels she shouldn't be applying those to her life, for example, the midsummer festival, it's fun but she won't do it anymore.</p> <p>She would still go to Catholic funerals to pay her respect to her family (her grandma passed away recently), but it doesn't mean she was praying in the church.</p> <p>She mostly speaks Lithuanian and she uses English with friends from outside Lithuania.</p>
Social Network	<p>Mostly her friends are from Greece as she was living there for a year. In Lithuania, her friends and family members are Lithuanian Catholics but they're not really practicing. Other friends (Muslims) are usually online friends, like from Libya, England, Jordan, etc.</p> <p>Only one colleague knows that she's a Muslim. She doesn't usually tell people that she's a Muslim because she feels they would change when they know that. Not all her Lithuanian friends know that she's a Muslim. Her best friends in Greece know.</p>

<p>Perceived Discrimination</p>	<p>Her family was shocked when she told them she converted to Islam. Her parents didn't want her to convert, especially because she was only 14. She said they told her she could do whatever she wants when she's already 18. They said Muslims are terrorists and this comment hurt her a lot. She doesn't want to speak about Islam anymore with her parents.</p> <p>Her parents don't like it when she's practicing her religion, but again, she doesn't really talk about it anymore with them. Her mother respects her decision, though, she doesn't make any pork dishes anymore when she's at home.</p> <p>In general, Muslims in Lithuania are being discriminated against. People don't think Muslims are humans, they're from a different world. Her parents said that they were born Catholics so they should stay as Catholics. They don't believe people can convert to another religion. People make fun of Muslims. She was wearing a hijab one time, in a very bright color, and there were 2 drunk men sitting next to me asking why my hijab was not black.</p> <p>The discrimination is usually in form of jokes. And people associate Islam with terrorism because of the media. She had a friend whose parents questioned her about her Muslim identity. She was on her period during Ramadan month and the friend's father was asking in a rude way, "So are you eating or are you fasting?"</p> <p>What's hard about being a Muslim in Lithuania is the food choice. Only 2 companies make halal chicken. Lithuanian companies. But only that. So it's difficult.</p>
<p>National Identity</p>	<p>When she's not in Lithuania, she would say that she is definitely from Lithuania.</p> <p>She feels kind of less of a Lithuanian after she converted to Islam. Even though according to the Lithuanian constitution, everyone is free to choose their religion. But if you see the current parliament, they're still more into the Christian side. Kind of discriminating against other religions. They don't really include all of the people.</p> <p>She follows Lithuanian news but she's not really active in civil events.</p>
<p>Perceived Value Compatibility</p>	<p>Depends on what you think of Lithuanian culture. Cause back in the day it was actually paganism, but not it's Christianity. She thinks Christianity and Islam are actually very close and similar to each other, but not paganism.</p>
<p>More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?</p>	<p>She can't really say that. Lithuanian is like a race, and Muslim is like your real identity, who you should really be. As a Lithuanian, you can't choose it, but you can choose to be a Muslim. So she feels more of a Muslim than a Lithuanian.</p>
<p>Additional Comments</p>	<p>She feels Lithuania has double standards when it comes to supporting other countries or groups of people. For example, they show strong support to Belarus, but somehow are not saying anything about Palestine. She really supports Palestine to be free, and she wants Lithuania to support this as well.</p>

Code	Interviewee 04
Category	Lithuanian Muslim convert
Demographics	Female, 23, from and lives in Vilnius (LT), finished her studies in Kinesiotherapy at Vilniaus Kolegija, works for a private company as Customer Support Representative.
Religious Identity	<p>She became Muslim when she was 15, just after finishing her 11th grade. She grew up in a non-religious family and she remembers she always felt a longing for faith and jealousy towards her friends who got to spend time in religious events with their family. She always felt like something was wrong when she didn't have any faith. She met a girl from Egypt when she was in the gymnasium. She didn't think they would be close (as she was wearing a hijab and it was foreign to her), but now they're best friends. She went to the mosque the first time with her, she actually invited herself. She said, unlike the stereotype, she never felt pushed to become Muslim. It was absolutely her will to know and learn more. She said it was a totally different experience compared to when she went to church. She said she felt like she wanted to go out immediately, but she didn't feel that way in the mosque. She stated the shahadat to become a Muslim at her Egyptian friend's house. They were both crying. She's highly practicing now. Islam is very important to her. She's trying to learn something new, at least spending 10-15 minutes a day to know more about the religion.</p>
Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes Believe in the Quran: Yes (read in Russian, listen in Arabic) Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes Belong to any Muslim community: Yes, she goes to some events together with her Muslim friends as much as she can when she's not busy with work Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: Yes Fast during Ramadan months: Yes Eat pork: N/A Drink alcohol: N/A Attend the Friday prayers: No, as it's not obligatory for women Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No, she hopes to do it one day Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: Not much Read/speak Arabic: Pray in Arabic, she learned from her friend</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>Russian. Her father is a Russian from Russia and her mother is a Russian-Lithuanian.</p> <p>She feels that Lithuanians don't like Russians that much. When she was in school, it was okay, because she went to Russian schools. Her Lithuanian improved when she went to Lithuanian school (after 10th grade, cause Russian school stopped at this grade. So in 11th and 12th grades she went to Lithuanian school with the Egyptian friend). She said she treats people equally, doesn't matter what they are, but some people unfortunately are not like that.</p>

	<p>She usually speaks Lithuanian in public places, e.g. banks. She speaks Russian with her family and at work (as she works with Russian-speaking clients). She also uses English with friends and other people. Her first language is Russian.</p>
Social Network	<p>She likes her colleagues, they're very friendly. Her best friend is the Egyptian girl, she sees her as her own sister. She lives in Vilnius with her mom. She has her grandma from her dad, some uncle and aunt as well. She would sometimes visit them. Her father has been living in Denmark for work since she was 8. They would just visit him in summers or winters. Most of her siblings live in different countries/cities, e.g. London, Moscow, the USA. One of her family members actually worked for the twin tower but overslept and didn't come to work on 9/11, so life was spared.</p> <p>She keeps contact with some of her childhood friends, also friends of her mom. She sometimes visits them as well. She's the type that likes to be outside the house.</p>
Perceived Discrimination	<p>She feels it's 50-50, depending on the people she meets. Her friends are usually respectful of this.</p> <p>She hasn't really been discriminated against, personally. Maybe just her dad... She mentioned he has a strong character, can't be changed. He was shouting at her saying that he would never accept her converting to Islam. He met some Arab Muslims in Denmark and somehow he believes that all Muslims should be Arabs, and all Arabs are bad, stereotypes like this.</p> <p>Her mom is very supportive of her. Grandma is influenced by the media, Islam means becoming terrorists or that she will be kidnapped or something. She said if someday she will marry a Muslim man, she said her family would turn their back on her.</p> <p>She doesn't feel there are difficulties/challenges for her practicing her religion in Lithuania. Only that usually her family doesn't understand her when she's fasting, they thought she was on a diet or something.</p> <p>She would say that she's a Muslim if someone asks her. She doesn't hide this fact.</p>
National Identity	<p>If she's outside of Lithuania, she would say that she's from Lithuania, though she knows that most people don't know where Lithuania is. She said Latvia seems to be more popular than Lithuania when it comes to the Baltic region.</p> <p>She won't vote for the parliament because she'll be working and last time nothing changed, so she doesn't really see the purpose of voting. However, she follows news in Lithuanian and Russian. She's not a very active citizen but she will try to keep herself updated.</p> <p>When asked if she's a proud Lithuanian, she paused for a bit and told me that she always wanted to move out from Lithuania when she was younger, especially knowing that lots of</p>

	<p>Lithuanians don't like Russians. However, now she feels that her not moving out actually led her to the right thing: meeting her friend and becoming a Muslim.</p> <p>She doesn't feel less of a Lithuanian since she converted to Islam as not Muslims should be Arabs for example.</p>
Perceived Value Compatibility	<p>In Lithuania, the majority are Christians, so events are usually related to this religion. She would say 20% compatible but the rest incompatible.</p> <p>She said Christian and Islamic values are quite different from each other.</p>
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	<p>She can't imagine her life without Islam. Even when she's busy with work and stuff, she would still think about Islam to improve herself as a person. She feels the religion helps her a lot, in all aspects of life. She feels that it's her obligation to also know more about Islam. She wants to marry a Muslim man and she wants her kids to be Muslims.</p> <p>Islam is more than her nationality for her. She said there are plus and minus points in Lithuania, but it's possible to be a Muslim in this country.</p>
Additional Comments	<p>She hopes that more people would respect people with other religions. And that people would understand that people becoming Muslims are not forced and that it doesn't mean they want to become terrorists. She converted to Islam doesn't mean she has changed. She's still the same person and she wants people to understand that.</p>

Code	Interviewee 05
Category	Lithuanian Muslim convert
Demographics	Female, 24, from Tauragė (LT), lives in Vilnius (LT) during weekdays for work in a transportation company and Tauragė (LT) during weekends for a family visit and work in a cultural center, just graduated her bachelor's studies in Turkology from Vilnius University.
Religious Identity	<p>She converted to Islam in 2017 after having dreams about Prophet Mohammad for one week. Then she consulted with someone, and not long after that, she decided to become a Muslim. However, her interests in Islam have been there for quite some time. She met a lot of Turkish people when working for the cultural center so then she got the interest to do her bachelor's studies in Turkology in 2015. Prior to that, she actually studied music and she's a musician. Islam is very important to her and she tries not to skip any prayer time, if possible. Trying to do everything that Islam says. But for example, she's not wearing a scarf, because her family doesn't know that she is a Muslim now.</p>

Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes</p> <p>Believe in the Quran: Yes</p> <p>Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes, of course</p> <p>Belong to any Muslim community: No. Actually yes, in the Lithuanian Muslim women group. Sometimes we are meeting in some places, just talking. But not official.</p> <p>Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: Yes</p> <p>Fast during Ramadan months: Yes</p> <p>Eat pork: N/A</p> <p>Drink alcohol: N/A</p> <p>Attend the Friday prayers: No. Sometimes, but very rarely. When I go, I go to the mosque in Vilnius.</p> <p>Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No, but I hope one day when I have a chance</p> <p>Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: No</p> <p>Read/speak Arabic: Just a little bit. Trying to learn. Some are similar to the Ottoman language, so I can understand a bit. But someday I want to do an Arabic course.</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>100% Lithuanian. Family members are Catholics. Her family celebrates Christmas and Easter and they don't know that she's a Muslim. When she's with them, she would celebrate but without the actual intention to celebrate. She usually speaks Lithuanian, Turkish, and English. Her husband is Turkish. She speaks Turkish with her husband and Lithuanian with family and friends.</p>
Social Network	<p>Her parents are very religious. Her husband is Turkish, so she usually speaks in Turkish with him. Her parents love her husband but they're not approving if she would convert to Islam, so she's still hiding the fact that she's a Muslim from her family as she mentioned they're Catholics and they're quite strict. She said they once said that she could marry a Muslim man, it's okay, but don't be a Muslim, don't wear a scarf. If she does, she shouldn't go back home anymore.</p> <p>Her best friend (Lithuanian) knows that she's a Muslim and even already knew that one day she would become one, considering her interests in Turkology and all. She's very supportive. Her other friends don't usually know that she's a Muslim, so most of the friends that know, they're Muslims as well (the Lithuanian Muslims she's in the same community with). Nobody from family, colleagues, or university friends know about her being a Muslim.</p>
Perceived Discrimination	<p>She actually mentioned that in Lithuania, people are quite tolerant, at least in her environment. People usually have a negative image of Islam from the media but do not discriminate or confront others about it. Only once she was on a bus and she was wearing a scarf as she was going to a mosque, she felt like people looked at her. But she sees it as a form of curiosity, not discrimination. When you look different, people will usually look, but that doesn't mean they discriminate against you. They didn't say anything bad to me, they were just looking.</p> <p>She doesn't want to tell her family because she's afraid, they're pretty strict, and she doesn't want them to reject her. But they know her husband is Turkish and they actually love him.</p> <p>When she's in Taurage with her parents/family for the weekends, she will need to skip prayers</p>

	and all as she can't really practice her religion in front of them. She feels freer to practice in Vilnius.
National Identity	If she's not in Lithuania, she would definitely say that she's from Lithuania. She's a proud Lithuanian, 100% Lithuanian. She mentioned she's patriotic. She follows Lithuanian news and will vote. She doesn't feel less of a Lithuanian since she converted to Islam. It doesn't change her Lithuanian identity.
Perceived Value Compatibility	Quite compatible, she mentioned that religion and nationality are two separate things anyway. She also mentioned that Islam, Christianity, and Jewish are actually very similar. She feels 100% Lithuanian and 100% Muslim at the same time.
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	Both, 100% Lithuanian and 100% Muslim.
Additional Comments	She hopes for people to become more tolerant of Islam.

Code	Interviewee 06
Category	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred
Demographics	Male, 24, from Klaipėda (LT), lives in Klaipėda (LT), studies bachelor in Marine Navigation at Lithuanian Maritime Academy, previously worked at the sea/ship as well.
Religious Identity	He found it difficult to describe it in words, so from a scale of 1 to 10, he rated himself as an 8 or 9.
Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes</p> <p>Believe in the Quran: Yes (read mostly in Russian)</p> <p>Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Kind of, he thinks it's good to have more information, but he's not really/purposely searching. If something bothers him, then he will search</p> <p>Belong to any Muslim community: No, not interested. Just by himself.</p> <p>Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: No. He did it when he was younger. Times changed a bit, and he stopped doing that. He feels bad for not doing it.</p> <p>Fast during Ramadan months: If not busy with hard physical work, he will try</p> <p>Eat pork: No</p> <p>Drink alcohol: No</p> <p>Attend the Friday prayers: No</p> <p>Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No, not yet</p> <p>Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: Maybe a little bit, not so good</p> <p>Read/speak Arabic: No, but he would like to actually, to read the original version of the Quran, not translated</p>

Ethnic Identity	<p>Half Volga Tatar (from father), half Lithuanian (from mother). Actually, he misunderstood this question a little bit and he mentioned that he's a Sunni Muslim.</p> <p>He doesn't do the Tatar traditions. He's never been to Kazan where his father was from. He said his father wasn't a very festive man and he doesn't know much about this part of his roots.</p> <p>He speaks Russian, Lithuanian, and a little bit of English. The language he uses to think or count would be Russian. But he considers both Russian and Lithuanian to be equal to him. He can speak both languages fluently, it's automatic.</p>
Social Network	<p>He went to Russian schools as a kid. In his university, Lithuanian is used. He has about 4 close friends who all went to the same gymnasium and they all went to the Lithuanian Maritime Academy together after finishing school. They're all Russian-Lithuanians. None of them are Muslims or religious in any way. From his family's side, all are Muslims. His mother converted to Islam when marrying his father. His uncles and aunts are all Muslims and his cousins as well. He usually speaks in Russian with his close friends, but he considers that Russian and Lithuanian are both his native/first languages.</p> <p>He said people who know that he's a Muslim usually don't ask him about his religion. He doesn't think people usually would know what to ask anyway. He doesn't talk about Islam normally. He doesn't like to 'agitate' others by talking about religion.</p>
Perceived Discrimination	<p>He never felt discriminated against because of his religion. He thinks that many Lithuanians might have misconceptions and are misinformed about what Islam actually is. Like thoughts that "all Muslims are bad" due to the sources, they had about Islam, for example, stories about Osama Bin Laden. If they watch TV, it's like brainwashing. However, he doesn't really care about this. If someone doesn't want to talk to him because he's a Muslim or something, he'll let them be.</p> <p>They might have some negative thoughts but they don't attack Muslims either verbally or physically. They just keep their thoughts for themselves. Sometimes his friends might joke about his religion, but he claimed they're usually good jokes, and he joked about his friends' religions or culture as well, so it's just something he does between friends and not harmful at all. He experienced having some people who got 'surprised' when they were informed he's a Muslim, but they usually didn't say or ask anything and then just continued treating him the same way. He said that in Lithuania, people are usually more discriminative against other races - so it's more of racism rather than religion-based discrimination. For example, he sees lots of Indians are being discriminated against in Lithuania because of their race, not exactly because of their religion. He doesn't think that religion is being mentioned here. Lithuanians are a bit more that way, discriminating based on races, not religions. He doesn't even think that religion comes to mind right away when Lithuanians are being discriminative towards others.</p> <p>If there's a mosque in Klaipėda, he definitely wants to go. He knows some Muslim</p>

	<p>communities in Klaipėda and they need to rent places to pray, and sometimes those places are also for drinking, etc. He doesn't want to go to these kinds of places. Better pray at home than that.</p>
National Identity	<p>He said he will say he's from Lithuania if he's abroad, but he said people usually don't even know where Lithuania is.</p> <p>He mentioned that he has zero interest in politics or news, so he doesn't really follow Lithuanian news or is not active in Lithuanian civil events. He won't vote for the parliament this year and he has never voted all his life. He doesn't think that votes will change anything.</p> <p>He doesn't follow Russian news either.</p> <p>He doesn't feel less of a Lithuanian because he's a Muslim. Religion doesn't tell your nationality.</p>
Perceived Value Compatibility	<p>Incompatible. People in Lithuania are far from Muslim culture. He mentions that there's no mosque in Klaipėda and that it's very hard to find halal food in Lithuania - which is a little bit sad, so he doesn't think that the two cultures are aligned with each other.</p>
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	<p>He feels more of a Muslim than a Lithuanian.</p>
Additional Comments	<p>N/A</p>

Code	Interviewee 07
Category	Lithuanian Muslim convert
Demographics	Female, 24, from Klaipėda (LT), lives in Vilnius (LT). Bachelor of Finance, working as a Financial Data Analyst at a private company.
Religious Identity	<p>She converted to Islam in 2011 when she was 14, almost 15. Funny story, she met a guy over the internet from Palestine. At that point, she didn't know anything about Islam, not even the media's opinion about Islam. At one point, the guy said, "Give me 10 minutes and I'll be back, I'm just gonna go pray." She was amused and decided to learn about Islam, especially at that time she just lost her dad due to cancer. She found a lot of explanations about life and the afterlife. She researched Islam for about 6 months and she converted (said the shahadat) at home.</p> <p>Islam is important, maybe she feels she was more religious in the beginning as it was very new, reading Quran more, etc. She still fasts during Ramadan, but kind of keeps it a secret from her family as she thinks they would never accept that. She considers herself a moderate Muslim.</p>

Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes</p> <p>Believe in the Quran: Yes (read in English and Lithuanian)</p> <p>Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes, but not as much as before</p> <p>Belong to any Muslim community: No</p> <p>Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: No, she does it every day during Ramadan and maybe 1 month afterward</p> <p>Fast during Ramadan months: Yes</p> <p>Eat pork: N/A</p> <p>Drink alcohol: N/A</p> <p>Attend the Friday prayers: No</p> <p>Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No</p> <p>Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: No, she knows a few details</p> <p>Read/speak Arabic: No, but she would like to</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>100% Lithuanian.</p> <p>She wouldn't say there is anything very different that Lithuanians do compare to other countries around. She thinks of Christian traditions when thinking of Lithuanian traditions, as well as pagan traditions a little bit. She thinks Lithuanian traditions are a bit of a mix between Catholic and pagan traditions.</p> <p>She still celebrates Christmas with her parents and family, but not with her husband. She speaks Lithuanian with her family and English with her husband. With friends, speaking Lithuanian. With colleagues, a mix of Lithuanian and English.</p>
Social Network	<p>Family members follow Christianity (Catholic) but don't really practice. She was baptized and got her first communion, but she didn't want to do the next step: confirmation.</p> <p>Her mom, after her dad passed away, she got married again to a Spanish man. When she was growing up, she got exposure to a mix of cultures of Lithuanian and Spanish because of this. Her grandparents also became very open-minded after her mom remarried. When she introduced her Moroccan boyfriend to them, they were amazed and they accepted him.</p> <p>Her husband's family is very cultural and practicing Islam (even though not full). Moroccan people are very traditional and they eat traditional food everyday, which is not common in Lithuania, she said.</p> <p>Most of her friends and colleagues are Lithuanians and either not-practicing Catholics or atheists. They don't know she's a Muslim, though, and she said she won't really tell them that she is one. Since she converted, she always had a feeling people wouldn't accept this fact.</p> <p>She and her husband are friends who are also mixed couples. The majority are Moroccan-Lithuanian couples.</p>

**Perceived
Discrimination**

She feels people wouldn't accept her as a Muslim after she started researching about Islam and found the media's opinion about it, especially in the West, they're kind of always portraying Muslims as terrorists. In Lithuania as well, even in movies you'll find movies depicting Arab Muslims in a certain way.

Her mom knows that she's a Muslim but she doesn't really want her to practice. She keeps practicing but secretly, and she thinks her mom somehow thinks that she has passed this 'phase' and now is no longer a Muslim. Other family members also know that she's a Muslim, years ago she was fasting in front of them, and they were saying some things that weren't nice though they still let her do it. She said, "This is stupid, what is this? You're Catholic, you're baptized. All Lithuanians are Catholics. How can you just become a Muslim? Why would you want to associate yourself with these people? They're terrorists and they're bad with women. If you marry a Muslim man, he will beat you, etc."

She argued back and tried to inform them about what Islam actually is. She tried to make them understand that it's just what the media wants people to believe. But the family thought she was delusional or brainwashed.

Lithuanian people, especially the older generation, are close-minded. They believe everything they see on TV. Younger generations are definitely more open. People in Vilnius are more open than in Klaipėda. Even young people there are quite racist. In Vilnius, it's more multicultural and has more exposure to international people, and people get adapted to that. When she's in Klaipėda with her husband, a lot of older people would stare at him like he's some kind of alien cause he's brown.

She herself never felt discriminated against personally because she doesn't express her religion publicly and she doesn't look like a Muslim. She doesn't stand out so people won't stare or discriminate because of that. She said the first impression would always be either color or clothes. She had one experience where she refused to drink and she got asked why, and when she said because of religion, the person couldn't understand. She said she would probably understand if the reason was not a religion, but her reaction was definitely something.

Some challenges to practice Islam are the lack of mosques, and the praying places are usually dominated by man and she doesn't feel very comfortable with that. She thought a lot about the hijab when she first converted, although she never really considered wearing it as many people think it's a symbol of oppression. Another challenge is actually because she's not a born-Muslim. If she goes to the Muslim community to pray together, she would meet people mostly who were born and raised as Muslims. She feels like sometimes she doesn't feel fully accepted as one because she doesn't look like a Muslim. Even in Morocco, when entering a mosque, she was asked to say the shahadat.

	<p>There was an Arabic Muslim guy who questioned her a lot about Islam, kind of testing her with questions about history, etc. She was actually very uncomfortable with this kind of attitude.</p>
National Identity	<p>When she's not in Lithuania, she would say that she's from Lithuania.</p> <p>She votes. She thinks it's important to follow the news and politics in Lithuania as much as she can. She would go to some civil events that she cares about.</p> <p>She would say she's a proud Lithuanian, but then she laughed. She said she's not proud of the older generation and their mindset. She doesn't like how the older generation affects and raises children with this mentality. It's the only thing that she doesn't like about Lithuania, if they're stuck in their trauma from the post-Soviet era. However, to foreigners, she would say that Lithuania is a very welcoming country.</p> <p>She's really proud of the young generation and for the progress of the country. Her mother's generation even started to be more open, she sees that they're trying to accept, let's say, black people - and not just see them as criminals.</p> <p>She feels a little less of a Lithuanian since she converted to Islam. She feels that advertisements, including political campaigns, always include Christian values in Lithuania - which makes her feel a bit like an outsider. She doesn't say it's a big difference, but it's there.</p>
Perceived Value Compatibility	<p>She thinks it's pretty compatible. Lithuanians value family, religion. As well as in Islam, family and religion are very important.</p> <p>However, she feels they're a bit different as well. Lithuanians are not very cultural, especially the younger generation. They're more like a modern society. In Islamic countries, people are usually very traditional. Islam is usually a very big part of people's lives in those countries. In Lithuania, they would not prioritize religion this much, they would still focus more on family and work, for example. She said that's why it's easier for a Christian to say that they're practicing, because they only need to go to church on Sundays and that's it. Muslims need to do a lot more.</p>
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	<p>She said in the middle - both. Being a Lithuanian is important for her and she can't separate that from her identity. Everywhere she goes, she'll always be a Lithuanian. Islam is also a part of her and it's more like a core of herself.</p> <p>She identifies herself with both, even though she's not open about it with her friends and most public.</p>

Additional Comments	<p>For Lithuanian Muslims, she hopes for more places of gatherings. There are some but not many. She wants to see more official mosques. She hopes more Muslims like her would come out as Muslims, and not shy or scared to admit it. She hopes for more families to accept it if their children would become Muslims. She hopes more people speak about it more publicly and not always speak about Islam as something that comes from abroad, because Islam has been in Lithuania for a long time. She hopes the progress would continue, there are more opportunities for people to come and live in Lithuania and not experience racism or hatred, and a more international environment. She hopes that the minorities would feel accepted and expand their network with the Lithuanians as well.</p>
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Code	Interviewee 08
Category	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred
Demographics	<p>Female, 35, from Nemėžis (LT), lives in Vilnius (LT). Two Master's in English and Public Administration from Vilnius College and MRU. Currently works as an English teacher in a gymnasium.</p>
Religious Identity	<p>Born and grew up in a Muslim family. Her family is very religious. They are Tatars. They practice Islam in daily life. She does everything that Islam asks them to do. She studies Arabic and plans to learn the Quran by heart in a month. She conducts women's and children's lessons at the Smolensko mosque. They provide both in-person and online classes.</p> <p>She can't imagine her life without religion, Islam in particular. It provides instructions in her life. She doesn't understand how people with no religion can feel and find the meaning or answers of this life.</p>
Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes Believe in the Quran: Yes (read in Russian, twice, different experiences - the more you read, the more you get something new) Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes Belong to any Muslim community: Yes, she belongs two: at Smolensko g. and in Nemėžis Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: Yes Fast during Ramadan months: Yes, and not only in Ramadan (Sunnah) Eat pork: No Drink alcohol: No Attend the Friday prayers: Yes Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No, not yet Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: As you know more, you understand that you know less Read/speak Arabic: Studying as well, almost a year</p>

<p>Ethnic Identity</p>	<p>She still belongs to the Nemėžis Tatar community where it's more cultural than religious. They still celebrate their Tatar traditions and hold special events. People there are actually not very interested in religion, more in the culture and traditions.</p> <p>She is Crimean Tatar, but she doesn't know if they're 100% Crimean. There's some new data that their ancestors are not only from Crimea and Kazan, as they were using a language with Arabic letters, but not the Arabic language. They also used to use Polish. The Tatar language is 40% similar to Arabic, but Tatar is not using Arabic letters.</p> <p>She feels her ethnic group is different as they have different cultural celebrations. However, many people have lost their traditions and languages around 500 years ago. She even said some Tatars eat pork now.</p> <p>She said some traditions are not correct according to Islam, so she's not doing some of them anymore. The generation lost religion during the Soviet era. So after the independence, some people mix Islam and Christianity, for example burying corpses in an Islamic way but in a coffin. She said some people think that because they're Tatars and they go to the mosque 2 times a year, they're Muslims. But actually, they know very little about Islam.</p> <p>Her family members in Nemėžis are still practicing.</p> <p>She speaks Russian, Lithuanian, and English. Russian is her first language, she uses it at home. She uses Lithuanian at work. She teaches English in Nemėžis. She spoke about the history of Nemėžis and how Grand Duke Vytautas gave the land to the Tatars and asked them 'not to measure' when he was asked how much land they should take.</p>
<p>Social Network</p>	<p>She loves her family. They have close relationships. All of her relatives are Tatars. Her colleagues are Lithuanians and Polish. Her friends from childhood are Catholics, so she knows some of their customs. She doesn't know if they're practicing or not, but they celebrate Christmas and Easter. She wouldn't go with them to celebrate these Catholic days. She used to, but not anymore as in Islam you're not supposed to do that. Fundamentally, Muslims don't accept the concept of Jesus as God. She doesn't say it's not good, she just tolerates the idea. She wouldn't greet them either.</p>

<p>Perceived Discrimination</p>	<p>At school, as she wasn't the only Tatar, she felt tolerated. She felt good growing up. However, she said people sometimes fear women in hijab or scarf, as they associate it with terrorism. She said this is kind of shaped by the media. She mentioned sociological research done by DELFI where they took 3 groups: gays, gypsies, and Muslims. She doesn't like it when Muslims are being compared to gays. They're not even categorizing it as Turkish, or Tatars, or anything - but Muslims as a whole.</p> <p>She said that when Muslims are being silent and just look like the rest of Lithuanians, they're okay. But if they want to wear hijab/scarf or express their religion, they won't like it. She also mentioned that the younger generation is more tolerant than the older one, in this case.</p> <p>She experienced one time when she was wearing a hijab (she would usually only use a cap, not hijab) and she wanted to cross the street, she noticed one car was trying to hit her. She said when you wear a hijab, they will think you're a foreigner. They don't even expect you to speak Lithuanian.</p> <p>She doesn't feel there is difficulty or challenge practicing Islam in Lithuania. Maybe just that she cannot pray at work. She's not given a separate room for that. But her parents live 2 minutes away from her workplace, so she would just go there to pray during working days. However, she has a Tatar friend who works in a ministry, and she's given a separate cabinet to pray. She said sometimes you just need to ask, and people are actually friendly and understanding.</p>
<p>National Identity</p>	<p>She would definitely say she's from Lithuania if she's in another country. She's proud of her country and she celebrates national/civil events. She said she's quite patriotic. She doesn't really attend civil events such as Baltic Way or the solidarity movement for Belarus that happened some time ago, as she tries to spend her time doing things that are more meaningful according to Islam. Instead of that, she would prefer to spend her time helping people, etc., so she's trying not to waste her time on things like these.</p> <p>She votes. She doesn't always follow the news because she considers herself quite busy with work, studies, etc. She specifically didn't like the time when we had quarantine in spring and she needed to stay at home and just watch news about coronavirus.</p> <p>She said usually people know that she's not a Catholic, from her looks. People usually know that she's a Muslim and they assume that she's either a Turkish or a gypsy. She doesn't exactly understand when being asked if she feels less of a Lithuanian because she's a Muslim. She said that she's a part of the country but she's a Muslim.</p>

Perceived Value Compatibility	<p>She thinks Lithuanian and Muslim values sometimes are similar at some point. However, she sees that Islam and Christianity are quite contrasting.</p> <p>In Islam, they value family, friendships, good things, and morals. In Lithuania and the rest of the world, she thinks that people don't really value family and relationships. They separate from their parents, they don't get married. She thinks it's very important to get married and to have children. In public transportation, she sees that young people are sitting and older people are standing. She thinks this is not okay and it doesn't show respect. She also said that in social media, people seek help for their problems, but they would only get comments that are not helping at all. She said not everything is terrible of course, there are also helpful and kind people.</p> <p>She's trying to make the world a better place. She's teaching her kids and her students how to do good things.</p>
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	Muslim, she said it straight up.
Additional Comments	N/A

Code	Interviewee 09
Category	Lithuanian Muslim convert
Demographics	Female, 30, from Vilnius (LT), lives in Vilnius (LT), went to college, and is currently a university student
Religious Identity	<p>Islam is my compass, it's a way of life on its own, not just a part of it, I consider myself to be very religious.</p> <p>I converted to Islam about a decade ago. I grew up in a non-practicing Christian family who believed in God, but never desired to live in God's way, never wished to transform their lifestyle and adhere to any particular religion. I on the other hand craved to be closer to God, to live a life that would be filled with worship, purpose, belonging. As a teenager I tried a few different Christian sects, even attending Mormon church in Vilnius for a short while, but as someone who rejects the idea of Jesus (peace be upon him) being a God I could not fit in there and gain peace from their teachings that I was looking for.</p> <p>One day while googling I stumbled upon the Lithuanian Muslim forum, I registered there, joined their discussions, was very amazed to find all this invisible world of Lithuanian converts to Islam. Those were mainly young women, many of them were very knowledgeable on Islam, they answered a lot of my questions, directed me to various sources where I could seek for more knowledge. I met some of them, received more information, the literature on Islam. I</p>

	<p>studied Islam for a while before taking a decision to convert, I knew it would change my life and perhaps even drastically...I did not want to take it lightly. It took me about a year of thinking and debating with myself before I said shahadat (testimony of faith). Perhaps if I had to distinguish just a few things which I liked the most about Islam it would be the ability to worship God and 'earn' good deeds through everything I do, from eating, using the bathroom, or reading a book. The simplest deed done following correct instructions and having a correct intention turns into a form of worship. Also, the feeling of being grounded, finding my heart at peace because I understand my purpose on this earth, feeling of always having something to turn to when I'm lost or confused. Something eternal, something that has no limits, no flaws. There is nothing more precious than peace of heart and the feeling of being grateful and content with life, regardless of what it throws at you. I grow up in a society that will question God (faith, destiny, etc.) whenever something bad would happen, but now I know that whatever happens it's just a part of a bigger plan, it doesn't mean that I don't get upset, it just means that I never become desperate or lose faith.</p>
Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes Believe in the Quran: Yes Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes Belong to any Muslim community: No Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: Yes Fast during Ramadan months: Yes Eat pork: No Drink alcohol: No Attend the Friday prayers: No Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: Yes Read/speak Arabic: I read and write in Arabic, know basic grammar.</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>Lithuanian. No, I don't consider myself any different from other ethnic groups. I speak Lithuanian, Russian, English, as well as a little Arabic.</p>
Social Network	<p>My family is Lithuanian/Russian, mostly non-practicing Christians. My friends are mostly converted or born Muslims of various backgrounds.</p>
Perceived Discrimination	<p>I would say that Muslims are misunderstood and feared by society, by people, but the country and its laws don't discriminate and grant us the freedom to practice our religion. I did not experience any actual discrimination personally. The biggest challenge is looking differently while wearing a hijab. Some people react negatively to it, may call you names in public or give you stares, etc. My family is very open-minded and liberal, they accepted my choice and respected it. My friends did have a harder time, unfortunately I did lose many friends after making this choice because our lifestyles and views started to differ a lot.</p>
National Identity	<p>I'm an average Lithuanian person, just with an uncommon religious choice... If I'm outside of Lithuania, I always answer that I'm from Lithuania, a small eastern/northern European country. I'm not active politically, but I do follow the news. Yes, I'm a Muslim before being a</p>

	Lithuanian, but I respect my heritage and love my country. Becoming a Muslim did not change that.
Perceived Value Compatibility	Lithuanians are quite conservative and there are some things that are compatible, like for example family values. My experience with some Muslim cultures did not match the teachings of Islam, I found some non-Muslims here in Europe adhere to parts of Islam that ask to obey authorities and laws better. Lithuanians are the type of people who do obey authority and tend to follow rules if they understand that they bring greater good.
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	I don't consider myself less of Lithuanian because I'm a Muslim. Like I mentioned before I'm a Muslim before my race, ethnicity, or nationality. Islam has no borders and it's the sole essence and purpose of my existence, to me it would be illogical to see myself being a Lithuanian before being a Muslim.
Additional Comments	My sincere wish is that Lithuanians would be less divided. Both inside the Muslim community and outside of it. That they would base their togetherness on mercy and human values, not on nationality or political/religious views only.

Code	Interviewee 10
Category	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred
Demographics	Female, 38, from Forty Tatars Village and lives here as well, bachelor in interior design (Vilnius College), at the moment she just got back from England and she's not working.
Religious Identity	Islam is important for her. From the beginning, when she understood that she was different from her friends, she was quite jealous of her school mates as they were all having time with her families during Christmas. So her religion started from her childhood. Her grandma always explained things to her and when she went to school she also had Islamic lessons. She started going to the mosque maybe when she was 4 or 5, before school. She remembers having traditions, celebrations since she was a kid. Giving sweets, etc.
Checklist	Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes Believe in the Quran: Yes Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes Belong to any Muslim community: Yes, volunteering for Forty Tatars Village Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: No. She tries to pray but not all the time, not 5 times a day. Fast during Ramadan months: Yes, everybody's fasting and it's a tradition in Forty Tatars Village. They also have iftar together in the community. Eat pork: No, eating halal meat Drink alcohol: No Attend the Friday prayers: Yes Done pilgrimage in Mecca: Never been.

	Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: N/A Read/speak Arabic: N/A
Ethnic Identity	Tatar. She was born, grew up, and lives in Forty Tatars Village, Vilnius, Lithuania. She speaks Russian, Lithuanian, and English. With the people in her community, she mostly speaks Russian. The Friday prayers are conducted in Russian and Arabic.
Social Network	She knows perhaps everyone in Forty Tatars Village. She used to work in England as well.
Perceived Discrimination	N/A
National Identity	N/A
Perceived Value Compatibility	N/A
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	N/A
Additional Comments	N/A

Code	Interviewee 11
Category	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred
Demographics	Male, 42, from around Visaginas (LT), lives in Vilnius (LT), studied law in Ankara (Turkey), and now works as a head of a Muslim community.
Religious Identity	Completely a Muslim. He believes that to be a Muslim, one should believe and follow all the aspects of the religion, not just following some and not agreeing with the others. He was born and grew up in a Muslim family in Lithuania, but he claims that he is a Muslim that because of his parents, but because he genuinely believes in Islam and agrees with the system from his heart. He doesn't see Islam as just a part of the tradition or culture that he was raised with, but truly as a religion. He thinks that many people see religion as a culture, when it's actually a faith. He hasn't been to Mecca, though.

Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes Believe in the Quran: Yes Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes Belong to any Muslim community: Yes Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: Yes Fast during Ramadan months: Yes Eat pork: No Drink alcohol: No Attend the Friday prayers: Yes Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: No Read/speak Arabic: A bit</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>Lithuanian (Crimean) Tatar. He also knows a lot of the history of Tatars in Lithuania and a big portion of the interview, he explained this to me. He told me about the time when Tatars arrived in Lithuania, the reason for it, the invitation, the right given, etc. And then the different ethnic groups arrived after that. He said that usually people think that Tatar = Muslim, or Muslim = Tatar. These two words are perceived as the same thing. He mentioned that most Tatars have forgotten the Tatar language. He speaks Russian, Lithuanian, and Tatar languages. He understands Polish but doesn't really speak it. He speaks Arabic a little.</p>
Social Network	<p>He went to Russian school as a kid, most school mates were not Muslims. Both parents are Tatar Muslims. His wife is a Lithuanian Tatar as well. His network now is lots of Muslims from various countries, people who go to his mosque, many Turkish.</p>
Perceived Discrimination	<p>He used to fight with school mates (he went to Russian schools in LT) because they kind of made fun of his religion. In the first 10 years of LT independence, the image of Tatars/Muslims was good. Everybody spoke well about this group. However, starting in the 2000s, a bad image of Muslims started in the media from other EU countries. People started to think that Muslims are terrorists. And as a Muslim, he felt like he would also prove that he's a good person. When he starts interacting with non-Muslims in Lithuania, he feels like they started from different levels, like he's below, and he needs to always prove himself to make the other person understand that he's not a bad person. The same thing happened when he was in school. He needed to be a good student, had good scores and good in sports, for him to make school mates want to be friends with him. He feels like usually people don't discriminate (it's not the correct word), but they misunderstand. He said that Lithuanians usually have good relationships with Tatars, but somehow perceive Muslims differently. Sometimes language context is being misunderstood as well, for example, the term "Allahuakbar" is perceived as something you say before committing terrorism without understanding the actual meaning. It's the same as Lithuanians would say "O Jesus" but don't necessarily believe in Jesus. The negative image of Islam comes from outside Lithuania.</p>
National Identity	<p>He didn't vote because he was sick, but usually he would try to be a good and active Lithuanian citizen. If something pushes Lithuania, starts a war with Lithuania, he would say to</p>

	<p>other people, that he would protect this country. He teaches his children that this is their country and they think that Lithuanian rules as a country are good rules. He is a proud Lithuanian and quite patriotic.</p>
Perceived Value Compatibility	<p>He thinks values are quite good and compatible. Not conflicting with each other. For example, in Lithuania, you can't drink in the streets, that's good in the eyes of Islam. Lithuanian rules allow hijab and halal processes. Also make nikah (marriage in the mosque) official. Lithuania agrees to this religion and Sunni Islam is one of the traditional religions in this country. He even mentioned that sometimes in Islamic countries, possibilities for Muslims are less than in Lithuania (I'm guessing less freedom, that he meant). Sunni = if you believe in one God and Prophet Muhammad, then you're a Sunni.</p>
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	<p>Religion comes first. So more of a Muslim. But if you believe in Islam, Lithuanian citizenship is included. Because when you're living in a country, you must agree to the country's rules. You must respect the country and be a good citizen. You must love your country. You have to protect your country. First constitution, and then country. First religion, and then country. You cannot build a house without a foundation. Everything starts with family, relationship with people. Islam is not only a belief, but a system as well. If one claims to be a Muslim but is not a good Lithuanian citizen, or doesn't respect their mother, he said this person is actually not a Muslim.</p>
Additional Comments	<p>He said people tend to think that religion is only something for the afterlife, but actually religion is something that was, is, or will always be there in your life. It's something present. It's before your life and after your life, too. It's rules, system, and norm. What you must be doing, what you must not do. Islam is about ibadah. Praying (salat) is a part of ibadah, but not only that. Helping your mother is ibadah. Helping your country of ibadah. Ibadah is all life, every good point you make in life is ibadah.</p>

Code	Interviewee 12
Category	Naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizen
Demographics	<p>Male, 39, Brazilian-Lebanese, lives in Klaipėda (LT). Studied business economics and engineering in UAE and the Netherlands. Currently works as a businessman and technician. He used to live in both Brazil and Lebanon, so he considers himself for both countries, he can't choose one. First came to LT in around 1997 to play football professionally. Became a naturalized Lithuanian citizen in 2008.</p>
Religious Identity	<p>Identifies as a Muslim and is proud of it, but he found it a bit strange that our mutual friend referred him to me cause they never talked about his religion.</p> <p>It's important for him. Not strongly religious, but he's believing. He applies some of its rules in his life. He respects and has no problems with other religions as well.</p>

Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes Believe in the Quran: Yes (read in Arabic) Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes Belong to any Muslim community: No Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: Not always (only when he needs) Fast during Ramadan months: Yes Eat pork: N/A Drink alcohol: N/A Attend the Friday prayers: No (he believes people don't need to go to public places to show themselves) Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: Only some of them Read/speak Arabic: Yes</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>Brazilian-Lebanese</p> <p>In daily life, he's using Lithuanian now. Arabic was one of his first languages. He speaks English, Portuguese, and French as well. He went to international schools and he was always exposed to different languages. He speaks Portuguese to his Brazilian mom and Arabic to his Lebanese dad, sometimes in English to both of them.</p> <p>He was raised with a lot of freedom by his parents, he could choose whatever he wants to follow or do in his life. He was never just following one ethnic group's traditions.</p>
Social Network	<p>He has a big international network. Some of them from Norway, some are Lithuanians, some are Egyptians, Algerians. But most of them were born and raised in Europe. Mostly non-believers, he thinks, but he never really talked about religion with his friends anyway. He doesn't choose his friends according to their religions. He doesn't have any dominant group of friends from a certain ethnic group, nationality, or religion.</p>
Perceived Discrimination	<p>People usually don't know about the religion. They see it in the media and they have their own image about it. In general, people in Eastern Europe can still be quite close-minded compared to their Western counterparts because they don't have that much exposure to or a mixture of different people from different backgrounds. It's a different mentality. But not everyone is close-minded, of course, just some people. He usually doesn't mind if people are being close-minded as he feels that it's not his problem, but theirs. He also mentioned that when people are discriminating, it's usually because of looks/appearance (if the person is brown/black), not because of religion. People look at you when you're a foreigner here in Lithuania, compared to how it is in the Netherlands for example. He said Lithuanians respect if foreigners speak Lithuanian.</p>

National Identity	<p>If he's not in Lithuania, he would say that he's from Lithuania. He's proud of being a Lithuanian citizen as he feels Lithuania gives a lot to him and he likes Lithuanian people. He doesn't hold any other citizenship.</p> <p>He used to vote some time ago, but this time he doesn't really have the time for that. He would usually follow Lithuanian news as he needs to know what's happening in the country where he lives.</p>
Perceived Value Compatibility	<p>He found it hard to answer this as the two are different things, one is about the nation and one is about religion. He doesn't want to compare national values and religious values. For him, the values don't affect each other.</p>
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	<p>Again, he doesn't want to answer this as he thinks these are two different things. He's proud of being both a Muslim and a Lithuanian citizen, he doesn't think it makes sense or that it is correct to compare the two.</p>
Additional Comments	<p>He hopes that people can live or interact with others not because of religions. He wants to see more variety in Lithuania, not just about people but also about food choice. He thinks it shouldn't matter where people come from and what they believe, as long as they contribute well to the country they live in.</p>

Code	Interviewee 13
Category	Lithuanian Muslim convert
Demographics	Female, 29, from Panevezys (LT), lives in Vilnius (LT). Bachelor of Social Work at Vilnius University. She works as a social worker.
Religious Identity	<p>Islam entered her life through her Algerian husband. Before she met him, she knew only a bit about Islam. She got to know a lot more from her husband. She got married in 2014 (after knowing him for 2 months) and she converted to Islam in around 2016.</p> <p>Islam is important for her and she considers herself religious even though she doesn't practice some things, like dressing codes. Not very strict, but still religious.</p> <p>She doesn't feel much difference after converting as before Islam, she was already not drinking, she didn't eat much meat. For 2 years she was even some kind of a vegetarian.</p>

Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes</p> <p>Believe in the Quran: Yes (read in Lithuanian and English)</p> <p>Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes, she follows podcasts, lectures, and readings about Islam</p> <p>Belong to any Muslim community: No, just online ones, she would say</p> <p>Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: Yes</p> <p>Fast during Ramadan months: Yes</p> <p>Eat pork: No</p> <p>Drink alcohol: No</p> <p>Attend the Friday prayers: No</p> <p>Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No</p> <p>Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: Little bit, still a lot to learn</p> <p>Read/speak Arabic: She's currently learning</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>100% Lithuanian, as much as she knows.</p> <p>She's not sure if she's still doing Lithuanian traditions, maybe they're more like Christian celebrations, not specifically Lithuanian. Her family is still including her in celebrations like this. She would still give Christmas gifts to her family.</p> <p>She speaks English with her husband. She speaks Lithuanian with her family and at work.</p>
Social Network	<p>Her husband is Algerian so he was born and raised as a Muslim.</p> <p>Her parents are actually Protestants, not Catholics. They're from Birziai, where there's a bigger Protestant community. However, they're not practicing. Father is an atheist, and the mother believes in God but doesn't practice. Her grandma still practices.</p> <p>She has 2 older sisters, one in Vilnius and one in another city. Not really practicing either.</p> <p>Almost all of her local friends are Lithuanian Catholics, but they don't really practice. They talk about religion because it's usually her friends who would be interested to know about her religion.</p> <p>At her workplace, they have some Catholic traditions, but they don't mind that she doesn't follow the customs.</p>

<p>Perceived Discrimination</p>	<p>Sometimes, yes. But this discrimination happens without any intention. For example, not long ago, she had a conference. There was food and there was beef but there was no halal option. So she doesn't think it's discrimination, but she believes this would be a problem for vegetarians too, as there wouldn't be food without meat either.</p> <p>She thinks sometimes when there are comments (that might be discriminative), they are more related to looks, not exactly religion. If you look different, people would have comments. However, she can pray normally at work. She and her husband didn't experience anything significant.</p> <p>Her family reacted not good when she converted to Islam. Her mother is still in denial. She would question her why she's not eating certain meat and stuff. She acts like she doesn't know but she doesn't make big arguments anymore. One aunt was very concerned when she got married to her husband, cause she thought she would be beaten/kidnapped and all. One sister commented, "How come you forget your Christian values?" But she never had any Christian values because when growing up, they never attended church, celebrated Christmas but only in a cultural way. She never considered herself having any Christian values. The other sister accepted and always asked what they can eat, always considering everything.</p> <p>Challenges to practice religion: at work, she can't just leave the children to go praying; food choice, she can't eat some things that her friends bring to her, e.g. cakes with gelatin, candies with colors that are made from insects (especially when they're red).</p>
<p>National Identity</p>	<p>If she's not in Lithuania, she would say that she's from Lithuania.</p> <p>She votes, she kind of follows the news, but not very seriously. She watches the news from time to time to understand what's happening around her.</p> <p>She doesn't feel anything changed in terms of being a Lithuanian national when she converted to Islam, but she said others might think of it differently, for example, her mother. They don't understand how someone can be a Lithuanian and a Muslim at the same time. The mother feels like her becoming a Muslim is kind of a betrayal to her ancestors.</p> <p>She's happy to be a Lithuanian citizen and she loves Lithuania.</p>
<p>Perceived Value Compatibility</p>	<p>Lithuanian and Muslim cultures are compatible. Of course there are differences, but in general they are compatible. Christian and Islamic values are very similar, it's about being a good person for society, etc.</p>
<p>More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?</p>	<p>They're different. She would always be a Lithuanian, even if she lives in another country. She does have plans to move to another country, but she would still want her daughter to speak the Lithuanian language, etc.</p>

	She feels that she is both and that nationality and religion are two separate things.
Additional Comments	She hopes that Lithuanians can learn more about Islam. At the moment most information about Islam from the media is negative.

Code	Interviewee 14
Category	Naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizen
Demographics	Male, 36, from Damascus/Latakia (Syria), grew up in Damascus, living in Kaunas since 2003, bachelor to Ph.D. from KTU, currently working as a coordinator in an NPO and running an engineering consultation business. In 2015 he submitted his application as a citizen, in 2016 he became a Lithuanian citizen.
Religious Identity	In some parts, Islam is very important, but he also compromised some things. He said if he's 100% Muslim, he wouldn't have friends in Lithuania. He told a story about him and his 2 Muslim friends (from Syria and Lebanon) who used to live together in the KTU dorm for 3 years. One of them was very religious, he wouldn't even shake hands with girls, couldn't eat if the food wasn't 100% halal. He realized that if they would live that way, they wouldn't have any friends. Misunderstandings also happened if they didn't compromise their Islamic rules in Lithuania, for example, his friend didn't want to shake hands with a Lithuanian girl, she was insulted thinking that he thought touching him was disgusting. He's been to Mecca because he actually worked in Saudi Arabia for about 3-4 years. He worked for a Lithuanian company and was based there.
Checklist	Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes, for sure Believe in the Quran: Yes, for sure Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Not all the time, depending on the case Belong to any Muslim community: No Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: No Fast during Ramadan months: Sometimes, not continuously Eat pork: No Drink alcohol: No, but he compromises this when people bring/have it Attend the Friday prayers: No Done pilgrimage in Mecca: Yes, when he was working in Saudi Arabia. 7 times. Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: No Read/speak Arabic: Yes, native language
Ethnic Identity	Syrian. Arabic is his native language / mother tongue. He speaks fluent Lithuanian and English. At home, he speaks Arabic with his wife, Lithuanian with his daughter and colleagues.

Social Network	<p>Mother is from Damascus and the father is from Latakia. The mother will be a Lithuanian citizen. The wife is also from Syria, a pharmacist. Brother is also a Lithuanian citizen, his sister is in Sweden. He and his brother compromise, his mom and his sister are strict. His sister is taking her kids to mosque and Quran lessons. Mother is only talking to his kids. His colleagues are very respectful towards his religion. Some of them are not religious and never asked about his religion. Some of them went to study together with him, they're Lithuanians. He talked a lot about his friends'/colleagues' educational backgrounds. His 2 best friends are not religious.</p>
Perceived Discrimination	<p>He speaks of a lot of others' experiences as he's been here for almost 2 decades and he works for the NPO where he met a lot of Muslims. He mentioned a lot of 'compromises'.</p>
National Identity	<p>Outside Lithuania, somewhere far, he would say he's from Syria. He went to Ukraine and showed a Lithuanian passport and he was kept for an hour. People in Lithuanian airport speak to him in English and can't believe that he really speaks Lithuanian. He was also sometimes questioned about why he would stand in the local/citizen line at the airport immigration. So to make it simple, if he would be somewhere else, he would just say he's from Syria. He mentioned that in UAE, immigration is more simple. He shows his Lithuanian passport and they just stamp and he can just go.</p> <p>He voted last time, those 2 parliament things. He's in a conservative party because his best friend is there and he likes how he manages politics. He would say he's a proud Lithuanian citizen.</p>
Perceived Value Compatibility	<p>Absolutely incompatible, so that's why we need compromises here. The culture in Lithuania is very different.</p>
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	<p>N/A</p>

Additional Comments	<p>From 2003 to 2010 it was a hard process to become a Lithuanian citizen, after 2010 and especially after 2015, it became easier. Lithuania was growing as a European country. He first moved to Lithuania purely for studies. He decided to change his citizenship because the immigration workers convinced him to do so, as he has been living in LT for a long time and speaks LT fluently. He got the decision in just 27 days. His daughter who was born in Syria got Lithuanian citizenship right away.</p> <p>He hopes that having more foreigners in LT would help this country further. If more LT people travel, they would see more things and understand how life works somewhere else.</p>
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Code	Interviewee 15
Category	Lithuanian Muslim convert
Demographics	Female, 22, from and lives in Vilnius (LT), studied Middle Eastern Studies at Vilnius University, working in foreigners integration and asylum seekers program as social consultant and translator in an NPO.
Religious Identity	<p>She got interested in Islam for as long as she can remember, she started researching about Islam since she was very young. She also learned the Persian language. She traveled to Iran, she married an Iranian Muslim guy who was an asylum seeker in Poland. His parents are very religious. However, he didn't really like Islam.</p> <p>They first got married in an EU civil marriage way, but then also the Islamic marriage in Iranian Embassy in Warsaw where she officially became a Muslim and an Iranian citizen at the same time.</p> <p>She considers herself a little bit religious, she doesn't follow all the rules of Islam. She accepts and believes the idea of Allah. She also mentioned that she is a Shia Muslim, not Sunni.</p>
Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes</p> <p>Believe in the Quran: Yes (read in English, Lithuanian, Arabic, and Persian)</p> <p>Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes</p> <p>Belong to any Muslim community: Yes, but actually in a Sunni community (she works as translator) and she interacts more with the women who are Tajik.</p> <p>Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: No</p> <p>Fast during Ramadan months: She did one time, not anymore</p> <p>Eat pork: No</p> <p>Drink alcohol: Yes</p> <p>Attend the Friday prayers: No</p> <p>Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No</p> <p>Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: No, not enough</p> <p>Read/speak Arabic: She reads and she can speak a little</p>

Ethnic Identity	<p>Lithuanian. Grandma from her father's side is from Ukraine. Father is half-Ukrainian half-Lithuanian, mom is Lithuanian.</p> <p>She doesn't sound sure whether she still follows Lithuanian traditions. She said, "I guess so." She does paint eggs on Easter for example and she really likes this tradition. But she said this is also done by the Iranians.</p> <p>She speaks 50% Persian and 50% Lithuanian / English on her daily basis. Persian with the refugees, Lithuanian/English with co-workers. With friends and family, Lithuanian.</p>
Social Network	<p>Her family members are hardcore Catholics, but her mom is a pagan, and she was never forced to follow one. She was raised by her pagan mom and her Catholic grandma, so she said she grew up in the middle of this conflict as they argued a lot about the religions.</p> <p>The biggest part of the network she has is from work, she considers lots of them are her friends. Mostly Muslims from Syria, Iran, Iraq, Tajikistan, Kurdish, and Afghanistan. She has some friends she keeps from school years - these people were born and raised as Christians but not practicing.</p> <p>She's getting a divorce from the current husband. She now has a relationship with another Iranian guy who was also born and raised as Shia Muslim, but he actually converted to Christian Protestantism. He's a refugee in Lithuania now because of his religion.</p>
Perceived Discrimination	<p>She said lots of Sunni Muslims don't consider Shia Muslims as Muslims, and the other way around. The difference is the approach or belief towards Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali. The praying hand gestures are also slightly different. Shia Muslims have the Ashra celebration when the descendant of Imam Ali was killed, it's very important and sad for the Shia Muslims. They even hit themselves to empathize with Ali's pain.</p> <p>She said that Muslims are discriminated against in Lithuania. It's usually because people don't have the right information about Muslims. She sees it a lot from her workplace. For example young Muslim girls who go to public schools in Lithuania. They're allowed to wear their scarves, but then the Lithuanian students would think it's not fair that they're allowed to do that while they're restricted to their uniforms. They see it as some sort of special treatment and they don't like it. The teachers also don't like it when these Muslim young girls wear a scarf in school. The boys, on the other side, don't really speak about their experiences at schools. She guesses it's still difficult for them to make friends if they don't smoke, drink alcohol, use drugs, etc.</p> <p>She doesn't feel discriminated against because she doesn't wear hijab and she drinks alcohol. Actually, her workplace is a religious organization and they have prayers together. It's not mandatory for all workers but they were not informed about it in the beginning.</p>

	<p>It's challenging to practice Islam in Lithuania as there are not enough mosques and the possibilities to learn Arabic are quite rare. The books are expensive. She mentioned even the Tatars in Lithuania usually don't know Arabic either, considering they were born and raised as Muslims in the first place. She said it would be good to be able to read the Quran in Arabic. The translation in Lithuanian is not very good, even though it's been improved recently.</p> <p>When she converted to Islam, her mother was not surprised and already expected that. Her father already stopped talking to me when she told him she was going to study Arabic. He said, "You're stupid, you're going to get raped and murdered, so good luck with that." She said her father has problems with foreigners, not sure if Muslims or just Asians in general. Grandma was fine. Friends from high school were not surprised either because she was also showing interest in Muslim countries since then. It was a bit weird for them at first but they can still have normal and even constructive conversations, even with the ones who are totally against religions in general.</p>
National Identity	<p>She has dual citizenship, Lithuanian and Iranian. She got the latter one from her marriage because she chose to convert to Islam. You automatically get citizenship and a passport. Lots of Lithuanians believe it's illegal, but this is actually one of the legal exceptions: a woman who gets married to a Muslim man and is automatically granted the citizenship of the other country.</p> <p>If she's not in Lithuania, she would say that she's from Lithuania cause she grew up here. She's not active in Lithuanian politics, she doesn't vote. She would attend civil events like Baltic Way, though. She doesn't really follow Lithuanian news, but rather international news as well as Iranian news. Sometimes she would watch Lithuanian TV but not daily, she doesn't put much importance here.</p> <p>When asked if she feels less of a Lithuanian since she converted to Islam, she paused for quite long, but then she said no. She's proud of some things in Lithuania, but she's not proud of the current situations. When she works for the refugees, sometimes she feels hurt when the refugees choose to just go to Germany because they're provided a house there, and it's not provided here.</p>
Perceived Value Compatibility	<p>She actually wrote about this topic when finishing high school. It's hard to compare because one is nationality and one is religion, but she doesn't see a reason why it should be incompatible. The values are actually quite compatible.</p>
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	<p>N/A</p>
Additional Comments	<p>She hopes for more Lithuanians to have more open minds and to understand Muslims by meeting and talking to them. It's a small thing but it's gonna have a huge difference.</p>

Code	Interviewee 16
Category	Lithuanian Muslim convert
Demographics	Female, 38, from Vilnius (LT), lives in Vilnius (LT), studied International Business Management at VU (bachelor), currently a business owner.
Religious Identity	<p>I consider myself very religious but not very strong in religion. Religion is very important to me. I believe in everything that Islam is teaching but I don't do all the practices.</p> <p>I don't remember exactly when I converted to Islam, around 6 years ago I think. When I was a child I was a believing Christian, then I got disappointed, because of priests' behavior. Also, some religious people, I didn't like how they were acting and communicating. I started doubting religion when I was a teenager then became agnostic. Then I started to feel something was missing in my life, like a purpose or meaning. My father was in a coma, I went to chapel, said "God if you exist, please help my father but I can't promise anything back." Then I was given holy water and brought to my father, and he actually woke up after 1 week in a coma and recovered completely. I started to think maybe there's God that doesn't ask me anything in return, so I wanted to have a religion. Then I believed in God but not in religion. Still, I started gathering info about popular religions (Christianity, Buddhism, etc), karma, etc. Then I went to Egypt and met my current husband, we started talking about religion. I first laughed at his idea about me converting to Islam, cause I used to believe the media about Islam. But then he made me realize that I was already living like a Muslim, not drinking, not eating that much pork. Just not the religion. So we got married, and then about 2 years later I finally converted to Islam. And now I believe in Islam. I always asked God to show me the truth, to not have doubts.</p>
Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes</p> <p>Believe in the Quran: Yes, I believe that the Quran is the work of God. Before I thought it's written by people, but now I have no doubt that humans cannot write anything like this.</p> <p>Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes. All the time I'm looking for knowledge and something new, esp about the rulings of life. For example, Sunnah is the best way to eat. It helps me health-wise. So many theories about what's healthy and not healthy. If I follow Sunnah, I don't need to think too much or look at theories, I use Islam as a reference for food and other things in life.</p> <p>Belong to any Muslim community: Not really, but sometimes I meet other Muslim women, about 20 people. Some are converts, Tatars, foreigners. There's 1 Algerian woman who came here and got married to a Lithuanian man. Mostly converts that I know, or Tatars.</p> <p>Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: Yes and also Sunnah.</p> <p>Fast during Ramadan months: Yes</p> <p>Eat pork: No. I prefer to eat halal meat, but sometimes we can't always do that, so I sometimes eat it, so not 100%.</p> <p>Drink alcohol: No, and no candies with alcohol either. Or gelatin. We don't consume. Unless we don't know. I always try to check. When I'm not sure, I prefer not to eat it.</p>

	<p>Attend the Friday prayers: No</p> <p>Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No</p> <p>Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: Little bit. History is my weak point. I don't remember much. I know some info, of course, but in general, it doesn't stick to mind, any kind of history. I confuse the names, dates.</p> <p>Read/speak Arabic: I can read the Quran in Arabic, I learned how to read it. But I won't say I speak it, cause I only know a few words. I know a bit of Egyptian.</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>100% Lithuanian, just maybe some people in my family who are not, but I'm 100% as far as I know. I don't know what is specific to the Lithuanian ethnic group. We still celebrate birthdays. I meet my family for Christmas cause it's important for them. This year I might not go because of the virus, and I'm actually happy, but I think they will not understand if I don't go. What else...? Easter maybe, sometimes we meet during Easter. Actually we don't really celebrate anything special or any tradition since growing up. Since I became a Muslim, I stopped going to the cemetery for Velines cause it's not an Islamic cemetery. If I have to go, to a funeral, for instance, I will still go. Not name days either, not for youth. It's more for old people. Grandparents' tradition from older times, I didn't celebrate it when growing up.</p> <p>Languages:</p> <p>Lithuanian - with my family, friends, colleagues.</p> <p>English - with my husband.</p> <p>Russian - with Tatar friends, some of them don't speak Lithuanian.</p> <p>LT is my first language, English and Russian probably the same. When I was growing up, Russian was kind of the official language. English is easier, but Russian is like something from my language.</p> <p>Arabic/Egyptian - when I go to Egypt, I can understand a little. Actually I tried to learn Arabic many times. It's hard if you don't practice, the language has more rules than the Lithuanian language, they have dialects. I am hoping to learn Arabic. For now, maybe only 0.5% and 1% that I know.</p> <p>I don't think it's that important to speak Arabic when you're a Muslim. It's good when you can read the Quran in Arabic, but to understand everything completely, it's not necessary because it's almost not possible to master it anyway, unless maybe you're a scholar. But I want to learn because my husband is Egyptian, so I want to connect more with him and his family. But to be able to read Arabic is strongly preferable.</p>

Social Network	<p>Mostly Lithuanians, they're not religious. I think some of them consider themselves as Catholics but not practicing, or following anything from religion. I don't really know about other Christians, they might be Orthodox, IDK cause we don't talk about religion here. I know one, she said she's a protestant, but I only spoke with her a few times. Not because of the religion, of course, just our paths are not crossing.</p> <p>People like to marry in a church and baptize their kids in a Catholic way. Christmas and Easter are more like feasts.</p> <p>My mom is not religious at all. My father said there's God, he said he's Christian, but he's not going to church and all. But he would still say that there is God. My mom sometimes joked that she's a pagan, but IDK, maybe she just didn't identify herself as a Christian. I have a sister who got married in a church, and that's all. She's interested in meditation, but not in a religious way.</p> <p>I think a lot of Lithuanians are confused. They get married in a church, they still baptize their kids, but they believe in karma and reincarnation, which are not taught in Christianity. Like they believe Ayurveda, not religiously, but they follow the rules from there.</p> <p>My husband is religious. His family is also religious. I have a daughter from my previous marriage, 16 or 17 years old. She's not a Muslim but she's supporting me, she doesn't mind me being a Muslim. She's turning her phone off when I'm praying for example.</p>
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**Perceived
Discrimination**

I think yes. For example, when my husband came here for the first time, it was hard for him to find a job. For example, there was a building owner who was complaining about workers who were drinking, and I offered my husband who's not drinking at all, but they refused. They said it's a language barrier, but I believe it was because he's a Muslim. One other time, we tried to help an old lady carrying her heavy bag, but then the lady looked at my husband in a strange way and said to me that I would regret marrying him.

I think discrimination comes as a combination of skin color, ethnicity, religion. Not sure which one is first. I have never felt like I was being discriminated against. I don't see people as different, unless they're completely black, cause there are also people from other Soviet countries, for example, who look a bit darker, and for me they're all white. But people usually look at me and my husband who's just a bit darker, but for me I wouldn't see the difference. You could also be a Lithuanian and I would believe it.

One public figure posted something on Facebook about Muslim kids wanting to be martyrs and she said they want to be terrorists. I commented on the post and she deleted my comment and blocked me. I created another account and she did the same. There are many people like this who are just shouting what they want to say and not open to the truth or others' opinions.

Because nobody knows I'm a Muslim, so no. My daughter knows, a few friends, and some other Muslim friends, of course. My parents don't even know. I think they suspected something, but they never asked, so I never told them. I don't tell them if I'm praying etc. People are normally pretty ignorant about Islam, they're joking about something that is completely not true. I know what's the truth so I think it's funny. It's like saying "all Indonesians don't speak English."

I have a friend, when I told them I was marrying my husband, they changed. Also I changed a bit cause I stopped drinking and all. There were a group of people, about 10 of them, that I met at an event. One of them was studying Turkish and oriental studies at VU and they were joking about how Muslims fart when praying. Basically being disrespectful even though they themselves study something related. They also said to me not to marry my husband etc.

Some friends commented how come I didn't have alcohol and pork at my wedding, then they talked about me and my husband badly behind our back. Not all friends of course, just some. Not respectful. We're not really friends anymore.

I have a friend who is a Russian woman who is very respectful. She consulted with me on what to wear to a Muslim celebration because somehow she just had a child and had sheep for qurban / feast.

Some challenges/difficulties: Yes, for example where to pray. There are not enough mosques

	<p>here. I tried to plan my time according to my prayer times to be able to be home for prayers. Sometimes I go to Smolensko g. to pray. One time I tried wearing a turban, but what I encountered, people might have thought I had cancer or something cause I was covering my head/hair and also I didn't have eyebrows at the time. So I felt guilty, but I didn't tell them that's cause I'm a Muslim, not because I'm sick. They started treating me like I'm a sick person.</p> <p>There was one Russian-Lithuanian who got married to a Turkish Muslim guy that I met in the Islamic Center, she commented that women who converted to Islam just want to please their husbands or the husbands forced them.</p>
National Identity	<p>I don't feel less of Lithuanian because I'm a Muslim. It's just the same. If somebody asks where I'm from, I would say I am from Lithuania. I don't follow the news. I don't vote. Generally I don't like politics, it doesn't matter from what country. I don't believe the news/media. I am proud of being a human in general, it doesn't matter from which country I am. I would say that the world is my home. I love Lithuania and its roots, but I would do the same for any country. If I go to Egypt, I also feel like home. Sometimes I miss it like I miss my home. Previously I thought that religion and culture are the same things, but you separate them.</p>
Perceived Value Compatibility	<p>It's hard to say... Can you repeat it again? I don't know what to say cause I don't know what are actually Lithuanian values... like some people always need alcohol, also some people don't drink at all. We don't really have completely strong shared values as Lithuanian citizens, as a country in general.</p> <p>I can't say they're compatible with Islam because I don't feel there are common Lithuanian values anyway. Before I became a Muslim, I felt a bit strange in this country, some people said I was a bit strange. When I went to Egypt I felt more belonging. Like for example, I smile a lot, and people find me strange for doing that here. In Egypt, people love me because of that.</p> <p>I don't drink and some people are offended. When I filled my wine glass with my grape juice, they were asking what I was doing. So people thought I was strange even before I converted to Islam.</p> <p>I'm no longer friends with some people because we don't share the same values, not because I'm a Muslim, because I was already the way I am before I became Muslim. I don't sit with people who drink anymore. Before I thought I could not change my friends, and now I know it's not true. Also, I had my daughter when I was young, and some friends stopped seeing me cause I was no longer fun for them.</p> <p>I always had different opinions from people around me.</p>

More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	Both. It's equal, me as a Lithuanian citizen and a Muslim. It's like asking "are you more of a woman or a teacher?"
Additional Comments	<p>I would hope that all people would become Muslim as I believe it's the right religion, and I care about people and I want them to go to heaven later. This is a wish from love, not from any other intention.</p> <p>For LT, of course, I would wish people would be more educated about Islam. Not to judge people by religion. I had my mistake when I was still a Christian, I judged Christianity from certain people I didn't like who happened to be Christian. We should not generalize people because of their religion. People meet or know 1 Muslim and generalize the whole religion, or the whole group.</p> <p>People need to be more educated, you can be completely misguided if you don't have knowledge about Islam. I would suggest they check the facts first.</p> <p>To be more accepting of different people, every person is a human.</p>

Code	Interviewee 17
Category	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred
Demographics	Male, 35, born and raised in Kuwait until 17, now lives in Vilnius. He lived in Syria for 3 years in the early 1990s. He has bachelor's and master's from TSPMI, VU. At the moment he is studying, only in the second year. Currently working as a translator in a few organizations.
Religious Identity	He used to think of himself as a very religious person, and was even a conservative. Religion is something that gives purpose and motivation to a person. But now not anymore. But he does think that everyone should have a relationship with God as it's important for life and hereafter. He performs some duties as best as he can, like fasting in Ramadan. At the moment he considers himself religious in a spiritual way.
Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes, no doubt about it</p> <p>Believe in the Quran: Yes</p> <p>Have interests in finding out more about Islam: More when he was younger, as for now he wants to explore more its historical/geographical side</p> <p>Belong to any Muslim community: Yes, a WhatsApp group, but he would only gather for big events such as Eid al-Fitr, etc.</p> <p>Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: No, but he tries to pray at least once a day (even though he doesn't always fulfill this)</p> <p>Fast during Ramadan months: Yes</p> <p>Eat pork: No</p>

	<p>Drink alcohol: Yes, occasionally</p> <p>Attend the Friday prayers: Yes, before the quarantine</p> <p>Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No, not yet</p> <p>Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: To some extent, maybe</p> <p>Read/speak Arabic: Yes, native speaker</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>Syrian-Lithuanian.</p> <p>He speaks Lithuanian, Arabic, English, and some proficiency in Norwegian. He lived in Norway for 7 months and he learned the language when he was there. Also a bit of French. He's very used to switching languages, even at home. He has always been exposed to different languages since he was a kid due to his mixed family and foreign media that his parents (Syrian father and Lithuanian mother) watched. His parents speak in Hungarian with each other as they met in Hungary.</p> <p>His first language is Lithuanian.</p> <p>Dad's family is deeply embedded in Islamic history. One of his family members is related to the Prophet Muhammad. Mom's family is Lithuanian, might've been mixed with Belarussian and Polish, too. He doesn't feel like answering the question about ethnicity, he would prefer to just choose NONE. It's because of his disappointment with some things that happened in Lithuania.</p> <p>He would still 'celebrate' Christmas etc as it's a kind of Lithuanian ethnic celebration, in a way, but not in a religious way. He would greet his fellow Syrians for the Syrian Revolution and other big days.</p>
Social Network	<p>He has mixed groups of friends, Arabs and Lithuanians, but recently mostly Arabs. It's the people he met through his workplace. Arabs who live in Lithuania, either naturalized citizens or not. Most of them are religious in a spiritual way, like him, so not really practicing Muslim duties, but maybe in their family life, Islam has a lot of influence. He has a Lithuanian friend who's religious. Doesn't bother him in any way.</p> <p>His father was kind of religious in a way but he would never force him and his brother to also pray and perform duties. He would be happy if the kids would also pray, but never push. Not strict. He gave them free choices.</p>

<p>Perceived Discrimination</p>	<p>Now, not so much discrimination. Until 15 years ago, if you're different, you would have to prove your loyalty to be fully accepted in Lithuania. For example, his grandma would always say that he would never be accepted here if he would express his different sides, if he would express his different religion. She told him he should lose that to become a true Lithuanian. However, later on she became more accepting of the fact that they are different. But back in the day, you needed to prove a lot that you're a good citizen, a good part of a community, so that you would be able to have good friends and more acceptance. Now it's not like that anymore, it changed a lot.</p> <p>He talked about the mass movement of refugees in 2015. Lithuania suffered from Soviet occupation for half a century and then got its independence back in 1990. When there were these refugees who were truly fleeing from wars, he was shocked how Lithuanians in general (how the statistics proved) were against the ideas of accepting people from outside, principally Syrians. They explicitly said because Syrians come from a different religious side and they would never integrate in Lithuania. He thought that Lithuanian values are standing up for the weak, going through the same condition as we did before in earlier history... but it seems like 25 years corrupted this value that people forgot the feeling of solidarity. Lithuanians appreciated the solidarity given to them by the US or Western Europe, but when they were required to give solidarity to these refugees, they refused. This is one of the main reasons he feels he doesn't want to self-identify as a Lithuanian. Lithuanian citizen, yes maybe, but not Lithuanian ethnic community.</p>
<p>National Identity</p>	<p>Dual citizenship, Syrian and Lithuanian. He's been a Lithuanian citizen since birth.</p> <p>He thinks that people in the younger generation, who are only 19 or 20 years old now, are very aware of their ethnic roots when it comes to 'nationality'. Different from the time when he just first moved to Lithuania. Back then, people would really notice different accents, different ethnic groups. He used to think that people should lose their accents when they speak Lithuanian, but now he enjoys listening to different accents.</p> <p>He said that anyone can be Lithuanian, even when they're from Somalia, for example, as long as she speaks the language, contributes to the country. He said his grandma would say it differently, she would see it as being a Lithuanian, the person should be from Lithuanian ethnic.</p> <p>If he's outside of Lithuania and gets asked where he's from, he would say that he's from Lithuania if he can only give a short answer. If it's a deeper talk, he would elaborate on his mixed background.</p> <p>He feels these days the acceptance of the 'others' has become better, but at the same time the patriotism of Lithuanians has also decreased. He said the new generation now identifies themselves more as a European rather than a Lithuanian. There is less stress on Christian</p>

	<p>values in Lithuania, significantly. There's this trend as well, especially in the West. Identity is a fluid thing. "When you change your identity, you change the way you look at things."</p> <p>He votes and he always has, never missed any voting events. Even if he's away, he would ask the Lithuanian embassy to send the ballot papers. He's also a member of the Social Democratic Party, although currently inactive, but he would like to go back in the near future. He's a part of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union (Lietuvos šaulių sąjunga), a paramilitary non-profit organization supported by the State.</p>
Perceived Value Compatibility	<p>Since these days there are more and more people who don't drink and who don't eat pork (or meat at all), if these are the main conflicts, they've been pretty much solved by themselves. So before Lithuanian and Muslim cultures were quite incompatible, but now they're not in a conflictive situation.</p>
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	<p>He seems more of himself as a Lithuanian citizen than a Lithuanian ethnic person.</p> <p>He's a bit against this kind of question. Back in the day after 9/11, there was a survey in the UK for the British Muslims, asking whether they are British citizens first or Muslims first. The British Muslims said they can't put their citizenship over their religion, so they chose Muslim first. Then it created big disappointment and misunderstanding in British society. Some people think that by choosing to be a Muslim first rather than a British citizen, this would mean that if they need to betray one, he would just betray the citizenship.</p> <p>He said he's equally Muslim and Lithuanian citizenship. He's a Lithuanian citizen in this life, a Muslim in this life and hereafter.</p>
Additional Comments	N/A

Code	Interviewee 18
Category	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred
Demographics	Male, 36, from a mixed family, Syrian-Lithuanian, born in Vilnius. She started school in Lithuania, then moved to Syria, spent 4 years there, then moved to Kuwait and lived there for 8 years. Now he lives in Vilnius (LT). Studied mechanical engineering in VGTU, and currently works in the financial sector.
Religious Identity	He clearly identifies himself as a Muslim, it's a basic presentation of himself. He's not fully practicing the religion, but he does try to maintain as much as possible the interpretations and beliefs. His father is a Muslim and his Lithuanian mother, he's not sure. He doesn't know whether she converted or not.

Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes</p> <p>Believe in the Quran: Yes (read in Arabic)</p> <p>Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Not daily, just occasionally</p> <p>Belong to any Muslim community: No. He doesn't know any active Muslim communities, maybe just the mosque.</p> <p>Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: No</p> <p>Fast during Ramadan months: Sometimes, just partially</p> <p>Eat pork: No</p> <p>Drink alcohol: Yes, sometimes</p> <p>Attend the Friday prayers: Used to go, not now</p> <p>Done pilgrimage in Mecca: No</p> <p>Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: No</p> <p>Read/speak Arabic: Yes. It was his first language back in school.</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>Syrian-Lithuanian.</p> <p>In terms of speaking, Lithuanian, English, and Arabic are all the same level. In terms of writing, he's weaker in Arabic. He makes mistakes in writing in it. He would consider Lithuanian and Arabic as her mother tongues.</p> <p>He said mixed-families are still a minority and not common in Lithuania. He would mostly relate himself to this minority group: a mixed family group. He doesn't consider himself ethnically different from any Lithuanian or Syrian, because he's exactly in between. He also thinks his name makes him look different, not fully Lithuanian.</p> <p>He still follows the Syrian/Kuwait culture when it comes to food as he grew up there. He would participate in Lithuanian typical events like Christmas, etc as he comes from this mixed family but he's not deep into these celebrations.</p> <p>He mostly speaks Lithuanian, but depends on the person/people he's speaking to. He speaks LT with mom, Arabic with dad.</p>
Social Network	<p>His cycle of friends or colleagues is mixed as well, some are Lithuanians, some Arabics, or other nationalities. He connects with different groups, different people. The majority of them are not religious.</p>

<p>Perceived Discrimination</p>	<p>In certain cases, yes, they're discriminated against, but again it depends on the person and the surrounding group. There's no simple answer to this. Some people are more accepting and people really appreciate it when they (foreigners) learn the (Lithuanian) language. At this point, he was talking more about foreigners in general actually, rather than Muslims. He thinks that it's easier for foreigners, regardless of their religion, to integrate into Lithuanian society if they would speak the local language. He said it might be easier for Muslim men in Lithuania, compared to women, for example (especially) when they want to wear hijab.</p> <p>Most of his experiences in Lithuania have been pretty good, people are quite open. He never really had any difficulty/challenge practicing Islam in Lithuania. He acknowledged just sometimes he still sees things about Islam in the media. He said that since 2008 or 2009 there have been more accepting people, when it comes to ethnic or religious background. He remembers a Muslim colleague he had, he was fully practicing, and the company dedicated a room just for him to pray.</p>
<p>National Identity</p>	<p>He has dual citizenship, Lithuanian and Syrian. He permanently resided in Lithuania again after finishing high school in Kuwait. He's been a Lithuanian citizen since birth, pretty much. In his younger years, he was under his mom's passport and he got his own when he was 16 or something.</p> <p>At the moment his Syrian passport has expired. He only keeps his Lithuanian passport.</p> <p>When he's not in Lithuania and someone asks where he's from, he would answer that he's from a mixed family, Syrian-Lithuanian.</p> <p>He votes but he's not very active in civil events in Lithuania. He wants to participate in civil events from time to time, but sometimes he doesn't go.</p> <p>When asked if he's a proud Lithuanian, he said yes and no. He likes that Lithuania is doing pretty good in technology now but Lithuanians don't have the best image out there in the western world. In the UK, for example, when it comes to lower-class society there, they would think that Lithuanians are thieves, drug dealers, and living on the benefits of the UK. Maybe in higher-class society, the image would be positive.</p>
<p>Perceived Value Compatibility</p>	<p>Incompatible, even though not completely. For example, fasting should not be very weird in Lithuania, as many people are religious as well (in Christianity). In the end, he said there are more similarities than differences.</p>
<p>More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?</p>	<p>Both. He thinks it's equal.</p>
<p>Additional Comments</p>	<p>He really wants to see a mosque being built in Vilnius. A proper mosque, not just a home/building made into some kind of mosque.</p>

Code	Interviewee 19
Category	Lithuanian Muslim born and bred
Demographics	Female, 37, from Kaunas and lives in Kaunas. Bachelor in Civil Engineering at KTU. Currently works as a Project Manager for translation, as well as Islamas Visiems website. Also the secretary of a Muslim community since 2017. Has been volunteering in Islamic weekend school for children and seminars for women as well, for 10 years.
Religious Identity	<p>Islam takes a big part of her life. How she spends her days is around her religion. She plans her days according to 5 praying times. It's important to organize her jobs and activities around these praying times. She also puts lots of importance on the feasts, events. She acknowledges that people around her are not all Muslims, but it doesn't influence her, because in Lithuania it's free to choose faith and to practice it.</p> <p>She thinks it's very important and it would be easier for Muslims to understand and practice Islam if they understand Arabic. It's much more meaningful when you know the language.</p>
Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes Believe in the Quran: Yes Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes Belong to any Muslim community: Yes Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: Yes Fast during Ramadan months: Yes Eat pork: No Drink alcohol: No Attend the Friday prayers: Yes Done pilgrimage in Mecca: Yes (Hajj and Umrah) Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: No. She knows some details, but not everything. Read/speak Arabic: Yes</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>Half Tatar (from dad, who is a Volga/Bulgar Tatar) and half Lithuanian (from mother). Bulgar Tatars have blue colors and lighter hair and skin, compared to Kazan or Crimean Tatar.</p> <p>She speaks Arabic but she said most Tatars can only read but don't understand Arabic. She thinks that it's important for them to actually learn it, especially because the Tatar language also uses Arabic (or similar) letters.</p> <p>She attends Tatar festivals, for example, Sabantuy (big meetings of Tatars) and they show traditional clothes, songs, and games. Tatars from different cities and even countries gather here, from Crimea, Kazan, etc. Other than that, maybe just mini-festivals. She really likes this</p>

	<p>kind of traditional event. She talked quite a lot about the Tatar songs. Her daughters sing in Kazan Tatar and Crimean Tatar languages. She said folklore is different. Kazan Tatar songs are happier and livelier; Crimean Tatar songs are more sensitive, melodious, and emotional songs.</p> <p>She speaks Lithuanian mostly. When she goes to Vilnius, she uses Russian. In her community, sometimes she uses English. She uses Russian and Lithuanian with her daughters. She and her daughters speak French with her husband (Algerian-French).</p>
Social Network	<p>Her husband is French of Algerian descent. Most of the people she communicates with are Muslims but from different backgrounds (nationalities, cultures). She doesn't see the difference, though, maybe because it's the Islam that unites them. Of course, there are non-Muslims, but the private and closer relationships, usually they're Muslims (including her best friends from school).</p> <p>Her Lithuanian mother is not a Muslim. They are close, she cares about her, and there's no problem with the different religions between them. She's not very close to her mom's side of the family, because she feels Lithuanian families are usually a bit distant from each other, compared to the Tatar/Muslim families.</p> <p>After the independence of Lithuania and her brother passed away when he was only 10, her mother became very sad and she wanted to look for faith. She went to church, trying to find answers. But she didn't grow up with religion and she never read the bible. She visited the church with her mom but she never really felt welcome and she felt that some customs were a bit forced, like kissing crosses, etc. She then visited the mosque when she was 12 with her dad and she liked it there. So slowly she learned about Islam and she only started wearing a scarf after being married.</p>

<p>Perceived Discrimination</p>	<p>There are strange stories about Islam in media, coming from the lifestyle of strange people, not exactly showing Islamic values. She's very proud of the website she manages because it's a counter of that, where everyone can access and have real news and information about Islam.</p> <p>In general, she doesn't feel Muslims are being discriminated against in Lithuania, at least personally. On a political level, she said yes. If they would ask to do projects, build mosques, they always had difficulties. But daily, she doesn't think there's discrimination as the society is very divided. There are people who are poor, alcoholic, etc. Sometimes they say rude things to you because you look a bit different. Especially when people have darker skin, or black. People don't care what you believe, it's just about appearance. They get discriminated against when they go to public offices, when they rent places, even when they go to police stations. She said we need to be careful when treating foreigners that way, especially the ones pursuing education in Lithuania, cause they could be future elite in the future.</p> <p>She always advised Muslim women to only wear bright/light colored hijab or scarf, and not black ones. Lithuanians don't like black scarves cause they associate them with funerals. She said it's really effective, there was a woman who actually had a different experience when she changed her hijab color from black to yellow/green/red/etc. She said wearing scarves is actually not very weird in Lithuania because older women are still wearing them, but just not in black color.</p> <p>She said people who are rude are not because they're discriminating, but because they're either poor or miserable in their life. They have anger inside themselves. She understands that lots of people are still living in bad conditions, especially after the Soviet era, so she can understand and she will just pity them and treat them with mercy. She knows even some Muslims from Muslim countries who had a cultural shock seeing how some people in Lithuania live, they commented that it's not like humans.</p> <p>People judge your religion by what you do. So you need to always check your speech, appearance, attitude. Because people observe you. For the minority, always need to be careful because they have more attention or double look.</p>
<p>National Identity</p>	<p>She would say she's from Lithuania when she's abroad.</p> <p>She follows the news, she tries to vote (but she's not very deep into it). She doesn't really see any changes after voting events. She sees more lobbying than actual politics.</p> <p>When asked if she's a proud Lithuanian, she giggled. She likes the country, she was born here, she got educated here, she got a lot of good things from Lithuania, and all. In this way, she's proud to be a Lithuanian. However, she thinks that globally Lithuanians don't really have a good reputation: they're liars, cheaters, criminals, etc in the UK for example. She thinks Lithuanians are good people but the majority who dominate in the international market</p>

	are somehow not the good representatives. Also, there's this image of Lithuanian women abroad who are prostitutes, but she never knew anyone who does this kind of job.
Perceived Value Compatibility	Lithuania before Christianity were pagans. Arabs before Islam were also pagans. There are similarities between Christianity and Islam. And it's possible to be a Muslim in Lithuania. Muslim customs in Lithuania are allowed. Society is quite individual, so they don't really care what you do, so you can create your life the way you want and nobody will interfere. She said there are many common things between Lithuanian and Muslim values: to clean your environment, to care for your children, to go to work, etc. The only difference is probably how you believe.
More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?	She identifies herself both as a Muslim and Lithuanian citizen equally. She said Lithuanian constitutions are not in conflict with the faith, so she can definitely say that she's a Lithuanian Muslim.
Additional Comments	She thinks Lithuania is a good country for Muslims. She just hopes that it would be easier for Muslims who want to immigrate to Lithuania to find jobs as Lithuania doesn't help social help as much as other EU countries would do. At the moment Muslims, when they come here, from the beginning they need to already find a way to earn money - it's not gonna be given from the sky (which she likes actually). In other countries, sometimes they give money but they don't allow the refugees to work.

Code	Interviewee 20
Category	Naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizen
Demographics	Male, 46, from Syria, has lived in Lithuania for 27 years. He finished medical studies at Kaunas Academy / Kaunas Medical University (LSMU), working as a medical worker now. Came to LT in 1993 or 1994. He lived in Latvia for 1 year before moving to Lithuania. He selected Lithuania for the possibilities of studying medicine in English and his dad helped him financially as it's cheaper to study in Lithuania than in other countries. He finished his studies in 2002 then started working temporarily for an ambulance, got his citizenship in 2015. Before that, he had some kind of green card.
Religious Identity	Born and grew up in a Muslim family. Raised in Muslim traditions and environment. Islam was the only religion he saw when he was younger. He does use a lot of Muslim/Arabic terms such as “Alhamdulillah” and “Insha Allah”. For 27 years in Lithuania, he never for once tried pork or alcohol.

Checklist	<p>Believe in Allah and His existence: Yes</p> <p>Believe in the Quran: Yes</p> <p>Have interests in finding out more about Islam: Yes</p> <p>Belong to any Muslim community: Yes, the one at Smolensko g. and TIKA</p> <p>Do the obligatory 5 praying times a day: Does his best to do this, but not all the time 5 times a day</p> <p>Fast during Ramadan months: Yes</p> <p>Eat pork: No</p> <p>Drink alcohol: No</p> <p>Attend the Friday prayers: Yes</p> <p>Done pilgrimage in Mecca: Yes, 1 time (2010), he went there also as a translator/guide</p> <p>Consider one's self knowledgeable of Islam history: No, just the main things/principles</p> <p>Read/speak Arabic: Yes</p>
Ethnic Identity	<p>Syrian, but he didn't spend much time in Syria, only until 7 years old. He grew up in the UAE until finishing high school, until 18 or 19.</p> <p>He doesn't have any Syrian community in Lithuania, kind of alone, so he doesn't do any Syrian traditions. Only speaking Arabic to some community members he goes to the mosque with.</p> <p>Most of his friends are Lithuanians. He uses more Lithuanian than Arabic. Especially at work.</p> <p>He also speaks English and a bit of Russian. Russian only for medical terms.</p> <p>At the moment he would claim himself as a Lithuanian Arabic, or Arabic Lithuanian.</p>
Social Network	<p>Most of his friends, also the best friends, are Christians but he respects them and he doesn't have any concern with that. He works with people of different nationalities.</p> <p>His ex-wife was a Lithuanian Christian. They got divorced but not because of religious differences. He doesn't value people because of their religions. There was no problem related to religion.</p>

<p>Perceived Discrimination</p>	<p>He doesn't feel discrimination from his surroundings. Sometimes people actually ask him about his religion and some friends converted to Islam because of him.</p> <p>He said some people have a very negative idea about Islam, especially when they only hear about Islam from the media. The friends who converted to Islam after contact with him, also used to have negative image of Islam.</p> <p>He had a few negative experiences in Lithuania, but he can't say that the whole of Lithuania is discriminating against Muslims. When he was a student, he had one guy following him after he got off from public transportation, then he started hitting him and asked for his watch. There was also a neighbor in his flat that never wanted to talk to him, even when he said hello to them.</p> <p>In any country in this world, there are bad people and good people. Actually, in general, he has a very positive opinion about Lithuanian people. He said the situation in Lithuania, is not completely discriminative towards Muslims, but it could've been better. He also realized that sometimes there are Muslims in Lithuania who don't integrate into society, so it created the gap.</p> <p>Sometimes what happens is that Lithuanians are afraid of dark people. Not necessarily black people, but if you're a bit darker, Lithuanians would be afraid. But now things have changed. More people speak positively about foreigners. Comparing the 1990s and now, it's like ground and sky. So the situation is really progressing.</p>
<p>National Identity</p>	<p>If he's not in Lithuania, he would say he's from Syria but he has Lithuanian citizenship. He's very proud of his citizenship. He lived the longest period of his life in Lithuania.</p> <p>He knows he has the right to vote but he doesn't like politics in general, so he usually didn't care to vote. For him, it's more important to contribute to the country in other ways. He doesn't really go to civil events, but he really follows the news, especially about COVID-19. He feels that if he lives in Lithuania, he must know what's happening around him.</p>
<p>Perceived Value Compatibility</p>	<p>Lithuanian and Muslim cultures are compatible, but every culture has its own specifics.</p>
<p>More of a Muslim or a Lithuanian, or both?</p>	<p>More of a Muslim. That's how he was born and raised, and he's proud of it.</p> <p>But he's also proud of his Lithuanian citizenship, and he's not hiding it. He needed to cancel his Syrian passport, but he doesn't keep it a secret.</p>
<p>Additional Comments</p>	<p>N/A</p>

Summary

English

Social experiments and opinion polls show that Muslims are one of the least desirable minority groups in society. More than a third of Lithuanians are not willing to live in the same neighborhood or rent out housing to Muslims. Many Lithuanians converting to Islam moved abroad to practice their religion more freely. This study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of Lithuanian Muslims. The goal is to know how they perceive their religious and national identities. Similar studies on European Muslim identity show that German/Dutch Muslims feel that European and Islamic values are incompatible. They need to repress one identity to have the other one stronger, while Norwegian/British Muslims see them as equally strong, important, and not conflicting.

This qualitative research used the Theoretical Framework of Social Identity Theory (SIT) by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, along with the theories from other identity-focused studies. Primary data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews in October-November 2020 with 20 Muslims holding Lithuanian citizenship and analyzed using the thematic analysis method. The sample includes three categories: Lithuanian Muslim converts, Lithuanian Muslims born and bred, and naturalized Lithuanian Muslim citizens.

The results indicate that Lithuanian Muslims do perceive strong Christian aspects in Lithuanian politics, but they can have strong Muslim and Lithuanian national identities at the same time. Having been born/raised or living in Lithuania for a long time and the usage of the Lithuanian language play a role in their sense of belonging to the country. Discrimination against Muslims is experienced in different layers, from family to state level. However, a person's appearance is said to be more prone to discrimination than one's religion.

Based on these results, it is concluded that the Lithuanian Muslim case is unique and that it stands between the findings of German/Dutch and Norwegian/British Muslims. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample and the number of research subjects are the limitations of this study. Future studies, preferably quantitative, are recommended to produce more generalizable data, test the existing theories, and find correlations between variables.

Lithuanian

Socialiniai eksperimentai ir apklausos rodo, kad musulmonai yra viena iš mažiausiai pageidaujamų tautinių mažumų grupių Lietuvos visuomenėje. Daugiau nei trečdalis lietuvių nenori gyventi tame pačiame rajone ar nuomoti būsto musulmonams. Daugelis į islamą perėjusių lietuvių persikėlė gyventi į užsienį, vien dėl to, kad galėtų netrukdomai praktikuoti religiją. Šiuo tyrimu siekiama išsamiau suprasti išgyventą Lietuvos musulmonų patirtį. Tyrimo tikslas – sužinoti, kaip jie suvokia savo religinę ir tautinę tapatybę. Panašūs tyrimai apie Europos musulmonų tapatybę rodo, kad Vokietijos ar Olandijos musulmonai mano, jog Europos ir islamo vertybės nesuderinamos tarpusavyje. Jie turi nuslopinti vieną tapatybę, kad kita taptų stipresnė, tuo tarpu Norvegijos ar Didžiosios Britanijos musulmonai jas laiko vienodai stipriomis, svarbiomis ir nekonfliktuojančiomis.

Šiame kokybiniame tyrime buvo panaudota Henri Tajfelio ir Johno Turnerio teorinė socialinės tapatybės teorijos sistema (SIT), kartu su kitų į identitetą orientuotų tyrimų teorijomis. Pirminiai duomenys buvo surinkti atliekant pusiau struktūruotus interviu 2020 m. spalio – lapkričio mėn., su 20 musulmonų, turinčių Lietuvos pilietybę, ir analizuoti naudojant teminės analizės metodą. Respondentų imtį sudaro trys kategorijos: atsivertę Lietuvos musulmonai, Lietuvoje gimę ir užaugę musulmonai ir natūralizuoti Lietuvos musulmonai.

Rezultatai rodo, kad Lietuvos musulmonai tikrai suvokia stiprius krikščioniškus aspektus šalies politikoje, tačiau jie tuo pačiu metu gali turėti stiprią musulmonų ir lietuvių tautinę tapatybę. Gimimo, augimo ar ilgo gyvenimo Lietuvoje faktas ir lietuvių kalbos vartojimas vaidina svarbų vaidmenį dėl priklausymo šaliai. Musulmonų diskriminacija patiriama skirtingais lygiais – nuo šeimos iki pat valstybės. Tačiau sakoma, kad žmogaus išvaizda yra labiau linkusi į diskriminaciją nei jo religija.

Remiantis šiais rezultatais daroma išvada, kad Lietuvos musulmonų atvejis yra unikalus ir patenkantis tarp vokiečių / olandų ir norvegų / britų musulmonų išvadų. Imties sociodemografinės charakteristikos ir tiriamųjų skaičius yra pagrindiniai šio tyrimo apribojimai. Būsiamiems tyrimams (pageidautina kiekybiniais) rekomenduojama rinkti labiau apibendrinamus duomenis, išbandyti jau esamas teorijas ir rasti koreliacijas tarp kintamųjų.