



Epistemic and Non-Epistemic Factors in Religious Conversion from Christianity to Islam: A Qualitative Study Based on Converts' Narratives

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Abstract

Conversion from Christianity to Islam is a multilayered, gradual process shaped by the interaction of epistemic and non-epistemic factors. This qualitative study employs narrative inquiry to analyze semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of converts. Analysis using Rambo's stage model and the Lofland–Stark process model indicates that epistemic crises and rational scrutiny of Christian doctrine combined with comparative study and philosophical and theological conviction typically initiate the conversion process. In contrast, affective bonds, spiritual experiences, and social support play decisive roles in sustaining religious practice and consolidating a new Islamic identity. The findings suggest that no single factor is sufficient; rather, it is the continuous interplay of rationality and emotion, as well as engagement with scripture and community, that drives the conversion process. Accordingly, the study emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach that centers lived narratives, integrates thematic and narrative analyses, and considers personal, social, and cultural contexts when examining religious transformation in various contemporary settings.

Keywords: Conversion, Epistemic Factors, Non-Epistemic Factors, Narrative Studies, Islam, Christianity.

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Introduction

Religious conversion¹, as a social phenomenon, represents a complex and multifaceted process that cannot be explained solely through the logic of the natural sciences or in a linear manner. This phenomenon is contingent upon a variety of epistemic and non-epistemic factors. In recent years, with the growth of migration, the multiculturalization of societies, and increasing interreligious interactions, a scientific and in-depth analysis of this phenomenon has become increasingly important, since religious conversion is not limited to individual beliefs but can also serve as a source of fundamental transformations in personal identity, social relations, and even cultural policies and interactions. Such conversion often paves the way for the formation of new social bonds or the emergence of novel challenges and tensions within communities. Previous studies on religious conversion have primarily adopted a quantitative or one-dimensional approach or have focused exclusively on either epistemic (cognitive) or non-epistemic (emotional-social) aspects. These studies have paid limited attention to interdisciplinary dimensions and to the lived narratives of individuals, thereby overlooking many of the complex and latent layers of the process. In contrast, real-life experiences of converts indicate that religious conversion results from the interaction and synergy of cognitive factors—such as the search for truth, rational critique of beliefs, and comparative religious study—and non-cognitive factors, including emotional crises, social pressures, and human attachments. The central issue of this study is the examination of epistemic and non-epistemic factors in the conversion from Christianity to Islam. This research aims to identify which of these factors—epistemic or non-epistemic—exert greater influence on individuals during this process, and how their interaction can facilitate or complicate the trajectory of religious change. The findings of this study are expected to enrich both the theoretical and practical literature on religious conversion and provide a foundation for the development of more effective cultural and religious policies. The objective of the present article is to analyze and elucidate the role and relative weight of epistemic and non-epistemic² factors in the process of conversion from

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1. Religious conversion refers to an individual's transition from one religious or belief system to another and is typically accompanied by changes in the person's beliefs, values, and religious identity. This process can be influenced by epistemic, psychological, social, and cultural factors.
 2. Epistemic factors are those based on rational reasoning, religious and philosophical studies, and scholarly inquiry, ultimately leading to changes in belief systems. Non-epistemic factors encompass emotional, social, and identity-related dimensions that indirectly influence the acceptance of a new religion. For instance, in the interview with Muhammad Abdullah, rational inquiry and the study of hadith texts played a key role ("I studied the Hadith of Thaqalayn"). In contrast, non-epistemic factors relate to emotional and social aspects, such as identity crises, family pressure, and social acceptance. For example, in Rosalinda Marie's narrative, a spiritual

Christianity to Islam, employing a qualitative approach and narrative analysis. The key research question is which of these factors, or their combination, has been more influential in the narratives of converts, and how the interplay between these factors has either facilitated or complicated the process of religious change. By relying on authentic narratives and established theoretical models, this study seeks to present a multilayered and in-depth depiction of religious identity transformation and to contribute to the theoretical and practical understanding of religious conversion. In this study, religious conversion is understood as the adoption and acceptance of a set of beliefs and doctrines belonging to a new religious system, replacing either entirely or substantially the prior belief system—a process that usually occurs gradually and is often accompanied by changes in the individual's religious identity (Glazier & Buckser, 2003, p. 28). Based on this definition, the present research assumes the occurrence of conversion among recent converts and structures its inquiry around a sociological analysis of this phenomenon, examining its dimensions, contexts, and consequences.

1. Literature Review

Research on religious conversion has primarily focused on theoretical models and the analysis of experiential narratives. Rambo's seven-stage model is one of the most widely recognized frameworks, outlining the stages of context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences in the process of religious conversion (Rambo, 1993). This model, rather than providing specific content, functions as an analytical framework within which diverse data and narratives can be organized. Its significance lies in emphasizing the multidimensional, dynamic, and interactive nature of religious conversion and highlighting the roles of psychological, sociological, historical, and theological factors. Similarly, the *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion* synthesizes interdisciplinary perspectives from sociology, psychology, and anthropology of religion, drawing attention to both individual and social dimensions of the process (Rambo & Farhadian, 2014). In addition, the social network theory of Lofland and Stark provides a complementary model, emphasizing the role of social ties and affective connections. It demonstrates that participation in new religious communities and bonding with members plays a critical role in either consolidating or changing religious beliefs (Lofland & Stark, 1965). To date, no more comprehensive alternative to these two models has been proposed; thus, they remain the most complete frameworks for studying religious conversion.

crisis that led to suicidal thoughts (“I tried to commit suicide”) played a decisive role in her turn toward seeking a new religion.

Jean-Marie Goudol collected and analyzed a set of conversion narratives from 22 countries over two centuries (Goudol, 1999). Drawing on numerous individual experiences, he challenges the common perception that religious conversion is impossible for Muslims, demonstrating that conversion is feasible and achievable. Goudol also classifies entry points into Christianity based on teachings or attributes of Jesus, illustrating that the process is highly individualized and shaped by personal and social conditions. However, his study is primarily descriptive and narrative-collecting rather than analytically grounded in multidimensional theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, the broad diversity of narratives across cultural contexts limits in-depth exploration within a specific socio-cultural setting. In contrast, the present study focuses on conversion from Christianity to Islam and, utilizing the frameworks of Rambo and Lofland–Stark, examines this phenomenon in the Iranian context with a deeper and multi-factorial analytical perspective. Domestic studies have also attempted to explore various dimensions of religious conversion, yet each exhibits certain limitations relative to the present research. Amini et al. (1399 SH) focused on students at the University of Tehran, suggesting that changes in religious attitudes primarily result from the interaction between individual transformations, urban lived experiences, and identity challenges. Nevertheless, the narrow scope limited to the university population restricts the generalizability of their findings to broader cultural contexts. Ansari et al. (1399 SH), through in-depth interviews, examined conversion from Islam to Christianity, emphasizing identity crises, social conflicts, and doctrinal attractions; however, they did not provide a coherent multidimensional theoretical framework to interpret their results. Pergari et al. (1397 SH), in a socio-historical study, investigated the causes of conversion among Georgians residing in Iran during the Safavid period, highlighting the roles of governance, family relations, and socio-economic variables. Yet, their findings reflect specific historical and ethnic conditions rather than an analysis of contemporary lived experience. In comparison, the present research, focusing on conversion from Christianity to Islam in contemporary Iran and employing the Rambo and Lofland–Stark models, aims to offer a more comprehensive and multi-factorial analysis of the converts' lived experiences. Another notable source is Karami-Pour's article, which reviews historical evidence and psychological studies to highlight the impact of religious conversion on individual and social identity. Karami-Pour demonstrates that this transformation is not merely an intellectual or ritual choice, but a redefinition of one's perspective on self, society, and the meaning of life (Karami-Pour, 1389 SH). Nevertheless, the study's focus on the geography of Iran limits the applicability of its findings to a specific cultural

context. The present study, without being restricted to a particular geographic location, incorporates diverse narratives of converts, thereby addressing this spatial limitation. Additionally, Afzali et al., employing narrative inquiry, investigated acute religious conversion among Tehranian converts, identifying factors such as identity crises, inadequacy of prior belief systems, and the search for meaning (Afzali et al., 1399 SH). The primary distinction between Afzali's study and the present research is that their focus was on "critical and acute cases" within a specific urban setting, whereas the current study adopts a broader approach, relying on established theoretical models to analyze religious conversion in a multidimensional manner, transcending spatial and typological constraints. Overall, empirical and analytical evidence indicates that religious conversion is a complex, multidimensional, and interactive phenomenon, which can only be adequately understood through the simultaneous study of epistemic, non-epistemic, individual, social, and structural factors. Qualitative and interdisciplinary approaches, particularly the analysis of lived narratives, provide a novel platform for understanding these complexities. The present study fits within this framework, aiming to address some of the gaps in the literature on religious conversion by relying on both established models and empirical data.

2. Theoretical Foundations of the Study

Religious transformation and conversion represent complex, multifaceted phenomena that have long attracted the attention of scholars in the fields of sociology of religion, psychology, and religious studies. Analyzing this phenomenon requires reliance on diverse and interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks, as the experience of religious conversion occurs within various social, psychological, and cultural contexts and is influenced by multiple factors. Contemporary research, emphasizing the importance of individual narratives and the diversity of motivations, has proposed various theories to explain why and how religious conversion occurs. The **mystical conversion theory** posits that profound spiritual experiences or moments of revelation can serve as powerful catalysts for fundamental changes in religious beliefs. From this perspective, an individual may adopt a new religion solely based on an extraordinary spiritual experience, even in the absence of clear rational or cognitive reasoning. In contrast, the **psychological shift theory** highlights the role of significant psychological crises or transformations, suggesting that in the face of identity crises, depression, or loss, individuals may reconstruct their belief systems entirely in the pursuit of meaning and psychological balance. According to the **deprivation theory**, the perception of lack or failure in

fulfilling material, spiritual, or social needs can motivate individuals to seek new spiritual frameworks or identities, wherein a new religion promises to address unmet needs. Similarly, the **re-socialization or brainwashing theory** emphasizes the profound influence of emerging social groups or environments, whereby conversion occurs gradually as new beliefs and values are introduced and internalized, eventually reshaping prior identity and convictions (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1989: 4–5). Based on the **faith reinforcement and deepening theory**, some individuals, following a period of religious doubt or crisis, experience a restoration of spiritual identity or psychological comfort by embracing a new religion, discovering a deeper and more meaningful faith. The **revivalist conversion theory** argues that religious movements and emerging spiritual currents encourage individuals to re-examine their beliefs and, at times, incline them toward a new religion, particularly in social contexts affected by cultural changes or crises. According to the **socio-cultural change theory**, macro-level social transformations, migration, and encounters with diverse cultures and values can destabilize prior beliefs and foster orientation toward a new religion. The **value conflict and cultural gap theory** emphasizes that exposure to conflicting societal norms and values can induce identity crises and undermine foundational beliefs, prompting individuals to seek alternative meaning or identity in another religion. Finally, the **rational choice perspective** considers the individual as a deliberate and calculating actor, who evaluates benefits, the rationality of doctrines, and practical efficacy, ultimately choosing the religion that best aligns with their expectations and circumstances (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1989: 4–5). The diversity and richness of these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that analyzing religious conversion requires a multidimensional and process-oriented approach, as reliance on a single factor or dimension cannot fully account for the complexity of the phenomenon. In reality, religious conversion is a gradual, layered, and dynamic process that unfolds across multiple social, cultural, psychological, and epistemic contexts, often resulting from the complex interplay of individual motivations, lived experiences, and environmental influences. Narratives from converts further indicate that religious transition is rarely a sudden event; rather, it is a step-by-step journey marked by crises, choices, and diverse experiences. Accordingly, processual and structural analyses of conversion are essential, necessitating attention to models capable of explaining the sequence and interrelations of the stages of transformation. In this regard, the **Lofland–Stark model** and **Lewis Rambo’s seven-stage model** have emerged as the most authoritative and comprehensive frameworks in contemporary research on religious conversion. Therefore, to achieve a deeper understanding of conversion from Christianity to

Islam, the present study relies not on classical theories alone, but on sensitive concepts and an interdisciplinary conceptual framework. This framework integrates Rambo's seven-stage model with Lofland–Stark's process model to identify the social and individual context, processes, and multilayered factors influencing religious conversion.

2-1. Lofland and Stark's Social Model of Religious Conversion

Lofland and Stark's model is a seminal theory in the sociology of religion, conceptualizing conversion not as a sudden event but as a gradual, staged process embedded within social relationships and collective contexts. Initially developed to study adherence to emerging religious movements, its principles are sufficiently general and flexible to analyze diverse conversion experiences, including shifts from Christianity to Islam. Within this framework, conversion results from a combination of psychological and social preconditions. The process begins when an individual experiences deep dissatisfaction, spiritual tension, or an identity crisis, prompting the search for new meaning. Gradually, the person comes to believe that the solution to their problems or inner voids must be sought within spiritual and religious domains, leading to the formation of a new spiritual perspective. The individual then identifies as a seeker of spirituality, actively studying and comparing the teachings of different religions and exploring solutions to fundamental life questions with curiosity (Lofland & Stark, 1965: 862–864). Life turning points, such as migration, loss of loved ones, or major occupational and social changes, create opportunities for genuine encounters with a new religion or religious community. At this stage, exposure to new teachings or direct interaction with members of the new community plays a critical role in triggering deeper motivation for conversion. Subsequent development of emotional bonds and friendships with members of the new group strengthens the individual's sense of belonging, acceptance, and security, making adoption of the new religion more meaningful and enduring. Simultaneously, previous social and emotional ties must gradually weaken; if prior attachments remain strong, conversion is unlikely to be sustained. Ultimately, continuous and active engagement with the community and rituals of the new religion fosters internalization of beliefs and consolidation of the new religious identity. At this stage, the individual moves beyond symbolic membership, fully embodying the beliefs, values, and norms of the new faith. Analysis of the Lofland–Stark model underscores that initial motivations, situational turning points, and especially emotional bonds and social interaction, are essential for the success and sustainability of conversion. Without emotional support from the new community and attenuation of previous attachments, this process often remains incomplete (Lofland & Stark, 1965: 862–864).

Accordingly, the stages of religious conversion in the Lofland–Stark model include: intense tension, formation of a spiritual perspective to address problems, self-identification as a spiritual seeker, encounter with individuals in the new religion, development of emotional bonds with group members, weakening of prior social ties, and continuous interaction with the new religious community. Although initially formulated for small religious groups, extensive empirical evidence, including data on conversion to Islam, demonstrates its effectiveness in understanding the role of human relationships and social networks in consolidating new religious identities. Overall, the Lofland–Stark framework, emphasizing a gradual and dynamic trajectory of conversion, complements more individual-centered approaches such as Rambo’s model, providing a more comprehensive and realistic depiction of the conversion process.

2-2. Lewis Rambo’s Seven-Stage Model of Religious Conversion

Lewis Rambo’s seven-stage model is one of the most widely employed theoretical frameworks for studying religious conversion, offering a processual, interactive, and multi-layered explanation of religious transformation. Grounded in historical research, case studies, and analysis of converts’ experiences, it conceptualizes conversion not as a sudden event, but as a complex, gradual process influenced by psychological, social, cultural, and individual factors. Rambo emphasizes the integrated and multidimensional nature of conversion, asserting that the experience of religious change does not fundamentally differ across religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism. His model is adaptable to diverse cultural and religious contexts. Although some critics argue that it is more applicable to Christian settings, field evidence demonstrates that, due to its comprehensiveness and conceptual flexibility, the model is also highly effective in analyzing conversion to Islam. The model begins with the **context stage**, which examines all environmental, cultural, familial, religious, and even psychological variables that may facilitate or hinder conversion. This is followed by the **crisis stage**, typically characterized by dissatisfaction, doubt, loss, or perceived inadequacy of the previous religion in addressing existential or spiritual issues, prompting reflection and reconsideration of beliefs (Rambo, 1993: 34). Next, the individual enters the **quest stage**, marked by an active search for new answers and meaning, whether through study of other religions, personal reflection, or interfaith dialogue. The **encounter stage** occurs when the individual first engages with a new religious option—through interaction with adherents, study of sacred texts, or participation in rituals and religious gatherings—opening a new spiritual horizon. The **interaction stage** follows, wherein, if the encounter is meaningful,

the individual engages in a sustained, active relationship with the new religious community, forming deep emotional, intellectual, and social connections with its members and teachings. This is succeeded by the **commitment stage**, a conscious and deliberate decision to adopt the new religion and transform one's religious identity, often manifested through public declaration of faith or participation in formal rituals. This decision emerges from a gradual, voluntary, and reflective process, rather than a momentary choice. Finally, the **consequences stage** entails experiencing the individual, familial, social, and identity-related impacts of conversion, including the redefinition of relationships, lifestyle, personal attitudes, and social status, which may yield both positive outcomes and challenges (Rambo, 1993: 34). Analysis of Rambo's model indicates that no single factor alone determines conversion; rather, it is the linkage and synergy of cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural factors that shape the trajectory of religious change. This multidimensional structure makes Rambo's model an especially effective analytical tool for qualitative research, particularly regarding conversion from Christianity to Islam, enabling researchers to conduct detailed, stepwise, and realistic analyses of converts' experiences.

3. Research Methodology

To understand why and how individuals undergo religious conversion, it is essential to engage with each person's meaning-making and lived experience, and to explore how they perceive, interpret, and ascribe significance to the peaks and troughs of their religious journey. Consequently, a precise understanding of the conversion process becomes possible when it is reconstructed and analyzed as a narrative (Flick, 2009: 368). Accordingly, the present study adopts a narrative approach as its methodological framework. Drawing on individuals' lived experiences through narrative provides a mechanism for conveying and reconstructing experience in a way that enables both the narrator and the audience to attain a shared and deeper understanding. Through this process, narratives not only facilitate the representation of various dimensions of individual experience but also create a platform for engagement and mutual comprehension among participants. Within this approach, humans represent their experiences, emotions, feelings, and perceptions of the world by storytelling. In other words, storytelling serves as a tool through which individuals construct and reproduce their social knowledge, thereby positioning themselves within the broader societal context (Mohammadpour, 2013: 80). In this study, a qualitative approach was employed to achieve a nuanced and multi-layered exploration of the epistemic and non-epistemic factors involved in conversion from Christianity to Islam, enabling a detailed examination of converts' lived experiences and personal narratives. Data were collected through

semi-structured interviews, designed in alignment with the theoretical frameworks of the Lofland–Stark and Rambo models. Purposeful and snowball sampling was used to access individuals with authentic and diverse conversion experiences, resulting in a total of fifteen participants selected until theoretical saturation was reached. Interviews were conducted in both Persian and English, both in-person and online, adhering to ethical guidelines, and were recorded and transcribed with participants' full consent. Data analysis combined thematic analysis with narrative analysis, proceeding through stages of initial coding, identification of common patterns, and examination of individual narratives to illuminate both shared structures and unique variations in lived experience. The credibility of the study was enhanced through participant validation, comparison of findings with theoretical frameworks, and triangulation of data. Ethical rigor was maintained throughout the research, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and preserving participants' right to withdraw at any stage.

Table 1- Background Information of Interviewees

Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Nationality	Religious Background
Nazeli Margarian	22	Female	Housewife	Armenia	Eastern Orthodox
Rosalinda Mary	51	Female	Retired Military	USA	Protestant
Hilary Laurent	22	Male	Theological Student	Madagascar	Protestant
Simon Landry	26	Male	Theological Student	Madagascar	Protestant
Leia Rindah	36	Female	Housewife	Madagascar	Protestant
Gerard Dirks	67	Male	Pastor	USA	Protestant
Alexander Hawk	61	Male	University Professor	USA	Protestant
Nicole Catherine	36	Female	Student	Canada	Catholic
Noor Taylor	19	Female	Student	USA	Catholic
Muhammad Abdullah	54	Male	Pastor	USA	Catholic
Claire Joubert	59	Female	Children's Author	France	Catholic
Louis Xavier	29	Male	Theological Student	Colombia	Catholic
Somaya Errol	61	Female	Translator	USA	Catholic
Dhu'l-Qa'da Nasrallah	43	Male	Religious Preacher	Congo	Catholic
Atosuko Hoshino	51	Female	Religious Preacher	Japan	Catholic

3-1. Design and Analysis of Interview Questions Based on Rambo and Lofland–Stark Models

To investigate the process of religious conversion from Christianity to Islam, a set of interview questions was developed, with their structure and content grounded in two well-established frameworks in the sociology of religion: Rambo's seven-stage model and the Lofland–Stark process model. This theoretical approach was adopted to ensure the comprehensiveness and coherence of the research instrument, as well as to enable a multidimensional analysis of the experience of religious transformation. In Rambo's model, the conversion process is divided into seven stages. Accordingly, questions regarding religious background and familial and social context address the "context" stage. Questions about doubts, internal conflicts, or significant life events reflect the "crisis" stage. Items concerning the study and examination of religions, rational evaluation, and intellectual comparison target the "search" stage. The "encounter" stage is explored through questions on influential individuals or sources of inspiration and the initial exposure to the new religion. Questions on social connections, sense of belonging, and the experience of emotional attachment examine the "interaction" stage and the formation of social support. Finally, questions related to decision-making, religious commitment, and the personal, familial, and social consequences of conversion address the remaining stages of the model. The Lofland–Stark model similarly emphasizes seven components. Questions were designed to capture these dimensions.

For instance, inquiries about the social and familial environment and challenges to existing beliefs correspond to the context and tension stage of the Lofland–Stark model. Questions on the study of religions and exploration of motivations address the seeker and problem-solving stages. Experiences of social contact and emotional bonding with Muslims, as well as analysis of the moment of decision and commitment durability, reflect the subsequent stages of the model. This coherent structure in question design enhanced the validity of the research instrument and reinforced the analytical overlap between the two models.

Moreover, analyzing the narratives and responses through these frameworks enabled the identification of recurring patterns, cognitive and sociological layers of religious conversion, and an in-depth comparison of converts' experiences. Consequently, integrating Rambo's and Lofland–Stark's frameworks not only ensures the methodological rigor of the study but also facilitates a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the process of religious change.

Table 2- Alignment of Interview Questions Based on Rambo and Lofland–Stark Models

Lofland–Stark Model	Rambo Model	Sample Questions
–	Context	Describe your previous religion, family background, environment, type of religious upbringing, and factors that created doubt
Tension	Crisis	What factors led you to question your previous religion? Any specific experiences or events? Contradictions in your former religion
Seekership	Quest	Researching the new religion, studying sources, comparing religions, role of rationality, when did you see yourself as a spiritual seeker?
Problem-Solving Perspective	Quest	Which concepts in the new religion were attractive to you? What role did logical reasoning play in your choice?
Social Contact	Encounter	Meeting new individuals or groups, influence of people or sources of inspiration, how did your first direct contact with the new group occur?
Affective Bonds	Interaction	Sense of belonging, interaction with members of the new community, experience of emotional bonds, who contributed to forming these connections?
Breakdown of Extra-Group Attachments	–	After conversion, how did your relationships with previous friends or family change? What social or emotional obstacles did you encounter during conversion?
Turning Point / Conversion Event	Commitment	Moment of definitive decision, emotions and challenges associated with it, persistence in the new choice
Intensive Interaction with the New Group	–	To what extent do you participate in activities, rituals, or collective life of the new religion? How does the new community influence your daily life?
Consequences	Consequences	Impact of conversion on personal, social, and family life, challenges and their management, experience of new religious identity

3-2. Analysis of Conversion Narratives Based on the Rambo and Lofland–Stark Models

The analysis of the narratives of fifteen converts to Islam demonstrates that religious conversion is a multidimensional and interactive process occurring at the intersection of cognitive and non-cognitive factors. These experiences can be interpreted through the frameworks of the Rambo and Lofland–Stark models, revealing that neither rational nor emotional components alone are sufficient; rather, it is the sustained integration of both domains that transforms conversion into a stable identity. The familial and social backgrounds of many participants were rooted in Christian contexts—environments that, rather than stabilizing

faith, in some cases prompted religious questioning. Noor Taylor reflects: "Catholic school really instilled religion in me; baptism, communion, church choir." However, the same experience had a different outcome for Claire Joubert: "From the very first confession, I realized the ritual space did not resonate with my inner peace." Muhammad Abdullah, raised in a pastor-centered family, adds: "From adolescence, I was forced to preach, but I questioned whether I truly worshiped the one God or merely continued a family tradition." These statements fall under the category of "context" and illustrate that pre-conversion religious capital, rather than providing stability, created conditions for crisis. These crises manifested on cognitive, moral, and existential levels. Hilary Laurent remarks: "They said God became human, but I knew neither this body nor that blood belonged to God." Muhammad Abdullah questions: "I read in the Bible that God is one; so why should I worship Him in the form of the Son and the Holy Spirit?" For Leia Rindah, the crisis was more ethical: "I felt I needed to free myself from the imposed feminine roles within Christianity." Rosalinda Marie, a former U.S. Army veteran, experienced the crisis on a psychological level: "I felt so empty that I considered suicide." These narratives indicate that crises are especially influential when individuals seek their resolution within a religious horizon. Active cognitive seeking represents the next step in the conversion process. Muhammad Abdullah states: "Jesus said the Lord is the one God." Hilary emphasizes her agency: "I did not want to follow blindly; I also studied Sunni Islam and ultimately chose Shi'ism." Noor Taylor notes the role of scientific discourse in the Qur'an: "I watched many lectures... the scientific miracles of the Qur'an played a major role in my decision." Claire Joubert explains: "From that night, researching Islam became certain for me." These statements suggest that rational inquiry and comparative study act as the engine driving the transition from crisis to decision. However, intellectual seeking alone does not reach a turning point without aesthetic and emotional encounters. Leia Rindah recalls her first attendance at the Night of Qadr ceremony: "I felt I had arrived somewhere I truly belonged." Nicole Catherine describes entering a mosque as decisive: "Congregational prayer was the most beautiful thing I had seen to that day." Simon Landry reflects: "I first went to the mosque for free bread, but after hearing the sermon about Jesus, I returned." These narratives indicate that sensory and social encounters create the pivotal turning point and foster emotional bonds. During the interaction stage, emotional ties and social networks reinforced the emerging religious identity. Claire Joubert says: "In the Qur'an sessions, for the first time, I felt at home." Noor mentions a Discord group: "They never mocked me and responded respectfully." Muhammad Abdullah adds: "My friend gave me the Hadith of Thaqalayn, and from there my path changed." Nicole Catherine recalls a

Muslim sister: “She patiently answered my questions and taught me how to pray.” These examples demonstrate that intensive interaction and social support translate religion from a cognitive understanding to lived experience. The culmination of this process is manifested in commitment, both declarative and practical. Noor Taylor recounts: “I declared the Shahada in a TikTok live; I wondered whether a false life was worse than going to hell.” Leia Rindah states: “When I pronounced the Shahada, I felt with all my heart that I had returned home.” Rosalinda clearly states: “I became Muslim in November.” Somayeh Ranjbar reflects on her experience with hijab: “When I wore the hijab at home, my mother said how beautiful I looked; her words strengthened me.” These narratives indicate that commitment is consolidated not only in speech but also in daily practice and lived experience. The consequences of conversion are dual: inner peace on one hand and external pressures on the other. Rosalinda describes the change: “My life transformed from black and white to color.” Muhammad Abdullah adds: “Now, accepting the guardianship of Ali (peace be upon him) brings me peace.” In contrast, Noor mentions familial rejection: “My grandmother said I should not come to her house; but my Muslim friends welcomed me into theirs.” Somayeh Ranjbar also recalls experiences of hijab discrimination in the U.S., while her volunteer service in the Imam Reza shrine represents her peak of tranquility. These experiences demonstrate that consolidating religious identity, while facing social pressures, requires intra-community support networks. Overall, these narratives suggest that conversion in these cases follows a staged chain from context to consequences. Key categories include cognitive and existential crises regarding previous teachings, cognitive persuasion through Islamic monotheism and justice, aesthetic encounters as turning points, social support and emotional bonds, practical and declarative commitment, and adaptive strategies against external pressures. The integrative core of these categories is “rational peace coupled with social belonging”: reason justified through theological coherence, and belonging experienced within an ethical and accepting community. This analysis demonstrates that religious conversion is not a singular event but a gradual and interactive process realized only through the convergence of mind and heart, reason and emotion, and individual and social contexts.

**Table 3- Integrated Matrix of the Conversion Process Across 15 Narratives
Based on the Rambo and Lofland–Stark Models**

Participant Name	Context	Crisis	Quest	Encounter	Interaction	Commitment	Consequences
Noor Taylor	Catholic upbringing, religious school	Value conflicts, crisis regarding the Trinity	Online research, anti-Islamic content	Online acquaintance with a Moroccan Muslim	Bond with Shi'a group on Discord	Shahada declared on TikTok	Familial rejection, support from Muslim friends

Participant Name	Context	Crisis	Quest	Encounter	Interaction	Commitment	Consequences
Hilary Laurent	Raised in a religious family	Conflict between Incarnation and monotheism	Study of the Qur'an and examination of sects	Connection with Professor Abdullah	Interaction with Islamic association	Acceptance of Islam, identity consolidation	Family opposition, support from the Shi'a community
Simon Landry	Life in a Christian religious environment, family-enforced religious duties	Identity crisis during migration	Study of the Qur'an, mosque attendance	Hearing a sermon about Jesus (peace be upon him)	Friendship with the mosque imam	Conscious decision to accept Shi'ism	Rejection by relatives, support from mosque
Leia Rindah	Traditional Catholic family	Conflict with prescribed female roles	Study of the Qur'an and prayers	Attendance at mosque during Night of Qadr	Bonding with instructor and Muslims	Shahada declaration and adoption of Islamic dress	Family opposition, support from Muslim community
Muhammad Abdullah	Pastoral Christian family	Conflict between Trinity belief and rationality	Study of the Qur'an and Hadith	Engagement with Shi'a community	Establishment of close relations with Shi'as	Shahada and religious practice	Exclusion from Christian community
Rosalinda Marie	Military family, religious background	Existential crisis	Study of the Qur'an and listening sessions	Hearing Qur'anic recitations online	Interaction with Shi'a friends	Acceptance of Islam, identity transformation	Church rejection, support from Muslim scholars
Claire Joubert	French Catholic family	Spiritual crisis within church ritual	Study of Islamic and philosophical sources	Participation in Qur'an sessions	Sense of belonging to Shi'a community	Shahada and active participation	Mixed reactions from family and friends
Nicole Catherine	Secular Christian family	Meaninglessness of church rituals	Study of Islamic civilization	Attendance at congregational prayer	Friendship with Muslim classmate	Shahada with inclusion of Ali (peace be upon him)	Shi'a identity acceptance in the West
Nazli Margarian	Armenian Christian family	Tension between tradition and lived experience	Study of Shi'a and Sunni sources	Participation in religious gatherings	Bonding with Iranian community	Gradual adoption of Shi'ism	Family challenges, inner peace
Atosuko Hoshino	Religious family, uncle a priest	Spiritual crisis	Study of supplications and Hadith	Pilgrimage experience and Qur'an recitation	Interaction with Iranian-Shi'a network	Decision to migrate to Iran	Migration, Shi'a identity consolidation
Dhul-Qa'dah Nasrallah	Christian family in Congo	Cultural and spiritual crisis	Study of the Qur'an	Hearing Qur'an and call to prayer in mosque	Engagement with local mosque community	Conversion during adolescence	Islamic propagation in Africa
Luis Xavier	Life among Colombian Christians	Social and ethical crisis	Academic study of Islam	Acquaintance with Shi'a teachings	Accompaniment of Shi'a cleric	Acceptance of Shi'ism	Migration to Qom, propagation of Islam in Latin America
Somayeh (Errol) Ranjbar	Catholic religious family, father in church	Prohibition of questioning, rational crisis	Study of the Qur'an	Engagement with Iranian Muslim women	Bonding with Shi'a community	Adoption of hijab and Shahada	Experience of discrimination

Participant Name	Context	Crisis	Quest	Encounter	Interaction	Commitment	Consequences
Alexander Hawk	Traditional Christian family	Fundamental questions about Christian rationality	Study of Abrahamic religions	Engagement with Islamic texts	Distinction between religion and culture	Acceptance of Islam	Writing books to promote Islam
Saint Hilary	Indigenous Christian background	Rejection of church teachings	Study of Islam	Attendance at Muslim schools	Close interaction with Muslims	Shahada and conversion	Participation in religious institutions

Conclusion

The present study analyzed the process of religious conversion from Christianity to Islam, focusing on both cognitive and non-cognitive factors and based on the narratives of recent converts. The findings indicate that religious conversion is not a unidimensional or linear phenomenon; rather, it emerges from a complex interplay of cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural factors, uniquely manifesting within the individual and social contexts of each convert. The narrative analysis revealed that most participants originated from Christian familial backgrounds—Catholic, traditional, or secular—often involving compulsion to perform religious rituals, which laid the groundwork for subsequent crises. These crises encompassed cognitive and identity conflicts, including issues such as the Trinity, the incarnation of Jesus, rationality of beliefs, the role of women in traditional Christian societies, and existential or cultural challenges. These conflicts served as primary catalysts for spiritual inquiry and religious transformation. The next stage in the conversion process involved personal study and research. Participants engaged in the study of the Qur'an, Hadith, supplications, and other Islamic sources, sometimes in philosophical or academic contexts, using modern tools such as online research, social media, listening to recitations, and attending religious gatherings. This intellectual exploration facilitated movement through the crisis toward informed decision-making. Social interactions and external support played a key role as well. Connections with Shia Muslims—through friends, teachers, mosque leaders, or online and local communities—enhanced emotional bonds and reinforced emerging religious identities. In some cases, these interactions even led to migration and active propagation of Islam in other regions. Acceptance and consolidation of the new identity were marked by the declaration of the Shahada and practical changes such as adopting Islamic dress, participation in Shia rituals, and sometimes changing one's name. A pronounced inclination toward Shia Islam was observed, often driven by the appeal of Shia teachings, including monotheism, rationality, and community orientation. Social responses often included rejection by family, relatives, or Christian communities; however, these pressures were mitigated by strong support from the Shia community.

Overall, the data indicate that conversion from Christianity to Shia Islam results from a combination of internal crises in previous beliefs and the external appeal of Islam. The process is generally individual and conscious but is facilitated by social factors such as in-person and online interactions and community support. Modern tools play an important role in facilitating conversion, while familial challenges are frequently offset by inner peace and the consolidation of a new religious identity. In conclusion, these narratives depict a global pattern of spiritual seeking that transcends cultural boundaries, culminating in the consolidation of a Shia identity and emphasizing active participation and propagation within the new community.

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