RELIGIOUS CONVERSION OF IRANIAN ASYLUM-SEEKING WOMEN IN THE PROCESS OF SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: THE CASE OF ESKISEHIR

Doctorate Thesis

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DOCTORATE THESIS

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Eskişehir
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ÖZET

İranlı Mülteci Kadınların Kimlik Arama Sürecinde Din Değiştirmeleri:

Eskişehir'de Bir Saha Araştırması

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1979 devriminden sonra, "din değiştirmeye" veya "İslam'dan" ayrılmaya karşı yasalar daha katı bir şekilde gözetilmekte ve diğer inançların yayılması ağır şekilde cezalandırılmaktadır. Bu eleştirilere rağmen İranlıların "İslam'ı" bırakıp başka dinlere geçme istekleri manidardır. İranlıların yöneldiği dinlerden biri de "Hristiyanlıktır". Yeni inananlar üzerindeki duygusal etkiler, birçok kişinin İran'ı terk etmesine ve başka bir ülkede kendi inançlarını takip etmesine neden olmuştur.

Bu araştırma "Eskişehir" ilinde yapılmıştır. Eskişehir, Türkiye'de mültecileri barındıran önemli büyük şehirlerden biridir. Araştırmada 2019-2022 yılları arasında bu şehirdeki farklı kiliseler sıklıkla ziyaret edilmiş, gözlemler yapılmış ve bu farklı kiliselerden 27 İranlı kadınla derinlemesine mülakatlar yapılmıştır. İranlı "Hıristiyanlaştırılmış" "sığınmacı" kadınlar için bazı modeller sunan bu çalışma kadınların çoğunun yeni bir kimlik arayışında olduğuna işaret etmektedir.

Çizilen modele göre kadınlar, İran'da yaşadıkları toplumsal baskılar, zararlar ve üzücü deneyimler nedeniyle göç süreciyle birlikte İslam'dan ayrılma eğilimine de yöneliyor. İslam'da aile bireylerinin hâkimiyeti ve devletin gücü nedeniyle, kadınlar kimlik inşa süreçlerinde problemler yaşamaktadır. Erken yaşta evlilik, aile içi şiddet, eğitimsizlik ve daha pek çok şey, kadınların kişisel ve sosyal ihtiyaçlarını fark etmelerini engellemiştir. Neticede bu araştırmada görüşülen kadınlar yaşadıkları bütün sorunları hesaba katarak, İslam'dan uzaklaşma eğilimine girmiş ve din değiştirmiştir. Bu kadınlar "Hıristiyanlığın", kadının dinini ve adını değiştirmesine, şahitlik yapmasına, günahlarından arınmasına ve sonunda yeniden doğmasına izin verdiğini vurgulamışlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İranlı Kadınlar, Din Değişikliği, Sığınmacılar, Hristiyanlık, İslam, Eskişehir, Türkiye.

ABSTRACT

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After the 1979 revolution, laws against "religious conversion" or leaving "Islam" are more strictly observed, and the propagation of other faiths is heavily punished. Despite these criticisms, the desire of Iranians to leave "Islam" and join other religions is significant. One of the religions that Iranians tend towards is "Christianity." The emotional effects on the new believers led many to leave Iran and follow their beliefs in another country.

This research was conducted in the city of "Eskisehir." "Eskisehir" is one of several cities hosting refugees in "Turkey." In the study, different churches in this city were visited frequently between 2019-2022, observations were made, and in-depth interviews were conducted with 27 Iranian women from these other churches. This study presents some models for Iranian "Christianized" "refugee" women and indicates that most women are searching for a new identity.

According to the model drawn, women tend to leave "Islam" along with the migration process due to the social pressures, harm, and painful experiences they have experienced in Iran. Due to the dominance of family members and the state's power in "Islam," women experience problems in their identity construction processes. Early marriage, domestic violence, lack of education, and many more prevented women from realizing their personal and social needs. As a result, the women interviewed in this study, considering all the problems they experienced, tended to move away from "Islam" and converted to "Christianity." These women emphasized that "Christianity" allows women to change their religion and name, testify, be cleansed of their sins, and finally be reborn.

Keywords: Iranian Women, Religious Conversion, Islam, Christianity, Turkey, Eskisehir.

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ETİK İLKE VE KURALLARA UYGUNLUK
BEYANNAMESİ

Bu tezin bana ait, özgün bir çalışma olduğunu; çalışmamın hazırlık, veri toplama, analiz ve bilgilerin sunumu olmak üzere tüm aşamalarında bilimsel etik ilke ve kurallara uygun davrandığımı; bu çalışma kapsamında elde edilen tüm veri ve bilgiler için kaynak gösterdiğimi ve bu kaynaklara kaynakçada yer verdiğimi; bu çalışmanın Anadolu Üniversitesi tarafından kullanılan "bilimsel intihal tespit programı"yla tarandığını ve hiçbir şekilde "intihal içermediğini" beyan ederim. Herhangi bir zamanda, çalışmamla ilgili yaptığım bu beyana aykırı bir durumun saptanması durumunda, ortaya çıkacak tüm ahlaki ve hukuki sonuçları kabul ettiğimi bildiririm.

....
(İmza)
....
(Öğrencinin Adı Soyadı)

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This dissertation is dedicated to women, life, and freedom.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Most of our understanding of our social world or the issues we face is based on theories and knowledge created mainly by men. The dominance of men in the field of theorizing and knowledge production has caused women to be left out of the formal processes of theorizing. When these theories are implemented, women's participation and critical issues related to them in many fields are ignored. Women worldwide have been trying for years to regain their rights in all economic, social, and political areas and be able to play a role in all the mentioned fields.

Some women's demands are sometimes highlighted before others, and many studies are conducted on them, but many things still need to enter the study cycle. There is a deep two-way relationship between demand breeding and research study. This relationship can be understood in the recent Iranian women's revolution, "Women, Life, Freedom." The series of what happened after "Mahsa (Jina) Amini", who was killed in Iran, was the product of the consciousness of a generation surrounded by demands (often ignored). These demands were constantly reminded by the academic atmosphere and activists. The advice of the Frankfurt School on the need to always have small requests in all areas many showed itself in this revolution. When women shout for freedom and life while preserving the dignity of femininity, it means that they do not have only one demand, but the set of shortcomings and neglect has shouted this slogan.

The topics related to women are vast. This expansion becomes even more complicated, especially in societies whose governance systematically ignores demands; it has become to deal with many issues without officially being a red line. One of these issues is conversion, which makes life more difficult for women and men in Muslim societies. After the 1979 revolution, women suffered much discrimination, and if these women were part of minority groups, discrimination in the religious and ethnic spheres also put pressure on women. In the meantime, these pressures may force women to leave their country so that they can experience freedom and life differently. However, life as an immigrant will keep a woman in the circle of a minority. It will present her with new problems never institutionalized in her family or community.

Therefore, this research tries to focus on Christianized Iranian women who immigrated and live in Turkey and find out the process of their religious conversion and migration, to address more detailed questions. In the following, many sub-questions have been raised to help find a more accurate answer to the central question: Why do women have difficulty maintaining the new religion in Iran and migrating? What are the prevailing conditions that invite them to the new faith? How does the church system look at women and prepare them to stay in the new religion? Under the influence of what factors do women join a new religion before or after migration?

This research was conducted in the city of Eskisehir. This city is one of several cities that have been introduced to accommodate refugees. 27 Iranian women living in this city from different churches participated in this research. The research was conducted using a qualitative method and with the framework proposed by Strauss and Corbin. By

presenting a unique model for Iranian Christianized asylum seeker women and extracting codes from those answers, the core is considered searching for a new identity.

Women leave Islam because of the social pressures and harm and the harrowing experiences they experienced in the Muslim era, according to the model that has been drawn. However, the God-seeking training of the Muslim age has always been with them as a background. This God-seeking need for religion has led them to seek faith to meet their needs. The primary market of women is identity. In Islam, due to the dominance of family members and the power of the government, they could not complete the identification process well. Early marriage, domestic violence, lack of education, and many other things prevented women from recognizing their personal and social needs. As a result, they identified all the problems of Islam and left it. Instead, Christianity provided an opportunity for women not only to change their religion but also to change their name, bear witness and be cleansed of their sins, and finally be born again.

1.2. Background to the Study

Birth in a Muslim family has special conditions and regulations, especially that culturally, from the very first moment of delivery, the father or one of the male elders of the family calls the Azan in the ears of the newborn baby to keep them committed to their religion. However, these conditions may become more difficult for a child-born female. This difficulty varies from country to country, family to family, and individual to individual. However, Iran is one of the countries that, despite the strict laws against women, not only after the 1979 revolution but also before that, has made life difficult for women and their choices. Of course, this difficulty increased a hundredfold after the 1979 revolution. Every Iranian woman has gone through difficult experiences due to law, culture, customs, and traditions, all of which happened because she was a woman. It does not matter what caused these hardships. Still, every Iranian woman experience divorce, unequal wages, forced hijab, domestic violence, etc., or has witnessed it among those around her.

As a woman born in Iranian society, I have gone through many problems. I was born during the Iran-Iraq war and immediately witnessed my parents' fights. The patriarchal system ruling in our home was further strengthened by the systematic patriarchal force from outside that tried to impose anti-women laws in the families. When my brother was born, my role in the family became less, and he received more support from my father. However, because my mother, my grandmother, and the women of the generation before us had the experience of living in a slightly more accessible system, they did not succumb to this suffocation, and they tried to be a barrier against the dominant male power in the home and community by being prominent in the community. This made me become a women's rights activist. I witnessed my father's violence many times against my mother and me, my parents separated, and the police and other supervisory forces have called me for various reasons, from hijab to civil activities.

In addition to being a woman and the experiences I have gained at home as a daughter and in society as an activist defending women's rights, what connects me with this research is the impact of the religious conversion that happened in the family. Today, it still affects my life and my family members.

My parents' family background is religious. Their belief in Shia has been firm. Shortly after the revolution, my uncle started working as a surgeon, and he felt contradictions in the sessions of the Shiite authorities; based on his choice, he changed his orientation from the Shia religion to Sunni. He lived as a Sunni Muslim until the end of his life and raised his children with Sunni names and Sunni teachings. He progressed to the point where he became a Sunni Imam and, for the first time, established the first Sunni Mosque in the province's capital city. This was because the country's capital still did not have a mosque specifically for Sunnis, and no big town had such a mosque. However, he went to the point where he was publicly executed on very complicated charges after more than nine months in solitary confinement. My father was very fond of his brother, and the effect of this execution led him to depression, neglecting his family, attachment to his brother's children, leaving work, and isolation. For a little girl who needed a father's affection and no excuses were accepted, the absence of her father's attention remained forever. This principle became the foundation of my relationship with him, which continues today. He could never return to everyday life, and the garden he could have built for his relationship with his daughter never blossomed.

Part of my anger towards my father needed to be answered. How could my uncle, with all that success, be so determined to change his religion and not think about the effects of this change on his relatives? His responsibility had two parts: family and Sunnis. I think he wanted to build a society where everyone has a voice, and the current established power, despite celebrating the week of unity between Muslims in the birth of the Holy Prophet, does not tolerate such diversity.

I still expected to choose the field of women for my doctoral thesis, but this time it was more complicated. I lived in Turkey, but my preference was that the issue was related to Iranian women, so I left myself in the community of Iranians living in Turkey. Suddenly, I saw an old friend, a fellow citizen, who had become an asylum seeker. I entered the atmosphere of the church because of my association with him. I went to Elam church for the first time, and after that, I tried to expand my circle of associations to other churches. Many things happened in the church. There were many different people, but by chance, I met a woman who made me connect more with another church, and our sincere friendship grew stronger every day. This is how my network with different churches was formed.

The topic I chose for my thesis covered all the conditions I had in mind: temporary life in Turkey, which I was experiencing as a student, changing the religion and insisting on new religious principles, Iranian women, and the problems they face.

With the help of 6 chapters of this research, the causes and process of the religious conversion of Iranian refugee women will be investigated. Women refused to give up the new religion and preferred to leave their homeland instead of leaving the new religion. The first chapter deals with the problem statement, the research significance, assumptions, and questions. As a researcher, I tried to find answers to my concerns. I also knew my personal experiences should not affect my judgments and conclusions. In addition to the fact that this issue is challenging in Iran, less attention is paid to women and religious conversion. In Iran, however, the situation is more complicated than in other parts of the world. Along with the vast wave of women's resistance against the laws, activities such as changing or propagating a faith other than Islam have heavy penalties. However, women do not accept the pressure of oppression and are on the path of struggle in different ways. This research focuses on Christian women who chose to leave their homeland due to their conversion and settled in Turkey as refugees.

The second chapter focuses on statistical information and Iranian Christians living in Turkey and Eskisehir. This chapter's journey to Turkey begins with Iranian women who became Christians. Access to statistics is difficult due to ideological issues because this information is kept secret by human rights organizations and governments. However, everything that was available was included in the statistical section. The statistics in the first part show the increase in the wave of Iranian immigration to Turkey after the 1979 revolution, and women are half of this growing population. The statistics of human rights organizations defending religious minorities also show that the number of Christians in Iran is increasing, and this group is also involved in migration. It was impossible to study the asylum seekers in all Turkish cities, so one city was chosen as a sample because of its characteristics, which will be explained in detail. The conditions of the city of the famous ski churches and the researcher's experience of visiting each of the churches are given in this chapter.

The third chapter examines the conversion definition, theories' history, and the differences between classical and modern approaches. It was essential to get a comprehensive understanding of conversion. Since 1920, when almost the first academic research in the field of religious conversion began, different definitions of this subject have been presented by thinkers, first in psychology and then in sociology. In this chapter, these definitions will be briefly reviewed. Then the theoretical views of thinkers will be examined in two classifications, modern and classical, emphasizing two terms, active and passive.

Today, qualitative methods have regained their place in social research. One of the successful qualitative methods is grounded theory. The research steps are based on data collection, note-taking, coding, memos, categorization, writing, and explanation. In general, the background theory is designed to build an idea, not just test hypotheses, to provide the necessary accuracy and determination to make a scientific approach, to help the researcher to overcome prejudices and to give an essential background, increase its richness and provide the necessary sensitivity and coherence to present rich and

coherent theories that have a close connection with reality. Because of these characteristics and the researcher's previous experience in quantitative research, choosing a qualitative method for the new study seemed appropriate and necessary. So, the fourth chapter describes the research methodology and explains the researcher's reasons for choosing the grounded theory method.

The fifth chapter includes the analysis of data collected from interviews with women. It was necessary to incorporate parts of the discussions in detail to confirm the researcher's claims. Therefore, all the interviews were converted from audio to text, then using the Maxqda software, the common points of each interview were placed in categories and then analyzed. Reading the interviews several times formed an initial idea on which the final organization of the interviews was based.

In the end, a theory has been presented that can be used to achieve a more realistic analysis of the situation of Christianized Iranian refugee women living in Turkey. However, besides studying women's conditions in churches and Christian society, there is a theoretical critique of thinkers' views in this field. According to the details extracted from the interviews, classical and modern theories have been criticized based on active and passive terms. Also, there were limitations in the path of this research that were pointed out, and suggestions for future studies in the same field were presented.

1.3. The Research Subject

The issues of women in contemporary Iran have become a big challenge. After the 1979 revolution, the rulers needed help adapting Islamic knowledge to women's needs men and needed answers to many questions. Therefore, the government tries to keep half of the society calm by suppressing, creating bans, and not amending the laws. Women's resistance not only in the geography of Iran but worldwide has shown that in the end, women get the correct answer for their demands, and no power has been able to stop the massive wave of women's movements. A part of these rebellions, which is the result of the predecessors' efforts, has crystallized since September 2022 and has attracted the attention of the whole world.

Although Christianity is suppressed in Iran and conversion from Islam is illegal, by referring to the number of visitors to the churches of Iranian refugees, it can be seen that a significant number of Muslim Iranians have joined Christianity. Some of these new Christians are also women, and the question may be asked, what different process do women go through to become Christians than men?

Imprisonment, deprivation of education and work, inquisition, and forced leaving of the homeland are part of the problems that Christianized women in Iran experienced after the revolution. Although these experiences can also happen to men, women's conditions differ. Iranian Christianized women face government oppression, and cultural taboos in the patriarchal society intensify their pain and challenge for dissenting and being different: women, Christians, and Iranian citizens face triple deprivation and discrimination by the Islamic government. In the last four decades, these systematic

restrictions have isolated women; during this condition, many have become servants and leaders of churches.

There is an ancient history of Armenian and Assyrian Christians in Iran whom the government protects. Christians are considered second-class citizens. They are not allowed to pray in Farsi, the national language, and are not allowed to get permission from Muslims to attend their prayers. In such an environment, Muslims tend to experience other religions, but if they step on this path, they will quickly fall into low social levels. Parallel to such a structure, women also do not have equal rights with men, but as Muslim women, they are still socially in a higher position than women of other religions. When Muslim women decide to leave Islam, they accept the risk of changing their social status, and it is not surprising that many of them feel compelled to leave Iran and try to start a new life elsewhere.

1.4. The Problem Statement

Iranian's laws recognize only four religions, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism. However, this formality does not mean that leaving Islam is free; it means that the followers of the mentioned religions can live in Iran and worship in their private circles without being allowed to propagate their beliefs. The followers must have inherited the mentioned religions, and leaving Islam to any of the other religions will bring heavy punishments.

Recently, several organizations (Article 18, Open Doors, MEC (Middle East Concern), and CSW (Commission on the Status of Women)) jointly published a report titled "2023 Annual Report: Rights Violations Against Christians in Iran". This report emphasizes the government's stricter attitude towards Christians. In 2021, the number of people arrested was 59, and this number reached 134 in 2022. In 2022, the following orders were issued: 76 Months Exile Sentences, 963 Months Combined Prison Sentences Issued, the Equivalent of $450,000 Demanded Bail, etc. It is also stated in this report that "In December 2022, two protestors were executed, and at least 100 others faced execution, according to Oslo-based Iran Human Rights".

The religious conversion fear of the government has made the forces inclined to adopt heavy punishments, and the religious converters' avoidance of punishment has caused them to follow the new religion secretly despite insisting on their beliefs, or they are forced to accept punishment at some stage. Although other ways, such as emigrating from Iran to continue following the new religion, are also one of the choices.

Despite internal strictures in Iran, the country is surrounded by predominantly Muslim countries with similarly strict religious conversion laws. However, among these countries, Turkey is the only country that tries to keep the issue of religion away from politics and has also accepted agreements regarding the protection of all classes of refugees. One of the most popular destinations for Iranians, especially newly converted Christians, is Turkey. Living in Turkey as an asylum seeker is not easy, and there will

be many problems on the way of the asylum seeker. For this reason, they prefer to leave Turkey and wait for years to be accepted by another third country.

Sebnem Koser Akcapar, a sociology professor at Istanbul's Koç University studying refugees and their change of faith, says she has witnessed the rise in conversions: "The numbers of Iranian refugees converting have grown tremendously over the years. A small church consisting of 20 to 30 families has become a much bigger congregation housing 80 to 100 people on a regular Sunday".

Many churches in Turkey receive financial and spiritual support from the leading centers in Western countries. Apart from supplying the needs of the church and its members, they can do nothing to speed up the asylum process, but they are highly influential in spreading Christianity. There are no accurate statistics on the number of Christians inside Iran, Christian refugees or asylums, and Iranian churches inside or outside Iran.

In the statistics section, the growing and significant process of immigration and church environments outside Iran, especially Turkey, is explained more. However, the presence of women is ignored in this process, and significant statistics and studies on Iranian churches.

This point was also the beginning of feminist theological studies. The goal was to change the utterly masculine view of the Christian religion on the Bible's content, myths, and language. These points dominated cultural, sociological, and human studies because masculinity was the default of everything. Therefore, women were given less attention in all dimensions, even though they had very effective roles. With the beginning of the big question about why women are absent in Christianity, the way was paved for their presence. Women in Christianity found a voice through which they could claim more rights in church participation, and on the other hand, the neglect of women by the church system was revealed and created new opportunities for women. An option that was sometimes even against the clear verses of the Bible.

This research examines the conversion process of Christian refugee women by studying the significant theories of religious conversion and paying attention to feminist theology. Many questions were raised in the study, and only a part of the dimensions of women's presence in this diasporic society was considered. Still, there is a long way to go for future studies in women and religious conversion.

1.5. The Research Significance

The constraints imposed on women since the 1979 revolution have closed the way for their original identity to emerge. Women compare their conditions with those before the 1979 revolution and want a position that other women enjoy today. Still, the government strongly resists and does not listen to women's demands. These demands also exist in families. With more vibrancy of women, families can no longer continue their traditional form, but the trump card is still in the hands of the resistant male force, which does not change the rules, and therefore women's demands are not answered. The

government insists that it wrote the laws based on Islam and that everything against Sharia is impossible and illegal. Therefore, all the neglected demands of women are attributed to Islam; In this situation, an identity crisis is created, which emerges in the face of the first Christian missionary and simultaneously as the first serious problem in women's lives.

Significantly few sources have addressed the issue of women and conversion from Islam to Christianity. Therefore, in this research, the process of religious transformation of Iranian refugee women living in Turkey as a transit country is investigated, and a theory is extracted in this field. The social and religious issue that my research deals with are that many newly converted Iranian women face problems, especially in an area such as Iran's laws that make it illegal for Muslims to become Christians and forces them to leave their country. Many factors play a role in women's migration. Still, the central core that causes them to experience changing their religion and place of residence simultaneously is the search for a new identity.

The concept of identity is knowing who I am and where I belong. In general, issues related to changing religion and identity are considered individual decisions in Western society, but in Iran, it is different. Iranians have built their identity in collective conditions. The Iranian Christian women I interviewed answered the questions collectively and shaped their identity under the influence of Islam, traditional cultural values, and social needs. For them, conversion to Christianity "means separation from society." However, women cannot live without an identity. Before they completely distance themselves from parts of the previous identity, they define an alternative to it to accommodate the desires and shortcomings in the framework of the new identity in the way they want.

1.6. Assumptions and Questions for Research

Christianized emigrated women have several characteristics compared to other women. First, they have made a significant and risky decision to leave their family and country and change their religion. To achieve their desires, these women start a path that they need to learn more about the future. At the same time, many married women inside the borders of Iran still cannot get a passport without their husband's permission, let alone travel abroad. Therefore, these changes require women's courage, which started over a hundred years ago and continues.

The second characteristic of women is changing their religion, which affects their identity. Sometimes, the change of faith and life in Iranian society has become so complex that it is the only way to leave the country. Sometimes, after migration, which also has reasons within the country, it causes asylum seekers to get acquainted with a new religion. Choosing a religion has many complications, especially if Muslim women are from an ideologically patriarchal society and have lost their trust in their previous faith. However, they may still need to find a new identity in another religion.

The questions that arose during this research and long conversations with Christianized women and visits to different churches formed the main foundation of this research. Why do women struggle to maintain the new religion in Iran and migrate? What prevailing conditions invite them to the new religion outside of Iran, especially in Turkey? How does the church system look at women and prepare them to stay in the new faith? Under the influence, what factors do women join a new religion before or after migration?

Immigration and residence in a country like Turkey, which is also Muslim, have caused many problems for women. Many Turks are still not ready to accept coexistence with immigrants, especially with apparent differences such as other religious followers. Christianized asylum seekers are expelled from their homes and jobs, and they cannot complain to any organization due to immigration cases, legal loopholes, and long waiting times. Some house owners avoid renting houses after discovering that the house applicants or tenants are Christians; this issue is also mentionable for employers. The Turkish government does not view this issue as a cultural conflict that needs to be treated because immigrants take away the work opportunities of its citizens and increase the country's insecurity. So, the more asylum seekers find less desire to stay in Turkey, the less expensive it will be for the Turkish government. However, this suspension does not benefit any asylum seeker, especially if they are women.

CHAPTER TWO: IRANIAN ASYLUM-SEEKING CHRISTIANIZED WOMEN IN TURKEY

In this chapter, after a general review of the situation of immigrants in recent years, I have tried to statistically examine the conditions of Iranian asylum-seeking women living in Turkey. Due to the reasons explained in this chapter, Eskisehir town is considered a study sample. The researcher tries to write her observations of the churches in this city so that the reader can get a picture of the living conditions of the refugees, the mechanisms of the churches, and how the refugees communicate with the churches before entering the main research subject.

2.1. A Look at the Statistics of Migration in the World

The nature of international migration requires that the statistics and information of international migrants be among the rarest and, at the same time, most expensive global data to access. There are many structural and content problems facing researchers and scholars. Compiling statistics and recording their changes in international migration is complex and faces many complexities. Due to the cross-border movement of people and change of residence, change of reason for living, change of length of stay from temporary to permanent, change of citizenship status, and other changes and developments in this area, it will not be easy to provide statistics and information. In this section, the migration conditions in the world will be examined using statistical data. Depending on the choice of research topic, the conditions of migration from Iran to Turkey as a transit country and sometimes a safe place of residence for Christianized Iranians are analyzed. Meanwhile, Christianized Iranians are part of the asylum seekers who are forced to leave their homeland to find a safer place so that they can freely spread their beliefs. This situation can be more difficult for women who have changed their religion and been forced to leave Iran. A look at the statistics sheds light on women's immigration status ambiguities.

As a result of conflict, political, ethnic, and religious persecution, natural disasters, etc., people have seen no other way than to leave their homelands. In such situations, they attempt to either seek asylum in other countries (Bacaian, 2011).

The number of refugees under UNHCR's mandate increased for the sixth year, and the total population at the end of 2017 was 20 million (UNHCR, 2017, p. 17). During the year, an estimated 1.9 million claims for asylum were lodged with States or UNHCR in 162 countries or territories. Out of the provisional total of 1.9 million shares, 1.7 million were initial applications installed in "first instance" procedures (table 1). The remaining 236,700 claims were submitted at the second instance, including with courts or other appellate bodies. The number of asylum-seekers with pending claims whose refugee status has yet to be determined at the end of 2017 increased to 3.1 million people from 2.8 million at the end of 2016 (UNHCR, 2017, p. 39).

> "There were about 25.9 million refugees in 2018, an increase of
> about 50 percent from 2006 and the highest level recorded since
> UNHCR began collecting data in 1951; 2018 saw an annual increase
> in the refugee population of half a million new refugees from the

preceding year, or almost 1,500 people every day" (Kabir, 2019, p. 6).

Table 1: **Refugee Population, 2017**

UNHCR regions	Refugees (including persons in a refugee-like situation)		change		% of the total, end-2017
	Start-2017	End-2017	Absolute	%	
Central Africa and Great Lakes	1,381,900	1,475,700	93,800	6.8	7
East and Horn of Africa	3,290,400	4,307,800	1,017,400	30.9	22
Southern Africa	162,100	197,700	35,600	22.0	1
West Africa	300,600	286,900	-13,700	-4.6	1
Total Africa	5,135,100	6,268,200	1,133,100	22.1	31
Americas	682,700	644,200	-38,500	-5.6	3
Asia and Pacific	3,477,800	4,209,700	731,900	21.0	21
Europe	5,200,200	6,114,300	914,100	17.6	31
Thereof: Turkey	2,869,400	3,480,300	610,900	21.3	17
Middle East and North Africa	2,679,500	2,704,900	25,400	0.9	14
Total	17,175,300	19,941,300	2,766,000	16.1	100

Source: UNHCR, 2017

The UN has paid significant efforts to provide a unified definition for migrants and creates a familiar and generalizable framework for addressing migration-related issues among the countries. According to the UN, an international migrant is "any person who changes his or her country of usual residence" (UN, 1998). The country of usual residence is also used in various frameworks, including the balance of payments, national accounts, international investments, and international advice on tourism statistics[1] (Sharif Policy Research Institute (SPRI)[2], 2020, p. 97).

According to a Gallup survey in 2017, over 750 million people worldwide desired to migrate. Therefore, based on the most recent available statistics, the average international migration desire worldwide is 15%. However, there is a massive distinction between "desire to migrate" and "serious intention to migrate." The average rate of desire to migrate varies in different parts of the world. For instance, this rate is about 33% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 27% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 24% in the Middle East and North Africa, and 21% in the EU. This rate is currently 16% in the US. There is a wide gap between "migration dreamers," "migration planners," and finally, "migration movers." Therefore, the population of individuals who plan and take measures is less than the 700 million who dream about migration. The gap between

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[1]Data on international asylum-seekers and refugees are dependent on their destination countries. In some countries, asylum-seeker status has a different definition depending on their application stage and results. In general, the migrants who register an application are known as "Asylum-seekers," and as soon as the application is approved, he/ she could be called "Refugees" (SPRI, 2020, p. 29).

[2]The Islamic Republic of Iran joined IOM as an observer in 1995 and was accepted as a full member of IOM's Governors' Council in 2001. Since 2004, IOM has changed its refugee-oriented approach and adopted a guiding program/policy-oriented approach to assist the Islamic Republic of Iran in migration management issues and tackling the country's new challenges.

"desire to migrate" and "migration moving" is vast in all parts of the world, making the population of these two groups utterly distinct from one another all around the world (Ibid, 2020, p. 51).

Globally, women are on the move. They comprise slightly less than half of all international, global migrants. Recently, there has been a trend toward the feminization of migration. Statistics on international migration by gender that make it possible to identify the characteristics of migrants are scarce and hard to obtain. However, census data and employment statistics can evaluate with varying accuracy and consistency using census data and employment statistics.

2.2. The Situation of Migrant Women

Due to the thesis topic, this section examines the women's migration wave from two perspectives. The statistics of women's immigration status in the whole world and then in Turkey, which is the place of study of this research, are attached. The number of female immigrants has been on the rise worldwide, and currently, women make up almost half of the world's immigrants. In recent years, women, like men, have been looking for better opportunities in life, and they no longer wait until they can find these opportunities in the company of men.

2.2.1. Migrant Women's Status in the World

Women who leave their countries of origin to find a better life situation may face risks during their migration journey that make it difficult for them to migrate. Women and girls may experience rape, extortion, exploitation, and rights violations. By mid-2020, 281 million people had migrated worldwide, of whom 48% were women and 51% were men. Figure 1 shows the total international migrant stock by region and sex during the mid-term of 2020. With a slight difference, half of the immigrant population in all parts of the world are women. Female migrants comprise less than half, 135 million or 48.1 percent, of the global international migrant stock. The share of female migrants has declined from 49.4 percent in 2000 to 48.1 percent in 2020, whereas the proportion of male migrants grew from 50.6 percent in 2000 to 51.9 percent in 2020 (UNDESA, 2020).

Figure 1: Total International Migrant Stock by Region and Sex, Mid-Year 2020

TOTAL INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT STOCK BY REGION AND SEX, MID-YEAR 2020

Global — 281 million — 51.9% ♂ ♀ 48.1%

Northern America 58.7 m — 48.2% / 51.8%
Europe 86.7 m — 48.4% / 51.6%
Asia 85.6 m — 58.2% / 41.8%
Latin America and the Caribbean 14.8 m — 50.5% / 49.5%
Africa 25.4 m — 52.9% / 47.1%
Oceania 9.4 m — 49.5% / 50.5%

● MALE ● FEMALE ● 10 m

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020). International Migrant Stock 2020.

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Source: UNDESA, (2020)

Since 1990, the proportion of female migrants has increased in all regions except East Asia and the Pacific (EAP). In Europe and Central Asia (ECA), the share of female migrants slightly increased from 52 percent in 1990 to 52.4 percent in 2017. In South Asia, the percentage of women among international migrants rose from 46.7% to 48.3%. The increasing share of women among all migrants in a country is not only determined by women moving to that country -- it may be partly explained by the longer female life expectancy of women migrants compared with that of men. In contrast, the share of female migrants in EAP decreased from 48.6 percent in 1990 to 41.7 percent in 2017. The declining share of female migrants may reflect increased demand for migrant workers in male-dominated sectors in parts of the region. When women do not have the same access to work in some occupations, it can affect the gender composition of international migration related to that work (Matulevich, 2018) (chart 1). In Lebanon, Germany, and Turkey, for example, between 6-8 percent of refugee women are employed, compared to 27-50 percent of host-country men (Kabir, 2019, p. 4).

> "The proportion of women and girls in the refugee population has
> proven relatively stable, varying by only a few percentage points

over time. In 2017, 50 percent of the population was female, about the same as in 2016" (UNHCR, 2017, p. 59) (chart 2).

Chart 1: Nearly Half of the World's International Migrants Are Women and Girls

Female Migrants (% International Migrant Stock)
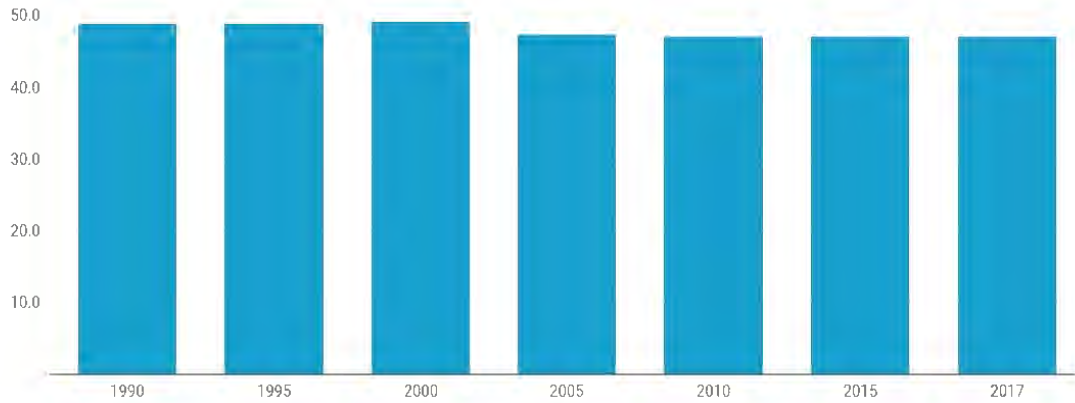
Source: World Bank, 2018

Chart 2: Demographic Characteristics of Refugee Population by UNHCR Regions, 2017
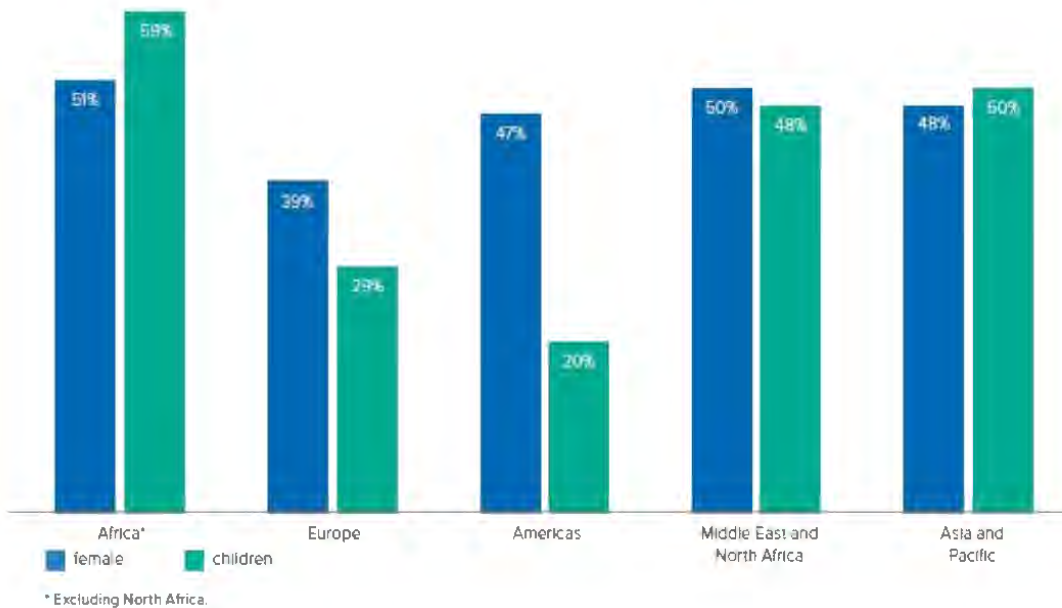
Source: UNHCR, 2017

Table 2 shows the accommodation type for refugee women from 2015-2017. 51% of the population in the refugee-planned camps were women. About 52 to 53 percent of female refugees lived in self-settled camps from 2015 to 2017. From 2015 to 2017, the population of women in collective centers sharply decreased. 48% of private accommodation centers are reserved for women. Women in transit camps have increased significantly over the past two years.

Table 2: Accommodation of Refugee Women, 2015-2017

Type of Accommodation	% Women		
	2015	2016	2017
Planned/managed camp	51.4	51.4	51.6
Self-settled camp	53.3	52.4	52.0
Collective center	45.0	18.6	23.9
Individual accommodation (private)	47.5	48.3	48.6
Reception/transit camp	51.3	62.5	60.4

Source: UNHCR, 2017

If gender is one of the essential identity indicators, since 2015, the share of immigrant women compared to immigrant men has increased significantly. Data sets and gender definitions are not always comprehensive enough. In addition, the cause of migration must be appropriately recorded in global statistics.

2.2.1. Migrant Women's Status in Turkey

Turkey has a long and rich history in migration flows. Contrary to the stereotype that it is called a labor-sending or exporting country, it welcomed immigrants long before the recent globalized migration movements. Kaşka believes that studies on migration and gender have been neglected since before 1990. After this date, with the efforts of feminist thinkers, the diversity of women's migration in economic, social, and political spheres has been considered (Kaşka, 2020, p. 31). Therefore, it may be possible to view the study in this field as a new phenomenon in Turkey. "Nowadays, Turkey, Uganda, Lebanon, Jordan, and Germany, together, these nations host almost eight million refugees or 40 percent of the world's refugee population" (Kabir, 2019, p. 3).

In 2019, the number of immigrants increased by 17.2% compared to the previous year and reached 677 thousand 42 people. While 54.4% of this population were males, 45.6% were females. When the immigrant population was examined by citizenship, 98 thousand 554 persons were Turkish Republic (TR) citizens, and 578 thousand 488 persons were foreign nationals (chart 3).

> "Today, migrant women stay in Turkey on different legal statuses; many are undocumented but spouses of Turkish citizens or hold resident permits, work permits, tourist visas, business visas, or asylum seekers or refugees living under the "temporary protection" regime or undocumented. The state's restrictions on migrants shape these statuses (and lack of quality). Turkey's migration legislation since the early 2000s has amended work permits, citizenship, and marriage regulations ostensibly to prevent "illegal" migration but has worked to drive migrant women into informal working and insecure and exploitative economic and social relationships" (Sener, 2020, p. 9).

Chart 3: Proportion of Immigrants and Emigrants by Sex, 2018-2019
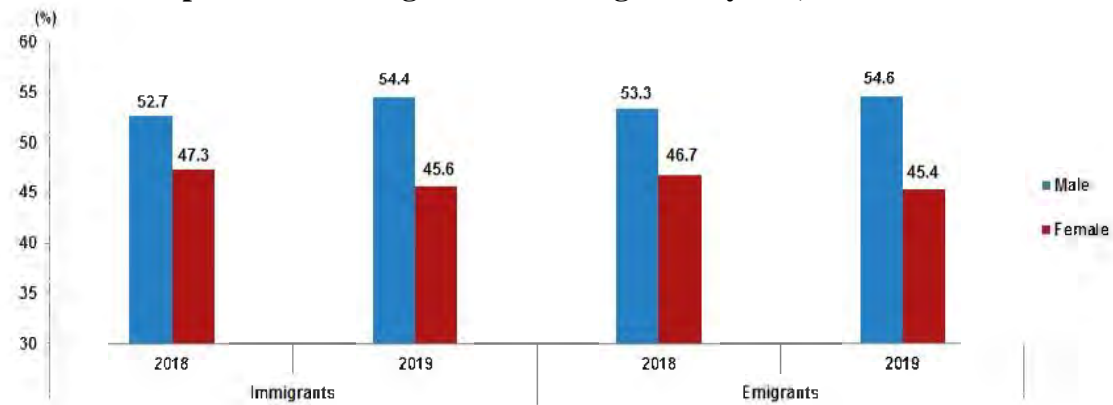
Source: Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), 2019

In Turkey, there is a demand for live-in care services in high-income families of women working in professional occupations. Although domestic and care work takes the first rank in the distribution of work permits to female migrants, registered workers comprise only a minority among those working as caregivers. The strictness of the regulations and employers' preferences for informal employment favor work without permits. The inferior position of domestic work, outside the scope of protective rules in general, and migrant women's everyday work without work permits means being deprived of essential health and social security rights. Except in the construction sector, women work in almost every type of labor-intensive and arduous job, which points to the feminization of labor migration in Turkey (Toksöz, 2020, p. 74).

Statistics are published when immigrants are registered under a different heading in a specific organization and can be referred to as "official immigrants." However, in some cases, immigrants continue to live illegally without special protection. This is also true for women:

> "Irregular migrants, who do not have access to work or residence permits, are excluded from officially granted social rights and services. The discrimination and sexual violence faced by Irregular migrant women are also invisible in social services... These inequalities shaped around legal status are also reflected in the social relations established by migrants and refugees. Therefore, more comprehensive policies and implementation are needed to prevent abuse of migrant and refugee women (and men), such as human rights violations, labor exploitation, and sexual harassment. However, the most effective measure to prevent this vulnerability and human rights violations should be extended to irregular immigrant women's social and work rights..." (Coşkun, 2017, p. 1310)

What has been said about migration and the world can be examined separately for each country; according to the subject considered, the global Iranian immigrants can be assessed.

2.3. The Global Statistical Situation of Iranian Migrants

Various groups from Iran go to Turkey, including Political dissidents, social activists, artists, ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBT people, each due to the pressures from the government and the complicated domestic conditions. These new homeland seekers go to Turkey sometimes through smuggling and sometimes with a regular but pre-determined trip. Turkey is more prevalent among all the countries around Iran due to its easy access, cultural similarities, and cheap life.

Figure 2: Number of New Iranian Asylum Applications Filed between 1980 and 2019
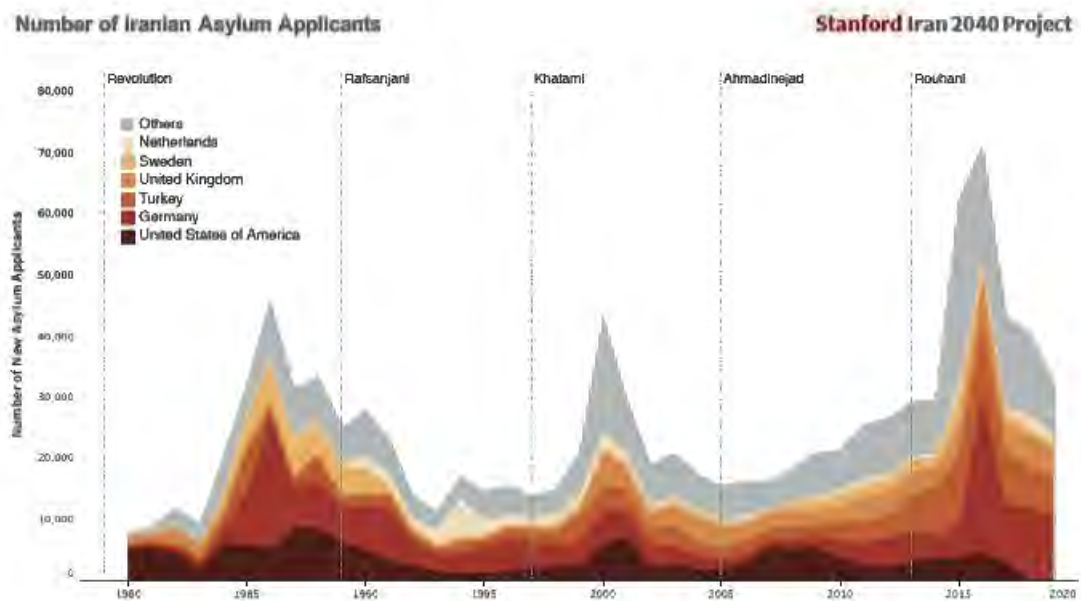
Source: Azadi, 2020, p. 14

"According to Figure 2, the trend in the number of Iranian asylum-seekers after the revolution shows three distinct peaks. The first peak—between 1984 and 1991, climaxing in 1986—was primarily due to the impact of the Iran-Iraq war and the consolidation of power in the Islamic Republic, achieved with harsh crackdowns on political opposition. About a decade later, there was a second surge in asylum seekers, lasting two years, from 1999 to 20014" (Azadi, 2020, p. 13)[3].

Based on the last available data (2019), the population of the Iranian diaspora in the world is 1.9 million people, equal to 2.29% of the country`s population. The Iranian migrant population has increased during the last 30 years, slightly growing from

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[3]The surge in the number of Iranian asylum seekers in 1999–2001 was partly due to the ease of travel to Bosnia, which did not require a visa then. This report is one of the parts of The Stanford Iran 2040 Project, which is an academic initiative that serves as a hub for researchers all around the world—particularly scholars of the Iranian diaspora—to conduct research on economic and technical matters related to the long-term development of Iran and to evaluate their possible implications in a global context.

819,936 people in 1990 to 1,937,048 in 2019. While Iran's share of the global population is about 1.07%, its share of the international migrant stock was 0.54% in 1990, reaching 0.7% in 2019 (SPRI, 2020, p. 33).

According to reliable statistics provided by the World Bank and United Nations (2020), the top 10 countries with the most significant Iranian migrant population are the United Arab Emirates, the USA, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Sweden, Australia, occupied lands of Palestine (Israel) and Kuwait. Therefore, North America, Western Europe, the United Arab Emirates, and Australia are the regions with the highest Iranian population worldwide (SPRI, 2020, p. 33) (figure 3).

Figure 3: Distribution of Iranian Refugees in the Top 10 Destinations, 2018
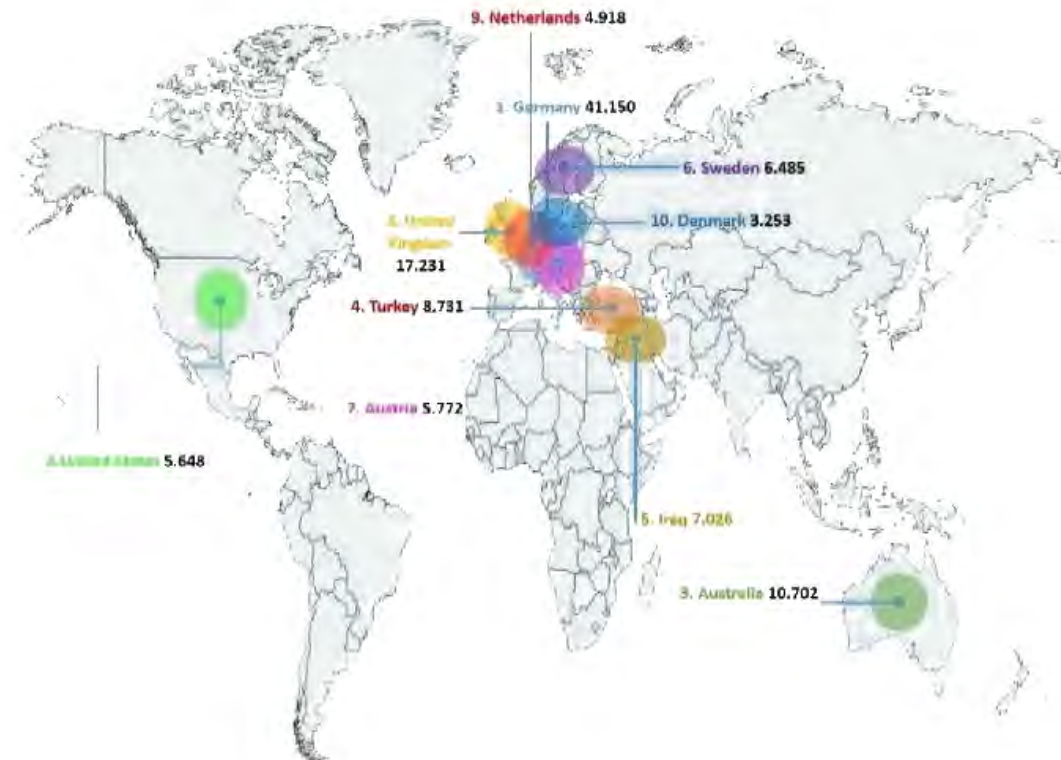
Source: SPRI, 2020, p. 52

Chart 4 shows the destination of Iranian asylum seekers. The most popular destinations have been Turkey and Germany, which have the largest population of Iranians. In recent years, restrictions imposed by host countries have made it difficult for migrants to enter. The head of the Scientific Association of Social Workers of Iran said: "It is unfortunate that Iranian citizens are willing to emigrate at any cost, and even though they know they may lose their lives, they still emigrate. They take all these risks to secure their or their children's future. They emigrate because we left them no other way" (Eghlima, 2020).

Chart 4: The Top Destinations of Iranian Asylum Seeker Applicants, 2009-2019
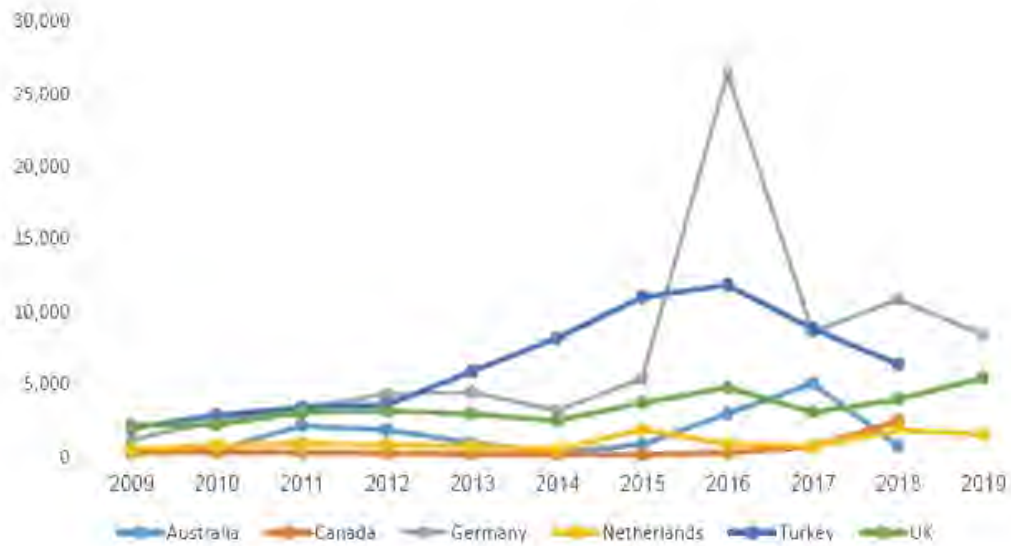
SPRI, 2020, p. 198

Table 3 briefly illustrates the status of the Iranian diaspora around the world compared to the global migrant population. From 1990 to 2019, the people of Iranian immigrants increased. Iran accounts for 1% of the world's immigrant population.

Table 3: Iranian Migrant Population Compared to Global Average

	Year				
	1990	**2000**	**2010**	**2017**	**2019**
Iranian migrant's stock in the world (million)	.082	1.15	1.49	1.8	1.9
Iran's population (million)	56.4	65.6	73.8	80.7	82.9
The share of Iranian migrants in proportion to the country's population (%)	**1.45**	**1.75**	**2.02**	**2.23**	**2.29**
Global migrant population (million)	152.2	173.6	220.8	257.7	271.6
The world's population (million)	5327.2	6143.5	6956.8	7546.9	7713.5
The share of global migrants in proportion to the world's population (%)	**2.86**	**2.83**	**3.17**	**3.41**	**3.52**
The share of Iran's population in proportion to the world's population (%)	1.06	1.07	1.06	1.07	1.07
Share of Iranian migrants in world migrant stock (%)	**0.54**	**0.66**	**0.67**	**0.7**	**0.7**

Source: SPRI, 2020, p. 34

According to Table 4, it is natural that the conditions of immigrants and refugees are similar and have an upward trend. The total population of refugees in the world has had an increasing trend during 2006-2018 and almost doubled, reaching about 25 million. The Iranian refugee population increased from 102000 to130000 during 2006-2018. The refugees' share of the world population was 0.26% in 2018, while the Iranian refugees' share of Iran's population was 0.15% in 2019. (SPRI, 2020, p. 47).

Table 4: Total Number of Iranian Refugees in Comparison with the Global Refugees[4]

Year	Global status				Iran's status			
	World population (billion)	World refugee population (million)	Refugees share of the world population	World refugees (per one million global population)	Iranian population (million)	Iranian refugee population ('000 people)	Iranian refugees share the Iranian population	World refugees (per one million global population)
2006	6.593	9.877	0.14	1,498	70.4	102	0.14	1,456
2011	7.003	10.404	0.14	1,485	75	72	0.09	965
2016	7.425	17.187	0.23	2,314	80	94	0.11	1,176
2018	7.593	20.356	0.26	2,680	83.2	130	0.15	1,561

Source: SPRI, 2020, p. 47

This list includes those countries that specifically limit women's capacity to emigrate by restricting the ability to leave the country or obtain a passport without a husband's or father's permission (Table 5). Of course, other structural and cultural barriers affect women's equality, but these definitions are comparatively clear and objective. At the top of the table is Saudi Arabia, with the highest score among the most restrictive countries, and Iran, with four points out of 6 punches, is also in this group, so the lower percentage of Iranian women immigrants than other parts of the world go back to restrictive laws that make problems for women's movement.

Table 5: Legal Restrictions on Women's Mobility (Barriers to Exit)

Gender-Unequal country	Legal Restrictions on Women's Mobility/Work (of 6)
Saudi Arabia	6
Iraq	5
Sudan	5
Afghanistan	4
Iran	4
Jordan	4

Source: Center for Global Development, 2010

Table 6 suggests that amongst some countries with legal restrictions specifically on women's ability to emigrate, the proportion of women in emigrant stocks is usually lower. Like any other social process, immigration is a gendered process. Immigration motivations, restrictions, and opportunities are different for men and women. The share of Iranian immigrant women differs significantly from the global population of immigrant women. According to Table 7, the figure of Iranian immigrant women is estimated at 47%, which is lower than the total immigrant women's population (By comparing Chart 1, Table 6, and Table 7).

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[4]In this table, refugees refer to those under the protection of UNHCR and do not include Palestinian refugees protected by UNRWA. The number of refugees means people with refugee status for a certain period, not including newly registered asylum seekers.

Table 6: Gender Imbalance in Migration Flows 2010

Source Country	Destination Country Percentage of Emigrants that are Women		
	World	Developed regions	Developing regions
World	48	52	45
Afghanistan	45	45	45
DR Congo	50	52	50
Egypt	32	40	31
Iran	46	46	49
Iraq	47	45	48
Pakistan	35	44	32
Saudi Arabia	41	46	36

Source: Center for Global Development, 2010

About 67,000 Iranian citizens in Turkey have fled their country due to the restrictions that influence all aspects of their lives, from socialization to financial resources[5] (Arab News, 2020).

Table 7: Data Bank, Gender Statistics of Iran

Female migrants (% of the international migrant stock)							
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Iran	---	---	47	---	---	---	47	---

Source: World Bank

2.3.1. Iranians in Turkey

One of the waves of non-European migration into Turkey occurred in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution 1979 and during the Iran-Iraq war when Turkey adopted a policy allowing Iranians to enter the country without a visa and stay there temporarily.

> "In this way, an estimated 1.5 million Iranians sought temporary refuge in Turkey between 1980 and 1991, most of whom intended to return to Europe and North America. Turkish authorities encouraged the majority to resettle in a third country" (Mannaert, 2003, p. 2).

Turkey still receives a particular annual population of Iranian asylum seekers due to having a common border with Iran and European access.

At the end of 2017, Turkey continued to be the country hosting the world's most significant number of refugees, with a 21 percent increase in its refugee population, from 2.9 million at the beginning of the year to 3.5 million at the end. The total refugee population hosted in Turkey comprised Syrians (3,424,200), Iraqis (37,300), Iranians (8,300), and Afghans (5,600) (UNHCR, 2017).

Due to the asylum-seeking channel being opened in Turkey caused to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq over the past decade, the number of Iranians seeking asylum in this country has increased significantly. According to international migration data by the UN, the number of Iranians in Turkey was reported at 83,000 people in 2019,

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[5]From 2018, "Turkey has provided nationality to anyone who spends $250,000 on the property or holds $250,000 as deposit money. So far, the scheme has helped some 25,000 people from various nationalities become Turkish citizens" (Arab News, 2020).

considering the number of people seeking asylum or those with a similar status (SPRI, 2020, p. 98-130). However, the same statistic is reported to be 36,000 in Turkey, about the World Bank Statistics. The number written by the World Bank has yet to take the population of Iranians waitlisted for refugee registration in Turkey.

Table 8: Iranian population in the World (Top 5 Host Countries)

Rank	Countries	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2019
	World	631339	746894	831372	889941	989560	1171364	1301975
1	USA	210941	250390	290417	314199	348249	394223	403136
2	Canada	29467	51266	74284	95395	120685	153473	164463
3	Germany	95723	100027	104331	108310	111268	115936	127177
4	UK	31563	36022	41087	58694	61831	79072	89794
5	Turkey	23816	13188	13427	14397	14728	39332	83183

Source: SPRI, 2020, p. 99

The top 5 countries with the most significant number of Iranian populations are indicated in Table 8 based on the data from the United Nations' International migrant stock database. Data on the immigrants in these countries have been provided based on their country of birth, except in the case of Iranians residing in Turkey. In the case of Turkey, the number of refugees, as reported by UNHCR, was added to the estimate of international migrants. It is worth noting that the data of some countries, including Iran's neighboring countries, is not available in the database of the United Nations. The following Table 9, indicating the number of Iranian migrants in top destination countries, has been obtained from the Bilateral Migration Matrix published by the World Bank and illustrates that some of the countries whose data is unavailable in the UN database are host to large numbers of Iranian migrants (SPRI, 2020, p. 98-100)[6].

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[6]According to the data on the Bilateral Migration Matrix of the World Bank, which utilizes various sources to aggregate its data, the population of Iranian migrants in different countries and top destination countries is not similar to the UN international migration stock. However, the data on the Iranian migrants in some periods are unavailable in this database; for instance, the population of Iranian migrants in the UAE in 2017 is not included. Still, the registered data in the World Bank database indicates that the population of Iranian migrants in the UAE was 412,400 in 2013 and 454,000 people in 2018, according to data registered in UAE national databases (Global Media Insight, 2020). Therefore, UAE might host more Iranian migrants than the US.

Table 9: Iranian Migrants Around the World (Top 10 Host Countries)

		1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2013	2017
1	USA	7294	5761	134447	229109	294355	82	393414	386073
2	Canada	---	---	---	---	---	---	108632	140318
3	Germany	7246	13586	35952	66008	108486	---	158901	119000
4	UK	4640	577	28735	33236	72672	351685	75773	77000
5	Sweden	113	403	3337	37842	50537	5930	67211	69067
6	Australia	108	180	3538	12461	18514	29116	36090	55650
7	Kuwait	19453	46502	75133	12408	11717	98302	46419	46419
8	Israel	44782	53211	59753	53077	58326	76259	53236	45170
9	Turkey	5077	6286	6315	10341	13096	---	19187	36226
10	Qatar	646	3271	6628	2984	3401	255	30000	30000

Source: SPRI, 2020, p. 99

Turkey has been among the emerging destination countries for Iranians in recent years. According to Table 10, the annual number of Iranians being naturalized in Turkey has increased from 2,638 to 32,111 during 2014-2018, which indicates an almost 12-fold increase over the recent four years.

Table 10: Residence Permits Granted to Iranians, 2010-2019

Region		Residence category	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
European Union		Short/Midterm (3-11) months	4786	5534	6816	6681	547	5063	7290	7622	8111	---
European Union		Long-term (12 months and over)	13677	13788	13431	13934	13962	13503	15825	31814	24321	---
North America	USA	Temporary except for tourists and visitors	4189	4827	6841	7694	8887	9316	8857	7362	5396	---
North America	USA	Lawful permanent	14822	14822	14822	12863	11615	13114	13298	13791	10116	---
North America	Canada	Temporary except for tourists and visitors	---	---	---	---	---	3620	4960	6950	11345	17390
North America	Canada	Permanent	---	---	---	---	---	11667	6483	4737	5510	5175
Turkey		All residence granted	---	---	---	---	---	6393	10704	13162	32111	---

Source: TurkStat, 2019

Chart 5 shows the trend of visas issued in Turkey. As can be seen, from 2010 to 2017, the visa issuance process, although increasing, took a while, but between 2017 and 2018, Turkey faced an increase in visa issuance for Iranians.

> "In February 2020, Iranian citizens bought 721 real estate properties in Turkey, almost double the amount in 2019, according to the official statistics of Turkey's General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadaster. In 2019, Iranian citizens purchased 5,423 real estate properties in Turkey, 1,771 more than in 2018" (Arab News, 2020).

Chart 5: The Trend of Visas Issued for Iranians in Turkey, 2010-2018
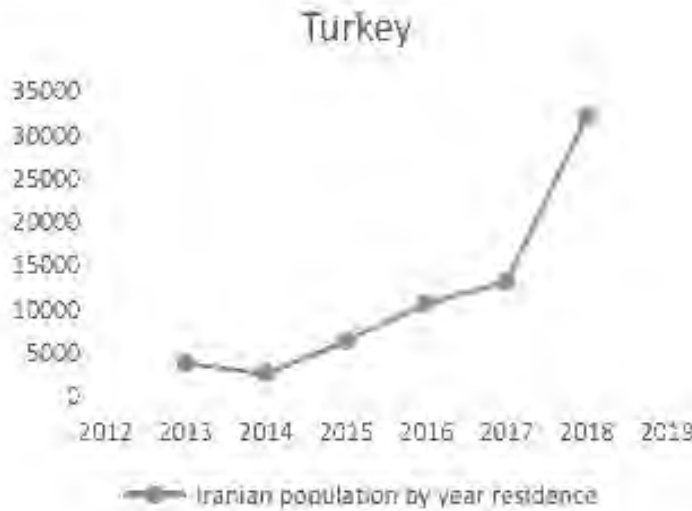
Source: TurkStat, 2019

Turkey is one of the influential countries in the Middle East and has been the destination country of many nations, including Syria, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Uzbekistan. As indicated in chart 87, the number of Iranians residing in Turkey underwent a 45% decrease from 1990-1995 and then increased slightly until 2010. However, the number of Iranians living in Turkey has had a remarkable 2.7-fold (167%) increase from 2010-2015. This increase has continued until 2019, indicating a 111% (2.1 times) increase in 2019 compared to 2015 (SPRI, 2020, p. 98-130).

> "About 2.7 million people were newly registered as refugees in 2017, double the amount from 2016 and close to the record number of new arrivals registered in 2014. One million three hundred twenty thousand seven hundred refugees were recognized on a group or prima facie basis, as well as the 1,410,800 who were granted some temporary form of protection. Most refugees fled to neighboring countries or elsewhere in their immediate region. An additional 731,600 people were granted refugee status following an individual refugee status determination procedure during the reporting period" (UNHCR, 2017, p. 18).

From 2009 to 2018, the number of Iranian asylum seekers in Turkey increased fivefold. This figure will reach its peak in 2017. It is important to note that these figures are for asylum seekers applying for the first time.

Most Iranians use Turkey as a station to reach the West. Still, in recent years Iran's poor economic situation has forced Iranians to buy a house in Turkey and make numerous investments. "Given that Turkey has experienced an unemployment rate of 14.5 percent in the last three months of February 2019, some Iranians are choosing this country to find a job, but along with those who go to Turkey to earn a job and income, there are many Iranians who think about living without income in Turkey, because they

are comfortable with their sources of income inside the country" (Sharif, 2019). It is estimated that if refugee women were employed full-time and paid at the same average rates as host countrymen, their contributions to national economies would increase by multiples of three (Kabir, 2019, p. 14). Table 11 shows the number of new Iranian asylum applicants in Turkey from 2009 to 2018. In 2015 and 2016, it was reported with the highest demand among Iranians. Although in 2017 and 2018, this figure will decrease compared to the previous two years, it still has an increasing trend compared to before 2015.

According to statistics published by the Anatolian News Agency, Iranian business persons and investors are at the top of the list of people applying for Turkish citizenship. In the first four months of 2019, Iranians bought nearly 1,278 houses in Turkey, which is 2.5 times more than in the same period last year (Sharif, 2019).

Table 11: New Iranian Asylum Applicants in Turkey, 2009-2018

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Turkey	1981	2881	3411	3589	5897	8202	11023	11856	8828	6387

Source: SPRI, 2020, p. 200

According to UN statistics, the population of Iranians residing in Turkey, taking asylum-seekers and similar conditions into account, reached 83,000 in 2019. This is while the population of Iranians living in Turkey in 2010 was reported to be at most 14,000 people (chart 6).

Chart 6: Iranian Population (by Place of Birth) in Turkey, 1990-2019
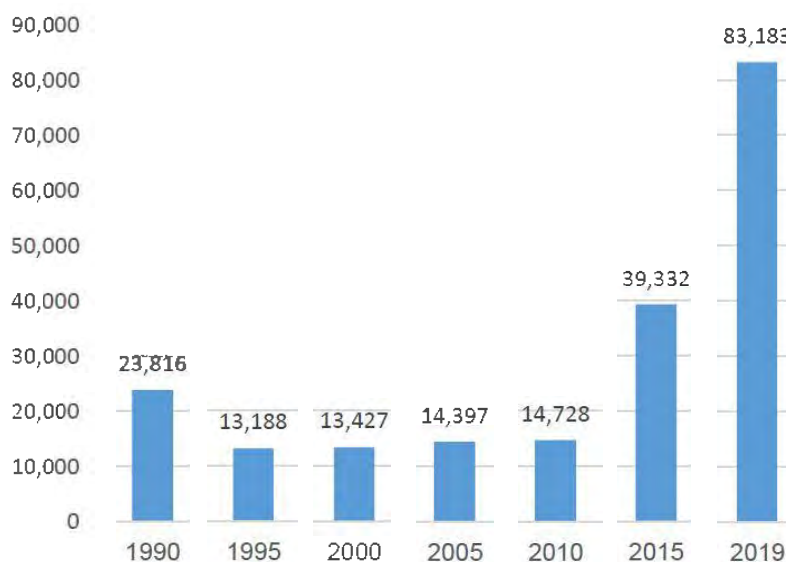
Source: UNDESA, 2020

After Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Germany, Iran is the fifth country whose citizens are naturalized in Turkey; According to the statistics of the Turkish Ministry of National Affairs, Iranians obtained 2,565 family residence permits (10th rank), 2,565 work

permits (10th rank) in 2018 and 4,456 student residence permits (4th rank) in 2017, which placed Iran among top-10 countries for sending migrants to Turkey. Iranians bought 5,423 houses in Turkey in 2019. Iranians ranked 8th among the foreign nationals who purchased properties in Turkey in 2015, 2016, and 2017 and ranked 2nd in 2018 and 2019. Iranians have also been among the first nationals with the most companies established in Turkey. Iranians have ranked first among the foreign nationals who established companies in Turkey in 2019, with 970 companies (SPRI, 2020, p. 217). Turkey has recently become the second-leading destination for Iranian students. So many factors, such as Turkey's geographical and cultural proximity, cancellation of visa requirements between the two sides, Turkish language, Turkish university ranking, and scholarship opportunities, have made Turkey an attractive destination for Iranian students (SPRI, 2020, p. 219).

2.3.2. Iranian Migrant Women in Turkey

Women who have migrated to Turkey for diverse reasons and have different immigrant statuses, whether employed in various sectors or unemployed, regarding their access to health services, human rights, and women's rights. Socio-demographic structures; and social and legal structures are influential factors in the immigration process. In particular, the social life of Iran and the inequality in legal rights between men and women are important factors, especially for women to leave their countries.

According to the 2021 Global Gender Inequality Report of the World Economic Forum, in around 156 countries in the world, the gender gap in Iran is 150th on the table, ahead of Congo, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan (Voice of America News (VOA), 2021). Turkey ranks 133rd (Evrensel, 2021). In 2019, according to the Turkish government (table 12), 267834 non-Turkish immigrant women entered the country, of which 18820 were Iranian women who were accepted as immigrants.

Table 12: Iranians Immigrants to and Emigrants from Turkey, 2019

Year	Country of citizenship	Immigrants			Emigrants			Net migration
		Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	
2019	Total	677042	368515	308527	330289	180444	149845	346753
	Turkish Republic citizens	98554	57861	40693	84863	51861	33002	13691
	Foreign nationals	578488	310654	267834	245426	128583	116843	333062
	Iran	42351	23531	18820	18004	9918	8086	24347

Source: TurkStat, 2019

"But the lives of female asylum seekers are much more difficult," said Aida Saadat, an Iranian social activist, referring to the hardships of asylum seekers' lives.

> "Turkish society is a traditional society. With the same restrictions; and attitudes that Third World societies have towards women's status, women are still considered the second sex. Although the appearance of this story may take on a more modern color and glaze, there is hidden violence in traditional societies such as Turkey. For many asylum seekers, the problem of work,

financing, and finding a roof is a big crisis. However, the situation is becoming more severe for women when hidden violence is exacerbated in a society where women are unfamiliar with the culture and language" (Karimi Majd, 2010).

Meltem Öztürk joined a solidarity group with migrant women. A group of women came together to make migrant women's problems visible and affect policies. She was a translator between Farsi and Turkish languages for Iranian and Afghan refugees for an NGO. She explains her experience dealing with the situation of Iranian and Afghan immigrant women living in Turkey: "When I used to work as a translator for Afghan and Iranian women, I listened to many stories of women who had fled from death threats and domestic violence from their families. They had reached Turkey in insecure ways. They were struggling with unprotected conditions in workplaces where they had been through sexual harassment without any access to protection mechanisms... All these stories reflect the daily practices of migrant women. They are a reality for the whole world but get heavier within Turkey's migration policy. Migrants are declared to be "scapegoats" of economic problems, the subjects of marginalization, hatred, xenophobia, and discrimination in social life" (Öztürk, 2020, pp. 96-97).

Whether the local government has strict laws or not, whether living away from home is difficult or not, the number of immigration applications from Iran is increasing yearly. Women, meanwhile, account for almost half of all requests, although, like women in other parts of the world, they face more problems than men. Decades after the start of immigration studies, research on why women want to leave the country should continue, especially for countries like Iran, which has gone through many political and social ups and downs.

Iranians, both men and women, tend to leave their homeland and emigrate for various reasons. However, it can also be divided into different spectrums. Iranians in an excellent economic position act through investment, those who can find their chance to continue their education act through students, and many Iranians can only succeed in one of these two ways.

Those who enter a country as asylum seekers must be able to open an asylum application under a case. These cases could be political, ideological, or security issues or be a subset of LGBTI+. However, there is another reason for migration that the local government is less willing to discuss, and its dimensions need to be explored. The official religion of the Iranian government is Shiite Islam, and "apostasy from Islam is forbidden and punishable in Iran and may entail capital punishment" (Landinfo, 2011, p. 6). Still, according to article 13, only three religions are acceptable in Iran: "Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities, who, within the limits of the law, are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies and to act according to their own rules in matters of personal affairs and religious education" (Article 13).

> "Conversion is not a codified crime in Iran. Judicial authorities have used national security laws to impose harsh sentences on converts, including imprisonment and floggings. Between May and August 2016, Iranian authorities reportedly arrested 79 Christian converts across Iran. The government has also shut down formally recognized churches offering services in Persian and prevented Iranians who are not Christians from entering churches" (Ceasefire, 2018, p. 26).

The issue goes beyond the legal formulation. Even if Christians promote their personal beliefs in their homes as house churches or through the Internet and social media, they can still be prosecuted as organized illegal activity. Human Rights Watch, in its report, recommended the government of Iran that "by its international obligations, the Iranian government must uphold the rights of individuals to have or adopt a religion or belief of their choice, to change their religion, including converting from Islam, and to practice their religion" (Human Rights Watch, 1997).

> "The penal code specifies the death sentence for proselytizing and attempts by non-Muslims to convert Muslims, as well as for Moharebeh (enmity against God) and Sabb Al-Nabi (insulting the Prophet). According to the penal code, the application of the death penalty varies depending on the religion of both the perpetrator and the victim. The law prohibits Muslim citizens from changing or renouncing their religious beliefs" (Bureau of Democracy, 2018, p. 1).

Therefore, issues related to personal and religious beliefs are one of the concerns of some people who want to immigrate and can be presented and examined as an immigration case. Among the different faiths and religions, Christianized Muslims who have migrated to neighboring countries, including Turkey, can be studied, and their situation will be explained.

2.3.3. Immigration of Iranian Christianized Muslims

The land of Iran, with ancient history in different historical periods, has experienced different religions. In other words, the history of Iran is full of confusion and coincidence between ideas and opinions and religion and government. In other words, throughout history, Iran has had numerous populations, races, and governments, some of whom have been immigrants from other lands. The last religion to enter Iran was Islam. According to the twelfth principle of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the official religion of Iran is Islam and Twelver Ja'afari Shia religion[7]. As mentioned above, in Iran, apart from Islam, three other religions are among the religious minorities and are officially recognized. These religions include Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians.

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[7]It states that all laws and regulations must be based on "Islamic criteria" and an official interpretation of sharia.

Currently, the most appropriate statistical source for examining the country's population by religion is the results of the general population and housing censuses. In the last half-century, at least 97% of Iran's population has been Muslim. The share of religious minorities in the country's population has consistently grown negatively from 1956 to 2011 (Chart 7). The reason for the relative decrease in the population of religious minorities is, on the one hand, the low population growth among minorities compared to Muslims and, on the other hand, the high proportion of emigration abroad among this group (Fathi, 2019, pp. 23-24) (Chart 8).

Chart 7: The Ratio of the Population of Religious Minorities to the Total Population of Iran[8]
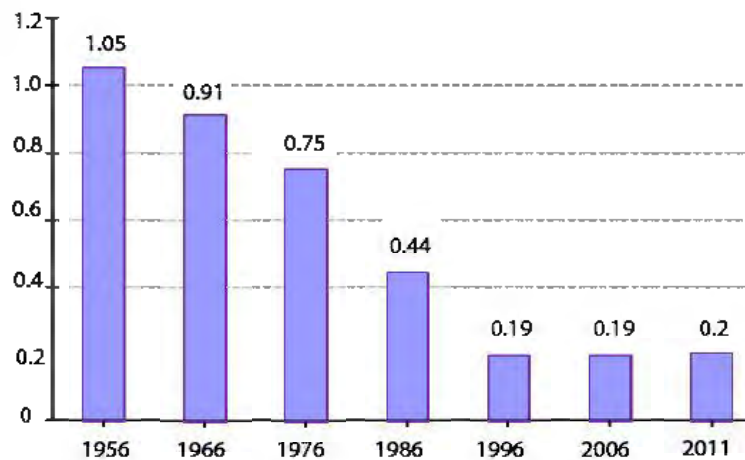
Source: Fathi, 2019

Chart 8: The Ratio of the Population of Iran's Religious Minorities to Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian
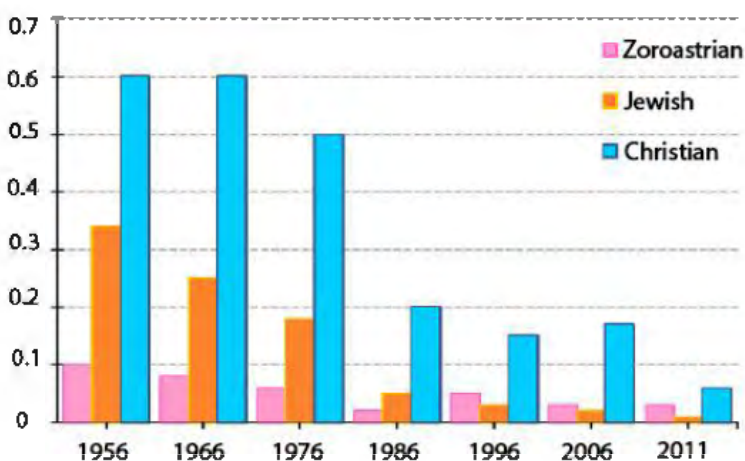
Source: Fathi, 2019

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[8]The statistics are for minorities whose religion is ancestral.

The survey titled "Iranians' attitudes toward religion" was conducted by Gamaan Org. Over 50 thousand respondents were surveyed, around 90% of whom lived in Iran. Figure 4 shows that 32% of the population identifies as Shi'ite Muslim, around 9% identify as atheist, 8% as Zoroastrian, 7% as spiritual, 6% as agnostic, and 5% as Sunni Muslim. Others stated that they identify with or follow Sufi mysticism, humanism, Christianity, the Baha'i faith, or Judaism, among other worldviews. Around 22% identified with none of the above (Maleki, 2020, p. 1).

Figure 4: Respondents Were Asked About Iranian Responders' Religious Beliefs and Faith in 2020
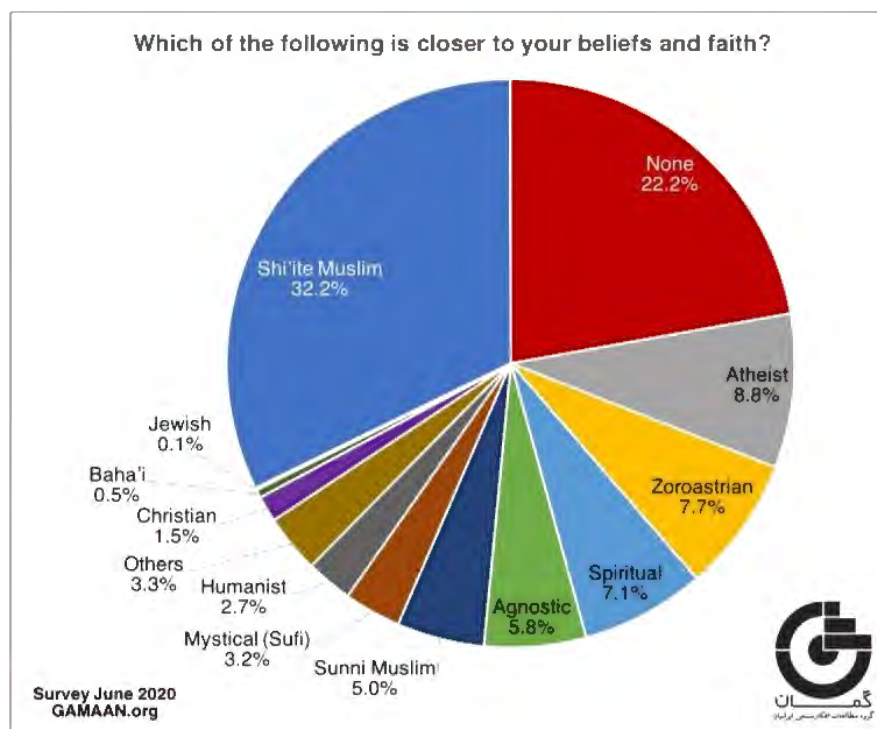
Source: Maleki, 2020, p. 11

In the same report, respondents were asked about the changes in their religious or non-religious beliefs during their lifetime by Gamaan Org (The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran). According to Figure 5, in yellow boxes, many converts to Christianity, Sufism, "Irfān-i Halqah" mysticism, and Buddhism flipped from a different religious orientation.

Figure 5: The Changes in Iranian Responders' Religious or Non-Religious Beliefs During Their Lifetime

How have your religious (or non-religious) beliefs changed during your lifetime?

	I went from being religious to non-religious	My belief/faith has not changed much	I became religious after being non-religious	I went from one religious orientation to another religious orientation
50-year-old +	41.1%	47.5%	5.4%	6.0%
30- to 49-year-old	46.0%	40.8%	6.9%	6.4%
20- to 29-year-old	51.8%	38.9%	4.7%	4.7%
Urban	48.3%	41.6%	4.9%	5.2%
Rural	41.1%	41.0%	10.1%	7.9%
University educated	51.0%	38.7%	5.1%	5.1%
Non-university educated	45.2%	42.5%	6.3%	6.0%
Man	49.9%	36.4%	7.2%	6.6%
Woman	43.4%	47.2%	4.5%	4.9%
Total	46.8%	41.4%	5.9%	5.8%

■ I went from being religious to non-religious
■ My belief/faith has not changed much
I became religious after being non-religious
■ I went from one religious orientation to another religious orientation

Survey June 2020
GAMAAN.org

Source: Ibid

Although the population of the official religions is declining compared to Muslims, some Muslims leave Islam and join another religion like Christianity. Converts, for the most part, are not officially considered Christian and are treated harshly by the authorities (Ceasefire, 2018, p. 26).

There are no definitive statistics on the number of Christians, particularly Christian converts in Iran, due to the need for more reliable polling. In 2010, the World Christian Database (WCD) recorded 270,057 Christians in Iran, or about 0.36 percent of the entire Iranian population of 74.7 million. There are two main categories of Christians in Iran: ethnic and non-ethnic. The majority are ethnic Christians, which refers to Armenians and the Assyrians (or Chaldeans) who possess linguistic and cultural traditions. Most ethnic Christians are members of their community's Orthodox Church (The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran Report, 2013, p. 6). "Christians in Iran include Armenians, the largest Christian group in Iran, whose presence dates back four centuries, and Chaldo-Assyrians, among the oldest settled groups in Iran. In addition, there are large numbers of Protestants and Evangelicals in Iran, many of whom are converts and are treated harshly by the government. According to the 2011 government census results, which only count Armenians and Chaldo-Assyrians, there were 117,704 Christians in Iran, although other sources estimate closer to 300,000,

including converts. Estimates for the number of converts vary widely, with some ranging between 66,000 to as many as 500,000" (Ceasefire, 2018, p. 10).

In addition to the Armenian Christians who are ancestrally ascribed to this religion, a group of other faiths have voluntarily accepted this religion.

> "Non-ethnic Christians are mostly members of Protestant churches, and most, though not all, are converts from Muslim backgrounds. The World Christian Database (WCD) 2010 reported approximately 66,700 Protestant Christians in Iran, representing about 25 percent of the Iranian Christian community. The Iranian government does not recognize them as Christians, and many converts do not report their faith publicly due to fear of prosecution. Thus, the number of converts in Iran is likely undercounted" (The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran Report, 2013, p. 6).

The Protestant community in Iran faces far more aggressive government restrictions and human rights abuses than ethnic Christian groups. This stems mainly from their use of the Persian language in church services and literature and their commitment to proselytizing (all of which facilitate the conversion, which is anathema to the regime) and the affiliations of some Protestant churches to denominations and church networks abroad. For instance, the Appeals Court of Bushehr ruled that a couple who has converted to Christianity from Islam should give up their two-year-old "Muslim-born" adopted daughter[9]. According to Article 6 of the Law regulating child adoption, adoptive parents must belong to one of the religions recognized by the Constitution of the Islamic Republic – that is, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism and "The law also requires that the adoptive parents and the child must be of the same faith. This means a Christian family cannot adopt a child born from a Muslim family. However, the same law allows Muslim families to adopt non-Muslim children" (Iran International Broadcasts, 2020).

Iranian officials consider Christian converts apostates and part of a broader foreign conspiracy to undermine ideological support for the state (The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran Report, 2013, p. 6). Concerns about the growing number of converts have also been raised in speeches by local officials. The Friday prayer leader of Bakhrez (a city in Razavi Khorasan Province, Iran) complained about the increase in the number of house churches[10] in Neishabour and Shiraz. Amjadizadeh said about the

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[9]A family court judge had allowed the child to remain with her adoptive parents, who have cared for her since she was three months old. The judge noted the child's "strong emotional ties" to her adoptive parents and the likelihood of "an uncertain future" if she was returned to a state orphanage, given the child's heart and digestive issues made finding another family difficult.

[10]A house church starts one-to-one: for example, a family may become interested in Christianity and contact Elam or other Christian ministries working with Iranians through satellite programs typically. Elam will put them in contact with a Christian family who will teach them. Converts instinctively know that security is an issue, and Elam also instructs them that they should not meet in groups larger than ten.

propagation of Christianity in different parts of Iran: "Unfortunately, Shiraz has become a base for the exchange of ideas of emerging religions and sects, and especially Christianity in Shiraz has a very high number of house churches and are active. When I was in Qom, two regions of the country were introduced as sensitive to the issue of Christianity, which was Shiraz and the other was Neishabor. Shiraz is very active in the field of Christianity. In the villages around Shiraz, they attract young people to promote Christianity by helping people by providing doctors and dentists for free. They also hold celebrations. "In Neishabour, a Muslim, Shiite, and Ahl al-Bayt (AS) city, the number of house churches has increased significantly, and although the city is relatively small, there are 11 house churches there." (Khabar Online, 2019). These concerns have continued to the point where official newspapers are following in the footsteps of Christian missionaries to Greek refugee camps. One of the internal websites of the Iranian government wrote: "There are reports of refugee camps in Athens, central Greece, that Christian missionaries inside the camps are promoting Christianity in the form of medical teams and entertaining children under the pretext of helping refugees" (Tabnak, 2020).

> "In Turkey and across the Middle East and Europe, Muslim refugees are encountering and, in some cases, converting to Christianity as they seek to emigrate to the West" (Religion Watch, 2018).

UNHCR estimated that approximately 20-25 percent of asylum seekers reported that they are converts. Some have converted to Iran; others are baptized in Van while processing asylum applications. A common feature of Iranian converts in Ankara and Van is that they, almost without exception, are ethnic Persians and were previously Shia Muslims (Landinfo, 2011, p. 7).

It is impossible to figure out how many house churches exist in Iran, and most house churches do not exist in the long term. Elam Ministries, a UK-based Iranian Christian NGO, has informed that "[w]hen a house church is raided, the authorities will detain the whole of the group and interrogate them often intimidating and threatening them with charges of apostasy but most often they are released without charges" (Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), 2015, p. 4). The house churches were already numerous due to the pressure on other Evangelical and Protestant church premises that existed above the ground. The churches change around a lot, changing locations and members. This is also due to the churches' monitoring, which compels them to close down and open new churches in new areas (Danish Immigration Service Report, 2014, p. 21).

If a person, or a family group, who is interested in Christianity wants to contact a house church, he or she/the family group may be taught one-to-one for some time and then enter a house church. The sorts of activities that go on in a house church include the teaching of the Bible as well as prayer and worship. It is often done quietly so as not to arouse suspicion from neighbors. Gradually such a fellowship becomes a house church as it grows and evolves (Danish Immigration Service Report, 2014, p. 23).

The Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) report published in February 2013 by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), and Norwegian Landinfo service interviewed several sources about Christians. The report stated that several Iranians had traveled to Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan to be baptized. The refugees in Turkey escaped Iran, where conversion to religion outside of Islam is illegal, and applied for asylum there, claiming they would face religious persecution if they returned home (Ahval, 2018). "Elam Ministries said that if such a person who returns from abroad is not connected to a house church or network, there would be no particular threat, however as far as their Christian faith is concerned, all aspects of their life will be affected because of their new faith and as a result, they will run into the same issues that other converts face for example with regards to school, marriage, university, employment, and housing. They must be secret believers and cannot speak of their faith to anyone else and live an openly Christian lifestyle. Such secret believers may use Christian satellite programs to communicate with other Christians or obtain Christian materials. Christian satellite programs influenced many Iranians, and they became Christians through live and pre-recorded programs. The programs give up telephone numbers and internet sites through which one can get in touch with the Christian organization behind it. It also has programs that can be viewed by satellite in Iran in which a telephone number is given at the end that people can call. It does occur that the Iranian authorities jam such programs occasionally" (Danish Immigration Service Report 2014, p. 17). The converts in Turkey could apply for asylum in a third country if they claim they would face religious persecution if they returned home.

The Turkish government allows freedom of religion and even protects churches in many cities, and because of these reasons, Iranian refugees have continued to immigrate to Turkey. The conversion of Iranians to evangelical Christianity is more evident in Turkey than in Iran due to the greater freedom and the presence of refugees in that country (Religion Watch, 2018). Koser Akcapar, a sociology professor at Istanbul's Koç University, believes that "only some of the refugees are genuine converts. Others are using religious persecution as a way to get to the West, which may be the only way for them to lead a normal life" (Ahval, 2018).

The refugee flow into Turkey has kept up its pace. The need for conversion to Christianity has only risen, as has the demand for more churches. Even church leaders doubt whether the converts will genuinely follow Christianity or are simply adopting the religion to get an easy pass into the United States or Europe (Glover, 2018).

According to Mohabat News (A Christian satellite network), many Iranians, living in the tens of thousands, now live in Turkey as refugees and asylum seekers. These people have left Iran for a reason and say they can no longer return to Iran. Many of these individuals are Iranian Christians who have applied for asylum in Turkey from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "Asylum seekers of Iranian Christian converts living in Turkey face many challenges in proving their conversion to the UNHCR. It is not easy to accept the claims of Christian converts to

change their religion. For this reason, many Christian converts have been denied asylum by the UNHCR or have been living in Turkey for a long time without answers" (WordPress, 2016).

Everything described so far is part of the situation of converts inside and outside Iran and Iranians migrating to Turkey. However, women's studies, which usually comprise only part of the immigrant population, are not explicitly stated. However, the situation is expected to be more difficult for them than for men. Migration studies in the field of women are more concerned with economic issues, while in addition to providing other reasons, they can also encourage women to migrate.

According to the author's observations, Eskişehir is one of the cities that receives Iranian asylum seekers. The Iranians living in this city have partially changed their religion and established churches. The researcher's observation results in the significant number of formal and informal churches in this city, which is added to the total number of churches from time to time with the opening of new churches and the increase in the number of asylum seekers.

2.4. Iranian in Eskisehir

Dr. Nader Vahabi, the author of the *Atlas of Iranians book*, entrusted me with extracting the statistics of Iranians living in Turkey for the mentioned book. I can also use my information in data collection at this point. After referring to the statistics of the entry/exit of Iranians from Turkey since 1976, I realized that the wave of return of Iranians from Turkey before and shortly after the 1979 revolution is significant, and the number of exits from Turkey is more than entries (even at the height of the Gulf wars). This process changes suddenly; since 2000, Iranian applicants have increased annually. For this reason, from 2005 onwards, Turkish governments are forced to enact stricter laws. Asylum seekers no longer lived in cities based on their request and by their own choice; their travel from one city to another was severely restricted, and they were not given work permits; asylum procedures were prolonged, land rights were required to be paid, and care was taken. Adequate health care and paying for insurance have become problematic. Still, with all these conditions, many groups go to Turkey, from students to asylum seekers to financiers who apply for property.

Iranians who live in Turkey as refugees have the same conditions, although these conditions can sometimes be more complicated and more accessible depending on the city of residence. During the years of waiting until the assignment is determined, each refugee is obliged to support themselves while they are not allowed to work. On the other hand, due to the lengthy immigration process, the asylum seeker must be able to learn the language because it will be challenging to find a job (black) without knowing the language. During the last few years, with the removal of responsibility from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the transfer of asylum cases to the Turkish Immigration Department, the problems of Iranian refugees and asylum seekers in this country have increased. Since 2009, Those who came to Turkey are not allowed to live in Ankara and Istanbul, and there are some cities where refugees are announced

to live. All these problems are at a time when the threat of leaving the land and the rejection of the case is always possible.

As mentioned above, Eskisehir is one of the cities that the Turkish government has considered for the settlement of refugees. Geographically, this city is located almost in the center of Turkey, and the Anatolian region and it connects the two cities of Istanbul and Ankara. According to the history on the website of the Eskisehir municipality, about 1200 years ago, the inhabitants of this historic city were under Byzantine rule, and this city was a battlefield in the First Crusade. Based on the geographical location of this city, it can be estimated that the residents of Eskisehir also accepted this religion at the same time as the promotion of Christianity and then the recognition of Christianity by the Roman rulers. The witness of this claim can also be Sivrihisar Church or Surp Yerrortutyun, which rests in the heart of the Eskisehir province.

Now, after many years, Eskisehir has again become a place to settle many Christians. Sometimes these Christians must live in this city for over ten years. A large part of Iranian refugees is also Christians. This process may occur before or after migration. However, in a town with a population of about 900,000 finding many churches only for Iranian refugees was remarkable.

The impact of the presence of Christians on the Turks is not hidden. Although the public promotion of other religions, except Islam, is prohibited, seekers find their way anyway. In one of the meetings, I had with the French pastor of Jehovah's Witnesses Church, a Turkish woman was with her. The woman, who used to be a Muslim, had changed her religion by associating with Christian refugees. This matter surprised me because I always thought that in Turkey, Islam does not impose its duties on its followers. However, the range of Christians living in this city is diverse. There are many houses and formal churches that attract refugees every weekend.

2.4.1. Iranian Churches in Eskisehir

Various churches in Eskisehir City are located in different places and promote a sect of Christianity. Most Persian-speaking churches are Protestant and have different branches. In this research, it was possible to interview several women from the Catholic Church, but they also entered Catholicism or other religions from Protestantism.

There are various churches not only in Eskisehir but all over Turkey; some are located in houses, and some are located in unique places. In this research, I had an opportunity to talk with a member of the sects such as trinitarian and non-trinitarian Protestants, Seventh-day Adventists, Catholics, and Cosmic Christianity. However, most of my visits were to Pentecostal churches. Therefore, I will explain the differences and similarities between the churches and the Pentecostal sub-groups. One of the characteristics of these churches is the belief in the power of the Holy Spirit. They believe that they have discovered the mechanism of the Holy Spirit. This issue can be seen in Pentecostal churches; for example, one of the participants announces the presence of the Holy Spirit during the ceremony, or the pastor touches one of the

participants, and they fall to the ground. This particular view of the Holy Spirit is unique to Pentecostals. Another belief of Pentecostals is speaking in languages. In the meetings, suddenly, someone starts reading prayers with unintelligible sounds, and some claim that they have the power to translate and understand the meaning of these sounds. However, this view does not exist in all Pentecostal believers; for example, Seventh-day Adventists believe that all Christians with different languages can pray together, which means the power of languages. However, the differences and similarities in beliefs of other churches will bring advantages and disadvantages. To understand this issue, the description of my presence in each church will follow:

2.4.1.1. Elam Church

My first visit happened with one of my old friends from Elam Church. Before that, I had the experience of visiting the church during my trip to Isfahan and Georgia as a tourist, and I had no image of the Iranian church. The presence of mainly Muslim Iranians in churches inside Iran is prohibited. There are a few churches that Muslims can visit on days other than Sundays and perform religious ceremonies. Therefore, the experience of participating in the church ceremony was unique for me; it was interesting that this church was outside of Iran and there were many Christians in it. Once I entered the church of Elam, the church system had just changed. The main center of the Elam church had decided to add a new pastor to the church of Eskişehir. This pastor converted more than 30 years ago and returned to Turkey to perform church duties after immigrating to England. The church was expected to be more disciplined than in the previous period. Later, when I inquired, many had left the church because of the bad behavior of the previous pastor, and the situation in the church was very chaotic.

Sunday prayer meetings were held in a hotel hall in the city center, while the church office was in another building. A large crowd attended the services, and new faces were always present. In his speeches, the newly arrived pastor tried hard to describe his experiences and other saved Christians. However, there were several noteworthy points. Pastor tried to keep the recently converted Christians determined in their choice by using the analogy between Christianity and Islam, the social conditions inside Iran, and the differences in beliefs in different layers of Iran.

They came from every social class in the church. No one knows everyone's real identity. Sometimes even the pastor does not know the identity of all the participants. When we went to the pastor because of a tragic incident that happened to my friend in connection with one of the church participants, the pastor tried to start making inquiries about the person in question. It was there that we all found out that this person is a human and drug trafficker and has a criminal record inside Iran! A few weeks before this incident, the pastor appointed this illegal person as a church server due to his bold activities in the church.

This incident shocked me, who had just started my association with the church. Still, after researching, I realized that different reasons confuse women in the Christian environment. Sometimes some of them experience other sects of this religion. Of

course, the outcome of staying in this religion is that the case will always remain open after leaving the transit country.

2.4.1.2. Kelisaye Shabane Niku (The Good Shepherd Church)

Another church that I visited the most was the Good Shepherd Church (Picture 1). The Persian-speaking pastors of this church were formerly members of the Elam Church, who formed an independent group after leaving this church. Finally, they managed to find a place in the back alleys of the city center in the Turkish Church. This church is a big house in which the verses from the Bible are displayed on a board outside. Pedestrians could read the verses in Turkish and become curious about this building. Inside the church, I saw a picture of the cross and Jesus everywhere. This was even though these images were not seen in other churches because the meetings were either in rented houses or private meeting halls. Therefore, Christians had no opportunity to hang pictures on the walls permanently. I remember that women expressed during the interview that in a Muslim country like Turkey, despite the implementation of secular policies, hanging a cross on the neck or the wall of the house is sensitive.

The church's interior was much more intimate and cheerful than the other churches I visited. The women had a session together, and the men went to football. Official meetings were held on Sundays, but other days were chosen for teaching or prayer. On Sundays and Tuesdays, there were practice sessions for the worship group. The worship group is familiar with the music and is responsible for singing hymns. On Sundays, before the main prayer session, the worship group practices together and prays with the ministers. Women have an active role in the worship group. Perhaps one of the reasons why women tend to join the hymn group is the freedom to sing because women's voices are banned in Iran.

After joining the church members, the Sunday service officially started. The Sunday service would begin with prayer, suddenly escalate, and become a celebration. They were all singing together, clapping and cheering. However, some people might cry or faint at the end of the meetings.

After the hymn, the pastor begins his sermon.

What I heard from the pastor's wife, the week's topics are determined based on experiences, inspirations, or frequently asked questions. Before the Sunday services, the pastor prays in private, and if he receives stimulation or considers a verse from the Bible suitable for preaching, he chooses. Pastor's sermons are inspiring. In the middle of the conversation, sometimes distant voices repeat the word, Amen. After the sermon, a church member holds a cross-stitched bag to collect the gifts of one-tenth of the income. The meeting is broadcast simultaneously on the church's Instagram page. This is one of the characteristics of this church. In other churches, virtual communication is closed, and church programs are accessible through special links in secure programs such as Zoom. Usually, at the end of each meeting, the pastor asks the audience who

came to the church for the first time. Has she/he been given the Bible? Moreover, does she/he have the desire to become a believer after seeing prayer and worship? Those invited there for the first time by the evangelism of the church members often stood up in the first meeting and demanded to read the prayer of salvation. Also, after inviting the audience to eat and drink cake and tea, at the end of the session, the pastor asks the attendees to go to him if they wish to receive a private and individual prayer. Usually, the pastor puts his hand on the applicant's forehead and chants a prayer under her/his breath calling the Holy Spirit.

Downstairs, everyone is gathered together and talking casually. Everyone finishes the meeting and goes home, and thus the Sunday service ends. The same ceremony will be held next week unless there are special holidays; the ceremony will be slightly different depending on the occasion.

Picture 1: The Interior of the Church of the Good Shepherd

2.4.1.3. 222 Church (Cathedral of Persian Speakers)

This church was one of my memorable experiences in visiting churches. The type of ceremony held in this church was different from other churches. The church did not have a specific office, but the Sunday Service was held in the large hall of a cultural center. The rows of chairs were arranged, and the reception was located in the corner of the hall, which the participants could use whenever they wanted to drink and eat. However, except for the audience, there was no pastor or supervisor! A large monitor was a virtual one-way communication between the audience and the speakers. These meetings can be watched in the church and through the Zoom link. This church had a pastor, but the pastor came every two weeks and performed the program in person—the worship group, which included women, pastors, and children, performed music and prayers virtually. Then, like in TV programs, two presenters, one female, and the other male, read from previously prepared texts and introduced the different sections and the

order of the programs. After finishing and before starting the programs, presenters would appear. Then a pastor from Europe joins the congregation to preach virtually. During his sermon, he prays for Iran and Iranians and talks about his experience of being deported. He attributes this experience to the possible mission of Jesus, of which he is unaware. A video clip is played in which a refugee man talks about his experience of becoming a believer, and a painting of the Last Supper is installed behind his head. This part is also one of the essential parts of the church system, mainly called witnesses. Usually, people who become believers describe their inspirations, experiences, and reasons for faith to everyone in this process.

2.4.1.4. Seventh-Day Adventist Church

I met this group through a Telegram channel. I found out that they are active in the city where I live in Turkey, and I contacted their Persian-speaking pastor. The pastor asked me many questions, and we finally made a Skype appointment. I explained my thesis topic on Skype, and he invited me to his house for the ceremony on Saturday.

The ceremony was held in the pastor's house, and there was no particular building as a church. Many people of different nationalities participated in the ceremony, including African, Korean, and Iranian participants! There was no sign of the cross or the face of Jesus and Mary in the house.

This group of Christians has more strict rituals than other Protestant tendencies. There was no exceptional vivacity and joy in the ceremony, which has organized with the piano and the singing of hymns. Prayers are held on Saturdays instead of Sundays. A Korean pastor managed the meetings in English, and the Iranian pastor's wife (who had a lower rank than the Korean pastor) worked as a translator to translate the statements into Farsi. Hymns were sung in Persian and English. Whenever a person was invited to pray, she/he prayed in her/his language, and naturally, all the participants did not understand what she/he said, but they confirmed her/him by saying Amen. The meetings were broadcast simultaneously on the Zoom program. The sessions were very dull and long. Translation also took a long time. After the prayer meeting, the food that everyone had cooked and brought with them was placed on the dining table, and while eating the food, the participants talked about various other topics. I participated in the Adventists' Saturday ceremony for a few weeks, and similar meetings were held routinely. The pastor's wife, as a woman, never wanted to interview me, and among the Iranians present at the intersections of this church, which were not many, I was able to convince only one woman to talk. Compared to other churches, the management of this church was highly conservative.

2.4.2. The Influence of Women in Iranian Churches
Maybe the resurrection of Jesus was the illusion of women who met him for the first time after his resurrection? (Luke 11:24).

From 1883 to 1949, there was a lot of missionary activity among Christian women in Iran. The presence of these women created changes in the social body of Iran. Many hospitals and schools were established under the name of American-Christian, whose

goal was to change Iran based on the American Protestant model by influencing the Iranian elite. This impact was also aimed at women. Alborz College President, Samuel Jordan, put this point in his speech in 1935:

> "Because of child marriage, polygamy, and easy divorce, the position of the wife has been inferior.... we have convinced our students that monogamy is preferable in every way.... the young men are insisting on educated wives who can be real helpmates, friends, and confidantes—and the harem is becoming a thing of the past" (Zirinsky, 1992, p. 174).

As in other mission fields, about two-thirds of the Protestant missionaries in Iran were women. Many were educated, middle-class women from the northeastern United States (Ibid, 1992, p. 175). This shows that the presence of missionary women became a platform for making changes in Iran. In a situation where there was no law to protect women and access to women by missionary men was impossible due to Islamic beliefs (lack of privacy), these were missionary women who freely displayed their lifestyle and spoke about patriarchal issues that are still included in the framework of women's rights, were able to penetrate the social layers.

> "Missionary women understood that their Iranian sisters were subjected to brutal discipline by fathers, brothers, and husbands. They opposed violence against women. They believed women should be free to decide on education, dress, career, marriage, and children" (Ibid, 1992, p. 175).

All religious missionaries aimed at two points; Education and medical institutions. The heritage of Protestant missionary women in Iran was diverse. They wanted to preach the Gospel, convert Iran to evangelical Protestant Christianity, and help rebuild Iran according to the modern Western model. Their deep desire was to change the country by proselytizing but realizing that this was impossible, they were happy to change the attitude of the youth through education and introduce new values. Since 1953, with the progress of Iran in medical and educational levels, the activity of Christian missionary groups decreased, but after the 1979 revolution, this activity reached its minimum.

It seems that after the passage of almost a century and a half and the continuation of the missionary activities of Christianity in Iran and the women's civil movement, Iranian women entered the propaganda body of Christianity, and despite the limitations, they have in the social and family context; they have found a new voice. The activity and presence of women in the Christian religion may sometimes lead to imprisonment, deprivation, and even being forced to leave the country. However, my research shows that there is still a long way to overcome the patriarchal system. There are still men who, due to living in Iranian Islamic society, may not have been freed from the framework of Islam, even though they have converted to Christianity. More precisely, if this issue is split, it becomes clear that the men who came to Christianity from Islam

and traditional Iran have not yet completely overcome the two powerful forces of Islam and tradition ruling the Iranian society and eliminating its effects. The laws approved by the government also give more formality to these two forces.

So far, in Christianized societies, several factors have hindered women from flourishing: the experience of living in a closed Muslim community, the influence of laws and restrictions attributed to Islam, the effect of the two factors mentioned in strengthening the male mentality of the church, and the lack of confidence of women in organizing Independent Christian institutions. In the following, two last aspects will be explained.

If there are verses in the Bible that praise women in the role of mother and wife, but at the same time, we can find verses that keep women away from the church community:

> *12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man;[b] she must be quiet. (1 Timothy 2: 12).*

However, there is this criticism of the content of the Bible that why prohibits women from being taught and imitated; why does it prohibit women from training and acting? Men often use these verses against women to turn women back.

These limitations are not only limited to the performance of churches and the verses of the Bible or male dominance; this negligence can also be touched widely in surrendering women to common customs. By comparing other Christian societies with Iranian societies, we can witness the existence of limitations in the diversity of women's performance in these societies.

> "Women, according to an old saying in the black church, are the backbone of the church," notes religion and gender scholar Ann Braude. "The double meaning of this saying is that, while the churches would collapse without women, their place is in the background" behind male leaders" (Zurlo, 2022).

Also, many Christian women's associations worldwide (such as the National Federation of Protestant Women to promote peace or the Catholic Sisters' Association to improve post-war conditions) are active in various fields. Still, this concern is not seen in Iranian women. Despite Christianized Iranian women's great interest and participation, their activities could be more organized. This lack of organization may be rooted in a closed government's culture and experience. Still, women should consolidate their participation in different fields in the nascent Christian society by establishing various associations. Although weekly women's meetings are popular among Iranian Christian women's communities, these meetings have yet to become an idea to combine femininity and Christianity as an association or organization. Therefore, women still do not have independent church speakers, and the church still sets lines for their demands. Most of the foremost leaders of the churches, who play a prominent role in the

leadership of the church and missionary groups, are men. Despite this, Christianity has features for women that keep them enthusiastic about this religion.

On the one hand, according to Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, the Bible is written in a male-centered language that is rooted in ancient patriarchal cultures and has acted in repressive and anti-feminist frameworks throughout history; On the other hand, the Holy Bible has been an inspiration to women and other subordinates, and it has been used to fight against patriarchy and domination. According to this point, in liberation feminist theology, it is always emphasized that the Bible is not only used to suppress women; Rather, based on the experiences gained, it has also inspired women in their liberation struggles.

Even if the theories are not paid attention to, by studying the mechanisms of the church and the amount of women's participation in the church system, it can be concluded that women rely on their demands (and, of course, the changes that have been made in recent decades in societies to promote women's rights) and try to have maximum participation in the church system even if they have not yet succeeded in all fields. Although theorists like Fiorenza also believe women's experience should reform Christianity captured by the patriarchal system.

2.4.3. Why and How Are Iranian Christians Together or Not?

Iran is the first country that has a spiritual awakening. It means that God is working a lot in Iran. Look at how many Persian-speaking churches are in Turkey. Iran has this spiritual awakening first, and then Afghanistan. God also mentioned Iran in the Bible, how important Iran is to God. Moreover, God said that I would establish my throne in Ilam. Well, Ilam is a part of Iran (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

The Christian community in the world is diverse, but new Christian groups are also being formed apart from traditional and historical views and divisions. Newly converted Iranians include new groups that add to the diversity of the Christian community. However, the main question is why common language, culture, and nationality forces cannot create solidarity between Christian groups.

The Islamic atmosphere still dominates the mind and behavior of ex-Muslims. I remember one of the times when I participated in the training session of the worship group, one of the servants unconsciously made movements similar to chaining the Muharram. This movement and his presence in Muharram delegations were institutionalized in him, which even the change of religion cannot erase. Some Islamic expressions such as "Insha'Allah" (God willing) are still heard in the words of many Christians. Another time, the pastor told a memory of playing football that one of the players (one of the church members) suddenly used the Islamic-Shiite phrase "Yaa Hossein" because of excitement in the middle of the football game.

In some churches, male and female servants are separated. Female servants were responsible for caring for women, and male servants were accountable for managing

men. At the same time, in Christianity, there is no privacy law based on gender, like in Islam (Mahramiat). This Iranian-Islamic-Shiite culture has also entered the church. An Iranian with a Shia Muslim background has become a Pentecostal Christian; Christians call each other brother and sister. However, some Islamic cultures, rules, and customs prevail in the church system. This case, together with the lack of experience in a diverse cultural environment where all religions and beliefs live together peacefully, which has never been experienced by an Iranian, causes there is only one look at the issue of religion; A new faith but with an Islamic background. There is a positive point among new Christians outside Iran that can be a point of unity in the future; Diaspora society relies on nostalgia. For example, the Shabane-Nikou (Good Shepherd) Church worship group uses Daf. Daf is a very nostalgic and Iranian instrument. Also, on exceptional Christian holidays, the pastor of this church plays the Bagpipes instrument. This instrument also belongs to the south of Iran and has a unique sound.

> We gather on Wednesday nights and pray for Iran, Afghanistan, and the world. In this challenging pandemic, we, as servants, also went to church. We prayed continuously for ten nights, especially for Iran, for Iran's salvation and the Iranians' awareness. Because God loves Iran and Iranians, God promises He will establish His throne in Iran so that the world will find peace (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

There may be an expectation that solidarity should be formed among Christian communities outside Iran due to distance from the homeland, having shared experiences, and many other common factors. However, even though there are many signs of dependence on nostalgia for the formation of diaspora communities, this unity does not exist. The lack of this unity makes the groups fragile. Christian communities in transit countries are more delicate than other expatriate Christian groups because they are all waiting to leave the transit country and settle in a permanent country. One reason that shows the lack of need to ally with these countries is the lack of stability. Pastors may leave the church at any moment. Church members may be called to other countries. So, no permanent and responsible person or organization can deal with the problems of Christian refugees.

As an explanation was given about the functioning of churches, there are differences and similarities regarding faith which will be mentioned in the next topic.

CHAPTER THREE: RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

3.1. Definition of Religious Conversion

Finding the exact meaning of religious conversion takes work. Sociologists and psychologists have been dealing with this issue for years. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, several academic psychologists have sought to enter this field. Various definitions, approaches, and typologies of conversion have been defined. Conversion is a powerful challenge to sociological theories about the relationship between society and the self.

Religious conversion raises essential questions about the social processes within which religion is embedded. Conversion is usually an individual process that involves a change in worldviews and affiliations by an individual but occurs within the context of institutional procedures and social relations. In the following, briefly and usefully, the opinions of most social scientists about religious conversion will be discussed.

> "In antiquity's religious "supermarket," there were more than two options—life-transforming conversions to Christianity or exciting initiations in the mysteries—on offer. Thus, the main suggestion is that conversion was accessible to all people in antiquity (Christians, Jews, and pagans alike), that different cults offered different opportunities, and that individuals could be initiates and converts on several different levels and in different ways. Let us investigate why people converted, what other results came from it, and what "ideal" conversions were found in the various cults. We will get a better understanding not only of the mystery cults and their differences but also of the Greco-Roman culture that they (as well as Christianity) grew out of and helped to shape" (Bøgh, 2015. P. 263).

The definition of conversion in the Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion is as follows:

> "Conversions are dramatic turning points in life, tied to external or internal events (personality processes and traumatic events), leading to re-assessing one's life, identity change, and a biographical break with the past. Higher self-esteem, or self-love, allows us to define a new identity. During stress and crisis, as during individual distress, there is a regression to "artistic," religious, or magical ways of thinking. When realistic coping fails, magical thinking takes over. When realistic coping seems to be falling or futile, individuals may turn to mystical or religious coping methods. These coping methods seem worthwhile when all hope is lost" (Leeming, 2010, p. 205).

From the viewpoint of Paloutzian, a professor of psychology, conversion is defined as a "more distinct process" in which a person joins from one belief to another. "The transformative process" may vary from moment to year at different times (Imawati, 2018, pp. 68-69).

> "In contrast to someone arriving at a point of belief through socialization and other developmental mechanisms, the convert can

identify a time before the religion was not accepted and after it was accepted. Those characteristics have something in common: a change in one's views and beliefs toward his religion. Changes that occur are affected based on psychological conditions in which changes can occur suddenly or through a process. The symptoms of that change are not always the same in each person or group. This conversion is a struggle to become a better religious adherent in the volitional or gradual change type. The other type is a self-surrender or drastic change, in which a person or group in his or her religion changes rapidly, naturally accepting the new condition with complete surrender of the soul" (Imawati, 2018, pp. 68-69).

Szpiech points out that in 1347 (early fourth century), the Castilian Jew Abner of Burgos converted from Judaism to Christianity and devoted thirty years to criticizing Judaism in Hebrew. He was described as an anti-Semitic Christian with titles such as liar, traitor, and apostate (Szpiech, 2013, p. 144). Szpiech points out that the issue of leaving religion or conversion has yet to be studied from a historical perspective and has been a subset of general studies in transformation. The same early texts had hierarchical views on leaving religion and conversion. For example, William James, as the first researcher, states in his study in 1917 that: negatively casts leaving religion as "backsliding" and conversion as optimistic, a "high-water mark of [man's] spiritual capacity" (James, 1987, p. 237).

Different thinkers, each working on the subject of conversion, have come up with varying definitions. Like other topics, these definitions can be examined from classical and modern perspectives. Because the issue of conversion came to the attention of scholars in the early twentieth century, it seems reasonable to expect that definitions were more limited and lacked a precise classification. However, over time and with more research, the scope for addressing the issue of religious conversion and related theories has expanded. As mentioned above, William James was the first to address the conversion issue. Therefore, to find the history of researchers' attention to the subject of conversion, it is better to start with the studies of William James, especially his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

The view presented by James and scientifically defining the change of religion for the first time was circulated among classical thinkers for a long time. James's book dealt with the conversion from a scientific point of view, and the transfer of people's experiences is significant. Nock himself concluded an introduction to a reprint of that James' work in 1960 with the following statement:

> "Finally, this is not only a masterpiece of understanding; it is a masterpiece of imagination and a masterpiece of art- the only book about the psychology of religion, in fact, the only book about religion (as distinct from the classics of faith), which you could conceivably choose to take to a desert island with you" (Nock, 1960. p. 21).

After James, Arthur Nock's studies imply a severe attempt to avoid such an implicit hierarchy. Nock does not see the change of religion as entering another religion but even interprets it as a departure from the faith. His definition of conversion was formulated as "a re-orientation of the soul, a deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right." Conversion was to "abandon the old spiritual home for a new one." İt resulted in the sense of perceiving previously unknown truths, an "ecstasy of happiness," the removal of anxiety, and a new start, a new faith, a new life (Nock, 1998, pp. 7–8).

However, the views of humanities scholars on the subject of leaving or conversion have slowly changed, and the description of this social phenomenon has become more complete daily, although it is still very original. As Szpiech argues, in James's view, subsequent studies of leaving or conversion continue with the same hierarchical approach and valuation of the concept of conversion to going. He suggests, "Overcoming the persistence of such assumptions is an important challenge for contemporary studies of entering or leaving religion" (Szpiech, 2020, pp. 255-256).

James categorizes the reasons for conversion into several reasons: Explosive emotions, A normal adolescent phenomenon, Inability to convert as a weakness, Self-surrender, The spiritual evolution of Christianity, Instantaneous transformation, and Subliminal consciousness.

If looking at James' view deciphers parts of the subject of conversion, it is also essential to address the opinions of other scholars. Scientists have found that defining conversion is widespread. If they wanted to add other contextual, religious, and personal variables, they would have to develop a new definition of conversion. This, along with structuralism and poststructuralism, helped the new look and purpose of conversion. In a change of attitude and relying on theoretical developments due to structuralism and poststructuralism, social science researchers give language and related concepts special attention.

With the help of the linguistic turn, which was the product of new thinking in the second century of the twentieth century, in addition to creating new concepts and perspectives on the definitions of leaving or religious conversion, these practices were revised in another way. They were examined as understanding the new worldview. As Lewis Rambo explains,

> "Some forms of conversion also require apostasy. Some modifications require explicit and enacted rejection of past affiliations. Still, all conversions implicitly require a leaving behind or a reinterpretation of some past way of life and beliefs" (Rambo, 1993, p. 53).

According to Bøgh, disagreement arises from a different interpretation of conversion. Because understanding religious conversion requires a strong understanding of one's

choice at the beginning of the experience. Bøgh, on the other hand, argues that using a limited definition of conversion does not cover a wide range of religious backgrounds. Also, reports that were initially loaded in the past are not used today.

> "Others have not defined the term or defended the possibility of pagan conversion by viewing it very broadly as a rite of passage. Other scholars operate with relatively narrow conceptions of conversion and hold that for a religious experience to qualify as a conversion; it must be characterized by several different qualities, such as ideas of absolute truth, dualistic worldviews, a need to missionize, and an event that initializes a radical transformation in the personality, worldview, and moral, ritual, and social behavior and gives rise to a life devoid of this-worldly concerns and filled with joy, faith, commitment to a new community, and new spiritual matters" (Bøgh, 2015, p. 268).

Some theorists use individual characteristics as a criterion in the conversion of individuals, and others have made a general division of the nature of conversion without regard to the individual. These differences of opinion in the definition of conversion over time have created a division. Classifying modern and classical views helps to understand the differences between theorists more deeply. However, Kilbourne and Richardson first considered some backgrounds to this dual classification. By their initial division of the religious conversion and the role of seekers, the views of old and new theorists can be placed in their two proposed groups, which will be explained in detail below.

3.2. Classical and Modern Paradigms of Religious Conversion

Kilbourne and Richardson provide a detailed comparison of classical and modern paradigms. They explain this division: "In the old paradigm, conversion is generally viewed in passivism and deterministic terms, whereas in the new paradigm, conversion is generally explained from the standpoint of active agency (i.e., self-directed behavior), personal choice, meaning, and negotiation. The "old" and "new" paradigms provide opposed ways of conceptualizing the same phenomena" (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1989, p. 1).

The study of religious conversion began in theology, focusing on examples of the transformation of biblical figures or the lives of critical religious figures such as St. Paul or St. Augustine. The social sciences have also studied religious behaviors since the earliest stages.

Religious conversion was initially a definite chapter in psychology and psychiatry's theoretical and experimental studies. The first views, strongly influenced by theological explanations, saw conversion as more of an individual than a social phenomenon and studied the effect of conversion on personality changes.

According to Richardson, the old paradigm does not entirely disappear or will disappear shortly; on the contrary, classic and modern paradigms compete against each

other in the same scientific field. The passive paradigm is based on the traditional Christian model conversion model, with St. Paul's conversion road to Damascus (as recounted in the Bible in Acts 9) as the prototype. As a result, it is also called the "Pauline Paradigm." The "activist" paradigm emerged in the 1960s in studying new religious movements, describing converts as active seekers of meaning.

According to Hetty Zock, there is also a third paradigm, the biographical-narrative paradigm. His theory differs from the paradigms proposed by Richardson. Zock describes his paradigm in detail below:

> "The biographical-narrative paradigm is an elaboration of the active interindividual paradigm. The convert is seen as a dynamic individual seeking transformation of life and self through religious-cultural models presented in conversion stories. The focus of attention shifts from psychic and social problems as determining factors in conversion to individuals actively dealing with these problems in identity construction, using the conversion model of a religious group as an integrating element. Conversion thus becomes less age-specific, linked to a person's whole life history. The transformation may have both emotional and rational aspects. In principle, it encompasses all human functions. Rather than a behavior/belief sequence, the interaction between beliefs and behavior is emphasized. The new paradigm must be characterized as socio-cultural rather than as interindividual. It is not only the individual's relationships and networks that have to be examined, but the broader socio-cultural context as well, including the specific religious tradition of the individual (to discern conversion models, the meaning of beliefs, and rituals) and his or her socio-political and cultural development" (Zock, 2006, p. 55).

This typology permits the systematic classification of different types of conversion and conversion theories and facilitates the understanding of the conceptual priorities of contemporary researchers.

In a classification based on the emergence of theories of conversion, they can be included under both classical and modern paradigms (Granqvist, 2003). Combining this classification with the American sociologist of religion James Richardson on the active or passive role of converts gives a more accurate picture of the dynamics of this field. Richardson sees the old paradigm with the assumptions of deprivation and pressure on human passivity and the new paradigm with an overemphasis on individuality as another way to view conversion. This new view emphasizes human beings as willful beings who give meaning to their actions and those of others in the social context. An example of the old passive paradigm of religious change is the sudden and dramatic change of St. Paul that occurs by a powerful external agent. The modern example of the passive paradigm includes brainwashing or mind control models for which no empirical evidence exists.

Although, as shown in Table 13, scholars of religious conversion are divided into active and passive groups, the truth is that individuals are neither fully functional nor entirely influenced by circumstances. According to James, there are traces of surrender even in the most conscious forms of change. In addition, a person may be wholly active or passive at certain life stages. Hence, active and passive paradigmatic divisions are only for clarification and explanation and do not necessarily correspond exactly to reality.

Table 13: Classification of Theories of Conversion			
	Passive Terms	**Active Terms**	
Old (classic) paradigms	Saint Paul the *mystical conversion*	James	
		Freudians (Students and followers of Freud's thinking)	
New (modern) paradigms	BrainWashing Edgar Schein	Psychological theories	Sociological Theories
		Attachment Theory L. A. Kirkpatrick P. Granqvist	Social Networks Lofland and Stark
			Conversion Motifs Lofland and Skonovd
			Collective Accomplishment Roger A. Straus
			Spoiled Identity A. L. Greil
			Religious Seekerships Max Heirich
			Religious Markets and Rational Choice Gartrell and Shannon, Stark and Finke
			The Convert Role Snow and Machalek
			Cultural Factors in Conversion Rambo
Retrieved from (Gooren, 2007)			

In classical and new paradigms, the active and passive division Kilbourne and Richardson first referred to is considered. In the classical and passive paradigm, a general definition of theories related to the sudden and magical conversion of St. Paul will be examined. İn the classical and active paradigm, the theories presented by William James and the proponents of Freud's ideas will be explained.

A typical example of the classic approach emphasizing passive terms is the experience of St. Paul, whose sudden conversion experience is extended to all conversions in Christian and other religious traditions. In this approach, change results from an emotional-cognitive gap resulting from an incident, resulting in the change occurring without any control from the individual, and is therefore called a passive

approach. This is an example of knowledge, psychological and deterministic, and considers the subject passive.

Against the view of the classics, who see the conversion process as passive, modern thinkers who follow the brainwashing theory also focus on the passive approach. This view has attracted much attention since 1980 and focuses on persuasive techniques of forcing people to accept previously rejected beliefs and behaviors (Hood, Hill, and Spilka, 2003, p. 270).

Edgar Schein and David G. Bromley did many studies in this field, and of course, Kilbourne and Richardson have made some divisions. Still, the theory's notable points are the lack of free will or "Systematic Manipulation of Social Influence" (SMSI).

The viewpoints on passivity in religious conversion are currently limited to these two. Still, the range of thinkers who base their theories on active terms is more significant in classical and modern viewpoints. In the classic view of James and the followers of Freud and contemporary thought, a large group of psychologists and sociologists have studied conversion based on active terms.

The earliest "academic" theories of conversion were from scholars who developed their methods under the influence of the "psychology of religion" school, originating with William James' groundbreaking study *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. The Gifford Lectures Institute explains a summary of James's lectures from 1900 to 1902 at the University of Edinburgh:

> "Some conversions can change a person's character or habits. This can occur through personal will and commitment to change. Other transformations are much more profound and alter the individual's core being. James deduces that such a significant change in a person might imply an external impetus of change and is often accompanied by a sense of the other and the revelation of new truths. However, not all conversions can be attributed to the intervention of an external other" (The Gifford Lectures).

James deals with two forms of mental events that lead to differences in the process of conversion:

• Conscious and voluntary mental occurrence, this change is usually gradual and is made in detail from a new set of moral and spiritual habits.

• Unconscious and involuntary mental events based on self-surrender. Of course, he does not consider the difference between the two very deep and believes that even in the most conscious forms of conversion, there are traces of surrender (James, 1917, p. 206).

According to him, there are two things in the minds of volunteers:

• The existence of a defect, mistake, or sin that a person is eager to escape.

- The existence of a positive ideal that one wants to achieve.

James tries to show the effects of change by distinguishing between two types of religious experience, sick souls and healthy minds[11].

At the same time, Freud saw God as a kind and protective father and angry and punishing. Therefore, such a god could easily control instinctive desires by mastering the superego. If, according to Freud's belief, behaviors are based on unconscious motivation, changing religion is also a type of unconscious motivational behavior originating from the Oedipus complex.

> "Freud himself saw conversion as related to the Oedipus complex. It is a matter of surrendering to the father's, or father's will. The period of doubt that often precedes conversion Freud saw as an expression of the subconscious wish to do away with the father. As the boy acknowledges the superior power of his father and puts to rest the Oedipus complex, the convert accepts the omnipotence of God. It resolves this Oedipal situation which has been displaced into the sphere of religion" (Scroggs & Douglas, 1967, p. 211).

Salzman and Jung changed their theories based on Freud's argument and showed that powerful and internal psychological forces could lead a person to a new faith.

From the perspective of an active religious conversion, and many theorists from psychologists to sociologists focus on it, religious conversion is considered unique.

> "The conversion process varies widely based on personal qualities, family environment, social, societal, religious, cultural, and historical contexts, and the interactions among these factors" (Snook, Williams, and Horgan, 2019, pp. 237-238).

Although psychologists first started the religious study conversion, since 1960, sociologists have studied this more vigorously.

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[11] Healthy minds naturally have a positive outlook on life. They feel good about life despite their difficult circumstances and the evil theology they were born with. Their childlike nature makes religion very pleasant to them. They know little about human sins in themselves and the world and are melted in love. Hence, they have no inner turmoil or resentment when they approach God. Satisfaction, romantic and emotional feelings in their simple worship. They have no element of crisis or torment of a sick conscience. They consider nature very beautiful and enjoy seeing it very much. From the beginning, their religion is an alliance with God. Those who have sick souls are depressed and consider the presence of the devil in the world as eternal and inherent evil as a part of the existence of the world. Those who cannot quickly get rid of the pressure of awareness of the devil are inherently doomed to suffer from its presence. These people have questions about the purpose of life and try to answer them, unlike the first group, who intend to deny it by expressing fear and sorrow to the world. James believes that instead of living in the light, these people are looking around in the holes of mice. He sees the owners of these torn souls as candidates for religious change. He believes the only way to cure sick souls is to experience A strong mystical experience or conversion. He argues that these so-called sick souls are reborn into healthy minds, and they can see life from other angles (James, 1917).

"The papers and discussions from a symposium on unbelief held in Rome in March 1969 were published in The Culture of Unbelief (1971). Peter L. Berger called the seminar "a historic occasion" and a "pioneering venture" and emphasized that the sociology of religion can no longer study theology exclusively but also needs to "broaden its scope to deal with the social dynamics of contemporary nonreligious culture." This symposium was attended by Talcott Parsons, Robert Bellah, Thomas Luckmann, Charles Glock, Harvey Cox, Bryan Wilson, and others who have since influenced the sociological study of religion" (Enstedt, 2020, p. 308).

In *Becoming a World-Saver* (1965), Lofland and Stark introduced an approach to conversion that emphasizes this process's complexity and far-reaching consequences. These two sociologists agree that religious change occurs over time and involves various dynamic elements. They develop a motivational model based on sequences of events that lead to religious conversion.

Lofland presents another theory with Skonovd called conversion motifs, in which Types of religious conversion are divided into six groups: Intellectual, Mystical, Experimental, Affectional, Revivalist, and Coercive.

In the intellectual change of religion, one seeks knowledge about spiritual or religious issues through books, articles, lectures, television, or other media with little social conflict. One actively searches and discovers alternatives. Belief is usually formed before active participation in religious rites and organizations.

The mysterious change that some have called the first example of religious difference, which in the case of St. Paul was known, this change is usually accompanied by a sudden eruption of insights evoked by dreams, whispers, and other unusual experiences.

The third motif, experimental religious change, is the primary way of change in the twentieth century, which has become popular due to more religious freedoms and the multiplicity and diversity of possible spiritual experiences. This change involves actively seeking religious options. The potential cluster has a searching mindset that is inherently interpreted as: "I seek this opportunity to see what spiritual consequences it may have for me." Many groups follow this method to see what spiritual consequences the new possibility will bring them. They do not ask potential believers to believe but to test the organization's teachings and practices and see if the existing system benefits and supports them.

The fourth motif is the affectional motif, first recognized in *Becoming a World-Saver* by Lofland and Stark's research. Lofland and Skonovd also recognized this type of conversion. This theme emphasizes interpersonal bonds as an essential factor in the conversion process.

Although the revivalist motif is less critical in the 20th century than in the 19th century, this form of change uses the masses to follow behavior. People are emotionally aroused, and the pressures encourage new behaviors and beliefs. For example, they use emotionally revitalizing music and powerful sermons. In addition to the group experiences of individuals, sometimes family members and friends who can directly impact potential clients try to attract and influence them.

Lofland and Skonovd believe this conversion motif only occurs in scarce and exceptional circumstances. "Brainwashing," "programming," "mind control," "coercive persuasion," "thought reform," and "menticide" are other terms for this process.

For Lofland and Skonovd, there is a range of types of conversion. Remember that they highlight many conversion paths; the process is multi-layered and complex.

Roger Strauss is a theorist of collective accomplishment theory who has studied religious conversion among college students and is highly critical of passive approaches and brainwashing ideas. He focuses on both individual action and individual seeking.

> "My current interest has been to develop a firm understanding of the most intriguing aspect of the conversion phenomenon -how the material is communicated to the seeker as concepts come to be experienced as actuality. This seems the same problem as expressed in the following question: How do the grounds of meaning and collective reality of a social world that the person initially accepts become a belief for which the person may willingly suffer and die a martyr?" (Straus, 1979, p.164).

In his model, he systematically draws the patterns of a kind of religious seeker. Strauss first seeks clues through social media and mass media. Gradually the nature of the search is refined, and the individual experiences certain religious denominations. Religious change occurs by learning the correct language, setting and interpreting programs, and following institutionalized practices. "There is no attention paid to the life-cycle stages of the seeking individual" (Gooren, 2007, p. 339).

> "The individual is conceptualized as a free, active seeker, instrumentally combing through social networks, chance encounters, and mass media … looking for leads to prospective means of help" (Straus, 1979, p.162).

In his study of how people change themselves, he argues that a person changes because he becomes an active actor and has a free choice. This process involves seeking, creative transformation or transfer, and creative exploitation.

Greil is a researcher who presents his theory (Spoiled Identity) from the perspective of identity. He believes that when a person's identity is spoiled, she/he becomes a seeker and seeks to find or restore meaning. In this view, factors such as social networks are second in importance.

Even he went further in his 1984 article with Rudy and concluded that there is no such thing as a conversion process. Still, there are as many conversion processes as organizational contexts in which conversion occurs. Therefore, future researchers should focus on the dynamics of social interaction between potential individuals, members, and group structures. The fact that there is a difference between the findings of various research on religious conversion is also the result of the different organizational contexts in which the research was conducted.

Heirich was the first researcher who used the control group in his study called "Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories about Religious Conversion" to measure that if the factors affecting the conversion of the data and those who did not convert were common, then Why do some change their religion and some do not?

He concludes that "immediate personal influences are more influential than the individual's previous psychological or socialization" and that "social networks influence those who have already decided to convert" (Heirich, 1977, p. 673).

After the 1960s, many thinkers in sociology studied religious conversion from different angles. The theories of some of them were briefly explained. Some of them, like Snow and Machaleks (1983) in the article "The Convert as a Social Type," Gartrell and Shannon (1985), and Stark and Finke (2000) with their theories of Religious Markets and Rational Choice have published their viewpoints in their articles or books that are accessible. Still, one of the most well-known theories accepted in recent years is the theory of Louis Rambo.

Rambo's approach to conversion covers the full spectrum of religious activity and offers a beneficial synthesis of many previous models. Rambo's follow-up mentions 15 theoretical options for conversion, including globalization and feminist theory, narrative and identity theory, and even psychoanalytic theory. Rambo suggests to academics studying the issue of conversion:

> "[Religion] should be seen as a variable phenomenon that depends on potential clients' and converts' structural, scholastic, theological, and individual needs. The transformation process involves the transformer's wishes, conditions, and orientations. It results from the nature of the group into which one becomes and the particular social context in which it is located" (Rambo, 1999, pp. 21-22).

As the author of the book "Understanding Religious Conversion," Rimbaud, like some theorists before him, distinguished religious conversion into five groups: Tradition transition, Institutional transition, Affiliation, Intensification, Apostasy, or defection (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Rambo's Model of Conversion
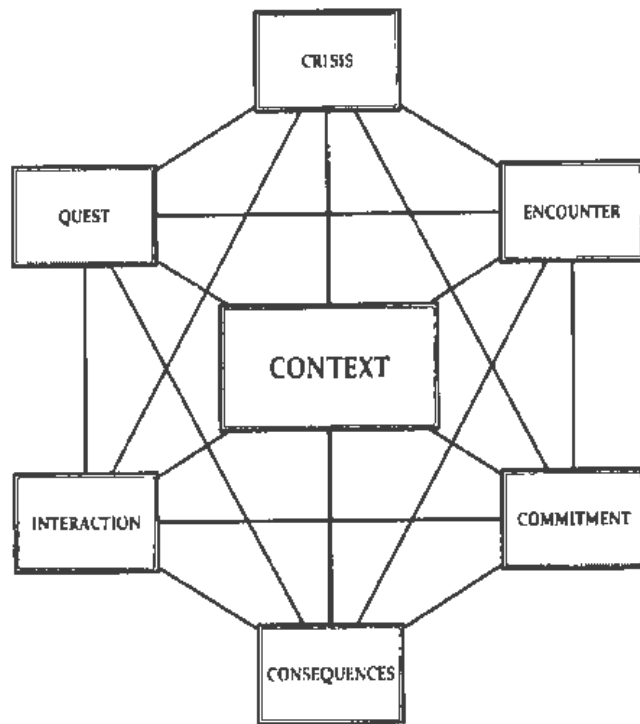
On top of all this, no model can show the whole reality of Rambo, but it must have at least these four components of cultural, social, individual, and religious systems. Based on the above, Rambo suggests a process-oriented, seven-stage model of conversion:

> "Context is the dynamic force field in which conversion takes place. We must remember that people shape the political, religious, economic, social, and cultural worlds. Conversely, people are shaped by the socialization processes of the wider world. Rambo distinguishes the macro-context of political and ecological systems from the micro-context of family, friends, and religious or ethnic communities. Crisis forces individuals and groups to confront their limitations and can stimulate a quest to resolve conflict, fill a void, adjust to new circumstances, or find avenues of transformation. Search is somewhat influenced by a person's emotional, intellectual, or religious availability. Most converts are actively engaged in seeking fulfillment. Encounter brings people in crisis and searching for new options together with those seeking to provide the questors with a new orientation. Potential converts, as active agents, are skillful in seeking out what they want and rejecting what they do not desire. Interaction: Relationships are often the most potent avenues of connection to the new option. Important here are rituals, rhetoric, and role-learning and -playing. Commitment is the consummation of the conversion process. Central to the converting process is the convert's reconstruction of his or her biographical memory and

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deployment of a new attribution system in various spheres of life—consequences: A radically transformed life, a sense of mission and purpose, security, and peace. However, one may find that the new orientation is not what one expected" (Rambo, 1993, pp. 16–18, 165–70).

Gooren (2012) presents a concept of the conversion career based on the theories of Rambo and Richardson. He identified five main factors affecting conversion at the individual level to religious activity: social aspects, institutional factors, cultural and political factors, personal factors, and contingency factors.

"The conversion careers approach only attempts to locate the basis of conversion at the level of the individual, (religious) organization, or society. As so many systems, for example, in sociology, have done in the past. Instead, it identifies the many factors operating at these three meta-levels and pays special attention to their interconnections" (Gooren, 2010, p. 52).

Gooren decided on five levels of individual religious involvement.

"Pre-affiliation describes potential religious group members' worldview and social context in their first contacts to assess whether they would like to affiliate themselves formally. (Some Christian churches use terms like "visitor" or "investigator" instead; scholars of religion often use the term seeker.) Affiliation refers to being a formal member of a religious group. However, group membership is not central to one's life or identity. Conversion refers to a complete personality change of worldview and identity. It is based on self-report and attribution by others—people from the same religious group and outsiders. Confession is a term from theology for a core member identity involving a high level of participation in the new religious group and a strong "missionary attitude" toward nonmembers outside the group. Disaffiliation refers to a lack of involvement in an organized religious group. This category may include various types. It can refer to an idiosyncratic personal religiosity, for example, New Age. However, it can also stand for an unchurched religious identity: either an apostate rejecting a former membership or an inactive member who still self-identifies as a believer. In the last case, affiliation and disaffiliation differences can be minor" (Gooren, 2007, p. 350).

Figure 7: The Levels of Individual Religious Activity in the Conversion Career Approach
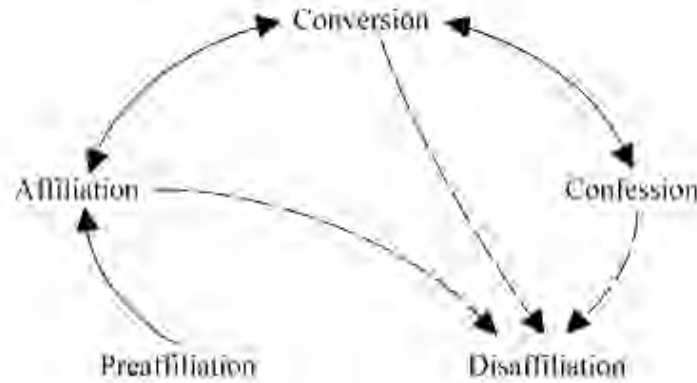
Source: Gooren, 2007, p. 350

Concluding his book, Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation, Gooren believes that most people adhere to their parent's religion. These people neither (re) affiliate nor (re) convert. Given the Figure 7 Gooren presents in his article, he notes that:

> "Affiliation, conversion, confession, and disaffiliation are the dynamic levels of individual religious activity, but they do not necessarily follow any chronological order during a person's conversion career. A person may go from affiliation to conversion, which is how many church leaders like to see it, or vice versa. Similarly, people may go from conversion to confession and vice versa. From the literature, it is clear that many go from affiliation, conversion, or even confession to disaffiliation. The many terms available for this—apostasy, backsliding, dropping out, and church desertion—already attest to its frequency" (Gooren, 2007, p. 350).

No theory has been able to cover all aspects of religious conversion fully. However, Rambo has provided the complete approach. Although he also has a general view and does not pay attention to dimensions such as gender and migration, he can be considered the best option to measure conversion (Rambo theory will be described in detail in later chapters.). Rambo and some other theorists suggest that future researchers address the issue of women's religious conversion separately and examine their motivation, circumstances, and purpose.

> "Other issues must be addressed to complete our vision of a multidisciplinary approach to conversion. Among these issues are gender, religious ideology, politics, and how conversion is not merely a passive or compliant survival strategy but a creative form of resistance and subversion. This collection of anthropological essays constitutes an excellent beginning" (Rambo, 2003, p. 220).

What can be concluded from the set of efforts of thinkers is to achieve the evolution that has emerged in defining religious conversion and creating various theories; At the same time, there is still a need for more research. For example, there is not enough

information yet on women and conversion, and theorists encourage researchers to study this field because most theories are general and devoid of gender differences. Therefore, the need to study converted women is one of the necessities in research. Due to the connection between the title of the dissertation and the subject of women and conversion, the topic of conversion and gender will be discussed in later chapters.

3.3. Data-Driven Studies

The forced relocation of millions worldwide requires a better understanding of the cultural compatibility of immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. Religious conversion in the context of the world's border impasse is sometimes seen as a strategy. In the context of an internal crisis, sometimes as the reason for being expelled from one's homeland. The exact number of converts living in Europe is unknown. A study by Kéri (2017) states: "At Trinity church in Berlin (Steglitz), the size of the congregation has increased from 150 to almost 700 individuals during the past two years" (Kéri, 2017, p. 284). The Austrian Catholic church registered more than 400 Muslim refugees for baptism in the first three months of 2016 (Ibid). The Eventually Evangelical Church of Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, (EKD)) was forced to publish a handbook on baptizing asylum seekers (Ibid)[12].

Relocation can sometimes be reversed; instead of pushing asylum seekers and refugees to religious conversion, scatter missionaries worldwide. While attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I learned that most church members and its principal pastor are from South Korea. It was surprising why this long journey and cultural difference should have brought them to Turkey. They sit and stand with other Christians from other countries. Everyone prays in their language, even though they may not understand it. The Koreans manage the prayer sessions alongside the Iranians and Turks. A new pastor was added to the congregation at one of these meetings. He was an elderly Korean man who described his 18-year service in China. In China, he taught Christian lessons to refugees who had fled North Korea and encouraged them to believe in Christ. He stated that some of his students had returned to North Korea to continue preaching Christianity there. He now travels worldwide as an experienced pastor to preach the Christian faith. Seeing him was an exciting experience because I had already read the following article, and the impact of Koreans in the newly Christianized communities became more understandable. On the other hand, in my interview with the wife of one of the Iranian pastors, she mentioned that she had sent her son to a Christian missionary training school in Istanbul, which the South Koreans run.

South Korean immigrants are trying to get their message through Christ and achieve their goal of reviving Christian spirituality. During my research, I came across a study

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[12]The introduction of the handbook of the Evangelical Church of Germany *(Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, EKD)* describes the situation as follows: "Asylum seekers—either alone or as a family—have increasingly turned to the Christian faith and asked church communities whether they could be baptized. This is a special challenge for asylum seekers and parish priests, parishioners, and parishes, who guide those baptized for many hours, sensitively and responsibly" (Kéri, 2017, p. 284).

by Heon Jung (2020) entitled "Crossing and Conversion among North Korean Refugee Migrants." The researcher was able to talk to fugitives from North Korea who had become Christians on the way or after being asylum. Findings showed that the change of religion of immigrants during their dangerous journey has been beneficial for them to be able to travel along the way and prepare for the new order in the destination countries. The researcher's empirical data show that mainly missionaries and evangelical churches provide secret shelters for refugees in the China-North Korea border region and help them escape from China to South Korea. The researcher deeply observed the life of two North Korean ex-residents who had taken refuge in Britain and Germany and found that religious conversion could make the destination countries more tolerable for refugees and asylum seekers and reconcile North Korean asylum seekers with residents of South Korea and even other countries. However, this research taught me that religion could facilitate migration and be an incentive to endure brutal conditions - which I will address in the rest of my research findings- but for me, the priority was to find common ground or differences in the field of conversion, especially in Iran and the Iranian community. Therefore, several advanced studies have been considered on religious conversion among Iranians.

Considering the integration of the two issues of women and religious conversion, the review section of previous studies in this research has been compiled from two aspects. The first part of the study has focused on religious conversion issues apart from the gender issue, and the second part has focused on (converted) women.

3.3.1 Religious Conversion Studies

Iranian society's structure is religious and based on the Shiite Islamic religion. Conversion to Islam is so encouraged that the national media interview people who have converted. The adherence to Islam is so important that the condition for registering marriages of Muslim women with non-Muslim men is still based on the conversion of men to Islam[13]. Leaving Islam is considered apostasy, and its punishment is executed according to the order of the Qur'an and the consensus of the religious experts. The Islamic Penal Code of Iran does not mention a single article on apostasy and punishment for conversion. Still, concerning Article 167 of the Constitution[14], based on the fatwas of the jurists, the death sentence is issued for those who leave. Also, insulting any of the elders of this religion is as punishable as leaving the faith[15]. A study by Karamipoor (2012) entitled *Sociological Analysis of Conversion from Christianity to Islam* on people who have converted from Christianity to Islam (16 men and 14 women

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[13]Article 1059 of the Civil Code of Iran: It is not permissible to marry a Muslim to a non-Muslim.

[14]Article 167 [Rule of Law for Judiciary]

The judge is bound to endeavor to judge each case based on the codified law. In case of the absence of any such law, he has to deliver his judgment based on authoritative Islamic sources and authentic fatawa. He, on the pretext of the silence of or deficiency of law in the matter, or its brevity or contradictory nature, cannot refrain from admitting and examining cases and delivering his judgment.

[15]Chapter 5 of the Islamic Penal Code adopted in 2012:

Article 262 of Blasphemy- Whoever insults or blasphemes the Prophet or any of the great prophets of God will be sentenced to death.

active in seminary schools) sheds light on the prevailing atmosphere in Iran regarding the conversion to Islam. After referring to the research that has dealt with the issues of leaving the religion of Islam, it is possible to compare the kind of view of the government on religious conversion.

Although the above research introduces in detail several psychological theories about conversion, and for sociological aspects refer to more classical and general approaches such as Merton's social status, Giddens' agency and structure, Bourdieu's habit but finally, for the conceptual framework of the research, Rambo's seven-step theory is considered. Social factors and contexts of attraction to Islam from other religions, symbols, slogans, inspirations, and the impact of the Islamic Revolution on the tendency to Islam have been the main questions raised in this study. The narration of the life of becoming Muslim shows that the existence of sparks and personal inspirations and contradictions and epistemological and cognitive inconsistencies have been the underlying factors of religious change. The new believers had stated that they had suffered from a rational inconsistency due to a lack of proper understanding of the text of the Christian (Holy) book, and they went to a pervasive logical system so that they could understand it in the Qur'anic verses and the Muslim life. Individual restrictions, social injustice, and discrimination are some of the things that have just made new Muslims eager for a new religion. Although they may have experienced rejection, violence, and deprivation, they have preferred pleasure and peace after conversion.

This study describes the crisis stage in the lack of an appropriate response from the previous religion. They had doubts because in the last faith, they could not find the exact answer to the questions. Asked about concepts such as monotheism and the hereafter, respondents cited the incompatibility of the ideas of Christianity with each other as the reason for the search. Also, they acknowledged that they did not have free access to other religions[16]. During the encounter, the believers became acquainted with significant others, and religious-cultural teachings and rituals, signs and symbols, new converts, and Qur'anic verses invited them to the new religion. In the interaction phase, new Muslims pondered the architecture, cities, and customs of the Iranian people and continued asking questions and finding the answers. Attendance at rituals, acceptance, motivational correction, and satisfaction indicate their peace of mind in choosing a new religion. In the consequence phase, the converts looked at their situation from different dimensions, including the role of individual orientation in evaluation, in-depth social, cultural, and historical studies, and psychological and theological results. In this study,

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[16]If the author had referred to the original nationality of the participants, it might have been easier to judge the phrase. However, as Ansari (2016) pointed to a similar finding in the case of new Christians living in Iran, strict internal conditions show a different aspect:
"In examples of post-conflict crises, exoticism or the attractiveness of being different (Christians) is the most important reason for people to change. Exoticism in converts can be seen as a reaction to society's desire for harmony or hegemonized. A society that tries to eliminate the distinctions of individuals and to make a minority hegemonic. Others have been excluded from social support outside this form" (Ansari, 2016, p. 182).

the findings show that following the consequences, the categories of compatibility, liberation, peace, and hereafter are the propositions mentioned by the participants.

This study's separate chapter is dedicated to converting Christian women to Islam. The participating women indicated they had gained a new understanding of identity, felt relaxed, made free choices, and reflected part of this distinction and identity in their hijab. They accept all the problems that may arise in the face of conversion, and they have turned to this selection by comparing the principles and teachings of the Bible and the Qur'an. However, the researcher has not been able to analyze the seven stages of Rambo's theory for women. In addition, it has approached cases that work in critical religious centers in Iran. Hence, the limitation of this research is the possibility of veiling and self-censorship during the study and demanding access to the participants.

Although there is no accurate information and statistics on the number of people who left Islam and new converts to this religion in Iran, the author suggests that a scientific association be established for them despite the knowledge of Iran's religious and political atmosphere. On the contrary, such a demand seems impossible for those who have left Islam in Iran. Ansari (2010), in contrast to Karampoor's research, has looked at the conversion of Muslims living in Iran to Christianity. Lack of theoretical sources in Iran, whether Persian or English, lack of research background on change in Iran, qualitative and quantitative, and finally, the uniqueness of this field in Iran are among the limitations of this study. In this qualitative study, in-depth semi-structured interviews and observations were the research techniques.

The main question of this research is why the conversion from Islam to Christianity occurs and how the conversion process occurs. Several sub-questions question the social context of the converts and their role in changing religion. Other questions in this study evaluated converts from the previous and new beliefs and, finally, the consequences of religious conversion. In this study, 17 Iranian residents were interviewed (7 were women, and the rest were men). Although the difficulty of accessing the samples due to the lack of social capital in the church space was one of the obstacles to this research, choosing the wrong time to conduct the study coincided with the security atmosphere before the tenth presidential election and increased their distrust.

The author of the thesis *Religious Conversion from Islam to Christianity*, in addition to presenting numerous theories from different theorists of religious conversion, has chosen Rambo's theory as a theory influencing the research process. Still, only four of the seven proposed stages have been considered. The researcher has tried to add new definitions and divisions to Rambo's theory. The first step of this theory is to examine the background of the converts' life (context). As a result, to find the micro-level that affected the participants' life, such as the individual's class affiliations, the type and degree of religiosity of the individual's family, and the extent of the individual's study, have been selected. At the macro level, the country's socio-political situation has been mentioned as a common background among most new Christianized Iranians.

According to the participants, most did not study or search for the religion of origin (Islam).

Examination of the crisis, quest, and encounter cases shows that a few had a semantic concern before meeting another Christian and sought to choose a new religion. Therefore, their conversion to the new faith slowly and gradually occurred. However, in the remaining cases, the examples have dealt with non-semantic crises (such as economic issues, emotional failure, etc.), which have put them in a position of acceptance and passivity of the new religion.

This research considers the crisis in two semantic or non-semantic forms, the distance between the current situation and the desired conditions. The semantic problem refers to the question of the existence of God and the relationship between the individual and God; on the other hand, the primary and central question of non-semantic crisis is not about meaning and faith (economics and pathology as the most common crises). This study showed that people change their religion because they suffer from non-semantic concerns and look for an answer to their problematic situation. When encountering a new religion that promises salvation, they choose a semantic solution to their non-semantic crises. Another question this research raises is why a semantic answer is found in another religion, such as Christianity, and not in the previous religion (Islam). Faith versus Shari'a is one of the first differences and the reason for this study's preference for Christianity over Islam. The emphasis on Shari'a versus religion is significant because it clearly shows the need for support and direct emotional connection. Islamic law somehow provides and conditions a relationship with God through deeds, while the Christian faith requires nothing more than a heart relationship and trust in God. The specific content of Christian literature means the great emphasis on God's love for man has become receptive, especially in a non-semantic crisis.

A person's first relationship with the church is formed by attending introductory courses in Christian theology and performing rituals such as days of prayer and worship. Through the introductory course in theology, one achieves the initial identity or first identification by the new congregation. By attending introductory training sessions, one becomes acquainted with the Bible, the Christian semantic system, language, and vocabulary. Relationships with the group cause a sense of belonging, and the person feels accepted. In most of the cases Ansari studies, Christianity is not a soothing but a therapeutic aspect. When the Christian faith changes a person's view of the world and prepares him or her to endure more suffering and problems, temporary relief becomes a long-term response or cure. Treatment means changing one's view of the critical situation. However, relief is the initial and necessary step so that the person in the shelter can think of a solution and take action for his problem. The results show that converts often turn to religion with a critical context and non-semantic questions, contrary to Rambo and other theorists of the modern approach, who consider converts to be an active factor in the conversion process.

The lack of a religious market in Iran and its low religious diversity has been mentioned as research limitations. Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism are recognized minorities in the Iranian constitution who have no legal or recognized activity in the monopoly market of Islam and the political logic of forbidding conversion except to giving and not receiving members. Ansari's research could only examine a few factors related to religious diversity or cultural relations. At the same time, studies such as Kok (2016) show differences in a multicultural society. In his research, Kok considered the existence of cultural diversity in a family as a tendency for people to change their religion. At the same time, Ansari believes that despite the lack of freedom of action and a religious market, it takes place to experience and face new experiences in times of crisis. The main question is whether there is a difference between converting from Christianity to Islam and vice versa. In a country that has an apostate view of leaving Islam ...

In 2016, Kok wrote a dissertation entitled *Religious Conversion Compared*. This study tries to find the similarities and differences between religious conversions. Therefore, in this study, a comparison has been made between the conversion process of Christian and Muslim converts. He has also found similarities or differences in the conversion of men and women. The method of this research is comparative and qualitative. To analyze the narratives, semi-structured questions were used, which were asked via Skype or in person with the participants. Respondents were found through the researcher's network. The researcher has prepared a topic list based on Rambo's model.

The qualitative method is most focused on theorizing, and even qualitative researchers have warned against over-reliance on a theory that limits the ability to see findings (Collins, 2018). Therefore, although this research has introduced other approaches, in the end, the qualitative method has relied only on the selection of Rambo's view and the test of his system and has not presented a proposed theory. In the research process, the difficulty of finding research related to the conversion of Christianity in the West and the rareness of resources about transformation and gender are among the limitations. One of the most vital points of this research is the attempt to find differences or similarities between the conversion from Islam to Christianity and vice versa; The similarities and differences between these two types of religious conversion are included in the seven stages of Rambo theory to be analyzed in more detail. Among the new Muslims are two women and three men; among the new Christians are three women and two men, all of whom live in the Netherlands. This number of respondents does not seem enough to achieve differences and similarities, especially in gender. The researcher considers pluralism a possible underlying factor in changing religion but has not analyzed it specifically. This study concludes that the cultural background in the conversion process of newly converted Muslims forces them to seek answers to identity questions. However, among those who converted to Christianity, there was no search for a mixed cultural background (parents or other family members having different cultures and ethnicities). It may be possible in the

following study to address the issues of cultural knowledge and pluralism in the process of conversion. Finally, the researcher concludes that:

> "The main similarities and the most significant differences in the conversion processes were found in the stages of "crisis," "encounter," and most of all, the "quest" and "interaction" stages. Having a religious experience distinguished the converts to Christianity from the converts to Islam, and the role of the advocates in the conversion processes proved to be different for converts to Islam than for the converts to Christianity. However, where the two groups differed most, and the similarities within the groups were most visible was in the path they took in their quest for answers or fulfillment. The converts to Islam seemed to have more intellectual reasons for conversion than the converts to Christianity" (Kok, 2016, p. 52).

The researcher examines gender while comparing new converts to Islam and Christianity. This study relies on Rambo's theory to apply his advice on women's conversion. Some gender similarities can be seen in the crisis, encounter, and interaction stages. In the crisis phase, gender similarities are related to what the respondents sought at the beginning of the conversion. However, it is still impossible to have a correct gender division due to the small number of participants. In the encounter phase, newly converted individuals demonstrated gender-specific ways of interacting with supporters. First, these were the only Christian women who considered their supporters influential in their lives and the conversion process. Second, these newly converted women stated that they talked to supporters and that talking to people about religion was essential to their conversion process. However, men described arguing with a supporter as an essential of their conversion process. This study does not provide accurate findings on the differences or similarities between men and women in the conversion process, i.e., if this part of the study were removed, the results would not change much.

Although this study has achieved significant findings on the differences between conversion to Islam and Christianity, it must provide accurate results on the differences or similarities between men and women in the conversion process. The researcher needed help understanding the religious conversion between men and women. Therefore, it may be concluded that attention to gender issues related to conversion is one of the gaps in social sciences that should be addressed more.

If we move away from Iran a little, why do some who leave Islam leave Iran? What is the relationship between immigration and the conversion of Iranians? Ansari and Karampoor's research focused on converts inside Iran. Still, other researchers are interested in this subject but do not have access to Iranians living in Iran, so they have to study among Iranians residing outside. Miller (2012), in his first article entitled "Iranian Diaspora Christians in the American Midwest & Scotland: Historical Background, Present Realities, and Future Challenges," as an observer, observed the

behavior of Iranians and sought to understand some of the main issues and challenges of the Christian community of Iran in the coming years. This analytical paper's author believes there has been a long diaspora after the 1979 revolution. From the author's point of view, the increase in the number of Iranians converting to Christianity and the growing population of Iranians in the Diaspora are related to the deteriorating situation in Iran regarding political, religious, and economic challenges. This study focuses on the events after the 1979 revolution and believes that the ruling religious government's behavior raised doubts about Islam's religion among the people because Islam does not separate religion and politics and intends to keep everyone under the united banner of monotheism. The author also notes that with the expansion of mass communication spaces and Iranians' access to Persian-language satellites and channels, a new religious metanarrative of Christianity has been made available to Iranians at home and worldwide. In this regard, various effects of identity can be classified: 1. Persian culture and tradition have faded under the influence of Islam. 2. Missionaries who have invested in Iranian evangelism for decades. 3. Indigenous Christianity (major and unique factors for all Iranians distinguish one community from another, and Christianity is flexible and creative enough to influence each).

Because Miller had previously lived in Egypt, was fluent in Arabic, and could not travel to Iran, he focused his thesis on Christianized Arabs living in Egypt and Christianized Iranians residing in the United States and Britain. The main question of the researcher is how the theology-making process is done in these two societies; he has used the concepts of Indigenization and Contextualization. The study uses these two theoretical terms to answer whether Muslims who have become Christians are making a new theological system in their churches that differ from what the West promotes in its theological system. So, Miller focuses on topics related to culture, local conditions, local theology, and local churches to understand the dimensions of theology among ex-Muslims in his thesis entitled *Living among the Breakage: Contextual Theology-Making and Ex-Muslim Christians* (2014).

In addition to these two theoretical terms, the author also pays attention to the concept of power. Another researcher's question is how to create social and cultural structures by power. The power and control of the people, directly or indirectly, are significant for understanding apostasy and conversion because they may give rise to a new theology. Considering Lukes's three dimensions of power theory is helpful in two ways, one examines the use of power by rulers to prevent the spread of apostasy, and another is the foundation of life in Christianity along with making a theology[17].

Lukes describes three dimensions of power that can also be used to form new Christian communities in Islamic countries, and Miller has used them to find the answer to his research:

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[17]The researcher seeks to answer two other important questions to know how converts understand conversion and what they expect from conversion. So, in addition to the theories explained, Rambo's theory is also considered.

The first dimension is the ability of one agent to create another; for example, churches were usually reluctant to remove crosses from the exterior of their buildings under Islamic rule, but in some cases, they did;

The second dimension is repression and non-decision-making; For example, the issue of baptism is abandoned after being announced by the secret police, even if going to church has been continued;

The third dimension is deprivation of recognition of a benefit; A curious Iranian could attend a local Assyrian church because she/he did not understand what was being said (although attending church recently requires permission). Iranians do not have easy access to the Bible, but Assyrians are allowed to pray in their first language (parent language), which the general Iranian public does not understand. One of the government's efforts to ban the Bible in Persian and to close churches is that informal churches facilitate the reading of prayers and teachings in Persian. So, it is an acceptable assumption that Christianized churches spontaneously create different forms of theology in the face of the repressive forces of power.

Regarding his observations of Iranians who have converted, the researcher emphasizes that having a Persian identity over Islam-Arabic has been a priority for their converts. Perhaps one of the reasons for changing their religion is to react to the identity of ancient Iran. Christianized Iranians did not have a previous ecclesiastical culture or ethnicity to rely on it historically because their ancestors converted to Islam from Zoroastrianism. Hence, they had to invent new concepts. In his previous research, Miller (2012) points out that choosing an Arabic name is a matter of choice in Islam. It is obligatory to recite prayers and the Qur'an in Arabic; none of the Christianized people researchers spoke to did not give her/his child an Arabic name after converting. These conditions may not be acceptable to non-Arabs, especially Iranians. Iranians celebrate Nowruz to preserve their identity, and Christianized Iranians replace the Bible with the Qur'an on the traditional table. The researcher generalizes the concept of a new identity to all new converts and sees the primary purpose of theology, which was the first question of the research, in identification. However, we can go even further and pay attention to the deeper aspects of theology-making:

> "The nature of God's power and how we relate to it cannot be understood outside of an understanding and indeed an experience of God's love—a love that is centered and communicated primarily in the person of Jesus Christ, who, in his words and life demonstrates that sacrificial love is the ultimate form of divine power. As revealed in Christ, God communicates that sacrificial love is the supreme form of true and absolute power, demonstrated in acts of love, not coercion. This conviction appears as an axis after the theology-making rotates" (Miller, 2014, p. 254).

Malaysia and Turkey are good options for Iranians to both lives freely and gain new religious experiences. Several articles and a thesis from converted Iranians in Malaysia

and Turkey have been selected for review. One way to be close to the Immigrant Christian Iranians' experience is to study their life in transit countries.

Nuei's (2018) research entitled "Iranian Christian Converts in Malaysia" seeks to find the causes of conversion in this group. The researcher states that Islamic countries pay less attention to the issue of executions in apostasy. Still, due to rejection at the social and governmental levels, most people who change their religion tend to emigrate or are forced to hide their conversion for fear of legal, social, and political consequences. This study tries to answer questions such as how people who agree with the change of religion experience and justify it and whether a religious conversion is a religious or political phenomenon. Why do some Iranian Muslims living in Kuala Lumpur leave Islam? Which religious, social, and personal reasons encourage Iranian Muslims to convert to Christianity? The researcher has used qualitative and quantitative (mixed) methods to find the mentioned questions. In the qualitative approach, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 people, and the snowball method made the participants available. Quantitatively, however, 45 people answered the pre-prepared questionnaires. In this questionnaire, the questions were made according to the Likert scale, having the choices of "defiantly agreed," "agreed," "neutral," "disagreed," and "definitely disagreed." SPSS was used to analyze the acquired data. Inferential statistic tests such as regression, correlation, and variance analysis were used to analyze the data.

Although in the quantitative method, the theoretical support of the questions mentioned but significant findings are presented:

> "Converts among Iranian populations do not usually convert at higher ages. Most participants left their childhood faith before the age of 32, and most (26 participants) said they had converted to Christianity before reaching the ages of 21-26. Immensely few changed religions after getting 39. In most narratives, it appeared that they were satisfied with the living conditions in Malaysia; they could practice their religion freely and socialize and worship openly with other Christians. Research findings showed that social reasons and ethics in Iran as an Islamic country were more effective than political conditions. Those who converted clearly stated that in an Islamic society, everybody from the family members of a person to the whole community is opposed to religious conversion, and their own families rejected them" (Nuei, 2012, p. 179-180 & 197).

In the qualitative section, the researcher achieved the results of the conversions problems in Iran, the benefits and disadvantages of Malaysia for new Christian members, benefits and tendencies toward Christianity, and social-political and religious reasons. Family reasons, such as fear of rejection, and social causes, such as not having access to the church or performing the duties of the new religion, provided the grounds for the immigration of these respondents. Religious rule, lack of freedom, and denial of rights to women led to hatred of the Iranian government and, ultimately, the desire to

choose a new religion. However, in addition to all these conditions, the interest in the Christian lifestyle and the feeling of happiness and peace were among the benefits the respondents mentioned for joining Christianity. However, according to the research findings, some of these benefits and feelings can be considered under Christian propaganda and the efforts of missionaries. This study also evaluated the Islamic knowledge of the respondents. Respondents did not study Islam and Christianity, associated Islam with extremism, had rigorous (religious) parents, were skeptical about Islam and the Qur'an, and ultimately preferred to choose a new religion.

However, staying in transit countries until the final status of asylum seekers is only sometimes safe; most people who face problems inside Iran prefer to try the asylum option. The asylum route is a very tedious and erosive way. Asylum seekers do not have the right to work; they must pay for their insurance and sometimes need help finding a home. Koser Akcapar, a Turkish researcher who has closely observed the asylum conditions of Iranians and Afghans in Turkey, has written several articles on this subject. In 2006, her article "Conversion as a Migration Strategy in a Transit Country: Iranian Shiites Becoming Christians in Turkey" examined the issue of social networks among Iranian asylum seekers in Turkey with a qualitative approach. The researcher interviewed forty-three Iranian asylum seekers in different cities in Turkey. Data collection techniques included open-ended questions, group discussions with family and friends, and listening to life stories. The researcher's question is how Iranian asylum seekers use social and religious networks in Turkey to access the West as refugees. Several important points of this research are essential. First, it focuses on cultural and social issues such as conversion. It considers social capital and social network, so it pays special attention to the church as an influential institution in encouraging conversion. In this study, churches play an active role in helping asylum seekers and are considered part of the migrant network. As a result, during a long period of frustration, the new religious community leads to a strong bond of trust (even temporarily) among the few who face hostility and risk of being expelled by government officials, Turkish citizens, and other immigrants. As conversion continues through social media as well as churches and missionaries, the researcher notes that:

> "International migration research has emphasized the importance of social media but has focused mainly on countries of origin and destination. The role of immigrant networks and religious institutions in transit countries must be addressed. Fieldwork in Turkey, an important transit country for Iranian immigrants after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, shows that immigrant networks are essential in transit migration. The newly established social networks within religious institutions in Turkey serve as a critical source of information for Iranian asylum seekers" (Koser Akcapar, 2006, p. 836).

According to the researcher, the reason for people's inclination to Christianity can be explained by social change and identity crises. Although she does not talk about other

factors influencing the formation of social capital, staying and using social networks, she believes the function and responsibility of churches go beyond providing a place to live, food and medical care, finding temporary work, paying rent, and holding Sunday services. They also assist asylum seekers in the residency process. For people who experience more or less the same asylum in a transit country, newly created social networks bring them together under one roof. This group acts as a "home church" and transmits the faith to the newcomers in their language. The researcher has not mentioned the negative points governing the church system because, in all dimensions, the church does not have a positive, supportive role. In some cases, it can have a controlling and limiting role and even keep people in the social network system by force. For example, church officials cite a lack of regular activity as a reason for refusing to be baptized. On the other hand, as churches find supporters in different countries and expand financial, legal, and medical assistance, they become an inevitable and necessary element in the lives of immigrants. Based on fieldwork with newly converted Iranian Christians in Turkey, Koser Akcapar emphasizes that conversion is often done in parallel with immigration. This conversion is discussed as an immigration strategy in a transit country.

> "The findings of the fieldwork in Turkey among Iranian asylum seekers and refugees waiting for resettlement suggest that although social networks and collective representations inside households or between individuals (micro-level) and other structural reasons (macro-level) are essential to explain international migration, it is as significant to include the institution of religion as a meso level in social capital theory. Religion as an institution transcends the boundaries of nation-states and combines established religious communities in the core countries with newly converted migrants in the periphery" (Koser Akcapar, 2006, p. 846).

A few years later, the same researcher published another qualitative article on Afghan asylum seekers in India and Iranian asylum seekers in Turkey entitled "Religious conversions in forced migration: Comparative cases of Afghans in India and Iranians in Turkey" (Koser Akcapar, 2019). The researcher also raises several questions in this study, which have been considered for both his study groups. Is conversion a personal or rather a group experience in this case? What is the importance of social networks in transformation? How do social networks change after conversion? Why do they choose to convert to India, -a multicultural yet Hindu-majority country, and Turkey- a Muslim-majority country? What do people have to gain from change in their religion in a migration setting? Is this a "genuine" conversion and change of heart, or is it used as an onward migration strategy? Is it leading to a total rupture with one's past and culture? If not, how does it lend an opportunity to keep former traditions?

This article deals with contextual and institutional factors, including the main reasons for emigration, cultural and political alienation, the impasse in the global asylum system, and the need to find economic and social capital. Contextual and institutional

factors act as a catalyst for religious tendencies, especially in immigration. Contextual factors are the reasons that lead to displacement and alienation from the homeland. Unsuccessful asylum policies around the world to deal with long-standing refugee situations lead to the experience of asylum. Institutional agents are also known as active transnational evangelical networks, which replace hypothetical relatives with the ones.

All respondents cited the hostile political climate in Afghanistan and Iran as the main reason for their escape. One of the most important reasons for emigration in this comparative study was avoiding social constraints. They often expressed dissatisfaction with the socio-political environment of the country of origin. In other words, their migration results from losing hope for change in their homeland. Those who seek to change their religion also enter a phase in which they question Islam and cultural traditions. The reason for choosing India and Turkey was a combination of contextual and institutional factors. For Afghans, India is the only country to obtain a visa quickly. In addition, because India is a country with more resources in the region, it is a magnet for temporary immigrants, business people, and university students. Iranians mentioned that relatives living in the country, Iran's proximity to Turkey, and visa-free travel for up to three months as reasons for choosing Turkey.

Besides the contextual factors of religious conversion in immigration, it is also essential to understand the institutional dimensions. Institutional factors strongly impact access to resources, increased mobility, and opportunities to connect with new religious networks. The researcher considers a combination of factors, such as long waiting periods, asylum difficulties, financial problems, and limited opportunities available to them, to be interested in creating new social networks through conversion. Converts show their commitment to the new religion, usually through sharing personal testimonies and participating in rituals. Internalizing new patterns and behaviors will help some people change their old habits and pave the way for other family members to change their religion.

The researcher has had significant theoretical changes compared to the previous research. Although in the first study, she introduced religion as a tool for migration (Koser Akcapar, 2006, p. 819), in her new study, she encountered people who could convince her that their conversion was profound and genuine. Also, when she decided to compare Iranians and modern Afghans, he did not consider the time interval because the time interval can effectively change the shape of the contextual and institutional factors. At the end of the article, the researcher suggests that future research should be on asylum seekers who have passed through transit countries and settled in destination countries.

With the same point of view, Stene (2020) has conducted in-depth studies entitled "Leaving Islam for Christianity: Asylum Seeker Converts" on Iranian and Afghan asylums (seven men and four women) who were living in Norway. This research seems to be more of a description of the author's observations because the author does not insist on presenting complex theories, models, and conclusions. Although the issue of

asylum is mentioned in the title, the role of asylum in changing religion or vice versa has not been assessed. The researcher's findings show that, in the opinion of some refugees, changing religion does not have the same meaning as leaving the faith. Conversion may be part of an immigration strategy, as Koser Akcapar points out in his research. Immigrants are vulnerable and forming new social and religious networks that are becoming essential safety nets. Considering the church as a social network institution, Koser Akcapar included all similar cases in the subset of institutional factors. In the continuation of the research, Stene considers life before the change as a crisis and life after it as a solution. For some immigrants, integrating with local networks is very important. Some reinforce religious and ethnic identities, such as Christian-Iranian. Everyone needs to have a kinship relationship after the change, but for some, this relationship may be severed, which opens the way for new connections. On the other hand, the church faces a climate of distrust for various reasons. Thus, despite their suspicions, people have intimate relationships with each other, but there is also a lack of trust, which in turn leads to a lack of social capital. Ansari (2016), in her research, also explains this exclusion and rejection with the phrase "integration elimination." Elimination means they are not well supported by the community (origin) and are left out of the community's umbrella and considered "other." Integration also means that they are not labeled or recognized in society. The research of Kok, Nuei, and Miller also points to the lack of sufficient social capital in newly Christianized societies.

Stene's research had a new point that others had not mentioned: the simultaneous belief of some participants in Islam and Christianity. Some convert in the Middle East use terms such as "Muslim follower of Christ." Sometimes, asylum seekers pretend to be purely Christian for fear of rejection by the government. This is because their conversion is considered public and official, and the researcher concludes that:

> "This is connected to the fact that they want their religious change to be public and recognized by the authorities. As asylum seekers, they cannot use the sometimes fuzzy-boundary conversions of the Middle East. They must show a clear break if they are to be given asylum due to fear of religious persecution. This may explain their often-unambiguous presentation of a new religious identity" (Stene, 2020, p. 217).

The findings of this study showed different results in which respondents were less likely to emphasize apostasy. This study shows that leaving a religion does not mean denying it. The UNE has observed that conversions/baptisms usually occur during the appeal process after an initial asylum application has been rejected (UNE, 2016). Related to this, Concerning Iranians, Miller (2014) argues that leaving Islam may be a way of remaining "Persian" in the context of migration, as Islam is associated with the Arab world. Christianity is seen as a religion where "Persian-ness" is given ample room. Christianity is considered a religion in which "Persian speakers" are given enough space to worship in the same language, read the Bible, and participate in religious and ancient festivals in the same vocabulary.

3.3.2. Women's Religious Conversion Studies

Dorothy Smith believed that sociology had ignored women's experiences, and since most sociological research is mainly focused on men, their results cannot be generalized to women. She accuses sociology of gender prejudice and considers this a field's weakness regarding methodology (Smith, 1974). Abbott & Wallace also emphasize that sociology has closed its eyes to gender issues and has been caught in sexism at worst (Abbott & Wallace, 1995, p. 5). Therefore, ignoring women in the field of sociology is a multifaceted process that has a long history. On the one hand, women's research was outside the mainstream and was not the focus of everyday sociology. On the other hand, sociology mostly revolved around the opinions of men who had social analysis. After the tumultuous years of 1960 to 1990, the gender variable became more prominent, and the issues that seemed to be resolved before were again debated. While this question remains, whether there is a feminist methodology or not? Feminist research has unique characteristics. This means that feminist research about women, for women, should be done with women as much as possible (Devalut, 1990; Wise & Stanely, 1983-1993). With this brief explanation, a general understanding of the topic under discussion and the issue of women in previous studies can be more significant. After reviewing the studies related to the mentioned topic, some criticisms seem to be mentioned. When women's issues are neglected in macro studies, it will have more profound objections in micro studies, which will be addressed after reviewing several research.

The first research in this section of Krotofil (2021) is "Theorizing the Religious Habitus in the Context of Conversion to Islam among Polish Women of Catholic Background." I chose this article because it examines converting Polish women with a Catholic background to Islam. Data were obtained from observations of participants in weekend gatherings dedicated exclusively to women in the mosque. Researchers have conducted in-depth interviews with 29 Polish women who have converted to Islam. Bourdieu's theory has been used because of the author's primary focus on the concept of habitus, as it focuses on women's religious practices. In this study, researchers try to argue that Bourdieu's habitus can be adapted to reflection, individual agency, and conversion and conceptualize it as a set of relatively stable tendencies that transform. Based on Bourdieu's theories, the findings of this study have found that in changing religion, it is essential to establish a connection between old and new faiths through the translation of religious beliefs, practices, and institutions. The translation of thoughts is considered a reflection process of interpretation in search of correspondences or equations between the beliefs, practices, or institutions of the two religions. During translation, the selected elements of the respective religions are considered comparable, and similarities are identified. Researchers point out that in Poland, factors such as immigration, social mobility, and the rapid expansion of information flow through technology make it possible for women to confront Islam.

Analyzes show that the Catholic habitus remains pervasive in the conversion process and shapes their newfound interaction with the new religion. Women translate the system of Islamic practices and beliefs into a particular Catholic logic that is more

comprehensible. In the process, they identify some of the inherent power dynamics in the religious realm. As converts go on a journey of conversion, their spiritual habits change. New practices are learned, new embodied tendencies are formed, and some old patterns are transformed or abandoned.

What I also found in my observations among Christianized is close to the above research findings. However, Miller sees this differently, but identity roots, both as a habit and retrieval of forgotten cultures, are always a factor in creating commonalities among Muslims. For example, Christianized Iranians maintain Christianity alongside their Iranian culture and try to see Christ as a savior who will establish his throne in Iran and find common ground between being Iranian and being a Christian and discovering ancient cultures. This is especially evident among Polish (new) Muslim women. These women have a further redefinition of the new religion based on their previous lessons.

I spoke to many Christianized women who attended church meetings in a well-groomed manner, were not veiled, and sang Christian hymns freely and loudly. Christianized women, unlike Muslimized women, were dissatisfied with the shackles and control of their bodies and cited the differences between men and women in various dimensions as one of the reasons for leaving Islam. These points may not be discussed in the media as they may be condemned as anti-religious propaganda. However, before reading other articles in this field, I watched a documentary called "Women Leaving Islam" to gain more confidence in my claims and the similarities I had found between Iranian Christianized women. Still, in the end, I did not find anything separate. The women in the film who spoke of their departure from Islam referred to the same points I encountered in the articles. I then read articles about newly becoming Muslim women and that the research process is similar on both subjects, although they may point to various motives for converting.

Boz (2011), in a study entitled "Religious Conversion, Models and Paradigms," focused on the experiences of Australian women becoming Muslims. The researcher refers to the Rambo and Lofland step model, although she criticizes both because she believes that both theories try to explain the process of conversion in an organized system; both point to an essential factor: social interaction with followers. Issues related to identity policies and individual and social dimensions of religious conversion have been studied so that interdisciplinary perspectives can have a mediocre view of the current atmosphere of interference between Islam and the West. Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, the researcher visited some new Muslim women to find answers to macro questions about identity politics, motivation to change religion, and everyday life with a micro-approach. In this article, the experience of 21 women from different social backgrounds who had the same experience in the conversion process is studied. Attention to identity and individual and social aspects of religious change is one of the characteristics of this research. The two factors of hijab and the relationship with the family after the change of religion have been considered to investigate the cause of women's inclination to the new religion and the challenges of their lives. Of course,

many other factors can influence the conversion process, and relying on two issues may not be enough to understand the complexity of the dimensions of this change.

However, an essential aspect of Muslim women's identity is the hijab, which makes their faith intuitive. Although the researcher considers the hijab a factor in creating conflict between the West and the East, she defines it as a free choice by newly converted women. On the other hand, these women have stated that after choosing the hijab, they feel they are no longer considered Australian by public opinion. Some women also believe they have gained stronger faith in God by wearing the hijab. The researcher concludes that identity changes have occurred at the individual and social levels. Religious conversion is not easy for Australian women as the reaction of family members is a significant issue. The response of family and friends is usually accompanied by fear and panic. However, despite all the initial adverse reactions, families have finally accepted the change. Taking refuge in support groups that simultaneously promote the teachings of Islam is a solution to the rejectionist behaviors of family and friends. Sisterhood among Muslim women is emerging for these reasons.

In marriage-related cases, converts reported experiencing drastic personal changes similar to conversions. In some cases, conversion has been associated not with a unique religious pursuit but as a means of finding a suitable partner with a cultural background with strong family values. A more recent study by Shestopalets (2021) entitled: *There is More Than One Way to Tie a hijab: Female Conversion to Islam in Ukraine* explains the similarities and differences in changing women's religion. For example, in both articles, the issue of marriage or having a partner has made women curious about Islam. In addition to a wedding, the subject of the Islamic dress code for women is central to the popular perception of women turning to Islam. While most male Muslims can keep their identities secret for a long time, every Muslim woman must wear a hijab. A sign by which Muslim women can be identified with other women in public.

Shestopalets (2021) analyzes women's conversion to Islam in Ukraine as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon encompassing various social, psychological, and cultural factors. This study explores the main reasons for the conversion of Ukrainian women to religion, their experiences of wearing the hijab in public places, and their views on Christianity. Using the theoretical perspectives of Lofland and Skonove (1981), this article shows that the intellectual motif of transformation - alone or sometimes in combination with other elements - may be predominant among Ukrainian converted women. Lofland and Skonove (1981) mention six motives for religious change: intellectual, affectional, experimental, mystical, revivalist, and coercive.

According to the researcher, the intellectual motif, the emotional motif (acquaintance with the spouse or partner), and a combination are very important in religious conversion. However, empirical and mystical motifs may also be involved in women's experiences in this process. In addition, new Muslims may begin to practice Islam both intellectually and emotionally (such as attending Friday prayers, following dietary restrictions, or wearing a headscarf) as a preliminary step in making a final decision:

"Along with this, both intellectual and affectional converts are likely to start practicing Islam in some form (such as attending Friday prayers, following dietary restrictions, or wearing a headscarf) as a preliminary step to making the final decision" (Shestopalets, 2021, p. 109).

The intellectual motif (explored through books and online resources) is the predominant role model for more than half of women converting. In contrast, the emotional motif had less effect on this process. In a third of cases, the intellectual and emotional motifs are intertwined.

In recent years, the marriage and inclination of non-Muslim women to Muslim men have become important. One type of religious conversion can be through marriage. Most partners (spouses) are essential in inviting their partner to live in a union of the same faith. Dariyo (2021), in his article "Conversion of Religion in Muslim Marriage Lives," reviews the change of religion in the married life of Indonesian Muslims. The researcher has studied the religious conversion process of five people (one man and four women) using a qualitative method, interviews, and observing their married life.

In addition to restrictions on Muslim life, Indonesian law limit marriages. Although conversion is legal, in the marriage phase, Act No. 1 of 1974 states that couples can marry if they have the same religion. If they belong to different religions, the marriage cannot be approved by the Department of Religious Affairs, which has the authority to legalize the marriage. According to this, couples getting married need to ensure they have the same belief. If there are still potential couples with different religions, one of the parties must agree on one religion, whether male or female. That is why marriage is an essential factor that influences the emergence of religious change and is the entry point for a person to make a religious conversion. The results showed that two factors influenced conversion: marriage and economics. Economic factors are important because one is willing to leave her/his religion and enter a new religion to escape the problems caused by economic deprivation.

Religious conversion under the influence of marriage is also visible among Christians. In my observations of the church, some men and women tended to convert because one of the couples became a Christian. One of the couples was the first to become interested in Christianity. After seeing changes in the behavior and character of one couple, the other couple also tends to the new religion. However, because the world is surprised by the volume of non-Muslim women turning to Islam and is concerned about creating an atmosphere of extremism, it needs to focus more on other related issues.

Previous studies show that definitions such as context, social capital (trust, goodwill, etc.), social institution (church, family, etc.), attitude towards an old and new religion, and identity have been considered. The present study will discuss these concepts, which are dedicated to women and their conversion experiences, but other new ideas will certainly emerge during the analysis process.

The religion is not limited to Islam but leaving may occur in other thoughts and beliefs. It is difficult to get accurate statistics on the number of new outputs and inputs to any religion. Sometimes the process of changing can occur multiple times and is only sometimes fixed. Regarding immigration, the conversion also has other distinct aspects, whether it can be a strategy to get out of a situation or to be a factor in leaving the homeland. In this regard, to achieve a model of the causes and consequences of conversion, researchers have conducted studies with different results in different fields and, sometimes, have expected outputs. Women are also part of the convert population, but surprisingly, less than men or alongside men are considered in research. In some in-depth qualitative research, such as Heon Jung (2020), the researcher does not talk about the wives of the men who participated in his study or their influences on the process of religious conversion, even though he has sought to discover the deep meanings of the lives of converted people. However, if we consider the same study for women, some convert because of emotional relationships (Dariyo, 2021; Shestopalets, 2021).

The study of converted women has been done more on Muslim ex-Christian women. This could be due to two reasons: Islamic propaganda criminalizes apostasy, so scholars may be reluctant to choose topics related to another kind of religious conversion. These issues are a red line for researchers who live in Muslim society, and they cannot deal with them except to strengthen Islam's goals.

On the other hand, the Islamization of European society is a matter for the West. It became a matter of concern that Muslims could conquer Europe under the guise of Islam but in the form of military and paramilitary groups. Thus, researchers focus more on issues related to the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam than on the causes of Muslims' conversion to other religions. The same is reflected in the field of women's studies. When a significant number of women became Muslims and sometimes joined militant (terrorist) groups, they were more interested in research studies, and perhaps independently, Western researchers considered more women's gender; But in some of the research that I introduced in the previous sections, some researchers also mentioned gender issues in the margins of addressing the dimensions of conversion and finding the processor causes. However, if we want to put women at the forefront of independent studies, researchers focus on women becoming Muslims for the reasons stated. Studying the research that has been done on Muslim (converted) women, although it may be different from the subject of this research, will also be instructive. Because researchers in the field of Muslimized women have used theories of conversion, they can be used as examples in the research literature.

If we move away from the issue of gender justice, women have not received much attention in the conversion from Islam to Christianity separately. Also, if studies have been conducted on conversion, women have been studied alongside men, and in some cases, a small part of the research findings have been allocated to them. Finally, a review of the research background shows that if attention is paid to new women

Muslims, the situation of women should also be considered in other forms of conversion.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

Before starting any research study, the researcher must thoroughly understand the process. A developed study outline and understanding the critical considerations in designing and conducting a survey are essential to achieving the research goals. While understanding how to develop a methodology is crucial, a researcher can align with a theorist and pursue an approach to advance research. This study aims to understand why the conversion process to Christianity occurs among Iranian asylum women.

In general, research methods can be divided into qualitative and quantitative in social sciences. This research is how the decision is made to use a qualitative approach. In the qualitative process, the criteria are different, and the principle is to explore as deeply as possible and be aware of the multiple dimensions of reality. Qualitative studies interpret the meaning or perception of a complex problem and provide insight into life experiences. In fact, in the qualitative method, the findings are obtained in ways other than referring to statistics. "By the term "qualitative research," we mean any research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It refers to research about people's lives, lived experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions between nations" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, pp. 10-11).

Sometimes, the researcher wants to look deeper at a particular person, situation, or series of events. Quality refers to what, how, when, where, how much, etc. Qualitative research, then, deals with the meanings, concepts, definitions, symbols, metaphors, explanations, and characteristics of the objects and subjects under study. "Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case studies, personal experiences, introspective, life stories, interviews, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 2).

Researchers interested in the qualitative method face a collection of field-text data that makes it difficult to understand information from them exactly. Discussion and conclusion in qualitative research are difficult due to their breadth, disorder, and lack of analytical structure. The qualitative research method does not have a standard and specific procedure for data analysis. Thus, research reports may seem tedious, with prominent, descriptive, and narrative arguments. However, the existence of various types of analytical procedures that have been developed and expanded in the world in recent decades rejects this claim.

One of the popular methods in this methodology is a contextual theory, first proposed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 in the book *Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Tie, 2019, p.2). This method is a qualitative way to create a theory that broadly explains a subject's process, action, or interaction with a specific identity. The grounded theory aims to study people involved in a similar activity or interaction process.

Choosing a research method is a challenging task. It can become even more complex when the researcher decides on grounded theory.

4.2. Grounded Theory

The underlying theory is an inductive research method. This method is used in cases where our knowledge (especially theoretical knowledge) is limited. The fundamental difference between grounded theory and other qualitative research methods is the emphasis on theory development. Grounded theory is a method of exploratory research. It allows the researcher to create a new theory instead of using predefined theories in cases where it is impossible to consider a hypothesis. Since the beginning of the academic theory of the grounded, its development and popularity can be seen day by day; over time, different types of this theory have been formed, and many valid types of research have been concluded based on this method. Grounded theory is problem-oriented and based on linking steps that help create a problem's theoretical structure.

There are two main types of approaches to grounded theory that Clarke (2019) distinguishes in the first chapter of *Current Developments in Grounded Theory*, in which the history of the evolution of grounded theory has been explained. Theorists, after the publication of The Discovery of Grounded Theory by Glaser & Strauss (1967), can be divided into two categories:

> (1) the Glaserian school of grounded theory, which operates within a post-positivist paradigm, and
> (2) Strauss, who then united with Corbin, advocated the school of grounded theory to adopt a constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Although these two views have much in common, there are differences. The most basic similarity in the efforts of both theorists is in the classification of data, but their approach to creating categories is different. If the Glaser approach is used, researchers need a relatively advanced understanding of the various schools of thought. "Glaser and Strauss undertook a variety of efforts to clarify the idea of theoretical sensitivity: in his monograph about "Theoretical Sensitivity, Glaser invented the terms "theoretical codes," "theoretical coding," and "coding families" to show how researchers may draw on existing theories to structure their developing grounded theories. Strauss proposed the use of a "coding paradigm" which can be used to develop and relate categories of the emerging grounded theory to each other" (Kelle, 2019, p. 74).

Glaser takes a different approach to Strauss's theory. Glaser looks at the ground theory from the point of view of Critical realism and Strauss from the point of view of pragmatic relativism. The differences between them are explained more by Howard-Payne:

> "The contextualist epistemology that Strauss advocates directs
> the researcher to be personally engaged with the research to describe
> better and understand the world as the participants perceive it. On

the other hand, the realist epistemology that underpins the Glaserian approach requires the researcher to embody the role of an objectively detached observer" (Howard-Payne, 2016, p. 53)

Howard-Payne (2016) points to another difference that is the reason for the tendency of beginners to the Strauss approach. Glaser relies on conceptual design, and Strauss uses a predetermined paradigm system to construct a theoretical framework. Because Strauss's proposed method has frameworks from the beginning, those who are beginners or do not have much experience in qualitative methods, incredibly grounded methods, should use the Strauss method (Kelle, 2019). The ease of the Strauss method is understandable from the outset. Strauss believes the researcher can (and should) begin the research by considering a predetermined research question from a comparative study of existing literature (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). However, Glaser forbids the researcher from entering the field of research with any pre-determined research questions.

In general, the standard features of the grounded theory family can be summarized as follows:

> "The repetitive process of simultaneous data collection and analysis; Theory/model development; Continuous comparison of data during the research; Creating codes and categories from data instead of previous hypotheses; Theoretical sampling to generate theory; Taking notes to examine the types and the relationships between them" (Abolhasani-Tayebi, 2018, p. 78).

In this study, due to the differences in the methods described, Corbin and Strauss's systematic and analytical approach has been used to obtain a suitable answer according to the questions. In the process of making grounded theory, according to Strauss and Corbin, the collected data are converted into coded concepts and connected in three stages open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Maxwell, 2004). "Strauss and Corbin define grounded theory as the theory derived from data systematically gathered and analyzed through research. The researcher "begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data" (Tie, 2019, p. 3).

An important feature that has made Corbin and Strauss's theory popular among researchers is having a coherent classification and system for advancing qualitative research from start to finish. Although this classified method has been criticized, it still retains its function. Some of the reasons that make the function of grounded theory consistent with the idea of the present study are:

> - Among the different approaches, grounded theory methodology can more favorably collect, analyze, and interpret the rich quotations of women who have left Iran due to social and political processes or have converted before or after their migration.
> - Since exploring the social process is the primary goal of this research, the methodology of grounded theory can be the best choice because, On the one hand, the quantitative analysis applies only to cross-sectional research. On the

other hand, the central philosophy of grounded theory methodology is to explore the process by studying participants who have experienced similar situations. Finding the stages of these processes and understanding how individuals have experienced them can only be achieved through the grounded theory methodology.

- When there is no theory to explain a process, or theoretical discussions do not refer specifically to the concepts desired by the researcher, the function of grounded theory seems desirable. For this reason, this study intends to specialize in theorizing about converted Iranian women asylum seekers.

4.2.1. Sampling Strategy

At first, I was able to build a trusted network by visiting several Iranian churches frequently, where friendships and socializing with Christianized women were a big part of my daily life. I tried to attend various church meetings every week and take close notes with the observer on points that were significant to me. Some women were never accustomed to attending church and were reluctant to interview me; Because my research units were Christianized asylum women, I used the snowball method to reach them. For many years, one of my closest friends in Eskisehir was a Christianized woman who had emigrated from Iran with her husband and mother. We met by chance, and we developed a long, deep relationship. We were in constant contact even when I returned to Iran on and off. The network of her church friends benefited me when I decided to dedicate my dissertation topic to the conversion process of Christianized women living in Turkey (Eskisehir). Also, during the research process, I suddenly came across a church advertisement in the Iranian Telegram group. I contacted the pastor of that church, and we arranged a meeting via Skype. The pastor was compassionate; I could not build the necessary trust until a long time later. As a pastor, he worked hard to protect his church members. Instead of Sundays, the church held prayer meetings on Saturdays. Finally, I decided to attend the first meeting after our conversation. Although the church was at home and the pastor and his wife managed the session with many Iranians, the pastor refused to introduce any women to me for an interview. After that, I tried to attend church a few times, and each time they were just as welcoming to me, but they did not want to be interviewed. Attending this church and seeing the slightly different ceremony up close introduced me to another friend by chance. A friend who studied sociology was also interested in the conversion process, so he went to other churches and had a good connection. He made an excellent connection for me to interview converted women, and I tried to keep in touch after recording the interviews and adding additional points to them.

To classify the data obtained from the interviews simultaneously, I had to go through the path of analysis and reach the grounded theory; I needed to go back to the field (churches) many times. In addition to taking constant notes of my observations, I completed and coded my interviews after they were finished. I followed the method that Tie (2019) staged in her article. Most researchers agree that the ground method is not linear:

"While grounded theory studies can commence with various sampling techniques, many commence with purposive sampling, followed by concurrent data generation and the collection and data analysis, through various stages of coding, undertaken in conjunction with constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is employed until theoretical saturation is reached. These methods and processes create an unfolding, iterative system of actions and interactions inherent in grounded theory" (Tie, 2019, p. 3).

The absence of a linear process in qualitative research does not mean that the theory is insignificant in this method. Still, the design of research questions strongly requires theoretical insight. With the approach, there will be a concept, and it is possible to formulate the problem using ideas. As shown in Figure 8, the development stages of a grounded theory can be divided into five stages until the result is obtained: *Purposive sampling*: guides data collection and production. In this study, two in-depth interviews were conducted with two women because the simultaneous output of data and their analysis is essential for grounded theory research design. Then the initial dialogue was collected, and the coding and analysis phase started from the first moment. At the same time, it was necessary to complete and review the research questions to make changes in subsequent interviews if necessary. *Generating/ collecting data*; Grounded data collection methods can vary, ranging from documents and texts to in-depth individual and group discussions. *Initial coding*; Initial data coding is a preliminary step in analyzing grounded theory data which categorizes and interprets data. Incidents are identified and coded in the data. Then the initial codes are compared with other codes. This process means the researcher compares the events with previous ones in similar and different categories. Then the new data are compared with those obtained before the analysis process. *Intermediate coding*; Intermediate coding is based on the initial coding phase. Intermediate coding begins to transform primary data into more abstract concepts that allow theory to emerge from the data. The main category becomes apparent with the formation of the developed types around the central idea. *Advanced coding*; During the advanced coding phase, the concepts that reach the categorization phase will be abstract, tell many stories, and be reduced to conceptual terms. The initial coding breaks down the data, while the theoretical codes turn the broken story back into an organized, complete theory.

Figure 8: Research Design Framework: Summary of The Interplay Between the Essential Grounded Theory Methods and Processes
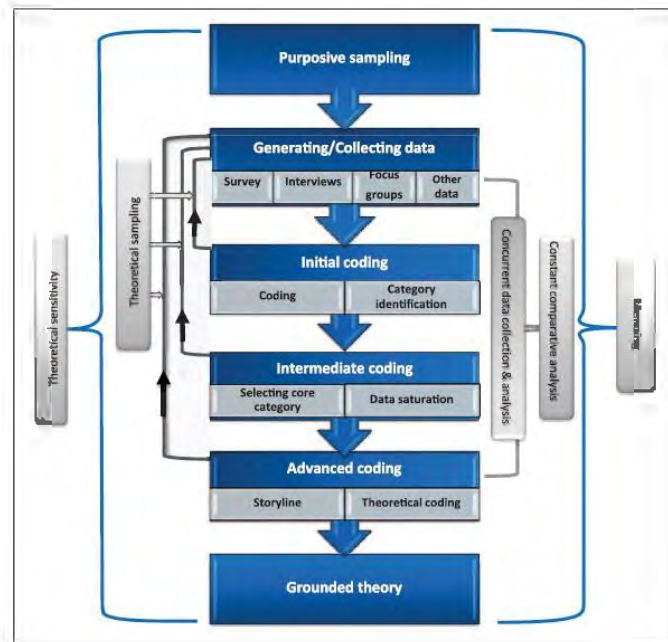
Source: Tie, 2019, p. 3

4.2.2. Place of Research

As a neighbor of Iran, Turkey is an accessible place for asylum seekers. The Turkish government offers asylum-seekers several places to live after checking their cases. Eskisehir is one of the cities where Christian asylum seekers are interested in living. They usually choose this city by asking other Christian friends who have had the most experience in Turkey, so the variety of churches in Eskisehir is remarkable. Church 222, Elam Church, Shaban Niko Church, Seventh Day Adventist Church, and Jamal Rabbani Church are familiar names in this city (also as several other houses of churches). Some churches are sometimes temporarily closed due to pastoral transfers and problems like the Corona epidemic. Sometimes the closure may take much longer than expected, and sometimes the ceremonies may resume virtually at home.

4.2.3. Participants

Some women attended church regularly, while others had their home church or attended church virtually. My most significant effort was having a face-to-face relationship and doing face-to-face interviews. Although the participating women had no problem presenting their real names, their information has been preserved due to the security and conditions of Iranian society. All the converted women had Iranian nationality but did not intend to emigrate due to the conversion. Some filed immigration cases for other reasons, such as social or political problems. Also, some women converted to Christianity inside Iran and others after settling in transit countries.

After the participants agreed to the interview, I sometimes saw some of them at home, at church, and sometimes at a coffee shop. We made phone calls, and first, I started a more intimate conversation and introduced myself a little bit. The information

given to the participant before the interview was limited because I did not want to conduct the interviews. After the interview, the participant was free to ask further questions about the research. In some cases, women refused to meet in person. So, the researcher had to do the interviews via Skype or Zoom. Direct contact with women allowed me to spend more time talking with them and knowing more about their lives. In some cases where the interview was conducted online, the women interrupted the interview several times or asked to end it. The trust that should be the background of the relationship between the questioner and the answerer became a little tricky. However, I had met most of these women in the church environment.

These women stated that informing the details of immigration cases might interfere with the process of accepting their immigration applications. In some cases, pastors or women indicated they had bad memories of similar interviews and felt threatened; for example, the interviewer was out of reach after the interview. For this reason, they feared that an informant might have been sent to the new Christians by the Iranian government as a researcher. Of course, these issues will be explained in the research limitations section. Twenty-seven women were interviewed, and a summary of their demographic characteristics was collected (Appendix 2).

The interviewed women are between the ages of 26 and 68. The women had been immigrating to Turkey for many years; some had lived there for over ten years. Women from different parts of Iran have traveled to Turkey. In terms of the status of asylum seekers, most of these women were waiting for their cases to be reviewed, but in the meantime, some patients had been accepted or rejected. Their education can be divided from middle school to postgraduate. In Iran, most of the women were homemakers or working. Still, after the migration, most homemakers were also forced to work, and all working women in Turkey were engaged in illegal work, from which they did not receive insurance or fair wages. Most of these women provide services in the churches; the list of these services can be included in the duties of minister, translator, worship singer, pastor, poet, and missionary. In terms of marital status, the conditions of these women can be divided into a range from single to widowed. Some of them are divorced and have not remarried until the time of the interview, and others have been married twice.

4.2.4. Data Collection
In this study, the data were conducted through in-depth interviews and by asking semi-structured questions (Appendix 1), and the answers are placed in Appendix 2. I have more than two hours for each interview; if necessary, I refer to the participants again with any questions left or new.

The research is based on a continuous questioning process. All researchers should ask questions at each stage of the study. One way to gather information is to ask questions. However, in the qualitative method, observation and collection of documented and written sources can also be data collection methods. In qualitative research, what and how to replace why in quantitative analysis (Corbin & Strauss,

2015). Corbin and Strauss present an approach used in all stages of this research, from data collection to the model's conclusion. In their proposed model, the researcher tries to continue the study until the data collection is saturated or she/he realizes that new information will not be obtained. Formulating and designing a question is an essential skill for anyone researching. In social science research, questioning is vital throughout the research process, especially in qualitative. "In qualitative research, the research questions are ultimately the result of curiosity, concern or the investigator's fascination for a complex and holistic context and not a mere measurement of controlled variables" (Neri de Souza, 2016, p. 6). Although the researcher's curiosity is significant, research cannot be based on dysfunctional interest leading to a useless research project. Thus, transparent and structured research questions result from a balanced combination of curiosity, creativity, and continuous work.

Before the recording began, I asked the participant whether she agreed with the interview recording. If the participant agreed, I would tell her that she was allowed to stop recording at any time, and if she was upset about answering a question, she could refuse to answer. I informed the participant that the interview would be anonymous and that the information would be confidential. I explained to the participant that I would start with a big question, and she would be free to tell her story. I would interrupt the participant only if I needed further explanation or wanted to know more about the particular topic raised by the participant.

My main and initial question from the participants was:

Describing the process of becoming a Christian. What was the process of becoming a Christian?

My goal was to give the audience enough space to tell her story. So, if necessary, I used the questions in the list in the interview process. The number of questions asked during the interview depended on the participant's information in response to the first question. All interviews were recorded in Persian.

4.2.5. Main Questions

It is generally recommended that the researcher use a comprehensive question and several sub-questions (Morse, 1994). Accordingly, this research's central question will be the conversion process of Iranian asylum women living in Turkey. In the following, many sub-questions have been raised to help find a more accurate answer to the central question. According to Sandelowski (2008), qualitative research can emerge during the study, progressively reaching the issues that are relevant to the study. In this multi-step process, I also tried to ask my questions through an initial interview with two Iranian-converted asylum women. Over time, I completed more questions by conducting more interviews, so sometimes, I had to return to the participants and ask them the remaining questions.

The interviews were recorded over the phone and then transcribed very accurately. After the transcription, I listened to the participants' voices again to compare them with

my list of questions. In the first two interviews, I realized I had to review the questions again and change some or add questions to this list. Finally, as mentioned before, I returned to the participants with new questions until I finally came to a final protocol. The questions for this research are divided as Appendix 3. These questions are derived from the analysis of the first few interviews and a review of previous research.

4.2.6. Data Analysis

According to the grounded theory methodology, data collection and analysis are done simultaneously and in parallel so that the initial analysis begins after each interview. Data analysis starts with the first interview, and based on the initial study, the topics of subsequent interviews are determined and directed. Interpretation is the reference on which decisions are made. An important finding is which data or item to include in the sample in the next step and how or by what methods this data should be collected. To create a theory proposed by Corbin and Strauss, a coding method was used which includes: (a) open coding, (b) axial coding, (c) selective coding, and (d) theory (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 2015) Table 14 provides an overview of the coding approach of Strauss and Corbin (2015) theory:

Table 14: Data Analysis Procedures for a Strauss and Corbin Approach to Grounded Theory

Code	Description
Open Coding	Initial stage of synthesizing each line in the transcript to form a wide range of categories that are the building blocks to answer the research question.
Axial Coding	Refine the original categories to create more focused ones that better relate to explaining the phenomenon.
Selective Coding	Reduce categories to create a final core selection by relating axial codes and data from the interview question journal.
Theoretical Coding	The new emerged process is explained and detailed.

Source: Restrepo, 2019, p. 72

The method Strauss and Corbin proposed is that the interpretation process begins with open coding. As we approach the final stages, selective coding analysis becomes more critical. The method proposed by Strauss and Corbin in the interpretation process begins with open coding, and as we approach the final stages, selective coding analysis becomes essential. Therefore, the first step is open coding, which involves analyzing, comparing, and categorizing the data. In the open coding stage, data and phenomena are presented as concepts. For this purpose, the data are first separated. Phrases are categorized according to semantic units to attach comments and concepts (codes) to them. Open coding is an analytical process that identifies concepts and discovers their properties and dimensions in data. A concept is a labeled phenomenon, an abstract

representation of an event, object, or interaction the researcher finds essential in the data. Categories are concepts that convey the meaning of a phenomenon.

Axial coding is the act of linking categories to subcategories in terms of their properties and dimensions. Axial coding is concerned with how categories intersect with each other and how they are connected. The classes are separated from the open coding in the axial coding stage. The types used the most in the following steps are selected from the many types created in the available coding step. In axial coding, one of the essential stages of coding, the theory of the phenomenon under study is formed using a paradigm model. At this stage, the researcher places one of the categories as a central phenomenon and determines the relationship of other categories with it. This relationship is grouped into six categories: causal conditions, phenomenon, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and results (Strauss & Corbin, 2015) and is presented as a visual model (Creswell, 2013, p. 167).

Figure 9: Paradigm Model of Strauss and Corbin
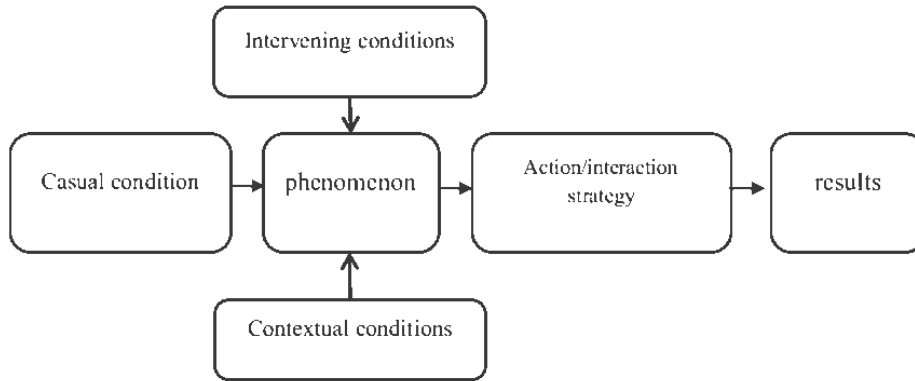
Source: Strauss and Corbin, 2015

The primary purpose of drawing a paradigm model (figure 9) is to provide an analytical framework to help the analyst understand structures and processes. Combining context with the process allows the analyst to understand some of the complexities of human life. The study of systems deals with questions about the phenomenon, and the study of processes examines the interactions of a phenomenon. To understand the dynamic and evolving dimension of events, it is necessary to study the structure and the function together (Strauss & Corbin, 2015, pp. 146-149).

Selective coding, the third coding stage, continues axial coding at a more abstract level. In this step, the formation and connection of each category with other groups are described. The purpose of this step is to integrate and refine the categories. The first step in integration is to determine the significant category (core) that represents the central theme of the research. From Strauss's point of view, there are several criteria for determining the core category: Relation to other categories, a frequent presence in data, reasonable and acceptable explanations, abstract adequacy, and the ability to explain diversity. After selecting the core category, the properties and dimensions of the core category are expanded again. The analysis and formulation of theory focus on

discovering patterns in data and the conditions in which these patterns emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 2015, pp. 168-165).

4.3. Trustworthiness

In grounded research, proving the study's validity is a vital part of the research process and is a judgment criterion for study quality. Validity in qualitative research is an attempt to evaluate the accuracy. The researcher reports the findings in detail and establishes a close relationship with the participants, which is a strong point in qualitative research. Creswell (2013) presents eight strategies for assessing the validity of qualitative research: Prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, Triangulation, Peer Review or Debriefing, Negative Case Analysis, Clarifying, Member Checking, Rich, thick description, and External Audit.

Examining these eight procedures, Creswell recommends that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them in any given study (Creswell, 2013, p. 253). As far as time allowed, I attended Sunday Services in the Protestant Church and on Saturdays in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I kept taking notes and increasing my association with Christian friends outside prayer time. In this study, for the peer review strategy, Dr. Ruhollah Jalili, as a researcher of the qualitative method, controlled this research process from Iran as a collaborator due to his background in conducting several qualitative types of research. He commented on the various stages of the study, including data collection, analysis, coding, and category extraction, and criticized the researcher's ideas. This way, the researcher could identify and avoid possible deviations and errors. Finally, the research findings will be confirmed by respected professors.

In the external audit strategy, several Ph.D. students in sociology who have nothing to do with the conduct and steps of the present study review the research process and findings and evaluate its accuracy. These individuals examine whether the data support findings, interpretations, and conclusions.

Finally, a rich and thick description strategy was used. Because the researcher describes the situation in detail, it allows the reader to comment on the transferability of the research findings. This goal began at the interview stage. Initially, participants needed to be comfortable with being honest about talking to the interviewer about their experiences. A secure relationship is required to provide rich data. At the time of the interviews, the detailed descriptions of the participants were conveyed in an utterly credible manner.

A few differences may highlight me as a research researcher with such a subject. As someone who has lived in Turkey for about five years, I have become familiar with the immigration environment. In addition, before I officially began my research, I visited the church from time to time and already had a clear mindset about the atmosphere of the church. It is also essential to have a common primary language (parents). During the study of other research with a similar subject for preparing a literature review chapter, I found that because most of the researchers were not Iranians, lack of connection with Iranian culture, lack of knowledge of the Persian language, and mastery of linguistic

subtleties prevented a complete understanding of the individual, religious and social living conditions of participants and this also hurt creating a close and intimate relationship between them and finally, having the same sex influenced the understanding of the difficulties of converting these women. We quickly became friends, socialized, and spent much time together. Of course, I must also mention the history of my personal life experience. Because of my family background, I was familiar with conversion. So, my previous experience in changing the religion of one of my family members and the shock of his loss gives me more insight into approaching the participants.

4.4. Ethical Considerations

Research has become an ethical issue in many areas, and rules have been formulated to regulate researchers' relationships with the individuals and fields they intend to study. These regulations are designed to avoid harming participants. From the beginning of entering the church and trying to establish a relationship with the individual, the researcher has never hidden her identity as a researcher and her research topic from individuals and church officials and has informed them in detail. Ethical considerations regarding the rights of participants and ethical considerations related to the quality of research, including the observance of the rules and stages of study and fidelity in data quotation and analysis.

Participants: During the initial encounter with the participants and based on previous conversations, sufficient information about the researcher's identity and the research subject was given to the participants, and permission was granted to record the sound. The researcher also guaranteed that information about them would be reported in a way that no one could identify, and no organ or institution would be able to use this information against the interests of the participants. Finally, they were free to decide whether to contribute to this research.

Quality of research: Besides a moral responsibility to the participants, the researcher has a moral obligation to the scientific community and colleagues and must make every effort, to be honest in each research stage. Accordingly, in various stages of research, including theoretical studies, data collection, and analysis of findings and reporting, the researcher tries to meet the criteria of scientific honesty.

CHAPTER FIVE: IRANIAN ASYLUM-SEEKING WOMEN'S CONVERSION AND IMMIGRATION PROCESS

The audio recording of the interviews was listened to again and carefully typed into Word software. The interviews were then transferred to Maxqda software, and the sentences were marked separately. This step is called open coding, in which sentences are selected as data in the text, and similar sentences are placed in a category.

In the second stage, the relationship between each category was identified and classified into a more extensive set called categories in the same software. This is the primary coding step. An attempt was made to select the central core in this coding. In the third step, selective coding, the relationship of the selected categories to the central core was examined. At this stage, the concepts became as abstract as possible.

Because the respondents' lives were divided into two parts before and after the conversion, it was sometimes necessary to split some codes into two parts, such as context and strategy.

In the model, all subcategories are not displayed, and only three levels have been considered. However, all of these sub-categories in the text, and examples of respondents' statements have been described in each sub-category.

After extracting the paradigm model and based on my experience of the church community, I needed to explain some of the issues with verses from the Bible so that the reader could better understand the conditions of the church and the relationship of women with this organization. The model was initially formed from a simple idea. Women leave Islam because of repulsion and gradually. They slowly entered Christianity and began the path of religious change. This idea is explained below.

5.1. Repulsions and Attraction to Leave or Choose a Religion

There must be repulsions and attraction to leave the religion and choose a new religion, respectively. The experience of some respondents also states that the lack of sufficient interest in other religions that they have experienced has caused them to leave the path in the middle. In addition to the attractions of the new religion, some factors cause a person to abandon the old faith and seek choice. This is why interests sometimes give way to repulsive elements after a while. This is shown in Figure 10. It should be noted that all stages must not be completed, and after finishing, a new stage is entered, but the steps can overlap and show their following settings in any position of the previous stages:

Leaving Islam and converting to Christianity is a gradual process. The gradual abandonment of Islam and the gradual conversion to Christianity will take place according to the process that will be described. Respondents stated that their religious belief in Islam was strong (Stage 1) and that they had converted to Christianity during the ups and downs (Stage 2). To show their faith after becoming Christian, they formally establish it in various ways (Step 3). Each of these will be explained below.

Figure 10: A Plan of Attraction and Repulsion in Leaving the Previous Religion and Absorbing the Next
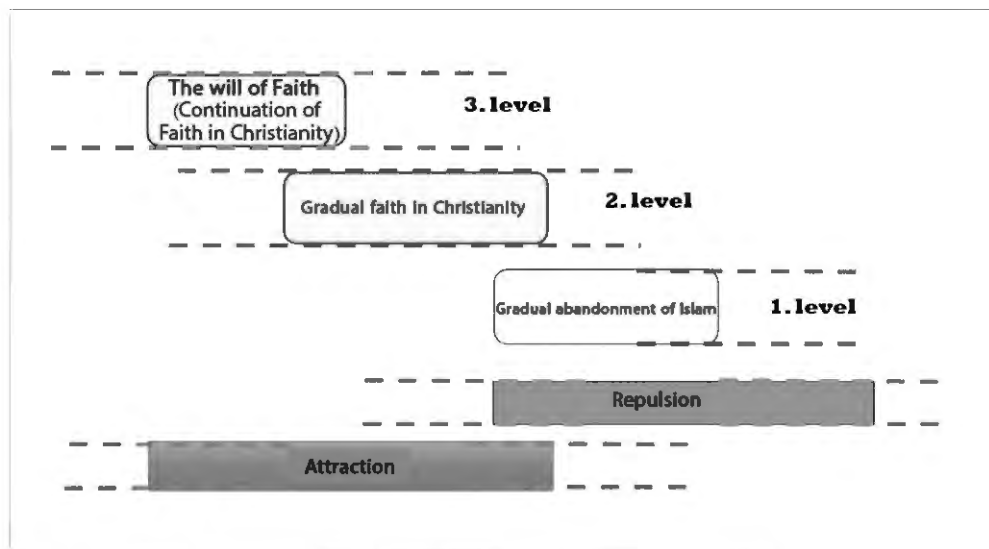
According to Corbin and Strauss's theory, an attempt was made to design a model for converting Iranian asylum-seeking women based on their interview references. As Corbin and Strauss and the thinkers after them have created, the model can be in different parts, such as contexts, causes, intervention, strategy, and consequences, focusing on the central core. However, elements can have minor changes.

5.2. Extracted Themes from Iranian Asylum-Seeking Women's Interviews

Based on the simple mental plan created in my mind from the series of interviews and the study of theories and research, the extracted classifiable data will be explained in this section. These themes and classifications have been formed based on the proposed model of Strauss and Corbin and according to the thesis topic.

5.2.1. The Context of Women's Lives Before Choosing a New Faith

The context is the point(s) at which the phenomenon under study occurs. Although not causally related to the phenomenon, conditions have been adequate. These contexts existed before the occurrence of the phenomenon and, in a word, were the last on which the phenomenon in question occurred. This study extracted individuals' religious beliefs and experiences before Christianity (mainly social and family harms and religions) as a background.

However, another context category is created after a religious conversation, which will be discussed later.

5.2.1.1. Religious Beliefs in the Lives of Women and Their Families

The issue of religious belief and adherence of respondents to Islam before changing religion can be viewed from several perspectives. The first approach is the conversations that have taken place about the religious commitment of the respondents,

and the second approach is the religious commitment of the husband, the husband's family, and the respondents' family, which shows the religious background of the respondents. In the examples that have been selected, the person's adherence to the religion of Islam before conversion is mentioned. These examples introduce us to women firmly committed to Islam before converting to Christianity.

> I was a Muslim who performed her prayers and fasts accurately and did all the Mustahabs (recommended). My family and my husband are very religious (Hamideh, 32, Independent Interview, 2022).

> We were Muslims; we fasted and did not leave. Even on Ashura (Muharram month), I vowed to go to Karbala on foot. I served Imam Hussein. I respect them, but it was a religion and a duty (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

> We were fasting. We were praying. We were going to the mosque. We were performing Ghadr nights. During Muharram's months, we sent my son Hussein barefoot to mourn (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I always asked for my prayers and wishes from Imam Zaman and Hazrat Mohammad; I did not even mention the name of Fatemeh Zahra because I believed that Hazrat Fatemeh Zahra was so pure and innocent that we do not even deserve to say her name. At that time, our house was Hosseinieh, and we had religious services every Tuesday. I gave my children an Islamic name if I did not know they were Christian. My eldest son's name is Elias, and my second son's name is Iman. How hard I tried to accept Elias's name because they said his name was Jewish. I chose the name Elias because Mr. Qaraati had said about the attributes of the Prophet of Islam that he was Elias, and I said I should give Elias as my child's name (Sayeh, 48, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I was highly religious when I was in Islam and a Muslim ... and because I come from a Muslim family, my parents observed prayers and fasting and adhered to the Imams. I was religious and grew up in a religious atmosphere. I organized a group prayer program in my house several times a month. I was in the seminary for a few months (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

The family has a significant influence on the formation of people's views on religion. Sometimes the strictures of the family cause a different attitude towards religion, and the person is not able to be bound and adhere to all the rules of that religion and gradually prepares the ground for leaving that religion:

> I grew up in a religious environment. Indeed, the background I was in and the upbringing I had were not ineffective. My father was a Muslim, and my stepmother's family was also Muslim, but that was not unwise and helped me along the way. It would not have been ineffective; perhaps, if I had been in a more secular or very liberal and different environment, I would not have been as I am here and now. Still, I do not think my parents' separation was involved or related, but it was

religious. My stepmother and father's family greatly helped me (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

My paternal family was very religious, so they had a mourning committee and still believed in flogging and this nonsense. When I got married, my husband's family was a martyr's family; they also had a series of religious beliefs. My husband's family was an honorary servant of an Imamzadeh (offspring of an imam) in Qazvin and was part of its board of trustees. They were a very Hezbollah (very religious) and religious family. After my marriage, I went to Qazvin, was active in the Basij (Resistance Mobilization Force), and used its benefits (Sahar, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

My family was religious, and my husband's family was much more spiritual because they had "Hazrat Qasim's room" in their house and held Ashura and Tasua ceremonies (Zohreh, 53, Independent Interview, 2022).

As mentioned in the examples, the context before religious conversion returns to individual and family beliefs and women's experiences. Sometimes the pressure of families to maintain religiosity creates a force of repulsion, and the person looks for a way to escape. The extent to which a person is dissatisfied with these pressures effectively persuades her to leave her heritage religion.

5.2.1.2. Women's Life Experiences Before Christianity

Respondent women in this study went through difficult life experiences. Their experiences result from a patriarchal society and a lack of legal protection. Part of the tendency of these women to change their religion comes from the frustrations they have endured in Iranian society. Part of it is subject to Islamic patriarchal laws, and the other amount is subject to the patriarchal system that governs society. For example, they could not continue their education after high school, and after changing their religion, they continued their education in virtual religious disciplines. "I was in middle school when I was given a husband, and I did not go to school anymore," "I could not graduate from high school," "I dropped out of college," and "I took a book once or twice and [my husband] said I would continue my education at home. I saw that it was not suitable for my situation at all." These are some women's narratives about the restrictions on continuing their education in Iran. When they emigrate, they cannot continue their studies due to the difficult conditions in the universities of the transit country (Turkey), and no system has been defined for asylum seekers. Abandonment, poverty, rape, serious illness, and large families have all been part of these women's experiences. Here are some of their other experiences:

Forced or early marriages have deprived women of many opportunities for advancement. They had to focus on family problems instead of individual abilities and capabilities. Forced and early marriages created a different view of Islam among these women. They have assumed that the current laws in Iran, which are derived from Islam, deprive them of opportunities by prescribing marriage.

I was forced to get married at the age of 19. Marriage was not my choice, and I was going to university to study computer science at the time. When I was accepted, my father became strict and decided to give me a husband to make it easier. My father gave me a short time (seven days) to think; Then I remembered that two or three suitors come home in a week, but I did not want any of them. I wanted to study like my friends. After seven days, I said I did not want to get married. My father told me that I would not let you go to university, and if you thought I would let you go to university and you would marry someone you love, you would be wrong. This was the ultimate democracy in our home... (Leila, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

In Iran, I was forced to marry my cousin at a very young age. I hated Islam from then on, and I was furious. I was always angry. I was angry with everything. It was inside me. I was twelve or thirteen when I married; I had not yet bled... (Fatemeh, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

I got married when I was about fourteen, and after several months and a short time passed, God gave us a daughter. I did not want to get married at a very young age. I did not know anything about a man. I was very blindfolded. I also had a tough time in life. I was married, hoping to have an easier life after many hardships, but I suffered a lot and was beaten a lot, which forced me to separate (Zohreh, 53, Independent Interview, 2022).

I had a lot of horrible things in my life, one of which was my father's addiction. At a young age, he would send me to find drugs. The stress was strange. I worked hard on myself to be able to forgive these things. I cannot improve my faith in Christianity because I have no forgiveness. I have forgiven many people, but every time I look, I see the cause of my misfortunes as my father, and I cannot forgive him. He thought only of himself and his pleasure. I married at 14 to escape my father's harassment (Sahar, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

Women have had difficult life due to their addiction. Living in families with the same background (family contexts) has caused women themselves to be involved in this issue.

I have been smoking hookah every night since I was 14. It is true that from the time I smoked it, I realized that it was harming my body, and it is said in the Bible, but if I want to live according to it, I must not harm my body. I understand all this but did not want to give up this hookah (Sahar, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

I was too young to smoke. I was too young to take drugs (opium and cannabis). Because my cousins were all drug users, I got it so quickly. I was very close with my cousins, and I used to travel with them, and I used to. I met my husband at a party. We were friends for four years, and we married after four years. I was still addicted, but before I got married, my brother found out and deported me to my sister's house in Shiraz. I quit drugs but still smoke cigarettes (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

The subject of addiction is one of the cases in which women narrate bitter experiences. They had to change their destiny entirely due to their family member's addiction and endure the effects on their lives forever.

> The day my second child was born, I discovered my husband was addicted. I did not know before. It did not show that he was addicted. From quitting his addiction, I learned the meaning of addiction. He was ill for twenty days. Then I found out that my sister-in-law and my mother-in-law were talking secretly to each other. I realized that they both knew about his addiction before. He was addicted to opium. In that situation, our daily life in Iran was immersed in Islam. When we got married, he was not addicted. After I became very involved in faith, he also became addicted (Fatemeh, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> My husband has been addicted since he was 16, but I did not know until my son was born. When we wanted to come, his crime had become very serious. I went to the prison to visit him all the time. By the time we married, he was all in jail, and I was alone at home. I had unwanted pregnancies. It was a chaotic situation; I did not understand the meaning of life at that time. Because I was a child myself. I was 15 years old when I married him. Our lives were always chaotic. The police and intelligence suddenly rushed into the house looking for drugs or himself. He was a permanent escapee. He would leave us at home without any food, water, or money and go to this and that city in search of drugs. One week, sometimes ten days, my children and I were alone at home with no telephone or access to my husband. When we came here, we were at zero point. We had no money. We would pick up cigarette butts left on the street and smoke. I just wanted him to be by my side, but for the first time, I stood before him and asked him to improve his living conditions, or I would return to Iran with the children. He was terrified because I had no history of such behavior and was very serious about leaving him. He promised to start all over again. I had no choice. I had two children, and I was only 18 years old (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

The texts had many similar statements, including the last two examples.

> The first time I entered my husband's family, I noticed something green spilling from his cigarette. I asked him what this green thing was. He said: "Don't you see it? It is a cigarette. I empty the cigarette, and because I have no money, I pick and dry the grass next to the wall, fill it with the grass, and smoke it". I was so upset that I said I would buy you a cigarette (Of course, he later admitted that he had been using cannabis since he was 13). I was going to work. I was 48 hours at work and 24 hours at home. When I was home, I realized that its consumption had gradually increased. I worked at the police station. At work, I would stealthily cut opium with a knife and take it home for him. Once my boss grabbed my wrist, he said, "Who are you taking opium for?" I said I would take it for my husband. My boss talked to me. He called my father. My dad came with my cousins and divorced me 24 hours after this occurrence happened while I was eight months pregnant (Sayeh, 48, Independent Interview, 2022).

Along with many pleasant and unpleasant factors in women's lives, divorce is an important and tragic event with many individual and social consequences. The end of a marriage and personal problems will change people's lifestyles and social status. Divorce has brought two kinds of experience for women, either they have had this experience themselves and were forced to terminate the marriage contract, or they have experienced divorce due to the separation of their parents:

> My parents separated. Until my father left Iran. We were very young. We only knew that my father was a kind person. He was always supportive. He was always behind us. He always supported us. When my parents separated, we did not understand the exact reason. They separated twenty years ago. Ten years ago, when my father left Iran, he said he had become a Christian, which was why they disagreed with my mother. They disagreed and had an ideological problem. They did not let us know at all. Only we knew they were fighting. My mother divorced, and it ended. Our lives ended here (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

> My father divorced my mother, and we still have no news or address of my father. I do not know why he separated from my mother. Right now, I have no concept of my father when I want to have a picture of him. Even now, I keep asking my elder siblings to give me my father's address, but they do not respond to my request. I have no memories of my father. My mother also decided to remarry. My mother left me too. My siblings were looking for their own lives. I was the last child in the family. My mother took my elder brother and sister to her new husband's house and left me. Sometimes when I visited my mother, she would open the door a little, and we would see each other right next to the door. Then suddenly, she said, "Go home! Your mother is worried". She had told her husband that I was her sister's daughter. I had no place to stay until I was 15 years old. I stayed on the street, sometimes going to my married sisters' house, but I could not wait for more than a few days there. I slept in the shrine of Imam Reza at night. I was always silent. When my sister asked, " Why are you not at our mother's house?" I did not answer. I was not a girl who made trouble for my mother or the rest of my family. I was always just looking for a place to sleep. My husband and I are 12 years apart in age. However, he understood me a lot. No one listened to me, and when he solved all my problems, it was unusual for me to have anyone listen (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

Divorce has consequences for women, including losing the foundations of identity and social status. Regarding women who are separated, there are beliefs and even reliance on words in popular culture that cause harassment and disruption of women's dignity. Loss of social support, isolation, diminished social relationships, feelings of insecurity, rejection, negative community attitudes, social labels, negative feedback from others, overt and covert gender-based harassment, and violence are some of the harm women experience in society after divorce.

> I was divorced and had children. I was divorced at the age of twenty-eight. I was a different person when I was living with that person. We separated very quickly (Sayeh, 48, Independent Interview, 2022).

I lived with my husband for four years, but because he beat me and he was addicted, it ruined our lives, and I got divorced. I got divorced at 19, at the peak of my youth. I came back again after the separation and that is because of my daughter. I came back and lived with him again, but I saw that it was unbearable, and I could not continue with him, so I divorced again (Zohreh, 53, Independent Interview, 2022).

Although all of the above can be categorized as domestic violence, some examples of domestic violence experienced by the respondents will be mentioned below. This violence has been from fathers, mothers, husbands, etc. Domestic violence is not necessarily limited to beatings and bodily harm. The following are some of the things that have also had a profound psychological effect on women:

We struggled a lot; the older brothers were under much financial pressure. My brothers were in a difficult situation, and they treated us very harshly, and I witnessed a lot of domestic flights (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

My father was fine, but my mother bothered me a lot. When my father returned home, my mother was calmer, but when my father was not, God did not want anyone…She was more hostile to me. Why? Because she said I wanted to have an abortion, but your father did not allow me. Now I do not know what my sin was. I was innocent…. If I could, I would separate from my husband. I had a tricky situation, but there was no one. Because my mother got married as soon as I got married, she went to her husband's house. Whose house would I go to if I separated from my husband? It was nowhere. I was four years old when my father died. My mother wanted to remarry because she was single at twenty-five. "I will go and get married because I want to get married until I am young" was the exact sentence she said. That is why she gave me a husband at thirteen (Shiva, 44, Independent Interview, 2022).

My mother left us when she was separated from my father. Because of their fights, and intense conflicts with my father, she left everything, and I did not see her. Fourteen years later, I met her. When did I meet her? When I got into trouble with my father, when I believed in Jesus, and my father realized that I believed in him, he became very nervous and hurt my body and soul a lot, and even chained me to the basement of the house and he said "I am imprisoning you here. Tell your Jesus to come and save you from this basement! I have been imprisoning you here for twenty years so that you can become a Muslim! I will convert you to Islam again". I shouted, "Do not worry, my Jesus, save me" (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

My father cared for me from a young age and loved a girl very much. We had a good relationship. We always had only one problem, and that was the issue of hijab and such religious matters. Although I tried to be holy, my father wanted me to be very religious. For example, he said that you could not laugh with your cousins (boys) while I was more friends with the boys since I was a child, and because we grew up with my brother, I enjoyed playing with boys more, and my father forbade

me. Alternatively, for example, we wanted to go to a wedding, and I did some makeup, but he would not let me, and even once my father insisted on removing the makeup, I preferred not to go to the wedding. My mother gets a car in the middle of the ceremony, secretly comes to me, and secretly returns me home earlier with my uncle's car. My father and I loved each other but constantly fought over these issues. After much fighting, my father is not the same as before and is not very religious. My mother does not wear a Chador (very strict hijab) now. Virtual networks were also influential. When my father comes to Turkey, I go out without a hijab (Shima, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

[Her brother sends her to Shiraz - their sister's home - to quit her addiction] …When I returned from Shiraz, I married my husband, but only the first two months of our relationship were good. I entered the life of a man with a terrible past who had also passed difficult experiences ...Our fights started…; disrespect, aggression, distrust…. (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

My husband had a history of beatings; he had a history of hitting me. I was pregnant when he used crystal (Methamphetamine) and had hallucinations, and wanted to throw me down from the third floor (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

In response to the violence that women endured, suicide was one of the reactions mentioned in the narratives. In premarital records, women try to escape the challenging conditions of their parent's homes and find another refuge:

I remember that as a child, I always wanted to commit suicide. In different ways, I took pills, self-harmed, and even wanted to hang myself, but I never succeeded. It was tough to accept my illness. Suddenly my glory was shattered, so I committed suicide, I wanted to commit suicide, and when I was very disappointed, I tried twice (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

I committed suicide several times. I cut my vein, drank Vitex, took pills a few times, and just wanted attention. I wanted to see if my family would do something for me. I wanted more attention. Otherwise, I would never have thought about death. I was not a girl to cause trouble for my mother or the rest of my family; I was always just looking for a place to sleep (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

I had reached a point where I had no choice but to commit suicide. I wanted to get rid of this woman (my mother). My sister came and once asked what had happened. She saw a glass of water beside me and asked, "Did you take a pill?" Only I could say yes. Then she informed my mother, and my mother told her to leave her to die! Let her die! Go to hell! Throw her down to the street. My brother and his wife took me to the hospital. When we came from the hospital, I was stressed; oh my God, what is my mother doing? After this incident, I was not beaten from the age of seventeen. Until that age, my mother beats me! She was pulling my hair from one side of the yard to the other (Shiva, 44, Independent Interview, 2022).

Running away from home and trying to stay away and not return home and leave family members is a reaction to a situation that is unfavorable, unbearable, and sometimes unchangeable for a person. This is usually done as a defense mechanism to reduce discomfort, eliminate annoying and harmful stimuli, and achieve desires and generally long-term aspirations.

> [Her brother forces her to marry his creditor and she must also run from home]. Of course, I must say that I left Iran twice. The first time I went, my brother talked to my sister and mother a lot to convince me to return because of my reputation and these stories. My brother swore he would have nothing to do with me anymore, and I trusted them and returned. My brother forced me to marry his creditor and become his second wife in return for his debt. When I returned, they had nothing to do with me, but I was going to university, and the man was harassing and threatening me. I studied in Shiraz and lived in my uncle's house. Even though my uncle told me to file a complaint, I was afraid of the consequences, but I did it at my uncle's insistence. When my brother understood the story, he came to me and hit me, and we had to withdraw the complaint. I was locked up at home, and I could escape with the help of my brother's wife; I left Iran for the second time with the help of my sister (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Our financial situation was perfect, and I wanted to take some money left to my mom and dad and be able to go to another country to live independently and alone. I hated my mother so much that I wanted to be a prosecutor to punish my parents (Sayeh, 48, Independent Interview, 2022).

> [Her father chains her underground because of her conversion. She manages to escape and never returns home] ...It was like a miracle that I could break the chain with that bit of stone. I knocked the stone to the part of the chain, opened it, and went upstairs; my clothes were upstairs; I picked up something and ran out of the house. I have not seen my father since that day (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

Women's injuries and experiences referred to the family and patriarchal social system are very diverse. These problems range from divorce and domestic violence to rape and force women to seek answers for the experiences in their lives. The answer sometimes goes back to the religion of Islam and the social laws derived from Islam, and they are presented as reasons for leaving the faith.

5.2.2. Women's Reasons to Gradually Leave Islam

As mentioned at the beginning, if the underlying conditions affect the phenomenon's occurrence, the causes are sufficient for this to happen. Causal conditions refer to events or happenings that lead to the circumstance or growth of a phenomenon. The gradual abandonment of Islam in this study is considered the cause. Of course, factors such as praying in Arabic, not receiving answers to religious questions, and anti-woman laws have contributed to the gradual abandonment of Islam.

The gradual abandonment of Islam can occur for various reasons that fit into different people's experiences. One of the results I noticed from the respondents' statements is the criticism of the performance of the officials and preachers of Islam. The preachers of Islam could not create a proper motivation and attraction for all sections of society to keep them in the religion of Islam, and these weaknesses can be divided into the following:

> However, one day, I reached a bottomless emptiness at the peak of religiosity. It became more profound; a whisper was in my ear, "Where is God? Where is God," All these challenges affected my situation. If I had not been born in Iran and my parents were not these people, I would have had a different religion and belief, and now if Islam is good, let me go and investigate myself to see what it is and where it came from. The questions arose when I was immersed in the depths of my religion (Islam)... (Shima, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

The gradual abandonment of Islam can be presented as a reason for religious conversion. This means that the converters either needed help finding a suitable answer to their questions or that the heritage religion needed more attraction and power to keep them. These factors are analyzed in three categories below.

5.2.2.1. Women's Questions about Islam

Respondents were asked questions about Islam before choosing Christianity or leaving Islam. They inquired about finding the answer but needed better experiences and were required to receive a convincing answer. The remaining set of questions had left them confused or skeptical. Finally, they decided to leave Islam:

> I got to the point where I was suspended. I knew everything said was wrong, but I still doubted God. Sometimes I said there is no God, and sometimes there is a God. I said this is not the way if a God exists (Shima, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I was looking for a real God; I had many challenges and questions about Islam. Why should you not ask about God? No one has seen God and should not talk about God at all. So why not talk about someone I do not know? How can I worship him? How can we communicate with him? (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

> My mind told me with my heart that I have a long way to go and believe in it, but it is wrong. You knew from the beginning that you were wrong; now you went the wrong way, stop! If you tried your best to get here, you do not have to try so hard. I am still waiting to get an answer to any questions from my previous religion. I asked my brother - being very religious - but it confused me the most. I went to the treatise, but it needed to contain the right words. I researched, read books, and saw their meaning; I needed help understanding Arabic, so I went and read its purpose, but I would not say I liked it much. I came out of Islam. If I prayed, it was not real (Fatemeh, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

I was looking for a firm and correct answer, even though I had a religious father's family, and when I was a Muslim, I practiced all the laws of Islam, prayer, and fasting, based on my family upbringing and my fear. However, this religion did not convince me. There were many doubts and big questions about this religion inside us. It was not convincing to me (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

Although many questions were in the respondents' minds about Islam, the respondents did not express satisfaction with this religion. They expected that no matter how hard they tried to be good believers, they would receive the same answer (on their scale), but they did not.

Which of my vows did I get? I had to go that way. When you read the meaning of a verse in the Qur'an, there are thousands of nonsenses. I do not want to blame Islam because everyone's religion is respected. My logic and intellect cannot do that. I cannot accept it (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

The crises and problems the respondents faced, their requests from God, and unanswered questions have made them doubt Islam.

I concluded that God does not exist because the God who created me could not witness all my suffering. All this I call him and pray night until morning, God does not show a shadow of himself, or if he is, he is so arrogant and a sadistic creature that he created us, humans, to witness the misfortunes of us to enjoy (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

How much I called on God, I did not get an answer. I told him I believe in you so much; I love you so much; I am coming to Mecca; I went to Karbala; I believe in you so much, so why do not I hear your voice? Now that I am at the peak of my problems, why not? I called God very much. I even remember being depressed for a while and feeling very bad. I told him, everyone, my age is primarily asleep, but I wake up because of you. Why do you not answer me? I struggled a lot with God. I was going to Imam Reza; I called God a lot here and there, I called him for years, but no one answered me. I relaxed after a while. I said then there is no God. If God exists, I called him so much; where is he? I have never heard the voice of God, or it was not the peace that should have come to me or the way it should show me. I have never listened to the voice of God. Before that, I was attached to God because I was a child and had no problems in life. After I got into trouble, I told God that I had been attached to you for so many years, now, do something for me; I did not hear any voice from him (Shima, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

I was in a religious mood. I was very, very spiritual. I wore unique clothes to my sons during the time of Ashura, and I covered them in black; I wore the clothes of Ali Asghar... I did a lot of these things. My problems were getting worse. I wanted to pray; I was going to the mosque, but I had a bitter dispute with my husband... I used to say, God, when I come with you, I feel sorry, I will come in your way, but I will get the opposite answer. I had disagreements with my husband because he used to tell me that you are in the bondage of religion, so our arguments deepened (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

An important issue that the respondents mention a lot is the family issue. The family has a vital role from the earliest stages of leaving Islam, the process of faith, and the choice of Christianity to staying in the new religion. The occurrence of unresolved problems in the family and the intensity of trust and reliance on religious teachings cause a contradiction between the two. A common question that arises in the minds of women is why, despite relying on the teachings of Islam in critical situations in life, they have yet to receive an expected answer. Alternatively, even in choosing a new religion to accompany their husbands or other family members or solve family problems, they turn to this religion. So, the issue of family is significant.

5.2.2.2. Praying in Arabic

Islam's emphasis on praying in Arabic was another issue addressed by respondents. Although learning Arabic is mandatory and emphasized in Iranian schools, and students have been studying Arabic for about six years, praying in this language has been difficult for these former Muslims. This insistence has prevented the respondents from establishing the relationship they intended with God:

> I had a very religious family, and I was not very prayerful and fasting since I was a child. I fasted for four days in first, middle school, or fifth grade and underwent eight-day treatment. What is this? What should a human do to torment her/himself? I always told my mother what taking a particular path was like and repeated Arabic words to show that she worshipped God. I think you can worship God everywhere; maybe that is why I am more inclined to Christianity (Zohre, 53, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I read the Qur'an in Persian many times but did not pray, and my mother always asked me why I did not pray. Then I responded how I could pray to it when I do not understand something and the language I do not understand. Even when I was reading the translation, they told me no, you must read it in Arabic! Why? Why should I not speak to God in my language? I used to say that Americans speak English, Russians, and French, and everyone speaks their languages; why should God speak Arabic to her/his/its servants? Didn't God create all these languages it/her/himself? I was thinking about this. I asked my mother. She followed me with a piece of brick that said, "You should not ask," because she could not answer me. My mother was illiterate and hated it if I asked the prophets, Mohammad or God. She was threatening me. Whenever she could not answer, she wanted to threaten to shut my mouth like that. I told my mother I would not say I liked to pray in Arabic, which I did not understand. I do not know what I am reading and what I am saying. At five or six o'clock in the morning, I would stealthily bring Dariush's (a famous singer) cassette and listen in a low voice (Shiva, 44, Independent Interview, 2022).

In Islam, most prayers are done in Arabic. Every prayer and communication with God must be in Arabic because the missionaries often emphasize that Arabic is the language of God and the perfect language. Still, it is difficult for those who speak other languages to understand. Sometimes the supplicants must read it once in Arabic and

refer to its meaning to understand the prayers. This can be challenging for the relationship they have with God.

5.2.2.3. Women's Interpretation of Laws

Reading about different experiences of women reveals everything that is hidden from view, everything that is sometimes forgotten. Many women suffer under the influence of anti-woman traditions, doctrines, and laws that the Iranian government highly values.

The government is reluctant to change these laws. Women are somehow complicit in this system because they have not had the opportunity to understand another system and recognize how egalitarianism works.

As long as the suffering of this discrimination does not overshadow their lives, they will probably never understand why egalitarian activists have been demanding a change in the rules for years. These are the reasons why women tend to leave Islam and look for a new solution or religion in this suspension of identity:

> Without my hardships in Islam, I would not have been drawn to another religion.
> I was looking for peace. Perhaps these things would not have happened if there had
> been no discrimination (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

Anti-woman laws have short-term and long-term effects on women's lives. Its impact on changing religions and choosing a new identity also shows that it affects the details and totality of their lives.

> In a Muslim society, a woman is not properly positioned. She is considered half
> of a man. She must always be careful not to cause a man to slip. Her hair should not
> be visible because it causes a man to fall. Her manner of speaking causes a man to
> stumble. I even think that these things of Islam have influenced the upbringing of
> our family. It was like this for us. Of course, I did not have a religious family, but
> these things are also rooted in our culture. When I was a child, they told me not to
> eat anything on the street, "Do not lick the ice cream." When I remember these,
> they all have roots that brought Islam and religion to our country (Marjan, 38,
> Independent Interview, 2022).

Hijab has been one of the most critical issues in Iran in the last decade. The compulsory wearing of the hijab and using any means by the government to promote this issue have put women under pressure. They must dress in school, at work, and on the street in a way the government approves. Otherwise, they may face severe clashes. In their analysis of discrimination and neglect, women blame Islam, and this causes them to flee from Islam. At the same time, the government's performance in the name of Islam may have failed.

Hijab is a small example of the legal and traditional discrimination imposed on women in Muslim societies. This cycle makes society anti-feminist rather than educating Muslims and values the levers of patriarchy.

We went to university; we could not keep our Chador on the head. I was a person who had never worn a Chador, and it was hard for me. It was pressure for me…The way they treat us as a woman, they look down on us, they always look at us with an eye of contempt that you do not know. A man can be a lawyer much better than a woman. A man can do much better than a woman. This is all because of the roots of the religion of Islam. Islam had put me in a position where I thought that if I went beyond that, I would never be able to return to that relationship with God. God loves me if I do these things; if I do not, I will not be accepted (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

In both Islam and Iranian laws, a woman remains a commodity. As long as the daughter is in the father's house, she is in the hands of her father, and when she is sold to her husband and goes to her husband's house, he treats the woman like someone who does not have the wisdom of her own. A man decides for him where to go and not to go. Even Islam says that if her parents die, she cannot attend their funeral without her husband's permission. Every Islamic hadith, the sayings of the Islamic tradition, and the Qur'an assume that a woman is a slave to a man. The ransom of a woman is half of a man, and the share of inheritance of a woman is half of a man. Unlike Christianity, there is much other discrimination and a commodity-oriented view of women that I do not like (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

In any case, whether in the name of Islam or by order of Islam, this religion gradually loses a large part of its faithful followers. Although several new Muslim women may be added to the world's Muslims each year, they have one significant difference from the traditional followers of this religion: They have not grown up with these teachings since childhood and do not have a strong family history of adhering to them. They must gradually perfect their knowledge of this religion, just as the new followers of Christianity.

As a woman who is a living being, she is a human and has the intellect and power to decide; I do not see myself as a man's penis and field. As a woman, I am as human as a man, and I can love and use my brain's grey cells as much. There is no need for two women to be witnesses. I do not need to be counted on my alimony with the penis. As a woman, I can make choices before being locked up or beaten at home. As a mother, I am responsible for the next generation. I think it would be better if every woman considered herself so responsible for her children and the way the next generation thinks. All we have problems with is that the ages before us were invited to say that women should not study and should work at home, which was the Great Jihad. Women used to forget that they were responsible for educating the next generations and raising the next generation with just a handful of superstitions. When I got married, my father used to say that a man hears from a thousand people from morning till night at work, and when he comes home, he obeys him (Leila, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

Women in Iran are very fragile. The status of women is deficient. For example, I lived with my husband for 11 years and tried to complete all my duties, but he did

not even work. In this lifestyle, he was accustomed to being disrespectful (Sayeh, 48, Independent Interview, 2022).

As explained, the laws governing Iran are influenced by Islam. The laws regulated for controlling Iran are by Islam, and efforts are being made that if a new law is enacted, it will not be against the Sharia. What will be the consequences of such strictness and inflexibility?

> [She has divorced her husband due to many problems. She has faced many problems while separating] My (ex)husband beat me a lot. I went to the police station, the court, the family, everywhere... wherever I wanted to defend myself, they silenced me because I am a woman! He was killing me; they do not see or hear. I still have the effect of these states and repressions on me. You lose confidence completely. Now, no matter how much I try, those weaknesses and those previous adventures bother me. We have no right in Islam. I got divorced. I forgave my dowry, but they returned it to my husband's family. They took the child from me without being able to protest at all. They do not give any rights to a mother. I suffer when I remember these things, these bullies. Now in Iran, girls and women are really under pressure. It is painful that you have no right to defend the truth. God knows it is tough for me, and I can do nothing for them but pray (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

From the articles of the constitution to every aspect of the life of every creature in Iran, it is influenced by Islamic laws. This has created challenges between the people and the government. People still need clarification about whether they follow the Iranian or Islamic lifestyle. Although the government is trying to put these two terms together, the traces of many daily affairs cannot be seen in the history of Iran. Even in Islam, it has no place in the historical culture of Iranians. Therefore, this argument remains valid. As the visible part of the Islamic face of society, women must endure most of these pressures in their personal and social life.

5.2.3. Intervening Factors in Persuading Women to Christianity

Intervention is effective in choosing the strategy and intensity of the phenomenon. Intervention usually alleviates or intensifies an individual's process and action. Intervention is generally other expected and eventual situations that must be addressed through action and interaction. Among the interventions that influenced the initial strategy in this study was the respondents' initial exposure to Christianity, the experience of other faiths, the history of the conversion of relatives, the critical living conditions, and immigration.

5.2.3.1. The Primary Encounter of Women with Christianity

The encounter shows a set of respondents' initial encounters with Christianity. They may have become acquainted with Christianity in various ways before converting and may have acquired a mindset about it. In addition, courses such as a history of the conversion of relatives or extensive publicity of the church system invite people who have not previously had a background in the religion.

Respondents' encounters with Christianity come in many forms. Sometimes respondents have pre-existing information about the new religion that gives them a mental background, and sometimes they have heard nothing about Christianity. Respondents, on the other hand, may have experienced another religion before choosing Christianity or may be mentally prepared to compare Christianity with other faiths. The experience of changing the religion of relatives is also a lever for this choice and creates a mental background. Women have given this study a unique feature due to their harrowing experiences facing the Christian religion. Accepting an invitation to a new faith has not been easy, and there have been initial adverse reactions to the final acceptance:

> However, let me tell you something...When he first gave me the gospel of Christianity... it was hard for me… At first, I did not understand; I went to church, the pastor was preaching, and I was busy on the phone or talking to others, but slowly I understood the pastor's words... (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> At first, it was ridiculous for me. Even that day, I was insulting. I believed that it was Islam; they just made it happy. They clap and deceive people; this is similar to Islam. The Lord's Supper was held that day, and I did not know what the Lord's Supper meant ... All their actions and behaviors were ridiculous to me. I saw a piece of bread and juice brought, and the pastor announced that whoever does not believe in Jesus Christ, please do not approach the Lord's Supper. I was surprised and said in my heart what is rude, and what is a piece of bread and water? These are worse than Muslims (Shima, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

> However, when my husband and I came to Turkey and became acquainted with Christianity - I also became very familiar with Christianity - I went to church for a long time to prove they were wrong. I did not go to church to get to know Christ. I went to church to prove there is no God, and their efforts are futile (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

Respondents had different mental backgrounds. Mental background also affects their initial reaction. However, the experience also has different spectrums. Sometimes women had no prior knowledge of Christianity, and sometimes they considered Christianity blasphemy:

> I did not know about Christianity and did not know Christ. Have you ever heard of Christ or not? My answer was that I had never heard of Christ. I did not understand what Christ was (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I did not know Christ. I never knew Jesus Christ. I knew him from afar, which are the things I read in the books (Fatemeh, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

The presence of the Bible in the niche of a house slowly breaks the barrier between dogmatism and norm-breaking.

Because, as usual, we always considered it a sin to touch the Qur'an, and we kissed it under certain conditions, put it on our heads, and hung it in the closet, I was afraid to touch the Bible. I was terrified of the Bible. I told my son, "No! No! Please do not touch it. This is a sin; put it in the closet..." (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

One day my husband and I went to Taq-e Bostan. We bought Bible books from street vendors. My husband picked up the Bible from the books, and I asked him why you picked it up. Before Christianity came, the name of evangelism came ... I said I do not bring the book home; the house's blessing will disappear. We are still struggling to make our problems end. He did not accept and bought the book. I also cleaned it daily, lifted it slowly, and quickly put it back in place... (Shiva, 44, Independent Interview, 2022).

The history of converting family members, especially husbands, has created a mentality toward Christianity in women. Before they became acquainted with Christianity, they became acquainted with this religion through their close family members. Influenced by family members and some with their insistence, women began to learn Christianity.

My sister was in the Armenian school in Isfahan. She had gone to church several times, the official church of Isfahan. Her school called and said, "They were Armenians; why does your daughter also attend church? It put the school in a problem," My family had to change schools. My sister has been a Christian ever since. She was in constant contact with these Armenian friends (Asal, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

My daughter gave me the main good news when I was in Iran. Nine years ago, my daughter was smuggled to Greece, where she met a pastor who baptized and preached to her. Because of her child, who was two years old and ill, she left everything and returned to Iran. She introduced me to a book and said if you read this, you will change. It was a Bible book that was rarely available. I read the Genesis chapter, and I found it very interesting. I did not have the opportunity to study such a thing because of the differences in my married life, and it would not be perfect for me if anyone knew (Zohreh, 53, Independent Interview, 2022).

I studied Christianity for a year and a half before I became a believer. My sister, who is also a believer and lives in Germany, talked to me. She became a believer before us all. She always told me that you were the one who came up with so many questions, and I always said that I wanted to study and choose the right path (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

Maintaining the family framework is a critical issue that forces women to accept Christianity and take the first step in obtaining information in this field. For women whose husbands have experienced a new religion before them, it has been so tricky to suddenly encounter this religion even if they threaten their husbands with divorce.

However, the main factor that prevents them from carrying out their threat is observing the change in the spouse's behavior and thus maintaining the family framework.

> My husband had problems in Iran and had to leave Iran. He preached Christianity in the theatre groups, so he became known and had to leave Iran. My husband and his sister gave me the good news, and my husband helped me a lot because he had become a Christian in Iran many years ago, and he answered my questions, guided me, and was very effective. In my husband's family, his sister and his sister's husband first became Christians and preached to my husband in Iran (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

> My husband first became a Christian. He became a Christian in Iran. It was many years ago. I was an atheist for almost four years and had no religion. After four years, I became a Christian and officially converted to Christianity in Turkey. About eight months after my husband, I became a believer (Marta 2, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

> When we entered the church, we saw them playing the piano and guitar and worshipping. I was shocked there. I told my husband: "Everything was perfect in our lives except that you became a Christian!" I started arguing, "You want to disbelieve me, and I picked up the children and returned home." I told him: "I coped with all your problems; just do not be an infidel." The presence of God was so strong. He stayed in the church, and I returned home. The night when he returned home, I continued arguing about what that meant. We were not honest Muslims, but I thought he should not sell his religion either. He had taken the Bible then and started reading to me from its inception. He reads books to me every night (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

If the husbands first became Christians, the women would convert to Christianity to preserve the stability of the family and then form the foundations of their faith, but this is not always easy, as has been said in the following cases:

> I told my husband we would not be Christians at all. I thought he was joking. I took everything as a joke. Then when my husband became a Christian and declared that he was a Christian, I reacted very seriously that I wanted to break up with him. I decided to separate from him (Marta 2, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

> One night my husband came home very late and, with indescribable happiness, said: "I became a Christian; I became a Christian." I also told him, "You are very selfish; how can you become a Christian without asking us? We are not going to do that at all". How much I argued and started shouting; my husband was calm and did not react. I told him, "Islam is a perfect religion, and you leave it; we must separate." He continued to be silent (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

The principle of Christianity is based on evangelism. Evangelism is a kind of propaganda and has different ways. Gospel preaching does not necessarily take place face-to-face. Still, one of the most important instructions to new Christians is to

encourage others to believe in the religion and increase the circle of Christians around them.

However, before the new converter becomes an evangelist, Christianity is introduced to her/him in various ways. Using cyberspace, satellite and television programs, and playing CDs of the life of Christ or the Bible are ways to present and introduce Christianity to the curious.

Cyberspace is used for evangelism, lectures, and meetings. This approach became more pronounced, especially after the Covid epidemic. The scope of access to cyberspace is such that from all over the world, even inside Iran, they can participate in meetings or access information.

One of the pastors, who are very active online and broadcasts the meetings live on Instagram, especially on Sundays, believes that in this way, Iranians inside the country can watch the Sunday services. Listening to sermons is not limited to Iran but is also possible during the Corona or for those who are unable to attend church:

> We have a live program on Instagram and Iranians inside can watch our worship and sermons (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Yes, some of my friends and family members liked the change of my identity very much, and it was pleasant for them, and I got permission from our pastor to give them the link to our online meetings (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

Cyberspace is not limited to Instagram. It uses email, online meeting platforms, Facebook, and anything that makes Internet access possible. Both individuals and the church system use this method to preach the religion of Christ.

> Fortunately, friends, family, and strangers who find me in Cyberspace ask me some questions, and I explain them, and some of them turn(ed) to Christ (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I know people interested in this field; we hold a conference and teach Christianity; I invite people from Iran. If they have experience in the area, we ask them to lead (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

> My sister, who also preached to me, met a Christian through Facebook, and he made her a Christian. She introduced my sister to the church. My sister also preached to us through Skype and Facebook... (Elham, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

New converters can participate in or teach wherever they are, not only for meetings and evangelism but also for teaching and learning. If, in Iran, women could not continue their education for any reason, they would have the opportunity to study Christian theology after joining Christianity.

We always have meetings online. We meet with members inside Iran once or twice a week. However, before the coronavirus spread decreased, Iran members also came here (Turkey) and received training (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

I thought I had to leave Iran to reach my goals. In Iran, I could study at the same university I am connected to. Classes are offline. I read the lessons, and I am in touch by email. It is now online. Incidentally, the same studies were in Iran, with the same professors; it was only offline. We watched the lessons on video, read the articles, sent the questions and answers, and got the grades. Now here (in Turkey), it is online and no different from when I was in Iran. The content is the same (Aftab, 35, Independent Interview, 2022).

Another essential feature of the extensive church system is satellite networks. These networks have significantly impacted the familiarity of respondents or their family members with Christianity; the narrations show that their initial encounter was through this.

Just as my husband smokes opium while watching the satellite... I realized he only watches the Nejat channel for one or two months. It was a question mark for me why he was doing this. He was only focused on that channel. He continued his previous work, but his morals had improved... (Fatemeh, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

...I do not know if it was a Mohabat or Nejat channel, I do not know exactly, but I saw a brother say, "Put your hand on the TV and say the prayer of salvation with me." I quickly opened the Bible because he speaks fast. I opened the back of the Bible, knelt, and began to read and repent. However, before that, I had given my heart to Christ. I thought I had to say a heartfelt sentence if I wanted to change my religion (Shiva, 44, Independent Interview, 2022).

...I went back home and saw the TV was on. A gentleman raised his hand, and everyone fell to the ground. I was surprised. I had only heard one word of healing and was curious to find out. Someone on TV said I was healed. My spiritual ears were closed, and I could not hear anything. I have been very ill for a long time. Even in the hospital, I had my prayer [Islamic] stamp because I was praying. Someone explained on that TV program that she had cancer, and her hand was disabled when Jesus Christ healed her... I did not know anything about Christianity then... (Sayeh, 48, Independent Interview, 2022).

I was home alone one day. A program on Iran's national television entitled Apocalypse showed different opinions among different religions about the apocalypse. There were also sections on the beliefs of Christ and Christianity. The documentary also showed excerpts from the film *The Passion of the Christ*. I remember that *The Passion of the Christ* film was prevalent in Iran (Aftab, 35, Independent Interview, 2022).

In 2000, a film was made about the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Iran. The producer of this film was one of the producers of national television affiliated with the Iranian government. The film was so well received that the Iranian leader visited the backstage of the film, and this film was well-received by the public, but it also had an impact on rethinking Christianity. In the following narration, an example is mentioned:

> I was a child; I was studying in elementary school. I remember that there was a movie called "Holy Mary" at the cinema. I was in a family where my mother was an average, secular woman, but my father was religious. My father was a Muslim, and religion always played a significant role in me, and I was always looking for the truth. I always wanted to know what the truth is and where it is. Even though I was young, I was inquisitive about going and seeing this movie when this movie was released. Because I had a particular interest in the character of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ. I did not know why. I had not read so much, read a book, or studied so much that I claim to have had unique and strange information. In short, I saw this movie in the cinema, twice with my family and once at school. I saw this movie, and from that age, an extreme interest formed in me, and it became increasingly intense (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

The first time I sat on a church bench, the pastor asked who had come here for the first time, and if anyone raised his hand, he would receive a small Bible and a CD of the film, "The Passion of the Christ." This film was the story of Christ's life and his sufferings when he was crucified. The story is made in a way that is very impressive and complex. The effects of this film have created empathy between the respondents and the invitation to Christianity:

> I remember many movies about the Passion of the Christ were popular. Everyone was going to buy a CD and watch it. It was in English, and it was hard to find subtitles. I had it without subtitles. I was curious about what the dialogue was saying from the picture. This documentary made me curious and think. I tried to pray in my language. I asked God for permission and stopped praying. It was hard for me as a religious person, so I told myself I would read his sentences later if I could (Aftab, 35, Independent Interview, 2022).

> One night my husband said I want to see a movie with the kids. "What movie?" I asked. Answered was "The Passion of the Christ." Then I felt terrible. I rejected it and cried. My husband said: "Well, you do not see; I want to see with the children." While my husband watched the movie with the children, I secretly watched it in another room. Where Jesus Christ was crucified, I wept like rain. I cried a lot… (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

In today's world, the mass media, newspapers, radio, television, and cinema have played a significant role in transmitting new information and exchanging public opinion. So that the current era can be called the era of communication. The media is a tool for transferring data, knowledge, thoughts, and ideas, and its role and position are such that it cannot be removed from life, and it is also effective in topics such as

conversion. Sometimes even sermons or prayers of worship, which may be less valuable than other methods of propaganda, are not wasted by the church institution:

> I incredibly like Rev. Siamak Zargari and listen to one of his sermons. I get the message I need, write it somewhere, and review it (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

Separating the crises faced by women from the process of conversion was difficult; on the other hand, it was difficult to be unaffected by listening to women's stories and crises as a woman researcher. I have separated the issue of having a problem when women believe in Christianity from the experience of other harms they have suffered. However, they have also provided the context for the moment of faith. The fact that women express that they were in crisis when they came to Christianity and that Christ saved them has a wide range. Sometimes the pursuit of the same social damage and the strengthening of its effects cause women to change their religion to find a way out, and sometimes crises are newly created and have no previous background.

5.2.3.2. A Critical Point in Women's Religious Conversion Experience

Another intervention that affects the initial strategy is the critical point in women's lives. Religious conversion is a process. People do not turn to a new religion immediately after they leave Islam. Still, they may become acquainted with Christianity because of their skepticism about the previous religion—the stages of the process of conversion overlap. The critical point in this process is the moment of the respondents' acquaintance with Christianity. Respondents state that Christianity entered their lives just as they dealt with a crisis. The presence of this religion in their lives has enabled them to deal with situations differently and get the desired result:

> I became stronger and forgave those who harassed me out of power, not out of oppression. Moreover, I consider myself more potent than anything anyone wants to upset me. I finally got rid of that depression (Samira, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

> At that time, if someone was in a similar situation, he/she might never have become a Christian because we were in a very difficult, painful, and critical condition in life. I knew God through my feelings. If he/she were someone else and a rational person, he/she would not accept these words at all... Personal and family issues stirred my emotions, and my feelings influenced my conversion to Christianity. I was so hurt and fragile when my friend recited a verse from the Gospel of Meta, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavily laden" I was touched. Maybe this verse had another meaning, but that moment was calmative (Aftab, 35, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Getting acquainted with Christianity saved me. I saw the world as black when I came here. Entering Christianity gave me this light of hope, and I still find peace in it. It has benefited me psychologically. Christianity saved me from my dark world (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

Critical living conditions have had a psychological burden on women. Depression, suicidal tendencies, and fragility have put them in a position to accept a new religion. They have entered the new religion hoping to find relief and a solution to their problems.

All the conditions for religious conversion are available, and a moment forms this event. A nudge is needed to create a complete conviction that the time has come to leave the previous religion. This turning point can be explained by facing a crisis or resolving a concern due to meeting the dimensions of the new religion. Most women face many problems when they encounter Christianity and accept the new religion with the idea that part of their challenges will be solved. The missionary system of the church has also understood this very well and often uses it in public testimonies.

5.2.3.3. Women's Experience from Other Beliefs

The path to Christianity has been challenging. There have been many experiences in this way. It is a pre-Christian experience in which there were various religious backgrounds, from atheism to several different religions, and finally, Christianity. In Iran, access to the religious market is limited. In countries with religious diversity, access to religions is more accessible; therefore, the cycle of religious change is more likely to occur. There may be a difference between religious belief and hereditary religion in Iran, and there are still dangers in expressing this difference. It is not easy to talk about religion in Iran because people are expected to live with a commitment to the religion they were born into. The government is constantly questioning inherited religion in various ways to ensure no change has occurred in this area. Iranians must write their religion in all government forms. However, with all the controls and restrictions, other religions open access.

In the process of gradual abandonment of Islam, respondents also have experienced stages such as not believing in God and religions other than Christianity, and this expert also has made them ready to accept Christianity or to be able to distinguish between the faiths they have experienced:

> After four years of unbelief and disbelief, I wanted to believe in something ... I became a believer after so many years because I had not felt in anyone for a long time, I had not believed in anyone or anything for four years, and I was in a bad mood (Leila, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

> There was a time when I was disgusted with all the religions I knew and God. Moreover, I thought Christianity was like any other religion. Christ and Muhammad are like each other, and there is no difference, and for a period of my life, I did not believe in God, and I did not want to have a relationship with God (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

> My beliefs were gradually rolled out, and I came to atheism. There was no god for me at all. First, it was atheism, and then I did not go to the [Dervish] monastery

anymore. I was disgusted with Islam. I ran away from Islam, and then there was no god in the end... (Neda, 39, Independent Interview, 2022).

First, I realized I do not need God at all. If he wants to be so strict and constantly reprimand me, I do not need God. I could handle everything myself. If I am in a society where women cannot be free, and Islam puts more pressure, there is no need for God. If God is so unjust, the God who constantly stands to rebuke us, then I do not need such a God, and I was far from God (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

Once, I fought with my husband, and he left. I went out and called on God for half an hour. I got somewhere and said that there is no God (he cries when he says this.) [I started writing letters to God] In the general letter, I was heartbroken. Finally, I wished for death (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

Atheism is a critique of the respondents' situation and a reaction to their hardships in Islam. For this reason, their need for religion has been a basic need. However, due to the restrictions in Iran on the free presentation of other faiths, they have not been able to experience different religions before believing in atheism.

Knowledge of other religions allows respondents to choose Christianity based on their experience of different faiths and also to make comparisons between Christianity and other religions. Although the respondents were all from the Shiite religion and the religion of Islam, and in a separate section, we will discuss the analogy between the two religions in their answers, the fact that they were able to test other religions before Christianity is worth interpreting:

In my youth, I was more inclined to become a Christian. [She had the experience of working in the home of a Baha'i's house and witnessed their religious meetings] I did not like some Baha'i things; For example, when they met, they called each other "Aba" as if their greeting was Aba. Not everyone was allowed in their congregation, but this is not the case in Christianity, and people from all walks of life can enter the church (Zohreh, 53, Independent Interview, 2022).

The most fundamental point and the difference between Christianity with other religions are in this simple system of acceptance. Islam also has this system of accepting newcomers, but it is difficult to get out of it, which may be an obstacle to initial absorption. The stages of joining other religious ideas, such as Judaism, Baha'ism, and Zoroastrianism, depend on many factors, such as ease of navigation, straightforward acceptance, extensive and regular propaganda system, etc. Christianity is a religious thought that is easy to enter and leave and has few religious requirements. Christianity, especially Protestantism, is propagated by Iranians in various ways inside and outside Iran. Respondents had different spiritual experiences. They have once abandoned their inherited religion and will have less resistance to joining Christianity:

We started going to the [Dervish] monastery. This went on for ten years, which means I went to the sanctuary for ten years. It was an excellent experience. The first

days were perfect. Until I reached intellectual maturity, I studied. Finally, after ten years, from the age of eighteen to the age of twenty-eight, why does something not happen? I was not indirectly accepted when I was defining my revelations... (Neda, 39, Independent Interview, 2022).

I was a Baha'i. I studied until the eighth grade. I was promoting for a while. We were having fun with a friend of mine who was a Baha'i. We had a lot of fun, and I was attracted to the classes. From somewhere, I said no; what does it mean? It is ridiculous. I do not accept this. I saw things I did not like at all. My other friend was a dervish. From the dervishes whose family was constantly taken away, I became Dervishes for a while. It did not make sense to me. I became a dervish; I became a Baha'i, and then I was in the mysticism of the circle for a while... (Asal, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

Flexibility in Christianity, especially in Protestantism, is one way to succeed and attract new believers. New believers state that they can accept only certain parts of Christianity and do not have to accept all the rules and laws dictated by the church. However, the author's observations point out that the closer people try to get more relative to the church system and carry out the commandments, the more likely they are to be accepted into the main body of the church.

I went to study religions because I wanted to research other religions. I wanted to believe in something after four years of disbelief. I followed the mysticism of the circle; I read a little about Zarathustra, which was not attractive to me at all. Christianity fascinated me from the beginning because I found the truth, and it made me feel good. Mysticism gives you a beauty box of truth but does not have beautiful content. Why? For example, they believe that Dr. Mohammad Ali Taheri is the Imam. This is an entirely distorted story because there is no supposed savior to come, and there is no savior at all; if there is one in Christianity, it is to attract the truth. I am not supposed to accept superstition because I am in this religion… (Leila, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

5.2.3.4. Conditions Inside Iran for Women

Respondent women are divided into two groups, one is those who first decide to immigrate due to internal circumstances and become acquainted with Christianity in the country of transit, and the second group of those who, for the reasons stated (social, political, familial reasons), decide to leave Iran after becoming Christians.

This section mainly introduces women to Christianity for other reasons, such as social issues. Women must become acquainted with the church after migrating in the face of the church's preaching system or by changing the religion of a relative. The following is a description of the first group:

You live in a country where you cannot tell the truth. In Iran, you have to lie about everything. Aren't you a Muslim now? Do you have a satellite in your house? You cannot say. Do you drink alcohol? You cannot say. Are you going to a party? You cannot say. Do you have a girlfriend or a boyfriend? You have to lie all the

time. These issues have been on my brain since I was a child. They teach us to show what we are not; Islam has brought this calamity upon us (Neda, 39, Independent Interview, 2022).

Another reason we came here, apart from the personal matter, was that my husband spoke very clearly against Islam everywhere inside Iran, and the intelligence service was looking for him. He was not arrested once, but they talked to him in the car, threatened him, turned him around in the street, and then let him go (Shima, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

In the example below, the respondent`s husband is an Afghan man who married his wife in Iran. According to Iranian law, this marriage is not official. While they were living in Iran, the children born of this marriage were not recognized as Iranians and did not have an identity:

I was in Iran for six-seven years after my marriage. During these six-seven years, my husband and I went from office to office. Because my husband was a dual citizen, we had to go to the offices for everything. I am anxious and afraid to consider returning to Iran, even for a moment. I cannot bear the situation I experienced in those few years (Marta 2, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

In this example, the husband has changed his religion in Iran, but his wife must be aware of his activities. The husband is forced to leave Iran for security reasons and takes his wife and children. In the middle of the road, he informs them they can no longer return to Iran. After staying in Turkey, she starts accompanying her husband and goes to church with him:

My husband told me we had to go to Turkey. "At this time of night?" I asked. Because it was close to the reopening of the children's schools. For example, we were buying stationery. My husband told us to take a short trip and would return a few days later. We came to Turkey. On the way, my husband said we could not bear to Iran. I did not know what to do! ... (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

The situation inside Iran makes many of its residents flee this country and are displaced in neighboring countries. They go through difficult paths and experiences at the origin and destination, which we will address in the section on immigration after conversion.

Iran's internal situation and the creation of various bottlenecks make women prefer to flee to stay. If possible, they tend to leave Iran for multiple reasons, such as family problems or strictures and laws. Sometimes they may become acquainted with Christianity along the way and after settling in transit or final destination countries. It is possible to get acquainted with this religion in any situation and any place:

When we arrived in Turkey, we lost money and had to work. We were working, and my husband met a newly converted Iranian in the workplace. He made an appointment with us to find a home. However, he wanted to take us to church. Do

you think we waited for him for four hours in the rain? He had just become a new believer; he did not know how to invite us to Christ. He just said that we are going to church, then we will go home… (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

In this example, the respondent escapes from a difficult family situation and seeks refuge in Turkey and at his friends' houses. He knew them in Iran before emigrating. His friends were forced to leave Iran because of religious conversion. After the respondent joins them, the propaganda of Christianity begins on her:

We were very close friends. The first people I trusted in Turkey were my friends, who sheltered me. They prayed for me constantly. I have not had this experience before. They prayed for me in peace. They took me to church and preached to me (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

This example is very similar to the previous case. Due to the desire to marry her boyfriend, the respondent leaves Iran without informing the family, and they live in her boyfriend's uncle's house. Uncle has become a Christian boyfriend and invites them to church:

A week after we came here, we became Christians. A few days after we arrived, we were at my husband's uncle's house, who told us we would attend church if he wanted to come with us. At first, my husband was not very welcoming, but I said I wanted to go (Shima, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

In the following example, the respondent had an experience of migrating to Iraq before migrating to Turkey. She has lived there for a while. She is forced to leave the country due to the many pressures and hardships that her mother's Iraqi family creates. Her sister, who has previously immigrated to Turkey, introduces her to Christianity:

My sister had become a Christian before us. She had a church in her house. When we were supposed to come to Turkey, I did not go to my sister's house for fear that my mother would be upset. However, I said no—I want to see a church this time. The church fascinated me as much as my sister talked about it, as much as I had seen it in my dreams. When I entered the church, the worship songs they sang impressed me for a moment. A strange feeling of calm entered my heart, entered my body. I felt where I was and where I was going. Slowly I made my way to church; I liked it more (Elham, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

In the following narration, the husband, who escaped from guilt in Iran and the heavy sentences for selling and smuggling drugs, was also selling drugs in Turkey. To distract the mind, he forces his wife and children to go to church with him:

One morning he took me to the same church I attend now. He took me under the pretext that I wanted to repent. It is also in his testimony. However, he originally wanted to sell drugs to the Iranians. That is why he wanted to go among the Iranians... (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

At two points in the proposed model, we face the issue of immigration, one as an intervention and the other as a consequence. Migration acts as an intervention when women still need to change their religion. Still, due to the reasons mentioned in the context and the internal conditions of Iran, they are forced to leave this country and get acquainted with a new religion on the way or at the destination. Therefore, here, immigration is considered an intervening factor.

The discussion of the consequences of immigration will be explained further.

5.2.4. Women's Primary Strategy: Gradual Belief in Christianity

The respondents must adopt a strategy. Gradual belief in Christianity is the first strategy to gain knowledge about this religion. Religious conversion is a gradual process because, along with the way, every day is different from the day before and after. The converter is trying to increase his knowledge in this field and eliminate doubts. She/ He tries to prove the legitimacy of his choice along the way and to the end that he continues this way. It may deviate from this path at any stage or change it to another religion and choice. In short, hesitation in choice is possible at any stage. However, in this study, those who were satisfied with the intention of Christianity until the moment of recording the interviews were examined; even if they had changed their sects or even had doubts, they could convince themselves and continue on their way.

> Many have turned away from the faith because of the moods in Christianity. Many returned to Iran from the lies they saw. Many converted from Christianity. Many went to other religions, atheism! ... all behave similarly to Islam. They also opened the fund (heart gifts, which are one-tenth of the outcome donated to the church) to earn money. Some are refugees and have no money. These customs are in Protestantism. We do not have these customs in Catholicism. Anything you touch is like Islam; it has only become more fashionable. They just told you, "You are free." Yes, I came from Protestantism, but I quickly withdrew (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

In the stage of gradual faith in Christianity, two factors help women to walk more decisively along the path and to put aside doubts. The following are two factors that play a crucial role in perpetuating the conversion from Islam to Christianity:

5.2.4.1. Comparison of Islam and Christianity

The comparison between Islam and Christianity is challenging and requires expertise. Theologians are still working on these issues, and the religion the researcher believes in takes a different angle from Islam. Indeed, Islam has been unpleasant for women who have left Islam and converted to Christianity. Otherwise, they would still have believed in it. They redefine Islam from different angles and based on their experiences in life, and the analogy between the previous and the next religion seems logical. Standard views can be extracted from women's comments, some of which will be mentioned below:

Because the idea that Islam gave me was that if someone converts from Islam to another religion, she/he is an apostate, and her/his place is hell. We had no other choice… (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

The Bible tells the story of a wicked woman about to be stoned. Jesus says that anyone who has no sin should be stoned. There is no one on earth without sin. The evil woman will be saved. How can Christ be so forgiving? Compare this with a story in Islam. Ali wanted to kill a commander in a war. He pauses for a moment. They ask why they are waiting. He answers because I am angry right now. He leaves the scene to calm his anger but beats the commander on the neck when he returns. Well, you are not mad, do not kill him! What matters is the custodians of that thinking. Whenever we talk about the difference, some people say Christians also fought the Crusades. I also answer, did Christ fight? He did not resist. However, in Islam, it started with the sword from the very beginning. I am telling the difference between the Qur'an and the Bible. I say the difference between Muhammad and Jesus. Muhammad is still human, Jesus is God (Neda, 39, Independent Interview, 2022).

Christ says to forgive your enemies and pray for them. I have never heard Islam says to forgive your enemies and pray for them. I was shocked when I heard it in Christianity. Can a person forgive her/his enemy and pray for her/him? (Marta 2, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

I remember verses about retribution. Moreover, this was while Christ wrote that you should forgive in any case. How many times can we forgive? He says not seven times but forgives seven thousand times or more. A dimension of psychology comes to mind that when a person forgives someone, it does not mean that the person did not do it; it means that you do not carry a load and your nerves and psyche are at peace... (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

I found the truth I was looking for. Before I came to believe it, I felt lost and inadequate. When I was a Muslim, even though I followed the rules of my religion, I felt a great distance between myself and God (the God of Islam) because God does not love sinners, but the Christian God loves sinners. He hates sin but accepts the sinner. Every teaching of Jesus and the words of the Bible show how Jesus welcomes sinners and loves them… (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

In Islam, I saw people praying for someone who had died after his death. I could not accept this in Islam as a person who does not pray during his lifetime. While Christ says that whatever you want to gain as a gift for your hereafter is in the time you are on earth. Moreover, you have a person alive between you and God, unlike Muhammad, who is dead. We have a person who has not committed any sin, not Muhammad, to whom Gabriel says, O Muhammad, repent for your sins and the sins of your people. Why should I read the book of someone who was a sinner? I have always had a problem with the murder of Muhammad in Islam. Still, no one in the world has made the slightest mention of the evil of Jesus Christ; even those who do not believe in God and religion accept the character of Christ as a historical figure (Hamideh, 32, Independent Interview, 2022).

> As a Muslim, I also performed rituals; for example, I did not touch the Qur'an; I kissed it a hundred times to avoid going to hell. I was afraid of suffering. I worshipped God for fear of hell. I did not worship God, but now I want Himself. He is close to me because he is inside me. He is really inside me, and I live with him every moment. Early in the morning, I pray first, but I know that God wants me with my sins (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

One of the church's teachings is to compare Islamic and Christian sources to persuade convertors. The church system does not just convey its teachings and tries to win this competition by comparing the Qur'an and the Bible. The church's educational system uses this comparison to highlight Christianity in the minds further. Although this comparison is made involuntarily in the minds of believers, the Church always tries to show the differences, even in sermons:

> I open the Bible, and it talks to me word by word. I had opened the Qur'an many times, but the text that came had nothing to do with what I had to say to God. I compared Islam to Christianity. You read the Bible and the Qur'an. The God of the Bible is the God of love, and the God of the Qur'an is the God of anger. I read the meaning of the Qur'an in Persian twice. However, after a few months, I understand that these two books are not comparable (Shima, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I read the Qur'an several times but did not get anything. I read the Bible and saw that it is full of love and affection. Jesus Christ never spoke of war; he did not seek his soul. He did not seek to kill anyone to seize his wife and children. He did not seek decolonization. I found love and affection in the Bible. For example, a woman was an adulteress who wanted to stone her, and she saw that all the Pharisees (mullahs of that time) wanted to stone her. They told Christ, "What shall we do? Do you hit the first stone, or should we hit it? They wanted to test Christ. Jesus, however, said that the first stone should be struck by someone who has not committed any sin, and this made everyone think that they had committed many sins and thrown the rocks and left. Christ said to the woman, everyone is gone. Go and do not sin. However, the woman became a great supporter of Christ who remained on the cross of Christ (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

From the Christian point of view, Christianity is not a religion but a form of thought. That is why the definition of God is different. "Of course, we say that Christianity is not a religion. It is a kind of thinking and a kind of life." Therefore, from the point of view of believers, converting to Christianity is not a change of religion but a choice of a new path:

> Christianity is not a religion at all. Religion itself brings separation. Religion acts as a mediator between me and God, which separates itself. Christianity is a relationship between God and me (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Christianity is not a religion. Christianity is a belief in the heart. It means to understand Christ with all your heart and to be able to communicate with it. I have

never accepted Christianity as a religion (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Let me say we have yet to have a religious change. There is no religious change in the Christian faith. We chose a path. Because wherever religion comes, the pressure happens to increase. We do not have a belief and did not change our religion. At some point, for whatever reason, I chose to believe in Christ and live like Christ (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

Although Islam tries to place itself next to the religions before it and get approval, it does not accept the diversity of beliefs in its society as it should. According to Islam, the God of the Trinity, which most Christians believe in, calls into question the oneness of God:

> I believe Christianity is logical, and having a god other than the God of the Trinity is impossible. What is the God of the Trinity? The God of the Trinity is a single essence in three different persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What does it mean? The father is loving, the son is loved, and the Holy Spirit is the love between father and son. We say in Christianity that God is the essence of love. God's love is within him; this is an action, not potential. If God's love is possible, there is a defect in God's existence; since God is perfect, his love is also real; who loves must have a lover—the one loved in Christ. Of course, Christ is a Jewish term; "It is better to say here that the son, the person to be loved is the son, and the ruling spirit between them is holy spirits… That is how the Trinity was fully justified to me, and I accepted it logically (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

According to Christianity's definition of God, God in their lives has a different meaning from when they were Muslims. "Christianity portrayed the opposite of a god I knew. A God is full of hope and love. A God who loves me for me. He gave his life for me." As someone who has experienced Islam and grown up in a Muslim community, I fully understand the difference in their views before and after the conversion. Muslims have not performed well in representing Islam. Muslims try to keep society away from sin and crime by portraying a constantly watchful and angry God, while one of the heavy consequences of this fear can be the departure from Islam:

> I turned to the God of love, not anger and resentment, because I was full of anger and resentment and did not want to have anger and resentment. "God could not be found! Look, God was far away ... God was far away. The fear was that God would take the hammer and punish. However, this God is the God of love. God came to earth. God became a human. He took my pain. He suffered—a person who does not suffer closely can understand me. I bend and straighten five times a day; what happens? I have to have a romantic relationship with God. In Christianity, God lives with me. He is always with me. Not far from me. I do not go forward with fear. I took the thread of love. God was far away in Islam. God was scary. He was sitting far away... (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

Does God allow you to know him? The answer in Christianity is yes. God manifested Himself as a human on earth. God walked beside us. He endured the suffering that humanity suffers. He lived with us and finally shed his blood on the cross for us to be forgiven of our sins because a human is born sinful in his/ her nature. Because of what we did in heaven, God shed his blood for us to be cleansed of our sins, which was the last thing God did for us. The main difference between Islam and Christianity is. In Christianity, God let us know him, he is with us, and we understand him. However, in Islam, he always looks down on us. He is always angry, and he has constantly threatened us. While in Christianity, God always invites us to love and cherish each other and speaks of peace (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

The image of God in Christianity and Islam is entirely different and contradictory. Muslims, based on the Qur'an and the punishments that have been prescribed, have established rulings such as execution, amputation, and retribution in society as the primary laws. Although these laws are intended to create order in the community, they also have adverse psychological effects, one of the most important of which was mentioned in the statements of the respondents: Fear of a punisher God. While the church community has realized the weakness of Islam, it has skillfully been able to fill this gap according to the teachings of Christianity and define a God who is as merciful and gracious as a Father.

I think my daughter was 3-4 years old then. In the library, we had a Qur'an with a beautiful cover. My husband and I read the translation of the verses to her every night, but because it was to promote violence, we decided not to read anymore (Samira, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

Iran is the only Shiite religious government in the world. Shiites are waiting for the advent of the Twelfth Imam. Accordingly, the Iranian government is conducting extensive propaganda to promote the ideology of staying under the guise of the doctrine of Mahdism. The women who participated in this study were from the Shiite community of Iran. The life of Christianity, like Shiism, is tied to expectation. There are differences and similarities between these two perspectives that will be more understandable from the language of responsive women:

I am not waiting for a savior; he saved me. Now someone may be waiting for me, but I do not think about it. If there was salvation, he kept me. I came out of the emptiness I had. Islam is waiting for a savior more than Christianity (Samira, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

First, the Shiites have one of the Imams in their imagination. We have nothing to do with him. Our savior is God. He is our savior. This God came to save us. He says that God loved the world so much that he gave his only son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Why a savior? You see, now human's relationship with God is damaged. The Savior corrects this relationship. Faith in Jesus bridges the gap between God and humans. It brings a relationship with God from slavery to a parent-child relationship. Believers inherit the kingdom

of Jesus. I am now a child of God, and God is my father. I have salvation through the blood of Jesus, so everyone is waiting for salvation, which is in Jesus' hands (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

Imam al-Zaman is the product of the thoughts and ideas of Islam, which is different from Christianity. Every religion believes that a savior will appear. I saw an apocalyptic documentary about the belief of all faiths. He also criticized them for their religious beliefs. Christianity also considers Jesus a savior based on the Bible. It is said in the Word that God said that one day I would go, and one day I would return, and he would be judged. There is a big difference between Christ and the Imam al-Zaman; they are incomparable. Imam al-Zaman is a human being who is said to have disappeared suddenly, has not died for a thousand years, and has a wife and children. However, in Christianity, it is said that Christ was the Word, the Word was the Word of God, and the Word himself. We have no answer for all that is in the word of God (Aftab, 35, Independent Interview, 2022).

The reading of Mahdism and the resurrection of Christ are different. Sometimes Mahdism is in the form of waiting for the reappearance, so some do nothing except wait. Another reading means the responsibility of waiting for the promised return and what mission it will leave.

14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching and your faith are useless. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Some Christians and Muslims do not consider waiting merely a historical moment. Instead, it is seen as a constant effort to bring the promised government to power. Shiites believe the Mahdavi government should be established worldwide for the promised savior. Some in Christianity also believe that the ground must be prepared for the return of Jesus.

We are not waiting for a savior in Christianity. We are waiting for his return. Jesus himself is the Savior. We await Him to return and bring justice and a kingdom to earth. Jesus once came to earth and was crucified. When you believe in Him, you accept Him as your Savior and receive salvation. He has done his job; he goes to heaven and returns one day; why? Because now the devil is ruling the world. If the devil did not lead, there would not be many fights, diseases, sins, catastrophes, wars, and famines. So now there is no complete rule of Christ on earth. He works among the believers and saves every day. The Word of God says that when everyone hears the good news, Christ will return and make his kingdom permanent. We are waiting for Him to establish this kingdom all over the world. Now this salvation and this kingdom are in the heart of each of us believers, but we

are waiting for Him to come and for this kingdom to be eternal (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

> According to the word of God, Christ will return, and the true kingdom of Christ will be established. If we want to examine it deeply, I can read the first sin of Adam and Eve. It brought misery and death to humanity. However, Christ was the new man and Mary the new Eve. God came in the form of Christ, humbled himself, put himself in place of man, atoned for his sins, and set man free. Humans should be reconciled to God and be able to enter heaven. This is a point of hope for me. The hope inside me affects my actions and behavior rather than trying to follow a dark and empty path (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

Although much is said in the Bible about the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 20:15, 23, 52 and Acts 32: 13-33, etc.), the church system has failed to convince all believers about the subject of the savior. There may still be some ambiguities in this regard for some believers, who will never accept this issue of Christianity.

> They believe Christ has a secondary return, but I do not accept this. This issue may have yet to be opened for me. I will be a guest on this planet once. My body will return to this planet again. I must leave a positive impression on myself during this time by doing good and loving my kind animals. I believe in this and Christ because I read all the books and prophets and felt what an art pleasure it is to love. However, I did not accept that a savior would come. In the mysticism of the circle, I did not get that the promised savior was Mohammad Ali Taheri (Leila, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

From the Iranian government's point of view, women in society are expected to watch the patriarchal domination of Islam over their lives with their eyes and ears, to put aside demands and act on orders that are becoming increasingly difficult. This has overshadowed the dynamism of Islam and closed the doors of civil society development. In such a situation, women who have emerged from religious backgrounds can neither endure the laws that govern Iranian society nor suppress the need for religion, so they turn to other options, of which Christianity is one.

> Why should you accept Islam? Why should not my salary and rights be equal to a man's? Why should my blood money be half a man's blood money? Why do I have to be crushed everywhere? "What is the excellent point in Islam? (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Christianity says a man should worship his wife like a church, and a woman should worship her husband like a cross. For example, I liked this verse very much ... I saw a place for women here (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> More women now believe in Christ. It is because of the pain, the need, the pressure, and the hurt they saw. I do not mean to say that men were not harmed in our society, but women were harmed more ... So, it is easier for women to accept it... (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

I believe there is no difference between men and women in Christianity. They are treated equally. Men cannot do many things, but I have seen women do. Many things that men cannot do; women have. Equality is fundamental in Christianity. In Islam, it was always patriarchal, or the word was always man's words. I saw in many Christian families, everything is equal. It greatly fascinated me (Elham, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

Most women refer to anti-woman laws in Islam and compare them to Christianity. The references from the Qur'an show the concern of women about the disruption of their families. In Islam, men are allowed to have four official wives. Men can beat their wives. The issue of divorce in Islam and women's rights when leaving a marriage is fundamental.

The first epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians (chapter 11):

7 A man ought not to cover his head,[a] since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. 8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10 It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own[b] head, because of the angels.

As soon as women experience equal rules and conditions in marriage, they will not have questions in other more general matters. For example, most of them do not ask why the name Eve is repeated in the Bible as a perpetual sinner. Or the question does not arise that according to the Bible, if Eve is considered the main culprit and responsible for the original sin, then does it mean that Christ became the victim of Eve's sin? (See Timothy and Genesis) However, here are a few examples:

In general, in the New Testament period, three punishments have been considered for women until the end of history: 1- Suffering from the original sin of Eve, 2- Deprivation of education, 3- Pain of childbirth and the rule of husbands; As it is stated in the New Testament: *"12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man;[b] she must be quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women[c] will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety"* (1 Epistle of Paul to Timothy: Chapter 2, verses 15-12). When I asked women the difference between men and women in Christianity, most did not mention the above. For women, it did not matter how they were viewed in the Bible. As a researcher, it does not matter how the church responds to these ambiguities. Still, it is essential to know why equality has become a problem for women in Islam, and they have bypassed it in Christianity.

It does not seem to be a problem for women until the verses of the Bible become religious precepts and social laws. Some Qur'an and Bible verses make women's living conditions difficult and limited. Still, Islam and Christianity differ in how they are implemented in society. Equality is not an issue for women, but for them to ensure a

more stable family than social equality and individual identity. Any law or verse that targets the strength of their family becomes a concern:

It is essential in Christianity that every man has a wife. There is no concubine in Christianity, and sex is accepted only in marriage and moral and heart commitment. It is considered a sin outside of that (Aftab, 35, Independent Interview, 2022).

Islam affirms having four wives who cannot guarantee the stability of the family at all. At the same time, in the Gospel of Matthew, Christ strongly emphasizes and commands that we do not divorce; you must be so loving that you do not divorce your wife, and he commands the man that as I love the church, you should love your wife. He oversees the women that just as I am the head of the church, your husband is the same to you, and this is how he keeps the family. We do not have anything like polygamy in Christianity, and it even says this is wrong... (Leila, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

It is stated in Sura Nisaa (The Woman) that if you make a mistake, your husband can warn you the first time and hit you the second time, and stay away from you for the third time. These things are not in Christianity, and equality can be seen. There is no woman in Islam and she has no privileges (Samira, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

I have always had a problem with Sura Nisaa because, in Islam, a woman has always been enslaved, while in Christianity, both sexes are respected. According to the Qur'an, a woman has always been inferior, but in Christianity, it is said that woman was created from the left rib of a man, which means that no one will ever harm the side of his heart. In Christianity, there is respect between men and women, like Jesus's respect for his mother... (Reyhaneh, 32, Independent Interview, 2022).

As much as a woman is low and a man is high in Islam, the opposite is true in Christianity. The Bible says that a woman is the head of a family and God has not made any difference in creation for man and woman, and the same spirit of God that was blown in man is also blown on a woman. The same restrictions apply to women as to men. For example, if adultery is forbidden for a woman, even daydreaming is prohibited for a man. God mainly raises the woman and lowers the man, and if a verse were revealed in the Bible, it would not be the case that it addresses man and woman separately and addresses them and instructs them both to pray and not to commit adultery (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

We have a verse in the Bible that says that a man separates from his family because of a woman and joins his wife and no longer belongs to his family. We have another verse that says that if you do not love your wife, none of your prayers will be accepted. Alternatively, in another verse, it says that Jesus Christ is the offspring of a woman, and there is a verse in which the first people to feel His presence after the resurrection of Christ were women. Women are important figures in the Bible. Why is it said that a woman dies from a left gear? For their hearts to be one (Hamideh, 32, Independent Interview, 2022).

Although there are criticisms of Islam and its customary laws, critics of Christianity have not remained silent. Moreover, they have challenged various aspects of this religion and the status of women. According to Bible verses, women are also secondary in this historical text, and not only have they been addressed, but men have defined their duties.

It seems that Christianity should be reconsidered as well, although the church system, especially the Iranian church, prefers to remain silent in this regard, despite its numerous female followers. However, the literacy and awareness of women attracted to the church also allow the system to be less accountable.

> There is a difference between Islam and Christianity, most women turn to Christianity, and Iranian women prefer Christianity more because they get more of their rights, and Christianity defends them more. However, men are less likely to accept Christianity; for example, some who have become Christians do not come to church in a way that they still adhere to some Islamic law, and somehow because they are in power, which is more favorable to them (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

> The status of women... The quality of women is the best and highest in Christianity and the lowest in Islam. As soon as there is a ceremony in Islam, the first feed the men and then the women, which shows the status of men and women. For example, I have this condition; unfortunately, I now respect my husband, but I have to leave the best part of the food for my husband, and we will eat the rest. "Well, that is not interesting (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

As in any ancient text, there is a critique of the biblical view of women. The fact that women in this position are also trying to become more aware of their rights and are sensitive to the establishment of equality shows the mental development of women. They no longer accept whatever society dictates, whether it be in the name of Islam or Christianity:

> Meeting many feminists has made me more sensitive about women. The things I see in the Bible or those who address God or Jesus are usually men. If he wants to name women, he mentions their names; otherwise, all the conversations are handled by men. I have discussed this many times in friendly gatherings and noticed this difference in the Bible. However, the words are so sweet and loving that I try to learn a lesson. I do not think that these things will disrupt one's faith. I believe in him, but I also see these differences and get pressured and jealous. However, I have not seen anyone talk about women or seen such a thing (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

> In Islam, it is said that we were created from mud, and God breathed life into us, but in Christianity, it is said that she pulled a rib from a man's rib and breathed into it and became a woman. This is precisely the question of why we call it ribs. I also had this question that the answer they gave me was that he pulled from the man's side, did not come to cut from the man's head or cut from the man's leg because if

you pull from her leg, it means that the woman is lower than the man. She is under the man's foot, and if she pulls from his head, it means that the woman is higher than the man, and she is on his head; God pulled from his side, which means that the woman is next to the man. I feel places are still being abused in the case of women, and it is all addressed to brothers and gentlemen (Sahar, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

To find more motivation for the new religion, women compare the new religion with the old one. In this comparison, they point out several notes. The difference between the concept of God in Islam and Christianity, the difference between salvation or savior in these two religions, and the difference between men and women in the teachings of these two religions. It seems that from women's point of view, Christianity has convinced them more than the previous religion in these three cases.

5.2.4.2. Characterizing of Christianity

New believers learn from the church's teachings to emulate the Bible and its accounts of the way of life of Jesus Christ. Therefore, reference to the Bible is one of the requirements of church teaching and the life of a Christian. Biblical characters, like a pattern, replace the ways they had experienced in earlier religions.

> A Christian always sees what the father and son have done, and he does the same (Zohreh, 53, Independent Interview, 2022).

> This is Christianity's whole purpose: to go to perfection, to become like Christ, and to follow the example of Jesus Christ. This is the purpose of becoming like God... (Aftab, 35, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Christianity is a new way and attitude, and a faithful Christian chooses exactly Christ as his model of life and lives according to the words and behavior of Christ (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

It seems logical that women should look for alternatives after separating from their previous religion. The Bible is a good choice with many examples of characterizations and instructive stories, especially since for Christians, Jesus Christ is a perfect figure who can show both appropriate behaviors and healthy lifestyles, and for women who have gone through difficult experiences of early motherhood, cold family relationships, domestic violence, and social injuries. They can be a good parent, mother, or constant companion, even if their physical presence is not tangible:

> I did not come across any verses about sex when I read the Bible. The Bible addresses issues referred to as humanity: live, forgive, and pray before anything else. The greatest commandment of the Bible is to worship and love God with all your mind and with all your heart and all your intellect, and then the second commandment, which is exactly like the first commandment, is to love everyone as God. If a society wants to follow all the commandments of the Bible, what will happen to that society? Does it take on the color of war, divorce, and hypocrisy?

No. Indeed, the community is growing. "Children, women, and men live in prosperity and peace." (Leila, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

The first time I sat down to read the Bible, got my attention, and pulled my chair forward, I heard Psalm 4 and was relieved: "Answer me (A) when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; (B) have mercy(C) on me and hear my prayer (D)" "It simply came to my notice then. I felt he was calling me like he was telling me to come forward. Psalm 4: 4 says, "Tremble and[d] do not sin;(J) when you are on your beds, (K) search your hearts and be silent." Psalm 37:3 mentions, "3. Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture." When I read this, I remembered my daughter. I had left her and fled Iran and got stuck in Greece. When I read this, I remembered my daughter. I had left him, fled Iran, and got stuck in Greece." I met the church in Greece, and they saved me from my situation (Sahar, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

Christianity means understanding the true sense. A Christian tries to live like Christ and be a real human being. We are not perfect, but we are trying to live better and help others, you know? Christianity is not just about saying I pray for you; it is about helping you take a step forward (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

Verses in the Bible also refer to the fact that the followers of Jesus Christ should follow him as an example:

Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Jesus did. (1 John 2:6)

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow me." (A) (Luke 9:23)

Christianity has characteristics for women that may be bold and faint but still affect continuing or deviating from the path they have begun. Some of the traits mentioned by the women were selected from the interviewees. These characteristics were derived from their personal and religious experience and a comparison of Islam and Christianity. Christianity has had new experiences for respondents. Many of the inner and outer needs that were not met in life are defined in Christianity. These needs include closeness to God, salvation, peace, love, and freedom.

Christianity made me happy and took away my sadness. For example, as a Christian Muslim who was immersed in Islam, I lacked peace and love. Christianity made me happy and took away my sadness. Christianity made up for my shortcomings (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

One of the most critical issues for women in Christianity is women's closeness to God. "The basis of Christianity is that you talk to God, and God speaks to you." Women say they can talk to God easily without fear of anger. The form and type of relationship with God change from Islam to Christianity.

Christianity means living with God, being close to God, hearing His voice, and communicating with Him ... A Christian life according to the words and promises of God and believing in Him. One who does not think of gathering in this world but feels of gathering for heaven ... Both in Islam and Christianity, I obeyed the laws of religion without any reason. I do not accept the word of God for the happiness of anyone. When I speak in church, one person is not enough for me to increase the number of people who listen to me, and I do not show the word of God's truth unreal, which is not from the word of God. I must walk the path of truth to avoid falling into this sin. When I find the truth, I believe in it and remain steadfast in truth. I have seen the hand of God many times in the problems and hardships of my life, and there is no room for doubt. Your faith will be stronger if you are always in prayer and thanksgiving. The distance between God and the believers and his true children is the distance between their prayers (Hamideh, 32, Independent Interview, 2022).

My relationship with God was perfect. Many times, I saw God in a dream. I saw a god in a dream that I did not think would love humans. God communicates with me when I speak with him, and this is not an illusion. These must be noticed. I believe God hears; God says I hear, and He shows His love for us in His Word. He calls us beloved, the jewel of the ring, the pupil of my eye, and he has made us cute. These are very sweet for me... (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

The doctrine of atonement is one of the central themes of Christian theology. This doctrine is, in short, the event of Christ's death on the cross to free man from sin. The issue of redemption is not separate from the point of salvation. Salvation in Christianity depends on the concept of redemption. Hence, sometimes the exact meaning is taken from these two words. Christians believe that because of original sin, sin entered into the essence of man. The nature of man became sinful, and the issue of saving man from inherent vice is critical. According to them, the coming of Jesus had no purpose other than to carry out God's plan to save man.

"God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy, 4: 2).

Therefore, it must be said that the truth of salvation in Christianity is God's decision and practical action to save people from the bondage of sin. Thus, salvation is achieved only through God and through the sacrificial death of his son Jesus for the salvation of the condemned man, and there is no other way for it other than God's direct intervention.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other names under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Act 4: 12).

Salvation in Christian theology refers to the mystery of man's liberation from sin and his return to grace by God, accomplished by divine will and his saving love. This redemptive act covers the entire range of human history from the time of original sin and the fall of grace. The salvation of man in Christianity is based on the crucifixion and death of Christ. Every person can become a believer by reciting a simple prayer the

moment they believe in Christianity, and according to Christians, they will be saved at that moment.

> I am saved now. I am held in Christ. I know I will go to heaven and be with Jesus Christ. I see myself saved (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

> If I want to look deeper, I can start with the first sin of Adam and Eve, which caused their downfall, and the fruit of it for humanity was misery and death. Adam and Eve were arrogant and wanted to be in the place of God, become a world of good and evil, and eat the forbidden fruit. However, Christ, the new man and man, and Mary, the new Eve, did the opposite. God came in the form of Christ, humbled Himself, put Himself in place of man, atoned for man's sins, and set man free, and this was contrary to what Adam did. By what he did, Christ saved man once again, opened the way of salvation for man, and made man reconcile with God and be able to enter heaven and be close to God. This is a point of hope for me. I understand this with the depth of my being and the hope created within me; it has influenced every action and behavior in my life, every goal I pursue, and everything I do. The hardships I endured were economic and emotional. My financial difficulties started when I separated from my father and left my father's house, I never saw him again, and he did not support me. My mother did not help me and caused me to stand completely on my own two feet and work independently. I was the man of my life; My parents. There was no love for me. I did not receive any financial aid. I was utterly alone in all my emotional problems. These were the hardships of my life. There were many dangers, but God saved me from all these hardships like a miracle (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

> God called me, brought me to Turkey, and saved me, and I am thrilled now that I am a child of God and have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior. God said you are my lost children. I was lost, and God was looking for me, and in time He brought me here according to His plan to save me. Because I have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior, I have been told to call on me in times of trouble...Even said in the storms of your life ... I calm the storms of your life. I am at peace at all times. I thank God. I thank my God in times of trouble. I also thank Him in poverty because God is always with my family and me (Marta 2, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

> If Christ had not entered our lives, either I would be dead now, or I would have committed suicide because it was like a habit for me, and I was very depressed, or if I were alive, we would have been 100 percent separated from my husband. God passed us in any way (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

Christians use love as the essential principle in propagating their school. The New Testament is full of moral precepts and is frequent in loving and tolerating people, observing the ethical issues of order, and living in peace everywhere (II Corinthians, 11, p. 15 and Romans, 15, p. 33). There is talk of aversion to violent acts (Meta, 5, pp. 38-48 and Romans, 12, pp. 17-21).

When the church's teachings are based on the Bible, definitions such as salvation and love are conveyed to the followers, which are also emphasized in the Bible. However, the weakness of many new believers is the same concept of love because it is new to those from the Islamic community, especially women.

> I think Christianity is love and the path of truth; on top of the door of our church is written kindness; if you cannot hold back, you are on track to Christianity. Christ is the one who can go the way of the gospel and do what he wants. Jesus Christ says that love is everything. I saw much hatred in Iran. I am sure that the spirit that prevails in Iran is hatred. That is why Iranians have so much trouble because I believe that the nature of hate in Iranians is much greater than love. "There is, or there is no love at all. It means we have not understood love yet (Zohreh, 53, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I followed the laws of Islam because I was afraid of God's punishment, but in Christianity, I follow the rules of religion because I love Jesus and because Jesus loves me. He was crucified for me. Because he loved me and because he is the God of love (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

Women come from a tradition and a society where love is not understood. Many of them enter Christianity with difficult experiences. When the behavior of family members changes after joining Christianity, they trust this religion with more confidence. If they cannot compensate for past shortcomings, they practice love and show it to others.

> There was no love at all between my family. I saw it after I became a Christian. I saw that what I lacked was real love. Because no one loved us, not even my mother, I realized that when I became a believer. True love is not to give your daughter in marriage at a young age... (Fatemeh, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I did not taste the love in my married life and in my parents' house ... Well, my father worked so hard, and my mother did. I have confidence and support in love. I feel the warmth of love. Christianity taught me to love. It taught me to love. It taught me to love God. It taught me to be close to God. Christianity gave me new life. It showed love, and I tried to be in love and live. Despite my mistakes, I tasted the love of God; I want to give that love to everyone (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

Respondents stated that the lack of specific conditions for worshipping and expressing faith in Christ was one of the reasons for turning to this religion. Of course, this freedom in worship is significant in various forms, such as not relying on intermediaries, not being dependent on coercion in actions, and not using a particular language. Believers are satisfied that they do not have to perform obligatory religious acts like Islam for their faith to be accepted or that they can perform actions of faith that were previously forbidden in Islam:

Early in my faith, I thought I should no longer dance or smile because I believed in Christ. I have to be very formal. I understand that Christ is not against my joy, against my balance, against celebration; Incidentally, Christ lived on flat earth so that we can live in harmony... (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

In Iranian society, the focus is more on women. If a girl has a boyfriend, they ask why you have one. However, if a boy has a girlfriend, they say he is a boy, and he can do whatever he wants ... I feel very accessible now ... now it depends on what you see freedom in ... But I found the space I did not have before in Christ, do you understand? (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

In the first year, I saw that if anyone cried in church, it was a cry of joy and sincere worship. Everyone worshipped in a certain way, and there were no special rules for prayer. One stood, one sat, and another worshipped by clapping. Early on, touching and jumping up and down seemed ridiculous, and I thought, wouldn't it look silly if I did? After those with whom I had become intimate, I asked about it, and they said that you could worship God in any way you want... There is no compulsion in Christianity, and this attracted me a lot. There was no need for fasting, praying and praying at a specific time, etc. (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

Christianity has fewer religions and practices. Although there are requirements in this religion, if someone does not attend church every week or fast on special days, he will not leave the circle of believers. Women have highlighted the difference between Islam and Christianity's compulsory and non-compulsory religious practices. The fact that there are acts such as the five daily prayers and the monthly fast during Ramadan has been another factor in abandoning Islam and converting to Christianity. However, some mandatory shares specifically address women, and in Iran, there has been a challenge between the government and opponents of the compulsory hijab:

The judgment that God has given us is not a difficult one. He says do not lie. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not look at your neighbor, do good to your parents ... Look, he asked us for these things. These ten sentences are light, are they? However, in Islam, there are 362 Shari'ah. A man can marry more than one time... should keep a hijab ... Do not polish your nail… These are trivial issues, but I am discussing their pressures (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

Christianity does not have a specific definition, unlike Islam. Islam has a framework such as a prayer, Khums (one-fifth of the poverty), hijab, etc., to become a true Muslim ... I was attracted to Christianity because there was no need to fast and pray at a specific time. Communication was only heartfelt (Samira, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

In Christianity, everything is given to you for free, unlike in Islam, where even if a good deed is done, it is only for a reward. Over time, I became more and more attracted to and became a church minister. In Christianity, if we take one step, God will come to us a thousand steps, and I feel it. Interestingly, like Islam, God does

not bless you according to your deeds and gives you this grace, mercy, and salvation for free (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

Shiite Islam believes in intercession. The dead, especially the Imams, can receive their needs sooner by interceding with God. That is why the Shiites decorate the graves of the dead and visit the graves of the dead, especially the Imams. In Christianity, because they believe that Jesus is not over, the needs are raised directly with Jesus or God. Therefore, the view that exists in Shiite Islam is also criticized:

> When it is possible to have a direct relationship with God ... Look, at that time, I was meditating. However, now I sit directly and talk to God like two friends. I feel sad; I sit in the corner of my house, talk to God, and relax. I now speak directly to God. "Even if I made a mistake, I will still go to him, apologize to him, and know I will be forgiven." (Neda, 39, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Why should I go after the dead God when God is alive? I remember the stones I worshipped. For example, we went to the shrine of the Imams. I adored them and got no answer, but when there is a God who is still alive and is supposed to come one day, and I can talk to him, and he hears my voice, why go to the god of the dead who is not at all? (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Do you ask for the living or the dead? If I want something, I get it from the residents, not the dead ... When Jesus Christ is alive, God is happening; why should I ask the dead? Slowly it opened to me who Jesus Christ is, who God is, what Jesus came to do, and why did he leave? (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

As mentioned, one of the problems of understanding Islam correctly was worship in Arabic and a language other than the parents' language. Christianity has no restrictions, and anyone can worship in any language. This is an advantage in Christianity and has made it easier to understand the verses of the Bible so that women, in their answers, referred to memorizing verses:

> What I was looking for was worship in my first language. I asked the evangelist, "Do you write prayers?" He said, "No, sister!" What you read in the Bible stays in your mind. You become acquainted with the words, and the Holy Spirit flows from your language. I did not know these and was embarrassed to pray in the congregation. One or two days after I became a believer, we went to church, and they asked me, "Are you praying? I said I do not know how to pray. They noted that one or two sentences are enough for prayer. I just said this: Thank God. I was very embarrassed. I was afraid to say one sentence wrong, and they would laugh at me (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

There is no line between positive and negative church intervention in the affairs of its followers. There is no line between positive and negative church intervention in the affairs of its followers. In this matter, however, there is no doubt that the church and its officials monitor the followers' lives to establish order in the church under their

command and correctly carry out biblical commands. However, the severity and weakness of this issue may vary from church to church:

> One day the pastor spoke of participation in his sermon, which means that, for example, everything in his heart should be said to him as a pastor, even if it was the darkest days of life, even if it was the ugliest days of life. Well, I had two. After that day, the pastor guided me very well. The next day, he did not behave as I talked to him ... He was even kinder to me. He paid more attention to me (Neda, 39, Independent Interview, 2022).

The following is an example of a woman who abandons her child and her husband due to family problems and gets stuck on the Greek border. During the twenty days, she resides in Greece, he takes refuge in the Iranian Church and becomes a Christian there. With the mediation of the priest, she returns to Iran and is again abused by her family members, and leaves them for the second time and seeks asylum in Turkey:

> I was there for twenty days and took lessons, and because my circumstances were exceptional, the pastor talked to my husband. I handed myself over to the Iranian consulate and returned to Iran, where my rewards began. I became a Christian, was baptized, and returned to Iran with a small Bible (Sahar, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

The church, in the view of the pastor and its officials, forbids actions, and the strictures may be relative:

> The teachings of the churches are different. There are many churches in this city. When they came to consecrate my house, a book from another religion was on the table. The pastor told me to take this book from home. I read the book for information. Now that you have more information, I would like to ask you. What is the prohibition on reading some books? We read that it should be added to our knowledge, so why do they forbid these things? Alternatively, I see many of my friends who drink but worry that someone will notice. Well, you are eating, why shouldn't anyone know? ... Why is it a secret! The pastor of the church passed in front of our house every day. I wanted to sit on the balcony and smoke a hookah, but the others told me not to smoke on the patio! If the pastor sees me, what will happen? This is what I do. I like it, so why should they forbid me? What is the difference between this and Islam now? I do not want to have anything imprisoned or forced (Sahar, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

> When I wanted to get a divorce, the pastor and the church were totally against it. They prevented us from saying that you cannot get a divorce as a Christian ... I asked why? Moreover, that is one of the questions I never got answered. How does Jesus Christ agree that two people living together in the same house under the same roof but having problems together? They replied that it was written in the Bible that it must be adultery or betrayal. I also said that you are promoting adultery, and to get rid of this life, one of the two parties must betray for this life to end. We lived together for a while. This led him to establish a relationship with someone else. The

church gets involved, but when? When that subject is mentioned in the Bible, or they feel responsible and enter it... (Elham, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

I have often experienced the heavy burden of being invited to Christianity to attend church. Not only the pastors but also the church members and the women I interviewed preached to me. The last time the pastor asked me if I wanted to recite the prayer of salvation for you, I mentioned the impartiality in the research as the reason for my lack of interest in it. However, not everyone can always argue against this demand:

One day, a large number of believers came to the church. The pastor of the church called me and said that I wanted to say the prayer of salvation for you. I said I did not know Christ. He said no, I want to pray for your salvation. "I allowed the prayer of salvation to be told because I respected him and my situation (Hamideh, 32, Independent Interview, 2022).

The Lord's Supper was held that day, and I did not know what the Lord's Supper meant. Moreover, I will never forget that work, and that look and that scene; he took the two trays and brought them to me and said: "You are the first person who, despite your unbelief, compliments you on the Lord's Supper because a feeling told me to compliment you. This blood of Jesus Christ may be a healing for your soul." Until that moment, I had no particular feelings. I picked up that cup and piece of bread, and now that I am defining it, I got goosebumps because it was an extraordinary feeling I had never experienced before. I had called God a lot and had not received an answer; after years of giving, you have a sense it is lasting. I ate the bread and swallowed the juice; I felt my whole being changed. I found it strange (Shima, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

How the church communicates its laws may not always work for everyone. Sometimes it causes injuries that are difficult to repair or permanently affect the person. For this reason, it can be said that the impact of church intervention on followers is fluid and can vary from person to person.

My brother was killed about two years ago. Of course, we were connected to the Catholic Church, but we did not enter the Catholic Church but were also separated from the Protestant Church. One day I was cooking noodle soup for my brother. I took a piece of video and published it on my Instagram page. The Protestant Church immediately contacted me to remove this film! They shot me exactly the last shot. They sent the message that we do not have such a thing in Protestantism and leave the dead to die. I saw that in the Catholic Church, there is a day when we pray for the dead and prepare food for all the loved ones we have lost, which was much more pleasant and soothing for me. My brother was killed in Iran; they say forgive! Our priest, our father, told me I should ignore the one who killed my brother. Whenever you come to this conclusion, you are free. So, it is much more complicated than Islam. It is painful that we do not have retaliation; we must forgive if we do not have revenge (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

Here is Arafa (the day before the festival of sacrifices), when everyone has to testify, for example, what happened in the past and later. It is illegal. When I came

to Turkey, I swore under the influence of false teachings and was far from wisdom. This had a profound effect on my personal life, my family, and my mood. It was a terrible blow to me. In the same church, one of these prominent Christian organizations, which has branches in every city like McDonald's, was a lesson called Freedom in Christ, which forced people to confess their past sins, believing that we are faithful. And then we stop, and they pray for us (Aftab, 35, Independent Interview, 2022).

The church environment is curious. Men and women sing hymns. The loud music sounds in the hall. Sometimes they cry and vent their emotions. That is why for those who are entering the church for the first time, seeing these moments is a new experience. However, the church atmosphere has other dimensions as well. Due to the diversity of people who come together in the church community, staying in a church or leaving depends on many factors. Still, the main issue is empathy and receiving a positive feeling:

> A few weeks after we emigrated, my husband said I had been invited to a house where everyone prayed. It was called a church, but it was not a church. Let us go together. I was not feeling well, but I liked it. I saw the crowd that sang so beautifully, there was no crying, but I was crying; I went there several times, and it made my heart tremble, and I believed (Marta 2, 32, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I was staying home alone. I was bored. My husband told me to come to the weekly meetings. He told me to go with him to the forum. I did not know about Christianity. I changed completely when I saw them and heard them talking about their God and Christ (Hamideh, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

In Iranian Islamic society, sadness is praised more than celebration and joy. Private celebrations are government-controlled, and public celebrations are governmental and religious. In Iran, people experience very little general happiness, which is why what goes on in the churches is new to them:

> I realized this when I entered the Christian world and went to church. In Islam, they cry to God, but in Christianity, they are happy, dancing, and singing. What was always forbidden to us? This is me. It impressed me, and the calmness it gave me gradually led me to research and always compare Islam and Christianity, and that was when I was attracted (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

Because most converters to Christianity have had a similar experience of rejection, there is involuntary support in the church. Families refuse to accept that a new religious tendency has crept in among their members, preferring to deal with the shock in silence for a while. This is why new Christians become more attracted to the support of the church and spend more time with church members:

> You really may not believe it. When I entered the church, I was rejected by my family at that time, but my Christian brothers and sisters were like a family to us;

they never left us alone. Whatever our spiritual or material needs, they were always with us (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

Because we were mostly cut off from our families, we were rejected, so we were with faithful friends several times during the week. There were about thirty of us. We went out not only for church programs but also for fun. They were our family (Shiva, 44, Independent Interview, 2022).

In this section, some unique features of Christianity were described from the perspective of women. Things like feeling close to God, the peacefulness of Christianity, emphasis on forgiveness and kindness, freedom in worship, and church atmosphere were listed as positive features of Christianity to attract more women. Although there may be criticisms that I have sometimes mentioned, due to the data-oriented methodology of the research, the researcher must rely only on the findings and interviews of women to conclude. Suppose they consider the mentioned items as positive points in persuading them to Christianity. In that case, they must be mentioned in the categories, which in this research has also tried to use the maximum concepts that can be extracted.

5.2.5. Women's Secondary Strategy: Will to Improve the Faith

Continuing to believe in Christianity is an essential stage in which respondents express their commitment to Christianity. They strive to be more like Christ and to transmit his teachings by participating in church activities, emphasizing evangelism, accepting parent-child relationships with God, and modeling the Bible. The secondary strategy is formed at this stage. At this stage, it is possible to return from faith.

5.2.5.1. Wide Participation of Women in the Church

There are many aspects to participating in church activities, and it is not just about attending church. The church system makes the best use of people's abilities. Below is an example of the activities of church ministers in the form of translators, essayists, writers, and producers of children's programs, responsible for media affairs, and the leader of the worship group and... The church system is such that it is formed with the cooperation of all people, from its details to its generalities, and everyone has a share in it. This allows everyone to work together as a group and feel responsible and close:

We prepared church pamphlets in Iran. We studied there. We became responsible for pamphlets and books because we had printers and computer equipment. When my husband and I migrated and believed in Christ, well, our house was very close to the church; when my husband went to work, I would go to church and ask different questions, I would study, and ... A week later, my husband also started repairing the church building. We were in church all the time. So, we started growing and learning (Samira, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

For the past two years, my ministry in the church has been to receive, greet, and pray, and my husband also composed worship songs which were our service in Iran (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

> We have weekly programs. We have classes every day. On Friday evenings, when Saturday starts, we teach for an hour. Of course, I am in charge, but there are other teachers. Each of us participates (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I work in the Catholic Church. First, I open the door in the morning, pray in front of the Blessed Virgin Mary, see the cats, and play with them a little. After greeting the priests, I go upstairs. I cook lunch and entertain guests if they come. It is like my own house; For example, how do you clean, iron, and cook lunch? I serve in the church in the same way. I will be home at four or five o'clock (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I used to be in a worship group in several churches in Iran. I was also a worship leader here. There was a church in our house. The church members chose me. I did not know any particular music, and I did not know the notes. However, they said, "Thanks God for your voice, and guidance in the heavenly worship group." If I hear a hymn, I will learn the notes, although I do not know how to read the message at all... I love worship very much. I love to worship. Remember I told my mom I wanted to be a singer. Now God has shown me that you should read to me. It was a sign that I understood that I should pray to God. I was four or five years old and wanted to be a singer... (Shiva, 44, Independent Interview, 2022).

Church service is not limited to Sundays; depending on ability and choice, individuals may be involved in church work all day of the week. On the other hand, the church deals with flexible people, which means that if it is not possible to attend Sunday programs weekly, there are different ways to participate:

> Because I serve in the church, I spend much time in the church. We have a program three days a week called Companions, which means friends who have just become Christians and do not know enough about Christianity. We work with them step by step on the Bible, prayers, adoption, etc. We practice worship on Tuesdays. We have group prayers on Wednesdays. We have training on Fridays. We also go to church, and because I am the director of the logistics department, I have to provide for the church... (Leila, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

> We must attend church every week because we are baptized, but the situation is challenging financially, and it is not possible to go to church every week, but we go to church at least once every two or three months and go inside the church for a week. We stay and receive the sacrifice every day. We keep in touch however we can (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

One of the most common sessions among new-converted women is a "Women's gathering." Only women participate in these courses. They pray together, discuss life's problems, and consult. In addition, everyone prepares food and gathers at a church member's home. These gathering increases self-confidence among women and encourages them to participate socially:

> Sometimes we have a gathering or a women's meeting. We sing a Christian hymn; we talk about the word; we eat... (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

Before Corona, we had a women's meeting once a week. In the women's meeting, I talked about the women's personalities mentioned in the Bible. I explained their problems, how they related to God, and the common denominator of all women in the Bible. It was essential for me that women know their position and the value God has given them, that is, their importance in Christianity. Because it always bothered me that the church pastor did not treat members like the lord and the servant, and I had seen these relationships myself, I never liked them. Now we are very friendly and intimate with the church's women (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

We had women's groups in the church. It is like a treatment in which if we have a problem and we have not been able to tell anyone so far, we tell each other, and the pastor, who is also a woman, opens the issue for us and talks to us. Even if there are issues that we do not want to raise in public, we will share them with her. We go on a picnic together or, for example, a communion dinner where everyone brings their food, and we gather together in the house of one of us, and we are sisterly with prayer for hours. The purpose of these classes was to create more love in the church. Those who come and are unfamiliar with the topics get acquainted with the old church members. Everything that is said that day remains a secret to everyone. When our pastor guides us and solves a problem, everyone is blessed by the pastor's words and applies biblical teachings to their lives, stabilizing lives (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

5.2.5.2. Formalization of the New Religion among Newly Christianized Women

When we entered the church and attended the meetings, we were told after a while that it was time for baptism and everyone would announce. I announced, and I was baptized. "I was in a perfect mood when we were baptized. The spiritual aspect was beautiful because everyone dressed in white and sang hymns. It felt so beautiful and soothing that it could not be described (Leila, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

At the church's discretion, respondents should take steps to demonstrate their commitment to Christianity. The experience of baptism was chosen because the point was to be considered the culmination of faith in Christianity.

Belonging to the Christian community has been chosen from the moment of baptism onwards with the knowledge that these points can differ for everyone. For example, when reciting the prayer of salvation, participating in church activities, or hearing a pastor's sermon, a person concludes that she/he has found her/his way and belongs to this path. Still, the generality of this matter is related to baptism. Many people endure the conditions of the church and attend its activities for many years to receive a baptismal certificate and officially declare their Christianity:

When I was about to be baptized, I opened the book and asked God to show Himself to me. A verse came that changed me. The basis of Christianity is that you talk to God, and God speaks to you. The page that opened for me was the trial of

Jesus Christ in the presence of Pilate. I came across a verse where the king asks, "Are you a king?" Moreover, Jesus says, "you say that I am a king. I was born for this reason, and this is why I came to this world to testify to the truth. and whoever belongs to the truth will accept my words". The defining point of my belief in Jesus Christ was here (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

The day I was baptized was so good and beautiful ... I mean, everyone has that feeling ... I will never forget my baptism day because I felt that we would be baptized and come back to life. That feeling, that feeling of happiness, that joy is always with us. I love that day very much for the strength that God gives to man ... because the Holy Spirit enters us (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

When I entered the water, I was baptized. My world turned around because of this. I felt that it was a rebirth. My body was like a baby that was born again. You have to experience this feeling yourself. Every word and every language cannot be described. I had a wonderful inner feeling: I love Christianity from the bottom of my heart right now. I get hope when I talk to Jesus Christ or open a verse, for example (Elham, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

Other churches may not accept certificates from previous churches, and each person must be baptized again. Depending on her/his circumstances, she/he has experienced baptism several times, either by changing or leaving the church:

We went to the gardens around the city where we live. A poster came from Canada. One day they called us, they took me and two of the sisters to the garden, and we were baptized. When you get baptized in the water, you are not yourself, as if the soul is separated from your body. I felt that. The first baptism did not take us into the water. They put their hands in a bowl, sprinkled water on our heads, and prayed. The feeling was different the second time ... The second time, I enjoyed baptism more because I knew more about Christ. It was a completely different world. I was on my own for an hour. I could not explain myself (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

In addition, conditions inside Iran have made the issue of baptism difficult. This has led to churches in Iran either secretly performing baptisms or not at all. The issuance of certificates is one of the problems that can be used as evidence if it falls into the hands of officials inside Iran. Also, some people have to travel to countries around Iran for baptism and attend courses there or get baptized:

Many of us were baptized in Iran, which would have been many stories if they had known. The church's pastors to whom I was attached were expelled from Iran. He baptized us at home, took our photo and video, and sent it to the main church. When I came to Turkey, I wanted my baptismal certificate, which the pastor sent me (Aftab, 35, Independent Interview, 2022).

After we started our service in Iran, we participated in pastoral courses in Armenia a few months later. The Father of the church baptized and ordained us

there, allowing us to minister unto the pastors. Even though we were pastors before... (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

I was baptized in Armenia, and baptism in Iran means execution. In Iran, they were very close to me, followed me, and created some problems for my husband. They were looking for both of us, they even caught us a few times, and we were released. Despite our wishes, we left Iran and took refuge in the first place we could go (Samira, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

We declared ourselves Catholic ... We came to Turkey in 2015 and were baptized in the Catholic Church with my son. We stayed for three or four days and returned to Iran. We returned to Iran in August and March and received our information (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

Those who have married in Islam also remarry in the church. Sanctifying a marriage or house after moving from place to home is one of the essential Christian customs. The pastor comes to the new house and, by reciting prayers similar to the baptism, consecrates the corners of the house with water:

I was baptized, but we married before becoming a Christian. After that, we got married once in the church. It was not a very special process; we just announced that I also became a Christian, and a prayer of repentance was said for me (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

We got married, but unfortunately, in the Islamic style, we only got married publicly and did not celebrate the wedding because I did not believe in Islamic marriage. I decided to get married here (in Turkey) after my baptism. We came here and joined the church. "I was educated in the Catholic Church, and we were baptized (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

A baptismal certificate for immigration, filing, and proof of conversion is a document. The church strives to testify to those who have proved their Christian commitment. In the example below, the Immigration Office found that the respondent was a Christian. Although the immigration case is not responsible for the conversion, the immigration Office has rejected the claim due to secrecy and failure to declare conversion:

The immigration officer told me, "Why didn't you tell us you went to church and were a Christian?" I said you had not asked me yet. I had never been interviewed. I was asked to update my terms constantly, and I was unaware of this. I have been going to church for eight years. I told them to call all the churches; there was no reason for me to say I was a Christian. My immigration file is not a religion to declare my faith. I returned to the church and asked the pastor for my baptismal certificate. I took the baptism certificate and handed it over to the immigration office. I said this is my baptism. The immigration officer said, "If you are right, what is the difference between a Catholic and a Protestant?" I told the other question was not more childish than to ask me. My case was rejected. I

complained about the process of reviewing my case. "Now I must wait (Asal, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

Christians separate water baptism from soul baptism and believe that in addition to water baptism, which is the proof of their entry into this religion, there is another baptism called soul baptism. The Holy Spirit, the third aspect of the Trinity, has a special place in the baptism of the Spirit. From the point of view of some Christians, water baptism and baptism of the Spirit sometimes co-occur, and from the point of view of others, the two are distinct. The baptism of the Spirit and the establishment of the Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers, which are discussed in the section on miraculous faith:

> In Christianity, we have two types of baptism, water baptism, and soul baptism. Spirit baptism means that a person is cleansed of his past life and is buried with Christ, and when he rises, he begins a new life with Christ. Soul Baptism means the Holy Spirit. Christ gives us the Holy Spirit, and this holy spirit of God provides a person with a gift that he can use, and my contribution is as a healing servant. The baptism of the Holy Spirit means that the Spirit of God enters our body and is somehow more important than the baptism of water because it is narrated in the Bible that Christ says: "I am going physically, but I leave the Holy Spirit to you. When I first believed, I still did not have the Holy Spirit, and I still had anger and resentment in my heart, and I was walking in the past life, and I could not forgive anyone easily, even though the Bible said, "If someone slaps you on the cheek, turn your face away." "And let him slap your other cheek as well," and "If someone wants your robe, give him your robe and your robe." However, I could not easily cope with this because I had not yet been baptized, the fruit of the Holy Spirit had not yet appeared to me, and I had no peace. One of the great things that happened to me after receiving the Holy Spirit was that all bad morals were removed from me and my patience increased, and I could control my anger and get rid of grudges. I forgot that whoever did the worst things to me, and I quickly forgave him because I did not remember what that person had done to me. "If I were very vindictive and easily learned to forgive, it would be a great change for me" (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

The subject of the Holy Spirit is also mentioned in the Bible. When he ascends to the Father, he will send someone (the Holy Spirit) to be his helper (John 14:26, 15:15). According to biblical statements, when Jesus left the earth, he said that it is in the best interest of believers to go so that the Holy Spirit can come (John 16: 7). The Holy Spirit lives in the hearts of believers (Galatians chapter 2 verse 20, Romans chapter 8 verse 16, Hebrews chapter 13 verse 5, Matthew chapter 28 verse 20). Jesus warns the disciples not to begin bearing witness about Jesus Christ until they have been equipped from above (Luke 24:49; Acts 1: 4). When the Holy Spirit was revealed to Christians on the day of Pentecost, they were given the power to follow Jesus Christ (even at the cost of their lives) (Acts 2: 1-4, 4: 31, 7, 59- 60).

5.2.5.3. Missionary Activities among Christianized Women

It takes time and experience from the moment of faith until a person is ready to be entrusted with various services as a Christian. Moments of faith and devotion to Christ with evangelistic support are critical moments. A look at these moments marks the beginning of the evangelistic cycle:

> I met a Christian friend. I asked him, "Are you a believer? Are you a Christian?" He said yes. I said, "Can I ask if you were born a Christian?" He explained that he believed in this religion with his mother. I was thrilled to find sympathy and could get out of this situation. He gave me prayer and said read this prayer and leave your heart to Jesus, do not be afraid! "With his words, he strengthened my heart, and we got to know each other better and talked… (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

> My aunt was happy to accept the salvation prayer. I took just to let me go. "Get on your knees," he told me. I did not kneel and sat on a chair. She said to repeat what I said. I sat on my knees involuntarily as he said those words. When it was over, I knelt and cried. At the same time, I was constantly resisting before this moment. While the prayer was recited, I unconsciously went to my feet, raised my hands, and cried. Something happened to me there that I did not know what it was (Neda, 39, Independent Interview, 2022).

For Christians, Christianity has no meaning without the person of Jesus Christ, and the Christian faith is not alive without evangelism. A Christian at any stage of his/ her faith may feel the duty of evangelism. However, the church system strives to train one to become a capable evangelist, which requires steps. The person first prays the prayer of salvation and then enters the classes of Christianity; when it is determined that her/his commitment to this religion has found acceptable stability, she/he is baptized and finally ready for evangelism. However, as mentioned, one may try to invite others to this religion in any of the following steps. Evangelism and getting the good news to have a reciprocal relationship. Before he became a Christian, he must have received this gospel in some way – which, in this part, means face-to-face evangelism. For the evangelist to be able to become a good evangelist, it is better to go through the steps described in Figure 11:

Figure 11: The Evangelistic Cycle

When I am talking, I start with them first. For example, they explain their problems while talking and empty their feelings. As I preached the gospel one day, I said a little about the Qur'an and then spoke about Christ. I will talk about the Bible after a while. I give him the gospel and gradually introduce her/him to Christ (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

If you want ... I have to see the desire from you. I would never do that if I came to tell you to believe. I mean, I have to do it; one of my duties is to preach; I have to do it as a Christian; I know I have to bring my fellow human beings in this way because it is perfect for them. Because they see themselves, they feel and touch themselves with their hearts. The important thing is that I can only give you the good news if you want. All I can tell you is to read the book only once. Read the word once. I cannot tell you anything more (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

I need to evangelize. I often preached that the early days I believed in were very important. I was showing the Bible and talking about Jesus; I was preaching to my family and friends. I liked it because I wanted the truth I had found to be tested by others and to see that God is good. However, I later realized it was impossible just by talking. I speak very nicely but cannot show anyone life; it is wrong (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

My husband and I never say, "We are Christians" at the first time we meet someone and start preaching. We let them come into our lives, see our lives, and then realize the difference in our lives. Then we will talk about what happened in our lives (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

I first introduce myself to them as a Christian. I start with Christianity and love and compare Islam and Christianity, and if I see that they are encouraged, I introduce the book to them and wait for the time to come. I first introduce myself to them as a Christian. I start with Christianity and love and compare Islam and Christianity, and if I see that they are encouraged, I introduce the book to them and

wait for the time to come. We also have a verse in the Bible that everyone must have time to accept that good news. I will start with the fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity. God (in the form of Jesus) came and walked with us, lived with us, drank with us, and ate with us. He endured our sufferings and shed his blood for us to be cleansed (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

They served us for a year after we believed. The person who was our pastor and visited us shook hands and let us go to do. We tore so many sacks and suitcases. We put the Bible in our bags and went from city to city. Sometimes my husband and I would spread the gospel to another town. We prayed and threw our hearts into the sea and left. "We were guided to whom to go and preach (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

Although evangelizing Turks is forbidden by the Turkish government, some Iranian asylum seekers go to Turkish churches instead of Persian-speaking churches and try to encourage Turks to convert to Christianity. This can come at the cost of losing their immigration file:

I had a dream on nights when I was distraught and had just separated from my husband. In this dream, I realized my service was to the Turkic languages. I have to give this good news to the Turkish languages. God clearly showed me that you are the person through whom God must convey his message in Turkish, and I see the day when I knock on every door and say that Jesus Christ is the living God ... I have to do this even if I am beaten, even if I fall hard and get hurt. From that day on, my first step was to create a Turkish page on Instagram, through which I preached to one hundred to one hundred and fifty Turks, and they believed, and we prayed the prayer of salvation together. The Turks who are free have democracy. This is a grace that God has given me, and I do not want to lose this grace. My service now is to evangelize the lost. Honestly, I did it twice, but with the Turks. My Turkish language is not strong enough to be a good evangelist, but I tried to bring them into the church, and they came and became Christians. I go to a Turkish-language church. I told the pastor I would like to preach; what should I do? He said to encourage them to come to church. I also suggested that prayer and teaching days come to church. I never forced anyone. My gospel was like this; I brought them to church to see and ask their questions. If she/he is convinced, she/he becomes a Christian; if she/he is not confident, she/he is still with us as friends (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

During the conversation with the women, I realized that they were trying to invite me to Christianity, even when they were answering my questions. At the last meeting, I went to one of the churches, and the pastor pulled me to a corner and asked me, "Do you still not want to become a Christian and say the prayer of salvation?" Several times during my conversations with women, I was asked if I had become a Christian. When I received a negative answer, their efforts to invite me to Christianity intensified. Therefore, a Christian call other to this religion in all moments of his life because this duty of Christians is mentioned many times in the Bible:

Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. Moreover, remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

5.2.5.4. Parent-Child Relationship with God
The place of the church is like your father's house, which belongs to you. The children do everything to help (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

The word "father" is used in various forms in the Bible, meaning that the term "father" appears in 61 verses and the term "Father" is used in prayer in 17 verses, the term "My Father" in 50 verses, and the term "Your Father" and sometimes "Your Heavenly Father" in 18 verses. Altogether, the word "Father" is repeated about 300 times in the Gospels as a reference to God. For example:

> *28 So Jesus said (to them), "When you lift the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM and that I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me. 29 The one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what is pleasing to him (John 8: 28-29).*

According to the Bible, the relationship between followers and God is a parent-child relationship. However, the form of this relationship is defined based on the respondents' past, their religious affiliation, and the teachings received from the church. The respondents' experience with their parents shapes the type of relationship they have with God.

> Jesus Christ is my Father. Jesus Christ is a Father, even higher than the Father. I can count on him for everything. Christ is my Father. I still say that I am not a true Christian because there is so much left for me to become a real Christian. I still have many mistakes. However, I can say that I am a small child of the Christian world (Elham, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

> When you convert to Christianity, your earthly Father, no matter how much he loves you, does not become like Heavenly Father, and I have seen this in these six years of my conversion. Wherever I extended my hand to my father (God) and not to anyone else, God answered, and it is very pleasing that God hears our voice so clearly (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

> When I read the book, he used the term "heavenly father," which was very enjoyable. It is enjoyable to have a heavenly father when you do not have an earthly father because I did not have a father. Because I did not have anyone, I could rely on at all. Do you know? It was perfect for me to have Christ as my support. It gave me much strength. It helped me a lot. I could easily become a Christian. It was very easy for me. If I had known Christ earlier, I would have become a Christian sooner (Fatemeh, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

When my husband introduced God as his father, because I had a shadow of my father's love in me, and my father's love for me, Christianity settled in my heart very quickly. My father always called me the Blessed Virgin Mary as a child. He combed my hair and caressed me. I became much softer when my husband told me God is a father. I decided to give my heart to Jesus Christ (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

Look! For me, who was hurt by my father, and for me, who never had a man as my backbone, I accepted Christianity easily. I always felt a lack of support. Now, when I get frustrated from anywhere, I call his name. It has been proven many times that her arms are open to me ... This has been said over and over again from hearing my life story that you are the special daughter of God, and God has heard my voice in many places and answered my prayers, and I am always thankful to God for that (Sahar, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

It has also testified that it has always been excruciating for me not to have a father. I always said that a girl who gets married is supported by her father. For example, when I was beaten and cried by my husband, my difficulty was painful because I did not have a father to go to and tell my father to let my husband take his place. This made me weak because I did not have a father. However, as soon as I converted to Christianity, I saw that I had a father and could say I was sitting down and talking to him. God knows, I never felt that fatherless grief at all anymore. It was so ridiculous that I was bothered and grieving so much. I have a father. If I have a problem with my husband, I will take him to his presence (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

Christians do not look at God or Jesus as the Father alone. Still, this motherly view may be defined by their experiences in life and their inclinations toward different denominations of Christianity. *"In a loud voice, she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! (Luke 1)"* In the Catholic Church, a homage is paid to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the Catholic Church, the praise of Mary, the mother of Jesus, takes place in various forms such as prayer, God-pleasing deeds, visual arts, poetry and music dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and so on.

In the Bible, in two places, God has introduced himself as a mother, whom I hide under your wings and feathers, and I am a compassionate mother. I have talked to God many times. I said, God, you are a mother; you have the compassion of mothers. If you look, the father wants to love, but a particular discipline prevents him, but the mother fills you with love (Sayeh, 48, Independent Interview, 2022).

Just as the respondents' personal experiences influenced the choice of Jesus and God as fathers, so did the personal experiences of women's religious inclinations and their inclination to choose Mary as one of the foundations of Christianity. This is more significant than any other denomination in Catholicism. In an interview with a Catholic woman, I found out that she had converted to Catholicism after converting to Christianity because of the trauma she had suffered from the separation of her parents

and the sudden separation from her mother as a child and Blessed Virgin Mary is sitting involuntarily (unconsciously) in the place of the mother.

> I did not see my mother for fourteen years. Because she left me as a child and left and separated from my father, she did not love me or support me at all. I have not had a good relationship with her and have been disconnected for a long time. Because I feel there is no psychological and behavioral balance... (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

> It was tough for me to be away from my child. I got away from her when she was three years old. However, I asked the Blessed Virgin Mary, and I believe she will give it to me; my faith in God and my trust in the Blessed Virgin Mary strengthens my belief that my daughter will return one day. She stayed with me for three or four days. She came from Iran. Even now, she does not want to be outside Iran. I cried so many nights about what she ate and did not eat; now I have faith in my heart that returns to me again... (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

Following Jesus Christ means that believers should strive to be like him. He always obeyed his Father (the heavenly God), so the followers must do the same (John 8:29, John 15: 10). True obedience to Jesus Christ means that he must be the God of the life of believers (Romans 10: 9; 1 Corinthians 12: 3; 2 Corinthians 4: 5). Every desire and decision must pass through the filter of God's word, and the purpose of everything must be to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

5.2.5.5. Women's Sect Changes in Christianity

The history of change in Christianity is very long. One of the most famous developments occurred with Martin Luther King, Jr., and the rise of Protestantism. In Iran, many worship the path of Protestantism to convert to Christianity. Still, in the conversion process, they do not follow the same sect for various reasons and may go from one denomination to another. It depends on the church environment, how people interact, and the overall experience one has in the church. However, other factors such as one's background, one's mood, and one's initial encounter with Christianity can also be practical:

> Protestantism annoys me; this celebration and ceremony are so disgusting; for example, they sing Andy, dance, and dance, and there is no name of God. We are a church community. We have happy songs. We can rejoice much more beautifully together. We are now Catholics. We are happy. Yesterday was Eid, we celebrated, and they sang, but we felt the presence of God. Among Protestants, I do not feel the presence of God at all. In Protestantism, for example, they speak in languages, go to church to believe in Jesus Christ, and are surprised to see these things, especially among the educated. Islam struck me, but I can be calmer in the Catholic Church; I hope you will experience it one day... (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I am not the Trinity. My brother is the Trinity. I am Pentecostal. The teachings are different. Education is different. When they want to pray, the Trinities say the name of the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Three people pray, but Pentecost

says that the Father is one person. That God is one person but in the role of Christ on earth, incarnate, Christ and came on the planet. They believe that they have received the Spirit and become the Holy Spirit. Let me give you an example: Is it true now that you are a child? You are the wife; you are the mother. One person, but you have three roles. We pray to a God. We are Pentecostals. We are worshipers. Christ is God. God is also the body clothed in the garment of Christ, which is in the body of Christ on earth. I first went to Trinity Church with the kids. Then I went to the Pentecostal church. I became friends with a woman in Turkey; she told me to come to our church teaching session! (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

I have been a Christian for 18 years. During these years, many things have happened in my beliefs. In the beginning, when I believed, I did not know Christian denominations. I thought that was the only reason I became a Protestant. Moreover, I should have cared about these sects and these branches. Then I went to a few churches and was taught by them. My view of Christ and Christianity changed utterly. I served as a preacher, pastor, and teacher in the Protestant Church, but in the last three years, there has been a great revolution in me, and the turning point has been the acquaintance with a prominent teacher. I cannot tell you if I am a Protestant, a Catholic, or an Orthodox ... I believe in the cosmic Christ ... We have a meeting on Mondays, and we call ourselves the Curiosities of God. There is no prayer in our meetings, or should we play music? Of course, we have prayer and worship meetings on Sundays... (Aftab, 35, Independent Interview, 2022).

My sister was from Pentecost. I became acquainted with the Pentecostal Church before the Protestant Church. There was no teaching in the Pentecostal church. I just heard that they taught. Someone used to preach, then we would ask questions, and you would never get the answer you wanted. In Protestantism, they are more convincing in answering than in Pentecost. That church caused me many shocks. I did not like the atmosphere of the church. They did not have an education. They were all thinking about eating and gossiping. I entered a Turkish church through a Nigerian woman. The people there are endless ... they will answer any question without reason or judgment (Elham, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

Seventh-day Adventists are great. I understand this because I went to other churches and learned from other places. When I came to Turkey, I went to the church of Elam. The education was inferior. Many came out, and it was not just me. Coincidentally, I received an e-mail on the seventh day, and virtual classes started, and I enjoyed the training. No church taught as well as this church (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

I am a Roman Catholic. We were Protestants first. Protestants do not believe in the virginity of Mary, which means that Mary is only the mother of God. Then my son followed the Blessed Virgin. It did not seem that "the mother of God" had an earthly life. I was more interested in the Catholic Church than Protestants because their traditions, prayers, and respect differed... (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

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Generally, the familiarity and introduction of Iranian invitees to Christianity begin with Protestantism. Still, over the years, they have reached the skill to choose a new sect or stay with the same initial denomination with more certainty. This stage requires study, experience, and interaction with others and is one of the advanced stages.

5.2.6. Changing the Experiential Context of Women after Christianity

Respondents' lives are divided into pre-Christian and post-Christian, thus creating a different context that distinctly affects the secondary strategy. Areas consist of two parts: the families' reaction and the experiences that respondents gained after becoming Christians.

A study of this in believers shows that they had bitter experiences before Christianity and did not discuss painful experiences after Christianity. What they had in the joint was the issue of the family and the change in their husbands' behavior after converting to Christianity. Although other family members have rejected them for becoming Christians at the same time as their husbands changed their behavior, the teachings of Christianity praise their closeness to their husbands and see rejection as one of the problematic conditions of joining this religion.

5.2.6.1. Gain Peace in Their Life

Women became fascinated with Christianity after seeing a sudden change in the behavior of those close to their families, especially their husbands. They have tried many times during their married life to solve marital problems, but it has been translated by knowing Christianity and receiving its teachings. Women consider the salvation of the marriage relationship in Christianity. The Bible also repeatedly mentions the compromise between men and women (Ephesians chapter 5).

> My husband's behavior had improved; for example, he said let us go shopping. Three days later, he said let us go shopping again! His addiction was completely gone. He also smoked. He quit smoking. He has not smoked for seven years. He put everyone aside (Fatemeh, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> After a while, I saw how much my husband had changed. He was bad-tempered, a wife-beater, and had hallucinations, and I endured all this; of course, everyone addicted has these. However, after going to church, I saw the change. He constantly read the Genesis section to me, and after a while, he started working. Slowly everything changed. However, I wanted to be by his side this way because I saw my husband change (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

> My husband did not have peace initially because we had financial problems and were just married. I noticed changes in my husband. His peace of mind had multiplied many times, and I liked this peace very much. My husband bought a Bible and brought it home. He told me about Christ, but I still loved his drastic changes. Although my husband and I were friends for a few years before we got married, we had never been so close and had no intimacy. At that time, all our

worries were economic. However, from the moment he started to change, I was fascinated (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

Family is an essential element for women. Growing up with Islamic teachings and a culture that honors marriage, they chose a new religion emphasizing loving marriage. Women seem to be thirsty for words in which love is advised by the Bible to husbands (Genesis 2:24; Colossians 3:19; Proverbs 31:10). However, in some verses, the equality of men and women may not be observed (Colossians 3: 18-19, Ephesians 5: 22-23, Matthew 5: 27-28):

> Yesterday my husband and I had a little discussion. He said a familiar word and immediately turned to and kissed me. There is so much Christ in our lives; we are quick to admit the mistake and sins we make, it is the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives that we sin, but we can still apologize (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

> When my husband became a believer, our relationship healed dramatically because we had a difficult time together. It was a forced marriage anyway. He forbade me from working and going to university. It made my life bitter and ruined our relationship. After I became a believer, my relationship was healed, and we had peace and respect. In many places, I was making mistakes. I began to love him, and from what I had learned in the Christian process, he also became attached to his family. He made me fall in love with my family. Now you seem to be looking at someone else (Shima, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

Here are examples of improving the marital relationship, but sometimes stability in the marriage does not necessarily mean reaching peace; separation and leaving the relationship can also bring peace to a person. Even though in the section on the pre-Christian context, family injuries were mentioned, there is no place for such experience in the post-Christian context.

5.2.6.2. The Reaction of the Women's Family

The reaction of families varies. It is certain that if there is support in this field, the new believers will maintain their faith with more peace of mind. However, this choice is more difficult for women. Since women come from a society that considers them second sex and pursue their interests and choices in the shadow of patriarchy, difficult choices such as conversion are no exception. Although some converts can affect their family members, others have to accept being rejected, which can sometimes have lifelong effects:

> My husband always fasted on time, prayed and was firm in his religion. When I became a believer, sometimes he would not let me go to church. He was worried I would get in trouble. It was tricky at first. After a year, he said, "Take the book for me to read" (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I did not tell my husband about it because he had read the Bible and often heard the good news. We were stuck in religion, and both had a stance on religion. We

wanted to refrain from talking about the new religion at all or entering it. When I believed I wanted to get married, my husband accepted because of me. The night before the wedding, he asked me, "How do you feel when you talk so much about feeling?" At that moment, I told him to get up and go to the pastor because I did not know the answers to many of the questions you asked, and it was a question for me. Every question we asked the pastor answered with a verse. When my husband's questions were over and lasted about four or five hours, the pastor said, "Let me pray for you." Before we married, I told the pastor that my husband was also satisfied and wanted to believe. He believed before our Christian marriage (Shima, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

When my family first visited me, they realized I was a Christian. My mother cursed me., she believed I became an infidel, and she cried for several days. My brother also fought me a lot. My brother may only pray until that day, but he started praying. Except for my father, everyone else in my family believed in Christ (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

Some verses deal with rejection and comfort believers. These verses can potentially comfort those who believe in Christ and are rejected by family and friends (Matthew 10: 32-39). That is why, despite being abandoned by the family of believers, they remain true to their faith:

What are the benefits of becoming a Christian? What can it have but be just excluded from society? It has no use. What benefits could Christianity have for me? Except that I am banned from my country, from people far away? I have fully defined my life for you. Did you see any particular advantage besides all these problems? (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

Everyone left me. My mother died. My father died. My brother died. My whole family passed away. You think I have no hope in Iran in terms of family. I have a sister. After my brother's death, because he did not have a wife, we inherited. My sister is trying hard to declare me an apostate so I will not inherit... (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

I was rejected by everyone when I believed in Jesus. I lost contact with my father and stepmother. I was denied by my half-brothers and by my mother's family. Even if they talk to me, they are not sincere and united. They cannot accept that a Muslim born can change her/his religion. My stepmother's brother sometimes calls me to advise me to return to Islam (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

Doubts about faith occur at every stage of religious change. At this stage, which may have been years of dedication and believers have endured many hardships, it is possible to leave the religion, but our discussion is about those who have continued this way. Some, despite their faith, decided to go to Iran due to the problematic conditions inside Iran. They settled in Turkey as a transit country. Some may stay in the country, and some may wait for their immigration case to be finalized. The common denominator of

all these immigrants is the situation inside Iran—those forced to emigrate due to lawsuits to convert. The following inside conditions of Iran will be described.

5.2.7. Women's Third Strategy: (E)Migration

As explained in the migration section in the intervention subcategory, migration takes place in two stages, a particular location for women who leave Iran for many reasons before becoming Christians, and another for Christianized women who are forced to leave due to internal pressures. For these women, migration serves as the ultimate strategy.

5.2.7.1. Christianized Women's Decision to Leave Their Homeland

A year goes by without news of arrests and harsh sentences for Christian believers. There is much pressure on this segment of Iranian society, forcing a part of this society to emigrate and leave Iran. These pressures are not limited to apostasy laws and fears of government action but also create bottlenecks, closed-house churches, denying permission for new believers (ex-Muslims) to participate in official church programs, and a lack of resources. So, they would instead leave Iran than stay. Regarding apostasy in Shiite jurisprudence, women differ from men (benevolent discrimination!). In natural and national apostasy, women will be exempted from the death penalty and sentenced to life imprisonment (Fifth article of the Islamic Penal Code). However, some of these women choose not to stay in Iran.

Behind each of the women's narratives are strange and long stories. I cannot deny that after the profound impact of what they said about the injuries they suffered in life, the next topic was the complicated narratives they had of their prison and escape experiences. There may be a few simple lines here, but due to limitations, the narratives of their personal lives and their experiences of struggle could not be integrated simultaneously. Women's perseverance in their chosen values was significant in a society where women were weak.

> My evangelist invited me to the house church, but she said, "I speak, and I will let you know" Then she called me and said the church accepted. Still, they said that because we did not know this woman, she may be from the security services, we could not get her immediately. So, the first meeting was held at my evangelist`s house. When I went to church, Iran was not free; we went to church maybe once or twice a month. After several months, they trusted me and consecrated our house, where they also held meetings. For the safety of the church, meetings were held in different places each time. One day, they opened the conditions for us: whether there was a problem with your duties, let others know immediately. If you discover a danger, let each other know immediately (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I left Iran because I was in danger. I was an apostate there by law, and the prison was disrespectful, tortured, and executed. They will not let you go the way you want. They say to be free in religion but their religion! If there is freedom, I must

have the right to choose. When I have the right to choose, and I prefer, but I have to be persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, and so on. I would confess if I were taken as a new believer and beaten and told whom I collaborated with. I was not afraid that many church members were new believers and their faith was not so strong; therefore, if one was exposed, the others might be revealed in chains... The security department was such that if anyone entered the church and found out, they would take his laptop and phone from him and ask his colleagues. One could be deported, and four executed. Indeed, it was God's will for this to happen and for us to be here now (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

I could have this religion in Iran and live easily, but I cannot express my faith there. In Iran, I cannot say I am a Christian, and my most minor crime is imprisonment, but here I can say I am a Christian (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

Churches are not allowed to operate freely. The activities of the official churches are also closely monitored. I tried to enter the church many times, but there must be a permit, even in remote villages. Sometimes historic churches can be visited, but official programs are held only in the presence of Christians, so new believers are forced to make their homes churches and hold secret meetings. However, the same activity is reprimanded because it has a propaganda aspect.

The Iranian government is the complete opposite of the people and has created severe religious repression and has not accepted in any way that a Muslim becomes a Christian. The cathedral was in Haft-Tir Square in Tehran; I was going there. Every Saturday at 5 pm, a ceremony was held in public, but no formal ceremony could be saved. I once asked one of these churches if I could get baptized there. In response, they said, "What is the problem of Islam that you want to become a Christian? What is the problem of Imam Reza and Imam Hussein?" They had to say this because of the prevailing suffocation so their church would not be closed (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

Our hands are always tied, and even though the churches were closed, I went to house churches. I wanted to know more and better, and since I became a believer, everything was so clear to me that I felt like I had come out of the darkness and into a light that did not bother me and was a way for me. I can go to church here. In Iran, churches were closed, and we were not allowed to enter the church ...The agents identified several house churches in our city by the spies. One day, they raided all these churches, arrested the pastors, and committed to us as participants in that ceremony. However, I changed my house into a house church, and we had a program with my daughter and some people around me. Coincidentally, one of the participants in my house-church was arrested for other issues. All his pamphlets were confiscated from his home, and his conversion to Christianity became public. Because we knew we would be identified sooner or later, we decided to leave the country anyway (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

Conditions are not limited to the closure of churches. The government pursues all those widely involved in the propagation of Christianity. Sometimes, if it becomes clear that a person's conversion is only his or her own and he or she is not doing any exceptional propaganda work, warnings will suffice. Still, in cases where serious activities are carried out, the reactions will be more severe:

> They raided our workplace. We would gather there at night, burn CDs, and make pamphlets... They took everyone. My workplace was also sealed. They took my brother and held him for ten nights. They bothered a lot and got bail. We informed the church... They ransacked our house. However, we had crossed the border earlier. My mother returned, and there was no news about her for a few days. My mother was taken away and held for several days. My mother denied everything... (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

> My husband believed in Christ in Iran. The police arrested the members of the church who preached to my husband. Because of the problems that arose for the church, my husband left Iran with other church members. After a month or two, they think the situation will calm down and they will return to Iran, but they realize that if the problem is not so calm, we must emigrate to Turkey altogether (Hamideh, 32, Independent Interview, 2022).

> After a year of emigrating to Turkey and converting, we returned to serve Iran. We did in Iran for three years. We went to prison there and returned to Turkey. They came to our house. They knew where our home was, and we thought they did not know ... A large number of agents entered our house ...There, they put a placard around our necks that my husband was number one, and I was number two, and they took pictures of us. They also showed our sentences. They were arrested and searched. Do you think they ransacked our whole house? You cannot believe they emptied the buckets of beans, pulled out the freezer, and took family photos and videos. I do not have my wedding photos and videos now. They took us right away. I only did not take my son with me because I knew I would be in prison longer when my son was with me. I do not know; have you ever heard of safe houses? They took us to the safe place of information and started interrogating us there. My wife and I were interrogated separately for about twelve hours. Think about the stress I got when my milk was dehydrated... (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

Lack of resources and lack of easy access to Christian content production networks is one of the things that believers compare. Some of them have never had the experience of group participation in churches; in some cases, they could not even access the written and educational resources in this field, so they had to suffice with their knowledge or searching instinct. Immigration requires a set of reasons. It is preferable to flee when there are heavy judicial sentences and danger to life. All of this pressure on the new Christian community to leave the country:

> When we were studying Christianity, we did not have books. That means we did not have access to the Bible in Iran. Because my sister lived in Germany, she sent

us the Bible link, my daughter translated it, and we read the book together (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

It was said at the time that anyone who attended a house church would be arrested. I was also afraid to participate in a house church. The Bible was nowhere to be found, so I was in contact with a shepherd from Australia. "He took the house's address from me, and then someone brought me the Bible..." (Leila, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

Learning Christianity in Iran is very different from Turkey. There is no church in Iran. We were connected to the Seventh Church. Everyone is a Trinity. You only attend meetings, that is all. Iran has no sect (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

My husband had taken the excuse of the Bible. He kept saying, "Where can we buy the Bible?" We went to bookstores in the city center to buy Bibles. "The Gospel of Barnabas" was written on the cover. I opened the book; the first page was written in Arabic, "In the name of God..." I told my husband this was not the Bible and had been distorted. My husband asked why? I said, can the Bible start with Arabic letters? This is not the Bible... Be careful if you go to Iran ... The Gospel of Barnabas has been distorted. It belongs to the mullahs themselves. I tore the book and threw it away... (Fatemeh, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

Two main themes can be identified in the sub-set of consequences. First, for women who have changed their religion in Iran and have decided to leave this country due to social, governmental, and family pressures, (e)migration is considered a consequence. Second, women try to explain their future in Christianity; what position will they have? What task will they undertake? How to transfer the teachings to their relatives? They are all questions that are summed up in becoming a Christian and their future perspective. These women no longer consider themselves Muslim women.

5.2.7.2. The Beginning of Women's Migration Route

The result of all internal hardships begins a path called migration. Migration is based on two factors. The repulsion that originates and the attractions that the destination offers. This becomes more apparent when it comes to the issue of conversion because believers, in addition to changing geographical locations, have also changed beliefs. Attraction and repulsion must also be considered in the path of changing religion. The religion of origin has repulsions, and in contrast, interests are offered by the secondary faith, which differs from person to person.

We were forced to leave Iran because of the change in our religion and the conditions for leaving Islam (Takfir, to become an infidel); There was no other way for us because of the danger threatening us (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

International organizations monitoring asylum applications are concerned that religious conversion may be due to asylum. This dramatically slows down the migration

process. However, according to the church's reception of new immigrants, there is a hypothesis that the church system considers asylum applications in the name of conversion and asylum seekers to go to church to become Christians.

The choice of Turkey as a transit country is not only due to the lack of visa requirements and ease of access to this country but also other reasons. "Because there was no other choice but Turkey." "Because Turkey was the most suitable option close to Iran and as a refugee had a comfortable temporary life in it." "It can also be connected to the Catholic Church." "Turkey was the best option, and there was no other choice." "My husband was forced to travel to Turkey because he had no choice. He came to Turkey as a smuggler, which was the least dangerous route." Some respondents had traveled to Turkey before, "Because I sometimes came to Turkey for fun and came here, I knew this place better, I preferred Turkey." They expressed satisfaction with their trip and the closeness of the culture of the Turkish and Iranian peoples. Others decide to join their migrated family members. "I came to Turkey because my sister was here and because you kept saying that she could become a refugee in Turkey, the rights of a refugee would be revoked, a woman is very protected here...".

However, migration is a challenging path. There are many unforeseen events. Governments can sometimes make conditions more complex, and all daydreams fail. There is no going back and forth. It is difficult to let go halfway, and all conditions must be accepted. Sometimes asylum applications may be suspended for more than eight years, sometimes applications may not be accepted, and a person is forced to leave the transit country and cannot return to Iran. There are insufficient reasons to get asylum in a third country and no opportunity to stay in the transit country.

Immigration is a difficult decision. Immigration can be more difficult for women from traditional cultures than men. Finding a job, feeling safe and secure, starting again, and being away from family are just some of the problems. Women have experienced migration, especially in this case, due to a religious change different from living in the country of origin. They emigrate to be able to participate peacefully in the new religion. While the Iranian government is worried about the influence of Christians in the country, the virtual space has broken the limits:

> The upstairs neighbor of our house was Iranian; he was an asylum seeker but a spy. I have not told anyone so far. This is the first time. Although he went to church, he was a spy for the Iranian government. We were afraid of that. There was a small window between our floor and theirs. We heard voices from above. They transmitted information about all Iranians and Afghans. We listened night after night when they reported. He speaks visually. It provided accurate information. Sends photos and chats with each person. I had seen a spy before, so we lost trust in the church (Asal, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

Immigrating, especially to transit countries where work and education are difficult, women can hardly get into a black position like men. Everyday life seems normal. Asylum seekers face a permanent sense of suspense. They constantly think that one day

they will leave the country of transit and go somewhere else, so it is a challenging decision to do something special or socialize with people who will leave soon. Also, building trust among immigrant communities needs to be stronger because there needs to be a document on the background of immigrants and the reason for their migration. A variety of immigrant groups live in transit countries:

> Whom do I associate with? This is a question that is answered in my own country. In Iran, my association changed. Because the church and its members were more enjoyable for us, our association changed. However, here it is different. Everyone is an asylum seeker, and everyone has come for a reason. Our association is limited; we know each other but do not have a family (Samira, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Our entertainment... I do not have that much fun because I am always at home... I was at home for a while when I was sick ... We do not have fun here. You can see that we are so busy and... If I must go shopping, I will go with my friends... (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

Immigration itself weakens families and deep family ties by forcing them away. Sometimes you may have to wait months for a few family members to visit, and experiences may have been difficult in a large family in Iran. If there is a problem for the asylum seekers, it may take days for the families to reach them.

> [She has been assassinated for being a Christian] I was in the hospital for three months after being attacked with a knife because we were Christians and had no one to be with us. We did not tell the family either. I was operated on four times in Turkey. We had no contact with anyone at all... (Asal, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

After enduring difficulties in the country of origin and on the way to emigration, Iranian asylum seekers finally reach the land of transit. The government of transit is in the middle, and it takes years and days to wait to settle elsewhere. In this expectation, in addition to the problematic conditions described, they must endure the uncertainty and complex legal requirements in the country of transit (Turkey). The lack of citizenship rights, the right to work, the right to leave the city, the lack of non-free health insurance, the impossibility of opening a bank account, and the non-acceptance of asylum seekers by Turkish citizens are some of the problems of immigrant community:

> It is unbelievable that Turkey has closed my case in these circumstances, and I must return to Iran. Think that with all these difficulties I have defined for you, I have to return to Iran after eight years. I was in shock for two days when they told me this. I wanted to kill myself. I mean, I used to take pills until now to forget all my problems, take all the drugs, and sleep so that I do not wake up anymore. I cannot return to Iran. I struck myself that my eyes were bruised. I went to the gas station to get petrol and set myself on fire, but no gas station gave me petrol. I cannot return (Asal, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

Although Turkey was one of the first signatories to the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Additional Protocol; however, it signed this agreement with geographical restrictions due to its national interests. "Signing a convention with geographical restrictions" by Turkey means that Turkey does not define asylum seekers who come to Turkey from outside the European Union and apply for asylum under the heading "asylum-seeker." Instead, it defines asylum seekers as conditional refugees and provides temporary protection until they are resettled in a third country. Thus, asylum seekers who are not EU citizens do not enjoy the rights defined as a refugee, nor can they be expected to obtain Turkish citizenship, even if they have been in Turkey for many years.

> I would not say I like living in Turkey because life in Turkey is hard. If I want to consider my children's future, they can never be considered compatriots in this country. It is not easy to work in Turkey. If I get sick one day and do not have money in my pocket, no one will support me. I try to go to a country with at least the government's support, and my children are accepted as citizens, not foreigners who have to go. They do not rent houses to asylum seekers here; they take them hard. You speak Persian on the street, and you are mistreated. It has difficulties, but we must deal with them (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Now we live here as foreigners. They still do not accept us as Turkish citizens. There is a foreign name on you everywhere you go, so we are deprived of all citizenship rights. We want to do banking with restrictions for foreigners. Wherever we want to go, we must get permission from the Immigration Office (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

The weakness of the project to adapt the asylum seekers to Turkish society and the deconstruction of some asylum seekers in the mainly conservative and nationalist community of Turkey, the economic recession, and the worsening of the living conditions of the people have changed the general atmosphere against the asylum seekers.

> My son was once fired for his Christianity, but his colleagues mediated. Finally, he left his job. His employer was very bigoted and upset that my son was a Christian. My daughter was not harassed because her employer was a Christian, but in her previous job in a restaurant, although she was not fired, she was harassed a lot. They closed his insurance. Even if we die from the severity of the disease, we cannot go to the doctor because of the high cost of treatment (Zohreh, 53, Independent Interview, 2022).

> As a Christian, I do not have freedom of expression here. As soon as they find out I am a Christian, they harass me. I have no rights as an asylum seeker ... I am working, but I have never received the rights of a Turkish citizen. I have been insured for a year because the police interviewed me, and Turkey accepted me. I remembered that last year, I registered on a modeling site. I sent the photo, and they liked it very much, but as soon as they realized I was not a Turk, they said it was

only for Turks. I would not say I like to stay in Turkey when I see these racists (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

Illegal work (black labor) is known as unpaid suffering. Iranian asylum seekers in Turkey must work to meet some of their daily needs. The kind of work they do cannot be called a real job. Some occupations that asylum seekers refer to as undeclared work are low wages, long working hours, uninsured premiums, and unrelated jobs to skills and education. Black labor is also common among Christianized women. They also have to work to make a living to manage their lives. The church does not permanently support its members in this regard and even demands that one-tenth of its members' income be donated to the church (Gifts of the Heart).

> I work here in Turkey, but as refugees, we cannot have decent jobs at all, and I work here in the kitchen (Aftab, 35, Independent Interview, 2022).

If we put aside the Turkish government's conditions for asylum seekers, the Turkish people are on the other side. Turkish people have different reactions to asylum seekers. Christians have memories and fears of living in this country, which shows the lack of sufficient cultural readiness of these Turkish people:

> Many here in Turkey are afraid to say they are Christians. The Turks are also fanatics. However, here, there is a church and the possibility of worship. Incidentally, here, if the police did not support them, the fanatical Turks were very harassed and entered the churches, where they set them on fire and harassed them… (Aftab, 35, Independent Interview, 2022).

> We rented a place; we held meetings there; it was a church. The police also knew. During one of the worship services, pepper spray was thrown into the church. There was a pregnant woman in the church, a sick man, an old man, and you think we had to take food to the hospital. The police came. The reporter came. We still have his newspaper that published the news. However, as a stranger in this country, we could not formally complain because no one cared. Would a Turkish citizen have easily complained if this had happened? (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

> My son was beaten twice at school. Their teacher told them to come to my son's religious class, and he said I am a Christian. I do not come to religious meetings. The schoolchildren understood. He was beaten twice. There is nothing we can do. Because the school does not pay attention to foreigners, life is hard here, but you can quickly go to church, and no one asks why you have a Bible... (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I hang out with my children's family friends several times a month. Fifty percent of them accept us as Christians, and fifty percent of them do not. It was my daughter's birthday; some people did not eat the food I made at all. It was hard for me, and I was upset. They believe we are impure. In any case, they are Muslims and have prejudices. In general, we are worried about our children in Turkey. We

constantly warn you not to talk about Christianity at school because we cannot preach to the Turks. My eldest son does not like the Qur'an class; he does not like it. I am afraid I have to disagree with my husband on this issue. I believe that my child should not attend these classes at all. My husband says they are now at an age when they should know everything. Therefore, the son of the teacher of the Qur'an class insists on my son reading from the Qur'an. My son refuses, and the teacher fights him. The work is beaten, and my son panics and reads from the Qur'an. The teacher also said you saw me hit you on the head; you also had to read! I beat harder to read the whole Qur'an from memory! This anger is left in the child. He is now arguing with Qur'an and religion teachers. These issues bother me. What permission was the teacher allowed to do that behavior? I cannot go to school and complain. Either my child is expelled from school, or the matter is reported to the police... (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

Although the asylum seekers in Iran have endured hardships and did not have favorable conditions in migration, they are not willing to return. They are afraid of repeating difficult experiences. Social ills, bitter family experiences, and the current situation in Iran leave no desire to return. In addition to the issues from each person's past background, some problems are related to the future. Staying in Christianity is an incentive to build the respondents' future, including their goals. Women are concerned about the fate of their families and children and strive to achieve their goals and define their future in Christianity:

> Many ask me, will you return to Iran if conditions improve? I say I will not return. I will not go back to being a decision-maker now. The court, police station, park, and mosque hit me... I have sour and bitter memories from all over Iran and do not want to return. I struggled. That is why I do not want to go back at all. Being an asylum seeker is less complicated than being an Iranian. We may not even have money for bread here, but it is much sweeter for me than in Iran, where the best food was in the fridge, but I was not happy. I remembered everywhere I looked. I do not want to return to Iran (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Now, if I know that returning to Iran is everyday torture, I have no problem. They finally crushed me. You will be fine again a month later. However, the fact that you do not know what is going to happen to you and you do not know what is waiting for you makes it impossible for you to return. This makes it impossible for you to speak. In all our meetings, it is our first prayer for our country. Our first prayer is to change everything. Who hates being in their own country? Who likes to live where they are not rooted? (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I love Iran more than before. I used to like to never live in Iran, but now if they say you return to Iran and as a Christian, we have nothing to do with you, and you are allowed to continue your Christian life, do you know what I was saying? I will return to Iran. Because I think people in Iran need more help if they allow me to live as a Christian, to be able to go to church and talk about Christ (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

5.2.8. Women's Christian Being Imagination

The consequences stand for what happens as a result of the actions/interactions or of people's failure to respond to situations by using actions/interactions. In this model, the consequences are migration, name change, lifestyle change, behavior change, and planning to continue on the path of Christianity. The results are the product of the pressure that society, the family, and the government exert on women who have converted. Women could not bear the conditions of their country of origin and decided to emigrate. Women begin an internal migration and build a new path by changing their names, behavior, and lifestyle. In addition, they plan to have a future in Christianity so that they may be able to fulfill their aspirations differently, although this model only shows part of their path. It is not clear whether they will endure until the end of the road and reach a third country or whether government agencies will accept their cases, but what is certain is that one reason has brought them here; forming a new identity.

The Bible says, *11 A woman[a] should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety* (1 Timothy 2). Women are barred from serving as educators or having spiritual authority over men. The ruling barred women from serving as priests for men, including preaching to them, teaching them publicly, and having spiritual authority over them. However, it seems that the Bible has operated differently over time. Christianity has found enough features to satisfy women's aspirations. Of course, the changes may not have been ideal yet, but steps have been taken. Recently, the Catholic Church and the Vatican ruled that women could run for high government positions, whereas there had been no such participation before. Such comparisons can be seen in a closed Iranian society where women play a minor role in politics and the expression of Islam.

In Christianity, women have found the opportunity to play a role and participate in any stage of religious activity without restrictions and fencing. In the Islamic-Iranian context, these opportunities are not for women. If women in Christianity can preach, sing in worship, experience pastoral care, and evangelize. In Islam, women preach behind the walls of seminaries, women's voices are forbidden, and no woman has ever been the Imam of the congregation.

> One of my biggest wishes is for Iranian women to know and believe in Christ because they often grew up with pain. My wish is for women to see and hear the truth. They are always in my prayers—especially women in south Iran because that region has more prejudice (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

Women seek their lost desires in Christianity. Those who could not study, sing, or experience freedom see their future in roles that they could not find in traditional Islamic Iranian society. A long list can be made of women's responses to their image of the end: the liberation of Iran, a Christianized Iran, being an evangelist, a lesson in

Christianity, singing in a worship group, becoming a nun, and growing in faith, becoming a preacher, and so on. Women now look elsewhere for what they could not achieve in the previous religion and society. These demands form one of the consequences of conversion, which, together with the other consequences, will point to the central core of research (new identity).

> Being a priest was not my first vision and dream. My main goal is to preach and teach. Now the first thing I do is preach and teach. My absolute dream is to be able to broadcast these teachings and sermons in Persian (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I want to be a great preacher in the future because I have much experience. I feel that God wants to make great use of me, and I may need to experience all of this so that later if someone comes to me, I can guide them right by referring to my own experiences (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

The fact that there is an opportunity in Christianity for women to show a new face in the name of religion binds women's identities to Christianity. The Christian community has understood this need to attract the dormant part of Islamic society. If the Christian community were to follow the religious precepts and the Bible line by line, it would be ineffective in presenting the image of Christianity to women. In addition, the mental image of women in the Christianized community is the image of the West. Christians give the ideal society of the West as a model. This is why most female asylum seekers consider migrating to developed countries without having experienced the living environment in the West. Women believe they can make up for their losses there and know their dreams without restrictions.

5.2.9. Women in Search of a New Identity: The Core Concept

Since identity is a multi-layered and multi-level concept, these levels of identity encompass human life from the inner being to the universal being. The primary story is on an individual scale. From a psychoanalytic point of view, each person in his or her life constantly gains experience and adds new layers to the core of his or her personality. Increasing the stabilization of these layers leads to forming the primary identity. The second level of identity is related to the identity of a group that can be raised about ethnicity, tribe, clan, neighborhood, and so on. The third level is national identity, which arises from belonging to a country or nation; In the modern world, this level is fundamental. Because it is the link between specific, local identities and general transnational identities, finally, at the fourth level, we can name transnational identities; At this level, factors and values such as religion are introduced that usually cannot be limited to a country or a nation.

Identity as a core concept in this research is extracted from women's narratives. Still, geographical change, choosing a new name, and changing behavior and lifestyle have also helped strengthen this concept.

I see a new identity. I am a child of God. I am a child of God. God, my heavenly Father, cares for me, listen to my voice, and says Amen to my prayers. He has saved my family and me from many dangers (Marta 2, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

I had my own life; I took my children to school and brought them; I still went to church, grew up a lot, and found a new and independent identity. I lean on Jesus. I trust in Jesus (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

Everyone who knows me, from my family and my husband to friends and acquaintances, tells me that I have become someone else and have tried to be like Christ and the Bible all these years, and I try to do well all that Christ wants me, I do. People around me are shocked. The one in my past died, and a new person was born. The Bible gives an example that if you have old wine, do you pour new wine on the old wine? You do this because the container does not have the capacity, and all the properties and ingredients of the new wine will be recovered by mixing it with the old wine. You have to put those old clothes aside and put on new ones, and this is the baptism of water. I have set aside my past identity... The one who inherits you and you are his heirs is Christ, and the only one who can inherit you is Christ (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

Identity is seen as the place of "self" and mentality. Identity is the core of the model. Women leave Islam because of the social pressures and harm and the harrowing experiences they experienced in the Muslim era, according to the model that has been drawn. However, the God-seeking training of the Muslim age has always been with them as a background. This God-seeking need for religion has led them to seek faith to meet their needs. The primary condition of women is identity. In Islam, due to the dominance of family members and the power of the government, they could not complete the identification process well. Early marriage, domestic violence, lack of education, and many other things prevented women from recognizing their personal and social needs. As a result, they identified all the problems of Islam and left it. Instead, Christianity provided an opportunity for women not only to change their religion but also to change their name, bear witness and be cleansed of their sins, and finally be born again.

Issues such as choosing a new geography for life, a new job, learning a new language, choosing new friends, and many other things affect women's identity. Still, three things are mentioned below as the most obvious ones. Choosing a new name, choosing a new lifestyle, and changing behavior are among the things that are directly mentioned in the interviews.

5.2.9.1. Choose a New Name

The names that people have on them not only give them an identity but are also reflected in their daily lives. Hence, many are careful in choosing a name for their children. Parents give their children unique names for many reasons. For example, some parents name their children in honor of a close or loved one.

Church members in Iran called me Sister Martha. They said I was like Martha, who was constantly receiving. I told them you are hungry and thirsty, and my heart burned... My husband has saved me… (Shiva, 44, Independent Interview, 2022).

I chose Chiara last year before I was baptized because, in Catholicism, you have to have a baptismal name for yourself at baptism. The name baptism means that when I am baptized, I choose a person whose characteristics in my life, actions, and behavior I can emulate and who is a saint. This person must be holy or blessed. Chiara is an Italian saint whom I have modeled. I read his biography and liked her personality and actions. I chose her as my baptismal name (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

I found a new identity in God. I found out when I was a child. I learned his love. I chose Veronica for the face of Jesus. Veronica is my baptismal name. Why did I choose it? Because when Christ went to Golgotha, he carried the cross on his shoulder to death, he was crucified, and with his cross, he fell three times in the streets of Jerusalem. The cross is tough to carry. His whole face was bloodied with the whip he had eaten and the crown of thorns on his head. A woman wiped the blood from Jesus' face with a handkerchief, and the image of Jesus fell on it. The woman's name was Veronica, and I chose it for that. The one who cleansed Jesus. The one who dared, among the soldiers, to wash that blood, to show that love to Jesus... (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

It is common for those who take a new spiritual path to change their name based on a change of religion; Many dreams of a new beginning in conversion. So, they choose a new name that reflects their accepted religious beliefs. After the change of faith and the time of baptism, Christians can choose another word based on Christian teachings. It has been a Christian historical practice to select a new name for baptism. This, of course, gives new believers a new identity that separates them from pre-conversion conditions.

5.2.9.2. Behavior Change

New believers try to change their moods and behaviors through the teachings of the new religion. Changing attitudes can lead to changes in behavior; conversely, changes in behavior can affect a person's attitudes. As mentioned, believers try to live like Christ and follow the teachings of the Bible, so behaviors and lifestyles that are not Christian should be changed. There may be similarities between the new and old religions at this stage, but the differences are more pronounced. This allows one to acquire unique characteristics in the middle of one's life by joining a new religion:

When I called the number on the TV again, a lady picked up the phone. I told her that a gentleman had read something before, and I repeated it. She said you have another birthday. (I was furious. I was angry and arrogant. I had a terrible temper.) I was constantly challenging this lady, and I wanted to condemn her. I told her that if you are right, tell your Christ to heal me; Heal my sorrow and anger. She recited a verse and asked me to repeat it. That verse was Isha 6 and 5. "O God, I do not despise your people. Sanctify me." When I sang, I became someone else. My

anger disappeared. Just as I lost my life one night, I was born another night. I became a child who was isolated, isolated, calm, and slow. So, I kissed my baby for the first time (Sayeh, 48, Independent Interview, 2022).

My lifestyle is different morally and behaviorally. The way I respect, the way I talk to God... If you were someone who knew me, you would see my changes. Everyone, for example, tells me that my pride has decreased and I have become kind. Previously, if I were an enemy of someone, I would be his enemy, and I would take revenge. However, now, if someone does the worst thing in the world to me, I tell myself that my father is upstairs, and he is looking at me. I have changed (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

You might not have wanted to talk to me if you had seen me then. I was a very hard, tyrannical, rigid person. You probably would not have spoken to me if you had seen me before. Morally, God has certainly changed me a lot. One of the most noticeable features is lying. I had difficulty talking to anyone and making friends because I thought I was better than everyone else. God has made it so that I speak to several people daily, pray with them, give advice, teach, and place myself in different positions. I have to empathize with other people, cry, hug them… (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

One of the issues that should be considered in the field of religion and lifestyle is the role, function, and efficiency of faith in the area of various issues of life, including individual, social, political, economic, and… In other words, it may be argued that religion does not only answer the spiritual aspects but also has a plan for daily life and the happiness of the human world:

As a Muslim, I was not a good person if I wanted to judge myself according to my conscience, and maybe many things did not matter to me. I was very nervous and bad-tempered; I insulted others or got mad quickly. If I were to say that I put these aside when I believed, it would be a lie, but gradually, I have grown in my faith and understood this with all my soul over the years. After a while, the more I study the word, the more I know, and the calmer and more polite I become from within as if I have become a healthy person. Even though this current is effective in dealing with animals, I now have three cats. Before I believed in Jesus, I cursed and drove away every animal I saw outside, but when I thought, my attitude toward animals changed... (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

5.2.9.3. Changing Lifestyle

Different religions offer a unique lifestyle. A style that stems from the basic teachings of that religion. Christians strive to present the Christian way of life to demonstrate the effectiveness of faith in matters of life. Believers seek positive change in life. These changes in Christianity are constantly repeated through the interaction between the church and believers by reading the Bible. For this reason, new believers try to incorporate the instructions into their lives, even if changing their circumstances and lifestyle is necessary. Lifestyle is expressed as a functional pattern and behavioral patterns (individually) in activities, attitudes, interests, values , and income allocation.

Lifestyle reflects the individual image and self-perception; The way people see themselves and believe others see them. Christianity seeks to model this reflection and understanding of the teachings of this religion and to establish a two-way interaction between one's motives, needs and wants:

> In Iran, we had two or three cars, a house, a great life, and everything. We had two of everything. I loved the ceremonial life very much—however, now my husband and I know we should help in the future as we get help. Anyway, we are supported through the church, and if we see someone suffering... we will give up... now I would love to live a simple and unpretentious life (Chiara, 28, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I am satisfied with what happened to me. It was precious. Look, I had a very prosperous life, but I still wanted more and more. I was never satisfied with what I had. Now come and see my house, I have a short and compact asylum life, but I am pleased about it (Sahar, 37, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I have nothing here. My husband is a worker. In Iran, our shop was our life. My life was not what it used to be, but it was the other way around when I came here. My husband became a worker ... he was no longer an employer. He endured hardships, and I also got into housekeeping and childcare... for example, the parties I gave... those strange extravagances... Now, when I come to church, they only see me as that simple sister, you know? I was known for my stylish clothes, ceremonies, and gatherings, but I no longer had any taste for myself. I like the taste of this life much more. At that time, when I opened my bag, it was full of money, but now it may not even contain ten Turkish Lira (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

The previous explanations stated the consequences of changing women's religion. The implications of all attitudes, behaviors, lifestyles, foresight, and even the names of people can be affected. All of these concepts fit into a general idea called identity.

Not only are women driven to search for a new identity for the reasons that have been explained, but also the spiritual and church spaces in which they are constantly involved pull them in this direction. Like any social organization, the church is also defined by the two-way relationship between itself and its members. That is why structures such as witnessing, evangelizing, and worshipping are constantly abolished from the church to the participants so they can live in the new Christian identity. An identity that removes the effects of the previous religion and creates new products in a person's mind, behavior, actions, thoughts, and life.

5.3. Constructed Research Model

The last parts were dedicated to getting to know the basic idea and components of the model. In the initial idea of the model, it was pointed out that religious conversion is a process with different levels. Also, using the concepts extracted from the interviews, other parts of the model were built based on the model proposed by Strauss and Corbin.

In Figure 12, all the concepts and themes extracted from the interviews of the women studied in this research are presented in a causal model. In the model proposed by Strauss and Corbin, the relationships between causes, context, intervention, strategy, consequence, and core have been placed. According to the explanation given in the methodology section, the associations of these concepts are also included in the proposed model of this research. In this model, the initial idea that referred to the processual and classification of religious conversion can also be seen.

Figure 12: A Model of Religious Conversion from Islam to Christianity of Iranian Asylum-Seeker Women
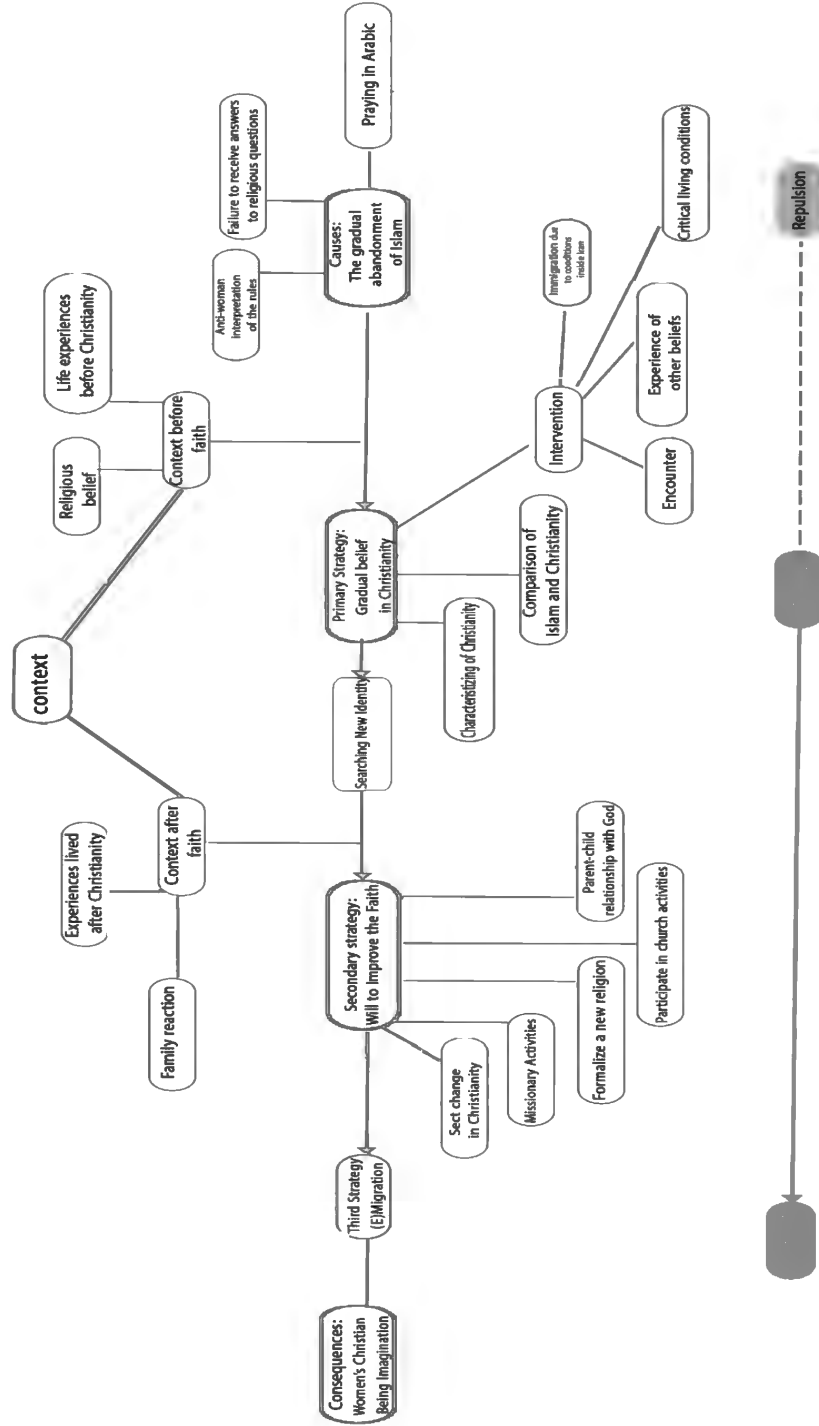
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION OF WOMEN'S SETTLEMENT IN NEW IDENTITY

6.1. The Possibility of Feminized Being in the Christianity

The most basic question that has arisen, which has also formed the central core of this research, is individuality, selfhood, or identity. The question of identity occurs when there is a crisis. Women in the new religion try to compensate for their identity deficiencies and redefine themselves as unique. As mentioned in the model, defining and creating the issue of identity is complex. In other similar research, such as *the Identity crisis of Jordanian BMB (believers from a Muslim background) women at the beginning phase of new faith* (Kim, 2013), identity has also been highlighted.

The author points to an important issue: "Islam's burden of identity on women". It is enough for men to confess their faith in God and follow His commandments, but the visible symbol of Islam is the dress and behavior of women in society. To determine how much a community is Muslim, we must look at its women. This is not the result of women's choice, but it is imposed on women by men and under their orders, and Muslim women cannot find an opportunity to define themselves from the beginning of their birth.

The same thing happened in the years after the 1979 revolution in Iran. With the beginning of a government tied to Islam from the very beginning and whose civil laws were derived from ancient Islamic laws, the control of women played a decisive role in the representation of religious society. This issue was not only crucial in families. What happened in families should be shown on a broader level in the community to conclude to what extent the powerful government has acted. It is the government that needs women more. Women can pursue two goals by changing their religion, firstly, to break the government's relationship with women, and secondly, to find an opportunity to show their protest with a different choice, stand against the dictatorship, and enter an independent life in which they can define whatever they want. The current research has similarities and differences with Kim's analysis. Still, Kim's research shows that many women do not adjust well to their newfound faith and return to their Islamic lifestyle.

This is while in the current study, women not only did not leave the new faith; but even decided to choose migration due to the difficult conditions in the country of origin. In addition, with the recent events that happened in the Iranian women's revolution (the femininity of the Iranian revolution), it seems that Iranian women have reached a level of awareness earlier than other women in neighboring countries that they want to live an independent life without depending on a male military system. There is still no severe reaction from women in the primarily Muslim, patriarchal, and Arab countries around Iran.

Women's conversion to a religion other than Islam is a product of contradictions, conflicts, and tensions that have constantly humiliated and questioned the being of women over the years. For this reason, it has created various forms of inequality, conflict, action, and tension in the daily life of women. After the revolution, along with power, Islam infiltrated all aspects of everyday life, but it targeted women more than men because it could show its success through women. In women's efforts to free themselves from the trap called religion, there was no fear of being labeled as Islamophobic because they lived in the bed of Islam every day and did not have to ignore it like in the West. The Islamic government did its best to present a single religious model to women by limiting the presence of women in the political arena, as well as in social and personal life, while at the same time suddenly depriving them of participation in many sectors. After the revolution of 1979, women gradually lost the right to sing, the right to dress, the right to political involvement at high levels, the right to judge, the right to decide when to get pregnant, and many other rights and were placed at the bottom of the gender gap table in 2022. Because in the years after 1979, the government could not see gender differences in addition to national identity and could not provide a position by the current demands of women and the advancement of women's role in the world arena, Iranian women faced the bottleneck and difficulty of presence.

In the same way, the role of women was not determined by themselves. Still, the government decided all the affairs of women's lives and embedded men against women

in the family as their representatives. The example of a female model was shown many times through television programs, parliamentarians, and government marches. In the face of these fronts, the symbolic violence produced against a diverse and wide range of other women was unseen and reinforced. The suppression, the humiliation, and, the violence makes women look for different ways to get out of these conditions and deny everything that causes such discrimination. These women convert to Christianity in a process, blame Islam for everything they experienced and deny it. In this way, the woman becomes an opposing force against the impositions, and choosing a new religion that is similar to the previous identity and does not have the limitations of the old religion will be an option for some women.

Parallel to women's desire to live in a modern and free society and the government's lack of attention, the church offers them an environment contrary to what women experience daily. Women can be independent and are not afraid of singing, dancing, being naked, commenting, becoming shepherds, preaching, and being a missionary. They can acquire individual and social responsibilities through religion, giving them a new identity. So, this comparison is formed in their minds; why did these opportunities not exist in the previous faith? Questioning starts from the first moment of encountering a new religion compared to the previous one and at the same time as searching for identity.

The search for identity begins with a crisis in the convert's life. Jindra (2014), in the book A New Model of Religious Conversion, refers to the term "The problematic trajectory before conversion":

> "…for many converts, their life before conversion had been characterized by a downward spiral, or if not a downward spiral, at least a form of long-term crisis…" (Jindra, 2014, p. 123).

In this situation, the control of life is taken away from the person; other people can influence her/him and advance the goals; At this moment, Rambo's encounter stage takes place. If a person is not involved in a crisis, she/he will not be ready to change, and, vice versa. To conceptualize religious conversion, socialization is needed. The process by which individuals learn the appropriate roles, norms, and situations of a group. They instill a group's values, beliefs, and worldview and acquire a new social identity based on group membership or affiliation (present or absent).

Although Rambo, one of the most well-known theorists of religious change, recommends studying women in this field, there must be a comprehensive and particular theory for women. Limited studies have paid attention to the issue of women's religious conversion, especially from Islam to Christianity. However, these few studies on women's conditions for changing religion according to backgrounds, ethnicities, and beliefs can be the first step to reaching more comprehensive theories. Although religious conversion was not the focus of researchers until the beginning of the 20th century, there are many theories in this regard. Even until the 1960s and 1970s,

sociologists had not entered this topic, and today they have surpassed the psychologists who initiated the study of religious conversion.

Regarding the church community, the process of feminization is visible. This issue is being formed not only in Iranian society, but on a larger scale worldwide. Although verses in the Bible emphasize the lack of religious education for women, the trustees have created an alignment between the new social environment, public demands, and women's wishes.

6.2. Inconsistency of Primary Encounter (Passive/Active) in the New Faith Process

Iran is a country that the Islamic system of governance has ruled for centuries. Despite ethnic diversity, religious minorities have had fewer opportunities to participate in political and social situations. After the revolution, the promotion and participation of non-Shia religions became difficult, and therefore, ordinary people's access to knowing other religions was limited. Despite such conditions inside the country, Iran is surrounded by Islamic countries from a geopolitical point of view. Although the approach of the countries around Iran and the region is mainly Sunni Islam, the existence of a relatively secular country like Turkey has provided a new opportunity for the religiously curious. If there was no such opportunity to enter Turkey freely without a visa, it might not be easy to access a unique religious experience. Turkey is where the call to prayer can be heard in the distance when going to church or singing Christian hymns. However, there are some restrictions in Turkey. Publicly promoting Christianity or inviting Turkish citizens to the new religion by any non-Turk is prohibited, and sometimes it can bring risks such as deportation from that country.

There are ways to know Christianity. According to the circumstances, everyone has a different experience with this knowledge. Christianity is encountered in different ways, and in the same way, the methods of believing in this religion are other. Faith can start from a moment, receive a message and a sign, and permanently be changed. When a person maintains or strengthens his faith every day, she/he is in the constant cycle of faith. Therefore, faith is not a momentary, temporary matter, although it can be all these things; if a person remains a Christian and strengthens her/his faith, she/he needs stimuli. To stay in a belief or to leave it, each person depends on incentives that can make her/his faith alternately strong and weak. In the following examples, the types of Christian faith among the women interviewed have been extracted. These examples can be related to the initial moment of faith or the process of becoming a Christian; it may have strengthened or weakened their faith. Different types of faith can be converted from one type to another during the process of believing, or they can happen simultaneously, before and after each other:

The Evangelical Faith

In this type of faith, the new religion is introduced through a relative or an evangelist (missionary). People rarely know a new religion, and their encounter with the evangelist pushes them to Christianity. Who is the representative also speeds up the process of

conversion; for example, when very close family members are evangelists, their close relationship and frequent contact make "the good news receiver" more affected:

> My brother's friend Arash was a good man. I knew him. He was a Christian. I went out with them. In fact, in the first three or four sessions, I said how much this boy, Arash, talks! Did you see, for example, this pyramid company wants to pull you toward them? How much they talk! For the first three or four sessions, I would come home and say, wow, how much this boy speaks. It looked like Christ stood up there and wanted to deposit dollars into his account. For example, he wants to include me in his group. The truth is, I thought this way at first, but little by little when I got to know him more and socialized, I sat down and talked, I read a small quantity of the book, I read a small quantity of the word (the Bible), I saw that it is different from what Islam says. It is very different. It means it is not just peace when you say, for example, I believe in you, God, you are a child of God, I am a child of God, God is a father, God is a light, subconsciously, a series of things change in your life, maybe you do not even notice. It is unbelievable how much your relationship with people changes (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I have had tough days in my life. I was very nervous and restless. I was always worried. My husband had cancer and was in a terrible mood. I had many problems from every dimension. One day I knelt and said: "My sister tells me to call Jesus Christ; he will help you, so if it is you, show yourself to me." (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

In this case, the sister has been very influential. Since I have a very close relationship with the narrator, the influence of his sister on the strengthening and continuation of her faith in the new religion can still be seen. She hesitated to change her religion for a long time but finally believed despite many problems and her sister's insistence. She describes the sister's influence as follows:

> I had an intellectual background in questioning, and when my sister told me about the Bible and its verses, I thought more, read books, watched movies, and compared many topics. According to my sister's advice, I chose Protestantism. Because he was a Protestant, I also chose this religion. While studying, I saw strict beliefs in Catholicism and Orthodoxy; it reminded me of Islamic religious fanaticism (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

Husbands are effective in changing the religion of their wives, just as in some examples, wives influence their family members after receiving the good news and changing their faith.

> One day I had a customer in my shop; she was a tailor. She was my regular customer. She used to buy sewing tools from me. She told me about Christianity. I was in a bad mood that day when I started talking to her. After that, she kept coming; she gave me a Bible, I read the Bible, then a light came into my life (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

Evangelism is one of the essential tasks of Christians, which shows itself at every stage of the conversion process, and it is one of the ways and foundations of the missionary system.

> My husband had a friend who was diagnosed with three diseases simultaneously. Everyone was waiting for the death of this person. Everyone had given up hope on him. The first time my husband quit drugs, this same person invited him to NA and took my husband to the NA meetings to quit drugs. One day he came to our house and gave the Bible to my husband and talked about the Bible. From there, they went to a meeting together, and some Christians gave my husband the good news, and he became a believer in Jesus. When he came to me that night to explain, even though he had not read the Bible, he began to present more than he knew. The next day, he went to his parent's house, and his mother converted on the same day. Because the word of God is more victorious than any sword penetrating the marrow, they will receive the message if someone is listening (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

In the example above, the evangelistic cycle is seen. A friend gives good news to a family member, and this cycle begins in that family. As mentioned, the evangelist's influence is essential in conveying the message.

If receiving evangelization outside the church system is person-to-person, it is done by one of the spouses, friends, and relatives, but there is not only person-to-person. In today's developed world, advertising systems operate very widely. CDs of the life of the Christ, various channels on virtual networks, and unique televisions dealing with Christian issues are constantly evangelizing.

> One day, I saw the owner's daughter at the door, giving me a Bible and a CD of Jesus's life story. She said: "Look! they gave this to me from the church, my friend, Valentin, gave it to me." She noted that Valentin had told her to read, and she did not say she had become a Christian... According to the custom, we are afraid of touching the Qur'an; we used to kiss it, put it on our heads, and keep it in the closet. I was scared to touch the Bible. I was terrified of the Bible. I told my son no! Do not touch it; it is a sin; put it in the closet, but we watched the Jesus movie with my son on the laptop. I saw the sufferings of Jesus; I was affected and thought. Then one day, we were sitting at my mother's house. The TV was on Hot Bird Satellite, which had many Christian channels. A channel showed a program belonging to Mr. Reza Safa, a Christian pastor. He suddenly said that God is love. God is love; this sentence touched my heart. I asked myself, "Oh, this is God's love, so which kind of love is this?" Why didn't I taste it? Why do I suffer so much in my life if it is love? Which love? I always thought that God is love... Then I took this thread; I went looking for that love... (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

The church's advertising system is pervasive. By establishing their communication networks inside and outside Iran, they do every possible way to penetrate society. The extensive network of the church is complex and is the subject of independent studies. Still, this same network takes help from pastors as a rudder and guides in creating a

cycle of evangelization and inviting people to Christianity. The function of the church system is effective in creating miraculous situations because many of the things that women mention in interviews are brought to the front of other church members as testimonies. Church members talk about their different experiences; this is part of witnessing and testing faith.

The Miraculous Faith

Another type of belief in Christianity is miraculous. This kind of faith can also happen under the influence of factors such as receiving gifts, messages, and Inspiration. This type of faith can create changes in a person in the very first encounter, and the first step of religious change can take place, but on the other hand, it can be seen and even repeated after believing:

> I became a Christian through miracles. In my opinion, two types of people want to become Christians; either they must see a gift, or their questions must be answered (religious questions, the difference between the Bible and the Qur'an). I had no questions, but a miracle happened to me (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

This miraculous realization may have occurred in a dream and is constantly repeated throughout the process of faith:

> **The first example:**
> I was sleeping, and Andre (the narrator's husband who changed his first name) was praying. It was midnight. You may not believe it, but after sixteen years, I am saying this, that many voices, that excellent and kind voice... it is still new to me... I was sleeping and reading about Abraham that night when God said to Abraham; I will bless you and your offspring like the sands of the sea... like the stars of the sky. Then I read this and fell asleep. Three times, three times, he said in my ear... He said I would bless you and your descendants. I will bless you and your descendants. I will bless you and your descendants. When I woke up, I started screaming, and suddenly my husband came into the room and asked what was happening. I said God spoke to me and told me I would bless you and your descendants (Shiva, 44, Independent Interview, 2022).

> **The second example:**
> I was sleeping. Suddenly I heard a man's voice. The man's voice was so strong and determined that I felt that even the windows were broken. Even I thought the God of Islam came to fight me. It was tough for me to move, especially when I was in several hospitals and had prolonged anesthesia. I had taken 12 methadone, and everyone said it was impossible to come back from a coma, and that voice was so loud and intense that I screamed and jumped out of sleep. At the same time as me, my son heard a word in the room that we thought was an Arabic word, but if it was a Hebrew word, someone said: Hallelujah. When we listened to this word, we were terrified. Then we hugged and slept for a few years (Sayeh, 48, Independent Interview, 2022).

> **The third example:**

I went to my room at night and prayed. I said, God, I will tell you something. If you are the way and the truth, I do not believe in you if I do not see anything from you until June 7th. You have to show me something. I want to know if it is true. I dreamed at night; I saw a light that came to me and said that "I am your shepherd; you will not need anything; I will make you sleep in green pastures; I will lead you to calm waters." I got up in the morning. I opened the Bible, and Psalm 23 suddenly appeared: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters (Veronica, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

The fourth example:

After my husband became a Christian, he always told me to ask God himself. Didn't you say that no matter how much I call God, he does not hear my voice? Ask God now. Ask God to show you what the truth is. As I was thinking, I fell asleep. I dreamed when I slept. I was in a small room with a door in front of me. Someone was standing next to me. The door opened, and a person entered and told me with the power of expression that the spirit would appear in you. I thought the person next to me was Yahya, even though I knew nothing about Yahya. I had not even read the Bible. I woke up, and after this dream, my heart opened. I was eager to know more. I told my husband about my dream, and he told me about Christ. My ears were open, and I always wanted to hear (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

However, there are other examples of miracle perception. When deliverance is achieved, the narrators' interpretation of miracles, revelations, and receiving the message and special attention of Jesus or God can be understood in every trouble and calamity. These miracles can be a wide range of receiving healing or freedom from a particular problem.

After the death of my niece, I suffered from a severe mental illness, so I really could not walk at all. After a few days of suffering and grief, I saw Jesus Christ, who hugged me and told me to read Psalm 69. I read this psalm, and I was well healed. I gave this testimony several times. I saw this healing from Jesus Christ (Marta, 46, Independent Interview, 2022).

When I was in the worst situation, I would sit and cry; I would pray and say that I want you to show yourself to me - to see those miracles - it would open the way for me. My husband and I were arrested at the border. The officer took my husband and me inside the police station. He started asking questions, and finally, the officer said, "I know… I know what you are going for, go!" He let us go. It was God who touched him... He could have arrested us at the same time, but it was God who did not let him stop us (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

After believing in Christianity, some mentalities have been created. These mentalities show that destiny has played a role in choosing every stage of new Christians' lives, especially in leading them to Christianity. People who do not provide a rational reason for choosing Christianity focus on supernatural explanations. Christians believe that God determines their choice and it is God who chooses the path

for them throughout their life most frequently used term by the respondents was "touch from God":

> Christ came directly and chose me. He picked me up. No one gave me good news. No one dared to give me good news (Shiva, 44, Independent Interview, 2022).

> If I were a man, I would not have been exposed to these events, but maybe I would have been led to this path in another way. Even if I were a man, I would not have chosen Christianity, but I would have been selected. Jesus Christ and God chose you; this good news will somehow be given to you (Parisa, 27, Independent Interview, 2022).

> God was also involved in choosing this church. When we came to Turkey, I prayed again and asked God: Lord! I am asking you to show me a church where I can go and come quickly and where there is more love and loyalty to you. After two weeks, we found this house, and I found out that our house was ten minutes from the church, and it reminded me that it was God who opened my way (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

> I was not interviewed, nor did anyone call me. I will do whatever he wants. Whatever he chooses for me, I will accept it with my heart and soul because God chose not to meet. However, if I want to select and be sure of my choice, I will regret it (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

The church also instills this belief in the converts. This belief is created in the minds of Christians that God specially chooses them, and this choice is effective in all stages of their lives. In this surrender to fate, many necessary life plans are affected, and even the journey of asylum seekers may be stopped in the middle. In the example below, the narrator hears a loud voice with the theme of Hallelujah when she is half awake. The following day, she calls the church to explain the matter to the church officials, and the answer she receives is as follows:

> I called the church manager and explained that God had come last night and fought me. He asked, what did he say? I replied that God was saying Hallelujah. It was typical for him; he explained that God had chosen. You heard it with your ears, meaning you were selected for special duty (Sayeh, 54, Independent Interview, 2022).

> When I became a Christian, in the church, they always said that it is not you who chooses Jesus; it is Jesus himself who chose you, and I believe this because I never had in my mind that one day I would come to Turkey, enter the church and meet a Christian and wanting to become a Christian was never in my mind. I liked it, I am not saying I did not like it, but I never felt it in my heart to become a Christian myself, or I never thought about it. In my opinion, based on the faith we have, I say that Jesus Christ himself chose us. I did not choose him (Elham, 36, Independent Interview, 2022).

For example, Christ saw us. He chose us; we were touched... While praying, I feel him sit beside me, putting his hand on my shoulder and listening. For example, everyone always tells me, "It has been five years since you emigrated; why don't you go and ask them to interview you" Why don't you call? Maybe I would have gone and come ten times if it was before. I say if he likes, he will call. If not, it does not work. Why? Sarah came and took a wife for Ibrahim. What did God say? He said, "Now is not the time." God has set a time for me; what should I do? (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

Fainting, crying, and speaking unintelligibly were the cases I witnessed during my frequent visits to the church. Secondary signs or one of the ways of miraculous faith can be included in the above points that the interviewees also mentioned. However, if we want to understand more about the reasons for these different feelings and behaviors, we must extract definitions from their language:

Christ gives us the Holy Spirit, and this Holy Spirit of God provides a person with a gift. My gift as a servant is to heal or treat (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

The Holy Spirit speaks from us without understanding what will happen. If someone who has the gift of translating languages will translate it into Persian. This is a gift (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

Christians believe that after reading the salvation prayer, the Holy Spirit resides in their body, giving them various gifts and equipping them with spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 4 to 11). These gifts include speaking with the Holy Spirit (language gifts), healing, worshipping, preaching, and others. A gift enables a person to perform actions outside of the will:

This is a fruit and a gift from God, and there are different gifts. One is the gift of healing, the exorcism of spirits, management, leadership, love, and hospitality; these are all gifts. Each believer has one or more of these gifts. However, if someone does not have skills, it is not a reason that she/he is not a Christian (Marjan, 38, Independent Interview, 2022).

We learned a lesson from the church pastor that each of us Christians receives grace or a gift from God. One is an evangelist, a worshiper; one is kind, one is hospitable, and an encourager, which means that even encouragement is one of God's gifts. So, a person may have all of these, one or both. After understanding the issue, I told myself I was not an evangelist. If I were an evangelist, I could go and evangelize. I am not an evangelist. God did not give me this gift. I am a worshiper. I worship. It is also a gift. Only some have this gift. Not everyone can worship God, so tens of people become ecstatic. For example, strangers and guests came to me after worship and told me separately that we were delighted to see your worship. It happened not once but many times (Neda, 39, Independent Interview, 2022).

One of the reasons for turning to Christianity among the respondents was the request for healing. Several responses may be to such a request, either directly fulfilled or indirectly justified in the gifts or donations.

> If someone is sick, I lay my hands on her/his body and pray for her/him to be healed, and maybe this will not happen at the same time, and this depends on the sick person's faith. The gift that I received from the Holy Spirit was the gift of healing. I even restore marital and family relationships (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

All religions do not have the same view on the issue of gifts and beliefs, such as Catholicism or Adventists, which have more prejudices, consider supernatural actions less acceptable, and offer different interpretations. For them, the language gifts do not have the same meaning as it has in Protestantism. In Protestantism, the Holy Spirit speaks in its language only to certain people, but Adventists and Catholics define the language gifts that everyone can pray to God in any language:

> In Adventism, we have gifts. For example, look at sister Azima; her English improved in six months. God gave her the gift of language so that she could serve the church and translate English into Persian so that everyone could understand the sermons. However, for example, someone lays hands on another person and says incomprehensible words in another religion. However, in Adventism, for example, the pastor (the Korean pastor of the church) cannot speak Farsi, right? He says an interpreter must be there when he is praying for me (Shiva 2, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

During prayer, a miraculous reception may happen, and people cry, faint, and suddenly start speaking in an incomprehensible language. All these cases are miraculous faith that gives their faith more consistency and strength. Although from the point of view of the converts, the expression of such perceptions does not create a difference between the expresser and others, it is impossible to distance from this view properly. It was difficult for me not to differentiate who witnessed such an experience from the outside.

> If I cry at that moment, I am so filled with the presence of God that my tears fall involuntarily. This filling of God's presence is not the same for everyone. Someone falls, someone sits on their knees, and someone cries (Soulmaz, 40, Independent Interview, 2022).

> That is not called fainting. We do not have the strength to stand on our feet when we feel good. It does not take more than a few moments; after that, you think entirely that you are in God's arms and presence. A charming warmth surrounds you inside, and the space has a good and different fragrance (Mina, 68, Independent Interview, 2022).

The Gradual Faith (Questioning)

The process of believing in Christianity after receiving the good news or a miracle may be accompanied by study, thinking, and meditation. A person must cross the bridge of doubt to take more decisive steps. Of course, each of the things that are mentioned in the explanation of the types of belief can happen back and forth or do not happen at all:

> Do not think that I got up and got a Bible for myself, opened it, started reading, and said, "Wow, my heart was touched, so and so!" It did not happen like this... It took a long time (Niloufar, 31, Independent Interview, 2022).

> Because when I was a Muslim and believed in the God of Islam, I saw that there are contradictions in some cases, and later I came and read the Bible and saw no contradiction. It is challenging for someone who believes in the God of Islam with all her/his heart to look for another God. When I thought about Christ, I had a war with myself for a few months, and firstly, I felt sorry for myself because I had accepted Islam so blindly, and secondly, I did not know Christ properly. I entered an unknown world from a world I knew very well (Hamideh, 32, Independent Interview, 2022).

> One thing that happens in the evangelism system is that they expect to become Christians overnight when this change should happen gradually. A person who has been a Muslim for 40-50 years and Islam has taken root in her/him cannot quickly become a Christian and must proceed slowly… (Hida, 34, Independent Interview, 2022).

The Involuntary Faith

> I believed only because the servants stopped telling me good news (Sara, 26, Independent Interview, 2022).

Sometimes people choose Christianity under compulsion and without going through any process and then enter the process of conversion. This compulsion happens due to the excessive persistence of evangelists. People only accept modification to eliminate excessive urges but follow the conversion process due to life conditions.

> My aunt became a Christian in Germany. She became a Christian and fell into our lives. She called me on and on and started crying. While crying, she said, "I was saved; you were not saved! If I die, I will not be able to see you in the world where I am. You will not come. Believe in God." Ten days passed like this. One of those nights, she called again and repeated the exact words. I took the phone away from my ear and said, God, why doesn't she let go? She was very desperate and sad. I told myself, "You are destroying this poor person because of your selfishness." I repeated the salvation prayer with her to make her feel comfortable (Neda, 39, Independent Interview, 2022).

> My husband was ready on the first day but waited for me... After a while, he approached me and said: I want to believe... We have been together until now, but from now on, the choice is yours. However, I want to think about today. I always

said in my speeches that I did this for my husband; I went and knelt at the altar, then I believed in Christ. After they gave me Christ as Lord, I was still fighting. I cannot say any exact date, but from somewhere, I realized that I was fighting in vain. I surrendered. After that day, God changed my character (Hamideh, 32, Independent Interview, 2022).

I became a Christian entirely unintentionally. Because I was very attached to my previous religion, but because something happened to my husband, I became a Christian. I have been here for almost two and a half years now. I was one of those people who liked to research something new, not necessarily believe in it, I wanted to know, but the further I went in this process, I understood the reality of Christianity more and more. So, I researched and studied more and was encouraged until I reached a point where I felt it was right because my husband and I believe in God ultimately… (Reyhaneh, 32, Independent Interview, 2022).

In the theory chapter, the modern and classical theories were explained. The common factor between these theories was believers' passive and active terms in the moment of faith. Accordingly, Richardson and Kilbourn are one of the complete theories that try to fill the space of believers' active and passive terms in a single theory. As a researcher focused on religious conversion, I have a critique of these theories, which I will discuss after a brief description.

Kilbourne and Richardson (1988) tried to present a combination of classical and modern perspectives. In Table 15, the typology of conversion is shown. In the interaction between the active option and intra, individual transformation is placed in the sense that people can accept the change in their personal space. The mystical conversion is most frequently associated with the conversion of St. Paul; the belief changes conversion, Affectional, and Psychopathologic.

In the first type, a person enters the stage of sudden change with a short-term crisis, and it is the product of individual differences more than social changes. This type of change of religion is called the change of Saint Paul religion.

In the second type, the person changes his belief and strengthens his commitment to the new religion. In the third type, emotions overcome all matters.

A kind of causal efficacy which suggests that what we are emotionally aroused by or attached to acquires tremendous power over what we do; emotional attachments lead some individuals into certain religious affiliations (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1988, p. 5).

The psychopathological conversion generally emphasizes individually or in combination the neurotic conflicts, psychological distresses, unmet needs, or frustrations of the convert. Religious conversion and commitment are viewed as compensatory mechanisms utilized by individual's incapable of dealing with life's frustrations, failures, and dis- appointments.

In cell three (active-interindividual), we see conceptual and empirical evidence of another new conversion type, the experimental conversion. This model happens in groups. Individuals assume the role of committed members. Their changes are gradual and experiential, similar to how people learn new roles in regular groups. People in this category experience unique lifestyles and different social groups through social networks, chance encounters, and the media, so they may actively and systematically sample other groups and report multiple conversions. The second example in the same group, social drift, emphasizes identity more than anything else. Individuals intentionally discover their identity within the framework of specific life problems and stress that affect their life course. These people's religion changes gradually and during the focus on interaction with others.

In the passive-interindividual cell (cell 4), there are four basic types of conversion: the revivalist conversion, the socialization conversion, the deprivation conversion, and the coercive conversion. The first type describes the transformation of a serious matter in an emotionally charged population. The emotional burden placed on the group causes individuals to change their behaviors and attitudes. In the second type, two socialization processes are separated; continuity in socialization and over-socialization.

> Both types are deterministic and focus on the continuing effects of early childhood socialization. From this perspective, individuals are indoctrinated during childhood and rarely is such indoctrination forgotten or neutralized as the individual grows older. Continuity in socialization occurs when adults affiliate with others who share views first learned in childhood. When views learned in childhood persist into adulthood despite a lack of social support, "over socialization" is likely to occur (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1988, p. 7)

In the third type, deprivations in any dimension, whether social, economic, or environmental, cause a change in religion. The basic argument is that social environments have a degree of deprivation, and as a result, they can produce a variety of transformations in different spectrums.

Forced conversion involves the individual's social-emotional breakdown and subsequent submission to powerful group forces in a controlled environment.

Kilbourne & Richardson describes cell one as a human, cell two as psychological, cell three as interactionist, and cell four as environmental-social.

Table 15: Kilbourne`s Richardson`s Typology of Conversion Types

TYPOLOGY OF CONVERSION TYPES

		Agency	
		Active	Passive
Level of Analysis	Intra-Ind.	1 Intellectual or Self	2 Mystical Belief Change Affectional Psychopathologic
	Inter-Ind.	3 Experimental Social Drift	4 Revivalist Socialization Deprivation Coercive

Source: Kilbourne & Richardson, 1988, p. 3

All the theories created based on the active and passive terms in religious conversion define religious conversion in a moment based on the type of action of believers. For example, if a person has acted passively at the moment of believing, she/he can be included in the modern theory of brainwashing or any of Richardson's definitions based on Table 15, or if it is active at the moment of believing, it can be placed into one of the theories introduced in Table 13; But if we look at religious conversion as a process, how will it be? Is it necessary that the exact moment of religious conversion can be a suitable division to separate believers from each other? If being active in some cases is a choice, is not being passive in other instances also an option?

Based on what was extracted from women's narratives, there were cases where women acted passively in the beginning or at one stage of faith, and at another location, they had an active role. The active and passive choices of women are reciprocating or reflexive. Even if we are more precise, women do not actively participate in all aspects of the conversion process. Still, they may be active in worship but passive in evangelization. It has also been seen in examples that women were happening at the beginning of faith, but they did not want to participate in more detailed activities or choose only one action. These differences show that if a believer enters a new religion with a prominent feature, that feature can be changed, so the type of faith will also change. It should also be noted that faith types can co-occur or overlap in parallel.

In the types of faith extracted from the female respondents of the current study (6.2), there are similarities with some of the things in Richardson's theory. For example, evangelical faith is done by an acquaintance, but the point is that it can also interfere with other types of religious conversion while it is an interaction. For example, while feeling depressed, a person gets to know an evangelist and enters the process of changing religion.

In short, the types of religious conversion do not have a specific border, but each can overlap in different numbers and types and happen simultaneously. The division based

on the kind of action (active/passive) of believers needs to be revised to clarify the place of activity in the stages and process of faith.

6.3. The Research Delimitations

Iranian groups living in Turkey are mostly refugees. Due to the strictness of the Turkish government, which in some cases leads to deportation, most asylum seekers do not want to be interviewed and are cautious. Even in some points during the interview, the women emphasized that their life stories should not be disclosed because someone else may tell the case officers the same level, and there will be no chance of becoming an asylum. For this reason, when I went into details in some cases, they did not want to explain and avoided giving additional answers.

One of the other limitations of the research was access to new-converted women. Because I had met Christianized friends in a different environment before choosing this topic, I could enter their safe spaces more quickly. Still, this possibility may only be available to some researchers. Although the New Christian friends had a good influence on the church, not all church members accepted my offer for an interview.

Another limitation in this research was whether women in the conditions of hardship and uncertainty prevailing in Turkey are telling the truth about the depth of their faith in Christ. Don't women use the possibility of becoming Christians to cross the borders? There is no way to detect this situation. It is impossible to answer explicitly that the instrumental use of religion is necessarily a negative approach. Hence, as a researcher, I decided to focus on the honesty of women's statements and only be an analyst and narrator of their experiences.

Another significant issue is the investigation of the statistical situation of asylum seekers based on ideological separation. In the statistics section, details of the immigration status of Iranians and women in the world and Turkey were collected based on religious beliefs. It was not easy to find such statistics. I tried to contact Dr. Nader Vahabi. He is a professor of sociology at the University of Paris. He has been researching the field of Iranian immigration for many years and also wrote the book "Iranian Migration Atlas." Dr. Vahabi pointed out that no official statistics separate people's religions or refer to the number of immigrants, asylum seekers, or ideological refugees; religious beliefs are irrelevant in Europe and official forms. Nevertheless, I tried my best to be able to add any usable statistics that provide a broad view of the immigration situation of Iranians, women, refugees, and especially Christians, in the statistics section. However, it should be noted that focusing only on statistics is not enough to show the depth of the importance of the topic. On the other hand, there are limitations in this field that make access to statistics difficult.

The chosen topic in the research only allowed me access to Iranian women living in Turkey, which raises questions that each can be an independent research topic. For example, the question of the conditions of new Christian women inside Iran has yet to be given attention. Even after leaving the transit countries, there needs to be more

information about the situation of Christian women. Has this group of women continued their faith after settling in a third country? Do they follow propaganda activities as widely as when they were residents of transit countries? Is their relationship with the church still continuous? Has the change of location and life in a free and, of course, Christian nation impacted their views?

Although many questions can be the beginning of extensive research, I will also suggest some topics based on the studies I have conducted in Turkey as a transit country.

### 6.4. Suggestions for Further Studies

When a Muslim woman becomes a Christian, she has to overcome many problems and challenges, such as breaking her old beliefs, psychological conflicts, fear of new adventures, and finally rebuilding her identity. Hence, she faces a veritable version of the "reevaluation of all values." In addition, she should be able to maintain her Iranian identity and, at the same time, be a part of the Christian community.

More than any other issue, the researchers' lack of attention to women and the religious conversion, especially from Islam to Christianity, was significant, also mentioned in the research literature review. Few researchers have addressed this issue, so its wide dimensions remain unknown. There is still no clear answer to what extent women are involved in advancing the goals of the church system and how far the church system is willing to assign critical responsibilities to women despite the clear verses against women's participation. Therefore, some women who can be studied in future research can be exclusively women active in pastoral and church management. This way, the hidden layers of the relationships governing the churches can be revealed more deeply. Two other issues remain far from the eyes of researchers in new Christian societies. The first issue is to pay attention to the relations of sexual and gender minorities with the Iranian church. In all my church visits, I did not see anyone belonging to the rainbow society, and I inquired about this several times. The answer was the clear verses of the Bible, which do not recognize other gender and sexual groups except women and men. For a long time, activists worldwide have been trying to get the rainbow community members identified by the churches. Even though their marriage takes place in churches, these people have no place in the Iranian Christian community outside of Iran. The initial impression will be that the Iranian church system does not invest in the concepts of human rights. In this regard, there will be severe criticism, which will also be researchable.

Another proposed issue is the presence of children in churches. For Iranians who often grew up in ideological religious schools, the type of education the church system has chosen for children is not so strange but is also more concrete. Maybe that is why they do not object to it and sometimes bring their children to church for over five years. In the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the presence and role of children were very prominent. According to the laws of children's rights, this deprives them of access to and choice of religion freely. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the presence of

children and their participation in church affairs was felt more than in other churches. A story of Youssef's life was broadcast along with the display of cartoon posters. After singing the hymn with the children in the group, one of the children prayed for everyone: "God, forgive us if we have sinned, and I want you to leave a good path for us as always." In church 222, children performed a piece of music called "Be ready, Jesus is coming back." During the sermon in the Church of Shaban Nikou (good shepherd), one of the children was addressed, "Be like these children so that I can raise you; I want my father to raise me like a child." That child was also sitting and playing with his father's phone. Children are absent during the central prayer and participate in their particular classes. Studying and praying and memorizing the verses of the Bible, learning religious stories, and narrating their spiritual experiences are among the things they do in these classes. Therefore, after dealing with women, it is essential to study the presence of children and research the type of their activities in categories called "Kanun Shadi" (the center of happiness) (Picture 2 & 3).

Picture 2: An Iranian Child Member of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church Being Baptized by A Korean Pastor
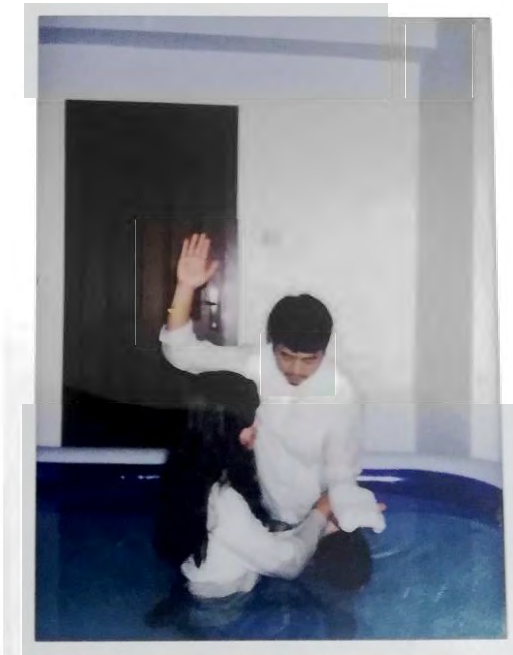
Picture 3: Children's Crafts in "Kanun Shadi" (The Center of Happiness)
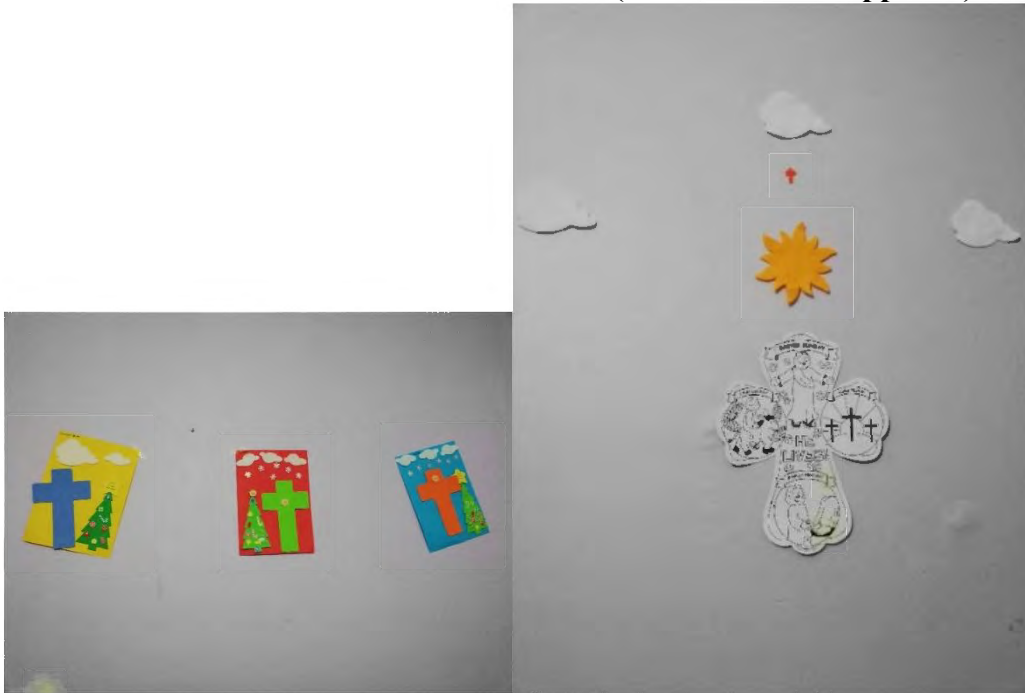
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Demographic Questions

Interviewed person:		Date of interview:
Demographic features		
1. Age?		2. When did you come to Turkey?
3. Education?		4. Occupation?
5. Marital status	6. Number of children?	7. Where did you live in Iran?
8. Immigration status?		
9. What kind of job did you work in Iran?		
10. Duty in the church?		

Appendix 2: Demographic Data

Demographic Data							
Name	Mina	Asal	Shima	Soulmaz	Sara	Shiva	Sayeh
Age	68	38	28	40	26	44	48
Years of immigration	4	5	3	10	8	9	3
Education	High school	High school	B. A	High school	Elementary	High school	M. A
Occupations in Iran	Housewife	Diving instructor	Employed	Pastor of the church	Housewife	Hairdresser	Security police officer
Occupations in Turkey	Iranian food cook	Unemployed	Unemployed	Pastor of the church	Housewife	Unemployed	Pastor of the church
Marital status	Widow	Partnership	2nd marriage	Married	Divorcing	Married	Divorced
Number of children	3	0	0	2	2	2	2
The city lived in Iran.	Rasht	Isfahan	Tehran	Abadan	Mashhad	Kermanshah	Rasht
Immigration status	Waiting list	Deported	Waiting list	Accepted	Waiting list	Accepted	Waiting list
Duty in the church	Deacon	Nothing	Servant	Pastor of the church	Evangelist	Singer of the worship group	Pastor of the church

Demographic Data							
Name	Neda	Fatemeh	Veronica	Parisa	Marta	Leila	Chiara
Age	39	40	54	27	46	38	28
Years of immigration	4	10	4	5	5	5	5
Education	B. A	Highschool	B. A	B. A	Highschool	Highschool	B. A
Occupations in Iran	Translator	Housewife	Accountant	Artist	Housewife	Housewife	Student
Occupations in Turkey	Translator	Hairdresser	Servant of the church	Labor	Housewife	Housewife	Servant of the church
Marital status	2nd marriage	Married	Divorced	Married	2nd marriage	Married	Married
Number of children	0	3	1	0	4	3	0
The city lived in Iran.	Rasht	Shiraz	Tabriz	Shiraz	Tehran	Tehran	Tehran
Immigration status	Waiting list	Accepted	No request	Waiting list	Waiting list	Waiting list	Waiting list
Duty in the church	Servant and Singer of the worship group	Nothing	Servant	Nothing	Nothing	Servant	Servant and translator

Appendix 2: Demographic Data (Continue)

Demographic Data							
Name	Niloufar	Reyhaneh	Hamideh	Samira	Marjan	Zohreh	Marta 2
Age	31	32	32	36	38	53	37
Years of immigration	5	3	4	6	15	5	7
Education	Highschool	B. A	B. A	B. A	B. A	Highschool	Elementary school
Occupations in Iran	Hairdresser	Nurse	Accountant	Housewife	Housewife	Labor	Housewife
Occupations in Turkey	Hairdresser	Labor	Labor	Labor	Pastor and theology student	Housewife	Labor
Marital status	Single	Married	Married	Married	Married	Divorced	Married
Number of children	0	0	2	1	1	2	2
The city lived in Iran	Tehran	Rasht	Rasht	Tehran	Isfahan	Tehran	Tehran
Immigration status	Waiting list	Waiting list	Waiting list	Waiting list	Leave the application	Waiting list	Waiting list
Duty in the church	Servant	Nothing	Pastor	Nothing	Pastor	Poet of religious poems and servant	Waiting list

Demographic Data						
Name	Aftab	Elham	Soraya	Hida	Sahar	Shiva 2
Age	35	36	35	34	37	40
Years of immigration	7	5	4	4	5	4
Education	B. A	Highschool	M. A	B. A	Highschool	Elementary school
Occupations in Iran	Accountant	Secretary	Lawyer	Shopkeeper	Labor	Shopkeeper
Occupations in Turkey	Labor	Labor	Housewife	Labor	Housewife	Housewife
Marital status	Married	Divorced	Married	Married	Divorced	Married
Number of children	2	0	1	1	1	2
The city lived in Iran	Tehran	Isfahan	Rasht	Karaj	Isfahan	Shiraz
Immigration status	Waiting list	Waiting list	Leave the application	Waiting list	Waiting list	Waiting list
Duty in the church	Preacher, teacher, and pastor	Nothing	Evangelist	Servant	Nothing	Preacher and teacher

Appendix 3: Main Questions

The questions for this research are divided as Appendix 3. These questions are derived from the analysis of the first few interviews and a review of previous research.

1. Theme: Situation Before Immigration and Life as A Christian in The Country of Origin

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself, your daily life in the country you come from, and your family? What job did your mom and dad do? For what reasons did you decide to migrate? Why did you choose Turkey to immigrate to? What would you like to say about it?
2. Can you explain the religion you have in your country before coming to Turkey? (About your religiosity, family religiosity, religious practices) Can you briefly talk about living in your old religion?

2. Theme: Economic Situation and Living Conditions

3. Explain your economic situation. Have you engaged in economic activity in Iran? Where do you earn money after migrating?
4. Did you get any help from the church? How do you get help from the church in an emergency?

3. Theme: The Process of Conversion and the History of Family Religiosity

5. Did your family adhere to Islam? Did your family pass on the teachings of Islam to you? Do the orders of Islam bind your parents? Explain this a little.
6. Why don't you convert to another religion, and where does Christianity come from? Have you been baptized? What was this internal process of belief change, its peak, and when?
7. What was the meeting with Christianity like, and when and where did this meeting take place? Where did you change your religion? Please explain how religious your family is. How did your family react to your change of religion? Does your family have a history of conversion? How did your family respond after you became a Christian? Who in your family is currently a Christian?
8. To what extent is the Christian faith institutionalized in you and part of your existence and identity? Has it affected your life and family day and night, and is your life based on that?
9. Do you feel rejected by your friends or family? If you think such a situation exists, what is the reason(s) for this situation? What do you want to say about this?
10. How has your lifestyle changed since Christianity? What are the benefits of being a Christian for you?
11. What does Christianity mean? Who do you think is a Christian? To what extent do you consider yourself a Christian? Moreover, how do you express your beliefs? In which religion are you more religious, and what is the reason for your devotion?

4. Theme: Christianity and Gender Perspective

12. What was the view of men and women in Islam and Iran? What is the opinion of men and women in Christianity? Do you see a difference between men and women in these two religions? How is the relationship between a man and a woman defined in Christianity?

13. Do you think your gender has influenced your conversion? Can you explain a little bit about this? How would you describe the position of women in Christianity and Islam?

14. Do you teach Christianity to your children? What activities do your children participate in Christianity?

5. Theme: Reason for Migration, Arrival in the Destination Country (Turkey), and the Conversion Process

15. Can you summarize your migration journey as far as you can remember? (Who and how did you come? What problems did you encounter during your immigration trip?) Why did you choose Turkey? What problems did you face when you first came to Turkey?

16. What were your reasons for choosing Christianity? Can you tell us what problems you encountered during the conversion process and how you tried to cope with them? Also, what opportunities did you get in a new religion? What are the benefits of being a Christian for others? How do you invite someone to Christianity? How do you convince them?

17. Can you explain the rights you have in your new religion? How much do you participate in church and religious activities? What problems do you have in this case? How do you try to cope with these problems?

6. Theme: Christian Social Life and Future Perspective

18. What kind of friends do you have in your city (natives, refugees from your country, or other refugees)? What do you do with them?

19. How do you think Christianity has affected your life? How do you try to cope with this situation?

20. Can you compare the church's participation in cultural and social activities regarding the country of origin and Turkey?

21. Can you explain why you chose this church and your duties? Can you explain more about your Christian beliefs?

22. Why are you waiting for a savior in Christianity? What role does faith in the Savior Christ play in your life?

23. How have you practiced Iranian customs since you became a Christian? How important is Iran to you? Do you think your change of religion has affected your outlook on Iran? Can you explain a little bit about this?

24. How do you maintain your relationship with other Iranian Christians? How is your relationship with other Christian women? What are your plans for the future of Christianity? What is your vision for the end of the Christian

community? Can you tell us more about your relationship with other Christians and the future of this community?

25. How did conversion affect your citizenship rights in Iran? Did you feel a change in your citizenship rights after the conversion to Iran? Are you aware of your citizenship rights in Turkey as a refugee woman? How do you assess the status of your citizenship rights after immigration?

26. Do you intend to return to your country when the conditions are right? Can you explain this a bit?

27. Would you like to continue your life in Turkey or another country? Why? What would you like to say about this?

28. What would you like to change if you had the opportunity? What would you like to say about this?

29. Apart from our discussion, is there anything else you want to add or say?

30. As a final word, how did you feel during the interview process? Was there anything bothering you? Can I learn your positive or negative feedback about the interviews we conducted?

"RELIGIOUS CONVERSION OF IRANIAN ASYLUM-SEEKING WOMEN IN THE PROCESS OF SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: THE CASE OF ESKISEHIR" başlıklı Tez, yukarıdaki listede yer alan konularla ilgili olarak tarafımızca kontrol edilmiş ve gerekleri yerine getirilmiştir.

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(Öğrencinin Adı SOYADI)   (Danışmanın Unvanı Adı SOY