

**APOSTASY FROM A QUR'ANIC AND HADITH
PERSPECTIVE: A STUDY AMONG CONVERTED IRANIAN
IN MALAYSIA**

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**ACADEMY OF ISLAMIC STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR**

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APOSTASY FROM A QUR'ANIC AND HADITH PERSPECTIVE: A STUDY AMONG CONVERTED IRANIAN IN MALAYSIA

ABSTRACT

Implementation of Islamic Law (Shari'a) has always been of interest to the Islamic countries. Apostasy, as a Qur'anic and Shari'a decree, is among the subjects which contradicts with two subjects i.e., Human Rights as well as Freedom of Religion. Therefore, this study has tried to investigate the reasons and causes of apostasy in two different periods. In the other part, this study goes one step further to see the roots of conversion among Muslim communities during the early period of Islam on the basis of Qur'anic, Ḥadīthī, and historical sources. The social, religious and personal reasons given for Muslim conversion in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth are also investigated in details. This will pave the way to begin the next part in which conversion in the contemporary era is addressed. The researcher investigated a population of Iranians who are living in Malaysia, and they have converted to Christianity. This thesis focuses on this subgroup of "ex-Muslims" with the aim of providing a window into how they experience and justify their departure from Islam. A mixed method (qualitative-quantitative) has been conducted through which 13 people participated in an in-depth interview, and 45 people answered questionnaire. The research findings revealed some of the typical religious, social and personal reasons behind the conversion of this group of "ex-Muslims." Finally, this study will compare the issue of "apostasy" in the early period of Islam and contemporary era in the light of Islamic scriptures and social contexts.

APOSTASY FROM A QUR'ANIC AND HADITH PERSPECTIVE: A STUDY AMONG CONVERTED IRANIAN IN MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Pelaksanaan Undang-undang Islam (Syariah) sentiasa mendapat perhatian negara-negara Islam. Isu murtad yang terkandung dalam al-Qur'an dan Syariah adalah antara isu yang dianggap bertentangan dengan Hak Asasi Manusia dan Kebebasan Beragama. Justeru kajian ini berusaha mengkaji faktor-faktor berlakunya murtad dalam dua periode masa yang berbeza. Periode pertama akan melihat bagaimana asal usul murtad berlaku dalam komuniti muslim pada peringkat permulaan awal Islam bersumberkan maklumat yang terdapat dalam al-Quran, hadis dan fakta sejarah selain faktor sosial, agama dan masalah individu. Maklumat yang diperolehi dalam periode pertama ini akan dihubungkan dengan faktor murtad pada zaman kini. Kajian ini melibatkan warganegara Iran yang tinggal di Malaysia dan telah menukar agama mereka kepada agama Kristian. Kajian menumpukan kepada pengalaman mereka dalam menukar agama dan justifikasi terhadap tindakan tersebut.. Kajian ini merupakan kajian kualitatif–kuantitatif yang dijalankan terhadap 13 orang secara temu bual mendalam (in-depth interview) dan melalui borang soal selidik terhadap 45 orang. Hasil kajian mendedahkan isu agama, sosial dan masalah individu di sebalik pertukaran agama kumpulan ini. Kajian juga berjaya membuktikan hubungkait antara faktor murtad pada periode awal Islam dan masa kini bersumberkan maklumat dalam sumber Islam dan faktor sosial.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

People who live in pluralistic societies, in general, and Western societies, in particular, freely convert to the religion of their choice without fear of social or legal consequences. By contrast, Muslim converts who live in Muslim-majority countries face ostracism, ridicule, physical violence as well as legal persecution leading to severe sentences, including capital punishment. Islamic law forbids members of the community to change their religion.¹ Nevertheless, many Muslims leave Islam every year. In an interview between Maher Abdallah and Shaikh Ahmed Katani on Al-Jazeera, Katani said, “six million Muslims leave Islam every year.”⁶ According to the Townhall Magazine, thousands of Muslims are becoming Christians every year. The Islamic scholar, Shaikh Ahmad Al-Katanni, believes that it is a tragedy in the Muslim world.³ The reasons and justifications for conversion of Muslims to Christianity change from country to country. For obvious reasons, these conversions are the subject of a lot of curiosity and concerns in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. There are many books, articles, reports written on this topic. Social networks such as YouTube and Facebook replete with clips of different confessionals of converts. Nevertheless, scholarly research in this area is rare. The present study is an attempt to shed some lights on this issue, focusing on a small group of Iranian converts to Christianity.

¹ Conversion from Islam to another religion or belief makes a person an apostate. Apostasy, *irtidad* in Arabic, which is understood as leaving Islam and following another religion, has been a great offense since early Islam, and the punishment of this offense is death. Griffel, F., ‘Apostasy’, in Kramer, Gudrun (ed), encyclopedia of Islam Vol. 3 (2008)

⁶ Online source: www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/print.php?storyid=3995/.

³

Online

source:

http://townhall.com/columnists/chuckcolson/2008/03/24/they_want_jesus_instead_why_muslims_convert/page/full/ (for more information about Muslim conversions in North Africa see: Conversion as Statelessness: A Study of Contemporary Algerian Conversions to Evangelical Christianity, *Nadia Marzouki*, Middle East Law and Governance 4 (2012) 69–105

Rosenberg has proposed that at present three separate revolutionary discourses are unfolding within Muslim-majority countries. The first revolution is waged by Muslim Radicals, who postulate that ‘Islam is the answer; *Jihad* is the way.’ (2009, p. 21). The second is advanced by Muslim reformers who contend that, while Islam is the answer, militant (*Jihad*) is not the way. Revivalists advance the third— or converts from Islam to Christianity, as well as other Christians living in Muslim-majority countries who say, "Islam is not the answer, and *Jihad* is not the way. Jesus is the way" (2009, 363).⁴ It goes without saying that these conversions are also used to criticize Islam.⁵

There is no doubt that the politicization of Islam is one of the causes of these conversions and an important component of the debate surrounding the issue. Also, the debate over freedom of religion seems to be at the center of some of these debates. For more than fifty years, the freedom of conscience has been ensconced in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Some Muslim scholars complain that Human Rights are used as an instrument of Islamophobia throughout the world.”² Two issues –the assertion of a right to choose a religion or belief and a right to change one's religion–faced serious challenges as Glen Johnson has written, “the right to freedom of religion aroused the intense interest of a number of religious groups.”⁷ He adds, “more serious was the Saudi objection to the right to change one’s religion. The Saudi representative considered that the guarantee of such a right represented an infringement upon the cultural principles of Islamic states. Saudi sponsored amendments to delete this

⁴ Joel C. Rosenberg, *Inside the Revolution: How the Followers of Jihad, Jefferson, and Jesus Are Battling to Dominate the Middle East and Transform the World*, Publisher: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.; Reprint edition (February 17, 2011) <http://www.globalengage.org/issues/articles/islam/1262-a-review-of-joel-c-rosenbergs-inside-the-revolution-how-the-followers-of-jihad-jefferson-a-jesus-are-battling-to-dominate-the-middle-east-and-transform-the-world.html>

⁵ We mean exactly that after common adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 and its presentation in the Muslim world. *Mohsen Kadivar*, the Islamic scholar, has demonstrated in detail how at least six areas of the Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) conflict with human rights norms. *New Directions in Islamic Thought: Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition*, Edited by Kari Vogt, Lena Larsen, Christian Mo, I. B. Tauris; London; 2008, Chapter 4 , pp.47-74

² The 18th article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says, “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

⁷ Glen Johnson and Janusz Symonides, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 45th anniversary 1948-1993*, UNESCO, Paris, 1994, p. 58

provision were repeatedly defeated by substantial majorities. And, in the end, as we have seen, the Saudis found the insistence on a right to change one's religion so significant as to require their abstention from the final General Assembly vote.” (p59).⁸

Some Muslim thinkers refer to a Qur’anic verse to support the right of freedom of religion in Islam. They refer to Q2:256 that states "*Let there be no compulsion in religion*"⁹ However, Islamic law and traditional scholarships (i.e., shar‘, fiqh and sunna) do not allow Muslims to change their religion. According to Islamic Law, one does not have the right to change their religion. If someone is born into a Muslim family, he or she must remain a follower of Islam (a Muslim or Muslima).¹⁰ Otherwise, they would be punished by death. UN reports that the death penalty for those who have left Islam remains an occurrence in some Muslim communities. In fact, the “Apostasy” issue plays a role on both sides of a coin; one is the Islamic side; and the other one is the contemporary issues and its status in the Human Right Declaration. Hence, the issue has been discussed by many Western and Muslim scholars who can be mostly divided into two categories: Adherents who are mostly the jurists and classical interpreters. They assume that the execution is a certain decree for an apostate who converts from Islam to another religion or non-religion. Opponents who are mostly living in the contemporary (pre-modern to modern) era; they believe that those who assumed the apostasy execution based on the specific atmosphere of Arabs in early Islam. Those who assumed the Qur’anic verses and Hadith about apostasy are irrelevant with Human status and rights.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 59

⁹ This could be interpreted as a statement clearly in favour of religious freedom and the right to freely renounce Islam and convert to any other religion. See: The Case of an Afghan Apostate- The right to a fair trial between Islamic law and human rights in Afghan constitution by: Mandana Knust Rassekh Afshar. Other Qur’an verses that promote religious freedom are Q6:104, Q3:20, and Q16:9. Regarding the interpretation of these verses, see: Taha Jabir Al-Alwani, *Apostasy in Islam: A Historical and Scriptural Analysis*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012.

¹⁰ As we said, Classical Islamic Law prohibits conversion from Islam to another religion, but some contemporary scholars have argued about this law; and criticisms and doubts have been raised by contemporary Islamic scholars. See: Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, *Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought*, I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009, 177.

In the majority of Muslim countries, people's identity and religion are the fundamental basis of government; it means that people's personal beliefs are important for the government. By contrast, in Western societies religion is primarily seen as a matter of personal choice where individual belief may have little relevance to the broader community or society or the state. The Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion & Public Life reports that "In total, about half of American adults have changed religious affiliation at least once during their lives. Most people who change their religion leave their childhood faith before age 24, and many of those who change religion do so more than once."¹¹ This is in contrast to Islamic nations, where religion is often the core unifying factor in communal identity and the most important political force. Therefore, it can be concluded that conversion in Islamic societies is not viewed as a personal issue but as a subject that affects the whole community.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The number of Muslims converting to Christianity is rarely documented. For obvious reasons, which is examined in this study, the majority of converts from Islam do not or cannot make public announcements of their act. Therefore, available statistics on this issue are notoriously unreliable. Nonetheless, this study aims to shed light on a small group of Muslims who [try to] convert, i.e., the Iranians living in Malaysia whose immigration status is varied. Apart from examining how the conversion is experienced, lived and justified by people, our main objective is to place the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth in this study. Indeed, we would like to see to what extent Muslims' scriptures play a role in their conversion journey. Both the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth include references to the issue of conversion and freedom of religion. And one may wonder how this can affect the way a Muslim convert to another religion. Does a convert, let's say an ex-Muslim, build his

¹¹ *Faith in Flux, Changes in Religious Affiliation in the U. S.* April 2009 (<http://www.pewforum.org/faith-in-flux.aspx>).

conversion on the basis of Islamic law, or he is ambivalent about the stance of scriptures about the issue of “conversion.” These questions will be answered throughout this study, where field study in the light of Islamic historical and textual sources examine the status of conversion among Iranian Muslims in Malaysia.

Also, readers will be able to appreciate the feelings of potential converts which are unable to actualize their wish to change their religion.

As religious conversion has both sectarian-religious and secular-political dimensions (Rigsby, 2013), the self-evaluation and fundamental understanding of the participant as well as their communal identity were of interest to our study.

As mentioned above, the number of those Muslim who converts to Christianity is an oxymoron, and there is no formal report. However, in some reports this is claimed that their number is growing day by day, but no one knows the exact number. Obviously, the majority of them simply leave Islam silently and make no public announcements, so we cannot have real statistics of those leaving Islam and not entering any other religion. Now, we should make several cautionary remarks. Muslims need to know why people of the *Umma* are leaving Islam for Christianity easily to call themselves an ex-Muslim.

Also, in the present era, regarding apostasy, there is much emphasis on the popular figures who were accused of apostasy and punished. As an example, below there are some of the cases which have been under considerable debates in media and human rights bodies. In 1995, one of the eminent Egyptian scholars was convicted to apostasy by a Cairo tribunal court when he displayed his new form of interpretation of the Qur'an. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (2010) defended a historical and hermeneutical approach of the Quran. He applied several eastern and western references to his essays that many

of his Egyptian colleagues were displeased with his affairs.¹⁶ After the court decree and according to the Islamic law, he had to leave his wife. He also left Cairo and spent his entire life in the shadow of accusations of apostasy until a short time before his death in July 5, 2010. The death of Abu Zayd was not the end point of apostasy, but it was a sample of thousands of samples of the religious rules.¹³ Another case in the contemporary era is the murder of Azerbaijani journalist *Rāfiq Tağ* (2011).¹⁴ One of the most famous contemporary Shī'a Ayatullāh, Shaikh Muhammad Fādhil Lankarānī (d. 2006), issued an execution *fatwā* for 'Rāfiq Tağ' (d. 2011) on November 25, 2006. Rāfiq Tağ was a Muslim Azerbaijani writer and journalist who received the *fatwā* owing to expressions on the role of Islam and the Prophet throughout the world. He was killed on 23 November 2011. According to a report published by an Iranian newspaper, Tağ was killed on grounds of Lankarānī's *fatwā*.¹⁵ It appears some Muslims felt that he accused Islam in his article "Them and US" that was published in *San'at* newspaper.¹⁶ Although Ayatullāh Muhammad Fādhil Lankarānī passed away – around five years sooner than Rāfiq- his son, Muhammad Jawād Fādhil Lankarānī, who is a Shaikh,¹⁷ wrote a remarkable statement to the people of

¹⁶ See: George N. Sfeir, "Basic Freedoms in a Fractured Legal Culture: Egypt and the Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd; Middle East Journal Vol. 52, No. 3 (Summer, 1998), pp. 402-414. Also: Abu Zayd, Nasr Hamid, Esther Nelson, Voice of an Exile: Reflections on Islam, Praeger Publishers, 2004

¹³ This theory has been used Throughout Islamic history, by some religious authorities at times to persecute their opponents who held different beliefs and some new (or different) interpretations of Islam has been Considered apostasy such as: the rebellious Kharijites, Mu'tazilite theologians, Sufi leaders, Muslim philosophers... and it remains one of the most contentious issues in Islam and continues to have a huge potential for abuse. Then, inter-religious modernists are face with serious problems. Abdullah Saeed, Source: Damien Kingsbury & Greg Barton (ed.), Difference and Tolerance: Human Rights Issues in Southeast Asia. Deakin University Press, 1994, pp. 27-37

¹⁴ Shi'i religious thinkers and the issue of Apostasy. By: G. R. Nuei, Faisal Ahmad Shah, Vol 3, No 5 (2015) (<http://www.revistas.usp.br/malala/search/search?simpleQuery=nuei&searchField=authors>).

¹⁵ <http://www.parsine.com/fa/news/52956>

¹⁶ Lankarānī also issued a killing *fatwā* for Samir Sadagatoglu, the newspaper's editor who alleged 'incitement to religious hatred' in a philosophical essay published in 2006. Haraszti, M. (2009). In God's name. Index on Censorship, 38(2), 108-115.

¹⁷ Shaikh Muhammad Jawād Fādhil Lankarānī, son of Grand Ayatullāh Fādhil Lankarānī, the marja' of the Shia world. now he has been teaching and lecturing to Islamic students. He has published some books such as: Moreover, he has presented many articles in various important assemblies. Besides his own scientific work and administration of Office of Marja' (Religious Authority), he is the principal at the Infallible Imāms (AS) Jurisprudence Center.

Azerbaijan displaying his joy at his father having carried out the *fatwā* and Rāfig having being executed!¹⁸ The statement was posted on his own website as well.¹⁹

Various Muslims [and non-Muslims] disapprove of the pleasure taken by Lankarānī. Mohsen Kadivar, a visiting professor of religious studies at Duke University,²⁰ wrote an open letter to Lankarānī²¹ in which he argues the *Objection to the Recent Fatwā of Terror*. He points out that not only is issuing and performing this *fatwā* a form of assassination, but it also leads to globally distorting the image and reputation of Islam, and particularly Shī'a thought.

In 1989, Many Muslims accused *Salman Rushdie* of apostasy. Ayatollah Khomeini, Supreme Leader of Iran, issued a death *fatwa* ⁶⁶against him and his publishers over the book "Satanic Verses."⁶³ Under tight British security, he remains alive. However, a Dutch film maker, Theo van Gogh (d. 2004) was killed by Mohammad Bouyeri. The reason was that Gogh directed the short movie *Submission*, which displayed violence against women in various Muslim countries²⁴.

In 1994, *Taslima Nasreen*, an award-winning writer and human rights activist, was accused of offenses against religion and forced first to live a clandestine life and then to

¹⁸ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6158195.stm

¹⁹ <http://www.fazelLankarānī.com/persian/news/4878/>

⁶⁰ Kadivar was born in 1959; from the fall of 1977 until the nation-wide university closures in the summer 1980, he attended Shiraz University as an undergraduate student in the Faculty of Engineering; in 1981, he permanently left Shiraz for his seminary studies in Qom. He studied at the Islamic seminary at Qom earning a certificate of *Ijtihād* (highest degree in Islamic religious tradition). He received his PhD in Islamic Philosophy and Theology from Tarbiat Modarress University in Tehran. His main intellectual interests and topics of publication include: human rights and democracy in Islam, classical and modern Shī'a theology and legal theories, Shī'a political thought, classical Islamic philosophy, and modern Qur'ānic studies. Kadivar has published eight books as sole author, and seven more as co-author and editor in Persian and Arabic. Nowadays, he is visiting professor of Islamic studies at Duke University (Durham, North Carolina, US) for his biographic information, see Zahra Rudi (Kadivar) ed., *Bahā-yi Āzādī: Difā'iyat-i Mu'Esin-i Kadivar dar Dādghāh-i Wuzhah-yi Rū'Āniyat* (Tehran, 1999), pp.17- 19

⁶¹ <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/45527/>

⁶⁶ *Fatwā* (legal judgment): A definitive legal pronouncement in response to a question about an Islamic legal practice, given by a qualified mufti or mujtahid based on authoritative precedents and not on personal opinion alone. A *fatwā* is generally advisory and informative, with the inquirer agreeing to abide by the response to the inquiry posed. Historically, *fatwā* has been separated from the verdicts of (judges) *qādīs*. In modern times, the *fatwa* has sometimes been associated with popular practices including declarations of *jihād* or death decrees. See Gordon, N. (2011). *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

⁶³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/14/newsid_2541000/2541149.stm

²⁴. Ayaan Hirsi Ali accompanied Gogh for making the "submission".

move to the West.⁶⁵ On 8 June 1992, another well-known Egyptian writer was shot dead by two masked armed men. After that, the jihadist group “*Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya*” claimed responsibility for the murder, accusing him of being an apostate.⁶² An interesting case among those accused of apostasy is a failed attempt in 1995 against the life of *Naghib Mahfouz*, the first Arab to win the Nobel Prize in literature, (2006). On Friday, October 14, 1994, after the publication of his novel “*Awlad Haratina*” (والد حاتينا), radical Islamists accused him of apostasy and blasphemy.⁶⁷ Still in Egypt, In 2001 *Nawal Al-Saadawi* - the first woman in the Egyptian history who was threatened with a forced divorce for expressing her views was accused of apostasy for allegedly insulting Islam.⁶⁸ Also in 1985, a Sudanese reformer, *Mahmoud Muhammad Taha*, was hanged on charges of apostasy in Khartoum.⁶⁹ The case of Faraj Foda, the Egyptian, human rights activist and writer, is also interesting. Faraj was assassinated in 1992 when al-Azhar accused him of blasphemy. In the trial, Fouda's killer was asked, "Why did you assassinate Faraj Fouda?" to which he responded, "He was a disbeliever." The questioner then asked, "Which writings show that he is a disbeliever?" The killer responded, saying, "I did not read any of his books. I am illiterate." In this court during the trial of the murderers, Azhari scholar and former Muslim Brother Muhammad al-Ghazali testified that when the state fails to punish apostates, somebody else has to do it.³⁰

⁶⁵ For more information about Taslima Nasreen see: <http://taslimanasrin.com/about.html>

⁶² *Egypt: Human right abuses by armed groups*. Amnesty.org. Amnesty International. September 1998.p11

⁶⁷ *Islamic Fundamentalism and the Intellectuals: the Case of Naghib Mahfouz*, Fauzi M. Najar, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies(1998), 25(1), 130-168

⁶⁸ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/correspondent/1619902.stm>

⁶⁹ Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im "The Islamic Law of Apostasy and Its Modern Applicability: A Case from the Sudan", Religion, 1986,16, pp. 197-223.

³⁰ Belén Soage, A. Faraj Fawda, or the cost of freedom of expression (2007) *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 2, Article 3/8

The last case is *Abdul Rahman* Afghan who was placed on trial for an "attack on Islam" by his action of leaving Islam for another religion. He was arrested during 2006, but Rahman's case was dismissed due to lack of evidence.³¹

Each of these and similar cases, in their times, were a great concern in media and among human rights bodies. However, silent apostasy makes no or a little noise, and it rarely attracts people's attention; the number of people who convert their religion to another religion is far more than the number of people who are accused of apostasy. Therefore, examining this kind of apostasy is important.

In light of this concern, it is important that sound methodological research is conducted to understand better how and why they wish to convert to Christianity. In fact, this survey is going to examine the main reasons for this conversion. We seek to answer this fundamental question based on the personal experiences of those who converted from Islam.

On the other hand, by analyzing interviews conducted with those who have experienced conversion, we obtained a better understanding of conversion to see if it may be considered a religious phenomenon or attributed to politics.

In addition, this study is unique because no research has been found that surveyed and exploring similarities and differences between converting to Christianity in the contemporary era and the prophet's era. It is also well-understood that apostasy from Islam is considered to affect all Muslim societies. Understanding more about the conversion process will help Islamic religious leaders, and this information can also be incorporated into professional academic programs for Islamic scholars.

³¹ *Apostasy in Islam: The case of Abdul Rahman, an Afghan Christian*, by Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance (http://www.religioustolerance.org/isl_apos1.htm).

1.3 Study on Iranian Conversion

The population of interest in the field research for this study comprised of Iranians living in Kuala Lumpur and converted to Christianity. The reason for being restricted to this group of people is because of the Islamic background of the Iranian society. In countries such as Iran, the citizens live under a state religion. Therefore, in the Muslim world, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, the conversion process is a complex and sensitive phenomenon. Of the forty-four Muslim-majority countries, Iran is one of the few countries officially declared as an Islamic nation.³⁶ She seeks to enforce Islamic tradition and belief not only as the state religion but also as the overarching societal framework.³³ Therefore, Muslims in Iran live in a country that has declared to be non-secular and has declared Islam as the official state religion. In addition, Islam is the official primary source of legislation. According to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, this country confers a constitutional role to Islamic principles and jurisprudence.³⁴ Hence, Iranians are Muslims to have been living under the Islamic state for more than thirty years.³⁵ After Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, people became more intimately acquainted with Islam. In Iran, Christianization does not often happen as a result of some purposeful missionary activity since the Western missionaries have been officially expelled from Iran.³² Hence, the specific assumption of this study is that,

³⁶ Article 1 (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran) states that the form of government in Iran is that of an Islamic Republic. Article 2: The Islamic Republic is a system based on belief in: 1. the One God (as stated in the phrase "There is no god except Allah"), his exclusive sovereignty and the right to legislate, and the necessity of submission to his commands; 2. Divine revelation and its fundamental role in setting forth the laws...

³³ Some researchers claim, "Perhaps the most notable examples of accusation and punishment of apostates come from Iran" see: *The dark ages of Islam: Ijtihad, apostasy and human rights in contemporary Islamic jurisprudence*, David A. Jordan, Washington and Lee Journal of Civil Rights and Social Justice, 2003 p62

³⁴ The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran declares shari'a (the Shi'a Twelve-Imam Ja'fari school of Islam also referred to as Imamiyeh) as the origin of all national law enforceable in courts, including criminal law (Constitution, 1989; Articles 12 and 4). Article 168 of the constitution states the judiciary functions "in accordance with the criteria of Islam" and Article 4 declares that "all civil, penal financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria."

³⁵ This is clearly seen in Iran where the main presence of Shari'a is demonstrated in the enforcement of *hudud* and *tazir* punishments; still there are the followers of Islam (or known to be a Muslim) that now reject Islam.

³² There is no doubt that the missions of evangelization and Christianization played a great role in this demographic shift of Muslims in the continent. But nowadays evangelistic Internet sites, radio and satellite broadcasting are among the of the ways the gospel message is being heard in countries whose government are Islamic authorities. For example, three Iranian Christian television channels, i.e. Nejat TV, Mohabat TV, Sat Seven pars, are beaming programmes to Iran.

"How could someone of such background choose to follow Christ as their Lord?" What attracts Muslims to follow Jesus?³⁷

In addition to Malaysia³⁸, there much more instances of conversion in other countries. Based on the news and reports, most of the Iranian people who seek asylum are seen in Europe. There are reports of people converting with the intent of getting asylum in Germany.

Hundreds have converted to Christianity at the evangelical Trinity Church in Berlin neighborhood most of whom are Iranian and Afghan asylum seekers.³⁹ According to the report, Pastor Martens recognizes that some convert in order to improve their chances of staying in Germany. However, for him, motivation is unimportant. Many, he says, are so taken by the Christian message that it changes their lives. He estimates that only about 10 percent of converts do not return to church after christening.

"I know there are —again and again— people coming here because they have some kind of hope regarding their asylum," Martens says. "I am inviting them to join us because I know that whoever comes here will not be left unchanged".

³⁷ The government generally ignores these reports and claims that only a few convert. But the Muslim clergy in Iran had been already aware of this phenomenal growth. "Iranian leaders have described house churches as the work of the 'enemy'," analysts said. On Oct. 19, in Qom, Iran's religious center, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said that Iran's enemies want to shake the country's religious and societal values through the spread of Baha'ism and a network of Christian house churches. Khamenei's speech marked the fifth public statement from an Iranian leader condemning Iranian Christians in the three-month period (<http://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/english/country/iran/32093/>)

³⁸ There are over 28 million people living in Malaysia. As of the beginning of 2018, there were approximately 153,480 refugees and asylum-seekers and stateless persons. However, it is believed that there are "tens of thousands more that are still unrecognized. Malaysia is signatory neither to the 1951 Refugee Convention, nor to its 1967 Protocol. It has not enacted domestic legislation recognizing the legal status of asylum seekers, refugees and stateless persons. However, it permits UNHCR to register, determine status and help these populations. There are no refugee camps in Malaysia. Most reside in urban areas – the largest numbers in Kuala Lumpur, the Klang Valley and Penang. As of September 2009, UNHCR had registered 63,572 persons of concern from 44 countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, 32.8% of whom were women and girls. 91% of them originated from Burma. Alice M. Nah, *Refugees and space in urban areas in Malaysia* (<http://www.fmreview.org/urban-displacement/nah.html>); Also see Inessa Wursche, *Refugee and Asylum-Seekers in Malaysia: The Consequences of Invisibility* (<https://www.msuir.org/msuir-legalforum-blogs/2018/7/9/refugee-and-asylum-seekers-in-malaysia-the-consequences-of-invisibility>).

³⁹ *Germany: Turkish Muslims pretend to convert to Christianity to gain residency.* <https://themuslimissue.wordpress.com/2015/09/06/germany-turkish-muslims-pretend-to-convert-to-christianity-to-gain-residency/>

Reports on Asylum Seeking by Iranians who convert to Christianity in Sweden. An Iranian actress who converted to Christianity is now facing prison after the asylum bid rejected by Sweden.⁴⁰

Also in a documentary broadcast by BBC (Praying for Asylum. Our World), the role of asylum seeking in conversion was addressed.⁴¹

There are also reports on asylum seeking in Britain. 'Iran was my Egypt': Christian convert from Islam finds asylum in the UK.⁴⁶

The matter is also seen in other countries such as Hungary. A report claims that Hungary offers asylum to Iranian convert to Christianity. Based on this report: Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén (Christian Democratic People's Party, KDNP) says Hungary would grant an Iranian convert to Christianity refugee status were she to seek asylum in the country.⁴³ Therefore, given the differences in environment and the lifestyles among non-Muslim societies, it seems reasonable to study the reasons of conversion in these countries.

1.4 Method, Design and Data Selection

The methodology used in this study is divided into two parts:

- i. Library-based study: by this method, the issues of apostasy among the early Muslim community was examined. The sources are the Qur'an and reliable *Hadīth* and narrative works including Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Asbab al-Nuzul Al-Wahidi, Sira of Ibn Hisham, etc. It should be pointed out that our discussions support a combination of the classical

⁴⁰ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/4210771/iranian-actress-who-converted-to-christianity-now-faces-prison-after-asylum-bid-rejected-by-sweden/>

⁴¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZPKUUYbDtU>

⁴⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bj2utAyAcO8>

⁴³ <https://budapestbeacon.com/hungary-offers-asylum-to-iranian-convert-to-christianity/>

approaches towards a prophetic narration, *man baddala dinuh*, and modernized disputations about this *Hadīth* and current inclinations of Muslims towards apostasy.

- ii. Field study: this method was employed for a particular Iranian Muslim community-based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Interviews and questionnaires were two main research instruments by which a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach was conducted.

Converts were invited to narrate their story of conversion in their mother tongue i.e. Persian language. Interviews were conducted during specific hours fixed by the participants in a coffee shop or their houses. However, the majority of them were interviewed after Sunday services. Interviews lasted between 90 minutes to two hours. Each interview was followed by a brief 30-minutes follow-up session. A total of 13 members of Iranian converts were selected for the study (see Table 4.1 for the sample size and descriptive).

In addition, for more access to the data, institutional analysis methods and analysis of documents were used as well. In the grounded theory methodology, 13 Iranians were interviewed, and the data were analyzed using open, axial and selective coding. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview question guide. While the questions served as a guide, this did not bind the interview to a concrete set of questions. Rather the questions served as a point of departure as a rapport and trust developed between each participant and the interviewer (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). They were flexible and allowed the subject to explore and adjust their responses.

1.5 Conversion, Christianity, and Iran

The issue of apostasy goes back to the birth of Islam when the first Caliph Abu Bakr waged the wars of “Riddah” against the tribes who wanted to leave Islam, thinking their

embrace of Islam was a contract between them and the person of Prophet Muhammad. Although that was a particular historical moment, the issue has been enshrined in Islamic law (Shari'a) as an injunction against any conversion. Leaving Islam remains one of the biggest social and political taboos in many Muslim countries and is widely considered as a betrayal of God and country. Although the death penalty is not often exacted by Islamic states today, other forms of persecution and ostracism could lead to a sort of "civil death" for most apostates. This could be the reason why many of them emigrate to other countries.⁴⁴ Contemporary Muslim nations often refrain from the execution of apostates. Nevertheless, many Muslim converts claim that they face persecution from the government as well as the society and even their family members.⁴⁵ If they do not leave, they must remain silent about their decision to convert for fear of social, the legal and political repercussions of such a public act.

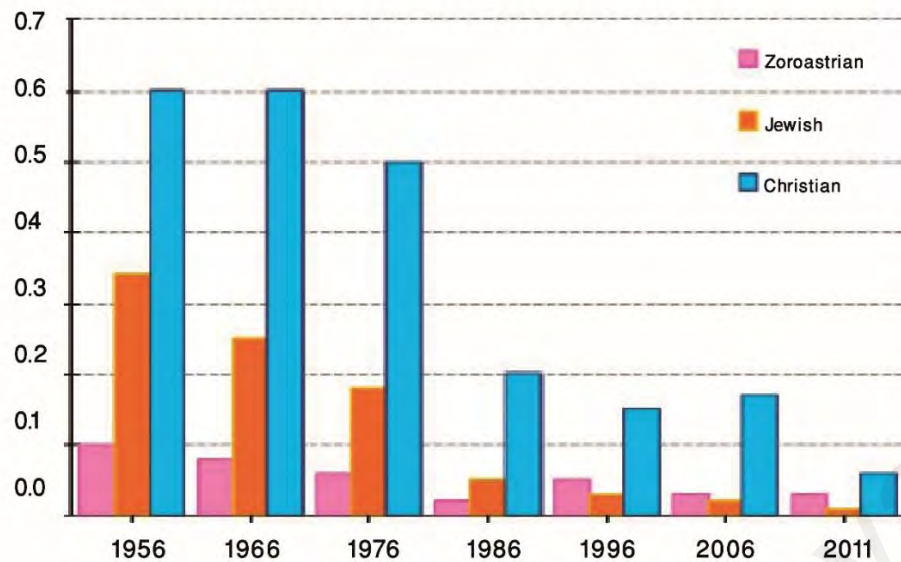
Since 1956, the contribution that minority religions have made to the population of Iran has always been decreasing. The reasons for this can be the low growth rate of population among the minority religions as well as high rate of immigration among them. Minority religions are mostly populated in urban areas with much less population in countryside. Furthermore, the minority religions, especially the Christians, are distributed all over the country in 31 provinces.⁴² Population ratios of minority religions are shown in Fig. 1.1.

Fig. 1.1 Population ratios of Zoroastrians, Jewish and Christians from 1956 to 2011.

⁴⁴ Iran: Reports of convictions for apostasy in Iran within the last 5 years; Ireland: Refugee Documentation Centre; 12 September 2012

⁴⁵ See also: Miller, Duane Alexander. 'Iranian Diaspora Christian in the American Midwest & Scotland: Historical Background, Present Realities, & Future Challenges' in *Global Missiology* 9:2, January 2012. The author has been able to meet (2009-2011) with numerous Iranian Christians in various cities- their churches and gatherings- in the UK and the USA. He has mentioned some of the key issues and challenges facing the Iranian Christian community in the coming years.

⁴² Fathi Elham, *Bimonthly of Amar, A Glance at the circumstances of religions and their population in Iran*, 2016, No 5, pp. 23-26



In city of Tehran, as the capital of Iran, 0.26% of the population are Christians. However, their local distribution in Tehran indicates a spatial centralization in choosing their accommodations.

The Christians, as the largest minority religion living in Tehran, mostly live in districts 1 and 3 of region 6, district 3 of region 7 and district 2 and 3 of region 8. A small number of them also live in adjacent regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 11, 12 and 22. The most important religious centers of Christians in Tehran include St. George Church (A place where Armenians used to live. However, today there is only a lane called Aramaneh) St. Thaddeus Monastery, St. Bartolomew (the oldest church of Armenians with rooms used as classrooms and a yard where famous people used to be buried), St. Mary's Church, St. Minas Church, St. Gregor Losarovitz Church, St. Sarkis Church (the greatest Armenian church in Tehran), St. Vartan Church, St. Targmanchess Church, St. Gregor Losarovitz Church, St. Stepanous Church, Holy Cross Church. Except for three churches, the rest are situated in the central districts. The Jewish, considered the second

largest religious minority in Tehran, live in the central districts of the city including region 6, district 3 of region 7 and district 1 of region 11.⁴⁷

Traditionally, the majority of Iranian Christians are ethnic Armenians and Assyrians who have lived there for millennia. According to official reports, 300,000 Christians live in Iran, the majority of whom are Armenians. Unofficial estimates for the Assyrian Christian population range between 10,000 and 20,000. The officially recognized “minority” Christians of Iran are relatively free to follow their faith. However, the situation is different for Muslims who convert to Christianity as they fall under the heading of apostasy.

Iran’s Penal Code does not have formal laws against apostasy.⁴⁸ Therefore, the persecution of converts is not based on promulgated law.⁴⁹ However, the Article 167 of the Penal Code gives judges wide latitude when laws do not exist, “In the case of the absence of any such law [the judge] has to deliver his judgment by authoritative Islamic sources and authentic fatwa.” Due to this linkage between Islamic Law and the Iranian courts, the death penalty for an apostate remains a real possibility – depending on the zeal of the judge who oversees the case. Amazingly, the fatwas of Grand Mullahs i.e. Āyatullāhs differ on this subject.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Atlas of Tehran Metropolis, Religion and religious minorities <http://atlas.tehran.ir/Default.aspx?tabid=270>

⁴⁸ The judges often add the charge of *muhārib* (one who is in war with God) for the execution of the apostates.

⁴⁹ Despite constitutional provisions guaranteeing freedom of speech; there are laws restricting freedom of expression in Iran. Hence, the government of Iran has long been criticized by human rights groups and a range of foreign governments for limitations on freedom of speech, expression, and used to charge individuals with religious offenses, including apostasy. See: IRAN Civil Society Report on the Implementation of ICCPR by Project on Extra-Legal Executions in Iran (ELEI). The Iran’s constitution, Article 23 is crystal clear: The investigation of individuals’ beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief. The sentence of apostasy in Shari’a is death, but Apostasy is not explicitly mentioned in the new IPC. However, the new law makes it easier for judges to issue the death penalty for apostasy because the new article 220 states: “If the present law is silent about any of the ‘hudud’ cases, the judge is referred to Article 167 of the Constitution.” Article 167 of the Constitution states: “The Judge is bound to attempt to rule on each case, on the basis of the codified law. In case of the absence of any such law, he has to deliver his judgment on the basis of official Islamic sources and authentic fatwa.” The reference to Article 167 was previously made in the civil code but now it is also included in the Penal Law (<http://iranhr.net/spip.php?article2440>). The approval of the new Islamic Penal Code (IPC) by the Guardian Council might lead to more death penalties for apostasy.

⁵⁰ An increasing number of contemporary Iranian thinkers have called for a re-evaluation of the shari’a position on the death penalty for apostasy. For example, the late Grand Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri argued that the death penalty for apostasy was originally prescribed to punish only political conspiracies against the nascent Islamic community; Montazeri believed Muslims today should be free to convert to another religion.

An examination of the data reflects that official executions for apostasy are relatively rare in Iran and that no Christian has ever been officially executed there. On the other hand, there is no specific information about the treatment of those who convert from Islam to Christianity by the courts.⁵¹

1.6 The Significance

Since a couple of years ago, a huge number of Iranians moved to Southeast Asia, in general, and to Malaysia, in particular. The main purpose of these newcomers is to study, live, and so on. Among these people, there are some Muslims who are interested in leaving their religion and convert to Christianity. The review of the literature (next chapter) proves that there is a dearth of studies tackling the issue of apostasy among Muslim migrants living in a Muslim-majority country. In this regard, Malaysia had the potential to be a safe place for Iranian converts who were included in this study. After analyzing the background of apostasy during the life of the prophet Muhammad, this study will decode the reason of conversion among Iranian communities based in Kuala Lumpur. To finalize the thesis, a comparison between the reasons and status of early and contemporary conversions will be made.

1.7 Objectives

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To explore the roots of conversion among Muslim communities during the early period of Islam by relying on Qur'anic and Hadith sources
- ii. To assess the reasons for conversion among Iranian community in Kuala Lumpur

⁵¹ The Human Rights Campaign mentions three cases in which Christians are charged with apostasy: those of Mehdi Dibaj, Youcef Nadarkhani, and Hossein Soodmand, and one case, that of Hossein. See: *The Cost of Faith Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran*, p 8.

- iii. To compare the issue of apostasy among early Muslims and contemporary Iranian converts in Kuala Lumpur

1.8 Research Questions

The research questions presented in this study were:

- i. What are the social, religious and personal reasons given for Muslim conversion in the Qur'an and *Hadiths*?
- ii. How could someone from an Islamic background convert to Christianity and choose to follow Christ as his Savior?
- iii. Why did some Iranian Muslims, in general, and those living in Kuala Lumpur, in particular, abandoned Islam and how?
- iv. What are some similarities and differences between the reasons for the conversion in the prophetic era and the contemporary world?

1.9 Participants

Most of the Iranian converts who live in Malaysia hide their conversion due to fear of persecution. Having lived for many years in Iran, they are fully familiar with the Islamic rules and regulations that became the law of the land in Iran after the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979.⁵⁶ In Iran they were by definition Muslims and subject to the strictures of Islamic law.⁵³ Before the Revolution, Iranians had experienced a secular, Westernized form of government (Soroush 2007, Mottahedeh 2000, Sadri). In the present day Iran, however, Christian proselytizing has been declared illegal.⁵⁴

⁵⁶ Article 1 (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran) states that the form of government in Iran is that of an Islamic Republic. Article 2: The Islamic Republic is a system based on belief in: 1. the One God (as stated in the phrase "There is no god except Allah"), his exclusive sovereignty and the right to legislate, and the necessity of submission to his commands; 2. Divine revelation and its fundamental role in setting forth the laws...

⁵³ This is clearly seen in Iran where the main presence of Shari'a is demonstrated in the enforcement of *hudud* and *tazir* punishments; still there are the followers of Islam (or known to be a Muslim) that now reject Islam.

⁵⁴ No doubt that the missions of evangelization and Christianization played a great role in this demographic shift of Muslims in the continent. But nowadays some evangelistic Internet sites, radio and satellite broadcasting is one of the ways the gospel message is being heard countries whose government or Islamic authorities. For example Three Iranian Christian television channels beaming programmes to Iran, Nejat TV, Mohabat TV, Sat Seven pars.

A specific definition of sensitive research is not very easy. However, Raymond M. Lee put it this way:

Studies in which there are potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research. For example, a study that examines the relative merits of day care for infants against full-time care by the mother can have broad social implications and thus can be considered socially sensitive.⁵⁵

A topic such as conversion of a Muslim in an Islamic society, which may cause heavy punishments for those who commit it, can therefore be considered socially sensitive. Research on topics like this may face various restrictions such as cultural barriers, publication problems, legal regulations, disappointment, etc.⁵²

Sampling from rare or criminal populations is faced with a plenty of restrictions, and on the other hand, the more sensitive is the topic, the more difficult is the sampling process –as the potential aware samples have more incentives to hide their actions. Therefore, the major strategies which can be used singly or in combination, for sampling ‘special’ populations which are rare or and/or deviant in some way are as follows:

1. List sampling
2. Multi-purposing
3. Screening
4. Networking
5. Outcropping

⁵⁵ Raymond M. Lee, *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics*, Sage Publications, 1993, p 3

⁵² *Ibid*, p 21

6. Advertising

7. Servicing⁵⁷

Given the hidden nature of conversion, it was definitely impossible to use strategies like list sampling or advertising. However, a combination of other strategies was used for sampling. The networking strategy was used most of all which was commenced with an initial set of calls and then extended to new people. The new people, in turn, introduced more. This method of extending samples is usually called Snowball Sampling.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p 61

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p 66

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Religious Freedom and Apostasy

Since the incident of September 11, many Muslim and non-Muslim scholars of religion, sociology, and anthropology have been working on the topics related to Islam and its Community (*Umma*). An important issue raised by scholars was a comparison of freedom in the Muslim World, on the one hand, and the West, on the other hand. To elaborate this issue, some of them worked on ‘apostasy’ as an untouched issue, which needed further attention.

In 2003, *Johanna Pink*, a German scholar of Islam, went through the status of Bahā’īs in Egypt through the lens of apostasy and Islamic law; a group of people whose attendance in Egypt brought about the emergence of various types of disputations among modern Egyptian jurists and courts. She also refers to Bahā’īs with the non-Islamic geographical background. In final sections of this essay, she concludes that “The fact remains that rigorous rejection of the Bahā’ī faith does not solve the practical problems caused by the continuing presence of Bahā’īs in Egypt.”⁵⁹

In his article, *Ambiguities of Apostasy and the Repression of Muslim Dissent*, Abdullah Saeed tries to draw the attention of readers to a social discrimination against Muslims. He believes that the unfamiliarity of people, in general, and Westerners, in particular, with the history of Islam and its literature along with the presentation of false information in media, is the main result of such social problems. Five important elements of dissent including ‘apostasy,’ ‘blasphemy,’ ‘heresy,’ ‘hypocrisy,’ and ‘unbelief’ are discussed in this work. This study attempts to specify the gradual

⁵⁹ Pink Johanna. "A Post-qur'ānic Religion between Apostasy and Public Order: Egyptian Muftis and Courts on the Legal Status of the Bahā'ī Faith." *Islamic Law and Society* 10/ 3 (2003), 409-434.

invention of 'Apostasy Law,' which according to Saeed, stifled the religious freedom of Muslims.²⁰

In line with the works mentioned above, there are other studies dealing with apostasy and law. Mohamed Azam Mohamed Adil as a Malaysian scholar, after providing the history of apostasy in Islamic literature, opines that punishment of an apostate contradicts the right of freedom of religion. He assesses the status of freedom of religion for Muslims in Malaysia who stand in dilemma of Article 11 (1) of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia and the Shari'a Courts.²¹ Regarding the death punishment for apostates, Ammar Fadzil contends that the Qur'an has clearly declared freedom of religion and therefore nobody should be forced to convert to Islam. However, it does not mean that Muslims can abandon their religion at no cost. There are decrees that apostates may face with one of which is a death punishment. Classical Muslim jurists found no difficulty in arguing that the apostates must be put to death where according to the majority the death punishment is carried out after they are offered with (*istitabah*) repenting. However, contemporary Muslim scholars can be divided into two groups based on their opinions: first, those who accept death punishment for apostate, and second those who question it. The former group views the reason for carrying death punishment on apostate is that apostasy must be associated with (enmity) *hirabah* whereas the latter group not only considers that apostates shall not deserve any punishment but such punishment is in contrary to the freedom of religion.²⁶ Also,

²⁰ Abdullah Saeed, "Ambiguities of apostasy and the repression of Muslim dissent." *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 9/ 2 (2011): 31-38.

²¹ Mohamed Azam Mohamed Adil. "Law of apostasy and freedom of religion in Malaysia." *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* 2 (2007): 1-36.

²⁶ Ammar Fadzil, "Death Punishment for Apostate: Classical Jurists and Contemporary Muslims Understanding of the Textual Provisions," *Journal of Islam in Asia*, Vol.3 No.1 (2006), 177-195

another scholar, Abdul Haq, addressed the apostasy and marriage by which he tried to answer how Islam considers penalties for an apostate.²³

It is apparent that the majority of studies tackle the issue of apostasy using Islamic law. However, there are some studies, like the one by Peters and De Vries (1976-1977), which consider the history of apostasy in classical and modern Islam. This paper argues that when and how the punishment for an apostate increased or decreased.²⁴

It seems there is still a dearth of studies pertaining apostasy, which can be filled with an emphasis on a particular community of ex-Muslims outside their hometown. Thus, this study pays particular attention to the Iranian ex-Muslims community in Malaysia who inclined to be Christians.

Plenty of punishment commands in *Shari'a* is extracted from the Qur'an. (e.g. Q2:217; 3:86-90; 4:88-91; 4:137; 9:66; 9:74; 16:106-109; 47:25-27).²⁵ The term *al-riddah* has been mentioned in some verses. Among modern scholars of Islam, some argue that there, not any verse which even prescribes an earthly punishment for apostasy; but these verses speak about when the God punishes an apostate in the Hereafter (*al-ākhirah*).²² Moreover, Ahmad Shafaat (2006) says, "lesser sins and crimes have penalties detailed explicitly in the Qur'an. Therefore, the more severe apostate's death sentence should most certainly be established by the Qur'an."²⁷ Rahman (2006)

²³ Abdul Haq, *Apostasy and Muslim marriage*, (University of Michigan Press, 2006).

²⁴ Peters, Rudolph, and Gert JJ De Vries. "Apostasy in Islam." *Die Welt des Islams* 17, 1/4 (1976): 1-25. Another study with a historical perspective was written by S. A. Rahman, *Punishment of Apostasy in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Other Press, 2006).

²⁵ Eight punishments have been mentioned for an apostate in the Quran, but the Qur'an is silent on the question of death as the punishment for apostasy. However, other scholars such as Dr Muhammad Hamidullah, said some "indirect verses of the Quran" mentioned such as Q5:54, Q33:57 but others didn't accept i.e. A.S. Rahman said: "it is difficult to agree with him that these verses can be pressed into service for sustaining the capital sentence for apostasy", S. A. Rahman, *Punishment of Apostasy in Islam*, 2.

²² Jamal A. Badawi "Is Apostasy a Capital Crime in Islam?" (<http://archive.islamonline.net/?p=1168>); Also see: Ammar Fadzil, "Death Punishment for Apostate: Classical Jurists and Contemporary Muslims Understanding of the Textual Provisions," *Journal of Islam in Asia*, Vol.3 No.1 (2006), 177-195

²⁷ Ahmad Shafaat "Q & A The punishment of apostasy in Islam" Part I: The Qur'anic Perspective. 2006.

says, “there is no mention in the Qur’an of any punishment for apostasy to be inflicted in this world.”²⁸

However, the view of classical interpreters of the Qur’ān (*mufasssirūn*) is different. For example, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.1209) the famous theologian and commentator have applied Qur’anic verses to prove the apostate’s death sentence.²⁹ On the other hand, a few jurists have used Qur’anic verses to legitimize the killing of apostates, such as Q3:85 of the Qur’an.⁷⁰

Such diversity of accounts is not restricted to those Qur’anic verses dealing with apostasy, but it is obvious when the Qur’an refers to freedom and non-obligatory principle. There is a clear difference between classical and modern works on religious freedom.⁷¹ As we said, one of the important elements in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) is religious liberty (especially Article 18); the question has always been how the right to religious freedom should be framed with this unlimited conceptualization; therefore, some Muslim scholars’ ideas are recorded under the shadow of this subject. These groups emphasized on heresy and faith as an individual’s personal choice between oneself and God.⁷⁶

²⁸ S.A. Rahman, *punishment of apostasy in Islam*, The Other Press, 2006, p2

⁶⁹ He points out the phrase »Hubot al-aamal« in Q2:217:

«أما يحيط الأعمى الذي لا يرى، ويقتل إلى أن يظرب، ولا يصح من لا يؤمن مولده، ولا نصرأ ولا ثناء حيناً، وتبين زوجته فيه، ولا يبين حق الهراط من الهلبيين»

Fakhr al-Razi, al-Tafsir al-Kabir (Cairo, 1308 A.H.), Vol.2, lines 17-20

⁷⁰ Al-Mabsut, kitabqata' al-tariq, vol. 2, p. 121 from al-hudud from the encyclopedia (silsilat al-yanabe' al-faqih)

⁷¹ Second half of the twentieth century - especially after The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948- witnessed a significant change in the Scholars view. AbulAla Maududi believes criticisms have been started raising doubts in during the final portion of the nineteenth century, he says: "Doubt about this matter first arose among Muslims during the final portion of the nineteenth century as a result of speculation. Otherwise, for the full twelve centuries prior to that time the total Muslim community remained unanimous about it. The whole of our religious literature clearly testifies that ambiguity about the matter of the apostate's execution never existed among Muslims." Abul A'la Maududi, *The Punishment of the Apostate According to Islamic Law*, translated and annotated by Syed Silas Husain and Ernest Hahn, 1994 p. 12. Tunisian academic Mohamed Talbi has noted: "I know of no implementation throughout the history of Islam of the law condemning the apostate to death- until the hanging of Mahmoud Taha in Sudan in 1985..." Mehran Kamrava (Editor), *The New Voices of Islam: Reforming Politics and Modernity: a Reader* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p 113.

⁷² Jamāl al-Bannā-who points out the importance of a "new *fiqh* (jurisprudence)." He says, "Every Muslim has the right to change his religion as many times as he likes, and nobody is allowed to stand in his way, because this is a question of freedom of conscience, and it is forbidden to intervene in matters of people's conscience. What do the legal systems or killings have to do with people's conscience?" Muslim Scholars Debate Apostates in Islam, November 5, 2007 (http://www.memritv.org/clip_transcript/en/1623.htm).

Despite the attempts to forge an Islamic equivalence for the modern human rights charter adopted by the United Nations, still areas of incompatibility remain in practice. Human rights advocates highlight these contradictions when Islamic requirements seem to conflict with recognized secular human rights. Some of those conflicts are the historically entrenched “protected” (*dhimma*) status of non-Muslims living in Islamic states, or predominantly Muslim states, the prohibition against Muslims converting to other religions, as well as the patriarchal presumptions that pre-modern Islamic jurisprudence makes with respect to women, which affect their civic and personal liberties particularly in their marital lives.

In case of conversion out of Islam to another religion, it is prohibited in the classical Islamic law, which at the first glance, seems to be in violation of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration (conferring the right to freedom of thought conscience and religion, including the right to change one’s religion and belief). Conversion is considered to be equivalent to apostasy (*ridda*) in terms of Islamic law and therefore an offense punishable even by death according to most schools of thought. To explaining the rule, many of the contemporary scholars have argued that apostasy in early Islam and medieval times was viewed as one of subversive activities that threatened the public security of the Muslim community. For instance, Sachedina explains that while the Qur’an advocated religious freedom, the disruptive events and political realities in the early Islam restricted the interpretation of such freedoms.⁷³ When the state becomes the guardian of the faith, then any threat to the state is regarded as an attack on religion as well. Sachedina argues,

In the face of the expansion of Islamic political power and hegemony, the deep Qur’anic impulse toward religious freedom steadily lost ground—in

⁷³ Moosa, E. (2001). The Dilemma of Islamic Rights Schemes. *Journal of Law and Religion*, 15, 185-215. doi:10.2307/1051518

*practice and in theory—to the equally strong concern for defending the faith against active persecution and violent assault. The defensive use of force gradually gave way to more aggressive legal and political policies.*⁷⁴

Some of the leading theorists in the modern Islamic revivalist movement who do not view apostasy as a religious offence punishable by religion share the same view.⁴⁰ Instead, they believe that it is a political offence that must be subject to punishment at the discretion of political authorities. This is a departure from the medieval consensus, which regarded apostasy as a religious offence and its penalty is sanctioned by law.⁴¹ It becomes easier for latter day scholars to dissent from the traditional consensus on this issue because of subtle epistemological transformations taken place in modern Muslim thought in dealing with the primary sources. Modern thinkers place greater emphasis on the Qur'an and are less fastidious with hadith sources. The warrant for apostasy is not derived from the Qur'an, but from prophetic reports (*hadith*) that can be impugned with error in transmission or interpretation with less controversy. The modern view has also attempted to reconcile the law with the overall spirit of the Qur'anic teachings that does advocate greater freedom to choose one's faith.

What expressed above was part of scholars' opinions that have seen incompatibility concerning some verses regarding apostasy. In fact, they claim that the death penalty for apostasy conflicts with the Qur'an. Recently, Mohsen *Kadivar* continuing his challenges with an Orthodox clergyman about the punishment of an apostate claimed, "the spirit of the Qur'an is contrary to such decrees."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, *Islam and Religious Liberty: Freedom of Conscience and Religion in the Qur'an*, in *Human Rights and the Conflict of Cultures*, p. 85

⁷⁵ See this author's book *The Right of People*, the article "Freedom of Religion and Belief in Islam", pp.204-05, and its English translation in *The New Voices of Islam: Reforming Politics and Modernity – A Reader*, edited by *Mehran Kamrava*; I. B. Tauris, 2006; London; pp. 119-142.

Authentic and sound *ḥadīth* (*ṣaḥīḥ*) is the second primary source of Islam, which is recognized after the Qur'ān. The phrase 'who leaves Islam should be killed' is a report seen in various collections of *aḥādīth*.⁷² However, a critical approach to the corpus of Ḥadīth has been increased. New scholars have stated that it is impossible to take a human life with some weak testimonies. Thus, *ḥadīth* should be strong enough for important issues such as taking the life of a person.⁷⁷ More comments are about the main relevant *ḥadīth* when the Messenger of God has said, "Whoever changed his religion kill him" (al-Bukhārī). Although this *ḥadīth* is considered as a reliable one, some modern scholars have questioned its authenticity, which administered death penalty for the sin. The first question is about the verification of the chain of transmitters.⁷⁸ The second one is a criticism that relies on the contents. For example, *Mohamed Talbi* has noted that the *ḥadīth* authorizing the death penalty is not *Mutawatir* -meaning that it is not narrated based on the traditional system of ḥadīth.⁷⁹ In conclusion, they claim that the authentic words of the Holy Prophet do not prescribe any punishment for apostasy. *Aḥādīth* in which the Prophet prescribed the death penalty for this sin is either unreliable or to be interpreted differently. In addition, they contend that *aḥādīth* about the death penalty is called into serious question by other *aḥādīth* that

⁷² The most important hadith that prescribes the death penalty for apostasy is found in Bukhari 2794, 6411, Abu Da'ud 3787, Tirmidhi 1378, Nasa'i 3991-7, IbnMajah 2526, Ahmad 1776, 2420, 2813 (cf. Ahmad 1802). «...مَنْ بَدَّلَ دِينَهُ فَكَفَرٌ بِمَا كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِ»

⁷⁷ Since taking the life of a person, if done without a just cause, is regarded by the Qur'an as tantamount to killing all human beings (Q5:32) a prophetic hadith says, "Avoid *hudud* penalties when in doubt" «ادبرءالحدود عندالريب» As Mohammed Abed al-Jabri had said, "This has become a basic principle in Islamic Legislation" *Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought*, I. B. Tauris& Co Ltd, 2009 P96.

⁷⁸ Kamali states: Rahman then traces the chain of transmission of the Hadith which proclaims 'kill whoever changes his religion'. As this is a solitary Hadith (ahad), Rahman finds some weakness in its transmission (isnad). *Freedom of Expression in Islam, the Islamic Text Society, Cambridge*.

For the view of majority regarding this hadith see: Sayyid Muhammad Yunus Gilani, Musaddiq Majid Khan, *An analysis of interpretations of Hadith, Whoever changes his religion, kill him*, HADIS: International Reviewed Academic Journal, 4 (2). pp. 109-141.

Also: Sayyid Muhammad Yunus Gilani, Musaddiq Majid Khan, *An analysis of interpretations of Hadith, Whoever changes his religion, kill him*, HADIS: International Reviewed Academic Journal, 4 (2). pp. 109-141.

⁷⁹ Mehran Kamrava (Editor), *The New Voices of Islam: Reforming Politics and Modernity: a Reader* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006) p 114. In addition, among Muslim scholars the viewpoint of *Gamalal-Banna* is notable.

Referring to many pieces of evidence from the Qur'an and the traditions, *Al-Banna* believes in Freedom of Thought and explicitly denies any type of punishment for conversion. In his opinion, punishment for apostasy has been made by the Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh). In the second half of his book (which spans 60 pages) he addresses the viewpoints by *Mohammad Salim Al-Awa* and *Taha Jabir Alalwani*. Failure in presentation of the reasons and discussion about them is clearly observed. As an important critique against the book, one can say that he has not used Qur'anic reasons as much as reasons taken from the traditions. Therefore, he has ignored many reasons.

show the Holy Prophet did not consider such a penalty for apostasy. Finally, they point out that this decree (hukum) does not fit with the Qur'anic perspective.⁸⁰

In recent years, these criticisms have been presented in different forms by Islamic scholars and to every of these claims have been replied.⁸¹

2.2 Studies on Muslims Conversion to Christianity

Religious conversion has various aspects such as theology, psychology, social context, and religious experience. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in this issue. Some works discussed religious conversion in a general way as a phenomenon. Lewis R. Rambo as a writer on *Understanding Religious Conversion*⁸⁶ tries to answer these questions: What are the factors that make conversion viable for people? How do we explain different kinds of conversion? Moreover, so on.

The authors of the article *Religious Conversion and Personality Change*⁸³ have examined the relationship between religious conversion and a variety of behavioral, attitudinal, emotional aspects and lifestyles.

The authors of *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*⁸⁴ explore religious conversion in a variety of cultural settings (including Oceania, Europe, and the Caribbean); they consider how anthropological approaches can help us understand the phenomenon. They discuss conversion to Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Spiritualism. Combining an ethnographic description with a theoretical analysis, the authors consider the nature and meaning of conversion, its social and political dimensions, and its relationship to the individual religious experience.

⁸⁰See also: Ahmad Shafaat "Q & A The punishment of apostasy in Islam" Part I: The Qur'anic Perspective. 2006.

⁸¹ For example, Dr. Taha Alavwani in the book, *Apostasy in Islam: A Historical and Scriptural Analysis*, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012.

Also Salih bin Ali al-Amirini has written a critique of that book titled *Al-Ridda bain al-Had va al-Hurria*, 2013, Daraltadmoriah.

⁸⁶ Yale University Press (October 25, 1995)

⁸³ Raymond F. Paloutzian, James T. Richardson, Lewis R. Rambo. *Journal of Personality*, Volume 67, Issue 6, pages 1047–1079, December 1999

⁸⁴ Edited by Andrew Buckser, Stephen D. Glazier. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers (August 18, 2003)

Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Over a decade, Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices by Henri Gooren is the first approach to a systematic analysis of the field of conversion studies, encompassing the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, and theology. Gooren analyses conversion and disaffiliation in a worldwide comparative framework, using data from North America, Europe, and Latin America. In his article, *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies (Issues in Contemporary Religion)*, M. Darroll Bryantin explores how conversion has been understood by different religions during different eras and includes a survey of the textual, legal, ritual, historical and experiential dimensions of the phenomenon of conversion.⁸⁵

Scot McKnight and Ondrey in *Finding Faith, Losing Faith: Stories of Conversion and Apostasy*⁸² examine conversion stories as told by people who have undergone a conversion experience, including experiences of apostasy. They show that a 'conversion theory' helps explain why some people walk away from one religion, often to another, totally different religion. It tells stories of conversion with empathy, and with a richness of detail and anecdotes that keep these converts real. However, McKnight and Ondrey do not merely narrate. They are at their best when they show how each type of conversion (Christian to non-Christian, Jew to Christian, Catholic to evangelical, evangelical to Catholic) has its characteristic crises and its distinctive sub-plots.

2.3 Conversion from Islam to Christianity

The study about conversion from Islam to Christianity is mostly premised by Christian academics.⁸⁷ A book, *Called from Islam to Christ why Muslims become Christians* by Jean-Marie Gaudeul⁸⁸, is a collection of proofs of Muslims from various

⁸⁵ Continuum; 1 edition (October 1, 1999)

⁸² Baylor University Press; illustrated edition (July 14, 2008)

⁸⁷ Some of them are not likely to have much positive to say about Islam.

⁸⁸ Monarch (March 19, 1999)

countries and backgrounds who have been called to Christ over the last hundred years and leave Islam to embrace Christianity. The author has compiled conversion stories from 22 countries over a time span of two or more centuries. Some are from previously published sources and some from interviews with those who felt they should remain anonymous.

The author of *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a great transformation* are concerned with addressing the world-building aspect of Christian conversion and Christianization; he also explores Christian conversion in its full complexity sociological, cultural and psychological aspects.⁸⁹

Chinese Conversion to Evangelical Christianity: The Importance of Social and Cultural Contexts has been arranged based on interviews in Chinese churches in the Greater Washington D. C. Fenggang Yang argues that social and cultural changes in China in the process of coerced modernization are the most important factors for Chinese conversion to Christianity; identity reconstruction of immigrant Chinese in a pluralist modern society also contributes to Chinese conversion to evangelical Christianity; institutional factors are of secondary importance. This study also has important theoretical implications for the ongoing debates concerning the reasons for and sources of growth among conservative Christian churches in the US. One dissertation follows a case-study design, with an in-depth analysis of conversion. *Religious Conversion to Islam and Christianity in Prison* is a field research conducted in late 2011 and published in 2012 by Malcolm L. Rigsby.⁹⁰ This study employs a qualitative methodology to explore transforming tendencies in identity among prisoners in the context of religious conversion to Islam and Christianity. The striking conclusion

⁸⁹ Robert W. Hefner University of California Press, 1993 page 4

⁹⁰ Rigsby, Malcolm L. 2012, *Religious Conversion in Prison and its Directions: Community Identity, Religious Dogma, and Exclusivist or Inclusivist Religiosity in American Prisons.* Texas Woman's University, United States — Texas.

of this research is that the religious conversion is a much-nuanced pathway for both religions in which many forks in the road are found during the conversion process and transforming identities.

Investigations for the determinants of religious conversion have typically focused on people within some countries e.g. *5 Reasons Muslims Convert*⁹¹. This was another field research, between 1991 and 2007, to survey 750 Muslims who had decided to follow Christ. They filled out an extensive questionnaire containing (Section 4.3.1) those basic questions. The respondents from 30 countries and 50 ethnic groups represented every major region of the Muslim world. The result of this survey shows five predominant reasons they chose to follow Christ.

- i. The lifestyle of Christians.
- ii. The power of God in answering prayers and healing.
- iii. Dissatisfaction with the type of Islam they had experienced
- iv. The spiritual truth in the Bible.
- v. Biblical teachings about the love of God.

Surveys such as that conducted by Georges Houssney (*Why 100 Former Muslims Converted to Christianity*) attempt to reveal the factors that led conversion to Christianity. This research demonstrates that conversion to Christianity is more driven by the positive aspects of Christianity than the negative aspects of Islam.⁹⁶

Ziya Meral has finished a report entitled *No Place to Call Home: Experiences of Apostates from Islam and Failures of the International Community*;⁹³ it is about the experiences of apostates based on in-depth field research into legal surveys of Muslim-

⁹¹ J. D. Woodberry, *Contextualization among Muslims Reusing Common Pillars*, IJFM, VOL 13:4 Oct.-DEC. 1996 p171.

⁹⁶ <http://biblicalmissiology.org/2013/04/08/factors-leading-to-conversion-of-muslims-to-christ/>

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/april/why-100-former-muslims-converted-to-christianity.html>

⁹³ Christian Solidarity Worldwide; United Kingdom, 2008

majority states and theological surveys of current and traditional Islamic thought. He interviewed 28 apostates in six different countries as part of a year-long research project. His report found that although the death penalty was rarely applied through the courts, apostates still face wide-ranging human rights abuses at the hands of the state, radical groups and local communities.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in apostasy in narratives of stories about Muslims converting to Christianity. *From Islam to Christianity: Stories of Converted Muslims* prefaced by Samir Khalil Samir and Edizioni Piemme is an example.⁹⁴ The authors presented stories about Muslims living in Italy who have encountered Christianity in a great variety of ways and received baptism after converting.⁹⁵

Some works take the form of a case study of conversion to Christianity. Duane Alexander Miller in an article, *The Secret World of God: Aesthetics, Relationships, and the Conversion of 'Frances' from Shi'a Islam to Christianity*,⁹² has written a conversion narrative from Islam to Christianity by an Iranian woman. This study is about an individual convert who was interviewed in Scotland.

In April 2012, Kathryn Kraft published *Faith is Lived out in the Community: Questions about New Community for Arab Muslims who have embraced the Christian Faith*.⁹⁷ The author investigates the social considerations faced by converts from a Muslim background to the Christian faith in the light of the strong social forces opposed

⁹⁴ Giorgio Paolucci, Camille Eid, "I cristiani venuti dall'Islam. Storie di musulmani convertiti" [*From Islam to Christianity: Stories of Converted Muslims*], preface by Samir Khalil Samir, Edizioni Piemme, Casale Monferrato, 2005. See also: http://sunday.niedziela.pl/artukul.php?dz=ekumenizm&id_art=00011.

⁹⁵ There are many collections of narratives/testimonies of conversions from Islam to Christianity. The greatest archive is on the internet. Fortunately, it appears to be fairly pristine and un-edited. It is found at www.answering-islam.org/Testimonies/index.html [Accessed 27 July 2009]. Other examples are found in the bibliography of this article, including *Leaving Islam* which is primarily about people leaving Islam for atheism, agnosticism, or secular humanism. Of particular interest is a collection by William Miller (1969) of conversion narratives from Iran. Although they are not contemporary, they reveal interesting facts about the shifting dynamics of Persian culture over the years.

⁹² Published in "Diaspora Studies" (www.GlobalMissiology.org) April 2012

⁹⁷ *Faith is Lived Out in the Community: Questions about New Community for Arab Muslims who have embraced a Christian Faith* By Kathryn Kraft, St Francis Magazine Vol. 6, No 6 | December 2010 St Francis Magazine is published by Interserve 954 and Arab Vision.

to that decision and their strong desire to live in the community. This research includes in-depth interviews with Arabs of a Muslim background who have converted to the Christian faith in the Middle East, mostly but not uniquely Lebanon and Egypt, and participant observation in their circles of friends and places of worship.

In a discourse analysis⁹⁸, insights into the Malaysian newspaper reports on apostasy cases in the country were provided. According to this study, in a Muslim country with many religions, apostasy was highly sensitive and hence any issues related to apostasy had to be carefully managed. In order to identify newspaper reports for the analysis, four keywords i.e. apostasy, apostate, Ex-Muslim, and murtad were used. Two newspaper reports were analyzed using a discourse analysis approach and it was revealed that the report in a right-wing newspaper carrying the voice of anti-apostate, disapproved the act of renouncing Islam. On the other hand, the report in a left-wing newspaper carried the voice of pro-apostate. This analysis contributed to the understanding of the agendas subtly set in the news. The analyzers concluded that the two reports had been strategically constructed to serve the interests and promote the ideology of their respective competing political groups in the country (i.e. the pro-apostate and the anti-apostate groups), thus creating a balance in the multi-religious context.

In an article that reviewed the apostasy cases occurring in Malaysia⁹⁹, the authors provided an overview of the issues in each case, which can be used as a reference for future studies related to apostasy. Three main cases received wide media coverage in the country. The three apostasy cases reflected the determination of the pro-apostate groups to fight for their rights. Those cases, though differing in their background and period, contributed to a rather similar impact on the landscape of justice system and the inter-

⁹⁸ Journal for the study of Religion and Ideologies Vol. 16, No 48 (2017): 96-111

⁹⁹ Man In India, 97 (16) : 297-301

religious relations in Malaysia. In the first case, i.e. Lina Joy, they showed constant efforts in going through the process of application, court by court, no matter how hard they were being rejected. Their indefatigable attitude should encourage the anti-apostate groups to do just the same to fight for their own rights. In the second case, Nyonya Tahir, the pro-apostate groups showed their consent in testifying the Syrian Court, which had never been done before. In the final case, Juli Jalaludin showed a high level of self-motivation when expressing her emotions and ideology. She used any possible means to follow her strategies; those means included Facebook, Twitter, as well as various weblogs; however, government blocked her attempts several times and she was constantly threatened receiving hostile reactions from the Muslims. The cases challenged the justice system accentuating a social tension between Muslims and other religious minorities in Malaysia. This article concluded that apostasy was a highly sensitive issue in the multicultural and multi-confessional texture of Malaysia. The authors believed that maintaining the harmony in the Malaysian Society requires diligent actions from the government.

In another research¹⁰⁰ though not directly related to this research, the issue of apostasy in Malaysia was addressed since conversion to Islamic is a common daily activity in that country. However, Muslim converts are faced with some problems after their conversion. These problems are due to reasons like lack of knowledge, realization, confirmation or confused acceptance of the religion, or even sociological complexities and negative influences of the surroundings. Islamic conversion could be done at any time by a non-Muslim by declaring the *kalimah shahadah* in private or in public. However, the issue of conversion is a complicated phenomenon. The transition period that the converts experienced indicates their inner conflicts in an attempt to adapt

¹⁰⁰ Journal of Sciences and Humanities Vol. 8, No 1 (2013)

to their new surroundings. Their original faith may no longer be relevant. However, adopting a new religion and living in the same society with different traditions of their old religion may result in invisible inner conflicts. Therefore, these feelings could gradually lead them to various conflicting feelings towards Islam. Research studies have been done regarding conversion to Islam and its outcomes. While every convert is different, and their experiences differ from person to person, one can say that a majority of converts take shape into a certain mould. After conversion, they go through identifiable phases, which are elation, emphatic enthusiasm, fanaticism, disillusionment, weakness, and renewal. Certain problems that Muslim converts are face with in Malaysia were explore in the study.

Fieldwork by *Sebnem Koser Akcapar* (2006) suggests that conversion to Christianity in Turkey among Iranian Shi'ites is often used as a migration strategy at a later stage of the migration process – usually after rejection by the UNHCR.

There are some reports by International Campaign for Human Rights such as *The Cost of Faith Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran*. In the present report, 31 Iranian Christians were interviewed between April 2011 and July 2012. About half of the interviews took place in person with Iranian Christian refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey during April 2011. The remaining were conducted using other means such as Skype video, telephone, and email.

The review of the literature proves that although there are several studies on Iranian converts and the issue of apostasy in Iran¹⁰¹, none of them tackled the issue of conversion among Iranians in Kuala Lumpur. More importantly, this study attempts to

¹⁰¹ Noori Ghale no says that "The issue of apostasy has social, political, legal and theological dimensions that everyone should be examined independently. However, in this study, focuses are on recognition of apostasy and its conditions. It is duty of the thinkers and writers to investigate other dimensions." Khadije Noori Ghale no, Islam viewpoint to the Apostasy with glances in Iran law, *International Research Journal of Applied and Basic Sciences*, Vol. 9 (2): 160-167

fill the blank space by connecting the issue of apostasy with the historical and contemporary status of conversion among Muslims.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 3: THEORY OF APOSTASY IN MUSLIM SOURCES

This Chapter will explain different aspects of the term apostasy from before the emergence of Islam until the present time. First the semantics of the word *apostasy* will be addressed. Then the history of apostasy in Arabia as well as the causes of apostasy in the Qur'an will be reviewed. In addition, verses related to apostasy will be briefly analyzed and we will have a glance at apostasy during the Prophet's lifetime. The apostasy atmosphere in the era of the Islamic Society foundation will be analysed as well. Next, the most significant historical incident after the Prophet's departure i.e. the Ridda Wars will be addressed in more details. The analysis of these wars is amongst the most important topics in this chapter. Then comes the analysis of the Wars of Apostasy.

In the end of the chapter, the different topics such as viewpoints of the jurists, rejection of Apostasy in Islam and Qur'anic verses, attitude towards both traditional and modern ways, roles of the Nonobligatory Principle, punishment of apostates (Prophet's behavior as the third source for this punishment), evidence from Hadith, and viewpoints of contemporary exegetes regarding apostasy will be covered in more details.

3.1 Semantics of the Word Apostasy

Conversion from Islam to another religion or belief makes a person as an apostate. Apostasy, *irtidad* in Arabic, which is understood as leaving Islam and following another religion, has been from early Islam a great offense, and the punishment of this offense is death (Griffel 2008). Griffel, F., 'Apostasy,' in Kramer, Gudrun (ed), encyclopedia of Islam Vol. 3 (2008)

In the Encyclopedia of Islam, apostasy has been defined as follows:

"Apostasy, which comes from the Greek word for "defection" or "revolt", is the partial or complete abandonment or rejection of the beliefs and practices of a religion by a person who is a follower of that religion."
(*Encyclopedia of Islam, Juan E. Campo, Facts on File, 2009, New York*)

The Arabic term for the word apostasy is *riddah* or *irtidad*.

In older references, a number of frequently used terms signify this concept. Among those are blasphemy after accepting Islam, leaving Islam, disobeying Islam, hostility towards Islam, treaty violation against Islam, etc.

The following definitions are given in Arabic lexicons for the words: The verb *riddah* means to return from something as Ibn Manzur says in *Lisan al-Arab* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, Vol. 1, p. 478, 1993).

In his *al-Sihah fi al-Lugha* (The Correct Language), al-Jawhari contends that, "*irtidad is the same as returning.*" (*al-Sihah fi al-Lugha*, Vol. 2, p. 473.)

Ibn Fares in *Maqayis al-Lugati* says, "*irtidad* means returning." He adds, "*A murtad is called so because they return themselves to their infidelity.*" (*Maqayis al-Lugati*, Vol. 2, p. 386.)

Al-Raghib al-Isfahani has explained about the meanings and usages of *irtidad* in details. He says that *irtidad* and *riddah* mean going back from a route one has taken before; but *riddah* is exclusively used in case of fidelity while *irtidad* is used in case of infidelity as well as other conditions (*Al-Mufradat*). Therefore, we conclude that the word *murtad* (apostate) can be used as an indication of one returning from a faith if we just consider the semantics of the word.

The phrase *irtadda dinihi* means he revolted from his religion. The person who commits *riddah* is called murtad. This argument has its roots in Q2:217 when it says, “And whosoever of you turns back from his religion and dies as a disbeliever...”¹⁰⁶ Arguments about who is considered an apostate are quite diverse in the Islamic Jurisprudence.

Regarding apostasy and its requirements, there is a lot of disagreement among earlier scholars. However, most of the recent scholars have considered apostasy as *leaving Islam to join other than Islam*¹⁰³ as well as *turning away from Islam*.¹⁰⁴

In addition, other definitions could be spotted in other writings. *Returning to blasphemy*¹⁰⁵, *leaving the religion*¹⁰², *dropping with Islam*¹⁰⁷, and *conversion form one religion*¹⁰⁸ to another are among such definitions.

According to the earlier scholars, an apostate is the one who “leaves the Islamic law, Sharia, since every one that denies any command by god or the Prophet, PBUH, has indeed disobeyed Islam.” However, more recent scholars define the apostate as “anyone who denies the Muhammad is the messenger of god... and join Christianity or Judaism or disbelieve in the prophets, revelation and afterlife resurrection.”¹⁰⁹ Also, “An apostate is someone who leaves the Islamic Society.”¹¹⁰

3.2 The History of Apostasy in Arabia

Knowing the history of apostasy in Arabia is a great help in the analysis of this topic during the early period of Islam. One can guess that conversion to another religion has

102 وَ مَنْ يُكَلِّمْهُمُ عَلَىٰ عَيْنِ عَهْدٍ فَقَاتِلْهُ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ لِكُلِّ ظَالِمٍ فَعْلٌ ۚ

¹⁰³ Ahmad Fathi Bahnasi, *Al-Hodoud Fel Islam*, p. 161

¹⁰⁴ Ahmad Ibrahim, *Al-Ahkam al Shareih lel Ahval al-Shakhsieh*, p.112

¹⁰⁵ Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Al-Fatawi*, Vol. 5, p. 1757

¹⁰² Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Quran*, Vol. 2, p. 228

¹⁰⁷ Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani, *Al-Mizan*, Vol. 2, p. 156

¹⁰⁸ Abul Hasan Ali Hasani Nadwi, *Irtidad*, p.4

¹⁰⁹ Abul Hasan Ali Hasani Nadwi, *Irtidad*, p.4

¹¹⁰ Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Quran*, Vol. 6, p. 917

not been an important deal among the Arab people as far as it was not tied to their tribal or individual worldly interests. Therefore, it is not unusual that in the texts remained from the Period of Ignorance (*Jahiliyyah*) we do not see many recounts of the possible punishments for conversion or the way they encountered the apostates.

Historical surveys regarding two religious creeds, who did not believe in the common faith among the Arab people of that period, show that those creeds, known as *ḥunafā* and *Zindīqs*, were not considered a big concern. *Ḥunafā* asserted that they were attempting to revive the Abarahmic ideology. Some of them joined Christianity as they considered it the righteous religion of their era. Some of the researchers think that *Zindīqs* were indeed the fire-worshippers who, under the influence of the Ancient Iranian religion i.e. Zoroastrianism, believed in Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) and Ahura Mazda (Ohrmuzd). There are no reports to indicate intensive quarrels between these creeds and the followers of the dominant faith, which was idolatry.¹¹¹

However, due to an oral culture among the Arabs of that era and the lack of documented historical books or treatises, little information is available. Amidst the historical accounts of famous religions common at that territory, some evidence for conversions amongst the Arabs can found. Four major religions have been reported to be common among the Arabs.¹¹⁶

3.2.1 Polytheists (Moshrekin)

Most of the Arabs were idolaters although some tribes converted to Judaism and Christianity. They worshiped numerous idols, and each tribe had its idol (s). The main

¹¹¹ Seiffollah Sarami, *The Apostasy Decrees from Islamic and Human Rights Points of View*, Tehran, Andishe Eslami, (1997), p. 116; Also see: Ghada Osman, Pre-Islamic Arab Converts to Christianity in Mecca and Medina: An Investigation into the Arabic Sources, *The Muslim Word*, Volume 95, and January 2005.

¹¹⁶ There are some reports suggesting that other religions including religion of Zarathustra and Manichaeism were also common. See: Masudi, *Murujadh-dhahab, Dar al Kitab Al Alam, Beirut, (1989), vol1-2, p439*, Also: Ya'qubi, *TarikhYaqubi, Dar Sader, Beirut, vol1, p254*

god in the Arabian was *Hubal*. There is a great deal of evidence in this regard in historical text¹¹³ and more importantly in the Qur'an¹¹⁴.

3.2.2 Jews

Jewish colonies flourished in the Arabian Peninsula long before Mohammed strode onto the proscenium of history.¹¹⁵ Judaism was one of the oldest monotheistic religions in there. They came to Hijaz after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and drove the Jews out of Palestine and Syria. There were three main Jewish tribes in Medina before the rise of Islam. These were the *Banu Nadir*, the *Banu Qainuqa*, and the *Banu Qurayza*. *Banu Nadir* was particularly hostile to Muhammad's new religion.¹¹² All three tribes were rich and powerful; also, they were more civilized than the Arabs. At the beginning of the prophet's migration, they were friendly to him. However, after a while they became enemies. Most confrontations have been reported in Medinan verses.

3.2.3 Christianity

The presence of Christians in this territory is not surprising as it was limited to the Roman Empire North and Ethiopia from South. A great deal of evidence in the Qur'an and other historical texts suggest such presence.¹¹⁷ A large number of Christian tribes are known to have inhabited or moved around vast areas of Arabia in pre-Islamic times. Christian Arabs had been doing business in Arabia for centuries. The Romans had converted the north Arabian tribe of *Ghassan* to Christianity. Some clans of *Ghassan* had migrated to *Hijaz* and settled there. The Christian tribe of the *Banu Ghassan* even had a stall close to the Ka'ba in Mecca because they were *hulafa* (associates) of the Christian *Quraish* clan of *Banu Assad*. In the south, there were many Christians in

¹¹³ In historical reports, we read that when the prophet conquered Mecca, there were 360 idols in it. It is also reported that each tribe had its own idol. *Ibn Hisham*, Vol 1, p 79, 86

¹¹⁴ See: *Wahbah Mustafa al-Zuhayli*, Tafsir al-Muneer, revelation of surah al jathiya verses 23.

¹¹⁵ http://www.hebrewhistory.info/factpapers/fl-043_preislam.htm

¹¹² Ya'qubi, *Tarikh Yaqubi*, Vol 1, p 257

¹¹⁷ *Ibn Hisham*, Vol 1, p 32

Yemen where the creed was originally brought by the Ethiopian invaders. Their strong center was the town of *Najran*.

3.2.4 Hanif (Abrahamic) religion

Historical texts suggest that there were certain individuals in Arabia called hanifs having repudiated the old gods, paved the way for Islam but embraced neither Judaism nor Christianity. Figures like Waraqah bin Nawfal, a cousin of the Prophet's first wife, Khadijah, and Umayyah bin Abu al-Salt, an early seventh-century Arab poet.^{118, 119}

The culture of the Arabs was intimately attached to the geographic realities they were living in. The harsh desert was not a place to be alone in. Given a tribal life and living in tents, clans and descent was much more important than anything else amongst the pre-Islamic (Jahiliyya) Arabs¹⁶⁰. In such a social structure, every single member of a clan is responsible against all other members. Indeed, honor is equal to dependence on the clan. Therefore, conversion from the dominant religion, as long as it is not in conflict with the interests of the tribe, would not be a big deal. That is why in the pre-Islamic history, nothing can be found regarding the punishment or dealing with the apostates.¹⁶¹ However, in respect with the intense confrontation with the newly Muslims, and tormenting them during the first years of Islam, was chiefly because they saw their benefits and tribal bonds in danger. In fact, the pre-Islamic prejudice was the most important reason that people resisted converting to Islam.

In 2005, Ghada Osman published a paper, in which she described how Pre-Islamic Arab Converts to Christianity in Mecca and Medina; as a result, several prominent Meccans and Medinans embraced Christianity. Among the Meccans, as she mentioned,

¹¹⁸ <http://www.britannica.com/topic/hanif>

¹¹⁹ *Ibn Hisham*, Vol. 1, p 237

¹⁶⁰ Montgomery Watt noted, "the lives of most of the Arabs was 'tribal humanism', have been in place before Islam", Muhammad at Madina, Oxford University Press,

¹⁶¹ Q49:14

from Qiṣāṣ¹³⁰ In addition, it is mentioned in *Tanwīr al-Miqbās min Tafṣīr Ibn ‘Abbās* about Q33:10/11, “when the eyes of the hypocrites grew wild (and hearts) the hearts of the hypocrites (reached to the throats) because of fear, (and ye were imagining vain thoughts concerning Allah) and thought.” Then, a few verses later, it is said that, “if they were attacked from out of town and they were asked to abjure their beliefs they did so, and a very few of them resisted.” Q33:14

3.3.4 Disbelievers

The Qur’an (e.g. Q14:13) informs that disbelievers i.e. infidels (*kuffār*) as well as pagans (*mushrikūn*) predominantly attempted to stray the believers from the straight path (*ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*).

Infidels and polytheists of Shu‘ayb’s era: Q7:88 displays how Shu‘ayb and his clan were threatened to be exiled unless they leave their faith.¹³¹

Infidels and pagans of Fir‘awn era, “And O my people! How (strange) it is for me to call you to Salvation while ye call me to the Fire”; “Ye do call upon me to blaspheme against Allah, and to join with Him partners of whom I have no knowledge...” (Q40:41-42)

Infidels of Muḥammad’s era: according to some verses such as Q60:2 the infidels’ wish was to make Muslims abjure their beliefs.¹³⁶ Q2:217 also draw the attention of readers to such attempts. “Nor will they cease fighting you until they turn you back from your faith if they can”¹³³ Q29:12 shows that non-believers used to tell Muslims,

¹³⁰ Tabarsi, *Majma‘ al-Bayan fi-Tafsir al-Qur’an*, Vol 2, p338

«حارث بن مسهر بن عمار أَمَتَ وَكَانَ قَتْلَ الْمَحْزَبِينَ فِي الدَّلِيلِ وَيَدْرَأُ، وَهَرَبَ وَاتَّخَذَ مِنَ الْإِسْلَامِ، لِحَقِّبَ كَيْفَ تَمُوتُ»
¹³¹ قَالَ لِلْأَمَلِ الَّذِينَ يَلْبَسُونَ مِنْ قَوْمِهِمْ خَرَجَ لِقَائِهِمْ فِي الْبَيْتِ وَالَّذِينَ أَقْبُوا مِنْكَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ أُولَئِكَ يَحْذَرُونَ لِقَائَكَ أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ الْكَافِرِينَ
¹³² إِنِّي كَيْفَ يَكُونُ الْإِيمَانُ أَغْدَاءَ هَيْسَطُوا إِلَيْكُمْ فَيَكُونُوا وَلَدِيَّةً فَتَمْلِكُ لَكُمْ وَتُذَوِّلُكُمْ وَتُغْنِيكُمْ عَنْ يَدَيْكُمْ
¹³³ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يَقُولُونَ سَتُحْيِيهِمْ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَكَاظِمُونَ

“If you abjure your faith to Islam and follow our beliefs, they will take responsibility for all your sins.”¹³⁴

3.3.5 Oppressor Kings

The kings who torture people to make them abandon their beliefs are other causes of apostasy. Some of these kings are named in the Qur'an:

- i. The king in the period of *aṣḥāb al-Kahf* who attempted to divert the seven sleepers from God's path:
- ii. “If they should get knowledge of you, they will stone you, or restore you to their creed; then you will not prosper ever” (Q18:20)¹³⁵

Pharaoh (*Fir'awn*) was also one of those kings who cruelly threatened magicians to death when they believed in the God of Aaron and Moses (*qālū'ammanā bi-rabbi Hārūn was Mūsā*) (Q20:70)¹³².

3.3.6 People of the Book (*AHL AL-KITĀB*)

Some verses of the Qur'an (Q2:109 and Q3:69) say that Jews and Christians had tried to deviate Muslims from their belief. Al-Wāhidī says that Q3:72 was revealed due to a conspiracy plan designed by some Jewish elites; they all made a pledge to “join the religion of the Muhammad at the beginning of the day and declare their disbelief in it at the end of the day.” Therefore, they will be able to corrupt the Muslim faith.¹³⁷

3.3.7 The Absence of Prophets

Based on some verses the prophets are considered as one of the most important barriers to apostasy and heresy; as long as one of them was with believers, they were

¹³⁴ قَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّبِعُوا سَبِيلَنَا وَلْنَحْمِلْ خَطَايَكُمْ وَمَا مُبْدِئُكُمْ بِهَا بَلْ كُنْتُمْ بِآيَاتِنَا إِذْ هُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ
¹³⁵ لَوْ كُنْتُمْ إِذْنًا قَائِلِينَ بِمَا نَدَّيْكُمْ أَفَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا نُنَزِّلُ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا وَلَكِنْ كُنْتُمْ إِذْ هُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ
¹³⁶ فَكَلِمَاتٍ لِّتُؤْخَذَ بِهَا مَوَاقِلُ ۚ وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ۚ ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ إِلَّا الصَّالِحِينَ

¹³⁷ Al- wahidi, *Asbab AL-Nuzul*, translated by Mokrane Guezzou, Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008, Also see: Al-Bayhaqi, Al-Sunan vol 3, p 281, Also: al-Tabari, Jāmi' al-bayān, vol 3, p 423.

protected and reassured, and so it was more difficult to make them detach from their faith.

In Q20:85 and Q2:51, 92 it is mentioned that the Israelite clan started to worship a golden calf again because of Samiri's trick when Moses disappeared. During the Conversation with God, He asks Moses why his clan started to adore an idol again. Moses says, "As long as I was with them, I protected them from heresy and apostasy." (Q5:116/117). In another verse (Q2:133), Jacob (PBUH) was worried about the future of his children after his death. He said, "What will you worship after me?"

Also in *Uhud war*, when the Prophet was rumored to have been killed, the hypocrites said to the believers, "If he has been killed, go back to your [previous] religion."¹³⁸ Al-Tabari explains that this verse has been revealed in the context of the battle of Uhud when rumors about the Prophet's death caused many Muslims to abandon the fight and even brought some of them close to apostasy. Some people started to think about abandoning their religious beliefs, and some became renegades, and the Holy Qur'an says that "*Muhammad is only a messenger; messengers have passed away before him. Why, if he should die or is slain, like others, will you turn back on your heels, will you return to unbelief?*" (Q3:143)

3.3.8 Hypocrisy

The hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is sickness have the perfect base for abjuration, and at the first good opportunity they will leave Islam and turn into renegades (Q33:11/14). Qur'an says, "Of people, there are some who say, 'We believe in God and the Last Day,' when they are not believers.' They seek to trick God and those who believe, but they trick none save themselves, though they perceive not." (Q2:8-9).

¹³⁸ Al-Suyuti and Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli, *Ibid*.

3.4 An Analysis of Apostasy Verses

The Qurān itself contains many verses regarding apostasy. With a search in these verses, we can divide the subjects into eight categories based on their contents.

3.4.1 Apostate's Doom

These verses have promised the apostate doom and perdition in the hereafter, and loss of apostate's deeds. Q2:217 is one of such verses:

وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ حَتَّى يَرُدُّوكُمْ عَنْ دِينِكُمْ إِنِ اسْتَطَاعُوا وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَئِكَ حَبِطَتْ

أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

Many points about apostasy can be deduced from this verse, including the efforts of infidels to turn back Muslims from Islam; this issue will be discussed under the cause analysis of apostasy. Some commentators such as Fakhr Razi have also interpreted “loss of deeds in the world”¹³⁹ as the execution of punishment for the apostate, which can be applied in regards to the killing of the apostates.

3.4.2 Satan's Role

Some of these verses such as Q47:5 refer to the deception of human by the Satan¹⁴⁰, which is an analysis of the cause of apostasy. How they are tormented is also mentioned in these verses. In this category, the following verses can be named: Q3:85, 88, 91,106; Q6:71 and Q39:65.

3.4.3 Harmfulness of Apostasy

In this group of verses, apostasy is condemned, and it is stated that apostasy does not harm God. Verses such as Q3:144, 177 and Q5:54 can be mentioned in this regard.

¹³⁹ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا
¹⁴⁰ الشَّيْطَانُ سَوَّلَ لَهُمْ

3.4.4 Apostasy as a Cause of Hypocrisy

Another series of verses consider apostasy as a cause of hypocrisy. This is seen in Q63:31 and has been noted in verses 65 to 80.

3.4.5 Miscellaneous Causes of Apostasy

In another group of verses, the causes of apostasy are discussed in detail. In Q16:107, 108, Q3:100 and Q4:89, choosing the world against the hereafter, obedience, and friendship with infidels (Kafir) and People of the Book (Ahl al-Kitāb), deception by Satan, and being sealed on the eyes and ears have been mentioned as causes of apostasy.

3.4.6 Legitimacy of Muhammad's Prophecy

In these verses, the issue of the legitimacy of the prophecy of the prophet (Q3:81) turning away from the divine covenant is mentioned. They are perverted transgressors (Q3:82). Seeking a religion other than Islam is also rejected (Q3:85). This verse is also considered as a reference regarding the killing of the apostates.

3.4.7 Blasphemy

Q16:106 refers to some blasphemous words spoken by the Muslims. The issue occurs in the case of coercion.

3.4.8 Repentance

Verses Q3:86-89 emphasize on repentance for those who have turned back from Islam because of ignorance. Although the first series of the verses have been revealed in the context of arguing with the People of the Book, commentators such as *Wehbe Alzohaili* have pointed out the issue of apostasy regarding their revelation. As in the last verses, returning under duress and coercion is also mentioned in these verses. In verses Q3:90 and Q4:137, the issue of the repentance of the apostates have been discussed again. However, in these verses, more attention has been paid to “go on adding to their

This verse banishes them from turning back to the period before Moses was assigned his mission and they were liberated from Pharaoh's dominion. Some of the exegesis scholars have interpreted the phrase "and turn not back ignominiously"¹⁴⁴ as a ban on returning to Egypt land. Therefore, it is not related to issues such as faith or ideology but related to the fatherland.

Q16:106¹⁴⁵: This verse was revealed in respect with *Yasir, Somayyeh, Suhayb, Bilal* and other companions of the prophet. After the Hijrat of the Prophet to Medina, they were arrested and tortured. *Yasir* and *Somayyeh* were killed. *Ammar*, who was not able to tolerate the tortures, did as he was ordered by the pagans and praised their idols while insulting the Prophet. When freed, *Ammar* went to Medina. He was so upset. However, when he came to the Prophet, he told him the story. He asked, "What was in your heart when you were insulting?" He said, "I was truly sad about it." It was how the above verse was revealed.¹⁴² Again, this verse has nothing to do with ideological conversion.

Q3:86¹⁴⁷: According to this exegesis, one of the *Ansar* (Helpers) joined the enemy, which cannot be an issue of ideological conversion.¹⁴⁸

Q4:137-138¹⁴⁹: The intention of these verses is those people who create parties or groups who become Muslims one day, then become infidels and again turn back to Islam. Such behavior is considered political but not ideological.

Q9:74¹⁵⁰: This honorable verse is related to a person called *Amer*, who once dispraised the Prophet in his absence. After revealing the verse, he confessed to his sin.

¹⁴⁴ وَلَا تَوَلَّوْا عَٰدُوهُنَّ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْوَيْلُ مِنْ أَلْفٍ مِّنَ الْغَنَاقِ ۚ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفٰسِقُونَ
¹⁴⁵ مَنْ هَكَذَا قَالَ اللَّهُ جَزَاءُ مَنْ يُدْعِي إِلَىٰ هٰذَا إِلَّا مِنْ قَبْلِ هٰذَا هَدَيْنَاهُ سَبِيلَ الْغَيِّ ۚ إِنَّهٗ كَفُورٌ مُّذِيبٌ ۚ إِنَّ يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيۤ اٰمَنَ اِنْ وَلَّيْتَ مِنْ شَرِّ الْغٰفِرِ كَرِهَ لِهٰذَا يَوْمٍ ۚ ۞ بِ جَنَ اللَّهِ لِيُؤْتِيَهُمْ عَذَابَ عَٰلَمٍ

¹⁴² Al-Wahidi, *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁷ اَلَّذِيۤ اٰتٰنِيۤ هٰذَا الشَّقْوَةُ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لِّيۤ اِلٰهٌ اِلَّا هُوَ ۚ وَشَهِدُوا اَنَّ لِّلرَّسُوْلِ حَقَّ وِجَءٍ مِّنۢ مَّۤا لَمْ يَلْقَۡنَا وَاَللّٰهُ لَا يَهْدِيۤ الْقَوْمَ الْفٰسِقِيۡنَ
¹⁴⁸ Ibn 'Abbas reported that a man from the Helpers renounced his religion and joined the idolaters, and Allah, exalted is He, revealed (shall Allah guide a people who disbelieved after their belief) up to His saying (Save those who afterward repent...) (Q3:89). His people sent him these verses and when they were read to him, he said, "By Allah, my people are not telling a lie about the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, nor is the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, telling a lie about Allah. By Allah, I will believe all three", and he went back repentant. The Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, accepted his repentance and let him be.

¹⁴⁹ اِنَّ الَّذِيۤنَ اٰقْبَوْكُم مِّنۢ مَّكْرٍ ۚ فَكُفِّرُوْا عَنْهُمْ وَاُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْفٰسِقُونَ ۚ اِذَا دَاوُوا الْغٰثَ الْاَلَمَ لَئِنْ اَسْتَفْتٰنَا لَنَقُولَنَّ لَهُمْ فِىۡ ذٰلِكَ مَا يَشَآءُوْنَ ۚ اَلَا بِمَا كُفَرْتُمْ اَنۢ نَّعْبُدَ اِلٰهًا اِلَّا هُوَ ۚ فَكُفِّرُوْا عَنْهُمْ وَاُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْفٰسِقُونَ ۚ اِنَّ الَّذِيۤنَ اٰقْبَوْكُم مِّنۢ مَّكْرٍ ۚ فَكُفِّرُوْا عَنْهُمْ وَاُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْفٰسِقُونَ ۚ اِذَا دَاوُوا الْغٰثَ الْاَلَمَ لَنَقُولَنَّ لَهُمْ فِىۡ ذٰلِكَ مَا يَشَآءُوْنَ ۚ اَلَا بِمَا كُفَرْتُمْ اَنۢ نَّعْبُدَ اِلٰهًا اِلَّا هُوَ ۚ فَكُفِّرُوْا عَنْهُمْ وَاُولٰٓئِكَ هُمُ الْفٰسِقُونَ ۚ

unusual and new as it already had happened. Through analyzing the literature of conversion to Christianity, a reader may come across three major themes:

- i. *A permanent journey to another land*: there were Muslims traveling to the land of Christians, where they converted to Christianity and lived there forever;
- ii. *Trading connections*: like the journey of some Christian and non-Muslim traders to Hijaz, e.g. from Syria to Medina;
- iii. *Muslims living near the territory of Christians and Jews*: some of their relatives had practiced Christianity or Judaism since their early childhood. Some members of the tribe of the Banu Nadir (in Medina) considered themselves as Jews. When the Prophet Muhammad issued his orders referring to Banu Nadir to leave Medina, some Companions (*sahaba*) attempted to encourage their relatives to convert to Islam. The Prophet then ordered his Companions not to compel anyone to convert but to give them a choice to decide for themselves what religion they wished to follow.¹⁵⁴

Following are some examples of people who turned to Christianity at the beginning of Islam:

3.7.1.1 Two Sons of Abulhusayan

In some *riwa'i* works of the Qur'an such as *Asbab Al-Nuzul* by *al-Wahidi*, it is related that *Abu'l-Husayn* had two sons who had embraced Christianity. Q2:256 was revealed in this regard.

¹⁵⁴ Abu Jafar al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub 'Ilmiyyah, (1992):15-19.

It happened that some traders from Syria came to Medina to sell oil. When the traders were about to leave Medina, the two sons of Abu'l-Husayn called them to embrace Christianity. These traders converted to Christianity and then left Medina. Abu'l-Husayn informed the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, of what had happened. He asked him to summon his two sons. However, then, Allah, exalted is He, revealed that There is no compulsion in religion... The Messenger of Allah, Allah blesses him and give him peace, said, "May Allah banish both of them. They are the first to disbelieve."¹⁵⁵

3.7.1.2 Ubayd Allah Ibn Jahsh

Here is another piece of evidence that a reader may come across about Muslim conversion to Christianity. Biographers reported the story of 'Ubayd Allah ibn Jahsh who seemingly committed apostasy. Ubayd-Allah ibn Jahsh along with his wife Umm Habiba, the daughter of Abu Sufyan, both converted to Islam. Due to Meccan persecution, they inevitably moved to Abyssinia where he converted from Islam to Christianity. He died there as a Christian but not a Muslim.¹⁵² From many sources, it is evident that he became an apostate converting to Christianity.¹⁵⁷

3.7.1.3 Al-Sakran Ibn Amr

According to *al-Tabari*, Ubayd Allah ibn Jahsh was not the only one who left Islam and converted to Christianity in Abyssinia. Also, *Al-Sakran ibn 'Amr* converted from

¹⁵⁵ According to another tradition, reported on the authority of *Mujahid*, it is stated that the verse was revealed against a man of the Ansar of Madina who had a black slave whom he used to compel through physical punishment to practice Islam. This tradition is also reported in a different manner. In another version, two young men had converted to Christianity before Islam. One day they came to Medina with other Christians as traders. Their father took hold of them and did not leave them until they embraced Islam, but they refused. The man protested to the Prophet Muhammad and said, "Should I let part of me enter the Hell-fire while I look on?" Upon revealing the verse, the man let his two sons go. (*Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.)

¹⁵² Ubaydullah went on searching until Islam came; then he migrated with the Muslims to Abyssinia taking with him his wife, Umm Habiba bint Abu Sufyan, who was a Muslim too. When he arrived there, he adopted Christianity, parted from Islam, and died a Christian in Abyssinia. Muhammad bin Jafaral-Zubayr told me that when he had become a Christian. 'Ubaydullah as he passed the prophet's companions who were there used to say, "We see clearly, but your eyes are only half open." He meant, "We see, but you are only trying to see and cannot see yet." Muhammad ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*. Translated by Guillaume, A. 1955.

¹⁵⁷ Ibn Hajr Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, Dar Al Rayyan Heritage, (1986) no:3660

« وهاجرت أم عبيدة وهي بنت طلحة بن عبيد الله مع زوجها عبيد الله بن جحش فمات قال، فقال: لن يقره الله »

Islam to Christianity there¹⁵⁸. *Al-Sakran ibn Amr* ibn Abd Shams (brother of *Suhayl ibn Amr* and *Hatib ibn Amr*) was the former husband of the Prophet's wife, *Sawdah*. He embraced Islam very early and migrated with his wife to Abyssinia during the second emigration. Some contend that *Al-Sakran ibn 'Amr* died in Abyssinia as a Muslim although a second source suggests that he came to Mecca, then returned to Abyssinia as a Christian, and died there.¹⁵⁹

3.7.1.4 Christian man who rejected Islam, so the earth threw him out

There is a *Hadīth* recorded by *al-Bukhari* that *Anas ibn Malik* reported, "There was a Christian who embraced Islam and read Surat-al-Baqara and Al-Imran, and he used to write (the revelations) for the Prophet. Later on, when he returned to Christianity, he used to say, "Muhammad knows nothing but what I have written for him." Then Allah caused him to die, and the people buried him, but in the morning, they saw that the earth had thrown his body out. They said, "This is the act of Muhammad and his companions. They dug the grave of our friend and took his body out of it because he had run away from them." They again dug the grave deeply for him, but in the morning, they again saw that the earth had thrown his body out. They said, "This is an act of Muhammad and his companions. They dug the grave of our companion and threw his body outside it, for he had run away from them." They dug the grave for him as deep as they could, but in the morning, they again saw that the earth had thrown his body out. So they believed that what had befallen him was not done by human beings and had to leave him thrown (on the ground)."¹²⁰

¹⁵⁸ al-Tabari Muhammad ibn Jarir, *Tarikh al-Tabari(History of the Prophets and Kings)*, vol 9:128

¹⁵⁹ al-Tabari, *Ibid* 9:128 and Jamhara, p.157.

¹²⁰ Muhammad al-Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, English translation by M. Muhsin Khan, Volume 4, Book 56, Number 814

3.7.2 Those Who Became Kafir

Following are some examples of people who became infidels at the beginning of Islam:

3.7.2.1 Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn Abi Sarh

Abdullah Ibn Sa'd Ibn Abi Sarh was the foster brother of Uthman and one of the prophet's 42 scribes of the Qur'an.¹²¹ Al-Tabari, in his book on *History*, records about him and the Prophet Muhammad that Abdallah ibn Sa'd ibn AbiSarh used to write for him. In some reports concerning him such as *Usûd Ulghâbah fî Ma'rîfat Is-Sahâbah* by *Ibn al-Athîr*, it is reported that:

*He converted to Islam before the conquest of Mecca and immigrated to the Prophet (P). He used to record the revelation for the Prophet (P) before he apostatized and went back to Mecca. Then he told Quraysh, "I used to orient Muhammad wherever I willed, he dictated to me 'All-Powerful All-Wise' and I suggest 'All-Knowing All-Wise' so he would say, 'Yes, it is all the same.'"*¹⁶²

According to this source and History of *al-Tabari*, he apostatized from Islam and later returned to Islam on the day of the conquest of *Mecca*.¹²³

Ibn Abu Sarh renounced Islam and departed from the Prophet's company by moving to Mecca. About the reason of *ibn Abu Sarh's* apostasy, it is recorded that he portrayed the prophet as a "self-created" prophet and "liar." On the day when *Mecca* was conquered, the Messenger gave an instruction that he should be put to death. However,

¹²¹ In the books of history The Prophet's scribes, who wrote the wahy, letters, and agreements it is reported that, "Ali ibn AbiTalib, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, 'Amr ibn Al-'As, Mu'awiyah ibn AbiSufyan, Shurahbil ibn Hasanah, 'Abdullah ibn Sa'd ibn AbiSarh, Al-Mughirah ibn Shu'bah, Ma'adh ibn Jabal, Zayd ibn Thabit, Hanzalah ibn Al-Rabi', Ubay ibn Ka'b, Juha'ym ibn Al-Salt, Husayn Al-Numayri." (Ya'qubi, *Ibid* vol 2, p 69).

¹²⁶ Ibn al-Athîr, *Usûd Ulghâbah fî Ma'rîfat Is-Sahâbah*, 1995, Dâr al-Fikr, Beirut (Lebanon), Volume 3, p. 154.

¹²³ Al-Tabari, "History of al-Tabari, The Last Years of the Prophet", transl. Ismail K. Poonawala, Vol. 9, p.148, Albany: State University of New York Press.

in Mecca, Uthman interceded in his favor, and the Prophet said there was no need to kill him.¹²⁴ Sa'd narrated,

*On the day when Mecca was conquered, the Apostle of Allah gave protection to the people except for four men and two women, and he named them. Ibn AbuSarh was one of them. He then narrated the tradition. He said, "Ibn AbuSarh hid with Uthman ibn Affan. When the Apostle of Allah called the people to take the oath of allegiance, he brought him and made him stand before the Apostle of Allah. He said, 'Apostle of Allah, receive the oath of allegiance from him.' He raised his head and looked at him thrice, denying him every time. After the third time, he received his oath. He then turned to his Companions and said, 'Is not there any intelligent man among you who would stand to this (man) when he saw me desisting from receiving the oath of allegiance, and kill him?' They replied, 'We do not know, Apostle of Allah, what lies in your heart; did you not give us a hint with your eye?' He said, 'It is not proper for a Prophet to have a treacherous eye' "*¹⁶⁵

3.7.2.2 Ayyash bint abi Rabi'ah

'Ayyash bint Abi Rabi'ah as recorded by *al-Tabari*, was a half-brother of *Abu Jahl*.¹²² He abandoned his faith because of infidels' pressure and became apparently an apostate. However, after a while, he asked for forgiveness and moved to Medina and Q16:110 was sent for him.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, vol 7, p 28. This case is also covered in a hadith collection of Abu Dawud.

¹²⁵ Translation of Sunan Abu-Dawud (partial). Translated by Professor Ahmad Hasan (online) Hadith 14:2677

¹²² al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari Vol. 39: Biographies of the Prophet's Companions and their Successors*, published by State University of New York Press, volume xxxix P112.

¹²⁷ According to Tafsir Ibn Kathir there is a difference of opinion concerning the reason behind revealing the verse based on Mujahid and others that it was revealed about Ayyash bin AbiRabiah. Based on Abdur-Rahman bin Zayd bin Aslam that verse was revealed about Abu Ad-Darda because he killed a man after he embraced the faith. (Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Volume 2, p543, publisher Daru salam, 2003. See also: Majma' al-Bayan fi-Tafsir al-Qur'an vol 6, p 598).

نزلت هذه الآية في عمار بن عبد الله وعياض بن أبي ربيعة واللهم بن أبي ربيعة: ..وقال آخرون ببل زلت هذه الآية في شريك بن أبي نفيس.

3.7.2.3 The tribe of 'Ukal

There are different versions as regard to the reason for the revelation of the verses 5:33-4. One of the versions is narrated by Bukhari on the authority of *Anas Ibn Malik*. According to *Bukhari*, there is a *Hadīth* to justify capital punishment for apostasy, which happened during the Prophet's life when dealing with some people from the tribe of 'Ukal. Based on this Hadith, the people from *Urayna* (or 'Ukal) tribe came to *Medina* after accepting Islam.

*Anas said, "Some people from the tribe of 'Ukal came to the Prophet and embraced Islam. The climate of Medina did not suit them, so the Prophet ordered them to go to the (herd of milk) camels of charity and drink their milk and urine (as a medicine). They did so, and after they had recovered from their ailment (became healthy), they turned renegades (reverted from Islam), killed the shepherd of the camels and took the camels away. The Prophet sent (some people) in their pursuit, and so they were (caught and) brought, and the Prophets ordered that their hands and legs should be cut off and that their eyes should be branded with heated pieces of iron, and that their cut hands and legs should not be cauterized, till they die."*¹⁶⁸

In the midst of disagreements on the punishment of the people from *Urayna* among the scholars, we find how and why they became apostates. As *Jamal Badawi* says, "The question here is whether they were killed because of apostasy or because of their brutal murder of innocent people. It appears certain that it was the later reason."¹²⁹ It seems

¹²⁸ Muhammad Ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Dar al-Fikr, vol 1, p64.

Bukhari has narrated this under the Diiat (blood money) Topic, the Chapter titled "Al-Ghassameh", No. 6899. Also Moslem has narrated this under the topic of those who fight and apostize, No. 1671. Nessaei has cited this in his Tahrir al dam (Blood Prohibition) No. 4024-1035 and Abu Davoud in his Hodud (Limits) No. 4364.

حيث صح رواه البخاري في باب 11 من كتاب الحدود (خ 233)، مسلم 171
¹²⁹ Jamal A. Badawi, "Is Apostasy a Capital Crime in Islam?" Apr. 26, 2006.

along with Abujahl...”¹⁷³ The sources that mentioned this event do not specify the name and the number of those apostates. Rather, they all speak of the event in an unqualified manner.¹⁷⁴ Regarding Q17:60, Imam Tabari says, “this verse alludes to those people who apostatized after they heard about the story of the Prophet’s *Isra* and *Miraj*. It is also about the pagans of Mecca who became infidels after hearing this.”¹⁷⁵

3.7.2.5 The group who joined the idolaters, at the battle of Badr

Qays ibn al-Fakih ibn al-Mughirah al-Harith ibn Zam'ah ibn al-Aswad, Qays ibn al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah, Abu'l-'As ibn Munabbih ibn al-Hajjaj and 'Ali ibn Umayyah ibn Khalaf are among such apostates. This group consisted of some newly Muslims who did not emigrate. At the Battle of Badr, they joined the idolaters in their fight against the Muslims in the end, and they died as infidels in this war. Al-Wahidi deemed that Q4:97 refers to these people.¹⁷² There is a tradition that 'Abd ibn Hamid, Ibn AbiHatim and Ibn Jarir have narrated from 'Ikrimah about the verse that they were forced to follow Muslim armies:

"When the polytheists of Quraysh and their followers went forth to protect Abu Sufyan ibn Harb and the caravan of the Quraysh from the Messenger of Allah and his companions and also to intend to take revenge of what they had suffered at Nakhlah, they took with them some youths who were unwilling (to join them as) they had (secretly) accepted Islam. They faced the Muslims at Badr without prior rendezvous. So (those youths) were killed

¹⁷³ Ibn Kathir, *Ibid*, vol 5p28.

¹⁷⁴ Also, interpretations of Qur'an such as Tafsir al-Jalalayn has maintained, “during the Night Journey, except as a test for people, [for] the people of Mecca — since they denied it and some of them [even] apostatized when he [the Prophet] informed them of it”

¹⁷⁵ Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, Dar El Marefeh, 1412.

¹⁷² This verse was revealed about some people in Mecca who professed Islam but did not migrate; they showed faith outwardly but were hypocrites inwardly. At the Battle of Badr, they joined the idolaters in their fight against the Muslims and were killed therein. (Al-Wahidi, *Ibid*)

at Badr while they were kafirs and have turned away from Islam, and they were those we have named above."¹⁷⁷

3.7.2.6 Al-Harith ibn Suwayd al Ansari

As mentioned previously, he was one of the Prophet's supporters who lived in Medina. After killing a man, he ran away to Mecca because he was afraid of the retaliation and became an apostate. However, after some time, he regretted and sent someone to see Prophet and asked for forgiveness and came back to Medina. It is also maintained that the Qur'anic verses Q3:86-9 were revealed in reply to this situation.¹⁷⁸

3.7.2.7 Meghiss ibn Sobabe Kanani

He was a poet from before Islam who lived in *Mecca*. After the murder of his brother by *Bani Najjar's* clan, he came to Medina and showed himself as a Muslim and went to the Prophet to ask for reparation. After he had got what he wanted, he killed a man from this clan, became an apostate and ran away to *Mecca*¹⁷⁹. The Prophet said, "I will not let him be safe inside or outside the Holly place." In the end, he was killed in Mecca's war. The context of Q4:93 is attributed to him.¹⁸⁰

3.7.2.8 Bashir ibn Obiregh

With his two brothers, *Bashar* and *Mashir* who were from *Ansar*, he disobeyed many laws of Islam, became an apostate and ran away to Mecca. Q3:115 is about him.¹⁸¹ Based on some other Qur'anic specialists, this verse is about the three brothers, and the preceding verse is about them.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁷ Tabatabai, Muhammad Hussein, *tafsir al- Mizan*

¹⁷⁸ al-Tabari, vol,3, p338.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, vol,2, p110.

¹⁸⁰ Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari*, vol 5,p 294.

¹⁸¹ Tabarsi, *Ibid*,vol 3, p 169. .

¹⁸⁶ Abu l-Futuh al-Razi, *Rawz al-jinan wa ruh al-jinan*, vol 3, p 169.

3.7.2.9 Uqba ibn abu Mu'ayt

Based on the testimony of *ibn Abbas*, he was from people who became renegades, and Q25:27 is about him. One day, he invited the Prophet for dinner, but the Prophet said, I, “will not eat anything until you say the word that makes you a Muslim”. For that, he said the words and became a Muslim, but with the pressure of *Abi ibn Khalfah*, he insulted the prophet, became an apostate and in the end died by the hand of the Prophet in Badr’s war.¹⁸³

3.7.2.10 The women who became apostates

Qur’an’s specialists, in Q60:11, recognize the women who became apostates and joined the infidels.¹⁸⁴ Umm Ruman committed apostasy. The Holy Prophet ordered her to make repentance. If she repented, she was still a Muslim, but if she refused, she would be put to death.¹⁸⁵

3.8 An analysis of Apostasy Atmosphere in the Era of the Islamic Society Foundation

After exploring the mentioned cases of persons or groups that became apostates when the Islamic Society was being formed (the time of the prophet and right after his death), it can be concluded that those cases were completely politically oriented. In other words, it was not so as to someone leave their faith due to pondering possible issues and contradictions. In the time of the prophet, the infidels were continuously attempting to divide the Muslims through the apostasy. They invoked everything including battles, deception, separation, and so on. The Qur’an reminds the Muslims:

¹⁸³ Al-Wahidi, *Ibid* (http://www.answering-christianity.com/umar/dead_poets_rebuttal.htm)

¹⁸⁴ Those women were Ommol hakam Bent AbiSufyan, (ام حكيم بنت أبي سفيان), Fatemeh Bent Abi Ommayeh ibn Maghirh (فاطمه بنت أبي عمير), Barvah Bent Hagib (بروه بنت حبيب), Abde Bent Eydalazza (عبد بن عذلة), Kolsoum or Omme Kolsoum Bent Jarval (كولسوم بنت جرحول), and Shahbe Bent Ghaylan (شاهبة بنت غيلان), or Hende Bent AbiJahl (هندة بنت أبي جهل). The Prophet spoiled them from their marriage portion and gave it to their husbands. Al-Qurtubi, *Ibid*, vol18, p 47.

¹⁸⁵ Daraquini and Baihaqi. This tradition is reported through a weak chain of transmission.(al-Showkaani Vol. 7, p.226)

ولا يزالون يقاتلونكم حتى يردوكم عن دينكم ...¹⁸⁶

يردوكم بعد ايمانكم كافرين¹⁸⁷

يردونكم على اعقابكم¹⁸⁸

The hypocrite ethos i.e. pretending to have faith and accompanying the Muslims, and then leaving it to undermine their faith was another behavior among the Jews and Christians that is mentioned in the Qur'an (Q3:72). According to the Qur'an, also the hypocrites did so. They used to change their faith many times scornfully (Q5:51-54; Q63:3). They would hide their infidelity among the Muslims but tried to make them infidels:

فما لكم في المنافقين فتنين... ودوا لو تكفروا كم اكفروا فتكونون سواء¹⁸⁹

As mentioned under the topic of the *riddah* wars, this era of apostasy was not individual but a group, clan-based movement.

3.9 The Ridda Wars

In Islamic history, the Ridda wars are known as the Wars of Apostasy, or the *Hurub al-Riddah*. They were a series of military campaigns against rebel Arabian tribes between 632 and 633 AD, immediately following the death of Muhammad.¹⁹⁰ There is disagreement as to the causes of the rebels. These wars were both religious and political in nature. "Some argue that it was provoked by a rejection of the taxes the Prophet had

¹⁸² Q2:216

¹⁸⁷ Q3:99

¹⁸⁸ Q3:149

¹⁸⁹ Q4:88

¹⁹⁰ Qur'an's specialists have identified in the Qur'an, other than those people, some groups or clans who lived in the Prophet's time or after him and turned into apostates. Those groups were:

Bani Mazhij (ذريح) whose leader was Zolkhamar ibn Kahbolnahs (ذولخامر بن كعب الهمداني) who claimed to be a Prophet in Yemen. The Prophet wrote a letter to Moazibn Jabal (معاذ بن جبل) and his own family in Yemen and asked them to start a war against this clan.

Banu hanifeh (بنو حنيفة) they were Masilmeh Kazzab's clan who, with other partisans of Kazzab, started a war against Muslims. Some specialists say that the context of the creation of Q6:93 was Kazzab's story. Tabarsi, *Ibid*, vol 4, p 518.

Banu Assad (بنو اسد) (their leader was Talhe or Talyhe Ebn Kholid (طليح بن خolid)). He was among those who pretended to be a prophet, but in the war against Khaled, he was imprisoned by the Muslim army; he asked for forgiveness and became Muslim.

imposed on the Islamicized tribes together with what implied regarding political domination. Others have seen it as expressing a religious revolt, challenging the religion of the new state at Medina. "The author adds another view" "each of the revolts against the new order had its causes."¹⁹¹

3.10 An analysis of the Wars of Apostasy

Examination of many historical references about these wars shows that we can divide these references into three categories¹⁹⁶:

- i. A category of reports emphasize on the vast number of the tribes that abandoned the religion (excluding the people of Mecca, Medina, and their suburbs); the major references for these accounts are the works by Seif ibn Omar (786 AD):
 - Seif ibn Omar, "When people declared their allegiance to Abu Bakr, ... in some tribes, everybody and in others some became apostates." (Tabari, 461/2; History)
 - *Ibid*, "The people of the earth became infidels and all the tribes, but Quraish and Saghif became apostates totally or partly." (Tabari, 475/2; History)
 - *Ibid*, "The tribes Asad, Ghatafan, Havazan, Salim, Tay,... oppressed the Muslims when they became apostates." (Tabari, 490/2; History.)
"All the Arabs became apostates but the people of Mecca, Medina as well as the suburbs and a few more." (Massoudi, 301/2; *Moruj al zahab*.)

¹⁹¹ Encyclopedia of Qur'an Volume I.

¹⁹⁶ Pakatchi Ahmad, *An investigation into the bibliography of Ridda wars*;

- ii. Based on another category of reports, apostasy does not necessarily mean leaving one's religion, but there were Muslims who had problems paying Zakat. The first evidence for this claim is a lecture by the First Caliph in the early days of his reign. [Al-Waqidi, *The Book of Ridda*, p. 48.] He said, "Apostates are two groups: some disapprove of the prayer, and some refuse to pay Zakat."¹⁹³ In addition, the matter is clearly observed in the following references:

*Umar ibn Shabbeh says, "Delegations from Arab tribes went to see him (the Caliph). While they approved of the obligation of the prayer, they refused to pay Zakat. However, Abu Bakr did not accept this approach of theirs and let them go."*¹⁹⁴

Muslim and *Al-Bukhari* reported in their *Sahih*:

"After the Prophet had died, and Abu Bakr was made his successor, there were [some] Arabs who turned to disbelief. 'Umar said, 'O Abu Bakr! How can you fight the people when the Prophet of Allah (S.A.W.) has said, 'I have been ordered to fight the people until they say: 'There is no God but Allah' and whoever says this, makes himself and his property inviolable except by legal right, and his reckoning is with Allah?' Abu Bakr replied: 'By Allah! I will fight whoever differentiates between Salat and Zakat, for Zakat is a lawful right to the property! By Allah! Were they to withhold even a single

¹⁹³ Al-Waqidi, *The Book of Ridda*, p. 51.

¹⁹⁴ Tabari, vol2, p 474.

*animal that they used to give the Prophet of Allah (S.A.W.), I will fight them over their withholding it”.*¹⁹⁵

iii. In this category, the apostates are divided into two group i.e. those who abandoned Islam and those who left Islam thoroughly and the Muslims who refused to pay Zakat¹⁹²:

- Yaghubi reports that “Some Arabs claimed to be a prophet; some became apostates and coronated while another group just refused to pay Zakat.”¹⁹⁷
- Massoudi says, “The majority of Arabs became apostates after the Prophet passed away; a group was infidels, and many declined to pay Zakat.”¹⁹⁸

It is observed that in these historical references, apostasy in the issue of Ridda has been outlined in two different contexts, i.e. completely leaving Islam or refusing to pay the tax (Zakat) while accepting the other aspects of the religion. The blending of the two topics has taken the historical subject to an obscure corner.

3.11 A General Analysis

As mentioned above, apostasy was not solely a matter of changing one’s opinions toward religion, but in many cases, it occurred due to other causes such as conspiracies set to weaken Muslims, heavy offenses like murder, treachery in recording the revelation, spying, or helping the enemies of Islam. Therefore, in the citation of historical evidence to extract capital punishment for special apostasy care must be taken. On the other hand, conversion based on doubts is not very common. Most of the

¹⁹⁵ al-Bukhari in "The Book of Calling the Apostates to Repent" in "The Chapter on Killing those who Refuse to Accept the Obligatory Laws and those Associated with Apostasy" and Muslim, in "The Book of Faith" in "The Chapter on the Order to Fight People"

¹⁹² Those who claimed to be a prophet: Musaylimah bin Ḥabīb from Banu Hanifa [Ibn Qutaybah, al-Ma‘ārif, p. 405; Kahale, Mojam, p. 312] and Sajahbint al-Harith ibn Suaeel from tribe of Banu Bani Yaru [Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr Qurtubi, Asad al Ghaba, Vol. 4, p. 277]. Those who left Islam and converted to their previous religion: These people converted as soon as they heard the news of the Prophet’s death. For instance, shortly after the messenger of god passed away, Monzar ibn Savi, the Muslim governor of Bahrain died too and therefore, some of the people of Bahrain left Islam and became apostates. [Al-Waqidi, Book of Ridda, p. 147; Also: Al-Baladhuri, Futuh al-Buldan]

¹⁹⁷ Yaghubi, *Ibid*, vol 2, p128

¹⁹⁸ Massoudi, 247.

cases are due to denial and hostility rather than a systematic, thoughtful examination of Islam's teachings. In addition, financial issues were among the main reasons stimulating people to leave Islam. Political issues also affected religious people to divert from Islam to another faith.¹⁹⁹

3.11.1 The viewpoints of the jurists

Islamic jurists of different schools have different viewpoints regarding apostasy. From the Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) viewpoint, three types of apostasy could be considered: realization of apostasy only through intention, apostasy by speech and apostasy by deeds. The repetition of blasphemy (converting for many times) has also been considered as the first type that is apostasy through intention.⁶⁰⁰ Since the Islamic jurists outline the issue of apostasy within the frame of *Hudud* (limits) topics, they believe that the proof of apostasy is only possible through confession or testimony by witnesses.⁶⁰¹

Denial of necessary aspects of the religion has been regarded as a cause for apostasy.⁶⁰² Al-Juba'i al'Amili does not regard opposition to consensus as an instance of denying the necessary aspects of religion unless that consensus has been over an issue of religious compulsions.⁶⁰³ On the other hand, Muhammad Hasan al-Najafi (*Jawāhir al-kalām*) has criticized the opinion of Shamsuddin Muhammad Ibn Ahmad

¹⁹⁹ There are lots of disagreements regarding the historical event of *ridah* wars. For example, during *ridah* war there are reports regarding the killing of Malik bin Nuwairah and he died by Khālid ibn al-Walīd. Malik was a chief of the Bani Yaru'. He refused to pay zakat. It has been said he wanted zakat distributed to their communities hence they were not apostates who change their religion.

⁶⁰⁰ Zayn al-Din al-Juba'i al'Amili, *Al-Rawda al-bahiyya fi sharh al-lum'a al-Dimashqiyya*, Jami'a al-Najaf al-Diniyya, 1966, Vol. 9, pp 333-334; Muhammad Hasan al-Najafi, *Jawāhir al-kalām fi sharh sharā'i' al-islām*, Beirut: Dar 'Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1984, Vol. 41, pp 600-601; Muhammad az-Zuhri al-Ghamrawi, *al-Siraj al-Wahhaj 'Ala Matn Minhaj al-Talibin*, Beirut: Al-Maktabat al-'Asriyyah, 2009, p. 519

⁶⁰¹ Zayn al-Din al-Juba'i al'Amili, *Al-Rawda al-bahiyya fi sharh al-lum'a al-Dimashqiyya*, Jami'a al-Najaf al-Diniyya, 1966, Vol. 9, pp 333-334; Muhammad Hasan al-Najafi, *Jawāhir al-kalām fi sharh sharā'i' al-islām*, Beirut: Dar 'Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1984, Vol. 41, pp 600-601

⁶⁰² Muhammad Hasan al-Najafi, *Jawāhir al-kalām fi sharh sharā'i' al-islām*, Beirut: Dar 'Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1984, Vol. 41, pp 600-601; Sayyid Abu l-Qāsim Khansari, *Manahej al-Ma' erf*, Tehran, 1972, p. 820

⁶⁰³ Zayn al-Din al-Juba'i al'Amili, *Al-Rawda al-bahiyya fi sharh al-lum'a al-Dimashqiyya*, Jami'a al-Najaf al-Diniyya, 1966, Vol. 9, pp 335

Safarini Nablusi, who believed that the denier (at first place) must have admitted that the denied case *was* a religious compulsion and then they denied it; otherwise, it was not a denial at all. Al-Najafi believes that the initial belief of the denier is not important in the final result.⁶⁰⁴

Several conditions are mentioned for apostasy in jurisprudential texts. If any of those conditions are not fulfilled, the matter of apostasy will be automatically out of question and no punishment shall be considered for the accused one. Adulthood, sanity, autonomy, and intention are amongst such conditions mentioned for realization of apostasy.⁶⁰⁵ The same conditions have also been outlined by the Shafi'i School.⁶⁰² However, there is disagreement about the condition of adulthood among the scholars of Maliki School⁶⁰⁷ while Hanbali and Hanafi don not consider it condition at all.⁶⁰⁸ However, in view of the above mentioned conditions the insane, the forced and the like are never considered as apostates.

In the Imamiah School, the apostates are categorized into two main groups i.e. apostates who was born Muslims and those who chose to be Muslims and then converted. This categorization is not generally outlined in the Sunni schools. For instance, Shafi'i the founder of Shafi'i School says that such a categorization can be inferred neither from the Qur'an nor from the Hadiths. If one study the appearance of

⁶⁰⁴ Muhammad Hasan al-Najafi, *Jawāhir al-kalām fī sharḥ sharā'i al-islām*, Beirut: Dar 'Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1984, Vol. 41, p. 601

⁶⁰⁵ Zayn al-Dīn al-Jubā'i al'Amili, *Al-Rawḍa al-bahiyya fī sharḥ al-lum'a al-Dimashqiyya*, Jami'a al-Najaf al-Diniyya, 1966, Vol. 9. pp 341; Abu l-Qāsim Ja'far b. Ḥasan b. Yaḥyā b. Sa'īd al-Ḥillī (al-Muhaqqiq al-Hillī), *Shara'i' al-Islam fī masa'il al-halal wa al-haram*, Najaf, 1969, Vol. 4, 183; Sayyid Rūhollāh Mūsawī Khomeinī, *Tahrīr al-Wasīla*, Qom, Vol. 2, 495

⁶⁰² Ibrahim, Abu Ishāq ash-Shirazi, *al-Tanbīh*, Beirut, 1983, pp. 230-231

⁶⁰⁷ Mohammad Kharashi, *Sharḥ ala Mokhtasar Sayyidi Khalil*, Cairo, 1901, Vol. 8, p. 62

⁶⁰⁸ Maulana Shaykh Nizam et al., *al-Fatawa al-Hindiyah*, Darul Kutubul Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1980; 'Alā' ad-Dīn Abū Bakr ibn Mas'ūd al-Kāsānī, *Badā'i' al-ṣanā'i' fī tartīb al-sharā'i'*, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1986, Vol. 7, p. 134

the Qur'anic verses and the Hadiths available to Shafi'i and valid from his point of view, of course they will agree with him.⁶⁰⁹

From the viewpoint of Mālikī School, three causes may lead into apostasy:⁶¹⁰

1. A speech from which blasphemy can be inferred e.g. announcing disbelief in God or the Prophet or the Quran.⁶¹¹
2. A speech that requires blasphemy e.g. denying the obligation of prayer.
3. Doing something that shows blasphemy such as throwing the Quran or putting dirt on it.

Muhammad Jamaluddin al-Makki al-Amili, a Shiite scholar, considers the following as the causes of apostasy:

1. Leaving Islam for any reason.
2. Turning to any kind of blasphemy.
3. Denying the obligations of the religion.
4. Considering non-religious affairs as religious ones.
5. Doing something that explicitly implies disbelief such as prostrating oneself before the Sun or putting dirt on the Quran.⁶¹⁶

Zayn al-Din al-Juba'i al'Amili, another Shiite scholar, believes that three reasons will realize an apostasy: blasphemy by heart, by tongue and by actions.⁶¹³

⁶⁰⁹ Seiffollah Sarami, *The Apostasy Decrees from Islamic and Human Rights Points of View*, (Tehran: Andishe Eslami, 1997), p. 265

⁶¹⁰ Abd al-Rahmān Ibn Muḥammad 'Awad al-Jaziri, *Islamic Jurisprudence According to the Four Orthodox Schools (Al-Fiqh 'Alā al-Madhāhib al-Arba'ah)*, Vol. 4, p 331.

⁶¹¹ *Sab al-Nabī*: Insulting the prophets, Imams and companions, the particular verdict for this is the death penalty and execution. See: Ziraat, A. (2002) Legal and Jurisprudential Investigation of Sab al-Nabi Crime, *Mutaliat Islami*, No. 57, pp.75-104

⁶¹⁶ Muhammad Jamaluddin al-Makki, *The Sharia Lessons in Shiite Jurisprudence*, Vol. 2, p 51.

⁶¹³ Zayn al-Din al-Juba'i al'Amili, *The Beautiful Garden in Interpreting the Damscene Glitter (ar-Rawda-l-Bahiyah fi Sharh allam'a-d-Dimashqiya)*, Vol. 2, p 368.

6. Blasphemy by heart is the will and desire to deny. Blasphemy by tongue is denying God, the Prophet, or a religious obligation in speech. Blasphemy by action is doing things like prostrating oneself before an idol or putting the Quran in dirt.

The followers of Hanbali school consider the following as reasons for apostasy:⁶¹⁴

1. Denying the lordship of God.
2. Committing polytheism .
3. Denying a property of divine properties .
4. Denying the Prophet's mission .
5. Cursing God or the Prophet.
6. Leaving or denying one of the five pillars of Islam.
7. Denying the religious prohibited so that it cannot be justified and it cannot be claimed that the denial is committed through ignorance .
8. Claiming prophecy.
9. Confirming the one who claims prophecy.

Although the followers of Hanbali School consider nine reasons for apostasy, with more deliberation, one can admit that the nine reasons are seen in three causes mentioned by the Mālikī School.

3.11.2 Rejection of Apostasy in Islam

In the Islamic view, respecting the individuals and social rights of people as well as respecting the followers of People of the Book (*'Ahl al-Kitāb*) is considered virtuous. This issue has been focused in different verses of Qur'an. For instance, regarding the

⁶¹⁴ Ibn Qudamah, *al-Mughnī*, Vol. 10, pp. 72, 82, 84, 86, 100

invitation of People of the Book, the Qur'an says, "moreover, dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except in the best way", (Q29:46) Also in the Islamic jurisprudence, under the topic of *ahl al-dimmah* (أهل الذمة), the right of People of the Book are mentioned. If they accept the Commitments, their lives, properties as well as wives will remain safe. However, it is important that in Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet, there is some evidence that converting to other religions is discouraged and the only acceptable religion to God is Islam.

3.11.3 Islam the Only Acceptable Religion in Qur'an

According to Q42:13, all the prophets have one religion

*"The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah...."*²¹⁵

God says to the prophets to follow this religion. For example, the prophets Jacob and Abraham said to their children, "And this was the legacy that Abraham left to his sons, and so did Jacob," Oh my sons! Allah hath chosen the Faith for you; then die not except in the state of submission."Q2:132⁶¹²

Pursuing the matter, after Mohhamad's first revelation, the Qur'an (Q5:3) clearly declares that there is not any acceptable religion to god other than Islam, "and have chosen for you Islam as your religion..." Also, "The Religion before Allah is Islam" Q3:19⁶¹⁷ And presents those who are non-believers as losers (Q3:85):

²¹⁵ شَرَعْنَا لَهُم مِّنَ الْدِينِ مَا وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ أَنفُسَنَا وَلِلَّهِ الْوَحْدَانِيَّةُ...
²¹⁶ وَصَّيْنَا بِهِ الْبِرَّ الَّذِي فِيهِ رَوْحِي وَإِنَّ إِلَهًا مِّنْ دُونِي لَيُخْلِفَنِي وَإِنَّ إِلَهًا مِّنْ دُونِي لَيُخْلِفَنِي
²¹⁷ إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِندَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ وَرَزَّيْقُكُمُ الْإِسْلَامُ هَذَا

*"If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter He will be in the ranks of those who have lost."*²¹⁸

However, there are some other verses, which state that what is important to God is faith and good-deed. Moreover, the appearance of the religions is not that much important to God (Q2:62 and 2:112).

3.11.4 Religious sources for the punishment of an apostate

In the Qur'an, harmful consequences are mentioned for apostasy. For example, it is pointed out that first Satan makes the apostate ones believe that what they have done is nice. As Allah says, *"Indeed, those who reverted [to disbelief] after guidance had become clear to them - Satan enticed them and prolonged hope for them."* (Q47:25⁶¹⁹). Therefore, in the Q5:5 it is mentioned that their work will become worthless, and in the Hereafter, they will be among the losers⁶⁶⁰. Also in Q2:217 it is said that the deeds of whoever that reverts have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter⁶⁶¹. Another harmful consequence, which is mentioned in the Qur'an, is that Allah shall not help people who disbelieved after their belief (Qur'an 3:86⁶⁶⁶). Of other bad consequences mentioned in the Qur'an is the wrath from Allah; there is a great punishment for whoever disbelieves in Allah after his belief, and they must be ready for that (Q16:106)⁶⁶³. Wrath from Allah and punishment are also pointed out in the Q3:106⁶⁶⁴.

Other verses point out to the curse of Allah and the angels, and the people: *Those - their recompense will be that upon them is the curse of Allah and the angels and the*

²¹⁸ وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ يَتَّبِعْ الْإِسْلَامَ فَإِنَّمَا هُوَ مِنَ الْإِسْلَامِ هُوَ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْإِسْلَامِ
²¹⁹ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا يَهُودَ النَّبَارَةَ مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ لَمَّا تَبَايَعُوا عَلَى أَنْ يَكُونُوا لَهُمْ عِبَادَ اللَّهِ فَلَمَّا خَلَّوْا بَيْنَهُمْ وَلَدُونَ

²²⁰ وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ يَتَّبِعْ الْإِسْلَامَ فَإِنَّمَا هُوَ مِنَ الْإِسْلَامِ هُوَ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْإِسْلَامِ

²²¹ وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ يَتَّبِعْ الْإِسْلَامَ فَإِنَّمَا هُوَ مِنَ الْإِسْلَامِ هُوَ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْإِسْلَامِ

²²² لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الْكَافِرُونَ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

²²³ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

²²⁴ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"With regard to punishment for crime, the destination we are after is justice.

*In order to establish justice a society needs to punish people who commit crimes against that society. But the form of punishment mentioned in the Quran is a historical expression of punishment carried out by a specific society in a specific time and place- it is not a divine directive. Punishment for crime is principal that when carried out establishes justice. Justice is a principle reflected in divine, universal World of God. Punishment is part of constructing a just society, but the form punishment take is historically determined - it is not fixed."*⁶⁶⁹

Nowadays, there are not many interpreters or Islamic jurists to emphasize on this source for authorizing a death penalty.⁶³⁰ By scholars' viewpoints, there is no Qur'anic proof that states death penalty is obligatory for an apostate. Moreover, God does not prescribe any specific worldly punishment for apostasy, and some scholars completely reject the Qur'anic emphasis concerning the death penalty for an apostate. For instance, S. A. Rahman argues that "there is no mention in the Qur'an of any punishment for apostasy to be inflicted in this world."⁶³¹

However, the view of classical Muslim interpreters is different.⁶³⁶ For example, *Fakhr Razi* (d.1209) the famous Sunni scholar and the exegete of *Tafsir ul- Kabir* has

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid* p154.

⁶³⁰ Among contemporary scholars *Abul Ala Mawdudi* [1903-1979], one of the most influential Muslim thinker of the 20th century, has had a different idea about this issue. Thence, many Muslims disagree with *Abul Ala Mawdudi's* understanding and argumentation. In his book on apostasy in Islam, *Mawdudi* argues that even the Quran prescribes the death penalty for all apostates. *Maulana Maududi* claims that Qur'an prescribes death sentence for apostasy. He quotes the verses Q9:11-12 and argues that Qur'an prescribes death sentence. See: *Abul Ala Mawdudi* , The Punishment of the Apostate according to Islamic Law, trans. Syed Silas Husain and Ernest Hahn (1994) , available at Answering-Islam

⁶³¹ S. A. Rahman, punishment of apostasy in Islam, The Other Press, 2006, p2

Punishment of Apostasy in Islam (S. A. Rahman, 1972) is among the books that many researches done in English language have referred to it as for about half a century, it was the most complete work written on the matter. Rahman has addressed the matter of punishment for apostasy through the viewpoints of the Qur'an, the tradition and the manner of the *Rashidun* Caliphs as well as the opinions by various Islamic scholars. He concludes his book with a chapter opposing those who consider capital punishment for apostates. However, he does not dissent on many works by non-Arab Muslim scholars who have studied the interpretation of reasoning texts. Therefore Rahman's book is not very deep from the tradition-science point of view.

⁶³⁶ See also: al -Khazan concur: Surah II. 214, to prove that apostasy merits the death penalty, the commentary of Al Khazan, quotes from Malik ibn Anas, Ahmad ibn Hanbal and others, and gives this interpretation of the verse: "All the deeds of the apostate become null and void in this world and the next. He must be killed. His wife must be separated from him and he has no claims on any inheritance " (page 155, vol. i, Cairo edition). ALSO, Ath Tha'alibi (788 A.H.), in his commentary on Sura II, verse 214, leaves no doubt that the verse in question, whatever the grammatical construction may be, demands the death of the apostate. (Cf. vol. i, p.

and controversial exegetical history.” Its special significance lies in the legal limitations it places on the harsh *riddah* legislations”.⁶³⁷ Although the Qur’an strongly states *la-ikraha fiddin*, and this verse contains a charter of freedom in the religious annals of mankind; But previous interpreters claimed that this verse was “abrogated” by other verses (verses of killing, Qital, Q9:12, Q9:73, and Q48:16). They believed this verse was revealed before the Prophet's command to fight against the people of the book.⁶³⁸

In contrast, contemporary interpretations do not accept this comment and say that the abrogation of this verse is untenable.⁶³⁹ At this moment, Mohammad Hashim Kamali has stated that "the only notable difference between classical and modern works on religious freedom is that some of the earlier writers were persuaded by the argument that many Qur'anic passages which that the freedom of religion has subsequently been abrogated or superseded by other passages of a more restrictive nature. However, modern Muslim opinion on the subject tends to dismiss this rather weak argument.⁶⁴⁰ This is a tangible change in their attitude to this freedom issue and therefore on the harsh *riddah* legislations.

As we know, one of the important elements in the Charter of Human Rights is the religious liberty. Especially, in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR, 1948]⁶⁴¹, it has always been a question that how the right to freedom of religion should be framed with this unlimited conceptualization; therefore, we see that

⁶³⁷ Mahmoud Ayoub, *Religious Freedom and the law of apostasy in Islam*, Courtesy: Islamochristian = Islamiyat Masihiyat, Vol. 20, 1994, pp. 75-91

⁶³⁸ A list of Quranic exegetes that state Q2:256 has been abrogated is available: S. A. Rahman, punishment of apostasy in Islam, The Other Press, 2006, p8

⁶³⁹ Although the issue of al-naskh or abrogation is a complicated one, contemporary commentators have negative the theory of abrogation especially about these verses. For example, Tabatbaee (Commentary Al-mizan, Vol. 4) has said “an order cannot be cancelled unless and until its reason is also abrogated. So long as the reason is valid the rule must remain valid. There is no need to emphasize that the verse of the sword cannot negate the clear distinction of the right way from error. For example, the verses Q4:98 (and kill them wherever you find them...) and Q2:91 (And fight in the way of Allah...) have no effect whatsoever on the clear distinction of truth from falsehood; and therefore they cannot abrogate an order based on that distinction. Also see: Wahbah Mustafa al-Zuhayli, *Tafsir al-Muneer*, Beirut, Dar al-fikr, 1991, Vol. 3, p 24.

⁶⁴⁰ Muhammad Hashim Kamali, *Freedom of Expression in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing Sdn, 1994)

⁶⁴¹ Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. Available online at the United Nations Website: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

some Muslim scholar ideas are under the shadow of this subject. These groups emphasize on heresy and faith as an individual's personal choice between oneself and God. Gamal al-Banna, who defended a “new fiqh (jurisprudence)” that lately made him come under attack said, “Whoever says, ‘there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah’ is a Muslim. It is not our place to delve into the details of his belief. In addition, heresy and faith are, first of all, up to Allah, and secondly, they are personal issues. If belief is not based on awareness and conviction, it is worthless. In other words, every Muslim has the right to change his religion as much as he likes, and nobody is allowed to stand in his way, because this is a question of freedom of conscience, and it is forbidden to intervene in matters of people's conscience. What do the legal systems or killings have to do with people's conscience?”

A group went even further and said, “Islam recognizes the diversity of religion even though it does not approve of it.”⁶⁴⁶ Then, according to this idea, religious liberty is already recognized in Islam. Although this writer's view is clear for people, who have specific questions and are looking for direct answers, in the writings of many writers in the past we see the phrase “Freedom of belief is among the basic principles of Islam” repeatedly. They have contented with some ambiguous generalities.

3.11.7 Incompatibility with the Spirit of the Qur'an

We previously pointed out that some scholars have seen incompatibility concerning some verses regarding apostasy. In fact, they claim that the death penalty for apostasy conflicts with the Qur'an. A contemporary writer has divided the Qur'anic verses that support the notion of freedom of religion and belief into seven categories.⁶⁴³ He has

⁶⁴⁶ Abdullah Saeed, Source: Damien Kingsbury & Greg Barton (ed.), *Difference and Tolerance: Human Rights Issues in Southeast Asia*. Deakin University Press, 1994, pp. 27-37

⁶⁴³ The first category of verses prohibits compelling people to change their religion to Islam or to remain within it (Q2:256, Q10:99, Q11:28); the second category stipulates the necessity of freedom in finding or losing one's way in the world (Q18:29, Q10:108, Q39:41, Q27:91-3); in the third group, emphasis is on the worldly freedom and the importance of free will in the choosing one's religious belief (Q88:21-2, Q50:45, Q25:56-8, Q13:40, Q5:99); the forth group prohibits the imposition of punishment on those who change their religion (Q7:88, Q7:121-4, Q40:26) ; the fifth group is related to the manner in which the leaders and guardians of

cited specific reasons for each category of these verses; in conclusion, he has reached some points. In one point, he claimed, “Islam recognizes the plurality of religions and beliefs even after the Revelation of the just religion, with some accepting the invitation to join and others refusing to do so. The Unbelievers have numerous religions and creeds.” He also believes it is obvious that the freedom of faith and belief has been guaranteed in Islam.⁶⁴⁴ Kdivar, as a modern Islamic thinker is deeply concerned about the phenomena of apostasy. He has elaborated on it about the contemporary Islamic world, and he has classified it according to its nature and social impact. Recently, in one of his challenges with an Orthodox clergyman about the punishment of apostasy, Kdivar has claimed, “the spirit of Qur’an is contrary to such decrees.”⁶⁴⁵ This claim is of considerable importance as no so many interpreters have pointed it out.²⁴⁶ Another contemporary Muslim scholar, Mohamed Talbi, believes that punishment for apostasy is not commensurate with the Qur’anic perspective and the spirit of the Qur’an; he has noted, “We must consider the apostate case. In this field, too traditional theology did not follow the spirit of the Qur’an.”⁶⁴⁷ Ebrahim Moosa concludes that “The modern view has also attempted to reconcile the law with the overall spirit of the Qur’anic teachings that does advocate greater freedom to choose one’s faith.” (The Dilemma of Islamic Rights Schemes, Ebrahim Moosa, p.13)

different religions have confronted one another, and the Almighty's acceptance of different beliefs by man (Q11:118-19, Q2:113, Q109:1-5); the six group prohibits the imposition of earthly punishment of apostasy (Q2:216-17, Q3:85-90) ; the seventh group provides guidelines for inviting others to join the faithful (Q16:125). Mehran Kamrava (Editor), *The New Voices of Islam: Reforming Politics and Modernity: a Reader* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), pp132-39.

⁶⁴⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.* p140.

⁶⁴⁵ See this author's book: *The Right of People*, the article “Freedom of Religion and Belief in Islam”, pp.204-05, and its English translation in *The New Voices of Islam: Reforming Politics and Modernity – A Reader*, edited by Mehran Kamrava; I. B. Tauris, 2006; London; pp. 119-142)

⁶⁴² It should be noted that according to the Qur’anic, mystical and legal approaches, human free will is a gift from God which has a significant effect on the human rights and duties in society. In contrast to those who believed that free will is the natural right of human, the Qur’anic statements signify it is a specific favor from the Lord to human. On the one hand, “Am I not your Lord?” (Q 7: 172) announces a divine ethic, which it is the origin of free will that God, himself bestowed it to human. On the other hand, there is a Pharaonic-dictatorship ethical approach to human free will “I am your most exalted lord” (Q 79:24).

⁶⁴⁷ Mehran Kamrava (Editor), *The New Voices of Islam: Reforming Politics and Modernity: a Reader* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p 113.

3.11.8 Apostasy: A Sin or a Crime?

A crime is defined as ‘a gross violation of law,’ while a sin is defined as ‘offense against the religious or moral law.’ What defines both crimes and sins can vary quite a bit. Hence, a sin is something, not necessarily a crime but something done against a belief. In the dominant opinion in Islamic jurisprudence and traditional ideas, apostasy had been considered a crime – the embodiment of departure from the general norms, which must be punished: therefore, it cannot be listed under individual human rights! Contrary to the view of some contemporary Muslim scholars who consider it a sin in the eyes of God - which would be punished on the Day of Judgment – as mentioned, “Apostasy is treated as a sin, albeit a very grave sin, and not as a crime by the Qur'an.”⁶⁴⁸

3.11.9 Punishing an apostate: changing the religion or a political issue

Some modern thinkers stated that the idea of punishing an apostate was not merely declared based on ‘changing the religion’; in fact, it was a strategic self-defense in battles. The distinguished Moroccan philosopher, Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri, in the chapter of “Freedom, is One Thing, Apostasy Another” says:

*“After the rise of the Islamic state was not merely a person who changed his faith. He was also a person, who renounced Islam as a faith, a society, and a state.” He adds, “the apostate at that time was equal to a traitor who betrays his country and colludes with the enemy at the time of war.”*²⁴⁹

In addition, some modern scholars say that the death penalty for an apostate would be interpreted in the light of the socio-political context of that time. It had been reported

⁶⁴⁸ S. A. Rahman, *punishment of apostasy in Islam*, The Other Press, 2006, p45.

⁶⁴⁹ Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, *Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought*, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009 P199.

Jabri cited an example for his argument: "The ‘Apostasy Wars’ at the time of Abu Bakr were against people who did not only ‘betray’ the Islamic state, which they joined at the time of the Prophet, but organized themselves to attack that state after violating its laws (by withholding payment of al-zakah). Therefore, the apostate in this sense is one who renounced the Islamic state as a ‘fighter’, a conspirator or a spy for the enemy."

in the Qur'an for a group of Jews who had accepted Islam and then converted to their original religion (i.e. Judaism). These Jews would pretend that they had accepted Islam in the first part of the day and show that they did not believe in it at the end of the day (Q3:71-73). Hence this is a political issue. As Mohammed s. El-Awa says, "at that time the prophet was the ruler of Medina. Consequently, one cannot imagine how such people could have done this under a government which punishes apostasy with the death penalty, while they were not, in fact, punished in any way."⁶⁵⁰

3.11.10 Evidence from Hadith

As stated in Islamic law, the certain punishment for an apostasy act is death execution.⁶⁵¹ This study focuses on one of the basic penalty sources for those who have left Islam. It has two primary sources in the *shari'ah* including Qur'anic verses, and authentic narrations from the Prophetic (the words and acts of Muhammad). After considering the Qur'an, the queue reaches the *Hadith*. Authentic (reliable) *Hadith* is the second primary source of Islam.⁶⁵⁶ There are many *Hadiths* which talk about the punishment of an apostasy act, but there is another aspect of Islam which considers a specific sentence for any good or bad act. In *Ijtihad*⁶⁵³, a specific cleric-jurist expresses the limitations and boundaries of Islamic and anti-Islamic acts. A Muslim jurist uses the Islamic *fiqh*, which has been founded based on the Islamic sources (i.e. Qur'an and Hadith). Meanwhile, he expresses all of his sentences (*fatwa*) according to the aforementioned Islamic sources. One of these issues is apostasy as the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said those people who 'leave Islam should be killed.' This *Hadith*

⁶⁵⁰ Abdullah Saeed, *A Fresh Look at Freedom of Belief in Islam*, Damien Kingsbury; Also: Mohamed Imran Mohamed Taib, *Apostasy & Freedom of belief in Muslim perspective A Brief Exposition*, Centre for Contemporary Islamic.

⁶⁵¹ According to Muslim law, the male apostate or Murtadd, must be put to death, According to Hanafis (Sarakhsi, Mabsut, vol. x, pp.108-110) and the Imamiyyah Shiah, a female apostate, is not subject to capital punishment, but she may be kept in confinement until she repents and adopts Islam. But according to Hanbal, and the Malikis and Shafiites, she is also put to death. for general literature on apostasy see:

⁶⁵⁶ The practice of Muslims derives not solely from the Quran, but from the hadith also, they have to obey and follow the Messenger (peace be upon him) because the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) explained the Quran; Note the following verses from the Quran: Sura 24:54, 4:80, 64:12, 3:132

⁶⁵³ *Ijtihad* (strive): A word derived from the same root as the term *jihad*, meaning to strive or make an effort, to exert oneself; in jurisprudence it means the exercise of independent judgment by one who has sufficient knowledge, as opposed to *taqlid*, or the imitation of precedents. Gordon, N. (2011). Encyclopedia of Islam.

مُرْسَلٍ، يَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَلَيَّ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، إِلَّا بِإِخْدَى ثَلَاثٍ: لِلنَّبِيِّ لِرَزَلِي، وَلِلنَّسْرِ بِالنَّبِيِّ،
وَلِلنَّارِ لِكُلِّ هَذَا لِقَوْلِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ: "أَعَدَّ" ٢٥٧

Hafs bin Ghayath and Abu Mu'awiyah and Waki' related to us from al-A'mash from 'Abd Allah bin Murrah from Masruq from 'Abd Allah (bin Mas'ud) who said: The Messenger of God said: 'The blood of a Muslim who bears witness that there is no god but God and that I am his Messenger is not lawful except in one of three cases: a person who, being married, commits zina, a person for (the murder) of another, and a person who abandons his religion and separates from jama'ah (of Muslims).' (Muslim 3175)

Also, there is another *Hadīth* which is reliable and found in three sources, Muwatta, Bukhari and Muslim, as well as in Tirmidhi, Nasa'i, and Ahmad:

وَحَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى عَنْ مَالِكٍ عَنْ مَحْمَدِ بْنِ الْأَنْكَدَرِ عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ أَنَّ أَعْرَابِيًّا بَلَغَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ لَيْ
اللَّهُ ﷻ وَسَلَّمَ ﷻ الْإِسْلَامَ فَأَبَى الْأَعْرَابِيُّ وَغَضِبَ الْمَدِينَةُ فَسَمَّى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ لَيْ اللَّهُ ﷻ وَسَلَّمَ
فَقَالَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷻ لَنْ يَبْعَثَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷻ لَيْ اللَّهُ ﷻ وَسَلَّمَ ﷻ جَاءَهُ فَقَالَ لَنْ يَبْعَثَ
فَسَمَّى جَاءَهُ فَقَالَ لَنْ يَبْعَثَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷻ لَيْ اللَّهُ ﷻ وَسَلَّمَ ﷻ جَاءَهُ فَقَالَ لَنْ يَبْعَثَ
لَمْ يَنْدَلِ الْإِسْلَامَ فِي يَوْمٍ هَذَا وَيَوْمَ غَدَا ٢٥٨

Jabir Bin Abdullah narrated that a bedouin pledged allegiance to the Apostle of Allah for Islam [i.e. accepted Islam] and then the bedouin got fever after that he said to the Prophet [P] "cancel my pledge." However, the Prophet [P] refused. He [the bedouin came to him [again] saying, "Cancel my pledge." However, the Prophet [P] refused. Then he [the Bedouin] left [Medina]. Allah's Apostle said "Madinah is like a pair of

²⁵⁷حيث صححه ترمذي في رواه البخاري في صحيحه ٧٨٧/١ ومسلم 1٧7٧ ورواه الترمذي في 3721 وقال الألباني: صحيح
²⁵⁸حيث صححه ترمذي في رواه البخاري في صحيحه باب ٣٧ من كتاب الأيمان 7211 ومسلم 13٨3

*bellow [furnace]: it expels its impurities and brightens and clear its good.*⁶⁵⁹

Some less reliable *Hadīth* mention other cases of apostates who were not executed.

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ رَفِيعٍ، حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو النَّرِّ، حَدَّثَنَا اسْلَمُ بْنُ مَرْثَدٍ، وَهُوَ ابْنُ الْفَيْزِ، عَنْ ثَابِتٍ، عَنْ الْأَسَدِ بْنِ
مَالِكٍ، قَالَ: "كَانَ هَذَا رَجُلٌ مِنْ بَنِي النَّجَّارِ قَدَرَأَ الْقَرَ وَالْ عَمْرَانَ وَكَانَ يُقْبَلُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ
اللَّهُ ﷻ وَدَلَّاهُ فَلَطَّقَ عَلَيْهِ الْحَقَّابَ، قَالَ فَوَسَّخُوهُ، وَقَالُوا: مَذَاقُ ذَلِكَ أَنْ يُقْبَلَ مُحَمَّدٌ
فَعُجِّلُوا بِهِ فَمَالَيْتُ أَنْ يَمُوتَ اللَّهُ ﷻ هِيَ مِمَّنْ فَخَرُّوا لَهُ فَوَارَوْهُ فَبَحَّتِ الْأَرْضُ قَدْنَتَهُ ﷻ
وَجِهْدَانُ عَادُوا فَخَرُّوا لَهُ فَوَارَوْهُ فَبَحَّتِ الْأَرْضُ قَدْنَتَهُ ﷻ وَجِهْدَانُ عَادُوا فَخَرُّوا لَهُ،
فَوَارَوْهُ فَبَحَّتِ الْأَرْضُ قَدْنَتَهُ ﷻ وَجِهْدَانُ فَتَرَكُوهُ هَهُذَا ۲٦٠

Muhammad bin Rafi' related to us: Abu Nadr related to us: Sulayman (ibn al-Mughirah) related to us from Thabit from Anas bin Malik who said: There was among us a man from Banu al-Najjar who had read Surah al-Baqarah and Al 'Imran and used to write for the Messenger of God but later on he departed in flight and joined the people of the book. They gave him lift saying, This is he who used to write for Muhammad. And they felt good about him. He did not live for long when God struck his neck among them. They dug for him and buried him. By the morning the earth threw him on its top. They again dug for him and buried him but by the morning the earth again threw him on its top. They dug for him yet again and buried him, but by the morning the earth threw him again on its top. So they left him discarded. (Muslim 6/360 = 4987; Ahmad 12846 also from Sulayman with the same isnad and very similar wording)

⁶⁵⁹ *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Maktabat Al-Riyadh Al-Hadeethah, Riyadh, 1982, Vol.9, Hadeeth # 316, pp. 241. Similar Hadeeths narrated by other chains of narration include Hadeeths # 318, P. 242; #323, P. 246.

²⁶⁰ حَيْثُ رَوَاهُ الْعَمَلِيُّ فِي حَيْثُ كُتِبَ فِي كِتَابِ فَاتَاتِ الْفُقَهَاءِ وَأَحْوَالُهُمْ ۲۷۸

As mentioned, authentic *Hadith* is the second primary source of Islam after the Qur'an. The most important written source in the context of Islamic jurisprudence, for those people who 'leave Islam should be killed,' is the *Hadith* in the various collections of Muslims *Hadith* that indicating apostates are to be killed.⁶²¹ Now that a critical approach to the corpus of *Hadith* has been increased, new scholars have stated that it is impossible to take a human life with some weak testimonies.⁶²⁶ Thus, *Hadith* should be strong for important issues.

It is obvious how Sheikh Mansour rejects the death penalty for apostasy issue, while he asks, "Is it permissible to put people to death because of traditions that have been reported by one person?"⁶²³ Mansour claims that the penalty for apostasy is like a sharp sword against their political foes and opponents.

Other scholars focused on the authenticity of *Hadiths* contents and stated that these *Hadiths* were seen in the light of the Qur'anic dictum. According to Gamal al-Banna's view, there is a *Hadith* from *al-Bukhari*, which states that anyone who changes his religion must be killed. Then he concludes:

Firstly, the authentic words of the Holy Prophet do not prescribe any punishment for apostasy. *Aḥadīth* in which the Prophet prescribed the death penalty for this sin is either unreliable or to be interpreted differently.

Secondly, the *aḥadīth* about the death penalty is called into serious question by other *aḥadīth* that show the Holy Prophet did not consider such a penalty for apostasy.

⁶²¹ The most important hadith that prescribes the death penalty for apostasy is found, in Bukhari 2794, 6411, Abu Da'ud 3787, Tirmidhi 1378, Nasa'i 3991-7, IbnMajah 2526, Ahmad 1776, 2420, and 2813 (cf. Ahmad 1802). "مَنْ بَدَّلَ دِينَهُ فَهُوَ مُنَافِقٌ..."

⁶²⁶ For more information regarding "The Right to Life" see: 0

⁶²³ Ahmed Subhy Mansour, *The Penalty of Apostasy*, Tiba Publishing, Cairo, 1992, p. 61

Ahmed Subhy Mansour is an Egyptian American activist. Mansour elucidates the Qur'anic position on the matter of apostasy and excommunication. He also points out to the position of the Prophet's tradition on the matter. Mansour believes that punishment for apostasy is due to political consideration. His methodology is based on reasons taken from the Qur'an without referring to the tradition. However, he has not attempted to present too many verses in relation with the matter. In general, he considers the Qur'an as the main source of Sharia and the tradition is not so important for him. The rules that he presents require more attention and indicate that he has not mastered the science of tradition.

Thirdly: this decree (hukum) does not fit with the Qur'anic perspective.⁶²⁴

3.11.11 Prophet Behavior as the Third Source for this Punishment

Islam, in light of its status and position, claims to be comprehensive and overarching (beyond the boundaries of place). On the other hand, its teachings bear a seal of permanency (beyond the boundaries of time). Such features have made it distinctive from other religions or schools of thought. This religion claims to bear the best model for the establishment of a utopian global community. Study of the Prophet's lifestyle and conduct as a 'good example' may attest to the claim. The life of Muhammad is categorized into two stages of Meccan and Medintie. According to the Qur'an, Sunna and rest of historical documents the Messenger as the leader of the Islamic community had established some sort of constitutions.⁶²⁵ A notable difference between classical and modern ideas on Prophet's Behavior is that some of the earlier writers believed that we have to understand the religious-political climate in the early days of Islam; it was not out of context. Mohsen kadivar says, "The question of the killing of an apostate needs to be placed in the proper context."⁶²² In fact, they depend on the time, the place or circumstances. They claim many of penalties for crimes are limited to a historical context; Abu Zaid had said, "I believe these punishments were a historical solution to current social problem."⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ See also: Ahmad Shafaat "Q & A the punishment of apostasy in Islam" Part I: The Qur'anic Perspective. 2006.

⁶²⁵ Muslims are constantly talking about the *sira* of the Prophet Muhammad. However, the important issue is an applicable-practical model in current era and how we can use his methods in our daily life. Many of his behaviors and functions are limited to a historical context and the specifications of their occurrence, e.g. the situation of peace and war, his privacy or especial ethics relevant to his period of life. Therefore, assuming the Prophetic behavior as a primary stable rules (ahkam), how could we introduce the Prophet as a sample in the modern world? If we consider his behaviors probe of the place and time, we are able to standardize a model for urban life which respect to civil rights. In this perspective, understanding of "an outward of the text" is not the same as understanding of the religion.

Features have been mentioned for the Prophet that one must consider when studying his *sira*. Those features are as follows:

- Indicating a distinction between the personal and official facets of the Prophet's life.
- Considering the historical context of each issue. It signifies that some of the Prophet's decisions had been made based on an especial reason, i.e. situational –historical context. "فَوَيْلٌ لِلْوَغَةِ"
- Indicating a distinction between the establishing and stabilizing's bylaw and rules. "الحكام عدالتشويس وعدالتشويث"

⁶²² Mehran Kamrava (Editor), *The New Voices of Islam: Reforming Politics and Modernity: a Reader* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p141.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid*, p164

To analyze the way the Prophet treated the apostates, one must pay attention to a general principle that he had in his encounter with the enemies. It is repeatedly claimed that he used to behave friendly with his enemies. However, the opponents and those who were in dispute with the Prophet are categorized into two groups: (a) ideological opponents, (b) non-ideological opponents. Ideological opponents were comprised of pagans, disbelievers and People of the Book while non-ideological opponents were hypocrites who sought to overthrow the Prophet's government. His treatment of these two groups varied based on what positions they took towards Muslims. Naturally, no single treatment could be considered in different conditions. The Qur'an has verses regarding the *Jihad* and moderation, peace and patience in treatment of the groups as well. The form of treatment varied according to whether their actions were theoretical dispute or practical confrontation.

The Prophet's treatment followed several general rules, which are as follows:

1. Respecting the human being dignity⁶²⁸
2. Principle of peace and no war (review of verses related to *Jihad* and especially initial and defensive *Jihad*)
3. Preference of peace and peaceful coexistence⁶²⁹ (review of related verses and traditions)
4. Rejection of "discomfort or difficulty in religion, *al-'usr wa haraj* (Q2:185, 22:78)⁶⁷⁰, and the principle of "Islam neither approves to inflict or sustain harm, *La dharara wa La dhirara fil Islam*.⁶⁷¹

²⁶⁸ «ولقد كفر في أذى آدم» (النساء: 70)
²⁶⁹ «يأبى الله أن يهدي القوم الظالمين» (البقرة: 208)
²⁷⁰ «يهدى الله القوم الصالحين» (البقرة: 208)
²⁷¹ لا زور ولا زيف في الإسلام

Instances of the Prophet's Moderation that have been repeatedly reported are as follows:

a. Moderation with disbelievers and pagans

- His prayers for disbelievers
- Examination of terms and conditions of *Hudaybiyyah* peace treaty
- General amnesty for the Meccan and leaders of disbelievers ("Go freely as you are released"⁶⁷⁶)
- Among disbelievers who were treated moderately are Abu Sufyan, Akramah, Abi Jahl and Wahshi.

b. Moderation with hypocrites:

Some of the hypocrites whom were treated moderately despite their persecution of the Prophet and for whose unbecoming conduct several verses were sent down are Abdullah ibn Obayy, Nabtal b. Haarith, WadiaibnSabet, Merba, Owsibn Qeytani, and Motabibn Qushayr

c. Moderation with People of the Book

The Quranic verses (Q3:60 and 61) as well as many historical records point to moderate treatment to Christians. Christians of Najran are among the cases mentioned in history. Regarding Jewish, the Prophet treated with them in different types. However, only his battles with Bani Qiynaqa, Bani Nadir, Bani Qurayza, and Kheybar have got known to people and his moderate treatment of the Jews has received little attention.

Major occasions of the Prophet's moderate treatment of the Jews are as follows:

- A public treaty with Jews: In a treaty signed between the Prophet as one party and the emigrants *Muhajerin* and *Ansar* as the other, Jews have been mentioned at numerous occasions. Ibn Hishaam is a unique historian to cite the text of the treaty, quoting from Ibn Ishaq. Abu 'Ubayd, a contemporary of Ibn Hishaam, has cited the text of treaty in his *al-Amwal* book.⁶⁷³ Later historians have cited the books. On the other side, such historians like ibn Saad, Belazari, Ya'qoubi, Tabari and Mas'oudi have made no mention of the treaty.

- A treaty with three renowned Jewish groups (tribes of Bani Nadir, Bani Qurayza, and Bani Qeynqa') is also cited by historians. The brief discussion notes that the Prophet's conduct was principally based on affection, affability and blessing and that violence were of secondary and minor status. He had also exercised several harsh positions towards opponent groups as follows.

Jihad with aggressors, law flouters and sedition mongers

Some of the modern scholars claim that the idea of punishing apostates was not just based on changing religion. As Mohammed Abid al-Jabri says, "After the rise of the Islamic state, was not merely a person who changed his faith. He was also a person, who renounced Islam as a faith, a society and a state." He adds, "the apostate at that time was equal to a traitor who betrays his country and colludes with the enemy at the time of war."⁶⁷⁴ Jamal A. Badawi, another contemporary writer accepts this idea and says, "references to early capital punishment for apostasy were not due to apostasy itself

⁶⁷³ Ibn Hisham, *al-Sira al-Nabawiya*, Vol. 1, p. 501; Also see: Abu Obayd, Qasemibn Salam, *al-Amwal*, edited by Haras, Cairo, Maktaba al-Koliyat al-Azhariya, 1968, p 291

⁶⁷⁴ Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, *Democracy, Human Rights and Law in Islamic Thought*, I.B.Tauris& Co Ltd, 2009 P199.

but the other capital crime(s) that was coupled with it.”⁶⁷⁵ Based on this idea, there is a distinction between the apostate who fights while he is in the precincts of Islam and the apostate who leaves to join the enemy.

To al-Qardawi, as a modern jurist, an apostate does not only deny Islam, but also incites a war against Islam and the Muslim Ummah. Al-Qardawi divides apostasy into two categories: major apostasy (رَدْفِعْلَة) and minor apostasy (رَدْفِعْغَة). Major apostasy is to abandon the Islamic faith with a proclamation, while minor apostasy is simply renouncing the faith without proclaiming it. In the case of major apostasy, the accepted punishment of death should be implemented to eliminate the apostate's evil and to shut the door of tumult (fitnah). However, in the case of minor apostasy, Al-Qardawi suggests that the view of Ibrahim An-Nakha' and Atthouri may be adopted and that punishment may take a form other than death.⁶⁷²

3.12 Viewpoints of Contemporary Exegetes Regarding Apostasy

The concepts of *Freedom* and *Freedom of Religion and Thought* and particularly the concepts of apostasy (*Irtidad*), which are closely interrelated, are among the topics with a substantial presence in the contemporary exegesis. Contemporary exegetes of different schools have different viewpoints regarding apostasy.

Muhammad Abduh (1849 – 11 July 1905) and Tafsir Manar

Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) Egyptian jurist, religious scholar and political activist, he is one of the most famous figures in recent Islam. As Mark Sedgwick said:

⁶⁷⁵ Jamal A. Badawi, *Is Apostasy a Capital Crime in Islam?* <http://www.fiqhcouncil.org/node/34>

⁶⁷² Qaradawi, Yusuf, *al-Riddah wa 'Uqubat AL-murtadd fi Daw' al-Qur'an wa as-Sunnah*, Cairo, 1996

"among scholars in the Muslim world and the west, he is known as Islam's leading modernist." ⁶⁷⁷

Emphasis on human free will, fate and their consistency with Human Freedom, denial of blind imitation and emphasis on an independent cognition as a requisite for guidance as well emphasis on the element of wisdom as the most obvious feature of human kind over other creatures are among the topics analysed in the exegeses by *Abduh*. In his exegetical works, he repeatedly and in various occasions has cited the Verse of Denial of Compulsion to emphasize on the freedom of human in religion adoption. ⁶⁷⁸

According to *Abduh*, the rule of "*Let there be no compulsion in religion*" ⁶⁷⁹ is a principle pillar of Islamic politics. Based on this rule, not only compulsion in accepting Islam is denied, but also it does not allow other people to make Muslims abandon their religion ⁶⁸⁰.

Abduh also considers the cases of compelling people to accept or abandon their religions in different societies as a governmental/political issue rather a religious one. He believes that faith as the very essence of a religion is the kind of acceptance which is not possible through compulsion or force. It is something which is realized through reasoning. ²⁸¹ Therefore, he reconciles the two concepts of Freedom of Thought and Invitation. Unlike many exegetes, citing the Verse of Denial of Compulsion, he arrives at a positivistic concept of Jihad for defending the Freedom of Religion and Thought.

⁶⁷⁷ Mark Sedgwick, Mohammad Abduh, one world Publications, 2010

²⁷⁸ Rasheed Raza Mohammad, *Tafsir Al Manar*, Dar al Fikr, 1987, Vol. 3, p. 38,

²⁷⁹ Q 2:256

²⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 39.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, Vol. 2, p. 26

Abduh has approached the modern concept of *Freedom of Religion and Thought* as outlined in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*. Thus, one must not ignore the importance of the innovative interpretation of *Abduh* to present a more systematic theory than the traditional one on the philosophy of Jihad even though the discrepancy is important.²⁸²

Abduh does not explicitly state what would be the punishment of apostasy in an Islamic State that, as he contends, cannot be expected to tolerate abandoning the religion to which that state is adhering. In addition, he does not clarify that how the Islamic State would be able to tolerate infidels and pagans while not being able to bear apostasy of its own citizens. However, one can definitely say that he does not believe in killing the apostate. He considers such a decree as political but not religious.⁶⁸³ In the interpretation of Q3:72, he writes:

The decree for those who honestly believe in Islam in first place but then become apostates follows a different rule... I think the Prophet issued the death penalty for those who initially accept Islam and then leave it intentionally to make Muslims doubt about their faith.⁶⁸⁴

Sayyid Qutb (9 October 1906 – 29 August 1966) and *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (In the Shade of the Qur'an)

Sayyid Qutb is one of the most famous and influential contemporary exegetes in the Era of Returning to Quran. He believes that the verses regarding the freedom of people in accepting the invitation by prophets depict the inexorable strife between paganism

⁶⁸⁶ Armin Mohsen, *Contemporary Exegetical Streams and the Question of Freedom*, Nasher Ney, Tehran, 2017, p. 127

and monotheism.²⁸⁵ Unlike many other contemporary exegetes and scholars, he believes that verses like Q109:6 (To you be your Way, and to me mine.) are not a reason for tolerance of pagans, but an obvious sign of a severe dispute. He writes:

This *separation* is quite necessary in clarification of signs of an essential complete dispute. A dispute that, given the two different ideologies, rules out any compromise on any issue. The dispute is in the very essence of the faith, the truth of the pathway. Monotheism is one pathway while paganism is something quite different... they have nothing in common... Monotheism is a pathway that directs people and the whole universe to an only god with no partner; a pathway along which people may form their beliefs, Sharia, values, criteria, ethics, ontology and all their attitudes towards the life... Jahiliyyah is Jahiliyyah and Islam is Islam. There is no pathway but leaving Jahiliyyah and its every aspect to join Islam with its all teachings.⁶⁸²

As it seems, in Sayyid Qutb's opinion, Q109:6 does not imply tolerating the paganism at all; on the contrary, it means that the Prophet and Muslims must completely separate from the pagans.

In the interpretation of Q2:256 (Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error) presents another viewpoint about the *Freedom of People in Choosing their Religion and Thought*:

This reflects the honor God has reserved for man and the high regard in which man's will, thought and emotions are held, and the freedom he is granted to choose his beliefs, and the responsible position he is afforded to be judge of his own actions. Here lies the essence of human emancipation which 20th-century authoritarian and oppressive

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 175.

⁶⁸² Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Quran*, Vol. 6, p. 3992, Cairo, Dar al-Chorouq, 1998

ideologies and regimes have denied mankind. Modern man has been deprived of the right to choose and live other than according to what is dictated by the state, using the full force of its colossal machinery, laws and powers. People are today given the choice only to adhere to the secular state system, which does not allow for a belief in God as the Creator and Master of the world, or to face annihilation.

Freedom of belief is the most basic right that identifies man as a human being. To deny anyone this right is to deny him or her humanity. Freedom of belief also implies the freedom to express and propagate one's belief without fear of threat or persecution; otherwise, that freedom is hollow and meaningless.

Islam, undoubtedly the most enlightened view of life and the world, establishing a most sensible human and social system, takes the lead in declaring this most fundamental principle. It teaches its adherents, before anyone else, that they are forbidden to compel others to embrace Islam.⁶⁸⁷

These words, in spite of showing a clear respect for *Freedom of People in Choosing their Religion and Thought* are in evident disagreement with his view of an inexorable strife between paganism and monotheism mentioned.

Somewhere else, Qutb explains his favorite freedom in the Islamic Society in a more explicit way:

... In the Islamic Society, the privacy of all non-Muslims is preserved. Civic rights of all citizens are respected regardless of what they think and what religion they have and no one is allowed to force the others to accept Islam... Under the light of such a system,

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid*, Vol. 1, p. 291

people are free to express their opinions. They are simply required to obey the social, moral, economical, and international laws of this society...⁶⁸⁸

Given what mentioned above, one can conclude that, within the limits of the Islamic System, Qutb believes in civic rights and freedom in general. In his view, freedom is a spectrum that involves *Freedom of Religion and Thought*, freedom in private affairs, and finally freedom in a small part public domain. Beyond this, one can hardly find explicit indications of accepting other forms of political and social freedom such as *Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Pen, Freedom of Parties, etc.* Indeed, there is no room for these forms in his political thought.⁶⁸⁹

Shaykh Ṭaṇṭāwī Jawharī (1862-1940) and al-Jawahir fi Tafsir al-Quran al-Karim

About apostasy, Ṭaṇṭāwī's unlike some of contemporary exegetes such as Abduh, who attempted to limit the death penalty decree to very few especial and exceptional cases, complying with previous exegetes, has a severe viewpoint. In the interpretation of Q2:217, he writes:

Beware that killing the apostate is obligatory. His wife shall not be illegal for him. Just like he shall not deserve any reward for the beneficence he has done.²⁹⁰

Basically, the exegetical ideas of Ṭaṇṭāwī regarding the *Freedom of Speech and Thought* are not quite clear. The author of *Al-Jawahir fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, has not offered a clear and organized view about the freedom of pagans or followers of non-

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid*, Vol. 2, p. 295

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid*, Vol. 1, p. 444

⁶⁹⁰ Ṭaṇṭāwī Jawharī, *Al-Jawahir, al-Jawahir fi Tafsir al-Quran al-Karim*, Vol. 1, Part 1, p. 192, Beirut, Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1991

Abrahamic religions, either. On the whole, one cannot realize that if he accepts the right of life for the followers of paganism and other religions.

Muhammad al-Tahir ibn Ashur (1879 – August 1973) and al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir ('The Verification and Enlightenment')

Ibn Ashur is a reformist exegete that the element of Maqāṣid al-sharī'ah (Objectives of the Religion) was in the center of his thoughts. In his opinion, the concept of freedom is among the *Objectives of the Religion*. This means that the Islamic jurisprudential decrees shall be necessarily deducted, based on this fundamental principle, from religious texts; any theorization in the establishment of a political-social Islamic system without considering this principle will be a fruitless attempt and in conflict with the *Objectives of the Religion*.⁶⁹¹

Nevertheless, Ibn Ashur believes in limitations religious limitations in *Freedom of Speech and Thought*, etc. However, he emphasizes that all of them are reasonable and are for the benefits of the Islamic Society.⁶⁹²

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⁶⁹¹ Muhammad al-Tahir ibn Ashur, *al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, p. 210, Tunisian Publishing House

⁶⁹⁶ Ibn Ashur, 1989, p. 89

⁶⁹³ Ibn Ashur, *Uṣūl al-nizām al-ijtimā'ī fī al-Islām*, Tunisian Distributing Company, 1979, p. 210

Nevertheless, Ibn Ashur believes in limitations religious limitations in *Freedom of Speech and Thought*, etc. However, he emphasizes that all of them are reasonable and are for the benefits of the Islamic Society.⁶⁹⁴

He is completely inflexible and like many jurists, he considers the death penalty for an apostate. To justify the death penalty (after asking for repentance), he uses the idea of social contract. According to him:

When someone enters the Islamic Society, they will enjoy a series of rights and freedoms. At the same time, because of being part of this society, they must be committed obey the laws governing that. And apostasy is a violation of such commitment. The Islamic Society is supposed to clean itself from the apostate so that its cohesion is preserved. If some one enters the society and the leaves, other members with weaker faith and thought will suppose that experiencing Islam, the apostate have not found it convincing...⁶⁹⁵

Also in the interpretation of Q2:217 (... And if any of you Turn back from their faith and die in unbelief, their works will bear no fruit in this life and in the Hereafter; they will be companions of the Fire and will abide therein), ibn Ashur tries to justify the death penalty for apostasy:

The reason why an apostate is to be sentenced to death penalty, while there is no such sentence for an infidel, is that apostasy means abandoning the Islamic Society by an individual or group of people. In this way, they practically announce that after accepting Islam and knowing it well, they have not found it suitable...⁶⁹²

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 89

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 172

⁶⁹² *Ibid*, Vol. 2, p. 336

From some of his comments one can guess that he regards this decree as a political one, though he has not pointed out to it explicitly.

Wahbah al-Zuhayli,(1932-2015) and Tafsir al-Muneer (The Enlightened Exegesis)

The contemporary exegete, Wahbah al-Zuhayli, believes that Islam is against making people accept the religion. Referring to Q2:256, like many other exegetes, he reasons that right and wrong will be distinguishable in this way. He believes that basically no belief can be settled inside hearts by using force; it just causes hatred. A belief can only be settled in souls through free will.⁶⁹⁷

Freedom of conversion is among the topics that has engaged Wahbah al-Zuhayli's mind. In *Haqq al-Huriyah fi al-'Alam (The Right to Freedom in the World)*, one can find out that he accepts the death penalty decree in general. But he believes not any apostate deserves death. In his view, only those apostates, who fight Islam (*mohareb*), deserve the death penalty. He believes that an apostate in the time of the Prophet was regarded as a *mohareb*, because as soon as one left Islam, they would join the enemies who were at war with Muslims.²⁹⁸ From this, one can conclude that according to al-Zuhayli, the reason for killing the apostate in Islam is a conversion associated with fighting, and not just leaving the religion.

⁶⁹⁷ Wahbah al-Zuhayli, *The Right to Freedom in the World (Haqq al-Huriyah fi al-'Alam)*, Beirut Dar al Fikr al Moaser 2005, p.142
⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 154

Al-Zuhayli, himself, has not come to a self-consistent theory about the decree for the apostate which conforms to *Freedom of Religion*, while he is trying to assure his audiences that there is a possibility that opinions compatible with *Freedom* are derived through *Ijtihad*.

Muhammad Izzat Darwaza (1888–1984) and *al-Tafsir al-Hadith*

Muhammad Izzat Darwaza must be regarded as one of the exegetes who support the religious reformism and a follower of Abduh. Also in the interpretation of Q2:256, he refuses the sayings of those exegetes who believe this verse is related to the People of the book or non-Arab pagans. Also refusing that the verse has been abrogated by Jihad verses, he emphasizes that the given the expression of clear reasons for the perfectness of Allah's attributes, and the necessity to worship him as well as the necessity to follow his prophets which can be seen in the verses before and after, this verse means that after the Way of Growth has been made quite clear from the Way of Revolt, naturally it will be necessary to force people to accept the right.⁶⁹⁹

Darwaza has considered *Freedom of Religion* more than any other form of freedom. In his view, in the Islamic Society, *Freedom of Religion* is recognized for every one whether they are pagans or People of the Book.³⁰⁰ Non-Muslim will enjoy complete *Freedom of Religion* in the Islamic Society provided that they do not take actions against the Islamic System or they do not try to undermine the religious beliefs of Muslims. Under the interpretation of the Surah Al-Kafirun, in a detailed discussion titled *The Foundation of Freedom of Religion in Islamic System*, Dr. Darwaza criticizes those exegetes and scholars who believe that Islam basically does not recognize any

⁶⁹⁹ Darwaza Mohammad Izzat, *al-Tafsir al-Hadith*, Vol. 6, p. 471, Beirut. Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 2000

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 471

right of life for pagans. He contends that they can live in the Islamic Society, even without paying ransom provided that the interests of this society require so.³⁰¹

Conclusion

The modern streams of religious thought in the contemporary era can be categorized into two completely different or even discrepant doctrines based on the approach to religion and human, especially to the phenomenon of society and its related concepts like freedom, particularly freedom of religion. The two doctrines can be named after their corresponding founders, i.e. Muhammad Abduh and Sayyid Qutb.

The two doctrines have features in common which make them distinguished from the traditional religious doctrine. Nevertheless, when it comes to the topic of *Freedom of Religion* and the concept of apostasy, they seem to be quite different

1. The approach of Qutb's Doctrine to religion is an ideological one based on disputes and denial of the others. This is while Abduh's Doctrine has a more realistic approach to religion which is based on tolerance of the outsiders.

2. Qutb's Doctrine does not recognize the right of life for humans just because they are humans. It admits the minimum rights for the outsiders within the perimeter of Islamic sovereignty. But Abduh's Doctrine recognizes the right of life for humans regardless of their religions and admits more freedom and individual/civic rights for the followers of other religions.

3. The different perception of the word 'fitnah' presented in Abduh's Doctrine paves the way to interpret the phrase "and there prevail justice and faith in Allah altogether and everywhere" in a manner consistent with the concept of *Freedom of Religion and*

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, Vol. 2, pp. 27-40

Thought. Based on the viewpoint, the mentioned phrase points to ending all the torments and threats to Muslims to leave their faiths. Therefore, in the topic of the philosophy and objective of Jihad, Abduh's Doctrine goes beyond the traditional one and unlike other exegetes, it considers Jihad as a guarantee for *Freedom of Religion and Thought* and not for extermination of other religions.

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CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

4.1 Data and Participants

The population of interest for this study comprised of Iranians living in KL and converted to Christianity. Reasons for this restriction to regions were based on constraints of time, cost, travel, and resources available to the researcher. Converts were interviewed, seeking self-narrative, to explore the deep meaning in conversion experiences about our issue. There were no restrictions on race or ethnicity. Religion was limited to those expressing conversions to Christianity. The participants were males and females. Participants were limited to those speaking in the Persian language.

This chapter describes the methodology employed in the study, the research design and the data. The population and the participant recruitment process, as well as the collection of the data, are explained in detail to orient the reader to the qualitative design. The method of the research was a mixed method (both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this investigation).

Religious conversion is a phenomenon which can be considered in humanities, social science and behavioral science. Therefore, in this study one cannot draw on quantitative methods to address its hidden aspects, because quantitative methods are not very effective in leading us to tangible results. Thus, under such circumstances, qualitative methods were employed as well. However, given the application of each type of methods (quantitative and qualitative), none of them can lonely help a researcher to get a better grasp of the phenomena. Then, if one can combine the two types of quantitative

and qualitative to study the phenomenon in question, a better grasp will be realized.³⁰⁶ Amongst the features of a mixed research method are the succession of quantitative and qualitative as well as formulating a measurement tool. Based on Creswell's theory, a mixed method design consists of different strategies:³⁰³

1. Triangulation
2. Explanatory
3. Exploratory

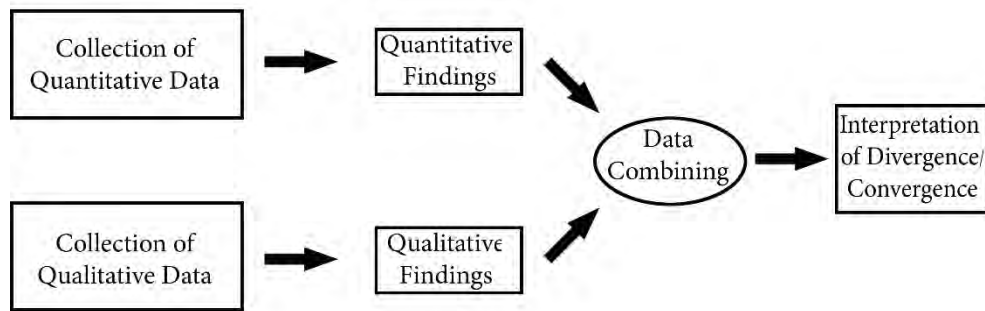
In a mixed research method, quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously and the researcher categorizes the qualitative data using a coding system. Then they determine the frequency of each category and describe it. The quantitative and qualitative data are then compared. In a descriptive research method, the researcher first examines the quantitative collected data and then describes their features using the qualitative data.³⁰⁴

Since in this study, we were examining an "indefinite situation" and formulating a measurement tool, we chose the third strategy i.e. the Explanatory Method. In this strategy, we attempted to make sure that the deductions from the data are of necessary quality. For this purpose, caution was exercised to reduce the internal factors that may damage the validity of the collection and analysis of the quantitative data. Furthermore, in the interpretation of qualitative data, credibility and acceptability must be considered.

³⁰⁶ Bryman, A. *Barriers to integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Research*. *Journal of Mixed Method Research*, (2007). 1 (1):8-22

³⁰³ Creswell .J. W. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches*. 2003 (second edition)

³⁰⁴ Abbas Bazargan, Didar, *An Introduction to Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research*.2016, p163



First, I will describe the qualitative analysis procedures followed for coding the interviews; then I will describe the quantitative data analysis procedures. Hence, it is performed in two steps:

4.2 Qualitative Research

A qualitative research method was used to explore religious conversion among Iranians living in KL who changed their religion. Due to the difficulties of finding interviewees from a relatively small research base, the ‘snow ball’ method was used to locate suitable individuals. A total of 13 members of the Iranian were selected for the study. (See Table 4.1 for sample size and descriptive). Patton (2008), and Marshall and Rossman (2006) define qualitative research as uncovering or focusing upon the “individual lived experience”.

Table 4.1: A total of 13 ex-Muslims agreed to take part in the study (the sample size and descriptive).

	Gender	Age	Education	Place of conversion	Status of living in Malaysia	Marital Status	Number of family Members Converted	Main reason
No. 1 Mahdy	M	45	Bachelor	Iran	Refugee/ worker at an Iranian company	divorced (one child)	-	Research on religions
No. 2 Kristofer	M	32	High school graduate	Malaysia	Refugee/ Exchange Cashier	Married With one child	Wife	First get a visa through UNHCR
No. 3 Hamed	M	34	Master	Iran	Refugee	Divorced (no children)	-	Stared by watching the film
No. 4 Jashova	F	30	Bachelor	Iran	Refugee	Married/ With one child	Husband	Problem with Islamic theology
No. 5 Jashova's Friend 1	F	31	Master	Malaysia	Work visa	Single	-	Started by politic issues
No. 6 Jashova's Friend 2	M	27	Bachelor	Iran	Malaysia My Second Home/self-employed	Single	-	Converted due to personal inquiry
No. 7 Khashayar	M	17	High school	Malaysia	Student visa	Single	Mother and sister	Family situation - converted because his mother converted
No. 8 Muhammad	M	32	Master	Malaysia	Student visa	Single	-	Doubts about Islamic teachings
No. 9 Delaram	F	19	Bachelor student	Malaysia	Student visa	Single	Mother and brother	Attracted to the Christianity - family situation
No. 10 Sima	F	48	High school graduate	USA	Depend visa/Self-employed	Widow with 2children	Son and daughter	Through Relationship with Iranian-Armenians
No. 11 Lida	F	33	Bachelor	Iran	Refugee	Married Divorced	Husband	Through friends converted and became/an active member House church and mission
No. 12 Kristofer' wife	F	29	High school graduate	Malaysia	Refugee/ Exchange cashier	Married With one child	Husband	Firstly, get a visa, but became a true believer

It seeks to interpret a complex social interaction (Denzin 1989; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Patton 2008; Marshall and Rossman 2006).³⁰⁵ As such, it must be flexible to allow for new developing questions and data in a pragmatic, interpretive, and natural setting. I chose this method because of its holistic approach to examining phenomena while assuring a systematic reflection by the researcher.

³⁰⁵ Patton, Michael Q. 2002. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3e. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing Qualitative Research*, 4e. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. Denzin, Norman. 1989. *Interpretive Interactionism*. London, UK: Sage. Denzin, Norman and Yvonne Lincoln. 1994. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

In addition, for more access to the data, institutional analysis methods and analysis of documents were used as well. In the grounded theory methodology.¹³ Iranian were interviewed and the data, using open, axial and selective coding, were analyzed.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview question guide. While the questions served as a guide to me, this did not bind me to a concrete set of questions. Indeed, questions served as a point of departure as rapport and trust developed between each participant and me (Marshall and Rossman 2006). They were flexible and allowed me to explore and adjust to responses. This part relies on qualitative techniques, and quantitative descriptive data emerged. After the interviews, data analysis was performed using data coding method in the form of open, directional, and optional coding. The population of interest for this study is comprised of from Iranians who are living in Kuala Lumpur and converted to Christianity. The frequency of the participants was undertaken based on reaching a theoretical saturation state (Snowball Sampling). First, the process of obtaining detailed concepts from general concepts and interpreting them to obtain deeper concepts was performed through a line-by-line investigation. Finally, a more general concept was achieved by comparing the concepts with each other.

The interviews were described and explained in a line-by-line analysis, using open and directional coding by considering the dimensions and size of events not by focusing on their frequency. In other words, each line of the interview has been described as a concept. These concepts have been achieved according to open coding. Open coding is such that a concept is selected among several concepts obtained from a line. Then, directional coding is obtained according to different phrases, which make several concepts. Eventually, they are specified by a more general label as a directional code. Next, by putting the obtained concepts together, major concepts presenting more general descriptions will emerge. Finally, according to the dominant logic of the

findings and also their transposition, which is obtained from inferential processes, we will come to a paradigmatic model which explains the problem.

Then, a questionnaire was made for data gathering based on the data obtained from the interviews. The questionnaire consisted two parts: first, demographic information of the respondents; second, information related to research's concepts whose components were composed of information from interviews. In this questionnaire, the questions were made according to Likert's scale having the choices of defiantly agreed, agreed, neutral, disagreed, and disagreed.

In this questionnaire, each concept of the research was asked several questions so that after recording the questions, the answer of the concept was reached. SPSS was used to analyze data. First, we extracted descriptive statistics of the respondents, and then inferential statistic tests such as regression, correlation, and variance analysis were used to analyze the data.

4.3 Qualitative Coding Procedures

The population of interest for this study was comprised of Iranians living in Kuala Lumpur and converted to Christianity. As mentioned before, due to the difficulties of finding interviewees from a relatively small research base, the 'snow ball' method³⁰² was used to locate suitable individuals. After interviews, data analysis was performed using a data coding method in the form of open, directional, and optional coding (Table 4.2). At first, the process of obtaining detailed concepts from general concepts and interpreting them to obtain deeper concepts was performed through a line-by-line investigation. Here we used open and directional coding and also considering the dimensions and size of events not by focusing on their frequency. In other words, each

³⁰² Snowball sampling is a method typically used with unknown or rare populations. Members of these populations have not all been previously identified and are more difficult to locate or contact than known populations (Spren, 1992). We have used Snowball sampling method because the population of so-called apostates in Malaysia can be characterized as 'unknown' as there is no list that contains contact information for them.

line of the interview was described as a concept. These concepts were arrived at by open coding. Then, directional coding was obtained according to different phrases. Eventually, a more general label as a directional code specified them. By putting the obtained concepts together, major concepts emerged. Finally, we arrived at a paradigmatic model, which explains the problem.

**Table 4.2: Data coding and concepts regarding how and why somebody
convert to Christianity.**

<i>The conversions problems in Iran</i>	<p>Family responses: Rejection by family, being removed from their homes the shame of their son leaving Islam, and being ostracized by their family, brother and sister converted, family's conversion to Christianity. Social responses: violence against conversions, loss of friends and problems arising within social networks, facing persecution in Iran, not being able to practice their new religion, being unable to attend church, no services in <i>Farsi</i>, the churches being not open to all, limited services on Sundays, the house churches being secret, employment incompatibility with conversions beliefs, economic problem for conversions, being too hard to speak to people about this directly, hiding their change of faith, being persecuted by radical groups, and extremely dramatic reactions from Muslims</p>
<i>Benefits and disadvantages of Malaysia for a new Christian</i>	<p>Living in refugee status in Malaysia, two churches with Persian-speaking in KL, being harmed if returned to Iran, attending church regularly, living in fear, being at risk on returning to hometown, fear of Iranian Security and Intelligence,</p>
<i>Benefits and tendency toward Christianity</i>	<p>The lifestyle of Christians: happiness, peace, being good to others, easy religion, the Bible being more clear and making sense, giving service to others, kindness and love, truthfulness, honesty, Christianity is more fun, Christianity teaches Christians to love and forgiving others, being more tolerant than Islam, Most loving, no gap between the moral profession and the practice of Christians, compassion. Christian propaganda and missionary efforts: websites closely associated with churches, Christian missionary efforts, distributing CDs about Bibles and the life of Christ, Feel comfortable with evangelism, website belonging to the Farsi Christian News Network, house churches, through radio and television evangelism, Relationship with Persian-Armenian, radio and television evangelism, television evangelism into Persian, Inviting friends, family, and co-workers to church, Encourage others to follow Jesus Christ, Get social or financial support, Parties hosted by non-Muslims, social and emotional and physical support, receive confirmation letter and acceptance from pastor church.</p>
<i>Social-politic reasons</i>	<p>Effect of the political situation: Religious rule, no freedom in Islamic Republic regime, the social and communal intolerance, many instances mistreatment, fanatic Islamic government, doesn't give women right, the Refugee Convention, Hate Iranian government</p>
<i>Religious reasons</i>	<p>The level of knowledge and learning about Islam: Little knowledge of Islam, Weak <i>Iman</i>, a true believer, Have a religious basis, performing daily prayer, Don't know how to pray, has Fasted the month of Ramadhan, wasn't a real Muslim, was a <i>Mu'min</i> believes in everything God said in the Holy Qur'an, a doubt about the validity of Islam, confusion, a true believer, a very strict (religious) parents, an extremely strict Muslim family, family wasn't too strict, atheist family, Family Pressure in Religious Matters, have been forced to study the Qur'an, extremely open mind, Didn't know how to pray, Family Pressure in Religious Matters, Doubt about Islam: Associated Islam with extremism, Islam allowed stoning, must pray, the family wasn't too strict, forced to study the Qur'an, extremely open mind, Islam is based on blind love, Haven't Spiritual Comfort and relaxed and peaceful in Islam, Islam encourages Muslims to judge another, Religious capital in Islam, Domestic violence, Islam Women's rights, The divorce rights of women in Islam The power of God, Strong faith Forced to wear a hijab, Family pressure to wear religious dress, Doubt about Qur'an: it is written by humans, The Qur'an is creations from the minds of Mohammad, Didnot know how recitation of Qur'an, understand the meaning of the Qur'an no one would answer the questions about doubts with the Qur'an.</p>
<i>Conversions based on research</i>	<p>Comparison of religions: Critical Research on Zoroastrianism in Iran, a wide-ranging discussion on Judaism, a brief research on Buddhism in KL, Research on Hindu in KL, having studied a Bible, Studying on the other types of Islam: Sufi, <i>Ni'matullāhī</i> (a <i>Sufi</i> order or <i>tariqa</i>)</p>

In addition, for more access to the data, institutional analysis methods and analysis of documents were used as well. In the grounded theory methodology.¹³ Iranian were interviewed and the data, using open, axial and selective coding, were analyzed.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview question guide. While the questions served as a guide to me, this did not bind me to a concrete set of questions. Indeed, questions served as a point of departure as rapport and trust developed between each participant and me (Marshall and Rossman 2006). They were flexible and allowed me to explore and adjust to responses. This part relies on qualitative techniques, and quantitative descriptive data emerged. After the interviews, data analysis was performed using data coding method in the form of open, directional, and optional coding. The population of interest for this study is comprised of from Iranians who are living in Kuala Lumpur and converted to Christianity. The frequency of the participants was undertaken based on reaching a theoretical saturation state (Snowball Sampling). First, the process of obtaining detailed concepts from general concepts and interpreting them to obtain deeper concepts was performed through a line-by-line investigation. Finally, a more general concept was achieved by comparing the concepts with each other.

The interviews were described and explained in a line-by-line analysis, using open and directional coding by considering the dimensions and size of events not by focusing on their frequency. In other words, each line of the interview has been described as a concept. These concepts have been achieved according to open coding. Open coding is such that a concept is selected among several concepts obtained from a line. Then, directional coding is obtained according to different phrases, which make several concepts. Eventually, they are specified by a more general label as a directional code. Next, by putting the obtained concepts together, major concepts presenting more general descriptions will emerge. Finally, according to the dominant logic of the

findings and also their transposition, which is obtained from inferential processes, we will come to a paradigmatic model which explains the problem.

Then, a questionnaire was made for data gathering based on the data obtained from the interviews. The questionnaire consisted two parts: first, demographic information of the respondents; second, information related to research's concepts whose components were composed of information from interviews. In this questionnaire, the questions were made according to Likert's scale having the choices of defiantly agreed, agreed, neutral, disagreed, and disagreed.

In this questionnaire, each concept of the research was asked several questions so that after recording the questions, the answer of the concept was reached. SPSS was used to analyze data. First, we extracted descriptive statistics of the respondents, and then inferential statistic tests such as regression, correlation, and variance analysis were used to analyze the data.

4.4 Qualitative survey sampling

4.4.1 The Questionnaire and Scale

After gaining the sample via the "snow ball" method, a questionnaire was made for the interviews. The questionnaire had two parts: (a) demographic information and (b) substantive information. In this questionnaire, the questions were made according to Likert scale having the choices of "defiantly agreed," "agreed," "neutral," "disagreed", and, "definitely disagreed." For control, each concept of the research was asked through several questions. SPSS was used to analyze the acquired data. Inferential Statistic tests such as regression, correlation, and variance analysis were used to analyze the data.

4.4.2 Limitations and Strengths

The nature of investigating the individual belief is sensitive and controversial. It can also be very difficult to locate and gain the trust of a persecuted community. The research has the potential to cause further problems for those who agree to be interviewed even if extreme caution is taken. We, therefore, spent six months finding our subjects.

As apostasy is considered a crime in Iran, it has far-reaching consequences affecting inheritance, marriage, and custody of children. In some cases, it leads to compulsory divorces. Due to these security concerns, the interviewees insisted on remaining anonymous. Moreover, they were reluctant to reveal where they had been baptized in Iran or Malaysia.

Often, within a Muslim family, the father, mother or siblings or other close family members are violently opposed to conversion to Christianity. Some of our subjects said that they were forced to hide their conversion to avoid exclusion from their families, destruction of their marriage and the estrangement of their children. One subject claimed that he was attacked physically. Many of them used the cautionary account of the demise of a Christian convert named Mehdi Dibaj whose body was found in 1994. He was presumed to have been killed by poison as punishment for his missionary activities in the city Sari, Iran. They also talked about the Pastor Youssef Nadarkhani an Iranian house church leader, who was arrested in October 2009 and sentenced to death in Rasht. However, he was released in September 2012.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁷ <http://www.csw.org.uk/nadarkhani.htm>

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion

A comparative study of three following results will be presented:

- i. Why and how Muslims wish to convert to Christianity
- ii. The analytical result that proves why and how Muslims wish to convert
- iii. Comparison between the reasons at the prophetic era and contemporary world

5.2 Analysis of the Results

The survey questionnaire (Section 4.3.1) began with some background information about the participants. In all, forty-five ex-Muslims were interviewed. The ages of the participants are grouped as in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Frequency and percentage distribution of converts Ages

	Age	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18	3	6.7	6.7	6.7
	19	2	4.4	4.4	11.1
	21	3	6.7	6.7	17.8
	22	1	2.2	2.2	20.0
	23	3	6.7	6.7	26.7
	24	4	8.9	8.9	35.6
	25	1	2.2	2.2	37.8
	28	1	2.2	2.2	40.0
	32	4	8.9	8.9	48.9
	33	4	8.9	8.9	57.8
	34	8	17.8	17.8	75.6
	35	2	4.4	4.4	80.0
	36	4	8.9	8.9	88.9
	40	1	2.2	2.2	91.1
	41	1	2.2	2.2	93.3
	42	1	2.2	2.2	95.6
	43	1	2.2	2.2	97.8
	44	1	2.2	2.2	100
	Total	45	100	100	

The age had a range of 18-44, with ages grouped less than 20, 21-26, 27-32, 33-38, and over 39. The results showed that 37.8% of the respondents were 27 to 32 years old. The age range of the participants was grouped as in Table 5.2. However, 13 of these people agreed to participate in the whole process of this study.

Table 5.2: Frequency and percentage distribution of converts range age

	Age Range	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 20	5	11.1	11.1	11.1
	21-26	12	26.7	26.7	37.8
	27-32	17	37.8	37.8	75.6
	33-38	8	17.8	17.8	93.3
	More than 39	3	6.7	6.7	100
	Total	45	100	100	

The gender and age of the converts are also reported. Twenty-one (46.7%) participants were male, and 24 (53.3%) were female. The percentage of the women was slightly higher than that of the men 6.6%. The Gender of participants is grouped as in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Frequency and percentage distribution of converts' gender.

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	21	46.7	46.7	46.7
	Female	24	53.3	53.3	100
	Total	45	100	100	

One of the most obvious results was that the converts were adults aged between 18 and 32 (64.5%). This is in keeping with anecdotal evidence suggesting that converts among Iranian populations not usually convert at higher ages. The education level revealed that 22.2% of participants (10 people) had a high school diploma or below, 26.7% (12 people) had diploma degree, 28.9% (13 people) hold Bachelor degree and

15.6% (7 people) had Master degree. 6.7% of participants were hold of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.). The education level of participants is grouped in Table 5.4.

The results of this study indicated that there was a strong correlation between college graduates and conversion, so that 49.7% of the converts held a high school diploma or bachelor's degrees. There were no illiterates in the sample.

Table 5.4: Frequency and percentage distribution of converts education level.

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High school diploma and below	10	22.2	22.2	22.2
	Diploma	12	26.7	26.7	48.9
	Bachelor	13	28.9	28.9	77.8
	Master	7	15.6	15.6	93.3
	PhD	3	6.7	6.7	100
	Total	45	100	100	

The survey finds that most participants leave their childhood faith before the age 32 and most of them (i.e. 26 participants) said they converted to Christianity before reaching the age 21-26. Very few changed religions after reaching 39. The age they had changed their religion is grouped as in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Frequency and percentage distribution of the time they had changed their religion.

	Age	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 20	5	11.1	11.1	11.1
	21-26	21	46.7	46.7	57.8
	27-32	11	24.4	24.4	82.2
	33-38	5	11.1	11.1	93.3
	39-44	3	6.7	6.7	100
	Total	45	100	100	

The ages of subjects ranged from a 17 to 48. The gender distribution among the converts was five females and eight males. We had four high school graduates, six

Bachelors, and three Masters holders. Eight were married, and five were single. The results showed that five had converted in Iran and seven in Malaysia and one in another country.

Most participants had something to say about their experience in Malaysia. The majority of Iranian converts attend the church regularly (based on my experience during six months). In most narratives, it appeared that they were satisfied with living conditions in that country, practiced freely and were able to attend the churches, to associate and worship openly with other Christians.³⁰⁸ In this regard, a male participant said:

“The final destination for me as a refugee is a western country... there’s just one problem: We cannot make money as a refugee, but it’s a peaceful place to live with your new religion. There are churches with English and Persian-speaking members in Kuala Lumpur. Although, I have lost some of my relationships with Muslim community, I have started a new life in Malaysia, with new friends.”

One subject who is an active proselytizer and a trained Baptist missionary is well known among the Iranian convert community of Kuala Lumpur. He said,

I have been living here for about eight years. At the outset, I was worried about Iranian and Malaysian security and intelligence authorities. However, gradually I understood that Malaysia is a secure and safe place. Some Malaysian Muslims were

³⁰⁸ Although, Malaysia has been a relatively successful multicultural society, there are tensions between the Muslim and Christian communities. For example, the riots by some Muslims in Malaysia and attacks on Christian churches over a recent court rule that allows Christians to call God “Allah” are as baffling and dismaying to me as to everyone else. (<http://www.juancole.com/2010/01/riots-by-some-muslims-in-malaysia-and.html>)

The laws of Malaysia do not allow leaving Islam, but there are reports showing the number of Muslims who had converted to Christianity in Malaysia. See: <http://www.mysinchew.com/node/62869>

On the other hand, some Muslim NGOs are calling for stronger laws against conversions. See: <http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http://www.worthynews.com/10876-malaysian-muslims-decry-proselytizers&date=2011-08-17>

It is also reported that some Malaysian ex-Muslims say they are persecuted after converting. In countries like Malaysia, Morocco, Jordan and Oman, punishments for apostasy include fines, imprisonment, flogging and exclusion from civil or family rights (such as the right to child custody).

Political and Legal Status of Apostates in Islam, by: the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, p58

surprised to learn of my conversion. They asked me: ‘You come from a Muslim country. So, why did you become a Christian?’ That gave me a reason to share the message of Jesus Christ. Now my mission is to witness for Chris, invite people to his way and draw their attention to Christianity. I usually baptize new Iranian converts in my home.

In response to the first research question, “The place they have changed their religion” some participants reported to have converted to Christianity in Iran, while others converted after arriving in Malaysia. The results showed that among ex-Muslims who lived in KL 23 (51.1%) had converted in Iran and 17 (37.8%) in Malaysia and 5 (11.1%) in other countries; The conversion places of participants were grouped as in Table 5.6. On the other hand, among 23 participants who had converted in Iran, 17 said they have emigrated because of the conversion (Table 5.7)

Table 5.6: Frequency and percentage distribution of conversion place.

	Place	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Iran	23	51.1	51.1	51.1
	Malaysia	17	37.8	37.8	88.9
	Other countries	5	11.1	11.1	100
	Total	45	100	100	

Table 5.7: Frequency and percentage distribution of the people who have emigrated because of conversion.

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	17	37.8	73.9	73.9
	No	6	13.3	26.1	100
	Total	23	51.1	100	
Missing	system	22	48.9		
Total		45	100		

In response to the question about whether their expectations as a new Christian convert have been fulfilled in Malaysia, 4 (8.9%) strongly disagreed, 7 (15.9%)

disagreed, 10 (22.2%) agreed, 5 (11.1%) were neutral, 18 (40.00%) strongly agreed, and 1 (2.2%) did not answer. It appears that most of these new Christians were satisfied with living in Malaysia (Table 5.8).

Although Iranians are satisfied with the conversion conditions in Malaysia and there are reports indicating freedom of religion in Malaysia³⁰⁹, and researches show that people can legally convert to Christianity³¹⁰, there are also reports that indicate some converts in Malaysia are faced with violence. For instance, it has been claimed that:

While some converts are arbitrarily arrested and sent to the centers, detention in one of the three camps is “slowly gaining preference among sharia judges in Malaysia” as an alternative to prison sentencing.³¹¹

In another instance of conflict with converts in Malaysia, a note titled “Path to Leave Islam Simple, but far from Easy” says: An Indian woman whose Hindu wedding was recently disrupted by Selangor Islamic officials insisting she is Muslim despite her efforts to leave Islam has again put the spotlight on the difficulties in exiting the religion. Like many Malaysians who dispute their official identities as Muslims, she was told to go to the *Shariah* courts in order to remove the status from her official documents. Little is known of the procedure and potential dangers that one might face in such applications.

309 Malaysia Rules Muslim Man Can Convert to Christianity, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2016/march/malaysia-rules-muslim-can-convert-to-christianity.html>

Also: www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2016/march/malaysia-ex-muslim-finally-allowed-to-legally-be-a-christian

310 *How did this Malaysian Muslim legally convert to Christian?* <https://cilisos.my/eh-did-a-sarawakian-muslim-just-get-kebenaran-to-become-christian/>

Also: “*Malaysia Rules Muslim Man Can Convert to Christianity*” www.pagadiandiocese.org/2016/06/20/malaysia-rules-muslim-man-can-convert-to-christianity/

311 *Converts from Islam in Malaysia Detained in ‘Faith Purification Cent*, <https://morningstarnews.org/2016/07/converts-from-islam-in-malaysia-detained-in-faith-purification-centers/>

The Department of Syariah Judiciary Malaysia (JKSM) said that the Islamic courts are the only place according to current laws for Malaysians seeking to be no longer known as a Muslim.³¹⁶

Table 5.8: Frequency and percentage distribution of the people whose expectations have been fulfilled in Malaysia.

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	8.9	9.1	9.1
	Disagree	7	15.6	15.9	25.0
	Neutral	5	11.1	11.4	36.4
	Agree	10	22.2	22.7	59.1
	Strongly agree	18	40.0	40.9	100
	Total	44	97.8	100	
Missing	System	1	2.2		
	Total	45	100		

Since the 1990s, many Christians have left Iran.³¹³ Some of our participants left Iran for reasons, which they claim to be connected to their conversion to Christianity. These included not being able to openly practice Christianity in Iran and the services are not presented in Farsi.³¹⁴ A respondent said that the ethnic churches (in Iran) did not accept converts. In addition, she said that churches were merely open to foreigners and diplomats:

When I was in Iran, the churches were not open to all. Actually, it was very difficult for converts to go to a church. I wanted to practice freely, but I was not able to practice my new religion and the Sunday Services were limited.

Although there are few people who are legally convicted of apostasy in Iran, some responses referred to social problems and harassments. A participant, who was a victim of violence, lost her job and moved away from homesaid:

³¹⁶ Read more at <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/path-to-leave-islam-simple-but-far-from-easy#DUCj1sofekUiTu3A.99>

³¹³ Report Iran: Christians and Converts, Landifo – July 7, 2011 p6

³¹⁴ According to some reports, Assyrian and Armenian churches nearly do not accept Muslim converts. (Report Iran: Christians and Converts, , Landifo – July 7, 2011, p8)

As a house church leader, I faced many problems and lost some of my friends in social networks. I also encountered some problems in my career. To be honest, I proselytized at work and as a result was faced with persecution by radical groups. They thought I had betrayed my religion.

However, some respondents stated that they have freely travelled to Iran. Four respondents (out of 13) explained that they travelled to Iran with a student visa or dependent visa during 2013. One of the interviewees stated:

I do not announce my conversion. Hence, I do not have problems with the Iranian regime. Last month, I returned to Iran legally. In fact, I will never reject my country and my people and their culture. As an ex-Muslim, I do not see myself as a political opposition.

The social problems of converts are social in nature. They include loss of friends and problems arising within social networks,” inability to practice one’s new religion, churches being closed to Muslims, and offering of services in ethnic languages of indigenous Christians (Armenian and Assyrian) instead of Persian. The alternative of “house churches” was also limited due to state persecution. This includes the firing of the converts from their jobs. And finally there was fear of vigilantes threatening the converts with physical violence.

On the question of the responses of their family and friends to the subjects referred to rejection by family, being expelled from their homes,” shamed for leaving Islam” and “being ostracized.”

Three of them had a difficult conversion. One individual described his turning point this way:

When I first became a Christian in Tehran, I had to move away from my family and I was banned from my parents' home. My mom's family was disappointed and they still are. I started a business in Kish [an Island in the Persian Gulf] but after a while I went bankrupt, moved to Malaysia and started a new life as a refugee... Nowadays I am a waitress in a restaurant. I am a Church member and attend the church regularly.

For Muslim families who piously believe in Islam, a rejection of their religion can be a shock. One of the subjects (Y) who converted in Iran more than two years before the interview confided:

I come from strict parents and the conversion was a dishonor to my family, particularly to my father who was ashamed of his son leaving Islam.

Having said that, many of the reports did not reveal any harsh reaction from their family to their conversion:

My parents got divorced about eight years ago. My brother and I live with my mother who is extremely open- minded although she comes from a strict Muslim family. My brother and converted to Christianity at the same time. .

Another converter said:

I am the only child of my parents. Getting away from my family was so difficult. Finally, my parents accepted me as a Christian. Now we are very close. They completely accept my Christian faith. Sometimes I miss my country.

On the issue of the reasons for converts' immigration from Iran, 14 (31.1%) participants claimed that it was caused by the inappropriate behavior by Muslims

towards apostates, 11 (24.4%) claimed that it was the result of the lack of legal freedom to have free practice in the new religion, 9 (20.0%) stated that it was fear of punishment was the reason for their flight, and 7 (15.6%) claimed that it was caused by the dearth of economic and social growth and development due to their conversion new religion (Table 5.9).

Table 5.9: Frequency and percentage of the reasons for converts' immigration from Iran.

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A: Lack of legal freedom	11	24.4	24.4	24.4
	B: The dearth of economic and ...	7	15.6	15.6	40.0
	C: Inappropriate behavior by...	14	31.1	31.1	71.1
	D: Fear of punishment	9	20.0	20.0	91.1
	E: Your alternative reasons	2	4.4	4.4	95.6
	F: Education	2	4.4	4.4	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "Those Muslims who know my conversion to another religion would change their behaviors towards me" the results were 20 (44.4%) strongly agree, 8 (17.8%) agree, 3 (6.7%) neutral, 3 (6.7% disagree), 11 (24.4%) strongly disagree (Table 5.10).

Table 5.10: Results for the question "Those Muslims who know my conversion to another religion would change their behaviors towards me."

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	11	24.4	24.4	24.4
	Disagree	3	6.7	6.7	31.1
	Neutral	3	6.7	6.7	37.8
	Agree	8	17.8	17.8	55.6
	Strongly agree	20	44.4	44.4	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "I am afraid of announcing my conversion to a new religion among Muslims." the results were 4 (8.9%) Strongly agree, 5 (11.1%) Agree, 5 (11.1%) Neutral, 19 (42.2%) Disagree, 12 (26.7 %) Strongly disagree (Table 5.11).

Table 5.11: Results for the question “I am afraid of announcing my conversion to a new religion among Muslims.”

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	12	26.7	26.7	26.7
	Disagree	19	42.2	42.2	68.9
	Neutral	5	11.1	11.1	80.0
	Agree	5	11.1	11.1	91.1
	Strongly agree	4	8.9	8.9	100
	Total	45	100	100	

The question the familial religiosity was coded as, “very strict (religious) parents”, “family wasn’t too strict”, “atheist family”, “family pressure in religious matters”, “open minded family”, “family wasn’t too strict”, “forced to study the Qur’an”, and, “extremely open minded,” a participant who was a young girl expressed:

Maybe I was not a real Muslim and had a little knowledge about Islam, but in my opinion, that was enough to change my idea. I, as a youth, disagree with some Islamic rules such as forced hijab, polygamy, the banning of music and so on. I often asked myself why shaking hands with the male (or vice versa) is not allowed in Islam.

In contrast, the man born into a religious Muslim family in Mashhad said:

I cannot believe it when some people say that Muslims are leaving Islam because they have a weak faith or they say a true Muslim would never change his/her religion. I come from a religious city and my family has a traditional Muslim lifestyle. I prayed and was a Qur’an reciter (qari).

On the issue of family members' level of religious commitment to the Islamic rules the results were as follows: 21 (46.7%) too little, 12 (26.7%) little, 6 (13.3%) average, 5 (11.1%) high, 1 (2.2%) much high. (Table 5.12).

Table 5.12: Frequency and percentage distribution of their family members' level of religious commitment to the Islamic rules.

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Too little	21	46.7	46.7	46.7
	Little	12	26.7	26.7	73.3
	Average	6	13.3	13.3	86.7
	Higher	5	11.1	11.1	97.8
	Much higher	1	2.2	2.2	100
	Total	45	100	100	

On the issue of whether the family was strict on performing the Islamic rituals, the results were: 17 (37.8%) strongly disagreed, 8 (17.8%) disagreed, 13 (28.9%) were neutral, 2 (4.4%) agreed, 5 (11.1%) strongly agreed (Table 5.13).

Table 5.13: Frequency and percentage distribution of their family members were very strict to perform the Islamic rules.

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	17	37.8	37.8	37.8
	Disagree	8	17.8	17.8	55.6
	Neutral	13	28.9	28.9	84.4
	Agree	2	4.4	4.4	88.9
	Strongly agree	5	11.1	11.1	100
	Total	45	100	100	

5.2.1 The Level of Knowledge and Learning about Islam

On the question of the responses of the level of Islamic knowledge and learning the coded concepts were, "little knowledge of Islam", "weak faith", "having a religious basis", "performing daily prayer and fasting the month of Ramadan", "Not knowing how to pray", "Not being a real Muslim", "Being a faithful person (Mu'min) who

believes in everything in the Qur'an", "In doubt about the validity of Islam", "A true believer", "Having been forced to study the Qur'an."

Concerning ritual worship act some years before conversion, a respondent said:

My family has never been religious. They are all non-practicing Muslims. I did not know how to pray, how to read the Qur'an in Arabic. Only, we were forced to study the Qur'an in schools ...

A few respondents stated that they were not practicing their religion. A respondent frankly emphasized the hypocrisy and insincerity of her religious practice when he was a young man:

We were forced to pray in public schools. Ramadan was a month in which Muslims must refrain from eating or drinking in public, but my friend and I ate in secret.

About daily prayers, the majority of respondents (9 out of 13) admitted that they did not pray or they did it infrequently. Eight of them said that they did not fast in Ramadan. Also, the majority of them (11 out of 13) were not attending the mosque for several years and that they never attended the Friday prayers (al-Jum'ah). Overall, they did not feel that they were adhering to all or most Islamic ritual practices.

In response to the question "When you were a Muslim, what was your level of religious commitment to Islamic rules?" the results were 21 (46.7%) too little, 12 (26.7%) little, 6 (13.3%) average, 5 (11.1%) high, 1 (2.2%) much higher (Table 5.14).

Table 5.14: Frequency and percentage distribution of their level of religious commitment to Islamic rules.

	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
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Valid	Too little	21	46.7	46.7	46.7
	Little	12	26.7	26.7	73.3
	Average	6	13.3	13.3	86.7
	Higher	5	11.1	11.1	97.8
	Much higher	1	2.2	2.2	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "In terms of religious beliefs and practices, I believed myself as a real believer in Islamic teachings." the results were 9 (20%) too little, 7 (15.6%) little, 13 (28.9 %) average, 7 (15.6% high), 9 (20.0%) much higher (Table 5.15).

Table 5.15: Results for the question “In terms of religious beliefs and practices, I believed myself as a real believer in Islamic teachings.”

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Too little	9	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Little	7	15.6	15.6	35.6
	Average	13	28.9	28.9	64.4
	Higher	7	15.6	15.6	80.0
	Much higher	9	20.0	20.0	100
	Total	45	100	100	

To answer the second part of the research question, which was, “How could someone from Islamic background convert to Christianity and choose to follow Christ as his Savior?” Multiple regressions were conducted.

5.2.2 Conversions based on Research

Converts come from different social and professional backgrounds and their previous engagement with Islam are often extremely varied.³¹⁵ On the question of the responses of Conversions based on research, there were also some comments expressed by participants. Themes and the coded concepts for the causes of conversion based on research on comparison of religions were, “Research on Zoroastrianism in Iran”, “a

³¹⁵ *Conversion as Statelessness: A Study of Contemporary, Algerian Conversions to Evangelical Christianity*, Nadia Marzouki, Middle East Law and Governance 4 (2012) 69–105, p90

wide-ranging discussion on Judaism”, “a brief research on Buddhism in KL”, “Research on Hindu in KL”, “having studied the Bible”, “Studying on the other types of Islam such as the ‘Sufi’ orders.”

Some participants said that they had compared some religions together. Three participants maintained that:

...in Iran some other types of Islam are found. I was a follower of Sufism. I used to go to the khanqah for a few months in Tehran. I was quite attracted by the subject of love in Sufism. ... I could not find answers to my questions in Islam. I do not claim that I am an expert in religions, but I studied Zoroastrianism and Judaism too.

...I began to understand why Christian countries are developed and rich. From that point on, I began to do my own research. I was not satisfied with reading the books written by Muslim scholars... Now that I’ve come to think of the values of the West, it makes me more respectful and sensitive. I found peace, truth, kindness and love in Christianity.

What I am stressing is that a man should be able to choose her/his own religion. I mean it is the parents who make children a Muslim, Zoroastrian, Jew or Christian. I had a brief research on Buddhism and Hindu in KL.

While in some answers it is appeared that there were personal reasons that played some role in the individual’s turning point in their conversion, such a case was expressed by a participant called Conversion 10. She expressed emotional factors at the turning point or conversion. The following describes her tendency:

I lived in the United States for five years. Although I converted to Christianity there, my tendency toward Christianity began in youth when I

*lived in Tehran and had a good relationship with Iranian-Armenians. I fell in love with a young Armenian man who was my neighbor. My mom and I often had arguments about that, and she said: You are not allowed to marry him as a Muslim”.*³¹⁶

Convert 13 describes his familiarity with Christianity as an impulsive entrance to a church:

I first became interested in Christianity when I accidentally went to church in Kuala Lumpur. [In the binging] I was attracted to the singing and the music of the church.

The experience of "Conversion 10" reminds us that conversion is a multifaceted process. This finding is in agreement with Duane Alexander Miller's (2012) findings that narrated the conversion experience of a woman from Shi'a Islam to Christianity.³¹⁷

Distribution of answers to the question “How many religions have they compared before choosing their new religion” is interesting: 33 (73.3%) said one religion, 7 (15.6%) said two religions and 5 (11.1%) said more than two religions. The question “About which religions (Hindu, Zoroastrian, Jew, Buddhist, Other) the subjects studied is the subject of the next Table. Out of the 45, four of them can predict 8.9 percent said Judaism, 11 (24.4%) Zoroastrian, 4 (8.9%) and 3 (6.7%) Hindu, 24 (53.3%) said nothing.

Table 5.16:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	One religion	33	73.3	73.3	73.3
	Two religions	7	15.6	15.6	88.9

³¹² See another conversion experience by an Iranian woman, “*The Conversion Narrative of Samira: From Shi'a Islam to Mary, her Church, and her Son*”, Duane Alexander Miller, St Francis Magazine 5/5 (October 2009), pp 81-92.

³¹⁷ The Secret World of God: Aesthetics, Relationships, and the Conversion of ‘Frances’ from Shi'a Islam to Christianity, Duane Alexander Miller, Published in “Diaspora Studies” - www.GlobalMissiology.org April 2012

More than Two religions	5	11.1	11.1	100
Total	45	100	100	

Table 5.17:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Judaism	4	8.9	8.9	8.9
	Zoroastrianism	11	24.4	24.4	33.3
	Hinduism	3	6.7	6.7	40.0
	Buddhism	3	6.7	6.7	46.7
	Nothing	24		53.3	100
	Total	45	100	100	

Concerning a question about the familiarity (academically, non-academically) of respondents with other types of Islam (e.g. Sufism), 39 people (86.7%) of those who were interviewed indicated that they have not faced and studied and six people (13.3%) said Yes.

Table 5.18:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	6	13.3	13.3	13.3
	No	39	86.7	86.7	100
	Total	45	100	100	

To the question whether her knowledge and learning about Islam was enough to leave it the subjects responded in the following manner: 18 (40.0%) strongly disagree, 11 (24.4%) disagree, 5 (11.1%) agree, 5 (11.1%) neutral, 6 (13.3%) strongly agree,

Table 5.19:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	18	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Disagree	11	24.4	24.4	64.4
	Neutral	5	11.1	11.1	75.6
	Agree	5	11.1	11.1	86.7
	Strongly agree	6	13.3	13.3	100
	Total	45	100	100	

To the question whether they knew how to recite the Qur'an they answered with 18 (40.0%) strongly disagreeing. 16 (35.6%) disagreed, 2 (4.4%) agreed, 6 (13.3%) were neutral, and 3 (6.7%) strongly agreed.

Table 5.20:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	18	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Disagree	16	35.6	35.6	75.6
	Neutral	6	13.3	13.3	88.9
	Agree	2	4.4	4.4	93.3
	Strongly agree	3	6.7	6.7	100
	Total	45	100	100	

Were they familiar with the translation of the Qur'an? 14 (31.1%) strongly disagreed, 14 (31.1%) disagreed, 10 (22.2%) were neutral, and 7 (15.6%) strongly agreed.

Table 5.21:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	14	31.1	31.1	31.1
	Disagree	14	31.1	31.1	62.2
	Neutral	10	22.2	22.2	84.4
	Strongly agree	7	15.6	15.6	100
	Total	45	100		

5.2.3 Religious Reasons

The desire to convert was attributed by some participants to 'doubt about the Qur'an' and by others to 'doubt about Islam.' Themes and the coded concepts emerged in the context of doubt about Islam was, "Islam being associated with extremism", "stoning being allowed in Islam", "compulsion of prayer based on a blind faith", "lack of spiritual comfort and relief in Islam", "Islam encouraging Muslims to judge another", "religious capital in Islam", "domestic violence", "women's rights", "divorce rights of women", "Being forced to wear hijab", "family pressure to wear religious dress", "being confused about God." "Doubt about the Qur'an" was broken down to the

following assumptions, “it is written by humans”, “it is created by the mind of Mohammad”, “didn’t know the recitation of Qur’an”, and, “didn’t understand the meaning of the Qur’an.” In expressing unhappiness with performing practical rituals and rules of Islam, some respondents decried the imposition of Islamic Law. One respondent said:

For years, Islamic position with regards to the punishments and religious capital in Islam was my question. I could not understand why the Shari’ah [Islamic law] allowed death by stoning or to cut off the thief’s hand, and lashing in public – not only in Iran, but also in many strict Muslim countries such as Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia. Clerics just would say, “Punishments in Islam are very difficult to apply in practice.” Then one day I read some Christian literature and I found the teachings of Christianity made much more sense... in fact Christianity is a personal relationship with God.

One more convert emphasized the difference between Islam and Christianity as the difference between a religion of constraining law and one of love:

Before I converted, I used to believe that Islam was a religion of peace... There is so much violence and oppression in the Qur’an itself. Everyone wants an easy religion. When I visited the church, I was surprised to find that Christianity is very simple and pure that makes it very convenient. In my opinion, Islam is based on a strict shari’a law, but Christianity is based on love and life.

Another converts said:

Muslims' claim that Muhammad was a messenger of God is not really logical. Why did Muhammad and his followers kill non-Muslims? Why apostasy is punishable by the death?

A participant claims that no one would answer the questions about the doubts with the Qur'an. He spoke of the lack of spirituality in Islam:

A true religion must include both kindness and spiritual comfort. I could not find anything in Islam on the subject of spiritual life. I was always scared of death and afraid of God. For a long time, my doubts and confusions regarding God, Islam, and the prophet remained in dormant. Step by step, my faith in Islam crumbled. I started to ask my friends, university professors, and clergymen some questions. But I was not convinced by the answers. In my opinion, having doubts is perfectly natural, but they rejected my questions. I don't know why Muslims are afraid of a dialogue?

Another participant mentioned the fear of God in Islam:

As a Shi'a Muslim, I knew that the Qur'an was the word of God transferred from God himself. I have been struggling with my daily prayers since I was young. Step by step, I got away from it and also from fasting in Ramadan. I couldn't be sure of my acceptance by God. I always feared hell, when I was growing up. I was constantly afraid of God, "God will punish me because of my sins." I do not want a Holy Book that only talks about punishment and war. Take a look at books about The Day of Judgment in Islam. They are horrible.³¹⁸

³¹⁸ The findings of the current study are consistent with a survey of 100 former Muslims by Georges Houssney (<http://biblicalmissiology.org/2013/04/08/factors-leading-to-conversion-of-muslims-to-christ/>), The vast majority of respondents

Another participant pointed to Qur'anic concepts and the violence mentioned in the Qur'an and they did not believe that it was a divine speech:

Qur'an is not the word of God. It is a figment of the mind of Muhammad or it was copied from Christianity and Judaism. Muslims constantly claim that Islam is the most peaceful religion in the world. Correct me if I'm wrong. I want you [] to look up each verse in the Qur'an. Unfortunately, there are very few verses of tolerance and peace, but there are verses of violence such as, "kill them wherever you find them." You can compare: Which is more tolerance, Bible or Qur'an?

The answers to the question were distributed thus: They believed in the Qur'an as a divine speech. 11 (24.4%) strongly disagree, 14 (31.1%) disagree, 2 (4.4%) agree, 6 (13.3%) neutral, 12 (26.7%) strongly agree.

Table 5.22:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	11	24.4	24.4	24.4
	Disagree	14	31.1	31.1	55.6
	Neutral	6	13.3	13.3	68.9
	Agree	2	4.4	4.4	73.3
	Strongly agree	12	26.7	26.7	100
	Total	45	100	100	

who were mostly moderate Muslims (40%) or nominal Muslims (40%) before their conversions (20% were self-described "fanatics") said they viewed their relationship with Allah as based on fear or duty. See: Factors leading to conversion of Muslims to Christ (<http://biblicalmissiology.org>).

In response to the question "The spirituality in Islam gave me comfort and made me satisfied" the results were: 8 (17.8%) strongly disagree, 3 (6.7%) disagree, 6 (13.3%) agree, 6 (13.3%) neutral, 22 (48.9%) strongly agree. (18)

Table 5.23:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	17.8	17.8	17.8
	Disagree	3	6.7	6.7	24.4
	Neutral	6	13.3	13.3	37.8
	Agree	6	13.3	13.3	51.1
	Strongly agree	22	48.9	48.9	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "Ambiguity in doctrinal and theoretical issues was effective on my changing religion." the results were 13 (28.9%) strongly disagree, 16 (35.6%) disagree, 3 (6.7%) agree, 10 (22.2%) neutral, 3 (6.7%) strongly agree.

Table 5.24:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	13	28.9	28.9	28.9
	Disagree	16	35.6	35.6	64.4
	Neutral	10	22.2	22.2	86.7
	Agree	3	6.7	6.7	93.3
	Strongly agree	3	6.7	6.7	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "Performing practical rituals and decrees of Islam affecting conversion the results were 5 (11.1%) strongly disagree, 4 (8.9%) disagree, 13 (28.9%) agree, 12 (26.7%) neutral, 11 (24.4%) strongly agree.

Table 5.25:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	5	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Disagree	4	8.9	8.9	20.0
	Neutral	12	26.7	26.7	46.7

Agree	13	28.9	28.9	75.6
Strongly agree	11	24.4	24.4	100
Total	45	100	100	

In response to whether the new religion provides the space for the subjects' questions and criticism of Islam," the results were 16 (35.6%) strongly disagree, 8 (17.8%) disagree, 6 (13.3% agree), 5 (11.1%) neutral, 10 (22.2%) strongly agree,

Table 5.26:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	16	35.6	35.6	35.6
	Disagree	8	17.8	17.8	53.3
	Neutral	5	11.1	11.1	64.4
	Agree	6	13.3	13.3	77.8
	Strongly agree	10	22.2	22.2	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "Who would help you when you got questions, faced problems and wanted to criticize Islam? The results were 2.2% by the University Professors, 4.4% by the Muslim clergy, 15.6 % the family, 13.3% friends, 13.3 % nobody. The rest of answers are seen in the table below.

Table 5.27:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A: University Professors	1	2.2	2.2	2.2
	B: The Muslim Clergy	2	4.4	4.4	6.7
	C: The family	7	15.6	15.6	22.
	D: Friends	6	13.3	13.3	35.6
	Nobody	6	13.3	13.3	48.9
	Two helpers	16	35.6	35.6	84.4
	Three helpers	4	8.9	8.9	93.3
	Four helpers	3	6.7	6.7	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "When I discussed my questions, problems, the given answers convinced me." the results were 18 (40.0%) strongly disagree, 11 (24.4%) disagree, 6 (13.3% agree), 3 (6.7%) neutral, 7 (15.6%) strongly agree.

Table 5.28:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	18	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Disagree	11	24.4	24.4	64.4
	Neutral	3	6.7	6.7	71.1
	Agree	6	13.3	13.3	84.4
	Strongly agree	7	15.6	15.6	100
	Total	45	100	100	

The lifestyle of Christians might have been one of the attractions for the converts. Themes and the coded concepts emerged in the context, "happiness", "peace", "be good to others", "easy religion", "Bible being clearer and making sense", "giving service to others", "kindness and love", "truthfulness", " honesty", "Christianity is more fun", "Christianity teaches people to love and forgive another", "more tolerant than Islam", "Most loving", "no gap between Christians beliefs and their practice", and, "compassion."

Some participants said they were attracted to Christian faith because of the lifestyle of the Christians. A put it this way:

When I become Christian, I do not hate Muslims or followers of any other religion. In fact, hate is not good for any person specially for a Christian. Christ loves all people, True Christians love all people too, but I don't like the behaviour of some Muslims because they're such hypocrites. You cannot see a gap between the beliefs and practices of most of the members of our Church.

Another participant said:

As I began to get closer to Christianity, I felt that Church friends offer joy, service, kindness, and compassion to the others. Actually, my heart was attracted to this religion by Christ's love for all people. Christianity teaches its followers to love and forgive the others.

The findings of the current study are consistent with a Field Research performed between 1991 and 2007, which was a survey of 750 Muslims who have decided to follow Christ. They filled out an extensive questionnaire on that basic question. The respondents were from 30 countries and 50 ethnic groups and they represented every major denomination in the Muslim world. This survey shows that, "The lifestyle of Christians" was one of the five predominant reasons they chose to follow Christ.

5.2.4 Benefits and Tendency towards Christianity

On the question about the benefits and tendency toward Christianity in a few narratives, it appeared that Christian propaganda and missionary efforts that played some role in the individual's turning point in the process of conversion. A participant claimed that he had been advised to approach Christian missionaries by his friend:

Although I left Islam in Malaysia, my challenge with my religion started in Tehran. Previously, I met a house church leader. I had never met a Christian in my life. She distributed CDs and books about Christianity and the life of Christ. She also was always very encouraging to parties hosted by other conversions.

One participant who considered himself as a religious Christian who helps other Muslims to find the path of salvation said:

I'm not afraid of anything; however, some of my friends hide their conversion. I also know other ex-Muslims who are not afraid to speak up against intolerant religions. In my opinion, this depends on their faith. I try to lead other Muslims to the Christian faith. Why not? I am just doing my duty as a pastor.

Three of the subjects claimed that their conversion was because of missionary contact. The next most important influence was the media. A participant said he was attracted to the Christian faith because of a film:

My familiarity with Christianity was started by watching 'The Passion of the Christ'³¹⁹. The film changed my life. I'm sure, that was just the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. I made a decision to read the Bible. My journey from Islam to Christianity started that point. I started watching Persian Christian Satellite TV and Radio for Farsi speaking people, too. For a long time, I had questions without answers such as: Is Jesus God or the son of God? But I was particularly surprised when I found the teachings of love, charity and forgiveness.

The third biggest influence listed by respondents was getting social or financial supports. A number of studies have found that there are opportunities for Iranian converts or minorities that are also asylum seekers. (Report Iran: Christians and Converts, Landifo – July 7, 2011 p6).³⁶⁰ Also a conversion can be used as a strategy for emigration. According to a research article by Sebnem Koser Akcapar (2006, p. 819),

³¹⁹ *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) depicts the final twelve hours in the life of Jesus Christ, on the day of his crucifixion in Jerusalem. It is directed by Mel Gibson and written by Benedict Fitzgerald and Mel Gibson.

³⁶⁰ The UNHCR office in Eastern Turkey reported that they received applications for an asylum from Iranian converts (meeting in Van, March 2011). UNHCR estimated that approximately 20-25 per cent of the asylum seekers reported that they were converts. Some of them have converted in Iran; others are baptized in Van during the processing of their application for asylum. A common feature of Iranian converts in Ankara and Van is that they almost without exception are ethnic Persians and were previously Shia Muslims. (Report Iran: Christians and Converts, LANDINFO – JULY 7, 2011 p6)

based on her fieldwork among Iranian asylum seekers carried out in Turkey, she argues that conversion from Islam to Christianity is used as a migration strategy. She demonstrates how Iranian asylum seekers use religion and newly acquired social and religious networks within different churches and congregations in Turkey to reach the West in a shorter period as refugees.³⁶¹

There are some participants reporting that not all who say they have converted are “real.” In other words, some individuals convert out of a desire for salvation while others seek conversion as a tool to get other benefits.³⁶⁶ In some Muslim countries, the hope of receiving a visa to a Western country can be the main motivation for Muslim conversions³⁶³, and a respondent said:

*I did not receive any support. Unfortunately, I know some people - my customers, our church members- who change faith to get social or financial support especially obtaining visa and achieving an asylum status.*³²⁴

Another respondent said:

For the first time, I was invited to a church ceremony in KL by a friend when I was 15. I was an international school student. The staff and the service were friendly and courteous. It was an excellent atmosphere in that place too... Our family church is a local one and has really helped in Christian faith. However, there are a few Iranian church members of whom I feel ashamed. They are just looking for immigration documents.

³⁶¹ About Iranian converts in Turkey see also: Report on the Situation of Iranian Refugees in Turkey, Omid Advocates for Human Rights, Report on the Situation of Iranian Refugees in Turkey, June 2010, <http://www.omidadvocates.org/>

³⁶⁶ Malcolm L. RIGSBY (2012) noted that prisoners often use religion as a tool to gain privileges that may create status among the general prison population.

also there is some organizations such as “Central Council of Ex-Muslims in Germany” that formed <http://ex-muslim.org.uk>

³⁶³ Marzouki Nadia, *Conversion as Statelessness: A Study of Contemporary Algerian Conversions to Evangelical Christianity*, Middle East Law and Governance 4 (2012) 69–105

³⁶⁴ I have seen some of the converts who receive a confirmation letter and acceptance from pastor church.

One of the most interesting findings of this survey was the fact that the financial benefits offered would definitely help to change the religion. 8 (17.8%) strongly disagree, 3 (6.7%) disagree, 3 (6.7%) agree, 6 (13.3%) neutral, 25 (55.6%) strongly agree,

Table 5.29:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	17.8	17.8	17.8
	Disagree	3	6.7	6.7	24.4
	Neutral	6	13.3	13.3	37.8
	Agree	3	6.7	6.7	44.4
	Strongly agree	25	55.6	55.6	100
	Total	45	100	100	

These findings were supported by the study conducted by Sebnem Koser Akcapar in 2006, "Certainly, in Turkey, there were some opportunistic people who believed that conversion could be their only way to reach the West."

In response to the question "The possibility of getting a residence permit from other countries would help to change religion," the results were 6 (13.3%) strongly disagree, 5 (11.1%) disagree, 11 (24.4%) agree, 8 (17.8%) neutral, 15 (33.3%) strongly agree.

Table 5.30:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	13.3	13.3	13.3
	Disagree	5	11.1	11.1	24.4
	Neutral	8	17.8	17.8	42.2
	Agree	11	24.4	24.4	66.7
	Strongly agree	15	33.3	33.3	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "How did you hear about the new religion?" The results were as follows: Participating in religious sessions 8 (17.8%), study 14 (31.1%), media

2 (4.4%) religious missionaries 1 (2.2%), connection with Iranian Armenians 1 (2.2%), friends 2 (4.4) (33).

Table 5.31:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A: Participating in religious sessions	8	17.8	17.8	17.8
	B: Study	14	31.1	31.1	48.9
	C: Media	2	4.4	4.4	53.3
	D: Religious missionaries	1	2.2	2.2	55.6
	E: Connection with Iranian Armenians	1	2.2	2.2	57.8
	Friends	2	4.4	4.4	62.2
	Two ways	11	24.4	24.4	86.7
	Three ways	6	13.3	13.3	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "Did Christian missionaries' encouragement had an influence on my conversion," the results were 8 (17.8%) Strongly agree, 9 (20.0%) Agree, 5 (11.1%) Neutral, 9 (20.0%) Disagree, 14 (31.1 %) Strongly disagree (24).

It is noteworthy that Activities of Christian Missionaries in Iran have a long history of hundreds of years.³⁶⁵ The author of the book *Christian Missionaries in Iran* believes that Christian missionaries paid more attention to countries like Iran and Ottoman Empire due to the presence of non-Muslim minorities and/or their proximity to important missionary centers (like India and Russia). For many political and cultural reasons, these activities increased in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries and individual missionaries as well as the members of Catholic and Protestant missionary societies founded missionary centers in various regions.³⁶²

³⁶⁵ According to a categorization, the activities of Christian Missionaries can be divided into two eras: A. before Qajars, B. during Qajars and Pahlavis. (*Christian Missionaries in Iran, from Safavid Period to Islamic Revolution*, Vida Hamraz, p272, Islamic Research Institute for Culture and Thought, 2012.)

³⁶² *Ibid*, p272.

The activities of Christian missionaries in are still continuing. The author of the book *Christian Missionaries in Iran* says, “Although its range and/or methods have changed according to the time and location, Iran has never been deleted from the list of Christian missionaries in America and Europe.” The author also believes that, “Today, Christian missionaries do not follow the old styles anymore but they are becoming more and more complicated. For instance, they were started under the cover of activities like charities, education, and hygiene and continue using media like books, newspaper, radio, TV and today with satellite networks and Internet.”³⁶⁷

Before the Islamic Republic Revolution in 1979, the methods of the Christian missionaries could be divided into the following categories:

1. Cultural affairs including educational activities of the American and British missionaries;
2. Medical activities including those by American, British and German missionaries;
3. Religious affairs and founding new churches in Iran including Evangelic Churches, Assemblies of God, Catholic Churches, and Plymouth Brothers Church³⁶⁸

Table 5.32:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	14	31.1	31.1	31.1
	Disagree	9	20.0	20.0	51.1
	Neutral	5	11.1	11.1	62.2
	Agree	9	20.0	20.0	82.2
	Strongly agree	8	17.8	17.8	100

³⁶⁷*Ibid*, p272.

³⁶⁸ For more information see: *Christian Missionaries in Iran, from Safavid Period to Islamic Revolution*, Vida Hamraz, pp. 183-249, Islamic Research Institute for Culture and Thought, 2012.

Total	45	100	100
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In response to the statement "I propagate my new religion," the results were 4 (8.9%) Strongly agree, 5 (11.1%) Agree, 5 (11.1%) Neutral, 19 (42.2%) Disagree, 12 (26.7%) Strongly disagree.

Table 5.33:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	12	26.7	26.7	26.7
	Disagree	9	42.2	42.2	68.9
	Neutral	5	11.1	11.1	80.0
	Agree	5	11.1	11.1	91.1
	Strongly agree	4	8.9	8.9	100
	Total	45	100	100	

Conversion efforts are also promoted by media such as books, some Internet sites created by Christian scholars and organizations reserving a significant space for literature on Muslims converting to Christians. Some missionary activities by media are focused on Persian speakers. For example, on the Iranian Christian International (ICI) website, it is seen, "Providing counseling, communication, information, and referral services and monitoring human rights of Christians in Muslim countries and providing advocacy on their behalf."³⁶⁹ According to reports, there are missionary activities about Iranian Muslims through social work among Persian-speaking asylum seekers and refugees. Also, according to Danish Refugee Council & Danish Immigration Service (2009, p. 33-34) it is possible to convert "online" from Iran. Iranians could contact US-based TV stations and receive religious instructions, a certificate of baptism and a recommendation from American churches. Although established for the purpose of

³⁶⁹ <http://www.iranchristians.org/ministries.shtml>

undertaking missionary activity among Persian-speaking Iranian refugees in other countries such as Turkey (Sebnem Koser Akcapar 2006, p. 820.) There is no a well-known Christian missionary organization in Malaysia.

Table 5.34:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A: Participating in religious sessions	8	17.8	17.8	17.8
	B: Study	14	31.1	31.1	48.9
	C: Media	2	4.4	4.4	53.3
	D: Religious missionaries	1	2.2	2.2	56.6
	E: Connection with Iranian Armenians	1	2.2	2.2	57.8
	Friends	2	4.4	4.4	62.2
	Two ways	11	24.4	24.4	86.7
	Three ways	6	13.3	13.3	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "What are the strong points of new religion you accepted in comparison with Islam?" the results were: Patience 1 (2.2%), kindness 13 (28.9%), tolerance 4 (8.9%), faithfulness of Christian followers to their religion 1 (2.2%) other.

Table 5.35:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A: Patience	1	2.2	2.2	2.2
	B: Kindness	13	28.9	28.9	31.1
	C: Tolerance	4	8.9	8.9	40.4
	D: Faithfulness of the Christians to their religion	1	2.2	2.2	42.2
	Two points	5	11.1	11.1	53.3
	Three points	13	28.9	28.9	82.2
	Four points	8	17.6	17.6	100
	Total	45	100	100	

5.2.5 Sociopolitical Reasons

By examining interviews conducted with those who have experienced a religious conversion, we attained a better understanding of the extent to which conversion is a religious or a political phenomenon. In this study, some participants mentioned the religious rule in the Islamic government as a reason why they were attracted to Christianity. In these cases, it seems that conversion to Christianity does appear to affect the political outlook of the converts. A convert said:

I am so happy I left Islam. Islamic concepts didn't make me relaxed and peaceful from inside. In my opinion, lots of the Islamic doctrine is political, not spiritual, especially in the Middle East countries. In fact, Islam is a state religion and the Islamic governments control the peoples' lives from A to Z such as social relations, wearing, eating, and drinking. Muslim leaders see the religion as a tool, not a goal. For example, the Imams in Masjids never pay any attention to mosque members, but the pastor's relation to his flock is palpable. The leaders of churches focus on the individual members.

Another covert said:

[In church] I noticed that there was an atmosphere of expectancy in worship and spiritual life without hatred of others. My worship experience was different from hate slogans sprayed on the walls of the mosque. In addition, a holy place must be responsive to God, not the political leaders. To me, being with the Christians in the church is more enjoyable than being with the Muslims in mosques.

The theme was also developed by another respondent:

I grew up in a not so strict Muslim house. Before I changed my religion, the only time I attended a religious ceremony was during The Month of Muharram ('Ashura) with my friends. I would like to say honestly that the hate of the Iranian government and violence against opponents, and women was the main reason [...] I'm looking for a chance for something better.

In response to the question "Did politics influences changing [your] religion," the results were 7 (15.6%) Strongly agree, 6 (13.3%) Agree, 3 (6.7%) Neutral, 11 (24.4% Disagree), 18 (40.0 %) Strongly disagree

Table 5.36:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	18	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Disagree	11	24.4	24.4	64.4
	Neutral	3	6.7	6.7	71.1
	Agree	6	13.3	13.3	84.4
	Strongly agree	7	15.6	15.6	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question " The political situation in Iran affected my conversion to another religion," the results were 4 (8.9.0%) Strongly agree, 2 (4.4%) Agree, 20 (44.4%) Neutral and 11 (24.4% Disagree), 8 (17.8 %) Strongly disagree

Table 5.37:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	17.8	17.8	17.8
	Disagree	11	24.4	24.4	42.2
	Neutral	20	44.4	44.4	86.7
	Agree	2	4.4	4.4	91.1
	Strongly agree	4	8.9	8.9	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question “Nowadays, I believe leaving Islam is a political issue,” the results were 5 (11.1%) Strongly agree, 10 (22.2%) Agree, 19 (42.2%) Neutral, 4 (8.9%) Disagree, 4 (8.9 %) Strongly disagree.

Table 5.38:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	8.9	8.9	8.9
	Disagree	4	8.9	8.9	17.8
	Neutral	19	42.2	42.2	60.0
	Agree	10	22.2	22.2	82.2
	Strongly agree	5	11.1	11.1	93.3
	9.00	3	6.7	6.7	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "Nowadays, I believe leaving Islam is a political issue," The results were 17 (37.8%) Strongly agree, 10 (22.2%) Agree, 9 (20,0%) Neutral, 7 (15.6%) Disagree, 2 (4.4%) Strongly disagree

Table 5.39:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	4.4	4.4	4.4
	Disagree	7	15.6	15.6	20.0
	Neutral	9	20.0	20.0	40.0
	Agree	10	22.2	22.2	62.2
	Strongly agree	17	37.8	37.8	100
	Total	45	100	100	

Table 5.40:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	8.9	8.9	8.9
	Disagree	4	8.9	8.9	17.8
	Neutral	19	42.2	42.2	60.0
	Agree	10	22.2	22.2	82.2
	Strongly agree	5	11.1	11.1	93.3
	9.00	3	6.7	6.7	100

Total	45	100	100
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In response to the question "The Conversion of some Muslims brings about intellectual and social instability in an Islamic society," the results were 15 (33.3%) Strongly agree, 6 (13.3%) Agree, 8 (17.8%) Neutral, 6 (13.3% Disagree), 10 (22.2%) Strongly disagree.

Table 5.41:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	10	22.2	22.2	22.2
	Disagree	6	13.3	13.3	35.6
	Neutral	8	17.8	17.8	53.3
	Agree	6	13.3	13.3	66.7
	Strongly agree	15	33.3	33.3	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "The attitude of Islamic leaderships affected my religious conversion" the results were 11 (24.4%) Strongly agree, 13 (28.9%) Agree, 12 (26.7%) Neutral, 4 (8.9% Disagree), 5 (11.1 %) Strongly disagree.

Table 5.42:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	5	11.1	11.1	11.1
	Disagree	4	8.9	8.9	20.0
	Neutral	12	26.7	26.7	46.7
	Agree	13	28.9	28.9	75.6
	Strongly agree	11	24.4	24.4	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "Theocracy affected on my changing religion," the results were 6 (13.3%) Strongly agree, 3 (6.7%) Agree, 5 (11.1%) Neutral, 17 (37.8% Disagree), and, 14 (31.1 %) Strongly disagree.

Table 5.43:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	14	31.1	31.1	31.1
	Disagree	17	37.8	37.8	68.9
	Neutral	5	11.1	11.1	80.0
	Agree	3	6.7	6.7	86.7
	Strongly agree	6	13.3	13.3	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question “those Muslims who convert to a new religion intend to undermine Islam,”³³⁰ The results were 20 (44.4%) Strongly agree, 8 (17.8%) Agree, 3 (6.7%) Neutral, 3 (6.7% Disagree), 11 (24.4 %) Strongly disagree.

Table 5.44:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	11	24.4	24.4	24.4
	Disagree	3	6.7	6.7	31.1
	Neutral	3	6.7	6.7	37.8
	Agree	8	17.8	17.8	55.6
	Strongly agree	20	44.4	44.4	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "The horror of retribution Islamic law prevents conversion by Muslims," The results were 2 (4.4%) Strongly agree, 10 (22.2%) Agree, 4 (8.9%) Neutral, 15 (33.3% Disagree), 14 (31.1 %) Strongly disagree.

Table 5.45:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	14	31.1	31.1	31.1
	Disagree	15	33.3	33.3	64.4
	Neutral	4	8.9	8.9	73.3
	Agree	10	22.2	22.2	95.6

³³⁰ Some claim historically apostasy laws have been used as a form of control. It is no different today. Islamists use it as a means of political control. As a leading Egyptian cleric who supports the killing of apostates has said, “If they left apostasy alone, there wouldn’t have been any Islam”. Political and Legal Status of Apostates in Islam, the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain US Department of State, Report on International Religious Freedom, 2009 (chapter on “Algeria”, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/index.htm>)

Strongly agree	2	4.4	4.4	100
Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "Did you know the punishments and decrees of Islam especially for those who change their religion?" the results were: I knew completely 35 (77.8%) I did not know 5 (11.1%) I knew so little 5 (11.1%).

Table 5.46:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I knew completely	35	77.8	77.8	77.8
	I knew so little	5	11.1	11.1	88.9
	I did not know	5	11.1	11.1	100
	Total	45	100	100	

In response to the question "What is your current viewpoint about Islam?" the results were Abhorrence 8 (17.8%) kind 6 (13.3%) I do not think about Islam 22 (48.9%) Does not matter 9 (20.0%).

Table 5.47:

		Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Abhorrence	8	17.8	17.8	17.8
	Kind	6	13.3	13.3	31.1
	Does not matter	9	20.0	20.0	51.1
	I do not think about Islam	22	48.9	48.9	100
	Total	45	100	100	

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In response to the important research question “What are the social, religious and personal reasons given for Muslim conversion in the Qur’an and *Hadiths*?” we can briefly say that by examining the Qur’anic verses, *Hadiths* and historical references one can consider the phenomena of apostasy in different eras (from the time of the Prophet himself to the end of the *Rashidun* Caliphs, i.e. 661 AD) and in different types such as returning to idolatry, Christianization, and denying to pay the *Zakat*. The reasons for these conversions were addresses in detail.

As mentioned in the previous sections, instances of conversion had concurred before the Prophet's mission. However, to analyze the apostasy in those times, the tribal life style of Arabs must be considered. This essential point can significantly help us in addressing the topic of apostasy before and after Islam. It is seen as a very influencing factor after the Prophet's death. During the *Riddah* Wars, collective apostasy of tribes clearly indicates a rigid tribal structure. In addition to the social reason, individual interests were also among other reasons for leaving Islam (there are reports of murder, treachery and financial incentives). There are also historical reports showing that some people left Islam under the pressure of their tribe members or even their own family.

We previously mentioned that an analysis of the verses reveals that the Qur’an divides the factors influencing apostasy into two types i.e. internal and external ones. Internal factors are evil spirits like hypocrisy, worldliness, and ignorance. External factors include oppressor kings, People of the Book, or ambitious pagans who use chains of deception to make the Muslims return from their faith.

There is another reason for conversion that the Qur'an mentions. As mentioned in the previous sections, turning from or denying the religion has been repeatedly addressed in the Qur'an referring to concepts such as *Irtidad* (apostasy), *Kufr* (blasphemy) or *Fisq* (evil doing). Sometimes *Irtidad* and *Kufr* have been used interchangeably. However the word *Fisq* indicates a kind of obstinacy and stubbornness. The Qur'an is much sterner about this third type (Q3:90). In the *Hadisths*, this type of denial is mentioned by the word *Jahd*.

In response to two main questions of this study, i.e. how could someone from an Islamic background convert to Christianity and choose to follow Christ as his Savior? Why did some Iranian Muslims, in general, and those living in Kuala Lumpur, in particular, abandoned Islam and how?

The following results can be obtained.

6.1 Role of Research in Conversion

According to the studies made regarding religious reasons, they did not come from a religious family; therefore, they did not have a rich religious background. Even some of them stated that they had been a Muslim just by name, and their knowledge of Islam was so limited or they did not have any knowledge of Islam at all. In response to the question when they were a Muslim, and what was their level of religious commitment to Islamic rules, the results were 46.7% too little, 26.7% little, while 11.1% high, 2.2% much higher. Whereas the highest percentage of the results (75%) have shown that they were not able to read the Qur'an, and 62% of the respondents were not familiar with the translation of the Qur'an.

Another result that can be obtained based on these interviews is that the subject's conversion has not been based on any research. They have not done so much research

about different religions to help them with choosing the premier religion. Distribution of answers to the question how many religions had they compared before choosing their new religion is interesting: 73.3% said one religion; a great fraction of them (68%) stated that their knowledge and learning about Islam was not enough to leave it. Concerning a question about the familiarity (academically, non-academically) of the respondents with other types of Islam (e.g. Sufism), 39 people (86.7%) of those who were interviewed indicated that they have neither faced nor studied one and 6 people (13.3%) said “Yes”.

In addition, this group not only did not know much about Islam but also they did not go on a research to find answers to the doubts and questions they had about Islam.

6.2 Social and Political Reasons

Some interviewees feared for their own safety or the safety of their households and they claim that the lives of converts are particularly at risk because Islamic-religious authorities view apostasy as a criminal offense. However, we should not necessarily look at this issue from a political angle. Although, political conditions in Iran have an influence on this issue, it is not limited to just politics. In response to the question if politics influenced changing their religion, the result was 64.0% disagreed. Also, in response to the question, if the political situation in Iran affected their conversion to another religion, only 13% of them agreed, and approximately 30% disagreed. Research findings showed that social reasons and ethics in Iran as an Islamic country were more effective than political conditions. Those who converted their religions, clearly stated that in an Islamic society everybody from the family members of a person to the whole society are opposed to religious conversion, and he or she were rejected by their own families. It can be found in the reports of some people, often within a Muslim family, that the father, mother or other family members are radically opposed to conversion to

Christianity. Some of the subjects said that they hid their conversion fearing to be excluded from their families and being estranged from spouse and children. One of the subjects claimed, “if my family finds out I am no longer a Muslim they will completely cut me off.” On this subject, another subject stated that her family still did not accept her conversion and that she is still arguing with her family about it.

Therefore, one-third of the them declared that how Muslims in Iran behave towards us was the reason of our migrations. Whereas 11 (24.4%) claimed that it was the result of the lack of legal freedom to have free practice in the new religion, 9 (20.0%) stated that the fear of punishment was the reason for their flight. This issue has been confirmed in another way because when the subjects were asked about the reactions of other Muslims toward their conversions, (44/4%) strongly agreed that Muslims’ behavior toward them changed.

6.3 Christian Missionaries and Invitation to Religious-Conversion

Christianization of Muslims by the Evangelists has common reasons among many societies. Those reasons can summarized as follows.

Presenting the Contents of the Bible: The Evangelical delegations enthusiastically translated the Bible into many languages to encourage the Muslims to read it.

Those who are aware of the activities of these delegations know that in order to realize their objectives, they followed a precise plan, which was based on several methods. Among those methods were to travel to remote regions, distribution of religious books in the weekly bazaars and making friends with the local merchants and the teahouse owners.

Making Relationships with Muslims: The Evangelists managed to found schools and educational centers and send the religious students among the Muslims to realize

their objectives. However, making relationships with the illiterate was more difficult. Therefore, they tried to communicate with Muslims, to be in company with them and gain their trusts. They could make them doubt in their beliefs in the next step.

Muslims being baffled with Poverty: The Evangelists tried hard to study the lifestyle of the Muslims to get acquainted with them. Therefore, it is no wonder that the missionaries used the inappropriate social and economical status of the Muslims who were mostly struggling with drastic poverty, drought and contagious diseases. Through helping them in such status, especially the women and children, they managed to communicate with the Muslims.

Advertising Media: Advertising media are among the most important tools through which a façade of Christianity was presented to the Muslims. The Evangelists fully believed in the role of advertising media and successfully used them to convince many Muslims.

Having an Obsession with the Christ's Personality: Christianization of many Muslims has been a direct result of an obsession with the Christ's personality since they considered him as a person promising salvation. Some renegades believe that he tolerates the burdens that the hell people are tolerating on earth. His return will put an end to every burden. He will peacefully lead humanity into the realm of god. The Christ is known for peacefulness, patience, mercy and kindness. Therefore, we see that he is not a usual person but someone special, extraordinary and unique. These renegades can be divided into three groups.

A. Those who are under the storm of troubles and abandoned their faith thinking of the Christ as the best example of their own sufferings.

B. Those sinners who think that the Christ has appeared to promise the divine mercy and thus Christianize.

C. Some of the patients and disabled who think that with miracles by the Christ, they will gain their health.

The important point is that for all these renegades, Christianity is rather a religion based on having faith in a pivotal person than a religion with "Ideal" teachings. This pivotal person has a mythical presence in their lives. In addition, to them, faith is a unique and special experience that wisdom cannot cross its boundaries.

It is noteworthy that ignorance of some these people about the very principles of Islam make them decide that the divine horizon is far reaching. It is as if , through Christianization, they try to guarantee the salvation that the Christ has promised.

Having an Obsession with the Church: In the Early Days of Islam, the Muslims used to build mosques of different sizes. However, they deliberately built them plain and suitable for saying the prayer to their god in a humble manner. It was not an artistic place to draw attentions. However, the Christians, except the Protestants, built their churches as artistic entities to impress the spectators with their exquisite buildings and colorful artworks. Some people were impressed by the magnificence of the churches since they saw them as a place of artistic creativity, beauty and charm. It was in churches that sculptures were blended with different geometrical shapes while the sound of prayers by the priests was in harmony with their vestments.

Dreams and Revelations: A researcher who searches for the reasons of Christianization is faced with causes that maybe the most interesting of which are strange experiences. For instance, the renegades state that their Christianization has been due to special events such as hearing a strange voice ordering them to confess a

divine truth, seeing the Virgin Mary in a dream to lead them into Christianity, or having a dream that totally changed their life.

Christian propaganda and missionary efforts that played some role in the individual's turning point in the process of conversion. A few participants claimed that they had been advised by missionaries to approach Christianity.

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979), it is officially illegal to proselytize; therefore, the Christian missionaries had a little impact on the conversion. In response to the question if Christian missionaries' encouragements had an influence on their conversion, about 70% of the participants disagreed. However, the new ways of proselytizing have had some influences on them. Therefore, some participants said that they were attracted to the Christian faith because of films, house church leaders, books about Christianity and the life of Christ, as well as Persian Christian Satellite TV and Radio networks broadcast for Farsi speaking people.

6.4 Personal Reasons

6.4.1 The Effect of Personal Benefits on Conversion

It is observed that groups of Iranian people are living in Malaysia as a refugee just in pursue of a hope to become a resident in a western country. As far as it is a good reason for you to claim that you were persecuted in order to grant you asylum, some of these people are those who has converted their religion and has seized this opportunity. Among the respondents of the present study were some cases who insisted that there was a relationship between the conversion and getting a residence permit from a western country. The respondents would also believe that the possibility of getting a

residence permit from other countries would help to change religion. In response to the question “Does the possibility of getting a residence permit from other countries help to change religion?” Overall, 57% agreed on this matter: an interesting point of this research was that 70% of the participants believed that financial proposals had an impact on the conversion. Results of the study have shown that some people have converted their religion for reasons other than religious and political ones such as personal reasons, personal feelings, romantic events, or family relations: sometimes they convert their religion under the influence of Christianity.

6.5 Differences and Similarities

The results from the present study answer the third main question i.e. what are some similarities and differences between the reasons for the conversion in the prophetic era and the contemporary world? In this way: This study shows that there are a couple of differences between the apostasy during the early period of Islam and contemporary era: however, there are a few similarities.

Financial issues were the main reason by which people left the religion of Islam. Political issues also affected religious people to divert from Islam to another religion.

The minister’s propagation had an influence on converting from one religion to another in both early and contemporary era.

The study of Islamic sources including narrative-based sources as well as *AHadīth* has helped the researcher to aptly analyze the current situation of a Muslim community.

Apparently, it is only the way that Muslims are impressed by Christianity, and their conversion have changed while the contents and themes have not changed a lot. In the past, people had a face-to-face relationship due to the traditional structure of the society, and therefore other religions turned to be attractive through discourse with other people.

However, in the present century, mass communication media have changed the mode of our relationships and therefore the religious missionary propaganda. Albeit, the passion, hope for a better life, and being impressed by the lifestyles of non-Islamic societies are still intact and remained the same.

6.6 Suggestions for further Research

Freedom in its sociological or political contexts is a modern concept which is a result of economic and social changes. Therefore, the issue of apostasy, which is tightly related concept of freedom, can be discussed from other points of view, including a moral and psychological ones.

Conversion with the aim of asylum seeking in European countries is among issues that can be studied in more depth. For instance, as discussed in Section 1.3, there are reports of Iranian people who have converted in Germany, UK, Hungary, Turkey, and Sweden. The results of the present study can be compared with similar studies mentioned above.

A totally different approach of Muslims to the conversion of the followers of other faiths to Islam is another issue that can be addressed.

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