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FOUR MOTIVATIONS OF CONVERSION TO ISLAM: JAPANESE MUSLIMS

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Abstract

In this study, the phenomenon of conversion is analysed in the context of the experiences of Japanese Muslim converts. The purpose of this study is to understand the processes leading to conversion to Islam among Japanese and to explore religious conversion motifs of Japanese Muslim converts. A combination of phenomenology and grounded theory research methods were applied in order to understand the essence of the conversion experience of Japanese Muslims and also to develop a theoretical explanation for their conversion.

It is discovered that Japanese conversion to Islam is a social process, led by their encounters with Muslims. Most of the time, their first memorable encounter with Islam took place in the social context. Upon their encounters, the Japanese, who were not seriously dissatisfied with their existing living conditions and beliefs previously, and who were not in search of a new way of life and a belief, began to be interested in Islam in different ways. They had a lack of strong prejudice against Islam, thus following their encounters, they had an open attitude learning towards the religion and the people. Four motivational factors discovered influential on Japanese conversion to Islam: social, intellectual, psychological and pragmatic.

Keywords: Sociology of Religion, Religious Conversion, Japanese Muslims.



MÜSLÜMAN OLMADA DÖRT MOTİVASYON: JAPON MÜSLÜMANLAR

Bu araştırmada din değiştirme fenomeni Müslüman olmuş Japonlar örneğinde incelenmiştir. Araştırmanın amacı, Japon Müslümanların İslam ile karşılaşma ve din değiştirme süreç ve deneyimlerini anlamak ve Müslüman olma motifleri üzerine bir tipoloji denemesi yaparak ile din değiştirme literatürüne kavramsal bir katkı sağlayabilmektir. Bu amaca uygun nitel bir çalışma olarak tasarlanan bu çalışmada hem fenomenoloji hem de gömülü teori yaklaşımlarının bakış açıları,

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araştırma teknikleri ve veri analiz metotları kullanılmıştır. Saha çalışması 2016 Eylül – 2017 Aralık ve 2019 Şubat – 2020 Ocak dönemlerinde toplam 2 yıl 3 ay Tokyo’da sürdürülmüştür. Veri toplama aşamasında yarı-yapılandırılmış mülakat, katılımcı gözlem, saha notları tekniklerine başvurulmuştur. Mülakatlar, kartopu ve amaçlı örneklem metotlarıyla ulaşılan, yaşları 19 ile 81 arası değişen 32 kadın ve 20 erkek toplam 62 kişi ile yapılmıştır.

Araştırma sonucunda öğrenilenler şunlardır: Japonların Müslüman olmaları büyük oranda sosyal bir süreçtir. Din değiştirme hikâyelerinin başlangıcı Müslümanlar ile yaşadıkları anlamlı karşılaşmalara dayanmaktadır. İlk anlamlı karşılaşmaları büyük oranda yurtdışında, iş, gezi yahut eğitim seyahatleri esnasında gerçekleşmektedir. İslam ve Müslümanlar hakkında ciddi önyargılara sahip olmamaları sebebiyle, bu karşılaşmalarda öğrenmeye ve anlamaya açık bir tutum sergilemişlerdir. İslam ile karşılaşmadan önce hâlihazırda var olan yaşam şartları ve inançları hususunda ciddi tatminsizlikleri bulunmayan ve yeni bir yaşam ve inanç biçimi arayışı içinde olmayan Japonlar, farklı şekillerde İslam ile ilgilenmeye başlamıştır. Araştırmada, Japonların Müslüman olmalarının dört farklı motivasyon ile gerçekleştiği tespit edilmiştir. Bunlar sosyal, entelektüel, psikolojik ve pragmatik motivasyonlardır...

[The Extended Abstract is at the end of the article.]



Introduction

Religious conversion has been studied by the social scientists since the end of the 19th century. In the beginning it was regarded as a sudden personal change triggered by a life trauma. Around the middle of the 20th century, came the new religious studies and social scientists had started to play with brainwashing idea. Then process models have begun to develop. It was discovered that religious conversion was not a sudden change, but mostly a gradual one. The individuals were not keen on changing their whole life abruptly, on the contrary it happened in stages, taking time.

In 1897, in one of the earliest studies on conversion, Starbuck defines conversion as “more or less sudden changes of character from evil to goodness, from sinfulness to righteousness, and from indifference to spiritual insight and activity”¹. Shortly after him James makes a similar description and says conversion is “to be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self-

¹ Edwin Diller Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion – An Empirical Study of the Growth of Religious Consciousness* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1900), 21.

hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.”² In both definitions conversion is described as a positive change, a change to a more meaningful and happy life. In recent studies too, regardless of previous belief system and new chosen religion, conversion itself as an act is interpreted as a positive change for converted individuals. The act of conversion seems to bring a new hope and a new beginning for converts. They establish new connections with the religious groups they converted in, and have a new sense of belonging and security.³ For the convert this represents a safe harbour or a shelter in the midst of a chaotic and unknown world and its affairs.⁴

Social scientists differ on ideas on nature of conversion. Some argue that conversion has to be a change from one belief system to another. Nock is of this opinion, according to him conversion has to be a shift from one religion to another, or from being an unbeliever to believing and belonging to a religion. He also argues that convert must have the idea of it is a change from being wrong to right.⁵ Many think conversion can also occur within a religious system. Singer, for example, divides the experience of conversion two: inter-faith and intra-faith.⁶ Köse agrees that conversion can occur within a religious system as increasing the belief and belonging on one’s own religion, as well as a change from disbelief to belief, and from one religion to another.⁷ Rambo adds two other types. For him conversion has five types: apostasy, as leaving one’s belief and religion behind to a state of disbelief and irreligiousness; intensification, as an intensification of the belief and belonging to one’s religion; affiliation, as a transition from irreligiousness to committing to a religious group; institutional transition; as a denominational transition within an established religious system; and lastly tradition

² William James, *Varieties of Religious Experiences – A Study in Human Nature* (London: Routledge, Yüzüncü Yıl Baskısı, 2002), 150.

³ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 2-4.

⁴ Diane Austin-Broos, "The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction", *Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, ed. Andrew Buckser - Stephen D. Glazier (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003); Chana Ullman, *The Transformed Self – Psychology of Religious Conversion* (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 1989), 16.

⁵ Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), 7.

⁶ See. Merrill Singer, "The Use of Folklore in Religious Conversion: The Chassidic Case", *Review of Religious Research* 22/2 (1980).

⁷ Ali Köse, *Conversion to Islam: A Study of Native British Converts* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996), 1.

transition, as a transition from one major and established religion to another.⁸

Reasons, motivations and motifs are other discussion topics of conversion. Heirich tells three reasons for conversion: a solution for a stress, a result of upbringing or socialisation, and a change of understanding due to relationships with others.⁹ Flinn discusses that there are six factors that have effects on various degrees on religious conversion. These six factors are psychological, intellectual, religious, moral, sociological and political. None of these should be overlooked if aim is to understand religious conversion phenomenon fully.¹⁰

Lofland and Skonovd talk about six motifs of conversion: intellectual mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist and coercive. Intellectual conversion type occurs out of intellectual curiosity of an individual. A person reads, watches, listens and researches on alternative religions and beliefs systems, and conversion decision comes after a personal intellectual conviction. Mystical conversion type is a result of a mystical experience, sometimes even the converted individual might have a difficult time explaining it. In the experimental type, the individual is curious of trying new things, they simply test and try the beliefs and practices of the religions they are interested in, and then decide. In affectional conversion type an individual decides to convert as a result of close connections and intimate relations with religious people. Revivalist conversion is when a person's religious beliefs and feelings awaken dramatically by a religious preacher. The last conversion type is coercive; it happens when an individual is coerced to convert to a religion.¹¹ In his research on British Muslim converts Köse finds that only three of these types are relevant for them: intellectual, affectional and experimental.¹²

Allievi, on European Muslim converts, discusses two types of conversion: relational and rational. Relational, he explains is the conversion as a result of encounters and relationships with Muslims, and by far is the most observed type among converts. He divides relational type to two

⁸ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 13-14.

⁹ Max Heirich, "Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories about Religious Conversion", *American Journal of Sociology* 83/3 (1977), 653-680.

¹⁰ Frank K. Flinn, "Conversion: Up From Evangelicalism or the Pentecostal and Charismatic Experience", *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, ed. Christopher Lamb - M. Darrol Bryant (London: Cassell, 1999), 57.

¹¹ John Lofland -Norman Skonovd, "Conversion Motifs", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religions* 20/4 (1981), 373-385.

¹² Köse, *Conversion to Islam*, 38.

categories as well: instrumental and non-instrumental. In instrumental type the aim is to reach a goal by conversion, such as marriage with a Muslim. Non-instrumental type occurs due to relations with others as well, however the main focus of interest is the religion itself. Rational type is conversion due to intellectual curiosity and research.¹³

Another major discussion issue on conversion is if the conversion is a result of a life crisis. Two type of studies discusses the crisis issue. First type is the studies conducted regarded conversion a personal matter occurred as a result of a personal crisis.¹⁴ Following a highly stressful and problematic life period, it is thought that religious conversion is seemed to potential convert as a route to salvation, a last resort and a spiritual shelter.¹⁵ The crisis argument is also seen in studies conducted conversion within majority religious systems.¹⁶ Stage models of both Lofland and Stark and Rambo mention a crisis stage before the act of conversion. Lofland and Stark argues conversion occurs in seven stages divided in two stages. The first stage consists of three steps named as predisposing conditions. The predisposing conditions are the factors that leads an individual to conversion upon their encounter with a religious group or persons. According to Lofland and Stark, a person (1) has to encounter a life crisis that highly traumatised them/caused high stress for them, (2) has to think their cure is in the religious sphere and (3) has to seek a solution. Following comes that second phase (4) encountering with a religious group, (5) establishing a rapport with members of the group, (6) having lack of ties with outside of the group and (7) being in a strong communication with the group members.¹⁷ Rambo too has seven stages for conversion: context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitments and consequences. He also regards crisis precedent of conversion, and for him “that is acknowledged by most scholars of conversion.”¹⁸

¹³ Stefano Allievi, “The Shifting Significance of the Halal/Haram Frontier-Narratives of the Hijab and Other Issues”, *Women Embracing Islam- Gender and Conversion in the West*, ed. Karin van Nieuwkerk (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 120-152.

¹⁴ Raymond F. Paloutzian, “Psychology of Religious Conversion and Spiritual Transformation”, *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo - Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3-4.

¹⁵ Ullman, *The Transformed Self*, 16; Hans Mol, *Identity and the Sacred* (Bristol: Western Printing Services Ltd., 1976), 50-52.

¹⁶ See. Anne Sofie Roald, *New Muslims in the European Context: The Experience of Scandinavian Converts* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

¹⁷ John Lofland - Rodney Stark, “Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective”, *American Sociological Review* 30/6 (1965), 862-875.

¹⁸ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 44.

However, in most of the recent studies that focuses on conversion to Islam a life crisis has not been observed. While Köse mentions in his research on British Muslim converts %60 the participants had a stressful experience beforehand, he neither thinks that they are the triggers of conversion nor agrees that these experiences are prerequisite for conversion. He also finds the participants of his research had a normal childhood and life.¹⁹ Zebiri and Qwidi, also on British Muslim converts found no precedent life crisis before conversion experience.²⁰ Poston, in his research on conversion to Islam in Europe and the U.S.A²¹ did not find a significant crisis that plays a significant role on conversion decision. Roald's study on Scandinavian Muslim converts discovers no crisis as well. Moreover, she discusses that the crisis occurs in a context when a person changes faith within/to Christianity in a Christian society, and is not seen among converts who converted to a minority religion, Islam. Roald points that for Scandinavian converts, the fourth stage of Rambo, encounter, comes in the first stage.²²

On conversion to Islam, a discontentment of Western life style, common belief systems, and an intellectual search found to be a significant trigger.²³ Roald argues that while a change in between accepted forms of a majority religion can be due to psychological factors, conversion to a minority religion is mostly a social attitude.²⁴ Even if it may not begin as a social or political protests, conversion act to a minority religion can end up having social and/or political consequences on converts' lives.²⁵ Thus, in the

¹⁹ Köse, *Conversion to Islam*, 83.

²⁰ Kate Zebiri, *British Muslim Converts – Choosing Alternative Lives* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), 54; Maha al-Qwidi, *Understanding the Stages of Conversion to Islam: The Voices Of British Converts* (Leeds: The University of Leeds, School of Theology and Religious Studies, PhD Dissertation, 2002), 126-139.

²¹ Larry Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West – Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion to Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 169.

²² See. Roald, *New Muslims in the European Context*.

²³ See. Karin van Nieuwkerk, "Conversion" to Islam and the Construction of a Pious Self", *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo - Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-24; Zebiri, *British Muslim Converts*, 75; Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West*, 170-171; Köse, *Conversion to Islam*, 122; Al-Qwidi, *Understanding the Stages of Conversion to Islam*, 193; Geraldine Mossiere, "The Intimate and the Stranger: Approaching the "Muslim Question" through the Eyes of Female Converts to Islam", *Critical Research on Religion* 4/1 (2006), 99-10; Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, "Symbolizing Distance: Conversion to Islam in Germany and United States". *Women Embracing Islam- Gender and Conversion in the West*. ed. Karin van Nieuwkerk (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006) 80-88.

²⁴ See. Roald, *New Muslims in the European Context*.

²⁵ See. Esra Özyürek, *Müslüman Olmak, Alman Kalmak – Yeni Avrupa'da Millet, Din ve Din Değiştirme*, çev: İsmail İlgar (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2015).

beginning, converts do tend practice Islam in the strictest forms as a way to protest and rebel to Western societies.²⁶ Following, they can turn into bridges²⁷ and mediators²⁸ between Muslims and their societies. Then again, on the other side, Muslim converts can be double marginal as well. They can be accused of being traitors by their old societies as well as can have difficulty being accepted to Muslim communities, due to their effort learning Islam without cultural baggage of Muslims.²⁹ They can be ostracised by their non-Muslim society and get questioned about their loyalty to their own culture, while they are also keen to keep some distance with born Muslims in their countries due to their inclination on confusing Islam with their culture.³⁰

Japan has encountered with Islam and Muslims at the end of the 19th century. The first Muslims in Japan are thought to be merchants, mostly Indian Muslims. They stayed in port cities Kobe and Yokohama.³¹ Secondly came Turco-Tatar Muslims, taking shelter in Japan following Russo-Japanese war in 1905. They settled in Tokyo and close cities, established religious organisations, schools and mosques, published newspapers and books.³² They had close connections with Japanese politicians, intellectuals and military due to their shared interest of a powerful Japan, a leader in Asia and a protector of Asian Muslims.³³ During this period Turco-Tatar Muslims and Indian Muslims collaborated and established three big mosques in Japan:

²⁶ Zebiri, *British Muslim Converts*, 75.

²⁷ Zebiri, *British Muslim Converts*, 75.

²⁸ Anne Sofie Roald, "The Shaping of a Scandinavian "Islam" – Converts and Gender Equal Opportunity", *Women Embracing Islam- Gender and Conversion in the West*, ed. Karin van Nieuwkerk (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 48-70.

²⁹ Zebiri, *British Muslim Converts*, 75.

³⁰ See. Özyürek, *Müslüman Olmak, Alman Kalmak*.

³¹ Ali Merthan Dünder, *Japonya'da Türk İzleri: Bir Kültür Mirası Olarak Mançurya ve Japonya Türk-Tatar Camiileri* (Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, 2008), 47.

³² Sinan Levent, "Japan's Central Eurasian Policy: A Focus on Turkic Muslim Minorities", *Social Science Japan Journal* 22/1 (2019), 133; Sayako Numata, "Fieldwork Note on Tatar Migrants from the Far East to the USA: For Reviews of Islam Policy in Prewar and Wartime Japan", *AJAMES* 28/2 (2018), 132-133; Hisao Komatsu, "Abdurresid Ibrahim and Japanese Approaches to Central Asia", *Japan on the Silk Road – Encounters and Perspectives of Politics and Culture in Eurasia*, ed. Selçuk Esenbel (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 150.

³³ Hisao Komatsu, "Muslim Intellectuals and Japan: A Pan-Islamist Mediator, Abdurresid Ibrahim", *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World: Transmission, Transformation and Communication*, ed. Stephane A. Dudoignon, Komatsu Hisao, Kosugi Yasushi (London: Routledge, 2006), 278; Selçuk Esenbel, "Abdurresid Ibrahim: "The World of Islam and the Spread of Islam in Japan" 1910", *Pan-Asianism – A Documented History, Volume 1: 1850-1920*, ed. Sven Saalar, Christopher W. A. Szpilman (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2011), 195-196.

Kobe Mosque in 1938, Nagoya Mosque in 1936 and Tokyo Mosque in 1938.³⁴ The estimated number of Muslims in Japan before the Second World-War was over 1000.³⁵ Although Muslim immigrants had a significant presence in Japan once, during and after the war they migrated to other countries, mostly Turkey and the U.S.A., thus this situation has changed. Only 10-15 Turco-Tatar families stayed in Japan at that time.³⁶ Between 1945-1970's Japan has entered to a new phase economically, politically and religiously, hence Muslim migration to Japan had also entered to a static period.³⁷ Japanese Muslims has started to establish their own organisations. In 1952, Islam Friendship Association was founded by a group of Japanese Muslims. Its name has changed to Japan Muslim Association in 1964, and it became the first Islamic organisation recognised by the country. Japanese Muslims sent students to Islamic countries in order to learn Islam better. In between 1957-1970, 27 Japanese Muslim students went to Egypt, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, and returned to their country as religious scholars and leaders.³⁸ First Japanese translation of Qur'an by a Japanese Muslim, named Omar Mita, was also done in this period.³⁹ In 1961 Muslim Student Association was established by international Muslim students. In 1968 Japan Islamic Centre was founded as a result of a collaboration of Japanese Muslims and immigrant Muslims.⁴⁰ After 1970, following the oil crisis and fast economic growth of Japan two changes has happened. Firstly, Japan has taken an interest towards Islamic countries again: demand for Arabic language courses have increased and Japanese Muslims, who were knowledgeable in Arabic, Islamic countries and Islam were recruited by universities and

³⁴ Bk. Dündar, Japonya'da Türk İzleri: Bir Kültür Mirası Olarak Mançurya ve Japonya Türk-Tatar Camiileri.

³⁵ Numata, "Fieldwork Note on Tatar Migrants from the Far East to the USA", 133-134.

³⁶ Ali Merthan Dündar, "An Essay on the Immigration of the Turk-Tatars to Japan", *Annual Journal of the Asian Cultures Research Institute* 48 (2013), 170.

³⁷ Elif Büşra Kocalan, "Japonya'ya Müslüman Göçü", *Hitit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 20/1 (2020): 743-746.

³⁸ Japan Muslim Association, *Brief History of Association – Publication in Memory of the 50th Anniversary* (Tokyo: Japan Muslim Association, 2005), 3-54.

³⁹ Higuchi Mimasaka, "日本のイスラーム、戦後の歩みー20世紀後半から今まで" (Islam in Japan, Postwar History-From the Second Half of the 20th Century to the Present), *日本に生きるイスラームー過去ー現在ー未来* (Islam Living in Japan -History-Past-Future), ed. Suudi Arabistan Büyükelçiliği Kültür Bölümü (Tokyo: Suudi Arabistan Büyükelçiliği Kültür Bölümü, 2010), 119.

⁴⁰ Akiko Komura, *日本のイスラームー歴史・宗教・文化を読み解く* (Islam of Japan – Understanding History, Religion and Culture) (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Publications, 2019), 50.

international companies.⁴¹ The second change was the sudden increase of the number of Muslim immigrant workers from countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran and Turkey. As of today, it is estimated that there is around 150,000 Muslims in Japan⁴² and %10-20 of it guessed to be Japanese Muslims.⁴³

A. Purpose

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of Japanese Muslim converts, seek to understand their conversion process, and eventually, make a conceptual contribution to the religious conversion literature. The sub-problems of the research are as following:

- What were the conditions that led Japanese to Islam?
- Under which circumstances the Japanese has started to pay attention to the religion?
- What were their main motivating factors for the conversion?

Thus, seeking answers to these questions, the Japanese experience of becoming Muslim is explored in the following sections.

B Method

The study is designed as a qualitative study. The qualitative research examines the nature of social life. It tries to understand realities and experiences from the perspective of experienter with the meanings attributed by individuals. The data collection and analysis continue simultaneously.⁴⁴ The aim is not to test a hypothesis but to explore, to understand, to interpret and to define perspectives of research participants.⁴⁵ In order to achieve an in-depth understanding it is advised to conduct a lengthy field-study establishing a rapport with the participants and interacting with them long-term.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Mimasaka Higuchi, 日本人ムスリムとして生きる (Living as a Muslim in Japan), (Tokyo: Kosei Shuppan, 2007), 159-160,

⁴² Hirofumi Tanada “世界と日本のムスリム人口-2018年” (Estimated Population of Muslims in the World and Japan in 2018), 早稲田大学人間科学研究 (Waseda University Faculty of Human Sciences Research) 32/2 (2019), 259.

⁴³ Keiko Sakurai, “Muslims in Contemporary Japan”, *Asia Policy* 5 (2008), 70.

⁴⁴ W. Lawrence Neuman, *Toplumsal Araştırma Yöntemleri – Nitel ve Nicel Yaklaşımlar*, çev: Sedef Özge (Ankara: Yayınodası Ltd., 2016), 1/221-260.

⁴⁵ Zeki Karataş, “Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri”, *Manevi Temelli Sosyal Hizmet Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1/1 (2015), 63-65.

⁴⁶ Uwe Flick vd., “What is Qualitative Research? An Introduction to the Field”, çev.: Bryan Jenner, *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, ed. Uwe Flick vd. (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 3-11.

In this study, two of the qualitative study approaches; the phenomenological approach and the grounded theory approach were applied. Phenomenological studies seek to discover and interpret meaning, reality and essence of a phenomenon from the perspective of those who experience it.⁴⁷ The phenomenological approach has been adopted since the primary objective of the research was to understand the conversion experience from the perspective of Japanese Muslims converts. Additionally, during the field-study it was observed that the previous researches on conversion and theories developed from them could not be adequately and sufficiently utilised on understanding the study subject. Thus, the grounded theory approach was also applied during the data-collection and data analysis phases. In grounded theory the aim is to develop a theory based on the research data collected during the field-study.⁴⁸ The grounded theory approach is a result of a necessity. In some cases, rather than “forcing the data to be included in a few existing theories”⁴⁹, it is necessary to develop new theories to explain the data. With the grounded theory approach in this study, it is also aimed to develop a conversion theory based on the experiences of Japanese who converted to Islam.

The fieldwork is conducted in Tokyo, Japan in two different periods lasted more than 2 years.⁵⁰ During these visits to Japan, semi-structured interviews⁵¹ were conducted with a total of 62 Japanese Muslim converts, 32 women and 30 men, aged between 19 and 81⁵². Participants were reached by snowball and purposive sampling methods. Several mosques, masjids and religious associations, mostly in Tokyo, were visited. Participant

⁴⁷ See. John W. Creswell, *Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri – Beş Yaklaşım Göre Nitel Araştırma ve Araştırma Deseni*, çev: Mesut Bütün – Selçuk Beşir Demir (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 2020).

⁴⁸ Barney G. Glaser – Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory – Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New Jersey: Aldine Transactions, 2006), 2-3.

⁴⁹ Cathy Urquhart, *Nitel Araştırmalar için Temellendirilmiş Kuram – Uygulama Rehberi*, çev: Züleyha Ünlü – Erkan Külekçi (Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık, 2018), 6.

⁵⁰ First is the period in between September 2016 – December 2017. During this period the studies were done as a visiting researcher at the Waseda University for 12 months, and at the Tokyo Mosque and Turkish Culture Center for 3 months. The next period is in between February 2019 – January 2020. It is supported by the TUBITAK 2214A scholarship for 12 months, and the Waseda University was again the host institution.

⁵¹ During semi-structured interviews questions such as family background, childhood and adolescence beliefs and traditions, opinions on Islam previous to conversion, their first memorable encounter with Islam and Muslims and how they would describe their conversion process were asked. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours, in the places chosen by participants; coffee houses, their homes, mosque and masjids, etc.

⁵² In this study women participants are coded with W, men with M. The numbers are the order of their interview. For example, 1M is the first person interviewed and a man.

observations were made, and field notes were kept while visiting events organised by these mosques, masjids and religious organisations. The field data is analysed in accordance with the grounded theory methods in three steps: open-ending coding, selective coding and theoretical coding. In the first step during the open-ended coding, general codes are added by examining the transcribed data line by line. Next is selective coding: the data and general codes get divided into categories. In the last step these categories are connected to each other by making continuous comparisons. Finally, as a result of systematic and categorical comparison in the data the theories are formed.⁵³

In order to ensure the internal validity of the research the long-term interaction, participant confirmation and data triangulation were applied. Long-term interaction establishes a rapport between researcher and participant and helps to eliminate the possible prejudices. With participant confirmation, early findings and interpretations of the phenomenon are shared with the participants and they are tested by the participant feedback. Lastly, with the data triangulation the various data, interviews, observation notes and documents are analysed comparatively.⁵⁴ On the account of external validity, two different sampling methods, snowball and purposive sampling, were used in order to ensure the diversity of participants and thus the data, as well as the direct quotations of the participants were referred in the research. The data triangulation, recording the interviews, keeping field notes and paying conscious attention to bracket the possible prejudices and assumptions of the researcher were applied to ensure the reliability of the research.

The study is limited to converts who reside in Japan and those who were willing to participate.

C. Findings – Conversion to Islam in Japan

In this section the findings of the research are discussed. This section consists of three sub-titles. Firstly, the first memorable encounter of Japanese with Islam and Muslims is explored. Next, their initial attitudes are explained. Then lastly, the factors motivated them to convert are discussed.

The conversion process of Japanese Muslims is a social process, starting with encountering with Muslims for the first time, taking an initial

⁵³ Urquhart, *Nitel Arařtırmalar için Temellendirilmiř Kuram*, 11.

⁵⁴ Egon G. Guba – Yvonna S. Lincoln, “Epistemological and Methodological Bases of Naturalistic Inquiry”, *Educational Communication and Technology Journal* 30/4 (1982), 233-252.

interest on their lives, attitudes, ideas, beliefs or religion, evaluating Islam and Muslims from different aspects, and then deciding. For most of them the evaluation period lasts in between 3 months and 6 years until they decide to convert.

Most of the Japanese Muslim converts do not account any childhood traumas and they describe their childhood and families as normal.

“My parents are normal Japanese. They do not believe in any gods, but attend religious events. *Obon*⁵⁵, *hatsumode*⁵⁶... Even though they do not know what it means, they think it is good to do. Because their parents did, and their parents did too. It is part of the culture.”
(40M)

The common feature of these families is that, even the ones who state that they are not religious or do not have any beliefs carry out some religious practices in the course of their daily lives on a regular basis. Having a *butsudan*⁵⁷ or/and a *kamidana*⁵⁸ at home, and performing *obon*, *hatsumode*, *setsubun*⁵⁹ and *shichi-go-san*⁶⁰ are some of very common practices among Japanese families regardless they define themselves or religious or not. They visit both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. Reader states that many Japanese regards these practices as cultural not religious, and by performing them they consider that they are partaking the Japanese culture.⁶¹ In a year-long fieldwork research conducted by Nelson it is discovered that most of the shrine visitors were there because of cultural and social reasons.⁶²

Japanese Muslim converts do not receive any religious education from their family or schools.

“They did not teach me anything special. It was like in everyday life. Putting rice and water in front of *butsudan* for example... Lighting a candle, praying... When a food brought home, offering

⁵⁵ Obon: A Japanese Buddhist traditional festival, held to honour ancestral spirits during their annual visit to the world.

⁵⁶ Hatsumode: The first temple or shrine visit of a new year. Wishes for the new year are made during this visit.

⁵⁷ Butsudan: Buddhist family altar found in Japanese households.

⁵⁸ Kamidana: Miniature Shinto shrine found in Japanese households.

⁵⁹ Setsubun: The last day before the spring. Preparing to the start of the spring, some rituals are performed in order to cleanse the house from bad fortunes and evil spirits.

⁶⁰ Shichi-Go-San: Rituals to celebrate the healthy growth of the children. Girls of three and seven years old and boys of five years old are celebrated in November 15.

⁶¹ Ian Reader, *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (London: Macmillian Press, 1991), 10-11.

⁶² John K. Nelson, *Enduring Identities: The Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 3-31.

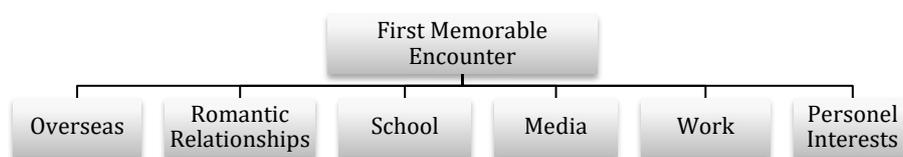
them first. In Japan, there is a thought if a person dies, they become *hotoke*⁶³. Such beliefs become normal in daily life. You learn by living. It is not taught.” (19W)

A Japanese learns these types of religious practices as a part of the culture during their socialisation process growing up. Socialisation is one of the ways in which these types religious practices, beliefs and images of gods are developed during childhood.⁶⁴ Indeed, in Japanese society “The kami-faith is caught not taught”⁶⁵, as well as other common religious practices.

1. First Memorable Encounter

As it is mentioned above, the process of Japanese becoming Muslim is a social process. Their encounter with Islam did not happen during a quest for a solution of a spiritual, psychological, physical or social trauma, while researching alternative ideas or belief systems. They came across with Muslims during the course of their daily lives and an interest in them sparked. This encounter is the beginning of the process that leads them to convert.

Image 1: First Memorable Encounter



The first memorable encounter of Japanese Muslim converts happens in six ways; overseas encounters, romantic relationships, school encounters, media, work encounters and lastly encounters due to personal interests and searches.

Most of the Japanese Muslim converts meet with Muslims during their overseas visits. While travelling a country due to business, education or leisure reasons, they encounter with Muslims. A classmate from Iran while studying at a university in the U.S.A (36W), or a Canadian Muslim classmate in a Canada university (14M), or a Muslim host-family in a student exchange programme in Australia (5M), or a co-worker in a company while working in the U.A.E. (34W), or the Muslims encountered during a backpacking trip to

⁶³ Hotoke: While there are many meanings of hotoke, in this context, it is the enlightened status of a person's soul reaches when they are dead.

⁶⁴ Fatma Nur Bedir, “Yetişkinlerin Çocukluk Anılarındaki Tanrı İmgisinin Analizi”, *Hitit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 16/32 (2017), 727.

⁶⁵ Ono Sokyo, *Shinto: The Kami Way* (New York: Tuttle Publishing, 1984), 94.

Nepal, India, Taiwan, Malaysia and Indonesia (15W) are some of the people encountered. Then, something caught their attention. It was their kindness (5M), their awareness to social problems and their answers (14M), their attentiveness to cleanness (34W) or the way they pray (28W)(48M).

Some of their romantic interests happened to be Muslims, and through them they learned about Islam. They met them at a blind-date (16W), during a work-trip (54W), or in Japan during the course of their daily life (35M)(29W)(61M)(22W)(8W).

Some met with Muslims during their education in Japan. They had Arab (55M) or Bangladeshi (2M) classmates in university, Malaysian exchange students in their high school (50W), or helped Indonesian students for their Japanese language (31M). Some had Muslim professors (38W), and some took classes related with Islam at university (46M)(10M).

Media is also another medium that leads Islam. 43W watched an informative TV programme about Islam, and the concept of God aroused her attention. 39W saw Morocco on TV, found it was a world she had no idea of, and went there for a trip later. 24M watched an interview Muslims living in Japan, and their ideas were interesting for her. 28W saw a mosque on TV, and decided to visit one in Japan. The starting point for their interest in Islam was the mass media.

Some Japanese Muslims got introduced to Islam via their work. Some of them were interested in starting a business with Muslim populated countries. 47M and 3M started learning Arabic for business. 3M visited Tokyo Mosque for the first time while he was searching a place to learn the language. 23M was planning to establish a business aimed at Indonesians. Some Japanese Muslims met Muslims at workplace. 41M met with Tunisians at a meeting, and had discussions on politics, economy and religion with them. 32W was working in health field, and she said that she had many Muslim friends at work. The company of 59M welcomed some Indonesians trainees, and there he met Muslims for the first time.

Lastly, some found Islam as a result of personal interests. 52M was interested in the life of Jesus, tried to learn from as many resources as possible, and it led him to Islam. 37M was a Christian, and he thought maybe he should learn about Islam as well. The story of 51M started with him reading a book of Toshihiko Izutsu. 42M started learning about Islam after seeing ISIS on the news. 17w was interested in world politics. She attended to an event for Palestinian children in Japan. The Muslims she met there was the contrary of what she was imagining. She remembers that they were

“clever and fluent in Japanese. And they were engineers and academicians...” She started taking Arabic classes and learning about Islam. One woman (11W) narrated the story of her difficulties in life. Her mother got cancer. She started having difficulties at work, could not sleep and she was trying to overcome her emotions by herself. Her husband she had married during this process was interested in different religions, that being the case they started checking many. They read Qur’an and hadith. They converted together eventually.

Four of these six motifs are connected to social relations. For Japanese Muslims, in the beginning of their conversion story there is a Muslim/are Muslims. Only two of the six motifs, media and personal interest are the more solitary beginnings, and the number of Japanese converts who got interested in Islam due to media or unassisted personal interests. For the majority of Japanese Muslims, the experience of becoming a Muslim is a social process. Although they were not interested in Islam beforehand, following these encounters a curiosity sparked in them, eventually leading to their conversion.

2. Open Attitude

According to the latest studies, Muslims living in Japan are approximately 150.000 people⁶⁶, around 0,1% of the total population, and most of them reside in big urban cities. Japanese converts estimated to be around 10%-20% of total Muslim population.⁶⁷ Majority of the Japanese do not encounter with Muslims in their daily lives. Apart from the situations occurred worldwide and seen from mass media, there is not much direct and continuous negative or positive influence on their perspective. Therefore, many Japanese do not have interest or idea of Islam, unless they meet with Muslims, which, during the course of their daily lives, is a low probability. Meeting with Muslim colleagues mostly happen in big international companies, having Muslim classmates or tutors mostly occur in numbered universities, seeing Muslims shopping, eating out, or busy with any other ordinary daily life activities is only normal in big urban cities. For this reason, most Japanese do not have any thought on Islam or Muslims prior to their

⁶⁶ Hirofumi Okai, “ムスリム・コミュニティと地域社会-イスラーム団体の活動から「多分化共生」を再考する” (Rethinking Multicultural Symbiosis Considering the Acts of Muslim and Local Communities, and Islamic Organisations), 現代日本の宗教と多分化再生 (Religion and Multiculturalism in Modern Japan), ed. Noriko Takahashi vd., (Tokyo: Akashi, 2018),182-183; See. Tanada “世界と日本のムスリム人口-2018年”, 253–262.

⁶⁷ Sakurai, “Muslims in Contemporary Japan”, 69-87; See. Keiko Sakurai, 日本のムスリム社会 (Muslim Society in Japan), (Tokyo: Chikuma Shinso, 2003).

encounters. However, it is also observed that they do not tend to have a noteworthy negative bias towards Islam or Muslims.

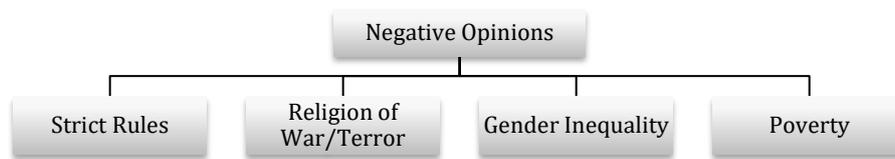
A significant number of Japanese Muslims who participated in this research is observed to have a neutral attitude towards Islam before their encounter. They “did not know anything” (47M), (2M), (3M), “never thought about it” (37M), (36W) and “had no idea” (33W). Some told that they heard about it before but were never interested in (27W), (38W), (12W).

“Before taking classes on Islam at university, I was thinking Islam was the religion of foreigners. I was not interested in. I cared about Christianity and Shintoism, but Islam seemed a foreign religion” (38W).

“I did not know anything before my encounter with Islam. I learnt some things at high school, like pork and alcohol ban. But it seemed something very far away, not my concern” (12W)

Although not all of them had a neutral attitude. Some Japanese Muslims had negative opinions beforehand.

Image 2: Negative Opinions Before First Encounter



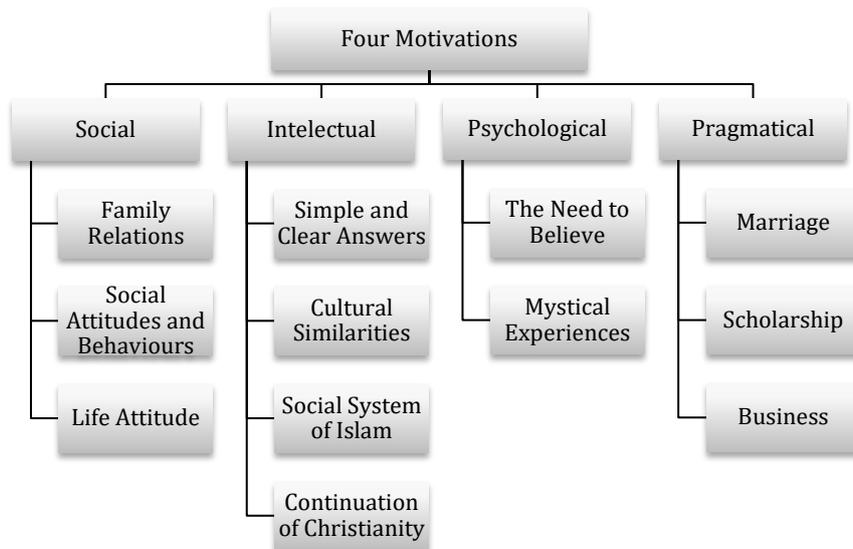
40M said that if he were to see a woman wearing a scarf before, getting scared, he would probably change his walking route. Others also mentioned being affected by the news and correlating Islam with terrorism (24M), (5M), (6W), (61M), thinking there was gender inequality in Islam (58M), (15W), imagining Islam as the religion of rural and poor (9W), (17W) and a strict religion with many rules (19W). It is observed that the participants who had some negative opinions on Islam beforehand did not have strong prejudices or strong opposition.

Considering the majority of them had a neutral attitude and the ones who had some negative opinions did not have a strong opposition, when the participants encountered Islam and Muslims, they had an open attitude and curiosity towards learning. Which brings the second step of their journey. Following their encounter, they started to observe Muslims and to learn and to examine Islam.

D. Four Motivations of Japanese to Convert Islam

After having their first memorable encounter with Islam and Muslims, a curiosity and an interest got sparked for the participants, and they engaged with the religion and its believers deliberately. From the field data, four main motivations discovered for their conversion.

Image 3: Four Motivations of Japanese Conversion to Islam



1. Social Motivations

Social motivations stem from the positive impressions of Japanese on relationships of Muslims with their families and society, and their attitudes towards the difficulties and calamities of life. They are impressed by lifestyles of Muslim families, their relationship, closeness and connection, by social attitudes and behaviours of Muslims among society and by their life attitude. They found Muslims they interacted with as kind, non-judgemental, respectful, sincere and brave. They liked the sisterhood-brotherhood ties among Muslims. The desire to be included and to have lives similar to Muslims are strong among the ones who converted due to social motivations.

a. Family Relations

Among many Japanese who converted to Islam, many expressed that they were impressed by the family relations of Muslims, and even some to the extent of becoming Muslim to have a Muslim family such they observed.

“I wanted to marry a Muslim woman and to have a Muslim family. Because the teachings of Islam were so beautiful. They

(family members) were respectful to each other and help each other. I found Muslim families very cosy and strong.” (45M)

45M was 33 years old when he participated to this research. Eventually, he got married to a Muslim woman and had his Muslim family within 2 years, as he desired. He was not alone in this sentiment. 23 years old 7M, who stayed with a Muslim host-family as international exchange student when he was still at university repeatedly stated that he was very impressed how his Muslim host family cared for each other, had close ties and lived peacefully. 61M and 13W had similar impressions when they met the families of Muslims they were dating, and desired to be part of them. 13W was very enthusiastic telling she could not wait to become a Muslim and join his “always caring and helping each other, not rich but happy” Indonesian family. 38W and 50W met with Muslim families during their education, and intensively talked about how they were impressed. All of these participants had Muslim partners, even when their partners did not require them to convert, converted and joined the Muslim families they were dreaming of.

b. Social Attitudes and Behaviours

Some of the participants were impressed by social attitudes and behaviours of their Muslim acquaintances. Charitableness and helpfulness are the most mentioned:

“Before going there, I did not have any friends in Indonesia. But I got introduced (by his Indonesian friend living in Japan) with his cousins and relatives to ask their help when I need. They welcomed me at the airport. They let me stay at their home, eat their food. They did everything for me. I did not pay for anything, and they did not ask anything in return. I was very impressed. When I asked why, they told me that’s what Muslims do. I think that was the starting point for me. I got curious. Then I started learning about Islam from them” (31M)

12W had same impression of her Arab friends at her university in USA, and 48M in Egypt. 24M saw an immigrant Muslim on a Japanese TV show, telling Islam orders them to help people in need and visited the nearest mosque to learn.

Others (55M), (57M), (22W), (6W) and (58M) mentioned about sincere friendships and international sisterhood-brotherhood ties. The idea of becoming sisters and brothers with every Muslim in the world regardless of race and class, praying side by side and working towards the same goals have enchanted them. 22W believed that if this sisterhood-brotherhood ties

expanded everywhere, all conflicts would be ended.

1M, who met with Muslims during his overseas education, told “They were good people, I wanted to be a better person. So I became Muslim.” He was not the only one hoping becoming a better person by becoming a Muslim. 9W met with Muslims living in Canada.

“They were good people. They did not expect anything from me. They just did kindness just to be kind. They were not pretending. It was natural for them. They were sharing their food, place, time and everything naturally. [...] I have always wanted to be a good person too.” (9W)

Some of them changed their former negative opinions after their encounters. 60W met with Muslims in her Arabic language course. “They were all good people. Islam was not that bad after all. I started wondering the source of their goodness. Then I thought that it was probably because of their belief in Allah” (60W). 59M had previous idea of Muslims being strange people, changed his idea after meeting with Muslims and deduced their calmness was coming from the teachings of Islam. 17W was interested in social and political issues in the Middle East, and her impression was that Muslims were weak and helpless. After joining an event on Palestine in Japan, she was surprised to see Muslims speaking fluent Japanese, having professional and successful jobs, being powerful and taking actions to solve the problems.

c. Life Attitude

Many of the participants gave examples of Muslims attitudes towards difficulties and calamities of life, and how strong and undaunted they were. They correlated that not fearing from death with a strong belief. They thought Muslims were powerful, happy and peaceful because they were with Allah.

44W was having troubles of death fear after losing her brother in a young age. She met with Muslims in the U.S.A. and Britain.

“I thought they were really cool. They were not afraid of anything. Even they were worried about something, they said inshaallah. Their way of life was very cool. [...] My friend from Britain. I wanted to be like him. I took him as a role model. He was not afraid of anything. He was stronger than everyone I know. We who had no belief, we were afraid of everything. What if I could not pass the exam? What if I could not find a job? But him. Even though things were rough, troubles were presents,

everything was fine for him because he had a belief. [...] I was amazed by Muslims, they were mysterious and powerful.” (44W)

27W remembered Muslims were living fearless and always with a smile. During a holiday in Egypt, 43W observed Muslims were strong, were not afraid of death and unknowns of life, and although they were poor, they were happy, and she adored these. 38W saw that, unlike her, her Malaysian friends were not afraid of future and were happy. 13W found her Indonesian boyfriend and his family were leading lives with a sense of confidence due to their belief in Allah.

Many participants were taken with the idea of everything good and bad comes from Allah. 8W noticed that her inclination of blaming herself for every stumble in life was wrong after meeting with Muslims. 3M, who visited Tokyo Mosque with a business concerning his work, observed praying five times in a day was an opportunity to slow down a stressful and busy life and to reduce stress, and tried praying before conversion.

All participants in this section were impressed by some qualities of Muslims they encountered and had the desire *to be like them* and *to become one of them*. Becoming someone or being a member of a society who had sincere relationships, cared for their family, had international sisterhood-brotherhood and had a fearless attitude towards life appealed them. This desire brought them closer to Islam.

2. Intellectual Motivations

The second motivation found is intellectual motivations. Similar with the previous category, following the encounter with Muslims and Islam, the participants in this category sparked an interest towards Islam as well. However, they were taken with intellectual side of Islam and mainly talked about it. They were impressed that answers they received to their questions were clear and simple. They found similarities between Japanese culture and Islam. They were interested in Islamic social system. Lastly, they regarded Islam as a continuation of Christianity, thus the next sensible step. This section will elaborate Islamic concepts and teachings that appealed Japanese.

a. Simple and Clear Answers

Some Japanese had questions about Islam and its ideology and belief system upon their encounters. While narrating their story, they remembered and emphasized the answers they received, and how these answers were simple, clear, sensible and convincing. 2M found that the idea of afterlife and God in Islam was quite clear. 50W and 12W received a sensible answer for

every “Why?” question of theirs. This increased 12W’s curiosity more and more. She was most interested in passages related with science in Qur’an. Mentions of stars and embryo and such convinced her the Qur’an was the word of a God, and led her to believe. 7M explained his questions such as “Why we are here? Why we have to treat people good?” were answered very convincingly. 24M, 18W, 62M found monotheistic god idea of Islam was easier to understand than Japanese polytheism. 24M also thought that the idea of this world was a test and everyone would either be punished or rewarded accordingly in the afterlife was reasonable. 5M talked about how a religion that presents a guideline for 24/7 was sensible for him. 14M and 46M read the translation of Qur’an and found it convincing. 14M said:

“About the creator and the creation... How the universe is created perfectly... I was atheist then. Did not believe any creator. Never questioned about it. After reading Qur’an and started thinking about it, I found the idea of a creator makes sense” (14M)

The participants in this group found the teachings of Islam and Qur’an clear and sensible in various aspects. The answers they received convinced them and fed their curiosity more, and led their journey towards Islam.

b. Cultural Similarities

Some of the participants were motivated by similarities they observed of Japanese culture and Islam. 22 years old university student 10M was one of them:

“And gradually I started to feel that Islam and Japanese culture were similar. Like in daily habits. For example, we wash our hands before eating. It is Japanese culture and sunnah. My mother used to tell me not leave one single rice in my plate. It is sunnah as well. We say *itadamikasu*⁶⁸ before eating, like bismillah. There are many similarities. I used to think Islam was foreigner and far away to us. But when I studied it I learned, it was very close.” (10M)

12W is of similar opinion. The more she studied, she said, the more she discovered Islam was closer and very suitable to Japanese life. She also mentioned about food being a blessing and being thankful of it as similarity. 39 years old 48M said he was raised being told “The sky is watching”.

⁶⁸ Itadakimasu: A phrase rooted in Japanese Buddhism, is said before a meal, means respect and thanks to everything went into that meal.

According to him this was the Japanese interpretation of the idea of a god seeing and knowing everything. 45M found similarities between ethics of human behaviour and daily habits. 26F thought same as well, and she further elaborated that Islamic behaviours seen among Japanese were fitrah. 22W said the first thing she noticed was “how a person should be and should behave” were similar. 39W was impressed how Islam and Japanese culture both valued the modesty.

56W, who is a Muslim more than 30 years, argues that these kind of similarities exist and they ease for Japanese to accept Islam. Furthermore, she thinks Japanese who become Muslim remember their own culture and become a better Japanese. Regardless, it is observed Japanese who find similarities between Islam and Japanese culture have close to zero difficulty adopting their two identities together. For them, cultural similarities are significant motivating factor for their conversion.

c. Social System of Islam

Some participants emphasized how impressed they were about the Islamic social system. The equality of every human being in front of God, lack of race and class discrimination, looking after the poor with the zakat system had impressed them.

14M studied in the U.S.A and Canada. He was always concerned social and political problems such as inequality, poverty, racism and violence. Meeting with his Muslim friend in Canada, they started discussions on these.

“When I talked about poverty, he mentioned zakat. He believed if everyone practised zakat there would be no poor. He used to argue there were no race discrimination in Islam, the face colour was not a matter and everyone was equal in front of Allah. He used to defend if everyone lived Islam there would be no social problems. These discussions were very stimulating for me. It was always interesting. I took an interest in Islam in this way.”
(14M)

58M who had similar concerns met with Muslims when he went to Africa for research.

“I liked the social system of Islam. Everyone was equal in front of God. Like the distinct gap between poor and rich, I was always thinking we had to do something about it. That’s why I wanted to be a journalist. ... The idea of everyone is equal in front of Allah. That’s great. And it is from 7th century. We started talking about equality after French revolution. Islam said that in the 7th

century. Great. Bilal Habeshi for example. He was from Africa. He was a slave. Our Prophet freed him, accepted as part of ummah. They prayed together. There was equality. I think that is great!" (58M)

17W, who was interested in Palestine problem and met with Muslims at an event on it, emphasized about equality as well. She was impressed the idea of lack of class and race discrimination in Islam.

These group of participants were preoccupied with social problems before meeting Islam. Thus, when they encountered with Muslims, the Islamic ideas on social issues and society attracted their attention. It motivated them to investigate and to consider Islam further.

d. Continuation of Christianity

Some participants were previously Christians. When they met Islam, they considered Islam and Christianity as connected to each other, and Islam being successive to Christianity. That is why conversion was a sensible next step for them.

37M was a Christian for 20 years. When he listened speech of a Japanese Muslim at Tokyo Mosque without any former knowledge of Islam, he got interested in and wanted to learn more. He converted considering Islam as the next step to Christianity. 52M had previous knowledge of Torah and Bible, and Islam sounded familiar to him. He said he accepted Islam easily. 41M was interested in Islam when he was a Christian, reading Qur'an and going to seminars. Both being monotheistic religions, he also found them familiar.

Similar to the participants who found resemblance between Islam and Japanese culture, the participants in this group are also motivated by the familiarity of Islam with their previous identities. This situation both motivated and eased their conversion process.

3. Psychological Motivations

The participants in these categories were either already in need of believing and belonging something when they met Islam, or highly touched by some mystical experiences they encountered.

a. The Need to Believe

Some participants found comfort in the idea of a powerful God who would protect and help them and relieve them from their fears.

44W was having a strong anxiety towards death after losing her brother. The feeling of security and fearlessness she observed among

Muslims appealed her. She wanted to believe and have the same sense of security. 7M and 43W had also been having the similar fears towards death. 7M was having difficulty to sleep at night, worrying about death. 43W found Muslims she met in Egypt very brave towards death.

8W had a stressful life before becoming Muslim. She was blaming herself for every mishap in the life and was tired of it. "I just wanted to be close to Allah. I wanted to believe Allah. I decided because of it" she said. The idea of Allah being with her and protecting her comforted her.

3M was going through a difficult time when he visited Tokyo Mosque. He had personal and work problems, and he was taking care of his sick father as well. When he was invited to pray with Muslims, he felt like he was taking a break from all his problems. 29W was visiting every temple and shrine in Japan, asking, wishing and praying. Her Muslim partner guided her to Islam, suggesting Allah would help her. His question "Do all Japanese gods really help you?" struck her. "I throw all the amulets I bought from temples and shrines. When I said I believe in Allah, not to the Japanese gods, everything went well." Visiting temples and shrines in certain days of the year was not enough for 32W. She wanted to be more religious. A life away from gods seemed like a waste for her. "I thought if I was close to god all the time I would be happier." She researched many belief systems and religions almost five years. Eventually when she visited Tokyo Mosque, she was informed there was no privileged clergy in Islam and everyone was in the same closeness to Allah, she thought it was the purest religion. 4W was married to a Muslim and pregnant. She never considered conversion before and her husband did not have any problem with her not being a Muslim. However, when she fell pregnant, she felt a strong need to believe like her husband and his friends. She said "I don't know when my heart felt close, I am not sure. But I wanted to believe strongly".

The participants in this group were in need of believing in a strong power due to various reasons. Worried about death, finding a life without religion meaningless and tired of life stress, when they encountered with Muslims, they found a shelter, a meaning and a comfort in belief.

b. Mystical Experiences

Some participants were enchanted by their experiences. The sound of adhan and Qur'an and the experience of prayer touched them, and motivated towards Islam.

33W, 34W and 28W were captivated by the sound of adhan. 33W heard the adhan for the first time while travelling Istanbul. She felt as if she

was being invited, so she followed the sound and entered to the mosque. 34W was in Dubai for work. First time she heard adhan she felt emotional and cried.

“I did not know anything about Islam. I did not know Arabic. But adhan touched my heart. I think it was in me, like fitrah. They say everyone born Muslim. So, I think when I heard adhan, I reacted as a result of my fitrah.” (34W)

28W said hearing adhan for the first time and observing everyone praying together wiped away all her negative thoughts on Islam. She converted 4 months later.

48M was in Egypt when he was invited to join pray by his friends. He was not Muslim at that time, and he was not considering becoming one. However, when he prayed, he felt good. He described his experience with the words “I can just say Allah guided me in that way”.

These emotional and somewhat mystical experiences affected these participants and motivated them towards Islam.

4. Pragmatic Motivations

Pragmatic motivations are some of the most common motivations among Japanese converts. In this motivation type, the aim is not the religion itself, but the goal they aim by converting that religion. Religion is an instrument in this case. Marriage being the most prevalent goal, work and scholarship follow it. While the fast decisions widely observed among the participants motivated by pragmatic reasons, their actions afterwards vary. Some of them taken an interest in Islam afterwards, and started learning and practising. Some found conversion alone is sufficient and did not have further interest in the religion.

a. Marriage

Marriage is the most common pragmatic motivation for Japanese conversion to Islam. Participants in this category convert in order to meet the requirement, by their partners or their families, for marriage with a Muslim. The marriage motivated conversions used to happen mostly among women in the past, however in this research it is observed the ratio of men and women who convert for marriage began to equalise. The 10 years' conversion statistics of Tokyo Mosque shows the same situation. While the phenomenon of conversion for marriage was more valid for women 10 years ago, it has now become common among men as well.

Tablo 1. Tokyo Mosque 2010-2019 Conversion Statistics - Gender⁶⁹

	Women	Men	Total
2010	33	3	36
2011	38	10	48
2012	43	15	58
2013	44	24	68
2014	42	31	73
2015	60	27	87
2016	59	29	88
2017	45	34	79
2018	49	38	87
2019	38	42	80
10 Years Total	451	253	704

Many participants in this group (49W), (25M), (21W) and (16W) responded to “Why you were interested in Islam?” question with a short and clear answer, stating it was for marriage. 61 years old 30M is one of them as well. When asked, he simply answered as “My wife is Malaysian and Muslim. She told me we could not get married unless I became Muslim. So I converted” (30M). 65 years old 53M also stated he became Muslim in order to be able to marry his Moroccan wife.

While some participants remained uninterested of Islam after conversion and marriage, some of them have taken an interest in the religion.

44 years old 26W said because she loved her husband, she converted without thinking about it. However, when she started to socialise with Muslim friends of her husband, she started to be interested in. 35 years old 35W also stated in the beginning, it was just for marriage. For seven years, even though he was not believing, he tried to practice for the sake of his wife. “One day, while I was praying, I felt Allah was protecting me” he said, “I think it was an emotional decision. I was not feeling well, I was depressed. There was not one to look after me while I was feeling this way. I did not want to be alone. No one should be alone while depressed. It is not natural. There has to be someone. Someone to protect us.” This was a turning point for him. 54W,

⁶⁹ Gathered by the researcher from the conversion certificates in between 2009-2019 given by Tokyo Mosque for Japanese converts.

who is Muslim for 25 years, also did not believe for the first 10 years. It was their move to Dubai for her. When she encountered some negativities among Muslims there, she started to want to learn what Islam was really about. 16W said she had no other options at the time, because her husband required for her conversion. Joining at events at Tokyo Mosque, other mosque and masjids with her husband gave her a chance to learn about Islam. 22W decided to convert for marriage, but it did not feel right, so she tried to learn Islam before conversion.

These participants are motivated by their relationships and decisions to marry with Muslims. Their stories started with the same motivation, and varied after conversion and marriage. A research from 2005 in Kanto region found similar results as well. In that research, while some developed an interest in Islam after marriage and started to believe, some never cared about it.⁷⁰ It is argued, although marriage is a common motivation among Japanese conversion, the experiences should not be oversimplified and reduced only one reason.⁷¹

b. Scholarship and Business

Getting a scholarship from a Muslim populated country or establishing business relations with Muslims some other pragmatic motivations among Japanese converts.

When 47M graduated from university the economic conditions of Japan were not bright and the chance to find a job immediately was low. Contemplating only English as a foreign language was not enough, he started taking Arabic classes. He found a scholarship opportunity for Egypt, and the condition was becoming Muslim, thus he became one. 23M was planning to establish a business aimed Indonesians. He thought if converted to Islam, he could gain trust of his clients and establish better relationships with them.

After their initial encounter with Muslims, Japanese had varied experiences towards Islam. Some, as told in the social motivations title, continued socialising with Muslims, learned about Islam through their relationships and influenced by the people, their characters, ideas, attitudes and lifestyles. The desire *to be like them* and *to become one of them* is a strong motivation behind their conversion. Some, following their encounter, were interested in Islamic ideas and teachings, and started to learn further. Some

⁷⁰ Nagisa Tamura, “日本人ムスリムと改宗” (Japanese Muslims and Conversion), *Japanese Association for Religious Studies* (2008), 384-385.

⁷¹ Akiko Komura, “日本とイスラームが会おうときーその歴史と可能性” (The Time Japan and Islam has Met) (Tokyo: Dendaishokan, 2015), 114-115.

found the god they were in need of or searching for in Allah. Lastly, some had the pragmatic reasons for their conversions. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that there is no distinct separation in between these motivations. One can be intrigued in the life of Muslims and want to be part of their society, and can also have an intellectual interest in Islamic and study about it. Or one can decide to become a Muslim for a marriage or a scholarship, later taken an interest in Islam, and eventually end up becoming someone in the leading position among Japanese Muslim community.

E. Discussions

Japanese Muslims were raised among families they described as normal Japanese. The common feature of these normal families is even if they may or may not have a religious identity and belonging, during the course of their live they continuously tend to practice behaviours, habits and actions rooted in Shintoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and even Christianity. Some of these practices are accepted as a part of Japanese culture and identity, and even Japanese who regard themselves non-religious and non-believer sees no objection in partaking them. In the literature on religion in Japan, it is discussed that the Japanese religion is a harmonious mixture born from the centuries of interactions of all religions and beliefs lived in Japan.⁷² All of them coalesced into each other and melded into Japanese lifestyle flawlessly, a Japanese can practice all without seeing any problem⁷³ by simply partaking in their culture. Religion based practices such as *obon*, *shici go san*, *setsubun* and *hatsumode*, or even Japanised Christmas, can certainly be practised with religious aims, but they also can be seen as cultural activities⁷⁴ and acting/living as Japanese⁷⁵ by a wide part of society. Religious festivals sometimes tent to be regarded as “seasonal festivities (*nenjû gyô jî*) that brightens up the routine of a busy life”⁷⁶. The surveys on Japanese national character make an interesting point in this issue. Surveys, which were repeated in five years period for more than 50 years, show that even though the declared personal belief is low (changing between 35%-25%) among Japanese, the importance given to religious behaviours is high (changing

⁷² Jun'ichi Isomae, “The Conceptual Formation of the Category “Religion” in Modern Japan: Religion, State, Shintô”, *Journal of Religion in Japan* 1 (2012), 226-245.

⁷³ August Karl Reischauer, *Studies in Japanese Buddhism* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1917), 3.

⁷⁴ Nelson, *Enduring Identities*, 31.

⁷⁵ Esben Andreasen, “Japanese Religions - An Introduction”, *Japanese Religions Past & Present*, ed. Ian Reader vd. (London/New York: Routledge, 1993), 64.

⁷⁶ John Breen - Mark Teeuwen, *A New History of Shinto* (Malden/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 4-5.

between 66-80%).⁷⁷ Social scientists studying on Japanese religiosity are at the opposite ends of the spectrum on this issue. Some regard the importance given to religious rooted behaviours as manifestations of a different type of religiosity.⁷⁸ However some argue that practices such as visiting temples and getting luck amulets cannot be regarded as religiosity declarations, but can only be traditional and cultural activities.⁷⁹ Regardless of the discussions on characteristics of Japanese religiosity, it is clear that most of the Japanese society partake in religious sourced practices, and Japanese Muslims were raised among families who had altars at their home and visited shrines and temples regularly. They did not receive a religious education but watch, join and learn these activities from their parents and society as a part of cultural socialisation. Nonetheless, most Japanese Muslims did not attribute any personal religious belonging or belief neither to their families nor themselves growing up.

They did not experience any traumatic events and had fairly normal childhood and youth. Although the process models are compatible with the case of Japanese Muslim converts, the precondition of a life crisis of a traumatic life event, and a quest to solve problems prior to encounter with religion are not observed in their experiences. In the process model of Rambo, he suggest that a convert goes through seven stages: context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment and consequences.⁸⁰ Although he says the order of these steps are changeable, he also argues that “some form of crisis usually precedes conversion.”⁸¹ On the other hand, in the stage model of Lofland and Stark a life crisis and a quest to solve problems are accounted for a pre-existing condition. According to them, an individual has to encounter a crisis in their life, to consider that possible solutions to their problems are within the religious framework and to seek accordingly. If an individual who has these pre-conditions meets a religious group, establishes close ties with them and also lacks of strong relationship outside of the group, following an intense interaction with the group, they convert.⁸²

⁷⁷ The Institute of Statistical Mathematics, “Study of the Japanese National Character” (Accessed 4 September 2019).

⁷⁸ Ian Reader, “Letters to the Gods –The Form and Meaning of Ema”, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18/1 (1991), 23-50; Ian Reader, “What Constitutes Religious Activity? (II)”, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 18/4 (1991), 373-376.

⁷⁹ Richard W. Anderson, “What Constitutes Religious Activity? (I)”, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18/4 (1991), 369-372.

⁸⁰ See. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*.

⁸¹ Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 44.

⁸² See. Lofland – Stark, “Becoming a World-Saver”.

In the case of Japanese Muslim converts, a crisis and a quest prior to their encounter is not observed. Moreover, a search for a new life or a belief system born from a dissatisfaction of previous lifestyle and belief, and social incompatibility mentioned by some⁸³ is not observed among Japanese Muslims. They had their first memorable encounter with Islam mostly in social situations. Their conversion process is a social process started from casual encounters. It is not triggered by a problem-solving search to a life crisis or a dissatisfaction of previous life. They were not in seek of a new belief system. While travelling and living in overseas, through their romantic interests or at their work or schools, they met Islam and Muslims, intrigued by it/them, and their journey started.

Although Islam in Japan is a distant and largely unknown religion, and most Japanese do not casually meet with Muslims in their daily life. An extensive and twelve year-long research by Kokugakuin University in Tokyo shows that only %2-%2.7 of university students had Muslim neighbours, and only %1.8-%3.6 of them had Muslim friends. Most of the students had never met with Muslims and never had any interest on Islam.⁸⁴ Japanese Muslims as well, until their first encounter, had almost no concern of Islam. It was a distant religion, related with foreigners living far away. Even though, no strong prejudice, hate or enmity along the lines of islamophobia is seen in their previous lives. Indeed, Japanese society do not have a phobia, hatred or enmity towards Islam. Even after the terror acts directly related with them, the society did not show significant signs of bitterness/discontentment towards the Muslims living among them.⁸⁵ On the contrary, a curiosity to learn the truth about Islam peaked among the society. The visitors of mosques and masjids⁸⁶ and the calls received by leaders and staff of these Islamic organisations had increased.⁸⁷ Japanese Muslims mostly had neutral attitude towards Islam was well. Thus, when they have encountered with Muslims, they had an open attitude towards discovering and learning.

By applying grounded theory data analysis methods to the interview

⁸³ Flinn, "Conversion: Up From Evangelicalism or the Pentecostal and Charismatic Experience", 56-61.

⁸⁴ See. Kokugakuin University, *College Students' Attitude Toward Religion Survey General Analysis (1995-2015)* (Tokyo: Kokugakuin University, 2019).

⁸⁵ Kanei Sato, *日本の中でイスラム教を信じる* (Believing in Islam in Japan), (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū, 2015), 222-228.

⁸⁶ Sato, *日本の中でイスラム教を信じる*, 222-228.

⁸⁷ Higuchi, *日本人ムスリムとして生きる*, 166-167; Toru Miura, "Perceptions of Islam and Muslims in Japanese High Schools – Questionnaire Survey and Textbooks", *Japan Association for Middle East Studies Özel Sayı 2* (2006), 173-191.

data, the four type of motivations for Japanese conversion to Islam is discovered. To summarise the motivations shortly, Japanese convert to Islam with four motivating factors: social, intellectual, psychological and pragmatic. Social motivations are rooted in the desires of *being like them* or *being one of them*. Intellectual motivation is being convinced by some idea or teachings of Islam intellectually. Psychological motivation comes from the need for believing and being protected by a higher power. Lastly, in pragmatic motivations conversion to Islam is an instrument for reaching their other goals, such as marriage, business or scholarship.

This result is consistent with the study of Allievi on conversion to Islam. His relational and rational conversion types⁸⁸ are seen among Japanese Muslims as well, although the relational type, which is the type motivated by social relations, is significantly high among Japanese. A booklet telling the conversion experiences of twelve Japanese women published by Muslim Shimbun, contains various conversion stories. The conversion story that these Japanese women lived through are all different, but the most common point of all the stories is that, their journey begun when they met with Muslims, and mostly in overseas. Some met with Muslims in Paris, some in the U.S.A, in England, in Sydney or in China. Their circumstances were all different, but for all of them, the Muslims they met led their journey towards conversion.⁸⁹ The study of Komura on Japanese Muslims aligns with this argument as well. She explains out of seven reasons Japanese do convert to Islam, five is due to social relationships.⁹⁰ Indeed, conversion to Islam for Japanese is a social process. It is not a result of a personal intellectual or spiritual search triggered by a crisis or a trauma. They do not go through an isolated crisis, research and decision process. Their journey simply starts when they encounter with Muslims during the natural process of their normal lives.

Conclusion

This research aimed to understand the conversion phenomenon in the example of Japanese conversion to Islam. Phenomenological and grounded theory approaches were applied during the research process. With the phenomenological approach, it is aimed to discover the common and

⁸⁸ See. Allievi, "The Shifting Significance of the Halal/Haram Frontier-Narratives of the Hijab and Other Issues".

⁸⁹ See. Aisha Yuki Ito (ed.), 私の入信記-スラームの信仰に導かれるまで (My Conversion Diary - Under the Guidance of Islam), (Kyoto: Muslim Shimbunsha, 2005).

⁹⁰ Komura, 日本のイスラーム: 歴史・宗教・文化を読み解く, 89-91.

different aspects of conversion experiences of Japanese Muslims, and to understand what it means for them. With the grounded theory approach, a conversion motif on Japanese Muslims is developed with the aim of contributing to the conversion literature.

In this study it is discovered that Japanese had four main motivations on their conversion to Islam: Social, intellectual, psychological and pragmatic. In the beginning of their conversion stories, there are mostly social encounters with Muslims, either in overseas or in their countries. Due to their lack of prejudice and open attitude towards Islam, upon their encounters they do not have difficulties building interactions, and if there is anything they are interested in they tend investigate and learn about it freely. Majority of Japanese Muslims are impressed by social and living aspects of the religion: the way Muslims live, their relationship with their families and other people, the stance they have towards life. They get impressed by these aspects, and a desire to be like a Muslim or be a part of the Muslim community shows up, hence the social motivation. Some of Japanese Muslims get convinced by the intellectual side of Islam. They also meet Islam through their social interactions with Muslims, however, unlike the previous category, the aspects that impressed them are the way Islam can give clear and simple answers to their burning questions, the similarities they find between Islam and Japanese culture, the social system of Islam or the idea that it is the continuation of Christianity. These Japanese are mostly motivated intellectually. The third group, even though they may not be aware of it previously and do not have a crisis regarding their beliefs, they are in need of a belief, and they find the God they need in Islam. Some Japanese Muslims in this group even go through mystical experiences. Last group is pragmatic converts; the reason they decide to convert is either marriage, or scholarship or a job. Muslim identity is an instrument for them to reach to their main motivation.

Religious conversion studies are an ongoing field of study in social sciences. In the beginning of conversion studies religious conversion was evaluated as a personal matter, as a change occurred as a result of one's own personal traumas and life. With time it is understood that there could also be social, political and economical sides of a conversion story, and interdisciplinary approaches have been developed. It is also discovered that there was not a universal conversion narrative or pattern which could fit into any experience. In this research, the phenomenon of conversion and the processes and motivations leading to conversion to Islam in Japanese case is studied. A typology of four motivation of religious conversion is developed in

the light of fieldwork data. The hope is to contribute to ongoing conversion literature and to inspire further studies in different fields with comparative studies and analysis.



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MÜSLÜMAN OLMADA DÖRT MOTİVASYON: JAPON MÜSLÜMANLAR

 Elif Büşra KOCALAN^a

Geniş Öz

Bu araştırmada din değiştirme fenomeni Müslüman olmuş Japonlar örneğinde incelenmiştir. Araştırmanın amacı, Japon Müslümanların İslam ile karşılaşma ve din değiştirme süreç ve deneyimlerini anlamak ve Müslüman olma motiflerini keşfederek din değiştirme literatürüne kavramsal bir katkı sağlayabilmektir. Araştırmada incelenen problemler Japonları İslam'a yönelten ve ilgi duymalarına sebep olan koşulların ve Müslüman olma motivasyonlarının neler olduğudur.

Bu amaca uygun nitel bir çalışma olarak tasarlanan bu çalışmada hem fenomenoloji hem de gömülü teori yaklaşımlarının bakış açıları, araştırma teknikleri ve veri analiz metotları kullanılmıştır. Fenomenolojik yaklaşım ile gerçeklikler onu deneyimleyen kimselerin açısından anlaşılmasına çalışılmaktadır. Bu çalışmada fenomenolojik yaklaşıma başvurarak din değiştirme fenomeninin Japon Müslümanların deneyimleri özelinde ne şekilde gerçekleştiği ve onlar için ne ifade ettiği anlaşılmasına çalışılmış ve ayrıca Müslüman olma deneyimlerinin ortak ve farklılaşan yönlerini keşfetmek hedeflenmiştir. Gömülü teori ile de din değiştirme deneyimlerine teorik bir açıklama geliştirmek hedeflenmiştir. Saha çalışması 2016 Eylül – 2017 Aralık ve 2019 Şubat – 2020 Ocak dönemlerinde toplam 2 yıl 3 ay Tokyo'da sürdürülmüştür. Veri toplama aşamasında yarı-yapılandırılmış mülakat, katılımcı gözlem ve saha notları tekniklerine başvurulmuştur. Mülakatlar, kartopu ve amaçlı örneklem metotlarıyla ulaşılan, yaşları 19 ile 81 arası değişen 32 kadın ve 20 erkek toplam 62 kişi ile yapılmıştır. Katılımcıların büyük bir bölümü Tokyo'da, bir kısmı ise civar şehirlerde ikamet etmektedirler. Saha çalışması boyunca sıklıkla Tokyo Cami ve Türk Kültür Merkezi ile Japon Müslüman Derneği'nin düzenledikleri etkinliklere

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katılmış, Japon Müslümanlar ile olan iletişime mülakatlar dışında da devam edilmiş ve ayrıca gözlem ve saha notları tutulmuştur. Literatür araştırması için Waseda Üniversitesi'nin kaynaklarından faydalanılmıştır.

Araştırma sonucunda keşfedilenler şunlardır: Japon Müslümanlar, normal Japon ailesi olarak tanımladıkları, dindarlık bilinci yahut dinî aidiyet oranları düşük ancak din kökenli uygulama ve ritüelleri gerçekleştirme ve katılım oranları yüksek, farklı dinlere ait ritüellerin bir arada yerine getirilebildiği, çocuğa dinî eğitim başlıklı özel bir eğitim verilmeyen ancak çocuğun gündelik hayatın normal akışı içerisinde sosyal katılım vasıtasıyla dinî kültürü öğrendiği ailelerde yetişmişlerdir. Bir travma yahut bir kriz sonrası ortaya çıkan anlam ve çözüm arayışı sonucunda yeni din ile karşılaşma durumu Japon Müslümanlar arasında gözlemlenmemiştir. Din değiştirme süreçleri sosyal bir süreçtir. Hikâyelerinin başlangıcı büyük oranda Müslümanlar ile yaşadıkları karşılaşmalara dayanmaktadır. İslam ve Müslümanlar ile ilk anlamlı karşılaşmaları altı şekilde gerçekleşmiştir: Yurtdışında, işyerinde, okulda, romantik ilişkiler vasıtasıyla, medya vasıtasıyla ve kişisel ilgileri sonucunda. Sosyal bir bağlamda gerçekleşen karşılaşmalar en yaygın gerçekleşen karşılaşmalardır. İş, gezi yahut eğitim için yaptıkları yurtdışı seyahatleri esnasında tanıştıkları kimseler, yurtiçinde okullarında ve işyerlerinde karşılaştıkları okul arkadaşları, hocaları ve iş arkadaşları veya romantik olarak ilgilendikleri kişiler vasıtasıyla İslam ile karşılaşmışlardır. Medya yahut kişisel ilgileri ve araştırmaları sonucunda İslam ve Müslümanlar ile karşılaşanların sayısı azdır. İslam ile gündelik hayatlarının doğal akışı içerisinde karşılaşan, öncesinde hâlihazırda var olan yaşam şartları ve inançları hususunda ciddi tatminsizlikleri bulunmayan ve yeni bir yaşam ve inanç biçimi arayışı içinde olmayan Japonlar, bu karşılaşmalarını takiben farklı şekillerde İslam ile ilgilenmeye başlamıştır. İslam ve Müslümanlar hakkında ciddi önyargılara sahip olmamaları sebebiyle, bu karşılaşmalarda öğrenmeye ve anlamaya açık bir tutum sergilemişlerdir.

Araştırmada, Japonların Müslüman olmalarının dört farklı motivasyon ile gerçekleştiği tespit edilmiştir. Bunlar sosyal, entelektüel, psikolojik ve pragmatik motivasyonlardır. Sosyal motivasyonda karşılaştıkları Müslümanlar gibi olma, onlara benzer bir hayat sürme ve Müslüman topluluğa dâhil olma arzuları güçlüdür. Bu kategorideki katılımcıların İslam ile ilk karşılaşmalarını takiben Müslümanların insan ilişkileri, hayata bakış açıları, hayat karşısındaki tutum ve davranışları dikkatlerini çekmiştir. Müslümanların aile ilişkilerinden, dünya çapında bir kardeşlik fikrinden, Müslümanlarda gözlemledikleri nezaket, samimiyet, yardımseverlik ve hayatın zorluklarına karşı gösterdikleri cesareten etkilenmişlerdir. Bu

gruptaki katılımcılar en çok Müslümanlar ve yaşam tarzları ile ilgilenmektedirler. Entelektüel motivasyonda ilgilerini çeken asıl faktör İslam'ın fikri yönüdür. İlk karşılaşmaları sonrası katılımcıların dikkatini İslam'ın teolojik ve ideolojik yönleri, öğretileri ve inanç sistemi çekmiştir. Etraflarındaki Müslümanlara İslam hakkında sorular sormaya ve araştırmaya başlamışlardır. Bazıları aldıkları net, basit ve mantıklı cevaplarla ikna olmuştur. Bazıları İslam ve Japon kültürü arasında benzerlikler bulmuş ve kendilerini İslam'a yakın hissetmiştir. Bazıları İslam'ın sosyal mevzulara bakışı ile ilgilenmiştir ve toplumsal problemlerin çözümünün İslam'da olabileceğini düşünmüştür. Son olarak, daha önce Hıristiyan olan bazı katılımcılar da İslam'ı atabilecekleri bir sonraki mantıklı adım olarak görmüştür. Psikolojik motivasyonlar kategorisinde katılımcılar ilk karşılaşma öncesi bir inanç ve Tanrı arayışı ihtiyacı hissetmektedirler. Onları korku ve kaygılarından koruyan, her an gözeten sonsuz güce sahip bir Tanrı fikri onları cezbetmiştir. Katılımcıların çoğu deneyimlerini anlatırken, bu ihtiyaçlarını İslam ve Müslümanlar ile tanıştıktan sonra fark ettiklerini ifade etmiştir. Bu kategorideki katılımcılardan birkaçı ise ezan ve Kur'an sesini duyduklarında yahut namaz kılmayı denediklerinde tam olarak açıklayamadıkları duygusal deneyimler yaşamış ve etkilenmiştir. Son motivasyon pragmatik motivasyondur. Pragmatik motivasyona sahip olan katılımcılar için İslam, esas ilgilendikleri hedefe ulaşmak için başvurdukları bir yoldur. Büyük bir çoğunluğu Müslüman partnerleri ile evlenmek için ve birkaçı ise ilgilendikleri burs ve işler sebebiyle Müslüman olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Sosyolojisi, Din Değişirme, Japon Müslümanlar.



Teşekkür:

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Beyanname:

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