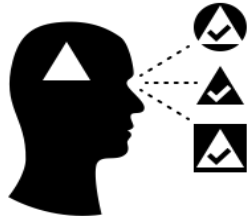


# The Credibility Assessment of Religion-based Asylum Claims

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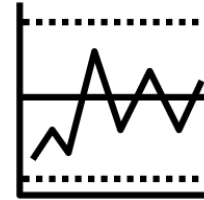
# Credibility assessment: A complex area of asylum adjudication



- Potential for **cognitive biases** and distortions



- Broader **organizational** and **sociopolitical** context



- Wide **variability** in asylum **recognition rates**

# Officials' assumptions about 'religious sincerity' influence credibility assessments



## Main findings from the recent literature, based on:

1



- Analyses of asylum **interview transcripts** and case **decisions**

2



- **Ethnographic observations** of asylum hearings

3



- **Interviews** with asylum judges and other practitioners

# Evidence of religious practice: necessary but not sufficient

## Internal religious change

- Profound thoughts and emotions
- Evidence of spiritual transformation
- Intellectual engagement with the faith

## External manifestation of religion

- Baptism, church attendance not enough
- Focus on community and social impact of religion not convincing
- Expectation of orthodox adherence, moral judgements of applicant's behavior

# Timing of conversion raises doubts about sincerity



**Opportunistic** 'Religious imposter'  
**Migration strategy** **Interest-driven**  
'**Assembly-line**' 'Social conversion'  
**baptism** **Asylum-tactical**  
**conversion**

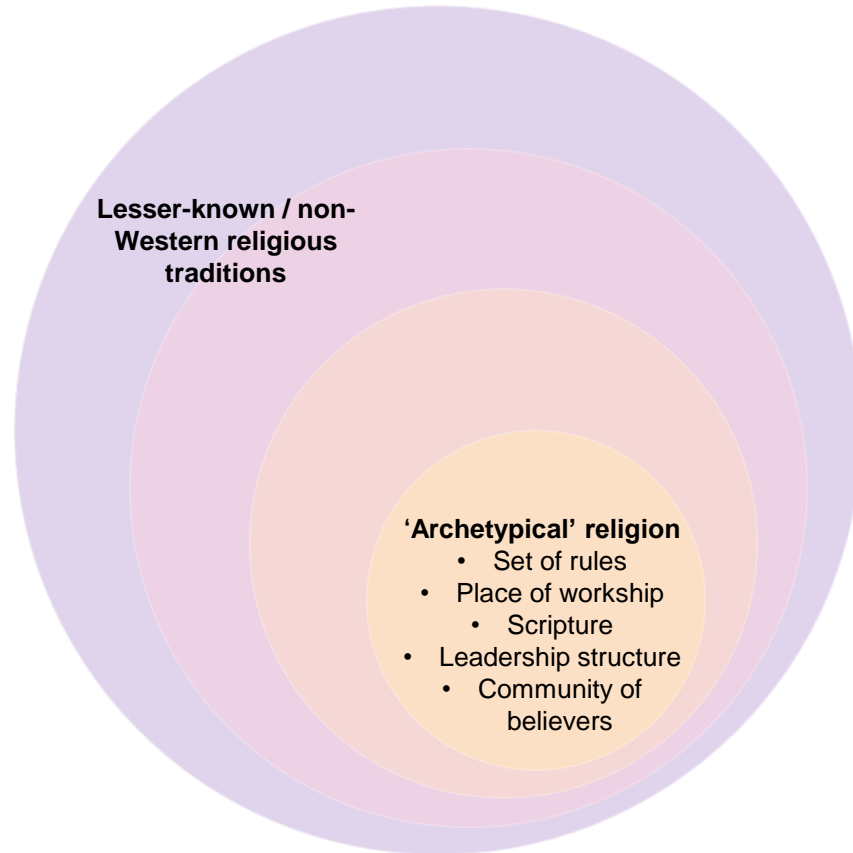
# Timing of conversion raises doubts about sincerity

## Why do asylum-seekers convert?

- Follows a personal **crisis** or changing circumstances (Rambo & Bauman, 2012)
- **Lowered** feeling of **personal control** (Kay et al., 2010)
- Semi-structured interviews with 129 asylum-seekers in Europe identified the following conversion patterns (Keri & Sleiman, 2017):
  - **Intellectual**
  - **Mystical**
  - **Experimental**
  - **Affectional**
- No evidence of coercive or strategic conversion

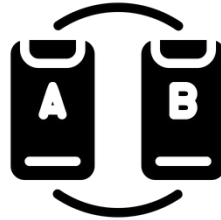
*Participation precedes  
internalized beliefs*

# Adherents of unfamiliar religions less likely to be believed





# Evidence of cognitive distortions in assessments of religion-based cases



## Case **comparison**

- Expectations surrounding narratives and evidence
- Effect of adjudicator experience



## General impression / **intuition**

*'There must be a spark, so to speak'  
'She had an immense amount of  
[religious] knowledge, but I just couldn't  
shake the feeling.'* (Judges in Germany)

## Concluding remarks & recommendations

Asking more **open-ended** questions

Engaging with **religious experts &** scholarship on religion

Reflecting on influence of personal **assumptions** and cognitive **biases**

Moving **beyond** religious **conversion** in research and practice



**Thank you!**  
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