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Discordance and the Eucharist: Exploring Diasporic Iranian Christian Converts from Islam in the Church of England

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Abstract

Iranian Christian converts from Islam in the Church of England (CoE) have grown numerically, yet limited research on their faith experiences exists. This study delves into their understandings and experiences of the Eucharist and how their cultural background, religious conversion, and traumatic experiences influence their faith. This research also develops theology and practice related to the Eucharist relevant to their context. Utilising qualitative research methods, lived theology and contextual theology within practical theology as the framework, this study examines the lived experiences of 13 Iranian converts from three CoE congregations. The analysis identified three key themes, capturing the concept of "discordance" with various tensions regarding these converts' identity ("cultural self"), belonging ("social self"), and being ("inner self"). Considering knowledge from various disciplines, this study suggests that Iranian converts inhabit an "in-between space" due to their disorienting cultural and religious identity formation and disconnection in their bodies and memories stemming from trauma. They also struggled to genuinely belong to the Church. The Eucharist, a tangible and tactile sacrament that embodied Christ's wounds, helped Iranian converts' post-traumatic "re-making" by reconnecting with their bodies and reconstructing the trauma narratives. From the "discordance" from Iranian converts' lived experiences, this study proposes a contextual interpretation of the Lukan resurrection narratives as "narratives of discordance" and an understanding of the Eucharist as a "sacrament for discordance" and a "sacrament of 'Rastakhiz' (رستاخیز – Christ's resurrection in Farsi)". These understandings signify a mutual encounter with Christ for Iranian converts, receiving a new life and reconciliation with themselves and others, echoing their New Year Nowruz celebration. Practical suggestions for the Church and Iranian converts are offered to continue their journey with humility and mutuality and to develop worship and liturgies that are contextual and intercultural. The research concludes that Christ is present amidst Iranian converts' discordance.

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Discordance and the Eucharist:
Exploring Diasporic Iranian Christian Converts from Islam in the Church of England

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

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Department of Theology and Religion

Durham University

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List of Abbreviations

AoG   Assemblies of God

AoR   Articles of Religion

ARCIC   Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission

BCP   The Book of Common Prayer

BMB   Believer from a Muslim Background

CMEAC   Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns

CoE   Church of England

CW   Common Worship

EVENS   Evidence for Equality National Survey

GAMAAN   Group for Analysing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran

GMH   Global Majority Heritage

IALC   International Anglican Liturgical Consultation

MBB   Muslim-Background Believer

PTSD   Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

RQ   Research Question

WCC   World Council of Churches

UKME   United Kingdom Minority Ethnic

Statement of Copyright

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent, and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

Acknowledgements

> *"How do I listen to others? As if everyone were my Master speaking to me His cherished last words.";* *"Now is the time to know that all that you do is sacred."*[1]   (Poems by 14th-century Persian poet *Hafiz*)

To allow me to complete this doctorate research, which is a sacred listening task as *Hafiz* suggested, I am in debt to the following:

- The Triune God, who loves me as my Heavenly Father, has saved me through the sacrifice of the Son and upholds me through the Holy Spirit, particularly when I want to give up

- Tracey, my wife, and Abigail, my daughter - for their patience, love, and support during my time away in Durham and beyond for my ordination training and doing this research. I owe both of you much.

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Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam!

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[1] Hafiz, *The Gift - Poems by Hafiz the Great Sufi Master*, trans. by Daniel Ladinsky (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 99, 160.

Dedicated to all the Christian converts from Islam

whom I know personally, especially Ebrahim.

They have challenged and taught me what following Jesus means

and what the Body of Christ is.

Also, to Michael Harrison, who supported me

but is now with the Lord and cannot see the fruit of this research in person.

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35, NRSV)

عیسی به آنها گفت: «نان حیات من هستم. هر که نزد من آید، هرگز گرسنه نشود،
و هر که به من ایمان آوَرَد هرگز تشنه نگردد.» (یوحنا 6:35، فارسیNMV)

Glossary

Islam related

Sharia
(Arabic: شَرِيعَة)

Islamic law

Surah
(Arabic: سورة)

A "chapter" of the Qur'an

'Ulama
(Arabic: علماء)

Islamic religious scholars and clerics

Ummah
(Arabic: أُمَّةُ)

Community – some transliteration as "*umma*"

Iran or Persia related

Chahar-shanbeh Suri
(Farsi: چهارشنبه‌سوری)

A festival celebrated on the evening before the last Wednesday before *Nowruz,* with a traditional observance of individuals jumping over the fire as a purification ritual

Daheh-ye-shasti-hā

The 1980s generation in Iran – those Iranians who were born or grew up in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)

Haft-sin Table
(Farsi: هفت‌سین)

Nowruz custom among Iranians. It is a table during *Nowruz* with items (usually seven) that start with the Farsi alphabet "س" (pronounced as "sin") and convey symbolic meanings related to nature, strength, and prosperity. A "wisdom book" is commonly placed on the table. There are variations of the items on the table, but they usually include *Sabzeh* (سبزه, sprouts grown in a dish), *Samanu* (سمنو, wheat germ sweet pudding), *Seeb* (سیب, apple), *Seer* (سیر, garlic), *Serkeh* (سرکه, vinegar). Some items may not start with "س", like mirrors, goldfish, and eggs.

Halva
(Farsi: حلوا)

A traditional Persian confection made of sugar, butter, and flour; sometimes, it may include tahini or semolina

Khoreh
(Farsi: خوره)

A canker-like open wound

Nowruz
(Farsi: نوروز)

Iranian New Year: the first day of a new year on the solar Hijri calendar, usually between 19 March and 22 March on the Gregorian calendar

Peyman
(Farsi: پیمان)

Covenant

Rastakhiz
(Farsi: رستاخیز)

One of the terms used in the Farsi Bible for Christ's resurrection; examples in the New Millennium Version (NMV) of the Farsi Bible using "*Rastakhiz*" for the resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15:21, 42, 1 Peter 1:3, Philippians 3:10

Shahnameh
(Farsi: شاهنامه)

A long narrative poem (an epic poem) by the Persian poet Ferdowsi between 977 and 1010 AD, it consists of Persian mythology and the Persian Empire's history from the world's creation until the Muslim conquest in the 7th century. This book is considered a literary masterpiece of Persian culture, language, and Zoroastrianism

Iran or Persia related (Continued)

Sizdah Bedar
(Farsi: سیزده‌بدر)

13 days after *Nowruz* and is known as "Nature's Day". It marks the end of the *Nowruz* period in Iran, and people spend time outdoors for picnics

Taarof
(Farsi: تعارف)

An etiquette of "ritual politeness" within Iranian tradition. It is generally seen as a tool for negotiating and relating among Iranians, especially in relationships among individuals of different social statuses. Besides its close association with the shame and honour culture, *Taarof* links to the sociological notion of "face", which is often noticed in various cultures' communications. It includes compliments as a token of goodwill and behaviours with a negative connotation, like flattery or manners merely for formalities.

Yalda/Yalda Night
(Farsi: شب یلدا)

An Iranian celebration of the winter solstice. Generally, Iranians gather with their family and friends to eat, drink and read poetry on the longest night of the year.

Others

Lex orandi, lex credendi

A Latin phrase can be translated as "the law of what is prayed is the law of what is believed". It suggests that liturgy and theology are closely linked to each other.

Majority world

Countries and territories outside of what has been known as the West, North America, Europe and sometimes Australia. (https://lausanne.org/video/what-is-majority-world, accessed on 10 June 2024)

Minority ethnic

A term which usually refers to an ethnic group in the minority population. In Britain, it typically covers all ethnic groups except White British. Minority ethnic is a preferable term for some individuals, as it recognises that everybody, including White British, has an ethnicity. Other terms with similar meanings include UKME (United Kingdom Minority Ethnic) or GMH (Global Majority Heritage)

Remembrance Sunday

Generally, it is on the second Sunday of November in Britain. It is a national event commemorating British and Commonwealth military and civilian service personnel who died in wars and other conflicts since World War I. A two-minute silence is observed at 11 a.m. throughout the country, and a Remembrance service is held at all the CoE churches. It is also in the CoE liturgical calendar.

Chapter One: Introduction

"*I can touch Jesus!*" exclaimed *Fatemeh*[2], radiating delight. *Fatemeh,* an Iranian Christian convert in my Church of England (CoE) parish, has continuously captivated me with her connection to the Eucharist. Her story and those of others I have encountered have sparked my interest in investigating their lived experiences as they navigate their Christian faith, particularly concerning the Eucharist. Following her Christian conversion from Islam in Iran, *Fatemeh* sought asylum in Britain out of fear for her safety upon the discovery of her conversion by Iranian authorities. She candidly shared with me the peace she has in Christianity, as well as the challenges she faces as a migrant in Britain, including loneliness, lacking family support, and a prolonged wait for the asylum outcome. I am often reminded of the deep solace the Eucharist brings to *Fatemeh* and other Iranian converts, who find this faith practice bringing them closer to Jesus. Echoing the findings of my previous research on suffering among Iranian converts in Britain,[3] *Fatemeh* identified her suffering with Christ's suffering on the cross. For *Fatemeh*, the Eucharist is more than a religious practice. It is a profound connection to her faith and experiences. Therefore, I am keen to delve into these converts' faith experiences in this study, employing qualitative research methods and practical theology as the overarching research design.

In this introductory chapter, I will outline the study's aims and research questions (RQs) and discuss the relevance to academia and the Church in examining Iranian converts and the Eucharist. I will provide context on Christianity among Iranians in Iran and Britain, emphasising Iranian converts' rapid growth within the CoE, and highlight the Eucharist's significance through my personal reflexivity. I will then justify the need for contextualised theology and practices,

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[2] To protect the individual convert's identity, the name was changed.
[3] Daniel Tai-yin Tsoi, '"When Muslims Meet Moltmann" – Can Jürgen Moltmann's Theology of Suffering Help Forcibly Displaced Ex-Shi'ite Iranians to Reconsider Their Understanding of God?', *Practical Theology*, 13.3 (2020), 218–32.

including the Eucharist, for Iranian converts. Finally, I will define key terms and provide a roadmap for this thesis.

1.1   Aims and Research Questions

The study aims to investigate the understandings and experiences of the Eucharist among Iranian converts in the CoE and examine how their backgrounds influence these experiences and understandings. Additionally, it seeks to develop a theology related to the Eucharist that is faithful and relevant to these converts' unique context. The study addresses three RQs:

RQ1: What are the understandings and experiences of the Eucharist among Iranian converts in the CoE?

RQ2: How does Iranian converts' background influence their understandings and experiences of the Eucharist, particularly concerning their cultural heritage, their religious conversion from Islam, and their encounters with suffering and trauma?

RQ3: What might a contextualised and faithful theology and practice related to the Eucharist entail in Iranian converts' unique context?

1.2   Significance of Iranian Christians and the Eucharist

This research studies Iranian converts from Islam, and their number has grown exponentially in recent decades. However, little is known about these believers. Christianity has a long history in Persia, present-day Iran. The New Testament states that people groups from Persia were present at Pentecost.[4] Christianity was significant in Zoroastrian Persia before Islam

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[4] Acts 2:9, NRSV.

arrived in 637 AD, and the Persian Church established itself despite persecution.[5] During the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722), Shi'ism was enforced among Iranians,[6] and still some Muslims converted to Christianity. However, following the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, the newly established theocratic Shi'a regime curtailed religious freedom, resulting in the shutdown of churches and severe persecution of Christians. Many Iranians embrace Christianity despite the dangers and meet in underground house churches. According to the 2020 Group for Analysing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran (GAMAAN) report, around 1.5% of Iranians identify as Christians, with a considerable number having converted from other faiths.[7] Iranian converts' distinctive religious backgrounds may influence their Christian faith experience, which is worth researching.

Census data confirms growing Iranian migration to Britain since the Revolution. Iran is the second top country of origin for asylum applications in 2024.[8] Iranians migrated to the UK in the 1980s and 1990s for economic and religious reasons, and another wave sought asylum during Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005-2013). In the last decade, many Iranians have come to Britain due to religious persecution after converting to Christianity in Iran. Some attended the CoE churches, and several CoE bishops have recently confirmed Iranian converts' rapid growth in the CoE. A service was held in March 2019 to celebrate the authorisation of the Farsi translation of the Common Worship (CW) Eucharistic liturgy prompted by the significant numerical expansion.[9] Despite their expansion, limited research exists on their experiences and

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[5] Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia: Volume 1 - Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), pp. 10-13,91-256.

[6] Mark Bradley, *Too Many to Jail: The Story of Iran's New Christians* (Oxford; Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch, 2014), p. 230.

[7] Ammar Maleki and Pooyan Tamimi Arab, *Iranians' Attitudes Toward Religion: A 2020 Survey Report* (the Netherlands: The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN (GAMAAN), August 2020), pp. 6–7 <https://gamaan.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/GAMAAN-Iran-Religion-Survey-2020-English.pdf> [accessed 8 June 2024].

[8] Peter William Walsh and Nuni Jorgensen, *Asylum and Refugee Resettlement in the UK*, Migration Observatory Briefing (Oxford: Centre on Migration, Policy & Society, University of Oxford, 1 July 2024) <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/COMPAS-Briefing-Asylum-and-refugee-resettlement-in-the-UK-2024.pdf> [accessed 8 July 2024].

[9] Paul Wilkinson, '"Iranians Are Gift to the Church of England" - First Eucharist Translated into Farsi Is Celebrated in Wakefield Cathedral', *Church Times* (London, 8 March 2019) <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/8-march/news/uk/iranians-are-gift-to-the-church-of-england> [accessed 19 May 2024].

understanding of the Christian faith. Therefore, studying their faith journeys can enhance their representation in academic and ecclesial settings, offering broader theological perspectives.

The Eucharist is this study's focus for several reasons. First, it is a crucial element of Christian worship in various Church traditions. The CoE website explains the Eucharist as the "heart of Christian worship".[10] Many Christians consider the Eucharist vital, especially since Christ instituted it. Anglican theologian John Macquarrie described it as "the jewel in the crown among the sacraments".[11] Second, I have noticed that Iranian converts I met in my CoE parish show some earnestness towards the Eucharist, which appears to be personally meaningful to them. This observation echoes what was reported in missiologist Duane Miller's research, one of the few studies that included Iranian converts. He argued that the Eucharist may act as a "boundary marker" for Iranian converts to form and assert their unique Christian identity.[12] Thus, the Eucharist serves Iranian converts with specific functions worth further examining. Third, the Eucharist, which signifies Christ's broken body, has been linked with trauma and related discourses for theological deliberation. Iranian converts face various suffering and trauma, as evident in my previous research. Their lived experiences can contribute further to the theology related to the Eucharist.

As this research will employ qualitative research methods, my personal reflexivity is crucial in considering how my background may shape this research.[13] Practical theologian Zoe Bennett and her colleagues believed that reflexivity is the researchers' attempt to locate themselves consciously and appropriately within their study: their "*situatedness*" or "*self-in-relation*".[14] On reflection, I share some similarities with Iranian converts. I am a migrant of

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[10] The Church of England, 'The Eucharist', *The Church of England*
<https://www.churchofengland.org/faith-life/what-we-believe/eucharist> [accessed 8 June 2024].
[11] John Macquarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments* (London: SCM Press, 1997), pp. 101–2.
[12] Duane Alexander Miller, *Living Among the Breakage: Contextual Theology-Making and Ex-Muslim Christians.* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), pp. 175–204.
[13] Carla Willig, *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3rd edn (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2013), p. 10; John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn (Norwich: SCM Press, 2016), pp. 56–58.
[14] Zoë Bennett and others, *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology* (London; New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 40–43.

Chinese heritage in Britain and a first-generation Christian in my family. Like Iranian converts in this research, I am a "convert" against my family's faith background. My religious conversion caused rejection by my family initially. Although I did not come to Britain for asylum, I faced the challenges of living as a foreigner in British society and churches, including frustration with the immigration system and racism.   Additionally, being a minority ethnic[15] person in Britain and within the CoE, I am frequently reminded of the issue of racism within the Church and wider British society. Furthermore, several years ago, I experienced suffering and trauma through a physical illness, causing a long-term disability. It was around the time of my suffering and trauma that I researched Iranian converts' suffering as my postgraduate research in contextual theology and missiology. I used to work in psychiatry and am interested in topics like identities and trauma. All these factors have influenced this research's development and focus. Also, this research formed a significant part of my ordination training within the CoE. My sense of calling to priesthood came unexpectedly through the Eucharist in an Anglo-Catholic monastery. Hence, the Eucharist has become increasingly meaningful in my faith journey. I was drawn to examine it after noticing that the Eucharist is also significant for Iranian converts.

I have explained why it is essential to research the growing group of Iranian converts within the CoE and their understandings and experiences of the Eucharist, especially regarding their religious conversion, suffering, and trauma. In this section, I will discuss the importance of the second aim: exploring and developing theology and practices in Iranian converts' specific context. Catholic theologian Stephen Bevans claimed: "There is no such thing as 'theology'; there is only *contextual* theology."[16] This claim suggests that the Christian faith does not exist in a vacuum. It should be considered in specific contexts, leading to variations in how the faith is understood (i.e., theology) and practised. "Contextualisation" is often used to describe this phenomenon in missiology and cross-cultural settings. Doing theology contextually suggests a "bottom-up" approach, starting from individuals' experiences or context rather than "top-down"

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[15] See Glossary. "Minority ethnic" is the term I adopt in this thesis.
[16] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Revised edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), p. 3.

from theologians with expert knowledge.[17] In missiology, "contextualisation" generally focuses on evangelistic efforts and communicating the Gospel in a relevant, culturally understandable, and appropriate way to those who need it. This concept has expanded to include theology. After the Second World War, as European colonialism declined, conventional academic approaches to theology were increasingly questioned. Movements began to emerge from the "grassroots" in various parts of the world, like Latin America, challenging traditional authorities. Ordinary people wanted their voices heard, and theology produced by the West seemed inadequate to address the issues in the majority world[18], such as injustice, oppression and poverty, leading to growing dissatisfaction. These post-war socio-political developments made Christians, especially from the majority world, question the validity of Western theological articulations, which were sometimes considered to be influenced by power.[19] Other ecclesial and theological developments also advocated a contextual approach to theology. For instance, the Second Vatican Council's document *Gaudium et Spes* highlighted the Church's need to listen to and understand the world's context: reading and interpreting the "signs of the times".[20] The Fourth World Council of Churches (WCC) Conference on Faith and Order in Montreal in 1963 advocated for a desirable plurality of theologies according to various contexts.[21] This contextual approach to theology is further demanded by the rise of World Christianity, where Christianity's Western dominance has transferred to the majority world, requiring a new way of doing theology to consider the different sociopolitical and cultural contexts.[22] Hence, developing Christian theology contextually, as in this study, is imperative.

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[17] Ibid., pp. 17–18.

[18] See Glossary.

[19] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, pp. 9–11.

[20] Vatican Council II, 'Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965' <https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html> [accessed 8 June 2024].

[21] P.C. Rodger and L. Vischer, *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order (Montreal 1963)*, Faith and Order Paper (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 50.

[22] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford : New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 96–121.

In summary, Iranian converts within the CoE are numerically growing. However, little is known about their experiences with their newfound faith. Their backgrounds are unique, combining Iranian cultural heritage, experiences of suffering and trauma, and religious conversion from Islam. This study aims to investigate Iranian converts' faith experiences and understandings of the Eucharist and how their unique backgrounds influence their experiences. There is also a pressing need to do theology contextually and "from below", particularly among Iranian converts who are underrepresented in academic and ecclesial settings. The findings from this study will shed light on converts' faith experiences and develop a faithful and contextualised theology related to the Eucharist that further informs their faith practices.

1.3   Key terms and definitions

Several key terms in this study need to be defined, and the reason for choosing specific terminologies requires clarification. First, I use the term Iranians in this thesis instead of Persians. There is a subtle difference between these two terms. Iranians generally refer to nationality related to the Islamic Republic of Iran, while Persians refer to the ethnic group. This study will focus on nationality, and various non-Persian ethnic groups, like the Kurdish, Armenians and Assyrians, can also be Iranians.[23] Second, for uniformity, the term "Eucharist" is adopted in this thesis. It refers to the sacramental rite of breaking bread and drinking wine, instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper and observed by the Church since.[24] This rite can be known as the Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, and the Mass in various Church traditions, emphasising different aspects and theological positions regarding the rite. Third, I named Iranians who changed their religion from Islam to Christianity as "converts" in this thesis, as it is often used in academia and focuses on their decision to adopt religious conversion. Nevertheless, there are other terms to

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[23] Kathryn Spellman Poots and Reza Gholami, 'Integration, Cultural Production, and Challenges of Identity Construction: Iranians in Great Britain', in *The Iranian Diaspora: Challenges, Negotiations, and Transformations*, ed. by Moshen Mostafavi Mobasher (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2018), pp. 93–124 (pp. 93–98).

[24] D.B. Forrester, 'Eucharist', ed. by Martin Davie and others, *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic* (London; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016), pp. 305–8.

describe these believers, including "believers from a Muslim background" (BMBs) or the more commonly used term "Muslim-background believers" (MBBs). These terms emphasise different aspects of identity: BMB focuses on the individual's present religious conviction, while MBB highlights their previous religious affiliation.[25] Besides, in this study, I have adopted theologian Arthur Darby Nock's classical definition of conversion: a reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from an earlier form of piety (i.e. Islam) to another (i.e. Christianity), a turning which implies a consciousness that a significant change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right.[26] Although other definitions of conversion exist, primarily from social sciences, as this study focuses on theology, I consider Nock's definition appropriate.

Fourth, "migration" and "migrants" are challenging to define as their definitions are context-dependent. In this study, I adopted the International Organisation for Migration's definition of migration: the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a state.[27] There are different types of migrants, but Iranian converts in this study are likely asylum seekers and refugees. Finally, the term "contextualisation" and its related expressions like "inculturation" also need further clarification, as its definition differs depending on the fields of study. I have adopted Bevan's definition of contextualisation of theology: to understand the Christian faith in a particular context.[28] The context includes the totality of human experience from culture, nationality, history, politics, or economics. Hence, it is broader in scope than "inculturation", which generally focuses on the relationship with the culture.[29] As the cultural aspect is one of the main focuses of this research, I use "contextualisation" and "inculturation" interchangeably. It is worth noting that

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[25] Duane Alexander Miller and Patrick Johnstone, 'Believers in Christ from a Muslim Background: A Global Census', *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*, 11 (2015), Article 10 (p. 3).

[26] Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 7.

[27] International Organisation for Migration, 'Glossary on Migration' (International Organisation for Migration, 2019), p. 137 <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf> [accessed 18 June 2024].

[28] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 3.

[29] Roy Musasiwa, 'Contextualisation', ed. by John Corrie, *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations* (Nottingham; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), pp. 66–71 (p. 66).

contextualisation or inculturation differs from "acculturation", which is used in social sciences to describe the sociological and psychological process of culture change to adapt to the prevailing culture of the society.

1.4   Thesis Roadmap

After this introductory chapter, Chapter Two will review the literature on this study's two key themes: Iranian converts in the CoE and the Eucharist. It will include various conversion theories and explore literature regarding reasons for Iranian converts' religious conversion from Islam to Christianity. I will also consider how Iranian converts form their unique Iranian Christian identity despite post-conversion persecution. The second section will explore migration and its related theologies, particularly the theological proposal by some theologians to link the Eucharist with migration and Christian identity formation. I will also review the literature on migrants' experiences within the CoE, focusing on racism. Finally, I will examine the diverse Anglican Eucharistic theologies and how contemporary theologians expand their understanding of the Eucharist through the lens of migration, trauma, and liberation in several contexts. I will also review the practice of liturgical inculturation, including the challenges and tensions.

Chapter Three will explain this study's methodology. Practical theology is the overarching research design to address the three RQs. Two approaches, namely lived theology and contextual theology, are employed. Qualitative research with mixed data collection methods is used to understand the contexts of Iranian converts and their lived experiences related to the Eucharist. These " data " sources are analysed using thematic analysis and feed into the pastoral cycle as the structure for theological reflection and construction, including exploration with insights from other disciplines.

Chapter Four will present the qualitative data and its thematic analysis, which addresses RQ1 and partially RQ2. Three themes related to Iranian converts' cultural identities, religious conversion, and traumatic experiences will be discussed. An overarching premise about

discordance from tensions emerged from the themes, impacting Iranian converts internally and how they relate to the world, including the Church. These themes are also associated with the three interdependent core personhood domains, namely identity ("cultural self"), belonging ("social self"), and being ("inner self").

These three domains provide the foundation for further interdisciplinary explorations and correlations, which will be presented in Chapter Five to address RQ2 further. The concepts of multiple cultural and religious identities are utilised to explore the tension in the "cultural self". For the tension of belonging, the Islamic concept of "*ummah*"[30] and political Islam in Iran are drawn on. Finally, psychological and theological insights about trauma are used to explore the tension of the "inner self." These explorations suggest that Iranian converts are in an "in-between space" from the ongoing and disorienting cultural and religious identity formation and the aftermaths of their trauma from their religious conversion and racism. They also have a sense of merely being "included" without genuine belonging to the Church. The "in-between spaces" and the lack of belonging contribute to the discordance observed. The Eucharist, a tangible and tactile sacrament that embodied Christ's wounds, helps Iranian converts' post-traumatic "re-making" by reconnecting with their bodies and reconstructing the trauma narratives.

In Chapter Six, I will present a further theological reflection on this idea of discordance and propose theological constructions considering these converts' context in the CoE. First, the resurrection narratives in Luke's Gospel are considered "narratives of discordance" that echo Iranian converts' experiences of discordance and highlight Christ's responses to their situation. Second, for Iranian converts, the Eucharist is also a "sacrament for discordance" and a "sacrament of '*Rastakhiz*'" (رستاخیز), which carries the meanings of resurrection, reconciliation and new life in these converts' context. Chapter Six addresses RQ3 and supports the argument that discordance underpins the contextualised understanding and practice related to the Eucharist for Iranian converts in the CoE and the Church, potentially making the Eucharist a

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[30] See Glossary.

source of new life and reconciliation for these converts. In this chapter and the conclusion chapter, I will offer suggestions regarding practices, including incorporating elements of the *Nowruz Haft-sin* table[31] in the Eucharistic Holy Table[32] and revisiting the relationship between Iranian converts and the CoE in terms of mutuality and their journeying together in a trauma-informed way.

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[31] See Glossary.
[32] The term "Holy Table" is used in this thesis, as it is in Canon F2 of the Canons of the CoE. Other terms are often used, depending on the church traditions. These include the altar for the Eucharist, the Holy Communion table or the Lord's table.

Chapter Two: Iranian Christian converts, migrants in the CoE and the Eucharist

This chapter will review the literature on two primary themes: Iranian converts in the CoE and the Eucharist. The first section will delve into conversion theories and reasons for Iranians' religious conversion to Christianity from Islam, particularly after the 1979 Revolution. Additionally, these conversions' consequences will be highlighted, including subsequent persecution and the forming of a distinct Iranian Christian identity. The second section will address migrations. It will review the theologies concerning migration, seeking asylum, and refugees. Particularly, I will present some theologians' propositions that the Eucharist can forge a distinct Iranian Christian identity for these converted migrants. This section will also address the challenges faced by Christian migrants upon joining the CoE, notably racism. The third section will concentrate on the Eucharist, particularly on the relevance of the Eucharist to trauma and liberation.

2.1   Iranians' Christian conversion from Islam

Scholars have developed various theories on religious conversion, a controversial phenomenon. For instance, psychologist William James considered conversion to be the healing of a divided self.[33] Another psychologist, Richard Travisano, believed that an identity change is crucial to conversion[34], and anthropologist Diane Austin-Broos considered conversion a form of passage that constituted and reconstituted through social practice and the articulation of new forms of relatedness.[35] Social scientist Henri Goreen adopted a more dynamic "conversion

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[33] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 189.

[34] Richard V Travisano, 'Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations', in *Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction*, ed. by Gregory P Stone and Harvey A Farberman (Waltham, MA; Toronto: Xerox College Publishing, 1970), pp. 594–605.

[35] Diane Austin-Broos, 'The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction', in *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, ed. by Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier (Lanham, MD; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), pp. 1–12.

career" approach to systematically analyse the shifts in individuals' religious activity levels throughout their lives, ranging from pre-affiliation to affiliation, conversion, confession, and disaffiliation. Goreen attempted to identify various factors that influence religious participation.[36] Likewise, psychologist Lewis Rambo's seven-stage interdisciplinary model is often quoted to describe religious conversion. These stages are context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences.[37] He highlighted the fundamental role of context, both within and outside the individual, in religious conversion. Rambo also believed the second stage, crisis, catalyses change when individuals actively seek new ways to confront their crisis.[38] Rambo's model provides a practical descriptive framework for religious conversion. Nevertheless, it does not consider the potential variation from other socio-demographic factors like gender and life stage differences in conversion. Also, as Rambo implied, whether the "crisis" is crucial for conversion is questionable.[39]

Rambo considered the motives for religious conversion likely include factors that individuals perceive as a sustained advantage, like experiencing pleasure, transcendence, and positive relationships.[40] This notion echoes the rational choice conversion model that Gartrell and Shannon[41], and Stark and Finke[42] suggested. This model considers the converts as rational agents who choose another religion when they believe they will gain more. This gain is not merely for individuals but can also be for the greater good. Indian American academic Gauri Viswanathan suggested that religious conversion can be seen as a socio-political act involving dissent and assent.[43] Biblical scholar Scot McKnight echoed Viswanathan's idea and considered

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[36] Henri Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 43–52.

[37] Lewis R Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 16–18.

[38] Ibid., p. 166.

[39] Gooren, pp. 39–41.

[40] Lewis R Rambo, pp. 63–65.

[41] C. David Gartrell and Zane K. Shannon, 'Contacts, Cognitions, and Conversion: A Rational Choice Approach', *Review of Religious Research*, 27.1 (1985), 32–48.

[42] Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 114–38.

[43] Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. xvi, 16–17.

conversion as cultural criticism and a societal protest.[44] Conversion is a profound social act and a personal process with various complex dimensions added to individuals' experiences.[45]

These theories and factors for religious conversion give the social scientific foundation for considering Iranians' conversion to Christianity from Islam, documented long ago when Western missionaries came to Iran in the 19th century.[46] The conversion continued in the Pahlavi period (1925-1979). Inculturation of the Christian faith was evident then as Iranian converts attempted to construct and maintain their Iranian identity by keeping the Persian language to practise their newfound faith.[47] Iranian authorities gradually eroded Iranians' freedom to practise Christianity openly after the 1979 Revolution. However, even before that, Christian missionary William Miller recorded ten Iranians' conversion narratives and their ongoing suffering, persecution and even death for their faith. These converts felt very much alone, as "Islam is not only a religion; it is a system of life in which political, social, economic and religious elements are united".[48]

Hence, conversion from Islam to Christianity contradicts those theories that emphasise rational choice and gaining advantages. Studies with different methodologies investigated the factors influencing converts' decisions to convert to Christianity from Islam. Some were specific to Iranians. In a qualitative study examining Christian migrants and refugees in Athens, researcher Darren Carlson reported why Persians and Afghans converted to Christianity.[49] The love displayed by Christians and the idea of God's love were the primary reasons for their conversion. Other reasons include the converts studying the Bible, experiencing their prayers

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[44] Scot McKnight, *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 111.

[45] Ibid., p. 175.

[46] Mark Bradley, *Iran and Christianity: Historical Identity and Present Relevance* (London; New York: Continuum, 2008), pp. 148–54.

[47] Marcin Rzepka, 'To Make Christianity More Iranian. Studying the Conversions to Christianity in Iran in the Early Pahlavi Period', *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis*, 14.Special Issue (2019), 209–18.

[48] William McElwee Miller, *Ten Muslims Meet Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1969), pp. 9–10.

[49] Darren Carlson, *Christianity and Conversion Among Migrants: Moving Faith and Faith Movement in a Transit Area* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2021), pp. 155–205.

answered, and encountering dreams and visions related to Jesus.[50] Carlson also mentioned the converts' frustrations with Islam as a "push" factor, which was not universal, and some converts were happily Muslims but later found themselves drawn to Christianity.[51] Some of Carlson's findings echo an earlier study by psychologists Szabolcs Kéri and Christina Sleiman.[52] They interviewed 124 Christian converts from Islam in Germany (primarily Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees) about their conversion narratives.[53] They reported that these refugees' religious conversion was driven by their intellectual concerns and curiosity about Christian teachings, mystical experiences, intense emotional reactions, and social affection. Social pressure and desirability did not cause their conversion. Also, missiologist J Dudley Woodberry and his colleagues surveyed 750 Muslim converts of various ethnic groups globally over 16 years through questionnaires to understand what influences their Christian conversion.[54] Woodberry *et al.*'s findings were like those from Carlson, except they found more emphasis on God's power and deliverance from demonic power, as the sample had a significant proportion of folk Muslims who focused more on supernatural power and mystical experiences. However, the survey's findings should be considered cautiously because of the uncertainties concerning the sample sources.

Moreover, Norwegian academic Nora Stene analysed the conversion narratives of four asylum seekers of different ethnicities (including one Iranian) and highlighted that Christian conversion could be part of a migration and integration strategy.[55] Her idea was shared by another researcher, Sebnam Akcapar, who did qualitative research with Iranian converts in

[50] Ibid., pp. 162–95.
[51] Ibid., pp. 179–81.
[52] Szabolcs Kéri and Christina Sleiman, 'Religious Conversion to Christianity in Muslim Refugees in Europe', *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, 39.3 (2017), 283–94.
[53] John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, 'Conversion Motifs', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 20.4 (1981), 373–85.
[54] J Dudley Woodberry, 'A Global Perspective on Muslims Coming to Faith in Christ', in *From the Straight Path to the Narrow Way: Journeys of Faith*, ed. by David H. Greenlee (Waynesboro; Milton Keynes: Authentic, 2005), pp. 11–22; J Dudley Woodberry, Russell G Shubin, and G Marks, 'Why Muslims Follow Jesus', *Christianity Today*, October 2007, 80–85.
[55] Nora Stene, 'Leaving Islam for Christianity: Asylum Seeker Converts', in *Handbook of Leaving Religion*, ed. by Daniel Enstedt, Göran Larsson, and Teemu T. Mantsinen (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), pp. 210–19.

Turkey as a transit country.[56] Akcapar reported that conversion to Christianity was often used after the refugee authorities rejected the asylum application. Social and religious networks like churches provide the converts with "positive social capital" to sustain their conversion and help them ultimately reach the West as refugees. Carlson also reported that he heard stories of "fake conversion" to support asylum requests.[57] Hence, tension is evident among these Christian converts from Islam who are seeking asylum, as others and authorities often question their motives for conversion. Many churches and Christian organisations were aware and cautious about inauthentic conversion to Christianity. They had measures to minimise conversions used primarily to gain asylum.[58]

Some factors related to religious conversion are specific to Iranians. Quoting the analyses from missionary Krikor Markarian[59] and researcher Mark Bradley's work, missiologist Duane Miller suggested that political, religious, and economic factors might have facilitated Iranians' Christian conversion within and outside Iran. First, worship in Farsi became more widespread in Iran under the Assemblies of God (AoG) Bishop Haik Hovsepian's influence around 1981. This initiative expanded the inculturation work started by the Anglicans, such as exploring the theme of Christ in Persian poetry and having some Farsi Christian hymns.[60] The inculturation facilitated Iranians to explore Christianity and affirm their Persian Christian identity, as it obviated using another language like Arabic in Islam. Second, after the Revolution, Iranians were increasingly disappointed with the new dictatorship of Ayatollah Khomeini, as Iranians, particularly women, lost their freedom and rights.[61] The Revolution and the subsequent Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) also

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[56] Sebnem Koser Akcapar, 'Conversion as a Migration Strategy in a Transit Country: Iranian Shiites Becoming Christians in Turkey', *International Migration Review*, 40.4 (2006), 817–53.

[57] Carlson, pp. 196–97.

[58] Kathryn Spellman, *Religion and Nation: Iranian Local and Transnational Networks in Britain* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), pp. 172, 193.

[59] Pseudonym from the articles

[60] Krikor Markarian, 'Today's Iranian Revolution: How the Mullahs Are Leading the Nation to Jesus', *Mission Frontiers*, 2008, pp. 6–13 (pp. 6–8); Duane Alexander Miller, 'Power, Personalities and Politics: The Growth of Iranian Christianity since 1979', *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies*, 32 (2015), 66–86 (pp. 73–74); H. B Dehqani-Tafti, *Christ and Christianity in Persian Poetry* (Basingstoke: Sohrab House, 1990).

[61] Bradley, *Iran and Christianity*, pp. 113–17.

seriously damaged Iran's economy, which frustrated Iranians.[62] The regime exercised extreme religious and political control and removed anything that undermined Shi'ism or the government.[63] Religious meanings were also attached to the war as propaganda, and Shi'ism was used as a political vehicle.[64] These actions impacted Iranians' sentiment towards Islam, and any government policy failure seriously undermined Shi'ism, which was perceived by Iranians as corrupted.[65] Hence, many Iranians have become disillusioned with Islam and sought alternatives.

Third, Miller believed that historical factors also push Iranians away from Islam, which, in some cases, is considered by Iranians as a form of socio-religious colonialism unjustly imposed by Arabs on Persia.[66] Fourth, the Christian messages attract Iranians as the Bible respects Persia and its people, including the suggestion that the Magi in the Gospel were from Persia. This positive image contrasts with the Qur'an, which does not mention Persia. Also, the Christian doctrine of atonement is familiar to Iranians as Shi'ism has the concept of redemptive suffering with their Imam Husayn, a renowned martyr who suffered willingly for God. Bradley argued that these attractions could well be preparing Iranians for the Gospel that other Islamic societies lack.[67] Fifth, Miller considered that there had been a paradoxical power reversal in Iran. The Iranian regime's coercive power, which increased after the Revolution, could not contain the growth of the relatively powerless Christian community in Iran and abroad. When the Christian message is more readily available to Iranians through the media and diaspora network outside Iran, conversion to Christianity becomes more acceptable for Iranians as a defiance and resistance. The Gospel message suggests that the powerless crucified Jesus became the victorious and eternal King, further reinforcing this power reversal sentiment.[68]

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[62] Ibid., pp. 100–112; Mammad Aidani, *Narrative and Violence: Ways of Suffering Amongst Iranian Men in Diaspora* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 96–100.
[63] Bradley, *Iran and Christianity*, pp. 113, 119.
[64] Aidani, pp. 97–100.
[65] Bradley, *Iran and Christianity*, pp. 65, 108.
[66] Duane Alexander Miller, 'Power, Personalities and Politics', pp. 75–76.
[67] Bradley, *Iran and Christianity*, pp. 21–22; Duane Alexander Miller, 'Power, Personalities and Politics', pp. 75–76.
[68] Duane Alexander Miller, 'Power, Personalities and Politics', pp. 77–84.

Scholars have suggested that Christian media are significant in Iranians' conversion.[69] Sara Afshari used a qualitative approach to investigate Farsi Christian media audiences to answer why and how they decided to watch Christian TV channels and negotiate and engage with the message to convert to Christianity in Iran.[70] Afshari argued that there is a "lived reality" in those Iranian audiences in their geo-political and socio-cultural contexts with complex life experiences. These audiences were not passive recipients but active agents with purpose and methods to achieve their goals through media messages, including changing Iranian society's religious and cultural dynamics. They set their agendas and created distinct frameworks to interpret the media message. The channels' content did not persuade the audiences to convert to Christianity. Instead, the audiences used, appropriated, and manipulated the media content to generate new meanings, which are more instrumental in their decision to convert. Afshari also highlighted the complexity of the negotiation process in these Iranians' conversion, which involves the converts' agendas, cultural context and community, the Islamic belief system, and recognition of political and religious rules and security from possible persecution. She argued that the converts' deconversion experiences from Islam had caused significant pain, which overshadowed and affected their conversion process to Christianity.[71] Afshari's study helpfully underlines how individual converts' past religious and cultural worldviews could influence their interpretation and negotiation of the Christian message, which impacts their Christian conversion and perception of the newfound faith.

This personal dimension in these Iranians' conversion is also suggested in other conversion narrative studies of Iranian converts. In a Canadian study, researcher Linda Darwish highlighted the significance of personal sensory and emotional experience in 17 Iranian converts' conversion narratives, and cognition and volition were insufficient for their conversion.[72] In

[69] Bradley, *Iran and Christianity*, pp. 177–78; Duane Alexander Miller, 'Power, Personalities and Politics', p. 77; Markarian, p. 9.

[70] Sara Afshari, *Religion, Media and Conversion in Iran: Mediated Christianity in an Islamic Context* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Taylor & Francis, 2023).

[71] Ibid., pp. 190–93.

[72] Linda Darwish, '"When Your Heart Is Touched, It's Not a Decision": A Narrative Analysis of Iranian Muslim Conversion to Christianity', *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 47.1 (2018), 45–77.

another study on 15 Iranians' conversion narratives in Germany, researcher Ebru Öztürk interpreted their conversion as providing them with ontological security as a "secondary institution" after they became "homeless" when they lost their faith in Islam, their primary religious and political institution. Conversion shielded these Iranians from existential anxiety at a personal level.[73] Hence, personal factors are as significant as other socio-political and religious factors in Iranian converts' conversion.

These Iranians' religious conversion brings consequences. Iranian converts are frequently prosecuted for their beliefs, according to human rights organisations. Anyone who leaves Islam is considered apostate, which is against Iranian laws.[74] These persecutions result in fears, tensions, and suffering, including leaving Iran to claim asylum in other countries. Nevertheless, their conversion caused them to develop a specific Iranian-Christian identity. German researcher Benedikt Römer recently examined Persian material in the Iranian Christian exilic milieu and interviewed diasporic Iranian Christian leaders. He argued that Iranian converts in exile emphasised their Iranian national identity rather than any denominational identity as their Christian identity.[75] Römer believed that Iranian converts attempted to "naturalise" Christianity by constructing a Christian faith that emphasised their loyalty to the Iranian nation. These naturalising acts included celebrating Iranian festivals like *Nowruz* and *Yalda*[76] and giving Christian meanings to these Iranian traditions and customs. Many Iranian Christian leaders considered that Christianity "fulfilled" Iranians' cultural identity.[77] Other acts involved interpreting Iranian poets, like Hafiz, inclining towards Christianity, identifying "Iranians in the

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[73] Ebru Öztürk, 'Finding a New Home Through Conversion: The Ontological Security of Iranians Converting to Christianity in Sweden', *Religion, State and Society*, 50.2 (2022), 224–39.
[74] International Federation for Human Rights and Iranian League for the Defence of Human Rights, *The Hidden Side of Iran: Discrimination against Ethnic and Religious Minorities*, October 2010 <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/IrandiscrimLDDHI545a.pdf> [accessed 17 June 2024]; Michael Nazir-Ali and Amir S. Bazmjou, 'Conversion, Persecution, and the Reforming Voices of Muslims in Post–Revolution Iran', *International Journal of Asian Christianity*, 5 (2022), 224–40.
[75] Benedikt Römer, *The Iranian Christian Diaspora: Religion and Nationhood in Exile* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2024), pp. 28–35.
[76] See Glossary.
[77] Römer, pp. 55–95.

Bible", and regularly commemorating the "martyrs of the Iranian Church".[78] Römer also reported

that Iranian converts dissociated themselves from Islam. They made sense of their exile by

ascribing religious meanings to their challenging experiences abroad and considering future

religious visions for Iran and the people.[79] However, tension arose when some Iranian cultural

traditions, like observing *Sizdah Bedar*[80] after *Nowruz*, were considered to contradict their

Christian faith irreconcilably.[81]

Other research also suggests similar arguments. Through qualitative research of four

congregations with mostly Iranian converts in the USA and Scotland, Duane Miller argued that

Iranian converts asserted their Persian identity ("Persian-ness") and emphasised their distance

from Islam with an Arab origin. He believed Iranian converts made theology by asserting their

"Persian-ness" when emphasising Iranian language and culture, including *Nowruz.* Miller

considered Iranian converts to have used baptism and the Eucharist as elements in their Persian

Christian identity formation strategy, with an unequivocal emphasis on Jesus's divinity as the

"boundary marker" to reject the Islamic understanding that Jesus is not divine.[82] Likewise,

researchers Sofie Hansen and Martin Lindhardt interviewed eight Iranian converts in their

qualitative study in Denmark. They found that these converts established their Christian identity

by reconnecting with Iran's pre-Islamic glorious past, which embraced Zoroastrian civilisation

and Indo-European culture.[83]

Hence, Iranians' Christian conversion from Islam involves a complex combination of

personal, social, and religious factors. Despite persecution that causes suffering and trauma,

many Iranians decide to convert to Christianity and establish a unique Iranian national Christian

identity related to the pre-Islamic civilisation and their Persian heritage, potentially to protest

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[78] Ibid., pp. 97–136.
[79] Ibid., pp. 191–93.
[80] See Glossary.
[81] Römer, pp. 86–89.
[82] Duane Alexander Miller, *Living Among the Breakage*, pp. 180–92.
[83] Sofie Alexandra Juliane Husbye Hansen and Martin Lindhardt, 'Converting to Pre-Islamic Glory: Historiography and National Identity in the Narratives of Iranian Christian Converts in Denmark', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 38.2 (2023), 243–59.

against the Iranian Islamic regime. Christian media and inculturation play significant roles in these Iranians' conversion, which is influenced by their contexts, including being migrants outside Iran as exile. Various tensions and conflicts are noticed when exploring the theories and narratives of these Iranians' conversion and their Iranian Christian identity formation.

2.2 Migration: theologies and experiences of migrants in the CoE

Besides conversion, migration is a significant issue among Iranian converts within the CoE, as they are all migrants to Britain. Scholar Jennifer Saunders and her colleagues highlighted that religion is central to migration at various levels for the migrants and the social and political contexts they situate. [84] The topic is considerable, and this review in no way attempts comprehensiveness. Nevertheless, I will highlight various representative theological works on migration and review American Catholic theologian Daniel Groody's work in more detail, as he linked the Eucharist with migration, which is particularly relevant to this study. Afterwards, I will review the migrants' experiences within the CoE, especially regarding racial justice.

2.2.1 Migration Studies and Theologies

A review of the various roles of religion in the Danish asylum system underscored that religion can be invoked as a call for inclusion and compassion for asylum seekers. [85] It also provides a route to belonging in the host country. However, tension can arise between asylum seekers and the local religious communities because of cultural and expectation clashes. [86] The

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[84] Jennifer B Saunders, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, and Susanna Snyder, 'Introduction: Articulating Intersections at the Global Crossroads of Religion and Migration', in *Intersections of Religion and Migration: Issues at the Global Crossroads*, ed. by Jennifer B. Saunders, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, and Susanna Snyder (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 1–46 (p. 2).
[85] Søren Dalsgaard, 'A Practitioner's View on Religion in the Asylum-Seeking Process', in *Faith in the System? Religion in the (Danish) Asylum System*, ed. by Marie Juul Peterson and Steffen Jensen (Langagervej: Aalborg University Press, 2019), pp. 27–40.
[86] Sara Lei Sparre and Lise Paulsen Galal, 'Routes to Christianity and Religious Belonging Among Middle Eastern Christian Refugees in Denmark', in *Faith in the System? Religion in the (Danish) Asylum System*, ed. by Marie Juul Peterson and Steffen Jensen (Langagervej: Aalborg University Press, 2019), pp. 41–52.

review also highlighted that religion has become the primary reason for a legal and human rights claim of seeking asylum, like many Iranian converts in Britain.[87] In a bureaucratic asylum process, religion can also provide support and hope, a source of meaning and resilience, and a sense of agency and control for asylum seekers to survive.[88] Although this monograph focuses on the Danish system, these issues apply to the British asylum system, which Iranian converts encounter. Besides considering migration from religious studies' perspectives, Christian theologians have offered theological proposals concerning migration in response to this growing global phenomenon. Catholic theologian Gioacchino Campese suggested that these proposals started after WCC's congress on migration in 1961. This development expanded in the late 1970s when Latin American liberation theology began to be established.[89] Campese highlighted that a specific theology of migration does not exist. Instead, there are various "theologies" of migration depending on methodologies and geographic and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, migrants' experience has become a *locus theologicus*.[90]

One influential theologian on migration is Daniel Groody, a Catholic priest-theologian who has written extensively about migration and globalisation for academic and ecclesial settings.[91] Groody's theology emphasised the migrants' experience and the preferential option for the poor and marginalised.[92] He offered four theological foundations for his theology of

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[87] Helge Aarsheim, 'Sincere and Reflected? Localising the Model Convert in Religion-Based Asylum Claims in Norway and Canada', in *Faith in the System? Religion in the (Danish) Asylum System*, ed. by Marie Juul Peterson and Steffen Jensen (Langagervej: Aalborg University Press, 2019), pp. 83–96; Eva Maria Lassen, 'Religion at Asylum Centres - from a Human Rights Perspective', in *Faith in the System? Religion in the (Danish) Asylum System*, ed. by Marie Juul Peterson and Steffen Jensen (Langagervej: Aalborg University Press, 2019), pp. 53–62.

[88] Zachary Whyte, 'Keeping and Losing Faith in the Danish Asylum System', in *Faith in the System? Religion in the (Danish) Asylum System*, ed. by Marie Juul Peterson and Steffen Jensen (Langagervej: Aalborg University Press, 2019), pp. 97–104; Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen and Gitte Buch-Hansen, 'The Complexity of Survival: Asylum Seekers, Resilience and Religion', in *Faith in the System? Religion in the (Danish) Asylum System*, ed. by Marie Juul Peterson and Steffen Jensen (Langagervej: Aalborg University Press, 2019), pp. 113–24.

[89] Gioacchino Campese, 'The Irruption of Migrants: Theology of Migration in the 21st Century', *Theological Studies*, 73.1 (2012), 3–33 (pp. 7–8).

[90] Ibid., pp. 18–19.

[91] University of Norte Dame, 'Daniel Groody, CSC', *Department of Theology* <https://theology.nd.edu/people/daniel-groody-csc/> [accessed 19 June 2024].

[92] Daniel G Groody and Gustavo Gutiérrez, 'Introduction', in *The Preferential Option for the Poor Beyond Theology*, ed. by Daniel G. Groody and Gustavo Gutiérrez (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), pp. 1–27 (pp. 1–7).

migration and refugees: *Imago Dei, Verbum Dei, Missio Dei, and Visio Dei.*[93] He considered theology and migration "a call to cross borders and overcome barriers".[94] Groody's four foundations were based on the incarnation, which he argued demonstrates how God, through Christ, overcomes the barriers and borders that separate.[95] For Groody, "It is about the God who first migrated to our world in the incarnation and the God who calls us through Christ to migrate back with him to our spiritual homeland".[96] The incarnation is a risky "border-crossing event" and a model of gratuitous self-giving through which God empties himself of everything but love so that he can fully identify with human beings, enter entirely into their vulnerable condition, and accompany them in a profound act of divine-human solidarity.[97]

Groody also linked his theology of migration with the Eucharist and proposed the "Eucharistic vision of migration", which is particularly relevant to this study.[98] He argued that the US dominant political narratives of migration have been moving the human community from "oneness to otherness", but the Eucharist is counterculturally centred on moving from "otherness to oneness". The Eucharist allows human and divine communion and draws individuals to a privileged, liminal and spiritual "in-between space" where human migration meets the "divine migration" in the incarnation.[99] Groody believed transformation happens in this "in-between space". He highlighted three underpinning dimensions in understanding the Eucharist that link with migration: God's Kingdom, the Passover, and the Table.[100] Groody considered the Church to be called to proclaim God's Kingdom and follow Jesus's mission by re-membering (i.e., becoming members again) those who have been cut off from the community,

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[93] Daniel G. Groody, 'Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees', *Theological Studies*, 70.3 (2009), 638–67.

[94] Ibid., p. 642.

[95] Daniel G. Groody, *A Theology of Migration: The Bodies of Refugees and the Body of Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2022), pp. 167–75.

[96] Ibid., p. 8.

[97] Groody, 'Crossing the Divide', p. 652.

[98] Groody, *A Theology of Migration*, p. 8.

[99] Ibid., pp. 11–12; Daniel G. Groody, 'Cup of Suffering, Chalice of Salvation: Refugees, Lampedusa, and the Eucharist', *Theological Studies*, 78.4 (2017), 960–87 (p. 962).

[100] Groody, *A Theology of Migration*, p. 208.

like migrants.[101] Also, the Eucharist originated from the Last Supper, which was a Jewish Passover meal. The Passover meal "remembers Israel's migration from slavery to freedom and calls the people of God to pass over to a new way of living and being in the world".[102] Using this notion of "passing over" to reflect on migration, Groody advocated that the Eucharist pushes us to explore the passing over from alienation to communion with God and others, which is central to the mission of reconciliation.[103] The incarnation redefines otherness by seeing strangers not as enemies but as neighbours.[104] The Eucharist is a time to remember Jesus's life and work and concurrently an opportunity to recall and reintegrate the forgotten and ignored "no-bodies" of society.[105] This "re-membering" entails living out the idea of "anamnestic solidarity": embracing reconciliation and challenging established societal injustice. Remembering Jesus in the Eucharist is the beginning of this reconciliation because it expresses tearing down walls created by sin that alienate our relationships.[106] For Groody, the disciples are called to embody Christ's presence by sharing Christ's love with all people, especially those who have become invisible in society, like refugees.[107] The Body of Christ, the Church, helps transform the prevailing narratives that exclude and discriminate into narratives that include and unite. The Eucharist is about receiving the Body of Christ and becoming the Body of Christ for the world.[108] Groody claimed that "migration is a sacramental issue".[109]

Groody also highlighted the table as part of his Eucharistic vision of migration. He advocates that the table is a symbol of universal love.[110] Groody believes tables are integral to the Eucharistic liturgy because Jesus did much of his ministry around tables.[111] Tables create connections with others but can also cause stratification within communities. Many are excluded

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[101] Ibid., p. 212.
[102] Ibid., pp. 212–13.
[103] Ibid., p. 225.
[104] Ibid., p. 234.
[105] Ibid., p. 240.
[106] Ibid., pp. 240–41.
[107] Ibid., p. 244.
[108] Ibid., p. 299.
[109] Ibid., p. 299.
[110] Ibid., p. 208.
[111] Lk 5:29-32; 7:36-50; 14:1-24.

for various social, political, economic and even religious reasons. However, the ultimate table is at God's promised banquet at the end of time. God welcomes all people to the table, particularly those being rejected in society. Christ also challenges those already at the table to look beyond the walls of their exclusionary mindsets of judging who is worthy to be present.[112] These notions of the promised banquet and welcome are significant for the refugees. Groody highlighted the tension between God's embrace of human suffering revealed on the cross and God's promise of salvation revealed in Christ's resurrection. He considered that these two elements come together in the encounter with Christ in the mystery of the Eucharist. In the migration context, the Eucharist combines the migrants' suffering on their journey with Christian hope in the resurrection.[113] The resurrection reveals God's power to bring about new life, paradoxically through the injustice and suffering of the cross.[114]

Groody's theology on migration and its link with the Eucharist has attracted criticism from South African theologian Christopher Magezi, who considered Groody's emphasis on the Incarnation as "a risky movement of God that can operate as a coping mechanism for migrants" problematic because it is incompatible with the doctrines of God's impassibility and immutability. Magezi argued that the incarnation in and through Christ is not a risk of movement in such a way that God lacks the knowledge to distinguish what will happen in the eternal world and within the created world. Instead, Magezi focused on God's omniscience. God abdicates divine privileges and migrates from heaven to earth to completely identify with humankind and save them from sin and its consequences. Put differently, Magezi disapproved of Groody's emphasis on the "journey" and movement and advocated that the focus should be on the theological concept of kenosis.[115]

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[112] Groody, *A Theology of Migration*, pp. 209–10.
[113] Groody, 'Cup of Suffering, Chalice of Salvation', pp. 981–82.
[114] Ibid., p. 978.
[115] Christopher Magezi, 'A Critical Assessment of Daniel Groody's Conceptualisation of the Incarnation and Its Implication in Challenging the Church to Embrace and Respond to Migrants' Needs', *In Die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi*, 54.1 (2020), a2627.

Besides Groody's theology of migration and the Eucharistic vision of migration, other theological and biblical paradigms have been suggested to interpret migration. For instance, Asian-American theologian Ilsup Ahn proposed a Trinitarian theology of migration, which involves the concept of God's Kingdom, political theology, the Holy Spirit's reconciling work, and ecclesiology focusing on the "church on the move".[116] Moreover, Catholic theologian Robert Schreiter advocated three approaches to a theology of and for migration: a biblical framework, theological themes, and countervailing narratives against the contemporary migration experience.[117] For theological themes related to migration, Schreiter suggested "stranger and guest", "pilgrimage and *paroikia* [118]", "reconciliation", and "catholicity". Likewise, Catholic theologian Peter Phan argued that "migrantness" is a mark of the Church and Christianity and the need to do theology from migration as part of "reading the signs of the times". Phan framed a theology of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, eschatology, and Christian existence (i.e. theological anthropology, liturgy, and ethics) from the migration perspective.[119]

Some theologians focused more on the theological application of migration. American researcher Jenny McGill used qualitative and quantitative methodologies and a multidisciplinary approach to investigate how international theological graduates in the USA understood their identities in their migration experience. McGill concluded that God employs migration to construct and shape these individuals' Christian identities. Migration can be a tool to reconcile identity configuration, and McGill described the concepts of "foreignness" and "keeper" as crucial to their Christian identities. Her research helpfully linked the issue of Christian identity with migration for theological reflection.[120] Australian researcher Ross Langmead approached the migration of refugees and asylum seekers through missiology and highlighted "hospitality"

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[116] Ilsup Ahn, *Theology and Migration* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019).

[117] Robert Schreiter, 'Theology's Contribution to (Im)Migration', *Center for Migration Studies Special Issues*, 18.2 (2003), 170–80.

[118] παροικία – 1 Pet. 1:17, translated as exile in NRSV.

[119] Peter C. Phan, 'Deus Migrator—God the Migrant: Migration of Theology and Theology of Migration', *Theological Studies*, 77.4 (2016), 845–68.

[120] Jenny McGill, *Religious Identity and Cultural Negotiation: Toward a Theology of Christian Identity in Migration* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).

as central. Considering the complex Australian socio-economic and political context, he also advocated that this missiology would become another form of liberation theology.[121] Moreover, Filipino Catholic researcher Gemma Tulud Cruz emphasised migration's social justice issues and concurred with Campese that migration is a *locus theologicus.*[122] She employed a lived theology approach to investigate the challenging experience of Filipino women domestic workers in Hong Kong.[123] Cruz highlighted migrants and refugees' lived experiences of suffering as "the way of the cross" for "crucified people".[124] Cruz also advocated for the liberation of their oppression and considered that migration theology should be transformative with theological imagination rather than descriptive.[125] In particular, she highlighted how the migrants' faith can also be a source of hope for the faith communities in the host countries, as well as the benefits and challenges of inculturation in migration.[126]

Therefore, as Campese suggested, there are "theologies" of migration with diverse approaches rather than a single migration theology. Migrants and refugees' lived experiences have become a *locus theologicus* and correlate with various theological domains such as theological anthropology, systematic theology, biblical studies, and practical and contextual theology. The Eucharist has also been linked with migration. Despite these different theological proposals and exploration, Iranian converts' experiences as migrants in Britain are yet to be considered theologically. Tensions were often reported between the migrants and the host country's faith communities, including the CoE.

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[121] Ross Langmead, 'Refugees as Guests and Hosts: Towards a Theology of Mission Among Refugees and Asylum Seekers', in *Religion, Migration and Identity*, ed. by Martha Frederiks and Dorottya Nagy (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 171–88.

[122] Gemma Tulud Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration: Social Justice and Religious Experience* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1–8.

[123] Gemma Tulud Cruz, *An Intercultural Theology of Migration Pilgrims in the Wilderness* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010).

[124] Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration*, pp. 140–57.

[125] Cruz, *An Intercultural Theology of Migration Pilgrims in the Wilderness*, p. 326.

[126] Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration*, pp. 77–126.

2.2.2 Migrants' Experiences in the CoE

Migration has caused ongoing debates within British society, but the anti-migrant sentiment, especially towards asylum seekers and refugees, has increased since the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. Migration has also become a crucial part of the British political agenda.[127] The Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS) reported the experiences of ethnic and religious minority people in the UK around the pandemic and discovered widespread experiences of racism and racial discrimination and ongoing economic, health and housing inequalities among minority ethnic groups before and during the pandemic.[128] These findings were not surprising, and there are deep-rooted and persistent ethnic inequalities from racism despite equality legislation in the UK over 50 years.[129] Racism occurs not only interpersonally but also on structural and institutional levels[130] and is associated with colonialism.[131] Migrants, especially asylum seekers and refugees who are predominantly minority ethnics, regularly face racism, causing trauma.[132]

The CoE does not escape the reality of racism in British society. Bishop Rosemarie Mallet summarised migrants' racial injustice experiences within the CoE, particularly those from the Caribbean and of the Windrush generation.[133] She described that the "colours and accents" set the migrants apart until or unless they adapted, assimilated, or departed.[134] Various individuals from different ethnicities reported similar experiences of racial injustice within the CoE: Glynne

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[127] Lindsay Richards, Mariña Fernández-Reino, and Scott Blinder, *Briefing: UK Public Opinion toward Immigration: Overall Attitudes and Level of Concern* (The Migration Observatory, University of Oxford, 28 September 2023) <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/MigObs-Briefing-UK-Public-Opinion-toward-Immigration-Overall-Attitudes-and-Level-of-Concern.pdf> [accessed 20 June 2024].

[128] *Racism and Ethnic Inequality in a Time of Crisis: Findings from the Evidence for Equality National Survey*, ed. by Nissa Finney and others (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2023).

[129] *Ethnic Identity and Inequalities in Britain: The Dynamics of Diversity*, ed. by Stephen Jivraj and Ludi Simpson (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2015).

[130] Finney and others, pp. 5–6.

[131] Alastair Bonnett, *Multiracism: Rethinking Racism in Global Context* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022).

[132] Sheila Wise Rowe, *Healing Racial Trauma: The Road to Resilience* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020).

[133] Rosemarie Mallet, 'Race, Ethnicity, and Participation in the Church of England: A Testament of Staying Power and Resilience', in *Race for Justice: The Struggle for Equality and Inclusion in British and Irish Churches*, ed. by Richard S Reddie (London: Monarch, 2022), pp. 17–32.

[134] Ibid., p. 18.

Gordon-Carter[135], Kenneth Leech[136], Mukti Barton[137] and, more recently, Azariah France-Williams[138]. Besides individuals' experiences, the CoE has also published several reports about racism within the Church. The *Faith in City* Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission in 1985 highlighted the under-representation of minority ethnic clergy within the CoE and the Church's lack of response regarding racism in British society.[139] The report also claimed that minority ethnic members felt "equally ignored and relegated to the peripheries of the church life".[140] They demanded that the CoE make space and receive the gifts of the minority ethnic Christians, and they made many recommendations for the Church to address the pressing issues. Nevertheless, the CoE General Synod only took the recommendations minimally despite accepting the findings of this report. It disapproved of establishing a Commission with more authority for racial issues and only agreed to set up a less powerful Committee for Black Anglican Concerns.[141]

Numerous reports have since been published, but they have had little impact on the CoE's practices concerning racial justice at the diocesan and national levels. Dr Elizabeth Henry, the then lay Advisor of the CoE National Adviser of the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (CMEAC), described the inclusion and representation of minority ethnic people in the CoE as "unfinished business".[142] In her 2020 departing comments, Dr Henry expressed her frustration that progress in tackling racism, increasing representation, and genuinely working to achieve a greater sense of belonging for minority ethnics in the CoE and wider society has been

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[135] Glynne Gordon-Carter, *An Amazing Journey: The Church of England's Response to Institutional Racism* (London: Church House Publishing, 2003).
[136] Kenneth Leech, *Race* (London: SPCK, 2005).
[137] Mukti Barton, *Rejection, Resistance and Resurrection: Speaking Out on Racism in the Church* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2005).
[138] A. D. A. France-Williams, *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England* (London: SCM Press, 2020).
[139] Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation: The Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas* (London: Church House Publishing, 1985), pp. 95–100.
[140] Ibid., p. 96.
[141] Gordon-Carter; Mallet, p. 23.
[142] Elizabeth Henry, 'I Too Am C of E: A Follow up to Unfinished Business - Matching Words with Action (General Synod GS Misc 1108)', 2017 <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/gs-misc-1108-cmeac-presentation.pdf> [accessed 20 June 2024].

"painfully slow" despite a willingness in principle.[143] Her comments were not a surprise, as the

first Black CoE Bishop, Wilfred Wood, expressed his experience of racism within the Church and

British society.[144] Black CoE priest France-Williams again echoed the experiences of racial

injustice minority ethnics faced within the CoE. He argued that a more radical "dismantling and

reassembling" of the CoE's structure and hierarchy would be required to tackle structural racism.

The CoE needs to take action to start actual work.[145] The Archbishop's Anti-Racism Taskforce

was established in 2020. In April 2021, they produced the report *From Lament to Action*, which

confirmed institutional racism in the CoE's structures and practices, especially in participation,

representation, and governance. They highlighted the lack of progress in the past four decades

and demanded urgent action to change the CoE's current culture, customs, and practices to

address the causes and consequences of "racial sin" in the Church.[146]

Hence, tensions are evident in the relationship between the migrants, who are

predominantly minority ethnics, and the CoE. Cognitive ecclesiologist Sanjee Perera argued that

the CoE's structure and ecclesiology contributed significantly to racial injustice in the Church,

causing "the racialised nature of its theologies, liturgies and oppressive ecclesial

infrastructure".[147] She believed the CoE has "a nostalgic attachment to Englishness, a sacralised

lifestyle choice or a middle-class aesthetic aspiration".[148] Perera considered the CoE based on

power dynamics fed by English exceptionalism and its close link with the British Empire and

colonialism.[149] Likewise, American Chinese theologian Pui-Lan Kwok reviewed the association

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[143] Chine McDonald, 'Is the Church of England Racist?', *Church Times* (London, 3 July 2020) <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/3-july/features/features/is-the-church-of-england-racist> [accessed 20 June 2024].

[144] Wilfred Wood, *Faith for a Glad Fool: The Church of England's First Black Bishop Speaks on Racial Justice, Christian Faith, Love and Sacrifice* (London: New Beacon Books, 2010), pp. 7–37.

[145] France-Williams, pp. 20–21.

[146] The Church of England, *From Lament to Action: The Report of the Archbishops' Anti-Racism Taskforce* (The Chruch of England, 22 April 2021) <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/FromLamentToAction-report.pdf> [accessed 12 May 2024].

[147] Sanjee Perera, 'Gauntlet at the Lychgate: How and Why Is the Church of England Racist?', *Modern Believing*, 65.1 (2023), 10–21 (p. 11).

[148] Ibid., p. 17.

[149] Ibid., pp. 14–15.

between Anglicanism and colonialism and advocated "decolonising" the Anglican churches.[150]

She considered the strength of Anglicanism to lie in the four crucial elements: Scriptures, tradition, reason, and experience. However, these elements were defined previously merely through the lens of Western culture and ignored other non-Western voices within the Anglican Communion. Traditions were coded only from the English CoE tradition. Kwok believed this Western bias should be addressed in the post-colonial era.[151] This correction is not just about power reversal but also critiques colonialism's structures, ideologies, symbols, mentality, and legacy.[152] In particular, Kwok advocated contextualisation of Anglican worship as essential and believed that the Anglican liturgy, such as the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), should be radically examined culturally and linguistically rather than merely translated into local languages for Anglicans from other cultures. Otherwise, the unequal power relationship embedded in the liturgy will be "reinscribed" in the translation process.[153] Kwok concurred with American Anglican liturgical scholar Shawn Strout, who argued that liturgical diversity does not erode Anglican identity. The desire for liturgical uniformity can be used to preserve English identity and culture instead of maintaining Anglican theology and liturgy.[154] Although post-colonial perspectives seem more applicable to the Anglican churches within the Anglican Communion outside the CoE, she also acknowledged that global migration has changed the landscape. The CoE and other Anglican churches have received many migrants who bring their cultures and vitality to enrich the Church. Nevertheless, Kwok lamented that the migrants are often treated as "strangers to the family" with much struggle to gain trust, recognition and resources from the Church because of racism and stereotypes about migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.[155]

Hence, theologians have adopted migration as the *locus theologicus* and developed various migration-related theologies. Groody proposed that the Eucharist can be considered

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[150] Pui-lan Kwok, *The Anglican Tradition from a Postcolonial Perspective* (New York: Seabury Books, 2023).
[151] Ibid., p. 17.
[152] Ibid., p. 53.
[153] Ibid., pp. 102–3.
[154] Shawn Strout, 'Prayer Book Uniformity: Myth or Icon?', *Anglican Theological Review*, 105.1 (2023), 24–40; Kwok, p. 103.
[155] Kwok, pp. 206–12.

contextually through the lens of migration. In contrast, racism and related colonialism seriously impacted the lived experiences of migrants within Britain and the CoE, causing trauma. There has been a demand for action to address this racial injustice, including reversing the power dynamics and advocating "interdependence" between the CoE and its minority ethnic members.[156] As migrants in Britain, Iranian converts are likely to share similar challenging experiences. However, not much is known about their experiences and how these experiences affect the understanding and practice of their Christian faith, including the Eucharist. A theology related to migration in these converts' context in the CoE will further enrich the various migration "theologies".

2.3   The Eucharist: Anglican and beyond

The Eucharist is vital in Anglican worship and is "the very heart of the life, worship and mission of the Christian Church".[157] Understandably, it is a massive topic with various perspectives. This section will focus only on what is significant for Iranian converts in the CoE context. The various understandings of the Eucharist will be highlighted as the CoE is a broad Church with different traditions. I will then consider the contemporary development of theologies related to the Eucharist, which focuses on its meaning to individuals and the Church community. As the Eucharist commemorates Jesus's salvific work, which includes his sacrificial and traumatic death, theologians have linked the Eucharist with theological thinking about trauma and liberation more recently. This development is particularly relevant to Iranian converts because many have experienced various traumas. Finally, liturgical inculturation will be reviewed because of its relevance to the Iranian converts' context.

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[156] Barton, p. 134.

[157] House of Bishops of the Church of England, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of Unity: An Occasional Paper of the House of Bishops of the Church of England (General Synod Paper - GS Misc 632)* (London: Church House Publishing, 2001), p. vii.

The CoE Bishop and theologian Christopher Cocksworth suggested that "there is no such thing as Anglican Eucharistic theology", as there has always been a spectrum of Anglicans' understandings of the Eucharist.[158] The CoE's Canon A5 states that the CoE's doctrine can be found in the 39 Articles of Religion (AoR).[159] Article 28 is specifically related to the Eucharist, stating it is "a sign of love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another", but more importantly "a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death". In the Eucharist, the bread and the cup is a partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, but they are received only in a "heavenly and spiritual manner", and the means to receive the Eucharist is faith.[160] Article 25 defines the sacrament as "sure witness and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him".[161] Hence, the Eucharist is considered a sacrament in the CoE. This understanding rejected a pure memorialist position of the Eucharist, which views the Eucharist as entirely commemorative.

Nevertheless, as the liturgist Bryan Sprinks concluded, Eucharistic theologies within Anglican history since the English Reformation are incredibly varied. Anglican theologian William Crockett concurred, describing it as "theological pluralism".[162] Anglican Eucharistic theologies have generally situated between receptionism and virtualism. Receptionism considers the real partaking of Christ's Body and Blood through the sacramental signs of bread and wine. It implies Christ's presence primarily to the communicants by faith and grace when they receive the Eucharist rather than to the elements of bread and wine, which remain unchanged. In contrast, virtualism considers Christ's presence independent of the reception in communion and is a position more prevalently held by the Anglo-Catholic tradition after the Oxford or Tactarian

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[158] Christopher J. Cocksworth, 'Eucharistic Theology', in *The Identity of Anglican Worship*, ed. by Kenneth Stevenson and Bryan D. Spinks (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1991), pp. 49–68 (p. 49).
[159] The Church of England, 'The Canons of the Church of England, Section A' (Church House Publishing, 2016), para. A5 <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-services/canons-church-england/section> [accessed 17 May 2024].
[160] The Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 623.
[161] Ibid., p. 621.
[162] William R. Crockett, *Eucharist: Symbol of Transformation* (New York: Liturgical Press, 1989), p. 189.

Movement. Christ is objectively present in the elements of bread and wine through the consecration and is present in grace to those who receive him by faith.[163] However, Christ's presence is not in a physical or natural mode but in a sacramental mode, in a manner of "a real symbol that participates in and mediates the reality that it symbolises".[164] The precise definition of "virtualism" is contestable, and even in these two possible Anglican Eucharistic theologies, there are various complex interpretations of their definitions and the Eucharist's nature.

It is beyond this thesis's scope to review comprehensively this complicated area of Anglican Eucharistic theologies. However, in recent decades, there has been a quest to find common ground among various understandings of the Eucharist, particularly for ecumenism. The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) and the WCC, of which the CoE is a member, produced reports on the Eucharist.[165] ARCIC considers Anglicans to recognise the sacramental sign of Christ's presence and the personal relationship between Christ and the faithful that arises from that presence. The elements are not mere signs but Christ's body and blood, which become "really present" by the action of the Holy Spirit. They are "really given" so believers may unite with Christ the Lord.[166] Moreover, the idea of anamnesis, the remembrance, especially its relationship with the concept of sacrifice in the Eucharist, is debatable.[167] The House of Bishops' report on the Eucharist confirms that anamnesis is that Christ's sacrifice is made dynamically present and effective in the Eucharist.[168] There is an emphasis on Christ's sacrifice as the once-for-all event of salvation in the historical sense, but through the action of

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[163] Ibid., p. 217.
[164] Ibid., p. 217.
[165] Anglican/Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission, *Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine* (Windsor, England: Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, 1971) <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/105215/ARCIC_I_Agreed_Statement_on_Eucharistic_Doctrine.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2024]; Anglican/Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission, *Elucidation Eucharist* (Salisbury, England: Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, 1979) <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/105221/ARCIC_I_Elucidation_Eucharist.pdf> [accessed 25 June 2024]; World Council of Churches, 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: (Faith and Order Paper No. 111, the "Lima Text")' (World Council of Churches, 1982) <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text> [accessed 4 April 2022].
[166] Anglican/Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission, *Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine*, paras 8–10.
[167] Anglican/Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission, *Elucidation Eucharist*, para. 5.
[168] House of Bishops of the Church of England, para. 22.

the Holy Spirit, it becomes effective now. The WCC Lima Report on the Eucharist echoed this understanding of anamnesis, a "representation" of the past event and an "anticipation" for now and the future.[169]

Furthermore, the understanding and the study of the Eucharist have also been broadened. Theologians explore what the Eucharist means to individual Christians and the Church community. This approach brings new insights to the study of the Eucharist, as it links lived experiences to theological thinking and development. Catholic sacramental theologian Joseph Martos advocated an interdisciplinary approach, including through the lens of social sciences, to deepen the understanding of the Eucharist.[170] As highlighted, Groody has used this approach and linked the Eucharist with migration. Other examples include linking the Eucharistic narrative of Christ's body being broken with human brokenness, including individuals and the world's traumatic experiences and related oppression. For instance, trauma theologian Karen O'Donnell linked the Eucharist with her experience of bodily trauma of reproductive loss and infertility. She affirmed the multivalent understanding of the Eucharist and unconventionally used the annunciation-incarnation event to interpret the Eucharist.[171] She also considered that the whole of Christ's story, from the annunciation to the resurrection in the Eucharistic narrative, could lay the foundation for recovery from trauma by shifting the grave imagery of dying to a nourishing and generative one.[172]

Moreover, Catholic theologian William Cavanaugh linked the Eucharist with the political reality of torture under Chilean General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte's military dictatorship (1973-1990). He proposed the Eucharist as the Church's "counter-politics" to torture through Christ's presence in the body of believers, the Church.[173] By reclaiming the Eucharist's eschatological

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[169] World Council of Churches, para. Eucharist-B7.
[170] Joseph Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), pp. 3–4.
[171] Karen O'Donnell, *Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary and the Body in Trauma Theology*, SCM Research (London: SCM Press, 2018), pp. 191–97.
[172] Ibid., pp. 199–203.
[173] William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 2, 205–6.

dimension, Cavanaugh advocated that the Eucharist overcame victims' spatial and temporal isolations from torture.[174] Cavanaugh's theological proposal of comprehending torture through the lens of the Eucharist highlights how the Eucharist can be interpreted contextually. Besides Western voices linking the Eucharist with trauma, Sri Lankan Catholic priest-theologian Tissa Balasuriya suggested it could relate to human liberation and respond to the world's suffering. He lamented that in modern Church history, the Eucharist has been associated with imperialism and colonialism and has become ritualised and privatised.[175] Balasuriya proposed a Eucharistic renewal, and the Church should not be preoccupied with the Eucharist service for its own sake but to build a real sharing community concerned with the whole society. The Eucharist should be an agent of personal and global transformation.[176] He argued that the Eucharistic liturgy should incorporate insights from other cultures outside the West.[177] Balsuriya's non-Western voice was prophetic and brought out a similar sentiment to Kwok's notion of colonialism in the Christian faith.

Furthermore, individuals' and communities' lived experiences could shape the understanding of the Eucharist, which impacts others in the congregation. Danish theologians Lorensen and Buch-Hansen reported in their qualitative research that an Iranian woman refugee became a co-interpreter of the practical theology of the Eucharist. Instead of the traditional Danish Lutheran interpretation of the Eucharist to absolve sin, the refugee understood the Eucharist more broadly as a ritual that transformed and incorporated her into the Body of Christ. The Danish congregation also described how they were transformed when partaking in the Eucharist with asylum seekers who are vulnerable and risk their lives for the faith. These mutual transformations created a different but stronger sense of community.[178]

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[174] Ibid., pp. 207, 251, 280.
[175] Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 1979), pp. 23–41.
[176] Ibid., pp. 131–32.
[177] Ibid., pp. 140–65.
[178] Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen and Gitte Buch-Hansen, 'Listening to the Voices: Refugees as Co-Authors of Practical Theology*', *Practical Theology*, 11.1 (2018), 29–41.

Besides theologies, liturgy is another crucial aspect of the Eucharist. The Christian motto "*lex orandi, lex credendi*"[179] is fundamental in Anglicanism. As evident in Kwok's post-colonial work, there is a demand to re-examine the colonial influences in the current liturgies. Even for the CoE, liturgical inculturation is necessary because of the increased ethnic diversity of the congregants. AoR Article 24 states that public prayers in the Church or ministering of the sacraments in a tongue not understood by the people is "plainly repugnant".[180] American Anglican theologian Ian Douglas considered the belief that God speaks through the local language and culture a foundational tenet of the English Reformation. Having the Bible translated into English and the BCP written in English for English people was radical then. Embracing vernacular and emphasising inculturation in worship were crucial in defining the CoE's witness and position in its early formation. Douglas believed these priorities were overshadowed when the British Empire expanded, resulting in the export of "Englishness" to its colonies.[181] AoR Article 34 further supports liturgical inculturation, stating that particular churches can change or abolish their ceremonies or rites according to "the diversities of countries, times, and men's manners".[182] Hence, adopting vernacular and liturgical inculturation already existed during the English Reformation as a reaction to the meticulously controlled and clericalised liturgical rites from the Middle Ages.[183]

Since the 20th century, the normative character of Cranmer's BCP has been questioned, and it began the request for reform in some contexts within the Anglican Communion, as there has been a growing awareness that no language or rite can be considered "transcultural" (i.e. standing above the particularities of other cultures).[184] The International Anglican Liturgical

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[179] See Glossary.
[180] The Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 621.
[181] Ian T. Douglas, 'Inculturation and Anglican Worship', in *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*, ed. by Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 625–38 (pp. 631–32).
[182] The Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 625–26.
[183] Louis Weil, 'Anglican Liturgical Developments in New Contexts', in *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume V: Global Anglicanism, C. 1910-2000*, ed. by William L. Sachs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 258–75 (p. 263).
[184] Ibid., pp. 259–60.

Consultation (IALC), established in 1983, advocates liturgical inculturation. Their 1989 York Consultation Statement affirmed that "liturgy to serve the contemporary church should be truly inculturated".[185] Like Groody's notion, the Consultation considered Christ's incarnation "God's self-inculturation" in this world and a particular cultural context. The Consultation acknowledged that adopting common prayer expressed in the language and culture of the English Reformation fostered cultural alienation, even within post-Christendom urban England. Therefore, as AoR Article 34 states, liturgical freedom is crucial.[186] The Consultation also encouraged minority groups to develop their own culture in worship.[187] The York Statement has been a reference point for IALC future consultations, including the one about the Eucharist in Dublin in 1995.[188]

Despite its significance, the process of liturgical inculturation is not straightforward, creating tensions. Anglican liturgist Louis Weil highlighted liturgical inculturation as not simply abolishing all the imported expressions from the early missionaries. Over time, these expressions have become an integrated aspect of the local church's spirituality about perceived Anglican identity. Hence, the question of how far inculturation can go yet remain recognisably Anglican is crucial but challenging.[189] I have highlighted Kwok and Strout's opinions that liturgical diversity does not erode Anglican identity. Weil argued that "a single universal model for common prayer, even within one Christian tradition, is an impossible goal in our complex world".[190] Douglas reviewed various elements of inculturation, including adaptation (sometimes called accommodation or indigenisation) and translation. Adaptation implies simply grafting "local" or "traditional" aspects onto existing liturgical practice without any deep dynamic exchange

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[185] International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, '"Down to Earth Worship": The Statement of the Third International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, York, 1989', in *Liturgical Inculturation in the Anglican Communion, Including the York Statement 'Down to Earth' Worship.*, ed. by David Holeton (Bramcote, Nottingham: Grove Books, 1990), pp. 8–13 (p. 8).

[186] Ibid., p. 9.

[187] Ibid., p. 12.

[188] Ruth A Meyers, 'One Bread, One Body: Ritual, Language, and Symbolism in the Eucharist', in *Our Thanks and Praise: The Eucharist in the Anglican Communion: Papers from the Fifth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation*, ed. by David Holeton (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1998), pp. 82–98 (pp. 92–95).

[189] Weil, pp. 267–70.

[190] Ibid., p. 273.

between the gospel and the culture. This grafting disapproves of new forms of the Christian community emerging beyond the confines of the Western churches.[191] Also, quoting American-Gambian missiologist Lamin Sanneh's work on the gospel's "translatability", Douglas highlighted the challenge: "Translation into the local vernacular is much more than the simple direct exchange of one word for another".[192]

Hence, the inculturation process is more complex than "translation", especially since liturgy, including the Eucharist, frequently involves symbolism. Anglican liturgist Phillip Tovey highlighted the challenge of how liturgical texts should be created to reflect local theology in their context rather than merely adaptation. Tovey and other scholars called this phenomenon "beyond inculturation".[193] Tovey also advocated that inculturation should follow a complete hermeneutical circle, which involves "distanciation", a concept French philosopher Paul Ricœur suggested for understanding interpretation.[194] The interpreter distances themselves from their own culture and the new culture to evaluate and interpret critically. He considered that inculturation also applies to the multicultural environment in the West, including the CoE, as a shared concern in the Anglican Communion.[195]

In summary, despite the diversity of Anglican Eucharistic theologies, there is a consensus that the Eucharist is a sacrament rather than merely a memorial. These theologies also endorse Christ's presence. The Eucharist has also been understood contextually through the lens of migration, trauma (including racial trauma) and liberation, which is particularly relevant to Iranian converts. Individuals' experiences shape their understanding of the Eucharist, which impacts other Church members. Liturgical inculturation should be fundamental for non-Western Christians, including Iranian converts within the CoE. There are various tensions from the

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[191] Douglas, p. 628.
[192] Ibid., p. 629; Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 95–130.
[193] Phillip Tovey, *Inculturation of Christian Worship: Exploring the Eucharist* (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 147.
[194] Paul Ricœur, 'The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation', *Philosophy Today*, 17.2 (1973), 129–41.
[195] Tovey, p. 149.

different understandings of the Eucharist, which challenges the Church unity, even though it is considered a "sacrament of unity" and "bond of charity".[196] Also, the complex process of the Eucharistic liturgical inculturation creates additional tensions.

2.4   Chapter Summary

This chapter has highlighted that Iranian Christian converts from Islam have a unique background with a complex combination of personal, social, and religious factors in their conversion, which leads to their suffering and trauma because of religious persecution. These converts also attempt to establish a specific Iranian national Christian identity, employing their pre-Islamic Persian civilisation and heritage. They also use Christian practices like baptism and the Eucharist to assert their "Persian-ness", as missiologist Miller suggested in his uncommon research that included some Iranian Christian converts. As Iranian converts within the CoE are migrants to Britain, it adds extra distinctiveness to these converts' context. This review also underlined how theologians have adopted migration as the *locus theologicus*, including Groody's proposal to understand the Eucharist through the lens of migration. Moreover, Iranian converts share the experiences of racism that are frequently reported by migrants in Britain, including within the CoE as minority ethnics. Besides migration, the Eucharist has been linked to trauma, including racial trauma, which is particularly relevant to Iranian converts in the CoE. Also, multiple tensions were identified in various domains about Iranian converts in the CoE and the Eucharist. However, there are knowledge gaps as little is known about these converts' experiences within the unique CoE context, including their experiences after religious conversion and as migrants. How these experiences affect their understanding and practice of their Christian faith, including the Eucharist, remains undiscovered and yet to be considered theologically. The Eucharist is essential in worship and a vital sacrament for Anglicans. Hence, researching Iranian

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[196] Augustine of Hippo, 'Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John', in *St. Augustin: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. by Philip Schaff, trans. by John Gibb and James Innes (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888), sec. 26.13.

converts' experiences and understanding of the Eucharist is worthwhile and timely to fill these knowledge gaps. In the next chapter, I will explain this research's methodology and how it addresses the RQs to explore these uncharted territories.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Method

In the previous chapters, I reviewed why research on Iranian converts' understanding and experiences of the Eucharist is valuable, and this research addresses the three RQs in Chapter One. This chapter's first section delves into methodology. Two approaches under practical theology, namely lived theology and contextual theology, will be used as the overarching research framework to address these RQs. This study will employ qualitative research methods to comprehend Iranian converts' contexts and lived experiences related to the Eucharist, and critical realism will be used as the ontological foundation. The qualitative research findings will address RQ1 on these converts' experiences. These findings will also offer Iranian converts' "voices" from below to shape the theological reflection and construction, which will be based on the pastoral cycle outlined by theologians Paul Ballard and John Pritchard.[197] The pastoral cycle starts with Iranian converts' experiences, forming the basis for interdisciplinary "exploration" to gain further insights into their experiences and address RQ2. The pastoral cycle's "reflection" and "action" stages will specifically address RQ3. Figure 1 visually summarises this study's methodology and the relationship between each component and practical theology. This chapter's second section will focus on the research method and how the qualitative research was conducted, including any ethical considerations around using interpreters before giving details on data collection and analysis.

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[197] Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, Second edition (London: SPCK, 2006), pp. 81–95.

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

TWO APPROACHES: LIVED THEOLOGY AND CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

Data Collection: interviews, participant observations, digital written surveys, archival data

Analysis: Cross-case thematic analysis

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION METHOD

"Revised mutual critical correlation" with Scriptures and tradition

Eucharist and the Iranian converts from Islam in the Church of England

Experience (RQ1)

Exploration: Interdisciplinary (RQ2)

Reflection (RQ3)

Action (RQ3)

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION STRUCTURE

The Pastoral Cycle

OUTCOMES

Contextualised theology and practices related to the Eucharist and Iranian converts

Figure 1 Visual Summary of the Methodology

3.1 Methodology: Practical Theology as an overarching research framework

Practical theology focuses on theological insight from individuals' experiences and faith practices. This emphasis is particularly relevant to this study as it provides the overarching framework to address the three RQs related to Iranian converts' experiences and the practice of

the Eucharist. Practical theologians John Swinton and Harriet Mowat defined practical theology as "critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world". [198] They highlighted practical theology's interpretative nature, which examines the theories and assumptions that shape current practices and contribute to developing new theories that inform the practices of the Church and the world. This study not only examines the understanding and meaning of the Eucharist for Iranian converts in the CoE (RQ1) but also explores the dynamics of various factors that affect how Iranian converts interpret and experience the Eucharist, which is closely related to their Christian faith journey (RQ2). Hence, practical theology provides the necessary interpretative framework to examine theologically how the faith practice, the Eucharist, interacts with the "practices of the world" in Iranian converts, like their cultural heritage, religious conversion from Islam and their experiences of trauma and suffering, as Swinton and Mowat highlighted in their definition.

Other research frameworks can be considered. For instance, the first two RQs could be investigated from social scientific perspectives, such as ritual studies, which involve anthropology, sociology, literature, and religious studies.[199] The ritual studies framework will focus on the practice of the Eucharist as a ritual and Iranian converts' interpretations, likely emphasising symbolism. Ritual studies could provide insights into RQ1 about the meaning of the Eucharist to Iranian converts. Alternatively, the study could employ the sociology of religion as the primary research framework, focusing on social dimensions like social identity and how this identity could impact their experience and understanding of the Eucharist.

Although these potential research frameworks can provide valuable perspectives, they do not address RQ3 on contextualised theology and practice related to the Eucharist for Iranian converts. Theological reflection is crucial to addressing RQ3, and practical theology is the most

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[198] Swinton and Mowat, p. 7.
[199] Ronald L Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 3rd edn (Waterloo, Canada: Ritual Studies International, 2010); Martos, pp. 64–65.

suitable research framework. Swinton and Mowat's definition focuses on "faithful participation" in God's redemptive practices, i.e. God's ongoing mission. Practical theology is unique in constructing theology and ensuring faithful and transformative practices. It also enables personal and communal *phronesis*, a form of practical wisdom that combines theory and practice in the praxis of individuals and communities.[200] This notion of *phronesis* echoes theologian Don Browning's idea of "fundamental practical theology" as the foundation of theology, which embraces integrating practices and theories.[201] This combination of theological construction and practices fits well with RQ3. Hence, practical theology is this study's most appropriate research framework.

Furthermore, practical theology takes the context and individuals' lived experiences seriously. Swinton and Mowat considered the practical theological task "to mediate the relation between the Christian tradition and the specific problems and challenges of the contemporary social context".[202] Essentially, practical theology is contextual. According to Swinton and Mowat, *phronesis* is embodied practical knowledge based on people's experiences.[203] These emphases on lived experiences and context highlight two approaches closely related to practical theology: lived theology and contextual theology. In the next section, I will discuss these two approaches and how they address the RQs.

3.1.1 Lived theology and contextual theology as approaches

In this study, I will employ lived theology and contextual theology as two approaches to practical theology. Practical theologian Pete Ward suggested that lived theology highlights that theology is embodied and lived by individuals and communities and enacted within everyday practices. It can often be in tension or contradict the institutional or formal expressed forms of

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[200] Swinton and Mowat, pp. 24–26.
[201] Don S Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 1–12.
[202] Swinton and Mowat, p. 24.
[203] Ibid., pp. 25–26.

"official theology".[204] Ward argued that practical theology is primarily the discipline of paying critical attention to lived theology.[205] A research approach based on lived theology, which focuses on individuals like Iranian converts' experiences, can be particularly fruitful as it is "where practice and theology are most fundamentally and organically interconnected".[206] Lived theology has its strengths and limitations. Practical theologian Knut Tveitereid quoted Sabrina Müller's work and advocated that lived theology applies to everyone, including academics, ordained ministers, and even to distinct groups, such as minority ethnics like Iranian converts.[207] Quoting Müller again, Tveitereid suggested that lived theology comes into being when religious experiences move from private, individual, and internal experiences into public, open, and external discourses.[208] He believed that lived theology attempts to make theology meaningful in everyday life, and its research is a "negotiation of theological participation and reification".[209] In this study, the lived theology approach will allow a reappraisal of Iranian converts' experiences and understandings of the Eucharist, as well as shape and "reify" theology related to the Eucharist. The interrelations between Iranian converts' experiences and beliefs, the Eucharistic liturgy and formal theology related to the Eucharist will be explored. Nevertheless, Ward and Tveitereid accepted that lived theology is still "in the making" and has not reached a coherent scholarly discourse.[210] Ward stated that lived theology is complex and can be contradictory.[211] Having considered practical theologian Jeff Astley's work on ordinary theology, Tveitereid suggested that lived theology can give an impression as "less precise, stringent and coherent" when compared to other academic theological disciplines and "easily written off as a shortage

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[204] Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017), pp. 62–68.

[205] Ibid., p. 66.

[206] Ibid., pp. 55–56.

[207] Knut Tveitereid, 'Lived Theology and Theology in the Lived', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. by Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), pp. 67–77 (p. 69); Sabrina Müller, *Lived Theology: Impulses for a Pastoral Theology of Empowerment* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), pp. 29–30.

[208] Tveitereid, pp. 69–70; Müller, pp. 47–48.

[209] Tveitereid, pp. 70–72.

[210] Ibid., p. 70.

[211] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, pp. 62–68.

or deficiency".[212] Although lived theology may appear to lack precision, it is still a valuable way to understand Iranian converts' lived experiences and to reflect on theology and practices related to the Eucharist, as enquired in RQ3, which asked for renewed contextualised theology and practices in Iranian converts' context within the CoE.

Besides their lived experiences, Iranian converts within the CoE are in a unique context worth examining. They have their Iranian cultural heritage and now live in Britain as migrants, encountering a different culture. They converted to Christianity from Islam, and most faced significant adversities because of their religious conversion and the situation in Iran, causing them to leave for Britain to seek asylum. They now attend the CoE churches, as the established national Church in England, and this experience is different from their religious experiences in Iran. Combining all these factors makes their context particularly unique, with multiple layers intersecting. This distinct context can influence how Iranian converts experience their Christian faith and practice, like the Eucharist, and RQ2 will explore that. Bevans claimed that "the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context is a theological imperative".[213] Various theologians have stressed the importance of theology taking specific cultural expressions seriously: "theology in the vernacular", as some practical theologians suggested.[214] In exploring the relationship between practical theology and contextual theology, Bevans argued that "every practical theology is a contextual theology, but not every contextual theology is a practical theology".[215] He considered contextual theology as a way of doing theology that takes seriously both the experience of the past through Scriptures and tradition and present-day Christians' experience of the current "context".[216] The context includes individual and communal experiences, cultures (Bevans defined culture as a "network of meanings, values, and behaviours

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[212] Tveitereid, p. 74; Jeff Astley, 'Ordinary Theology as Lay Theology: Listening to and Learning from Lay Perspectives', *INTAMS Review*, 20.2 (2014), 182–89 (pp. 182–83).

[213] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 3.

[214] Elaine L. Graham and others, *Theological Reflection: Methods*, Second edition (London: SCM Press, 2019), pp. 217–49.

[215] Stephen B. Bevans, 'Contextual Theology as Practical Theology', in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, ed. by Kathleen A Cahalan and Gordon S Mikoski (Lanham, MD; Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), pp. 45–59 (p. 54).

[216] Ibid., p. 48.

which gives shape to a people's world – in which an individual or a community lives"[217]), and the social location (e.g. women, sexuality) and any social changes (e.g. migration). Bevans believed that contextual theology allows a mutually critical dialogue between the experience of the past and the experience of the present.[218] Like many aspects of practical theology, contextual theology engages in conversation with other non-theological disciplines, primarily but not limited to social sciences such as cultural anthropology and sociology. These interdisciplinary conversations help to understand and critique a particular context.[219] This mutual critical dialogue is essential for addressing RQ3 in developing contextualised theology and practices for Iranian converts' context. Hence, adopting a contextual theology approach can benefit this research about Iranian converts within the CoE, who show various features of the context as defined by Bevans. He also suggested that the contextual theology approach is one way of theologising within recent developments in world Christianity, as there has been an essential shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity to the non-Western world.[220]

As I will adopt both lived theology and contextual theology in this research under the overarching framework of practical theology, the question of whether they are compatible is crucial. I consider these two approaches complementary to one another in addressing the RQs. Lived theology focuses primarily on the lived experiences of Iranian converts and how the experiences may have affected their understanding of the Eucharist. This focus helps address RQ1 and part of RQ2. In contrast, contextual theology sees Iranian converts' individual experiences in the broader cultural and social context. It also emphasises theological construction that takes context seriously. Hence, the contextual theology approach helps to address RQ3 and the other part of RQ2. Employing both approaches together enables a comprehensive and rich examination of the situation and development of theology.

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[217] Stephen B. Bevans, *Essays in Contextual Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), p. 2.
[218] Ibid., p. 2.
[219] Bevans, 'Contextual Theology as Practical Theology', pp. 56–58.
[220] Bevans, *Essays in Contextual Theology*, pp. 166–69.

Bevans proposed six models of contextual theology, each representing a distinct theological starting point and presuppositions according to the theologian's fundamental attitudes towards both the experiences of the past and the present.[221] These models are made up of the translation model, the anthropological model, the praxis model, the synthetic model, the transcendental model and the countercultural model. They are along a spectrum between emphasising the experience of the past (i.e. Scriptures and tradition) and the experience of the present (i.e. context). Bevans highlighted that these models are distinct but can be used together. Which model to use depends on the situation, as certain models function better within specific sets of circumstances, and all have their strengths and weaknesses.[222] In this study, I will adopt Bevan's synthetic model in addressing RQ3 as I consider it the best model among all the models to deal with Iranian converts' unique situations. The synthetic model advocates a conscious effort to balance all elements (past, present, and need for transforming action) during critical dialogues with Christians from other cultures. It is considered the "middle of the road" between the experiences of the past and the present. It encourages honest and creative dialogues between the past (Scriptures and tradition) and the present context as "both/and". It also holds conversations with the imperatives of praxis. This model aims to develop a theology acceptable to all standpoints.[223] It emphasises the context's uniqueness and complementarity and believes every culture can learn from other cultures and remain unique. This model considers God's revelation as something finished, once and for all, of a particular place but simultaneously something ongoing and present, operative in all cultures, and not circumscribable in any way.[224] The ongoing dialogues can give the less established believers and churches a sense of equal status with the more established. These features match well with the situations of Iranian converts with the CoE. Its emphasis on balancing factors including the past, the present, the praxis, mutual learning from each other, and empowerment of less established believers, like

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[221] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, p. 31.
[222] Ibid., pp. 139–40.
[223] Ibid., pp. 88–102.
[224] Ibid., p. 91.

Iranian converts, is particularly relevant and inspiring. It also encourages the theologian to be creative in constructing theology "between the lines" of the received tradition, the experiences in the context and the demands of faith for action.[225]

In summary, practical theology will be employed as the overarching research framework in this study, as it can provide an interpretative foundation to examine theologically how the faith practice, the Eucharist, interacts with Iranian converts' understanding (i.e. theology) and experiences of this practice. I will utilise two complementary approaches, lived theology and contextual theology, both under practical theology, to address the RQs. Qualitative research is a beneficial inquiry method to understand Iranian converts' experiences and contexts, and I will explain more in the next section.

3.1.2 Qualitative research as a research method for practical theology

3.1.2.1 Qualitative Research in Practical Theology

Quoting qualitative researchers Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, Swinton and Mowat defined qualitative research as a method to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them".[226] Qualitative research assumes meaningful knowledge can be discovered in unique and non-replicable experiences through empirical observations. This study focuses on Iranian converts' experiences with the Eucharist. Hence, the qualitative research method will be invaluable in inquiring about and understanding their experiences for theological reflection. Nonetheless, Ward argued that qualitative research is more than a means of inquiry of lived experience to produce theological thoughts. He considered theology to exist in various forms, including in, with,

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[225] Bevans, *Essays in Contextual Theology*, p. 22.

[226] Swinton and Mowat, p. 28; Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 'Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research', in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, ed. by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 3rd edn (Thousand Oaks, CA; London; New Delhi; Singapore: SAGE, 2008), pp. 1–44 (p. 4).

and through the life of communities and in various material and cultural forms. The qualitative research method's fieldwork process highlights that theology is already alive in these forms and places. The experiences and expressions that shape individuals' and communities' lives are as theological as the reflection and construction produced from the qualitative data.[227] Hence, qualitative research can be considered a "revelation" and brings the realisation of lived realities' complexity to theology. Besides, Ward considered qualitative research particularly relevant to contextual theology as it brings a disciplined and structured approach to hearing individuals' and communities' voices, like those of Iranian converts, which have often been overlooked.[228]

In this study, qualitative research serves several functions. First, it will inquire about and interpret Iranian converts' lived experiences and utilise these as the starting point of theological reflection using the pastoral cycle. It will also allow an understanding of their cultural and social context for contextual theological constructions. The RQs will be addressed through inquiry and interpretation by adopting lived theology and contextual theology approaches. Second, through the qualitative data, Iranian converts' voices will be heard, and their lived realities in Britain will be exposed. Third, the qualitative research will help explore the interrelations between Iranian converts' beliefs and practices related to the Eucharist and normative and formal theologies. Finally, the qualitative research will show where Iranian converts in the CoE believe God to be at work in their lives. In this work, due to the limitations of a doctoral thesis, I will primarily focus on reporting the first function because it directly addresses the RQs. Nevertheless, the other functions are equally crucial in practical theology and should not be ignored.

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[227] Pete Ward, 'Theology and Qualitative Research: An Uneasy Relationship', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. by Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), pp. 7–15 (pp. 12–13).
[228] Ibid., p. 9.

3.1.2.2 Tension between qualitative research and theology

Although qualitative research is valuable in practical theology, tensions exist between them. Qualitative research's underlying epistemology generally is constructivism, which believes individuals and communities primarily construct reality. Subjective and socially constructed reality allows people to make the meanings that create the world. Constructivism embraces relativism as its ontological basis and emphasises multiple and changeable realities. It also advocates equal and independent validity of various interpretations of the same phenomena. The reality's meaning and definition are open to negotiation, depending on the individual's interpretative framework. The researcher's task is to enquire into these meaning-making processes.[229] Constructivism clashes with Christian theology, which believes that the reality of God is accessible through God's revelation to humankind. Christian theology traditionally assumes a privileged authority in the revelation through tradition.[230] Hence, Christian theology leans towards realism, which considers that reality exists to be discovered. There is also tension regarding normativity. Constructivism considers no normative expectation, as all disciplines offer equal-valued insights rather than a normative basis, like theology, for discerning the truth.[231]

Swinton and Mowat advocated a balance between realism and constructivism by adopting an alternative epistemological stance of "critical realism" for practical theological research using qualitative methods. They believed clearer approximations of the shared truth can be discovered through careful observation, interpretation and analysis of the situations.[232] They also argued against the assumption of reality being merely a social construction, as constructivism implies. "Critical realism" suggests that one can know reality better through constructions while simultaneously recognising that such constructions are always provisional and open to challenge. Swinton and Mowat insisted that reality is both real and, in principle,

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[229] Bennett and others, p. 142; Swinton and Mowat, pp. 34–35.
[230] Helen Cameron and others, *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology.* (London: SCM Press, 2010), p. 31.
[231] Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission: A Companion* (Norwich: SCM Press, 2013), p. 32.
[232] Swinton and Mowat, pp. 157–61.

accessible. Qualitative research and its underlying constructivism remind practical theologians that the ability to understand and define reality is always limited and constantly filtered through interpretation and construction, influenced by various social, cultural, spiritual, and interpersonal factors.[233] Practical theologians Cameron and Duce suggested that adopting critical realism as an ontological assumption embraces pluralism and encourages dialogues. Though Christian tradition is considered a meta-narrative, critical realism maintains a crucial distance from the tradition with both trust and suspicion.[234]

I concur with Swinton and Mowat's arguments on constructivism's limitations and believe that Christian theology is based on the reality of God, who is accessible to human beings through God's revelation. Christian tradition and revelation should be considered the meta-narrative with a normative position but through a critical lens. Hence, I will adopt critical realism as the ontological stance in this study. One crucial factor in this epistemological choice is my background as a researcher. Swinton and Mowat argued that good qualitative research depends on the researcher's self-awareness as a "primary tool".[235] The following section will highlight how my background may shape the methodology.

3.1.2.3 Epistemological Reflexivity

In Chapter One, I have offered personal reflexivity on how my background shapes the choice of this research topic. Besides personal reflexivity, Swinton and Mowat also suggested epistemological reflexivity, which allows the researcher to examine their assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge and how these assumptions can affect the research design, methodologies, and findings.[236] This research forms a significant portion of my ordination training within the CoE, especially during the design and data collection phases. While writing

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[233] Ibid., pp. 36–37.
[234] Cameron and Duce, p. 32.
[235] Swinton and Mowat, pp. 56–63.
[236] Ibid., pp. 56–59.

this thesis, I became a CoE-ordained minister. I come from the evangelical tradition and embrace the four distinctive marks of evangelicalism defined by British historian David Bebbington: conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism. [237] I hold the Anglican conventional understanding of the Eucharist as a sacrament, and my Eucharistic theological position is generally receptionism, which I have reviewed in Chapter Two (Section 2.3). I hold an orthodox and confessing theological stance on understanding God and God's revelation to humankind. Hence, I consider critical realism more compatible with my faith conviction in preference to adopting a pure constructivist epistemology. Also, I am a migrant of Chinese heritage who lives in Britain. I worked as a clinical psychiatrist before ordination training and have been involved in cross-cultural interfaith work with individuals from an Islamic background for decades. Before and after ordination training, my ministries were regularly involved in Iranian converts' discipleship, and I learned about their lived experiences in Britain. Therefore, with my minority ethnic and psychiatric professional background and experience with Iranian converts and cross-cultural work in Britain, I am particularly drawn to individuals' lived experiences and how their experiences interact with theology.   I also have expertise in cross-cultural interviewing and observation, using interpreters, and background knowledge of social sciences and contextual theology. These skills will help me conduct qualitative research in practical theology, focusing on people's lived experiences and encouraging interdisciplinarity.

3.1.2.4 Qualitative research design

3.1.2.4a Sampling strategy

This study will use a purposeful sampling strategy [238] to select research congregations and interview participants within those selected congregations for the qualitative research. A

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[237] David William Bebbington, *Evangelism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin and Hyman, 1989), pp. 2–17.
[238] Some qualitative researchers call this as purposive sampling.

suitable research congregation is defined as a CoE congregation with a group of Iranian converts who regularly participate in the Eucharist within their congregation gatherings. The snowballing sampling technique will also be used to facilitate recruiting interview participants who meet the inclusion criteria. Qualitative researcher Michael Patton suggested that purposeful sampling selects information-rich cases for in-depth understandings and insights into the crucial issues studied.[239] This strategy allows heterogeneity in selecting research congregations, and it is particularly relevant to this study to capture various traditions and settings within the CoE to reflect the vital characteristic of being a "broad church" with different theological understandings of the Eucharist. Also, any unconventional setting within the CoE with a significant number of Iranian converts participating in the Eucharist will be of interest for recruitment. These research congregations will be recruited through my direct link with the congregation or through recommended key persons who know the congregation. As an outsider researcher, I will need to spend time building relationships and trust with Iranian converts for data collection. The time and resource constraints limit this study to the CoE only, even though many Iranian converts attend churches outside the CoE. Information about the research congregations can be found in Sections 3.2.2 and 4.1.

Within each research congregation, participants will be recruited for interviews. The criteria for the participants include being Farsi-speaking Iranian, Christian converts from Islam, and regularly attending the Eucharist in their specific congregation. These participants will be selected purposefully to include a range of Iranian converts. Their demographics will determine participants' selection to maximise an encompassing but balanced representation. These demographics include their gender, age, educational background, status in Britain and when they converted to Christianity. To identify potential participants for recruitment in each congregation, I will liaise with the priest-in-charge and the key Iranian leaders among converts. These key leaders will act as a "middle person" to introduce me to the potential participants, and this link

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[239] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*, Fourth edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015), pp. 264–65.

will be crucial for gaining trust and credibility among the possible participants. This step is essential in working with Iranian cultural heritage, which highly values relationships. After the initial contact with a few relevant participants, a snowballing sampling strategy will also be employed. I will ask these initial participants for additional relevant contacts, especially those who may provide other perspectives because of their demographic backgrounds. I will then approach and recruit these additional contacts through the initial participants.

The sample size is a complex issue in qualitative research as it depends on various factors, such as the RQs, the type of data the participants provided, the data analysis, and data richness.[240] The availability of willing participants and time and resource constraints will also need to be considered, particularly in this study's sensitive topics, such as suffering and religious conversion. I will employ the concept of saturation in this research, where the recruitment of participants will stop when additional data fails to provide new information. However, using saturation to determine sample size is contestable and should not be the only criterion.[241] It has been suggested that 10 to 20 interview participants are appropriate for a medium-sized research project like this one.[242]

3.1.2.4b Mixed data collection methods

This research will use multiple data collection methods for "data triangulation". These methods include interviews, participant observations, digital written surveys, and archival data. Triangulation will help capture multiple perspectives on the meanings and experiences of the Eucharist among Iranian converts and build a deeper understanding of the situation.[243] Triangulation can also strengthen the credibility of evidence in evaluation.[244] Hence, the mixed

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[240] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE, 2013), pp. 45–50.
[241] Ibid., pp. 55–56.
[242] Ibid., pp. 48–49.
[243] Swinton and Mowat, pp. 160–61.
[244] Patton, p. 317.

data collection methods will be particularly beneficial in addressing RQ1 on Iranian converts' understandings and experiences of the Eucharist. Nevertheless, multiple data collection methods are resource-intensive and demand openness to accepting various approaches.

The first data collection method will be semi-structured open-ended individual interviews with Iranian convert participants selected from different congregations. Interviews capture individuals' perspectives, feelings, and encounters directly and deeply, including verbal quotations.[245] This benefit is particularly relevant to addressing RQ1 and RQ2 regarding their understanding and experiences of the Eucharist and their backgrounds.   Semi-structured interviews also allow a more flexible, responsive, and detailed exploration of Iranian converts' experiences and understandings of the Eucharist and their faith. I will meet with all the selected participants in person, if necessary with a Farsi interpreter, before the interview to explain the research and obtain written consent. I will conduct all the interviews, and the participants can choose in-person or online interviews via videoconferencing, according to their preference. Meeting the participants first in person is crucial to building trust and rapport for the interviews. I have expertise in conducting online interviews using videoconferencing and providing post-interview debriefing because of my expertise as a psychiatrist. All online interviews will be conducted in a private space of the participants' choice. Although it is suggested that establishing rapport and picking up non-verbal cues during online interviews might be challenging,[246] literature also indicates that online interviews can facilitate the participants to speak more freely.[247]   This arrangement can help participants to discuss more sensitive topics, such as persecution, suffering and trauma. Because of these sensitive topics, I will provide all participants with debriefing to ensure their well-being. A copy of the interview questions in English and Farsi translation is in Appendix One. The questions will cover participants' basic information, including

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[245] Ibid., pp. 27, 46.

[246] Janet Salmons, *Doing Qualitative Research Online* (London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi; Singapore: SAGE, 2016), pp. 41–51.

[247] Braun and Clarke, pp. 96–97; Tricia Williams, *What Happens to Faith When Christians Get Dementia? The Faith Experience and Practice of Evangelical Christians Living with Mild to Moderate Dementia* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), pp. 96–97.

previous faith practices, their conversion narratives and challenges, their understandings and experiences of the Eucharist and their insights on Iranian culture, including Iranian New Year *Nowruz*. I will take notes during the interviews, which will also be recorded as digital audio files for transcription. I will review and reflect on the notes taken following the interviews.

The second data collection method will be participant observations on several occasions during Eucharistic and non-Eucharistic events in those research congregations. These observations will help me gain insight from participating in that situation and understand the context. As a participant observer, I will hold both the position of outsider and insider within that setting.[248] This method is beneficial in complex situations with events unfolding over time and observing individuals' interactions. Nevertheless, this method is labour-intensive as it usually involves multiple visits for longitudinal observations.[249] In this study, I will observe the Eucharist services in all the research congregations and any relevant non-Eucharistic events that can provide additional insights into the contexts and about Iranian converts. Consent will be obtained from each research congregation's priest-in-charge before participant observation starts. I will take detailed field notes during or immediately after the events. When appropriate and relevant, some photographs will be taken during these observations with permission from the research congregation's priest-in-charge.

The third method will be digital written surveys. Interview participants from different research congregations will be invited to participate in digital written surveys through text messaging on various occasions. For each survey, text messages will be sent to each participant in the afternoon after the Sunday morning Eucharist services. The text messages will include two pre-defined questions in Farsi: (1) "*What does the Eucharist mean to you today?*" (2) "*How does the Eucharist relate to your life and faith experience last week?*" These surveys intend to capture Iranian converts' experiences of the Eucharist and Christian faith nearer the time they participate in the Eucharist. The survey can also identify any longitudinal variations at different time points.

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[248] Swinton and Mowat, p. 157.
[249] Patton, pp. 27–28.

These participants will be asked to send their free-text responses to these questions through text message, either in Farsi or English, as they prefer. This "non-conventional" method will be employed as it creatively allows Iranian converts to think and express their perspectives and experiences without my presence, which can provide another dimension that may have been absent when I was with them. From my experience, Iranian converts in Britain generally possess a mobile device to receive and send messages in Farsi. Hence, accessibility should not be an issue for them.

Finally, I will also use archival data to enrich the data. These archival data will include the Eucharistic liturgy and reports or video recordings of events related to Iranian converts in different research congregations I cannot attend. I will take notes from these archival data and review and reflect on the notes taken afterwards.

3.1.2.4c Data Analysis Plan

This study will adopt cross-case thematic analysis to address the RQs. It is defined as interpreting and assigning meaning to patterns with a thematic name that represents and interprets the patterns' implications after considering data together across different congregations and individuals.[250] Cross-case thematic analysis encompasses the following steps: transcribing raw materials, data coding, identifying and reflecting on patterns and themes, and finally, creating a structure with these themes for communicating the essence of what the data reveal about Iranian converts' experiences and understandings of the Eucharist.[251] The structure and the themes will provide the crucial elements of the lived experiences for theological reflection. Regarding transcribing, I will transcribe all the interviews. The audio files will be listened to again to verify the accuracy of the transcripts, and the transcripts will also be checked for discrepancies in the interview notes. Ideally, the participants should confirm the transcripts.

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[250] Ibid., p. 551.
[251] Ibid., pp. 630–31.

Checking the transcripts by individual Iranian participants will not be pursued because most participants likely have limited competency in reading English, and a proportion of interviews will involve interpreters. However, any uncertainties about the interview contents will be clarified with the participants concerned to confirm an accurate understanding. Before coding, I will reread all the materials to obtain an overall impression and initial thoughts. I will also make some reflexive notes on these thoughts and the process.

Abductive coding will be employed in the data analysis. It combines inductive and deductive thinking with logical underpinnings.[252] The inductive analysis aims to generate new concepts, explanations, results, or theories from the qualitative data. In contrast, deductive analysis determines how much the qualitative data supports the proposed concepts, explanations, results, or theories.[253] RQ2 aims to explore specific categories of Iranian converts' background, namely their Iranian cultural heritage, their religious conversion from Islam, their encounter with suffering and trauma, and how these may influence their understanding and experience of the Eucharist. Hence, the deductive approach will be appropriate. However, employing abductive coding will allow "surprises" to emerge from the data that can be relevant outside these categories. Abductive coding is described as a pragmatic way to think about data, directed by "astonishment, mystery, and breakdowns in one's understanding (abduction)".[254] Following the abductive coding, I will revisit the codes and data segments to understand the dataset and identify any prominent themes more comprehensively. This process will involve regrouping codes and data segments as I recognise the nuances of meaning within potential themes. I will also generate subthemes and decide which data segments to retain and which are redundant. At this stage, I will establish the names and definitions of the themes and how they should be organised. The identified themes will provide a valuable resource for theological reflection. After data analysis and theological reflection, I will perform "member-checking" as an

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252 Ibid., p. 561.
253 Ibid., pp. 541–42.
254 Svend Brinkmann, 'Doing Without Data', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20.6 (2014), 720–25.

additional approach to analytical triangulation to ensure correct understanding and interpretation. I will discuss the themes, the overarching structure, the theological reflection and construction from this study individually with the key Iranian leaders for each research congregation. Various opinions exist on whether checking in with participants to review findings is beneficial. "Member-checking" takes time and resources and has the risk of too much participants' influence on the researchers' interpretation, impacting the independence of findings. However, it also provides opportunities to correct any inaccuracies and misunderstandings. [255] Considering these factors, I believe "member-checking" is valuable, especially since I am not Iranian.

3.1.3 Pastoral cycle for theological reflection in practical theology

In this final section on methodology, I will explain the choice of using Ballard and Pritchard's pastoral cycle as the theological reflection structure. I will also discuss why I will adopt "revised mutual critical correlation", proposed by Swinton and Mowat[256] , as the theological reflection method at the third stage of "reflection" in the pastoral cycle. I want to highlight two issues here. The term "theological reflection" is somewhat confusing, as many will consider the whole pastoral cycle "theological reflection". However, Ballard and Pritchard also named the third stage "theological reflection" in their pastoral cycle.[257] To avoid confusion, in this thesis, I will call the process and stages of the pastoral cycle "theological reflection structure" and the third stage of reflection within the pastoral cycle "theological reflection method". Second, although the pastoral cycle will address all three RQs, its primary outcome will be for RQ3: proposing a contextualised theology and practices related to the Eucharist for Iranian converts from their lived experiences.

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[255] Patton, pp. 668–69.
[256] Swinton and Mowat, pp. 83–92.
[257] Ballard and Pritchard, pp. 126–44.

3.1.3.1 The pastoral cycle

The pastoral cycle is widely used within practical theology to offer a structure for theological reflection. Numerous variations of the pastoral cycle exist, and it likely originated from the "see-judge-act" model of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn in 1912. This approach has been widely adopted in various church traditions and settings, including liberation and pastoral theology. Its popularity increased further after the amplified use of the experiential learning model suggested by educational theorist David Kolb in his proposed learning cycle,[258] which was widely adopted in training various professionals.[259] Several practical theologians suggested their versions of the pastoral cycle with subtle differences. For instance, American practical theologian Richard Osmer called his theological reflection structure "the four tasks of practical theological interpretation" based on the pastoral cycle. These four theological tasks are descriptive-empirical, interpretative, normative, and pragmatic.[260] Dutch practical theologian Johannes van der Ven called his version "empirical theology", which includes the "experience cycle" and the "empirical-theological cycle". Both cycles have several phases, and this structure aims to improve hermeneutic-communicative praxis or to free it from constraints and expand its boundaries.[261]

In this study, I will employ the pastoral cycle described by Ballard and Pritchard, as shown in Figure 1. The pastoral cycle starts with experience in a given context.[262] This study will examine Iranian converts' experiences through qualitative research. The second stage is exploration, assessing and analysing the situation with other information.[263] In this study, I will draw on interdisciplinary knowledge from theological and non-theological disciplines for mutual conversations to gain further insights into Iranian converts' experiences. This exploration will

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[258] David A. Kolb and Ronald Fry, 'Towards an Applied Theory of Experiential Learning', in *Theories of Group Processes*, ed. by Cary L. Cooper (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976), pp. 33–57.

[259] Ballard and Pritchard, p. 82; Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, pp. 96–98.

[260] Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 4–12.

[261] Johannes Van der Ven, *Practical Theology: An Empirical Approach* (Leuven: Peeters Press, 1998), pp. 112–14, 120.

[262] Ballard and Pritchard, pp. 85, 96–112.

[263] Ibid., pp. 113–25.

address RQ2 and identify any further discoveries from their experiences. The third stage is theological reflection, which is the core of practical theology, aiming to "see where it fits into the mission of God". According to Ballard and Pritchard, it is the stage for combining the depth and complexity of the experience with insights from the Christian traditions to discover God's presence and action amidst this situation's contingencies.[264] In this study, I will correlate the qualitative findings with the Christian Scriptures and tradition to reflect on the theological dimensions of Iranian converts' unique context through the approaches of lived theology and contextual theology. The theological reflection will identify God's presence in Iranian converts' context through the Eucharist and help construct a contextualised theology related to the Eucharist. Ballard and Pritchard suggested various theological reflection methods, including applied theology, critical correlation, praxis, narrative, artistic and habitus.[265] In this study, "revised mutual critical correlation" by Swinton and Mowat will be used, and I will elaborate on it in the next section. The final stage is "action", and Ballard and Pritchard insisted that practical theology is "never an abstract and disembodied enterprise".[266] The action stage involves change, which can be cognitive, affective, behavioural, interpersonal, social and political, and spiritual. Change outcomes can also include educational activity, new attitudes, skills refinement, corrective action, new action, and prayer and celebration.[267] Whatever the outcomes are, they should be for Christ's mission and the final vision of God's Kingdom.[268] In this study, theological reflections and constructions will inform and formulate relevant practice revisions. The "reflection" and "action" stages will specifically address RQ3.

The primary advantage of Ballard and Pritchard's pastoral cycle is its straightforward structure for theological reflection, which focuses on process and method.[269] It also helps locate

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[264] Ibid., pp. 126–28.
[265] Ibid., pp. 129–44.
[266] Ibid., p. 162.
[267] Ibid., pp. 165–75.
[268] Ibid., pp. 175–76.
[269] Emmanuel Lartey, 'Practical Theology as a Theological Form', in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. by James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK; Carlton, Victoria, Australia: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 128–34 (p. 130).

the place and function of qualitative research methods and their relationship to the theological

dimensions of practical theology.[270] These strengths allow this thesis to be presented in a logical

structure. The pastoral cycle also starts with experience, and in this study, it is through qualitative

research methods. Hence, this fits well with our RQs, especially RQ1. However, the pastoral cycle

has limitations. First, it can dislocate theological reflection from how the Church should

continually link theology and practice. Second, it can become programmatic and overemphasise

the process and method. Practical theologians Kathleen Cahalan and James Nieman also

criticised the pastoral cycle's attempt to make theology into a specific stage in a structure during

the process. They argued that theology could appear to be switched off at some stages in the

pastoral cycle rather than theology shaping every aspect of the reflection. Cahalan and Nieman

believed that the pastoral cycle makes theology simply the application of abstract principles and

downplays the necessity for theology to be embedded in communities and practices.[271] I concur

with Cahalan and Nieman's concerns about this dislocation. However, I consider this more

related to the theologians rather than the pastoral cycle as the structure for theological

reflection *per se*. Ward highlighted the significance of the individual practitioners' identity and

their membership in the community in the ongoing conversation about theology and practice,

and the focus should not be only on the pastoral cycle as a method. In other words, the

theologian must be mindful of the necessity for theology to be present in all stages of theological

reflection.

Investigating practice and engaging with theology without using the pastoral cycle is

possible. For instance, practical theologian Christian Scharen's work on worship and ethics did

not follow stages nor start with experience. Scharen began with Christian ethics and theological

ideas and explored how worship and social-ethical commitment interact through empirical case

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[270] Swinton and Mowat, p. 92.

[271] Kathleen A Cahalan and James R. Nieman, 'Mapping the Field of Practical Theology', in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. by Dorothy C. Bass and Craig R. Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI ; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), pp. 62–85 (pp. 84–85).

studies of actual worshipping congregations.[272] Ward considered it a form of testing how theological assertions work practically.[273] Another example is Swinton and Mowat, who employed "complexifying" situations and contexts as their theological method in a study on chaplaincy in the UK.[274] This complexity is examined through the analysis of empirical data. The approach starts with experience, and the process of "complexifying" is to reveal that theological concerns and perception shape the depth of understanding and knowledge. Though this approach does not appear to follow various stages as in the pastoral cycle, Swinton and Mowat described a framework of four stages, which they mentioned is based on the pastoral cycle. However, they insisted that theology is not absent in the stages before theological reflection. They considered the stage of theological reflection as simply a stage for reflecting theologically in a more formal manner.[275] It is beyond this thesis to review all the types of theological reflection structures. Nonetheless, these two examples demonstrate that the pastoral cycle still has merits, especially if experience is a significant focus, as is the case in this study's RQ1, which enquires primarily about Iranian converts' experiences. Balancing various factors, I consider choosing the pastoral cycle as this study's primary theological structure justifiable. Besides the theological reflection structure, the issue of theological normativity is crucial in practical theology. In the next section, I will explain how this affects the choice of "revised mutual critical correlation" as the theological reflection method.

3.1.3.2 Revised mutual critical correlation as theological reflection method

I will adopt "revised mutual critical correlation" in this study. Swinton and Mowat proposed this correlation model as a counterpoint to the commonly employed theological reflection method in practical theology, "mutual critical correlation", which originates from Paul

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[272] Christian Scharen, *Public Worship and Public Work: Character and Commitment in Local Congregational Life* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004).
[273] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, p. 104.
[274] Swinton and Mowat, pp. 148–79.
[275] Ibid., pp. 89–92.

Tillich's method of correlations.[276] However, David Tracy developed it further as the "mutual critical correlation".[277] It is a model of integration that critically brings the situation, insights from the Christian tradition, and perspectives from other knowledge sources together for dialectical conversations. "Mutual critical correlation" respects and gives an equal voice to each conversation partner, and Christian tradition is not normative or prioritised in the conversations.[278] Theology is considered emergent and dialectic rather than revealed and applied. Therefore, qualitative data can challenge Christian theology on the same basis as theology and tradition can contest the qualitative research findings. However, Swinton and Mowat considered the interpretive dimension of "mutual critical correlation" theologically problematic and were concerned that "social sciences override theology on central issues". Hence, they proposed the revised version based on critical realism as the ontological underpinning, giving theology a logical priority. They acknowledged that contexts, histories, and traditions massively influence how God's revelation is interpreted and embodied. Theology should be subject to critical reflection and challenge. Nevertheless, qualitative data illuminates the lived experiences and does not inform us of the Christian "truth", like God's nature and meaning of life, which come through God's revelation.[279]

As I will adopt critical realism as the ontological foundation in this study, "revised mutual critical correlation" fits better as the theological reflection method and has a particular strength of balancing faithfulness to the Christian tradition and revelation with the critical review of faith practice and situation and bringing together theology and practice, including individuals' lived experiences. Essentially, theology is not separated from practice and lived experiences. This notion contrasts with other correlational approaches, like Don Browning's fundamental practical theology, which considers theology wholly independent and separated from lived experiences. Some practical theologians, like Elaine Graham and Gerben Heitink, criticised this complete

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[276] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), I, pp. 59–66.
[277] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 32–90.
[278] Swinton and Mowat, pp. 73–76.
[279] Ibid., pp. 72–79, 84–85.

separation in the correlational approach and advocated for a more interpretative and hermeneutical slant. They suggest theology has no authority in and of itself and only becomes normative if regarded by specific communities.[280] Swinton and Mowat's model pushes back on the hermeneutical approach.[281] However, their pushback does not go as far back as other theologians, like Thomas Oden and Ray Anderson, who hold a more conventional theological stance.[282] They considered that correlational and hermeneutical approaches to practical theology undermined the authority of theology and the Scriptures. Both hold theology in a much higher and normative position and disapprove of any critical evaluation of theology.[283] "Revised mutual critical correlation" attains a reasonable balance compared to the other models.

In summary, in this section on methodology, I have highlighted using practical theology as the overarching framework and the two approaches, lived theology and contextual theology, to address the three RQs. Qualitative research will be used to understand Iranian converts' context and lived experiences related to the Eucharist. This study will employ various data collection methods and cross-case thematic analysis. The qualitative research findings will address RQ1 on Iranian converts' experiences, which will be fed into the pastoral cycle as the theological reflection structure to address RQ2 and RQ3. In particular, "revised mutual critical correlation" will be used as the primary theological reflection method to identify where God is among Iranian converts' experiences and understandings of the Eucharist and help to construct a contextualised theology related to the Eucharist in Iranian converts' context.

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[280] Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002); Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).
[281] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, pp. 77–94.
[282] Thomas C. Oden, *Care of Souls in the Classic Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); Ray S Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001).
[283] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, pp. 77–94.

3.2   Research Method

After explaining the methodology, I will focus on how this study's qualitative research was conducted, particularly to address RQ1 and provide the lived experiences for RQ2 and RQ3. First, I will highlight the ethical considerations, including using interpreters in data collection. Second, I will describe the details of recruiting the research congregations and participants, the data collection procedures and the data analysis process. I will also explain additional data collection after a preliminary finding from the qualitative data and particular situations during fieldwork. These methods include two more group interviews with non-Iranian congregation members and additional questions asked through digital written surveys on two occasions. Finally, I will explain the quality control of this study using qualitative research quality and credibility indicators.

3.2.1   Ethical consideration and using interpreters

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University. I drafted the information sheet in English, which was translated into Farsi to facilitate the participants' understanding. Appendix Two contains a copy of the English and Farsi information sheet and consent form. Participants were given opportunities to ask questions about the study, with a Farsi interpreter if necessary, and give written consent. The issues of anonymity and confidentiality were discussed explicitly with the participants because of the sensitivity of religious conversion and persecution.

Using interpreters poses several ethical and logistic challenges. First, confidentiality can be a concern as the interpreter is a third party. Second, meaning may be lost or mistranslated through the interpreting process, especially since this study's research topic is specific and "technical"; an ordinary interpreter may not know those terms related to the Eucharist and Christianity. Norwegian researcher Axel Borchgrevink criticised the "silence" of language competency issues and using interpreters in ethnography, a qualitative research method used in

anthropology. Borchgrevink believed that the problems connected with interpreter use can be overcome or reduced through awareness and training. He advocated for ethnographers working with interpreters, which has clear advantages over struggling with a beginner's knowledge of an unfamiliar language. He suggested that, ideally, more than one local interpreter should be used. Training interpreters and how the interviews are conducted are crucial. The researcher should have some basic knowledge of the language to allow discussions regarding translation and language.[284] In this study, these concerns were addressed at various levels. The two interpreters used were Christian believers who understood Christian terminology in Farsi. I trained these interpreters, emphasising the importance of confidentiality and merely translating what the participants said. Their confidentiality agreement was obtained before the study. I used to work as a psychiatrist and had experience using interpreters to conduct interviews. I also can understand and read some basic Farsi, but I cannot competently conduct the interviews and understand the participants' responses in Farsi. I asked another independent Iranian interpreter to translate all the interview questions from English to Farsi, and the interview interpreters had a copy to refer to during the interviews to ensure consistency across research congregations. All participants were informed that an interpreter might be used and were allowed to decide whether they wanted to participate in that interpreter's presence. Although the ideal situation would be that I had enough Farsi to conduct the interviews by myself or that Iranian believers could carry out this research, all these measures should have addressed the challenges of using interpreters and ensuring data reliability.

3.2.2   Recruitment of research congregations and participants and Data Collection Process

Three research congregations (*St Matthew's, St Cuthbert's* and *Agape Fellowship*)[285] from different parts of Britain were selected for participant observations. 13 participants from

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[284] Axel Borchgrevink, 'Silencing Language: Of Anthropologists and Interpreters', *Ethnography*, 4.1 (2003), 95.
[285] To protect the individual convert's identity, the names of the congregations were changed.

these congregations were recruited for interviews. The descriptions of these congregations and participants can be found in Chapter Four. These research congregations come from different traditions and arrangements within the CoE: one from the evangelical tradition and one from the liberal catholic tradition. *Agape Fellowship* was a CoE fellowship for Iranians who met monthly for the Eucharist, led by an Iranian priest. These variations reflected the CoE's vital characteristic as a "broad church" with different theological understandings of the Eucharist. This "sample size" was chosen to allow detailed observations and knowledge of each congregation's context, balancing with time and resource constraints. My relationship with the Iranian "link person" in each research congregation allowed trust to be built with Iranian converts for data collection, which is essential as an outsider researcher. The restriction of time and resources and the number of link persons I found and knew limited the selection of research congregations. For instance, I could not find a "link person" for a CoE church in a more charismatic tradition.

The 13 participants were recruited to include Iranian converts with diverse demographics, as suggested in Section 3.1.2.4a. I have highlighted the complexity of sample size in qualitative research. A degree of saturation was finally reached as the last few interviewees did not provide much additional information.   There were also restrictions on Iranian converts' willingness to discuss their faith experiences with me as an "outsider" and the time required to conduct detailed participant observations in three locations. However, I considered these 13 participants appropriate and sufficient to reflect Iranian converts' lived experiences in the CoE. I conducted all 13 individual interviews between January 2022 and April 2022. Five interviews required Farsi interpreters, and the others were conducted in English. All interviews except three were conducted online via videoconferencing as the participants' preference. All participants were offered breaks during the interview and debriefing to ensure their well-being. Table 1 summarises the time I spent conducting interviews. The variations depended on the participant's responses and whether an interpreter was used.   The number of participants from each congregation reflected the number of Iranians in that research congregation, and *St Matthew's* had many more Iranians.

Participant observations in all three congregations happened between October 2021 and September 2022 on 21 occasions. I attended 14 Eucharist services (six Sundays at *St Matthew's*, five Sundays at *St Cuthbert's*, and three Saturday Eucharists across three months at *Agape Fellowship*) and other relevant non-Eucharistic events at *St Matthew's* and *St Cuthbert's.* The five non-Eucharistic events at *St Matthew's* included a Sunday baptism service, a Sunday memorial service for an Iranian in the congregation who died, the Racial Justice Sunday service, and a Sunday worship service after the late Queen's death. I also joined the lunch celebration at *St Matthew's* after the Sunday Eucharist on the day of *Nowruz* (Iranian New Year) in March 2022. For *St Cuthbert's*, the two non-Eucharistic events included an in-person pre-baptismal class about the Eucharist and an evening beach celebration on *Chahar-shanbeh Suri* [286] in March 2022. On all occasions, I took detailed field notes during or immediately after the events and took some photographs with permission.

Moreover, nine of the 13 participants took part in the digital written surveys through text messaging on up to four occasions. Six were from *St Matthew's,* and three were from *St Cuthbert's*. Between January and March 2022, 28 "data points" were collected. The following archival data were also used: First, the authorised Persian translation of the CoE Eucharistic liturgy was examined.[287] Second, I read the social media communications of both *St Cuthbert's* and *Agape Fellowship* about their *Nowruz* events in 2022, as I could not attend because I was a participant observer at *St Matthew's* then. *St Cuthbert's* had a baptism and a post-baptism gathering on that day of *Nowruz,* while *Agape Fellowship* held a *Nowruz* party the day before *Nowruz.* Third, I watched a special programme online for *Nowruz* 2022 (Persian Year 1401) with a Farsi interpreter.[288] This 90-minute programme was recommended by the participant *Babak* and produced by the Farsi Christian television channel *SAT-7 PARS*, which broadcasts a special

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[286] See Glossary.
[287] Archbishops' Council, the Church of England, 'Holy Communion (Order One) - English and Persian', 2018 <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/Eucharist%20English%20Persian.pdf>.
[288] SATS-7 PARS, 'برنامه نوروز ۱۴۰۱ ویژه (Translation - Special Programme for Nowruz Persian Year 1401)', 20 Mar 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8Qck9hb2DA>.

Nowruz programme annually. Finally, I also watched two more video recordings: the online baptismal preparation class conducted by *St Matthew's* priest in January 2022 and the recording of *St Cuthbert's* Eucharist service for Racial Justice Sunday in February 2022. Again, I was at *St Matthew's* for their Racial Justice Sunday service. I made notes while watching the *Nowruz* programme and these video recordings.

Congregation	Name (Gender, age)	Length of interviews in minutes
St Matthew's	*Aziz* (Male, 36) *	128.5
	Sara (Female, 32) *	121.5
	Leila (Female, 35)	125.6
	Shirin (Female, 58)	156.3
	Zoran (Male, 33) *	187.8
	Hamid (Male, 35)	156.0
	Nader (Male, 50)	122.0
St Cuthbert's	*Sheila* (Female, 36)	114.6
	Mahmoud (Male, 52)	118.4
	Maryam (Female, 48) *	108.1
	Hiva (Male, 35) *	138.5
Agape Fellowship	*Reza* (Male, 42)	109.6
	Babak (Male, 41)	183.0

Table 1 Summary of Interviews (indicates Farsi interpreters required)*

3.2.3   Additional Data Collection

I conducted two additional unscheduled data collection procedures because of preliminary findings from interviews and participant observations during fieldwork. Further ethical approval was obtained for the additional data collection. Qualitative researcher Patton highlighted that "being open to following wherever the data lead" is essential for qualitative

fieldwork.[289] First, for participants from *St Matthew's*, additional questions were asked in Farsi through digital written surveys on two occasions because of circumstances at *St Matthew's*. The first occasion was in February 2022, after the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy, which had Farsi translation alongside English on the screen for that particular Eucharistic service. The additional question was about the translation provision: "*There was a Farsi translation on the screen during the Holy Communion. Do you find the Farsi translation helpful? In what way is it helpful or not helpful?"* Five out of six participants responded. The second occasion was on *Nowruz* 2022, and the Sunday Eucharist at *St Matthew's* was conducted primarily in Farsi for the first time. Two additional questions were asked: (1) "*What is your opinion about the service this morning at church, which is mainly in Farsi?*"; (2) "*Today is Nowruz. Is your experience of the Holy Communion this morning different from other days? If so, what is the difference, and why?*" Four participants responded.

Second, two additional one-off group interviews with five *St Matthew's* non-Iranian congregation members were conducted in March 2022 in response to a preliminary finding from some participants' interviews and my participant observations. These two group interviews explored whether this preliminary finding, explained in Chapter Four, was specific to Iranian converts or a general trend in the British church that Iranian converts attended. One group included three members of the majority race (two women, *Mary* [aged 76] and *Tracey* [aged 61], and one man, *John* [aged 55]), and the other group had two members from non-Iranian minority ethnics (a woman of Pakistani heritage, *Sarah* [aged 27], and a Black South African man, *Duncan* [in his early 50s]). In the group interviews, I asked these non-Iranians in English the same questions about the Eucharist I asked Iranian converts (i.e., Part B of the interview questions). It is worth noting that these non-Iranians in the group interviews, on average, believed in Christianity longer than most Iranian convert participants because of *St Matthew's* congregation demographics*.

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[289] Patton, p. 299.

3.2.4 Data Analysis and Quality Indicators

I transcribed all the interviews, including the group interviews, from the digital audio recordings using the Express Scribe Transcription software version 11.00.[290] Only the contents in English were transcribed for interviews with interpreters. I listened to the audio files again and checked the transcripts against my interview notes to verify accuracy. A transcript example is in Appendix Three. All the transcripts, participant observation notes, messages and translations from the digital written surveys, and typed notes related to the archival data were securely stored digitally and uploaded to qualitative data management software NVivo 14[291] for coding by myself in two stages. First, I did a round of open coding across the entire dataset using abductive coding. I identified relevant data segments and assigned those segments a meaning (inductive approach) or one of these specific categories (deductive approach): Iranian cultural heritage, religious conversion from Islam and experiences of suffering and trauma. In the second stage, I looked at the data and the codes generated from the first stage again. I grouped the codes according to any pattern of related meanings, including those within specific categories. I also re-coded some data segments. The NVivo software was instrumental in streamlining the coding process and visualising how the themes and subthemes were interconnected to form a structure. After coding, I identified three themes from the data set, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Quality and credibility are crucial for qualitative research methods. Patton suggested three criteria to judge qualitative inquiry quality: systematic and in-depth fieldwork for data collection, logical and conscientious data analysis, and the researcher's credibility. I consider this study to meet these quality indicators. For data collection, triangulation of qualitative data sources, such as interviews, observations, digital written surveys, and archival data, was employed to increase confidence in the confirmed patterns and themes. The data sources

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[290] 'Express Scribe Transcription Software' (Greenwood Village, CO: NCH Software) <https://www.nch.com.au/scribe/>.
[291] 'NVivo' (Denver, CO: QSR International, 2022) <https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/>.

involved the purposefully selected three research congregations with distinct church traditions and characteristics. I also used purposeful sampling for the participants. Purposeful sampling improves the generalisation of the qualitative findings.[292] Moreover, this study's data analysis is rigorous, and additional data collection was done when an unanticipated but significant pattern emerged in the early data analysis stage. This constant evaluation allowed the exploration of further evidence and alternative explanations to improve data analysis quality. After data analysis and theological reflection, I also performed "member-checking". I discussed the themes, the overarching structure from the qualitative data, the theological reflection and the construction with the three key Iranian leaders (*Nader, Mahmoud* and *Babak*) for each congregation individually to identify potential misinterpretations and inaccuracies. I believe "member-checking" is valuable in enhancing the credibility of data analysis. Finally, I have expertise in conducting cross-cultural interviews in my previous role, with or without an interpreter. I had also conducted theological qualitative research before.[293] I discussed my reflexive process and considered how my background and experiences could influence how this study was shaped and conducted. These various elements supported the researcher's credibility.

3.3   Chapter Summary

This chapter highlights that this research employed practical theology as the overarching research framework to address the three RQs, using two approaches, namely lived theology and contextual theology. I also utilised qualitative research methods to understand Iranian converts' contexts and their lived experiences related to the Eucharist, adopting critical realism as this study's ontological basis. Multiple data collection methods were used to understand the situation better. Through cross-case thematic analysis, key themes from the qualitative data were identified to allow Iranian converts' lived experiences to feed into the pastoral cycle as the

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[292] Patton, p. 719.
[293] Tsoi.

structure for theological reflection and construction. The qualitative data was further explored and analysed with interdisciplinary knowledge, and "revised mutual critical correlation" was used as the theological reflection method. The correlation of the qualitative data findings with Christian Scriptures and tradition will aim to identify where God is among Iranian converts' experiences and understandings of the Eucharist and help to construct a contextualised theology related to the Eucharist in Iranian converts' context, including any necessary practice revisions. In the next chapter, I will present three themes identified from the qualitative data. These themes are linked to Iranian converts' cultural identities, religious conversion, and traumatic experiences. An overarching structure of "tensions" emerged from the themes, supporting the argument of discordance among Iranian converts. The qualitative data findings provided a rich theological reflection and construction resource for Chapters Five and Six.

Chapter Four: Discordance among Iranian Christian converts

This chapter will present the thematic analysis of the qualitative data from the 13 participants in the three research congregations.[294] Three themes related to the Eucharist were identified, each showing various tensions. These tensions contributed to overall discordance among Iranian converts, internally and externally, when they connected to the world, including the Church. In this study, discordance is defined as "disagreement, conflict, lack of harmony or concord"[295], and the term is often used to describe "incongruity" in the English translation of the French philosopher Paul Ricœur's work on understanding time and narratives.[296] The qualitative data in this chapter supports the argument of the first part of the thesis: the lived experiences of Iranian converts from Islam in the CoE demonstrated discordance related to their cultural identities, religious conversion, and traumatic experiences. Before presenting the themes, I will describe the research congregations and the participants' characteristics. The first theme focuses on converts' cultural identities ("cultural self") and reports the tension between the continuity and discontinuity of their cultural identities through their participation in the Eucharist.   This tension is expanded in the second theme, focusing on converts' interpersonal relationships and highlighting the tension between the Iranian tradition of being communal and their mistrust of others as observed through their participation in the Eucharist. This tension demonstrates the complexity of these Iranians' "social self" when interacting with one another, the Church, and society. The final theme about their "inner self" recounts their suffering and trauma, which generated tension *per se*; particularly, their suffering and trauma primarily came from their religious conversion. There was also a "trauma-faith" paradox that created further "inner self" tension. Although Iranian converts had trauma and suffering because of their conversion, paradoxically, they persisted in their Christian faith rather than quitting as an anticipated

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[294] The names of all participants and research congregations were changed.
[295] Oxford English Dictionary, 'Discordance' (Oxford University Press, 2023), Oxford English Dictionary <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2363993776>.
[296] Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (The University of Chicago Press, 1990) <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb04912.0001.001> [accessed 5 May 2024].

response generally to suffering and traumatic experiences. This "inner self" tension was further extended by some converts who reported triggering feelings and thoughts from the Eucharist because of the narrative of Jesus's betrayal, sacrifice and trauma, mirroring their experience of betrayal and suffering.   Although these three themes are distinct, they relate to one another, contributing to discordance. These tensions underpin the analysis and the constructive theology of the later chapters, pointing to the second part of the thesis: discordance underpins the contextual understanding and practice related to the Eucharist for Iranian converts in the CoE and the Church, potentially making the Eucharist a source of reconciliation and new life for Iranian converts.

4.1   Descriptions of the research congregations and participants

I will first describe the three research congregations and the thirteen participants recruited for interviews. The first congregation is *St Matthew's*, an urban parish church in a deprived area of a city in the Midlands. The church is from the evangelical tradition within the CoE, and I knew the congregation personally before the research. According to the Church Urban Fund data from 2020, the parish is among the most deprived in Britain. [297] It is also one of the most ethnically diverse within its diocese, and 62.9% of the parish population is minority ethnic. The Eucharist[298] is celebrated in English every fortnight on Sunday mornings. The parish priest does not wear vestments, as is generally the case in more traditional and liturgical CoE churches.[299] There are no gestures and actions like in a more liturgical service, such as processing before the service, bowing, or raising the Eucharistic host. The Eucharistic liturgy is based on CW.[300] The church uses conventional sliced bread for the Eucharist. There were 131 people on

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[297] Church Urban Fund, 'CUF Look Up Tool', *Church Urban Fund* <https://cuf.org.uk/lookup-tool> [accessed 28 February 2023]. – Specific link to the data of the parish was not shown here for identity protection, but details can be obtained directly from the researcher.

[298] In *Case A*, St Matthew's, the term "Holy Communion" is generally used in the congregation rather than the "Eucharist".

[299] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Visit 1*, 21 November 2021.

[300] Archbishops' Council, the Church of England, *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000).

St Matthew's 2022 electoral roll, including 43 Iranians.[301] Only 26% of the congregation on the electoral roll live inside the parish boundary. On average, the attendance at Sunday morning Eucharist is about 120, with 30 to 40 Iranians attending. Cross-cultural ministry, particularly among Iranians, is vital to *St Matthew's*, and they have two Farsi gatherings for Iranians weekly. These meetings used to be in person at church but moved online after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The second congregation is *St Cuthbert's*, a city centre church in the North of England. The church is of liberal catholic tradition within the CoE. It has been a member of the Inclusive Church Network since 2021, which "celebrates and affirms every person and does not discriminate".[302] According to 2021 census data, 94.6% of the city population is White.[303] *St Cuthbert's* used to have a full-time priest who retired in 2021, and four part-time associate priests were serving in the church. Sunday mornings have two services in English: the weekly Sung Eucharist, which follows the CW liturgy, and the informal all-age service after the Sung Eucharist. The Eucharist was traditional and liturgical; the priests wore an alb and stole for the Eucharists. There was a short procession before the Eucharistic service, and the priest bowed before the altar. During the consecration, the priest raised the Eucharistic host and the chalice and genuflected after the consecration prayer.[304] Incense was previously used during the Eucharist before the Covid-19 pandemic. *St Cuthbert's* has a long history of welcoming asylum seekers and refugees, including Iranians, and the church was a key stakeholder when the city joined the "City of Sanctuary" movement.[305] The church used to have a Farsi service in the evening. However, it was later combined with the Sunday morning services to help Iranians integrate with the wider congregation at *St Cuthbert's*. During the research, *St Cuthbert's*

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[301] *The Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) Report of St Matthew's, 2021-22* (St Matthew's, 24 April 2022).

[302] Inclusive Church Network, 'The IC Statement – Inclusive Church', *Inclusive Church* <https://www.inclusive-church.org/the-ic-statement/> [accessed 1 March 2023].

[303] Office for National Statistics (ONS), '2021 Official Census Data of Population', *Nomis* <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021> [accessed 1 March 2023]. - a specific link to the data of the parish was not shown here for identity protection, but details can be obtained directly from the researcher.

[304] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Visit 1*, 24 October 2021; Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Visit 5*, 6 February 2022.

[305] 'City of Sanctuary', *City of Sanctuary UK* <https://cityofsanctuary.org/> [accessed 1 March 2023].

provided refugee drop-ins and a weekly online Bible study group for Iranians with Farsi translation. For the Sunday Sung Eucharists, on average, there are five to ten Iranians among a majority White congregation of about 40.

The third congregation, *Agape Fellowship*, was included as it was distinct from the other two congregations. They meet monthly on a Saturday afternoon for the Eucharist and fellowship in Farsi, using the meeting space of a CoE parish church in a major city in the South of England. All who attended were Iranians or related to some Iranians in the *Fellowship*. In the past, *Agape Fellowship* was mainly for those Iranian Anglicans who had been Christians for some time in Iran and had migrated to Britain. The *Fellowship* provides an opportunity for them to meet and support one another. The *Fellowship's* focus shifted in the last few years as more Iranians converted to Christianity and came to Britain. A CoE priest of Iranian heritage was appointed to develop *Agape Fellowship* further and nurture the new Iranian converts. This appointment is sessional. The priest is also the vicar of another English-speaking CoE parish, and he started the Farsi Eucharistic service during the *Fellowship*, using the CoE-authorised Farsi translation of the Eucharistic liturgy.[306]   There were no vestments or liturgical gestures during the Eucharist in the *Fellowship*. On average, about 15 Iranians attend this monthly Farsi Eucharist service. Most also attend other English-speaking churches, primarily the CoE churches, on Sundays.

Thirteen participants from these three congregations were recruited for individual interviews. Table 2 summarises their demographics. Nine participants also contributed to the digital written surveys. Five participants were women, and two Iranians were Kurdish in ethnicity. Eight participants lived in the UK for less than three years. However, four interviewees (including both participants from *Agape Fellowship*) lived in the UK for over ten years. *Shirin and Mahmoud* lived in Iran before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, while all other participants were born after that. *Babak* from *Agape Fellowship* used to work as an underground church leader in Iran and had

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[306] The Church of England, 'Additional Resources for Worship - Persian', *The Church of England* <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/additional-resources-worship> [accessed 2 March 2023].

some informal theological training. [307] The other participants had no theological training. Apart from the two Kurdish Iranians who were Sunni Muslims before conversion, all other participants were ex-Shi'ite Muslims. These participants reported variable degrees of practice of their previous Islamic faith. Some described being "religious" and practising Islam faithfully before conversion. [308] *Aziz's* grandfather was a mullah (Islamic clergy). [309] Several participants considered themselves "*not religious*" with their previous Islamic faith. [310] Regarding their conversions, *Sara, Nader,* and *Reza* converted in Britain, and the other ten participants converted to Christianity in Iran. They had been Christians from two to twenty-four years, with four participants over ten years, including both from *Agape Fellowship.* All participants were baptised outside Iran except *Babak*, who was baptised in Iran when it was tolerated.[311]

4.2   Theme One – *Eucharist and the "cultural self"*: Tension between continuity and discontinuity of converts' cultural identities

Through the observations and the reported experiences of Iranian convert participants' partaking of the Eucharist and their church involvement, the first theme highlights the tensions when their Iranian cultural identities, which were influenced by other religions, conflicted with the British cultures within the CoE context and with their newly acquired Christian identities through conversion. Notably, Iranian culture intertwined with two religions, Islam and Zoroastrianism, causing tensions with Iranian converts' Christian faith. I will present two main identified elements of tension in this section. First, tension occurred when Iranian converts navigated how to keep their cultural heritage and learn and adapt to the host British culture as Iranian diasporas in the CoE context. This tension is illustrated by two observations: converts'

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[307] Babak, 'Transcript', Interview Online, 20 February 2022.

[308] Aziz, 'Transcript', Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter, 5 January 2022; Hamid, 'Transcript', Interview In-Person, 13 February 2022.

[309] Aziz, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.

[310] Leila, 'Transcript', Interview Online, 22 January 2022; Shirin, 'Transcript', Interview Online, 28 January 2022; Zoran, 'Transcript', Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter, 5 January 2022; Nader, 'Transcript', Interview Online, 27 February 2022; Mahmoud, 'Transcript', Interview Online, 24 January 2022.

[311] Babak.

dilemma in choosing between Farsi and English in saying the Lord's Prayer during the Eucharist and their participation in two culturally highly "British" events in their churches: Remembrance Sunday and the memorial of the Queen's death. This tension was also exhibited through Iranian converts' perception of whether Christianity is a "Western religion".

Congregation	Name (Gender, age)	Highest education level	Status in the UK	Time outside Iran	Number of years since their conversion to Christianity
St Matthew's	*Aziz* (Male, 36) * #	University degree	Asylum seeker	5 months (18 months in Greece before)	5 years
	Sara (Female, 32) * #	Secondary school	Asylum seeker	2 years	2 years
	Leila (Female, 35) #	University degree	Asylum seeker	5 months (2 years in Germany before)	3 years
	Shirin (Female, 58) #	University degree	Refugee	17 years	18 years
	Zoran (Male, 33) * # [Kurdish Iranian]	University degree (not finished)	Asylum seeker	8 months (32 months in Germany before)	5 years
	Hamid (Male, 35) #	University degree	Refugee	7 years	8 years
	Nader (Male, 50)	University degree	Refugee	22 years	13 years
St Cuthbert's	*Sheila* (Female, 36) #	Master degree	Refugee	20 months	2 years
	Mahmoud (Male, 52) #	Master degree	Refugee	2 years	4 years
	Maryam (Female, 48) * #	Secondary school	Refugee	3 years	4 years
	Hiva (Male, 35) * [Kurdish Iranian]	University degree (not finished)	Asylum seeker	20 months	3 years
Agape Fellowship	*Reza* (Male, 42)	Postgraduate Diploma	Refugee	19 years	19 years
	Babak (Male, 41)	University degree (not finished)	Refugee	10 years	24 years

Table 2 Summary of Participants' Demographics (indicates Farsi interpreters required for interview; # indicates interviewees agreed to participate in the digital written survey through text messaging)*

Second, tension arose from how Iranian converts incorporated Iranian cultural components of Islam and Zoroastrianism into their understanding and practices of the Christian faith. This element is demonstrated by observing the potential conflicts in their celebration of *Nowruz*, the Iranian New Year, as Christians, and how converts associated their understandings of the Eucharist with *Nowruz* and metaphors originated from their cultural heritage, influenced by other religions. Although it was beneficial, or even crucial, for Iranian converts to combine their cultural heritage with their Christian faith, some cultural traditions carried the other religions' theologies and practices, potentially contradicting the Christian faith.   The contradictions caused tensions among converts, who showed various opinions and acceptance of this combination.   I will also explain how Iranian converts attempt to diminish the tension by re-interpreting some Christian theology and practices to facilitate combining their Iranian cultures with the Christian faith. Nevertheless, this attempt could paradoxically increase the tension rather than diminish it because of the contradictions between their cultural heritage and Christian theology and practices.

4.2.1   Remaining Iranian or becoming British?

4.2.1.1 The Lord's Prayer: English or Farsi?

The tension between how Iranian converts attempted to keep their cultural heritage and adapt to the host British culture as diaspora is first illustrated by these converts choosing English or Farsi in partaking in the English-speaking Eucharist in *St Matthew's* and *St Cuthbert's*. Farsi translations of the Eucharistic liturgy were provided in both churches, including the Lord's Prayer. Some converts (e.g. *Zoran, Hamid*) were optimistic about the Farsi translation provision.[312] Nevertheless, providing Farsi translation outside the existing CoE-authorised Farsi liturgy required labour and time. I spoke to a lay preacher at *St Matthew's*, who told me that translating

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[312] Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.

her sermon was impossible as she could only finish writing it the day before.[313] Still, *St Matthew's* and *St Cuthbert's* employed Farsi whenever possible to engage with their Iranian congregation. For instance, during my visits, a non-Iranian priest at *St Cuthbert's* said parts of the Eucharistic liturgy in English and Farsi.[314] At *St Matthew's*, the non-Iranian lay minister used a short Iranian video clip in Farsi with English subtitles featuring Persian poet Hafiz's poem on love and the Iranian Islamic practice of visiting the graveyard to remember the departed.[315] Using the video message as an illustration, the lay minister preached about God's love and the significance of resolving conflicts. The responses from Iranians in the congregation were remarkably positive, and some even applauded at the end of the sermon.[316]

Although these converts appreciated the churches' efforts to engage with Farsi and Iranian culture, their engagement with the liturgy during the Eucharist was somewhat shallow. At *St Matthew's* and *St Cuthbert's*, the converts participated in the Eucharistic liturgy either by not responding or responding in English, despite the Farsi translation.[317] I also did not observe any *of St Cuthbert's* Iranian converts taking the Farsi liturgy booklet that was provided.[318] In the interviews, I asked how these participants said the Lord's Prayer at the Eucharist, as it was the most consistent part of the Eucharistic liturgy that the Farsi translation was provided. Most interviewees reported saying the Lord's Prayer during the Eucharist in English. This choice of using English did not relate to their English proficiency. These participants suggested three reasons for saying the Lord's Prayer in English. First, several considered joining in the Eucharistic liturgy in English could improve their English.[319] Second, some participants expressed a

[313] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Visit 4*, 16 January 2022.
[314] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Visit 1*, 24 October 2021; Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Visit 2*, 14 November 2021.
[315] *Thursday Appointment*, 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXx_Hw34V-Q> [accessed 28 April 2023].
[316] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Visit 4*.
[317] Ibid.
[318] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Visit 1*; Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Visit 2*.
[319] Sara, 'Transcript', Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter, 15 January 2022; Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Maryam, 'Transcript', Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter, 15 February 2022; Babak.

preference for English over Farsi. *Sheila* mentioned she "*got better vibes when people talk in English*" and struggled with people talking about God in Farsi because of her unpleasant experience with Farsi-speaking Iranian Islamic clerics.[320] Likewise, *Mahmoud* considered a better connection with God when using English.[321] Third, most participants said the Lord's Prayer in English only in the church, and they said it in Farsi at home or with other Iranians. [322] *Maryam* mentioned she did so because "*everybody is praying in English*".[323]

This preference for English generated tension about liturgy's primary function for these converts: Is it to understand and practise their Christian faith or to learn the English language and culture? *Hiva*, *St. Cuthbert's* Kurdish Iranian, was the exception, saying the Lord's Prayer in Farsi or the Kurdish Sorani. He stated that the priest mentioned in the baptism preparation class that individuals could pray in their language. Therefore, *Hiva* said the Lord's Prayer in the languages he understood.[324] *Babak* also described a similar reason for saying the Lord's Prayer in Farsi until two years ago. He said, "*What's the point if I don't understand?*" He changed to say it in English as *Babak* explored ministry within the CoE. *Babak* mentioned that in the English-speaking CoE church he attended regularly, the clergy stated that people could say the Lord's Prayer in their languages.[325] This tension between understanding and practising the faith and learning the English language and culture from the liturgy was also observed outside the Lord's Prayer. *Sara* stated that many converts, including herself, had limited English proficiency and often struggled to understand the church services. She learnt the faith much better in Farsi during the midweek discipleship classes.[326] The Eucharist at *Agape Fellowship* was conducted in Farsi; hence, this tension was minimal. *Reza* from *Agape Fellowship* spoke fluent English. He described having the Farsi Eucharist once a month at the *Fellowship* as "*helpful*". He believed

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[320] Sheila, 'Transcript', Interviewed Online, 13 January 2022.
[321] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[322] Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[323] Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[324] Hiva, 'Transcript', Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter, 12 April 2022.
[325] Babak.
[326] Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.

hearing the Farsi Lord's Prayer connected him to his cultural roots.[327] Hence, Iranian converts found the Farsi liturgy beneficial for understanding the Christian faith and retaining cultural identities. Nevertheless, there was an urge to learn the English language and culture to adapt to the host country and the English-speaking churches, causing tension in how these converts could keep their cultural heritage and adapt to British culture as the diasporas. This tension is further illustrated by two more examples: how Iranian converts participated in two highly British events in their churches, Remembrance Sunday and the memorial of the Queen's death, and converts' opinions on whether Christianity is a "Western religion".

4.2.1.2 Remembrance Sunday, the Queen's death, and Christianity as a "Western" religion

This tension between keeping their Iranian heritage and learning the host English culture was also seen in converts' participation in Remembrance Sunday and memorialising the late British monarch. I was present at *St Cuthbert's* Sunday Eucharist on the Remembrance Sunday.[328] The priests at *St Cuthbert's* had the Act of Remembrance at the end of the Eucharist service. The priest mentioned in his sermon in English the Iran-Iraq war as an illustration of the war's devastating effect. The Eucharist president also said some liturgy in both English and Farsi. However, Iranians in that service appeared puzzled about the Act of Remembrance, which included singing the British national anthem and observing the two-minute silence. I spoke to *Sheila,* who said she had no idea about the Act of Remembrance. *Mahmoud* indicated his awareness of Remembrance Sunday but believed most Iranians at *St Cuthbert's* knew nothing about it. However, *St Cuthbert's* Iranian converts participated in that Act of Remembrance by following what other people did.   Again, tension was noticed in this Remembrance Sunday service. The church attempted to engage with converts using their language and events known to them. Nevertheless, these converts had minimal awareness of Remembrance Sunday, a highly

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[327] Reza, 'Transcript', Interview Online, 18 February 2022.
[328] See Glossary.

British cultural event, within the CoE, the established national church. In the church, they followed and imitated others to partake in the Act of Remembrance, which carries significant political and military meanings that these Iranians were likely unaware of.[329]

Similar tension was also observed at *St Matthew's* non-Eucharistic Sunday service in September 2022, a few days after the Queen's death. Iranian converts actively participated in the CoE-supported national mourning, demonstrating their willingness to integrate with the British culture. The monarchy is considered crucial in British cultural heritage. On the Sunday following the Queen's death, *St Matthew's* churchwarden *Susan* started the service by announcing the Queen's death. She asked the congregation to observe a two-minute silence and sing the national anthem. All *St Matthew's* Iranian converts participated in these memorial acts. *Nader* sent *St Matthew's* Iranians a message the previous day about the Queen's death and asked Iranians to bring something to "*reflect the nation's mood*". A memorial corner was set up at the back of *St Matthew's* (Picture 1). Some Iranians brought flowers and "*halva*" [330] to commemorate the monarch.   "*Halva*" is traditional Iranian mourning food, and a church member suggested the idea of having "*halva*" instead of biscuits as conventional refreshments after the church service, as her friend made "*halva*" with a picture of the Queen (Picture 2).[331]

The tension between keeping Iranian heritage and learning the British tradition was again noted in this memorial of the Queen's death. These converts attempted to make sense of British culture.   First, they conformed to the norm, as seen in their Remembrance Sunday participation. Then, they had their Iranian traditions alongside the British ones, as demonstrated in the memorial corner and the "*halva*" during a British-style memorial service, creating some form of hybridity, focusing on the common ground in humanity, namely grieving for the monarch's death. The tension generated by the two cultural heritages was reduced by allowing different but unique cultural expressions of the common humanity as acts of solidarity.

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[329] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Visit 2.*
[330] See Glossary.
[331] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Visit 10*, 11 September 2022.

Picture 1 Memorial corner at St Matthew's with "Halva"

Picture 2 "Halva" with the Queen's face

The close link between these British cultural heritages and the CoE could further contribute to Iranian converts' tension regarding their perception of the Church and Christianity. The CoE, as the national established church, has a unique "church-state" relationship in England. The notion of Christianity as a "Western" religion was widespread in Iranian Islamic regime propaganda. In the interviews, all participants disagreed that Christianity was a "Western"

religion, even though this notion was prevalent among Iranians. Many now advocated that Christianity was from the Middle East or Asia and highlighted that infant Jesus was visited by "*wise men*" from Persia.[332] Some even argued that, in contrast with Islam, Christianity is "*more than a religion*", implying superiority to Islam.[333]   However, some responses suggested underlying tension in some converts' understanding of Christianity and the West. *Nader* admitted that he considered Christianity as "*Western*" when he was in Iran because of Christianity's link with Europe. His opinion changed after recognising many Christian ideas shared with the Middle Eastern culture: "*Christianity is not the European way… it is what we do in the Middle East and Iran*".[334] *Babak* suggested how Western Christian missionaries to Iran might have brought this notion of a "Western" religion by "*putting their culture into the church*".[335] Though *Reza* believed Christianity was not "Western", he suggested that "*Western people own Christianity*". He alleged this claimed "*ownership*" by the West as Christianity hugely contributed to the Western civilisations. *Reza* explained metaphorically, "*This could be like a car made in Germany, but the Americans love it, enjoy it and own it…*"[336]

Hence, tension arose when Iranian converts positioned themselves between their cultural heritage and the host British culture within the CoE, as evident in various examples. The tension also highlighted the issues of conforming to the unfamiliar host culture and the Western "*ownership*" of Christianity. This tension was augmented in the CoE context as the established national church was actively involved in Remembrance and the British monarchy. Despite the tension, these converts demonstrated their conscious participation and even amalgamation of the two cultures with their Christian faith, possibly to reduce the tension. In the next section, I

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[332] Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'; Nader; Hiva; Reza; Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.

[333] Aziz, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'; Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'; Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Hiva; Reza.

[334] Nader.

[335] Babak.

[336] Reza.

will illustrate another element of this tension when their cultural identities encountered Christian teaching and practices. This tension was observed through *Nowruz* and their attempts to understand the Eucharist through their cultural heritage.

4.2.2   Incorporating Iranian heritage into the converts' Christian faith – compatible or conflicting?

Further tensions were evident when Iranian converts navigated the relationship between their cultural identities, which mainly originated from Zoroastrianism and were influenced by Islam, and their newfound Christian faith. Tension was observed in this research when converts celebrated *Nowruz*, a crucial festival with a Zoroastrian association and to their Iranian cultural identities. There was further tension when these converts described their understanding of the Eucharist through their cultural lens. In this section, I will describe the two types of tensions identified. First, Iranian converts had different sentiments towards the *Nowruz* celebrations, which created tension. Second, tension arose when there were potential conflicts of understanding and priorities between Iranian cultural heritage and Christian teachings and practices in some *Nowruz* celebratory rituals. Iranian converts attempted to reduce these tensions by emphasising that *Nowruz* was pre-Islamic and the positive attributes of Zoroastrianism. They also tried combining their Iranian cultural heritage with Christian teachings and practices to minimise the tension. Nevertheless, this combination was complex. Instead of reducing tension, it could paradoxically generate conflicts and more tension because of the different understandings and customs in the three religions that influenced Iranian converts.

4.2.2.1 Nowruz celebrations: potential tensions for Christian converts

Nowruz is the first day of the Iranian calendar and has a Persian origin. However, its history is somewhat unclear, and it has been proposed that *Nowruz* may predate Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrian religious leaders adopted *Nowruz* and augmented it with the Zoroastrian theological

framework. Before the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, Shi'a Islam also incorporated *Nowruz* and other pre-Islamic Persian traditions, like *Yalda Night*, into the Iranians' cultural and religious practices. *Nowruz* celebrations finish on *Sizdah Bedar* 13 days later. Iranians gather on the evening of the Wednesday before *Nowruz, Chahar-shanbeh Suri*, to mark the first festive celebration. The celebrations are full of rituals and symbolism, and a central theme for *Nowruz* is forgetting the wrongs in the previous year and looking forward to the renewal and new life in the coming year. For instance, on *Sizdah Bedar,* Iranians have outdoor picnics and enjoy the renewal of creation as spring arrives. The research participants confirmed that *Nowruz* is crucial to Iranian culture.[337] *Nader* described *Nowruz* as "*like something going into the blood*" and was more important than the Islamic festivals in Iran.[338] Many participants reported various *Nowruz* customs and related symbolic meanings.[339] The *Haft-sin* table is one of the most treasured *Nowruz* customs among Iranians. It is a table during *Nowruz* with items (usually seven) that start with the Farsi alphabet "س" (pronounced as "*sin*") and convey symbolic meanings related to creation, strength, and prosperity.[340] A "wisdom book" is commonly placed on the table. This table is crucial in *Nowruz*, as *Mahmoud* said, "*One cannot even imagine Nowruz without the seven س ('sin') …*".[341] The table also carries the meaning of togetherness, forgiveness, and reconciliation. *Sheila* explained that at the specific time when the New Year arrived, family members gathered around the *Haft-sin* table as the centre of the *Nowruz* celebration.[342] *Hamid* suggested that the time together in *Nowruz* and around the *Haft-sin* table provided opportunities to forget relationship challenges and to restart relationships again as part of the renewal and reconciliation in *Nowruz*.[343]

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[337] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hiva.
[338] Nader.
[339] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'; Nader.
[340] See Glossary for further information.
[341] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[342] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[343] Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.

The first tension arose as some converts expressed a different sentiment towards *Nowruz* and chose not to celebrate after their conversion. This sentiment contrasted with most participants, who continued their *Nowruz* celebrations after their conversion and in Britain. *Babak* and *Aziz* did not celebrate *Nowruz* for their personal preference.[344] *Zoran* stopped celebrating *Nowruz* after conversion to "*focus more on the important ones, like Easter, Christmas and events related to Christianity*." He explained,

> *I am different now… I am a believer, and Christmas is more important… I am not against people celebrating Nowruz; it has nothing to do with Islam… Its base is Zoroastrian and the empire [old Persian] … Christmas is different – it is about God coming as Jesus.[345]*

Zoran's response, echoing other participants, highlighted *Nowruz*'s Zoroastrian association.[346] Zoroastrianism was the main Persian religion before Islam arrived in the seventh century. *Zoran* prioritised his identity as a Christian believer as it was more "*important*", and his conversion had made him "*different*". However, *Zoran*'s opinion differed from that of the majority, who embraced and celebrated *Nowruz* in their settings and attempted to combine the *Nowruz* celebrations with Christian teachings and practices. This difference showed tension in how Iranian converts consider the hierarchy of their identities: Christians or Iranians. Iranian converts attempted to reduce the tension by combining Christian practices with their Iranian cultural identities. Nevertheless, this combination was complicated. Instead of reduction, tension could be intensified because of the potential contradictions of some *Nowruz* celebratory rituals, which came from Zoroastrianism, with conventional Christian theologies and practices. The following two examples illustrate this complexity: the "wisdom book" on the *Haft-sin* tables these congregations set up and the understanding of fire in the *Chahar-shanbeh Suri* fire-jumping ritual.

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[344] Aziz, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'; Babak.
[345] Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[346] Babak; Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

First, all three research congregations set up *Haft-sin* tables with traditional items in their venues during *Nowruz* (Pictures 3 to 5).[347] These congregations put the Bible as the "wisdom book" on their tables instead of the Qur'an or famous Persian poetry books. *Agape Fellowship* also put a Farsi copy of *Shahnameh* ("the Book of Kings")[348] alongside the Bible on their *Haft-sin* table. The "wisdom book" carries the symbolic meaning of wise guidance to the New Year. Although it seemed understandable for these converts to put the Bible as their "wisdom book" as their guidance after conversion, the book choice on the *Haft-sin* table also signified tension in Iranian converts' attempts to combine their cultural expression, which was mainly from Zoroastrianism, with the religious beliefs that came later. For most Iranians, that was with Islam, but for converts, it became their newfound Christian faith. *Babak* explained his opinion on this tension of mixing the Islamic and Iranian cultures on the *Haft-sin* table,

> *The Iranians wanted to keep something they already had… something [Islam] that*
>
> *was forced on them… they want to keep the festival Nowruz, but how they can keep*
>
> *that is by adding the Qur'an on the Haft-sin table*.

Babak believed Iranian converts repeated a similar practice by placing the Bible on the *Haft-sin* table to keep *Nowruz* and the Christian faith together.[349] Having both *Shahnameh* and the Bible on the same *Haft-sin* table in *Agape Fellowship* signified that some converts considered both sources, their Christian faith and their Iranian cultural heritage, as their guidance. This combination could be challenging and complex for some converts, such as *Zoran,* who decided to prioritise his Christian identity and distanced himself from *Nowruz.* Hence, rather than tension reduction by putting the "wisdom book" to express their Christian faith as guidance on the *Haft-sin* table, a crucial ritual of Iranian cultural heritage from Zoroastrianism, tension

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[347] *Agape Fellowship* had the *Haft-sin* table in their monthly meeting in March, about a fortnight before *Nowruz*.
[348] See Glossary.
[349] Babak.

remained from the question of whether their Christian faith was more important than their Iranian cultural heritage.

Picture 3 Haft-sin table of Agape Fellowship

Picture 4 Haft-sin table of St Matthew's

Picture 5 Haft-sin table of St Cuthbert's

The second example of the tension was jumping over the fire ritual during the *Chahar-shanbeh Suri* (Picture 6)*. St Cuthbert's* Iranian converts celebrated *Chahar-shanbeh Suri* by setting up a fire at a nearby beach. An Iranian convert at *St Cuthbert's* told me that when jumping over the fire, Iranians usually say, "*May the yellowness of me come from you and may the redness*

of you come from me."[350] Fire is a crucial Zoroastrian symbol, and the jumping over the fire ritual undoubtedly came from Zoroastrianism. I discussed with some converts their understanding of this ritual, and they considered it a purification process: to burn off all the bad things before starting the New Year after *Nowruz* with a new life, echoing what they said when jumping over the fire. Hence, this ritual carried the religious meaning of purification, which contrasted significantly with the conventional Christian teaching of purification through water in baptism, confession of sins and forgiveness and sanctification through Jesus Christ. The jumping over the fire ritual could be seen as heretical and superstitious by Christians and Muslims with more conservative theologies, as fire worship is a prominent religious practice in Zoroastrianism. The place of worship for Zoroastrians is called the fire temple, and fire is strongly linked with Zoroastrian divinity. Hence, differences in theological understanding could cause tension. I asked an interviewee, *Mahmoud*, who was in that *Chahar-shanbeh Suri* celebration, for his opinion on this ritual. *Mahmoud* rejected the notion that the ritual was heretical and superstitious and defended that fire represented life in Zoroastrianism, a positive and universal attribute. He saw no problem in participating in the *Chahar-shanbeh Suri* celebration.[351] This example again suggested tension among these converts when there was a potential conflict between some *Nowruz* celebratory rituals and conventional Christian theologies, and one way to reduce this tension was by focusing on these symbols' positive and universal meanings.

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[350] The saying in Farsi -" زردی من از تو، سرخی تو از من ". It means leaving the illness and unhappiness to the fire to burn away (i.e., the yellowness – the unhealthy yellow skin complexion) and through the fire, it brings health and happiness (i.e., the redness – the healthy red complexion on the cheeks from the heat of the fire).

[351] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Chahar-Shanbeh Suri Celebration on the Beach*, 15 March 2022.

Picture 6 Jumping over the fire on Chahar-Shanbeh Suri

Besides focusing on Zoroastrianism's positive and universal attributes to reduce the tension, Iranian converts also attempted to minimise the tension by distancing themselves from Islam, which was considered to be forced on Iranians. Many converts emphasised that *Nowruz* was not related to Islam and focused on *Nowruz*'s significance in Iranian culture. *Reza* highlighted that *Nowruz* originated before Islam came to Persia.[352] Even though many converts acknowledged that *Nowruz was* associated with Zoroastrianism, they tended to downplay *Nowruz*'s link with Zoroastrianism. Some convert participants inferred *Nowruz*'s Zoroastrian association only when they mentioned that the Iranian Islamic government attempted to stop the *Nowruz* celebration in Iran after the Revolution. The Iranian government considered *Nowruz* to come from Zoroastrianism. However, the regime faced significant opposition to stopping *Nowruz*. Many participants fervently but negatively described in their interviews the Iranian regime's attempts: "*taken off from Iranians*", "*erase Nowruz … destroy and ruin it*", "*suppressed… forced not to celebrate*", and "*prohibited*".[353] They expressed a sentiment that keeping *Nowruz* was a protest against Islam, as they believed the Islam portrayed by the Iranian regime intended to eradicate their Iranian cultural heritage. This strong sense of Islam being forced upon Iranians

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[352] Reza.

[353] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hiva; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Nader.

contributed significantly to many research participants' conversion, as mentioned in nearly all the interviews.

Moreover, there was evidence that Iranian converts preferred Zoroastrianism to Islam, echoing their focus on Zoroastrianism's positive and universal attributes. *Hamid* emphasised that Zoroastrianism has a more extended history as it is pre-Islamic, and the Zoroastrian Divinity, Ahura Mazda, is "*one God*" and "*a true God, not an idol*".[354] *Sheila* considered one Zoroastrian prophet comparable to Moses and Jesus, as that prophet was a good man and taught people good behaviours.[355] Iranian converts focused mainly on the similarities between Zoroastrianism and Christianity, and their responses contrasted hugely with how they mentioned Islam, of which these Iranians emphasised their negative experiences. *Shirin* highlighted Muslims' persecution of Zoroastrian believers in Iran when Islam arrived in Persia. However, when these converts were asked about the Persian Church before Islam came, only *Babak* mentioned that one reason why the Persian Church did not survive was the persecution of Christians by Zoroastrians because of the growing number of Christian converts from Zoroastrianism.[356] Thus, although persecutions happened from both Islam and Zoroastrianism against converts from these religions, these convert participants appeared to favour Zoroastrianism over Islam. Their inclination to focus on the positive contribution of Zoroastrianism to Iranian cultural heritage and the negative connotation of Islam could be considered as their attempt to reduce the tension between their Iranian cultural heritage and Christian faith. Other reasons for this preference included the lack of awareness of Persian church history and their unfavourable experiences of the Islamic Iranian regime, contributing to their conversion.

This tension over whether and how Iranians should celebrate *Nowruz* as Christian believers was longstanding and widespread. *Babak,* who used to be an underground church leader in Iran, mentioned that some underground church leaders in Iran disapproved of *Nowruz*.

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[354] Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.
[355] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[356] Babak.

However, most churches in Iran kept the *Nowruz* celebration for cultural and historical reasons.[357] The Iranian Christians' effort to reduce the tension by combining Christian teachings with their Iranian cultural heritage was also evident beyond these research participants. *Babak* stated in the interview that the Farsi Christian television channel *SAT-7 PARS* usually had an annual *Nowruz* special programme. I watched the 90-minute special programme with a Farsi interpreter. The hosts intentionally linked Christian ideas and practices with Nowruz in the programme. For instance, like the research congregations, the Bible was put on the *Haft-sin* table in the programme.[358] They also mentioned *Nowruz* bringing the renewal of nature as the beginning of spring and connected that to the Farsi term "*Rastakhiz*" (رستاخیز), one of the terms used in the Farsi Bible for Christ's resurrection.[359] The hosts used the same term "*Rastakhiz*" in the programme when discussing the renewal of Christian believers' lives during *Nowruz*. Hence, they linked the Christian concepts of renewal and resurrection with that seen in nature during *Nowruz.* Moreover, Persian poetry was often recited in the programme, including those from Rumi[360] and Hafiz, and these poems were linked with Christian themes like blessings from Jesus. In the programme, an Iranian Christian woman advocated the importance of keeping Iranian cultural heritage and tradition as Christians, saying, "*God gives us the ability to keep the tradition".[361]* There were further discussions with the hosts about some Iranian Christians considering that they should lose their cultural background after conversion. They believed that *Nowruz* was compatible with the Christian faith, especially with the theme of resurrection, "*Rastakhiz*".[362] This programme further illustrated the tension between *Nowruz* and Iranian converts' Christian faith and how they attempted to reduce it by reinterpreting some Christian teachings with their Iranian cultural heritage.

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[357] Ibid.

[358] SATS-7 PARS.

[359] See Glossary for further information.

[360] نوروز بمانید که ایّام شمایید (Translation – "*Nowruz* is your days") - https://www.ikorc.ir/203

[361] Translated from Farsi.

[362] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Observation Notes - Watching SAT-7 Special Nowruz Programme with a Farsi Interpreter*, 21 January 2023.

Besides linking Christian ideas with Iranian heritage, there were attempts to combine the *Nowruz* celebration with Christian practices, like the sacraments, in the three research congregations to reduce the tension between Christian faith and their cultural heritage. First, *St Cuthbert's* had a baptismal service on the day of *Nowruz* to represent a day for new lives, and all who got baptised were Iranians. At the baptism preparation class I attended, the priest mentioned using the translated baptismal liturgy, which contained Farsi responses to English questions. He also suggested that Iranian converts said the Lord's Prayer in Farsi at their baptism. The baptismal liturgy was expanded to highlight welcoming Iranians: "*People of God, will you welcome our Iranian friends and uphold them in their new life in Christ?*"[363] Second, *Agape Fellowship* hosted a *Nowruz* event in a church hall the day before *Nowruz.* It involved Persian meals, live Persian music, cultural presentations, and dancing.[364] *Reza*, the organiser, considered it one way he integrated his Christian faith with his Iranian culture. He also highlighted the missional opportunity for Iranian non-Christians to appreciate how the Christian faith could be combined with Iranian culture.[365]

The third example of combining Christian practice and *Nowruz* is *St Matthew's* first Farsi Sunday Eucharist on the day of *Nowruz.* The priest described the service as "*an interesting experiment*". About half of the congregations who attended were not Iranians, and they responded in English.   The sermon was in Farsi with English translation, and the intercession was led by an Iranian convert who prayed for Iranians, including persecution, seeking asylum, and renewal during *Nowruz*. Many Iranians applauded when the intercession finished. During the Eucharist, the priest intentionally used Iranian flatbread (Lavash bread لواش) instead of the standard bread roll. I noticed much more enthusiastic participation from Iranians, who responded to the liturgy (including the Lord's Prayer) in Farsi with louder voices. Their responses contrasted with the earlier observation that Iranians either did not respond or did it quietly in

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[363] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Visit 6 (Baptism Preparation Class: On Eucharist)*, 11 March 2022.

[364] Diocese of City C, 'Facebook Post from the Diocese about the Nowruz Celebration of Agape Fellowship on 19 March 2022'.

[365] Reza.

English during the usual English-speaking Eucharist service at *St Matthew's*. At the end of the service, *Nader* publicly expressed how much joy he noticed on that day in the church and compared that with his observation of the gloominess when he prayed in the mosques in Iran. This *Nowruz* Farsi Eucharist was further commended through the digital survey responses, especially praising the priest's effort to say the liturgy in Farsi.[366] After the service, *St Matthew's* Iranian congregation hosted an Iranian lunch shared among nearly 130 people, including their Iranian Muslim friends and non-Iranian congregation.[367] Hence, despite the tension of whether and how to celebrate *Nowruz* as Iranian converts, they appreciated the attempts from these congregations to combine Christian practices, like baptism and the Eucharist. The non-Iranian clergy and congregation members supported these attempts to reduce the tension, which were well-received.

4.2.2.2 Understanding the Eucharist through the Iranian cultural lens

So far, I have illustrated the tensions between these converts' Christian faith and cultural identity, as seen in their *Nowruz* celebration. The first tension arose from the different sentiments among Iranian converts towards the *Nowruz* celebrations. The second tension occurred because of possible conflicts between Iranian cultural heritage and Christian faith, as illustrated in the *Haft-sin* table and fire-jumping ritual during *Chahar-shanbeh Suri*. To manage these tensions, these converts emphasised that *Nowruz* was pre-Islamic and the positive attributes of Zoroastrianism from which *Nowruz* originated. Iranian converts also attempted to combine their cultural heritage with Christian teachings and practices. Nevertheless, combining their cultural heritage with Christian teachings and practices could paradoxically generate more tensions because of the different understandings and practices in Christianity, Zoroastrianism,

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[366] Leila, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 3) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 20 March 2022; Zoran, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 3) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 20 March 2022.
[367] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Visit 9*, 20 March 2022.

and Islam. In this section, I will highlight some converts' understanding of the Eucharist through their Iranian cultural lens to further illustrate the potential tension from their attempts to combine their cultural heritage and Christian theology and practices.

In exploring their understanding of the Eucharist, some convert participants identified parallels between the Eucharist and *Nowruz*. *Maryam* mentioned that both the Eucharist and *Nowruz* gave her a sense of "*getting together, joining tighter and sharing the food*". *Reza* initially thought that *Nowruz* and the Eucharist could not relate to one another but later admitted that "*there are actually quite a lot of similarities*".   He believed the Eucharist "*can relate Iranian culture to the Christian faith*". He mentioned the sense of renewal and new life at *Nowruz* and considered the Sunday Eucharist also brought him a similar sense of renewal when the week began.[368] Besides linking the Eucharist with *Nowruz*, some converts attempted to understand the Eucharist with their Iranian and Middle Eastern cultural heritage, including using analogues with Islamic disposition. *Hiva* mentioned how the German-Turkish Muslim footballer Mesut Özil kissed a piece of bread thrown at him during a match several years ago.   Özil also touched the bread to his forehead as a gesture of gratitude for being given food, even though the bread was thrown at him as an insult. *Hiva* highlighted that his Muslim parents told him to respect bread as God's blessing. He considered this meaning of God's blessing applied to the Eucharistic bread, and Özil turned the piece of bread thrown at him from an insult into a blessing.   However, *Hiva* mentioned that with hesitancy because what he described was with Islamic association, even though the analogy helped him appreciate and understand the Eucharist.[369]   Hence, Iranian converts not only combined their Christian practice and teaching with Zoroastrianism through *Nowruz*, but some also used ideas influenced by Islam to assist their understanding of Christian theology and practice, as seen in *Hiva's* example. Though *Hiva*'s description of the Eucharist as God's blessing is consistent with the Christian faith, his hesitancy suggested some converts showed tension in using ideas from other religions to understand Christian teaching and practice.

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[368] Reza.
[369] Hiva.

Sara also highlighted that bread was "*a sign of blessing*" and expanded that to the meaning of sharing bread and salt in Iranian and Middle Eastern cultures:

> *A proverb [370] that literally says, "When you eat the bread and the salt, you don't break the saltshaker". Not breaking the saltshaker means that you don't betray each other… we have a relationship as we have shared the table. When I take the bread in the Eucharist, this is the analogy for me as this proverb.*

For *Sara,* the bread and salt meant alliance, reconciliation, loyalty, and trust between two people. She linked this understanding of the Eucharist with her trust and loyalty to God, who shared the bread with her in the Eucharist. Contrasting with *Hiva*, *Sara* did not appear hesitant to link the Eucharist with the Iranian and Middle Eastern cultural understanding of bread and salt.[371] Hence, this tension varied among Iranian converts, and some might feel more comfortable combining their cultural heritage with Christian ideas and practices.   *Reza* also did not find this combination concerning. With a good knowledge of Persian poetry, he believed a strong connection between Persian poetry and the Christian faith existed, even though most famous Persian poets were Muslims. *Reza* concluded, "*There is quite a lot of Christianity embedded in, and a good deal of what Jesus did, and Christians did within the culture and poems that go back for 1000 years."*[372]

4.3   Theme Two – *Eucharist and the "social self"*: Tension between being communal and converts' mistrust of others

Besides the tension among Iranian converts' "cultural self", tensions also occurred interpersonally among these converts' "social self". In this section, I will first highlight the communal nature of Iranians' traditions. Iranian converts highly valued and practised the communal nature of Iranian heritage, especially with their families. Second, I will describe their

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[370] *Sara* used this Farsi word - ضرب المثل.
[371] Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[372] Reza.

strong mistrust of others because they emphasised shame and honour and the notion of "ritual politeness" (*Taarof*) within Iranian cultural heritage. Third, I will explain that this tension was further intensified by these converts' experience of political Islam from Iranian authorities. This tension created relational strain between Iranian converts and the others, contributing to their discordance. Finally, I will present the impact of this tension, including how these converts understood and experienced their Christian faith, including the Eucharist, and their engagement and participation in the CoE. The data showed that the CoE congregations attempted to engage these Iranians and build a sense of community and "family". Nevertheless, the extent to which these converts believed and experienced belonging to the British churches was questionable because of this tension between being communal and mistrustful of others. This uncertainty created additional relational strain between the CoE churches and Iranian converts. It is worth noting that although this theme was distinct from the first theme about their "cultural self", both were associated with Iranian cultural heritage. Iranian converts' willingness and ability to engage interpersonally also related to Theme Three about their trauma and suffering – the broken "inner self", which contributed further to Iranian converts' discordance.

4.3.1 "Togetherness and family": Being communal in Iranian tradition

Iranian converts highlighted that "*getting together*" was crucial in Iranian society, especially within families.[373] Several converts mentioned that Iranians highly value family and respect elders within Iranian families.[374] Family members were often considered together as a unit in Iran, and individuals' behaviour affected other family members. *Shirin* mentioned that her family was considered "*not good*" because her brother was jailed for expressing a different political ideology. Although *Shirin* was not involved, his brother's imprisonment affected *Shirin*'s

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[373] Ibid.; Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.

[374] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.

opportunity to study at the university because her family was considered "*the opposite side*".[375]

Iranians were expected to conform to preserve communal togetherness, especially within the family unit. *Aziz* suggested,

> *In Iran, staying inside a "framework" is important… If you break the framework, you break your identity, and then who are you?... Anytime you stand against or buckle the framework, either cultural or religious, you are going to be set aside, and people will always try to bring you back.*

These participants' Christian conversion was a prime example of breaking "*the framework*" and acting against togetherness. Their non-conformity resulted in massive conflicts and separation from their families. *Aziz* said he argued with his father, a devout Muslim, about Islam and ended up being slapped by his father.[376] *Babak, Hiva, Sara, Sheila*, *Reza*, *Leila*, and *Hamid* reported similar conflicts with their families because of their conversion.[377] These conflicts and separation from their families resulted in inner tensions among converts, which will be discussed further in Theme Three.

Iranian tradition's communal nature was also associated with several qualities commonly reported and observed among Iranians. Several participants highlighted generosity and helpfulness to others as Iranians' essential virtues. *Mahmoud* said, "*In my culture, in my country, we protect each other… when I realise that this person or this family needs help… I immediately start to help them in every way that I can*".[378] Practically, I experienced *Mahmoud*'s generous help as *St Cuthbert's* link person for this research. Moreover, Iranians were renowned for their hospitality, which was closely related to their communal nature. *Aziz* said, "*Hospitality is very common and normal – whatever I have, in my culture, I share with everybody.*"[379] Several Iranians mentioned the importance of providing the best for the guests, especially food and

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[375] Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[376] Aziz, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[377] Babak; Hiva; Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'; Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Reza; Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.
[378] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[379] Aziz, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.

sharing what they had with others, including strangers.[380]   As I highlighted in Theme One, their

celebrations and the meals provided during *Nowruz* illustrated their hospitality, which was also

seen in various celebrations and parties on occasions outside of *Nowruz*, as several participants

suggested.[381]   Furthermore, some participants mentioned Iranians' warmth and friendliness to

others in their interactions, which included touching and hugging people of the same gender,

even between men. During my participant observations in *Agape Fellowship* with Iranians as the

majority, compared to other congregations, I noticed much more physical contact among each

other.[382]   In short, generosity, hospitality, celebrations, and physical expression of affection

espoused this sense of togetherness in Iranian tradition. Conformity was expected within Iranian

society, but these converts went against conformity through their Christian conversion, creating

tensions and separation. This necessity to conform was also closely related to the concept of

shame and honour in Iranian tradition, contributing to tensions through mistrusting one another,

as illustrated in the next section.

4.3.2   *"Can I trust you?"*: Shame and honour, and "ritual politeness", *Taarof*

Although "togetherness" was highly valued and applied among Iranian converts, some

mentioned two aspects of their heritage which caused interpersonal tensions: the concept of

shame and honour and the distinctive Iranian notion of *Taarof* (تعارف).   These two aspects

created potential mistrust among Iranians, generating tension with their communal nature. First,

interpersonal relationships, according to Iranian tradition, were primarily based on shame and

honour. How others perceived an Iranian was crucial to their self-esteem and identity. They

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[380] Babak; Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'; Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'; Nader.

[381] Reza; Babak; Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'; Nader.

[382] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (Agape Fellowship) - Visit 1*, 5 February 2022.

avoided situations where they felt judged by others because of the shame brought by that self-perceived judgment. *Babak* suggested how this might affect interpersonal relationships:

> *Iranian culture is a "shame" culture… we need to present well before others… we want others to think of us well and accept us so that we feel better… A challenge in the Iranian communities is that we can't trust each other… because you don't know how much this person before you is the "real" person.*[383]

Likewise*, Sheila* and *Mahmoud* shared the uncertainty of interpersonal genuineness, which results in Iranians' mistrust of others. *Babak* and *Sheila* commended the British people as more "*honest with themselves and other people*" and more "*straightforward*". [384] Several converts also mentioned in their interviews that Iranians could be judgmental, intensifying their fear of being judged by others.[385]

Moreover, *Babak* and *Mahmoud* mentioned a distinctive concept in Iranian tradition, *Taarof*, which is closely related to interpersonal genuineness. *Taarof* can be understood as an etiquette of "ritual politeness" within Iranian tradition and is generally seen as a tool to negotiate and relate among Iranians, especially in relationships among individuals with different social statuses. This difference is influential in Iranian society, emphasising a hierarchical social structure and respect. Besides its close association with the shame and honour culture, *Taarof* links to the sociological notion of "face", which is often noticed in various cultures' communications. It includes compliments as a token of goodwill and behaviours with a negative connotation, like flattery or manners merely for formalities. *Babak* highlighted that *Taarof* is regularly used and could be confusing even among Iranians. He gave an example of how *Taarof* could damage trust and relationships among Iranians because of the confusion and perceived untruthfulness in communications with *Taarof*. A colleague of *Babak* often invited others to

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[383] Babak.
[384] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Babak.
[385] Babak; Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.

share his food because of *Taarof*, but he did not really want to share. This colleague then complained to *Babak* about those who took up his food offer. *Babak* questioned his colleague's genuineness in their interactions because he used *Taarof*. Using *Taarof* became a guessing game and obstructed the building of trusting relationships.[386] *Mahmoud* also voiced similar uneasiness: *"My culture is full of compliments… we say some words or use some expressions, we offer things to each other, but we don't believe what we say."*[387]

Therefore, despite the strong sense of "togetherness" and the communal nature of Iranian tradition, Iranian converts reported the concepts of shame and honour, and *Taarof* in their heritage that contributed to mistrust and challenges in building relationships, causing tension. This tension was augmented by Iranians' fear of being judged by others, resulting in shame and further mistrust. Another significant factor also contributed to Iranian converts' mistrust of one another: their experience of Christian conversion from Islam under the theocratic Islamic Iranian regime. This experience further deepened their struggle with mistrust, creating more tension with Iranian tradition's communal nature and "togetherness".

4.3.3 *"Is there a spy among us?"*: How political Islam intensified Iranians' mistrust of others

The previous section highlighted Iranian converts' potential challenges to trust one another because of certain concepts in their heritage, which caused tension with "togetherness". Political Islam in Iran intensified Iranians' mistrust, not only of one another but also of those in authority. As mentioned, the participants reported an intense disillusionment about Islam, which was considered to be forced on Iranians.[388] Several mentioned that they were required to attend Qur'an and Islamic classes and were not allowed to question Islam in Iran. *Hamid*

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[386] Babak.
[387] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[388] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'; Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.

reported an incident in which he asked why God sent prophets to other religious groups. His university Qur'an teacher accused him of "*saying something wrong and talking badly*" about religion and sent *Hamid* away.[389] *Shirin* said enforcing Islamic practices and teachings became a norm after the Islamic Revolution.[390] Several participants said they needed to "*pretend to be a Muslim*" despite not believing in Islam. "*Pretending*" prevented them from societal discrimination, like dismissals from the university or workplace[391], but also intensified mistrust of the authorities, which was noticed in various interviews. *Sheila* felt Iranians have "*lost the correct way*" because of the theocratic regime.[392] *Babak* described that the Iranian government wanted to control Iranians' minds from an early age so that they did not know what they wanted.[393] In particular, both Kurdish Iranians, *Zoran* and *Hiva*, voiced their negative sentiment toward the current Iranian regime, especially for the additional restriction on Kurdish Iranians. They both considered their Kurdish ethnicity more crucial than their Iranian nationality. *Zoran* mentioned that Kurdish Iranians were prohibited from using their Kurdish language (Sorani) in printed material and could only use Farsi. The Kurdish language was not taught at schools in the Kurdish region.[394] Furthermore, several converts highlighted the gender inequalities in Iran, causing further mistrust of Iranian authorities by both men and women. *Maryam* mentioned that women used to be considered "*valuable and worthy*" in Iranian culture before Islam. However, the situation has changed dramatically since the Revolution: "*In the present time, we are suffering a lot from Islamic rules and instructions… there are many things that haven't been in our culture and now become mandatory and obligatory that we have to do.*"[395] *Sheila* also described how her father forced her elder sister to marry their cousin, and the marriage resulted in domestic violence against *Sheila's* sister. Her father and cousin justified their actions using

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[389] Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.
[390] Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[391] Ibid.; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.
[392] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[393] Babak.
[394] Hiva; Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[395] Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.

Islam and the Qur'an. After that incident, *Sheila* started disbelieving in Islam, leading to her conversion.[396]

These sentiments had several consequences. First, as I have already suggested, mistrust of others and authority was widespread because of Iranian converts' negative experiences with the Islamic regime. This mistrust extended even within one's family, as seen between *Sheila* and her father and cousin, causing these converts' tension. Second, Islamic faith practices became superficial and somewhat meaningless to many Iranians. Several participants mentioned possible access to alcohol in Iran, even though alcohol was strictly forbidden in Islam and Iran, which could lead to severe punishment if discovered by the Iranian government.[397] *Nader* described that he was not a "*proper Muslim"* before conversion to Christianity and drank alcohol with other Muslims. Concurrently, he also continued to pray regularly according to Islamic rules. Third, these negative sentiments contributed to these Iranians' Christian conversion.

Nevertheless, their religious conversion further amplified their mistrust of others and the authorities because of the severe adverse aftermath, including imprisonment and execution. The potentially severe consequences after Christian conversion formed a significant part of these converts' sufferings and trauma, which will be detailed in Theme Three. Individuals with significant suffering and trauma commonly found trusting others challenging, especially if they experienced betrayal like some participants had when they attended the underground house churches in Iran. Many converts reported security measures when they attended these house churches in Iran. They could not practise Christianity openly and would face life-threatening consequences if discovered. For instance, *Hamid* mentioned the need to park his car somewhere far from the "house" and to switch off and leave his mobile phone elsewhere to prevent him from leaving any tracking evidence.[398] *Hiva* said he could not attend the house church until its leader came secretly to "*test"* *Hiva* and was satisfied with *Hiva's* genuineness. Meetings were

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[396] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[397] Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Nader.
[398] Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.

also irregular to avoid being discovered. When Iranian authorities later uncovered the house church, provoking *Hiva* to leave Iran, he often asked himself, "*Was there a spy?*"

Mahmoud had the same question when he reviewed what made him flee Iran, leaving his family there. *Mahmoud* believed he came to the authorities' attention after sharing Jesus with an individual *Mahmoud* encountered. *Mahmoud* thought he could trust that person, but after the police raided his house, *Mahmoud* considered that individual might have reported their conversations to the authorities. He concluded, "*It is fearful and so scary living in that situation.*"[399] Therefore, Iranian converts' oppression by the Iranian Islamic regime worsened their mistrust. There were constant concerns among Iranian converts about whether they could trust the people they met and whether someone could be a "*spy*". Although Iranians, including Iranian converts, still highly valued the communal and "togetherness" nature of their cultural heritage, mistrust was commonly observed after the Iranian regime tightened control on Iranians after the Revolution. This mistrust was at various levels – with one another, including those in the house churches, those in authority and even in the family. Questions like "*Whom can I trust*?" or "*Was there a spy among us?*" were frequent in Iranian converts' minds. The sufferings and trauma caused by the political and religious oppression from the Iranian regime reinforced Iranian converts' mistrust. This tension of being communal while mistrusting others also followed these Iranians after leaving Iran. It impacted their participation in British churches like in the CoE and their partaking in the Eucharist, contributing to these converts' discordance.

4.3.4   "*Part of the church?*": Impact on converts' participation in the CoE and the Eucharist

This tension of being communal in Iranian tradition and mistrust of one another affected how Iranian converts participated in the CoE, as seen in the data from both Eucharistic and non-Eucharistic events in the research congregations. Iranian converts navigated the crucial question

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[399] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

about belonging with this tension: "*Am I part of the Church?*" Family is critical for Iranians as their communal tradition, and many converts struggled with separation and strain from their families for their religious conversion. For instance, *Babak* mentioned that some family members in Iran separated the dishes *Babak* had used when he visited them, as they considered "*people of other religions were dirty*" and needed to clean the dishes *Babak* had used more thoroughly. *Sara* commented that her father assumed she was "*dead*".[400] Despite disapproval from their families, these converts often said they missed the in-person contact with their families, as illustrated by *Maryam*,

> "*Why I am here*" *is the biggest difficulty that I face. Why should I leave my family over there and run away? It has been almost four years since I have seen my mother and father.*[401]

The congregations responded to this reality and attempted to provide these converts with a "family". In *St Matthew's* online pre-baptismal class, the priest highlighted to soon-to-be baptised Iranians that they were "*baptised to a family, to God's family*"[402], quoting the Scriptures and considering them "no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household".[403] I noticed these converts helped set up and serve refreshments and audiovisuals in *St Matthew's* and *St Cuthbert's*. [404] *St Matthew's* churchwarden *Susan* openly thanked Iranian converts who helped distribute the parish Christmas cards.[405] The appreciation was bidirectional. On *Susan*'s birthday, *Nader* spoke for *St Matthew's* Iranians to express their gratitude for *Susan*'s care to them.[406] At *St Cuthbert's*, I witnessed a congregation member approaching an Iranian before the Sunday Eucharist to give

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[400] Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[401] Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[402] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Video Recording of Online Baptism Preparation Class*, 17 January 2022.
[403] Eph 2:19-21.
[404] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Visit 1*; Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Visit 1*; Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Visit 2*.
[405] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Visit 2*, 19 December 2021.
[406] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Visit 8*, 20 February 2022.

him some food. Another congregation member spoke to an Iranian family with two children, checking on their well-being as they were new to Britain.[407]

This sense of these converts being the British church "family" was further illustrated in the unexpected death of an Iranian convert at *St Matthew's*, *Ebrahim*, during the data collection period. *Ebrahim* lived alone and had no family in Britain. I was present at the Sunday Eucharist service following *Ebrahim*'s death and the non-Eucharistic memorial service two weeks later. Many Iranians who had not been to *St Matthew's* for some time attended the church on both occasions. Iranian converts also set up a "memorial corner" at the church (Picture 7), as they did for the Queen, including distributing Iranians' traditional mourning food - dates and *halva*. At the memorial service, various congregation members, both Iranian and non-Iranian, spoke about their memories of *Ebrahim*. *Susan,* who supported *Ebrahim* during his asylum application, commended *Ebrahim* for eagerly serving others at the church. She also mentioned *Ebrahim's* statement, "*The church is now my family*".   During that challenging time, there was a strong sense of "togetherness" among *St Matthew's* Iranians. Mourning and funerals are crucial communal events for Iranians. In Iran, they are generally organised and led by immediate family members. *St Matthew's* had taken up this role as his "family" to arrange *Ebrahim's* memorial service as he had no family in Britain, as *Ebrahim* described the church.[408] Other converts also advocated the need to connect with others, including their "*English friends*" at church, as part of "*the Body of Christ*"[409], and the importance of caring for one another, including helping with practical tasks at church.[410]

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[407] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Visit 2*; Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Cuthbert's) - Visit 4*, 9 January 2022.

[408] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Visit 4*; Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Visit 6*, 30 January 2022.

[409] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.

[410] Maryam, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1)', 20 February 2022; Hamid, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 2 March 2022; Zoran, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 3) - English Translation of Farsi Original'; Nader; Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.

Picture 7 "Memorial corner" for Ebrahim at St Matthew's

Despite this communal sense among Iranian converts in both congregations, tension arose from their mistrust of the others.   At the beginning of *St Matthew's* baptismal service, with many Iranians baptised, *Nader* reminded the priest to announce the "no photograph policy". The priest said, "*We need to protect these people, especially their families in Iran*". I checked with *Nader* and the priest about this "no photograph policy", and it was adopted in *St Matthew's* because of the concerns that Iranian converts' pictures appeared on social media, causing difficulties for them and their families in Iran.[411] Although baptism was a joyful and memorable occasion, the mistrust made security concerns a priority. This mistrust was also observed in the aforementioned *St Cuthberts' Charhar-Shanbeh Suri* beach celebration.   As a non-Iranian participant, I experienced excellent hospitality from Iranians at the celebration, including refreshments and an invitation to join them in jumping over the fire. Iranians there told me dancing was popular and expected during the celebration. However, despite the music, not much dancing among Iranians occurred at the beach. One Iranian later said that the *Charhar-Shanbeh Suri* celebration in Iran was usually an event for family and close relations.

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[411] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Visit 5 (Baptismal Service)*, 16 January 2022.

This Iranian communicated some suspicion and indicated that "*people didn't know each other well*", even though the majority at the celebration attended the same church and lived in the same city. Hence, this observation further supported the tension of being communal, having a celebration together, and simultaneously exhibiting this sense of mistrust.

This tension affected Iranian converts' church participation in Britain, including partaking in the Eucharist. During the Sunday Eucharist services at *St Matthew's* and *St Cuthbert's*, most Iranians sat at the back and the peripherals of the pews. The other non-Iranian congregation members usually sat towards the front and the central sections of the churches. One possible explanation for this seating pattern was that these converts subliminally separated from the non-Iranian congregations and remained at the fringe of the churches. This typical seating pattern changed on the day of *Nowruz* in *St Matthew's* when the Eucharist was conducted primarily in Farsi. Many more Iranians sat at the front and central sections of the church, showing their eagerness for more active participation and a sense of "ownership" in that service. Another noteworthy observation was made during the Lord's Prayer. Although it was magnificent to hear the Lord's Prayer said simultaneously in two languages by *St Matthew's* Iranians and non-Iranians, a "dissonance" also occurred. Iranians sometimes would finish the Farsi Lord's Prayer sentence first. At other times, non-Iranians would be ahead of Iranians with the English version. Rarely did both Iranians and non-Iranians finish the sentence of the Lord's Prayer together in Farsi and English concurrently.[412] This "dissonance" mirrored the tension in these converts. There was a subtle "dissonance" between the British churches trying to include these converts as part of the "family" and how much they would and could participate.

Besides impacting how these converts participated in the Eucharist, this tension also affected how they understood the Eucharist. Iranian converts reported diverse and ambiguous understandings when considering the Eucharist's communal dimension. The obscurity of understanding substantially contrasts the prevailing and specific answers all converts provided regarding how the Eucharist related to their individual faith in Christ. Although most

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[412] Tsoi, Daniel TY, *Participant Observation Notes (St Matthew's) - Visit 9.*

participants could suggest that the Eucharist related to the Gospel narratives of the Last Supper, a meal Jesus had with his disciples, several interviewees denied the Eucharist's communal dimension and suggested that the Eucharist purely focused on their individual relationship and covenant with Jesus. For instance, *Sara* insisted that the Eucharist was merely personal and "*the covenant between God and her, not shared*".[413] *Aziz* also said that the Eucharist was "*personal*".[414] *Shirin* and *Zoran* acknowledged that there might be an element of sharing within the Eucharist, but the priority was remembering their individual faith in Christ.[415] Other participants, like *Sheila* and *Hiva,* appeared ambivalent when they commented on the Eucharist's communal dimension and reiterated that the Eucharist aimed at their relationships between themselves as individuals and Jesus.[416] *Hamid* seemed only to recognise the Eucharist's communal dimension during the interview: "*[The Eucharist] is more remembrance for me… it could also be about sharing, but I haven't paid much attention to that so far."*[417] In contrast, some converts could relate to the Eucharist's sharing and communal aspect. *Leila* suggested that the Eucharist could be "*a symbol of the union of believers*".[418] *Maryam* also said, "*We share the body of Jesus… it is communal – between me and the others in the church… we share thanksgiving and communion.*"[419] Both *Nader* and *Reza* even linked the Eucharist's communal dimension with Iranian poetry. *Reza* highlighted the sharing of a common cup in the Anglican Eucharistic practice with Hafiz's poem about sharing wine and the challenge of being charitable - "*Pass the cup of wine and let us drink… let me get drunk because love seems easy in the beginning but is very hard…*"[420]. *Nader* also mentioned there were Persian poems about God and the banquet in that people shared food and drinks, like in the Last Supper and the Eucharist, as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. *Nader* considered the Eucharist's sharing and communal

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[413] Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[414] Aziz, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[415] Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[416] Hiva; Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[417] Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.
[418] Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[419] Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[420] Reza.

dimension critical, saying:

> *Sharing that one piece shows we care about each other… The sharing part makes us feel like one family… Sharing gives the meaning of who we are… It is not for an individual or me, but we share… I don't know who may have been before or after me during Holy Communion, but we still shared.*[421]

Babak highlighted the practice of sharing the peace in the Anglican Eucharistic liturgy and reflected on the communal dimension in understanding the Eucharist. He also explained why some converts might focus the Eucharist on their individual relationship with God. Coming from an AoG background, a more prevalent evangelical and Pentecostal tradition in Iran, *Babak* said that the key teaching of AoG was "*always on a personal relationship with God – the connection between God and me*". When *Babak* knew the CoE Eucharistic liturgy, he realised the broader communal understanding of the Eucharist, including connecting with the universal Church. *Babak* also argued that Islamic worship through prayers emphasised the individual believers' relationship with Allah, despite a generally collective practice when Muslims pray together at set times.[422]

It is worth noting that the converts' understandings of the Eucharist can also be influenced by their Islamic background and upbringing. Although *Babak* considered that Islamic worship underscored individual believers' personal relationship with Allah, Islamic worship undoubtedly has strong communal and ritualistic elements, which contrast significantly with the Christian theological understanding of Eucharistic worship as a sacrament that carries the meaning of an instrument of divine grace in Anglicanism. In Farsi, the term sacrament is generally translated as *ayeen moghodas* (آیین مقدس), *menask moghodas* (مناسك مقدس) or *marasm mazzehaby mosyheyan* (مراسم مذهبی مسیحیان). These Farsi translations carry the meanings of religious rituals, rites (*ayeen*, *menask*), and ceremonies (*marasm*). This view of the Eucharist as merely a religious ritual or ceremony because of the converts' Islamic worldview and framework

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[421] Nader.

[422] Babak.

can contribute to the more ambiguous understandings of the Eucharist's communal dimension observed in the data. In addition, these converts advocated linking the Eucharist with their personal commitment to God as their covenant ("*peyman*" – پیمان), which I will further elaborate in Section 4.4.2.1. This concept of covenant, "*peyman*", incorporates a much stronger sense of participation, as "*peyman*" is fundamentally linked to the idea of faith (*iman* ایمان) rather than merely religious rituals. This idea of faith is also associated in Farsi with the notions of security and protection (*ameni* امن), which are particularly relevant for the Iranian converts. Furthermore, *Babak* highlighted in the interview that there can be a significant influence from the evangelical and Pentecostal traditions, such as AoG, among the Iranian converts. Many converts learn their Christian faith in Farsi through Christian media platforms, which are often influenced by these church traditions.   Therefore, the converts' understanding and interpretation of the Eucharist can reflect more evangelical and Pentecostal theologies.

In summary, the data suggested a much more diverse understanding of the Eucharist's communal dimension and a potential "selective emphasis" on individuals' personal relationship with Jesus when these converts considered the Eucharist.   This finding echoed the tension between being communal in Iranian tradition and Iranian converts' mistrust.   Because of this mistrust of others, including those at Church, these converts primarily focused on their personal relationship with God and Jesus and downplayed their relationships with others despite Iranians' solid communal nature. The converts' Islamic background and upbringing, the source of their Christian theologies, and their understanding of the concept of covenant, "*peyman*", may have further contributed to the potential "selective emphasis". This tension affected how Iranian converts understood the richer meaning of the Eucharist. Two additional one-off group interviews with the non-Iranian congregation members of *St Matthew's* were conducted to explore whether this "selective emphasis" was distinctive to Iranian converts rather than a general trend in the British church these converts now attended. One group included three members of the majority race, and the other group had two members from other non-Iranian minority ethnic heritages (Pakistani and Black South African). When these non-Iranian groups

were asked the same questions about the Eucharist as Iranians, they candidly spoke about their understanding and the significance of the Eucharist's communal dimension, alongside how the Eucharist related to their personal faith. These two groups' spontaneous and similar answers differed considerably from Iranian converts' diverse and ambiguous responses.   It is worth noting that these non-Iranians in the group interviews, on average, believed in Christianity longer than most convert participants because of the demographics of *St Matthew's* congregation.[423] Hence, all these findings support the interpersonal tension in these converts' "social self", contributing to their discordance.

4.4   Theme Three – *Eucharist and the "inner self":* Tension within Iranian converts' suffering and trauma, and with their experiences of the Eucharist

Finally, besides the tensions noticed among Iranian converts' "cultural self" and "social self", further tensions occurred in their "inner self" at two levels. First, tension arose from within these converts' suffering and trauma for their decision to convert to Christianity. They suffered both in Iran and Britain. Some suffering was ongoing and reached trauma level, causing challenges in their well-being as migrants and Christians. These sufferings and trauma resulted in the oppression they experienced in Iran and as asylum seekers and refugees who faced hostility and racism in Britain. Second, there was a "trauma-faith" paradox among these converts, which generated another level of tension. Despite the suffering and trauma that arose from their conversion, Iranian converts paradoxically persisted in their Christian faith rather than quitting as a typical response to suffering and trauma. The data suggested they viewed the Eucharist as central to their faith and expressing their personal "covenant" with God. They also found strength, positive experiences and values through the Eucharist. However, some converts reported triggering and taxing feelings and thoughts from the Eucharist because of Jesus's

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[423] Duncan and Sarah, 'Transcript', Group Interview Online, 28 March 2022; Mary, John, and Tracy, 'Transcript', Group Interview Online, 29 March 2022.

betrayal and trauma narratives, echoing their personal challenging experiences. Both levels of tension contributed to Iranian converts' discordance. Although this theme was distinct, it was linked with the other two. For instance, Iranian converts' trauma contributed to their mistrust of one another (the "social self"), potentially aggravating their trauma and the aftermath. Also, these converts' cultural heritage (the "cultural self") influenced how they responded to their suffering and trauma and understood and experienced the Eucharist.

4.4.1 Sufferings and trauma among Iranian converts in Britain

The data from these converts' interviews revealed suffering and varied degrees of trauma. Three domains of suffering and trauma were noted: the reported general oppressions from Iranian authorities, the afflictions secondary to these converts' Christian conversion, and the challenges as asylum seekers and refugees in Britain. First, these participants frequently reported oppression by Iranian authorities, causing their suffering and trauma. Censorship and control by Iranian authorities were often mentioned. *Mahmoud* stated there was "*zero tolerance to any protest or idea*".[424] This sentiment was echoed by *Aziz*: "*Everything is being censored*".[425] The oppression through censorship and control contributed to these converts' exposure to traumatic incidents. For instance, *Hamid* said the authorities arrested him for seeing his girlfriend in public. He also reported that when walking home after school as a youth, he witnessed a public execution by hanging. *Hamid* could not forget that as it was "*one of the worst experiences*" in his life.[426] Moreover, Iranian converts mentioned various examples of the lack of religious freedom in Iran. They could not practise their faith publicly and openly discuss Christianity with others.[427] Churches could not meet openly and baptise new believers from Muslim backgrounds.[428] The churches in Iran generally did not practise the Eucharist because they feared being discovered by

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[424] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[425] Aziz, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[426] Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.
[427] Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hiva; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.
[428] Babak; Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.

the authorities.[429] Also, the authorities raided the underground house churches and searched one's property when they discovered Iranian converts' involvement with those churches.[430]

Second, these converts often mentioned the serious adverse consequences of their religious conversion. They reported fear of imprisonment and even execution if Iranian authorities discovered they left Islam for Christianity. *Shirin* mentioned that the authorities killed or persecuted many members of her church in Iran.[431] Besides the ongoing fear after conversion, several participants recounted personal losses in Iran and beyond. *Leila* was separated from her husband and school-aged son for months after arriving in Britain, as they stayed behind in another European country. She was tearful when she mentioned the separation, "*I don't see my family. I don't see my son... I don't have a home... I don't have anything because I left my country.*"[432]

Like *Leila, Mahmoud*'s wife and children were away from him in Iran. He spoke about the challenging situation with his wife, who was ill. He felt upset that he could not support them financially. [433] Losing close contact with immediate family was harrowing for these converts because of their communal heritage, as illustrated in Theme Two. Some also reported material losses. *Nader* mentioned losing his family farming business in Iran after the news of him becoming a Christian in Britain spread back home, causing constant disturbance to the business by the authorities. [434] Besides losses, Iranian converts often recounted their perception of being disliked by others, especially Muslims, causing inner tension. These Muslims could be Iranians and non-Iranians. *Nader* said,

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[429] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

[430] Aziz, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.

[431] Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'. Although Shirin mentioned the authorities killed or persecuted many members of her church, historical records suggest that Revd Hossein Soodmand of the Assemblies of God is the only Christian convert who has been officially executed forapostasy in Iran. He was executed in December 1990.

[432] Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

[433] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

[434] Nader.

I generally think, even in the UK, you can't just say that you have converted to Christianity from Islam… you need to hide a bit somehow… because other Muslims get cross with you. It is still the case even now.[435]

Similarly, *Shirin* also reported that some Muslims tried to humiliate her when she expressed her Christian faith.[436] Thus, many converts considered it necessary to keep their Christian faith private, sometimes even from their family members, creating further inner tension. Some of *Reza's* family members still did not know about his conversion, and *Maryam* had not told her parents.[437] *Mahmoud* expressed dissatisfaction: "*It hurts me that I am not allowed and have no power to share my faith with others.*"[438]

Third, most converts came to Britain as asylum seekers and refugees who experienced significant suffering and trauma during the process. The suffering and trauma came from their journeys to flee Iran, the asylum procedures in Britain, and the challenges of living as immigrants. The journey from Iran was often harsh and sometimes life-threatening. *Hamid* witnessed the people smuggler shoot someone's leg, and people died during his journey.[439] *Mahmoud* also described how he and other people got lost in the stormy sea during the boat journey, and they were "*almost dead*" before being rescued.[440] Even if they arrived in Britain, the asylum process was lengthy and complicated, including substantial waiting and uncertainty. *Sara*, who was still waiting for a decision at the time of the interview, expressed her frustration:

Many local people think refugees always come from poor countries, but actually, we have had a good life in Iran. If there is freedom of religion in Iran, 99% will not come here to suffer hardship.[441]

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[435] Ibid.
[436] Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[437] Reza; Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[438] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[439] Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.
[440] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[441] Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.

Leila reported waiting five months since she arrived in Britain for the government appointment to provide her biometric data as part of the standard procedure for asylum seekers. This long wait and uncertainty about their asylum application resulted in a lack of agency for these converts, who had already experienced the forced transition. This lack intensified their suffering and trauma. Hamid echoed this in the interview, "*The difficulty is that suddenly, in a second, you had no idea what was going on next minute.*"[442]

The challenge of being a migrant in the host country also brought Iranian converts further suffering and trauma. Many reported feeling isolated and lonely in Britain.[443] These converts needed to re-establish their lives in this new host country, which was challenging, particularly without family support and when English was not their first language. *Babak*, who was jailed in Iran because of his conversion, described his struggles after he moved to Britain, impacting his faith:

> *I had some trauma, which became more difficult after I moved to Britain as I lost everything… I started from zero… I also struggled with my faith, myself, the people around me, and the Church.*[444]

Likewise, *Hamid* stated that it was "*hard to start everything from the beginning*" when his life in Iran was good.[445] This challenge of living as an asylum seeker and refugee in Britain was intensified by Iranian converts' perception of disgust and hostility by the majority in Britain. To understand their lived experiences as migrants in Britain, they were asked to comment on their experiences of racism. Seven participants in all three research congregations reported they experienced racism implicitly or explicitly in Britain. *Reza* considered racism complicated, but he undoubtedly experienced "*prejudice*" because of his ethnicity.[446] *Mahmoud* also felt he had "*different treatment*" because he was Iranian.[447] *Sara* described an incident in the hospital when

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442 Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.
443 Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.
444 Babak.
445 Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.
446 Reza.
447 Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

two health professionals interviewed her without providing an interpreter despite *Sara's* persistent request, and she believed racism played a role.[448] *Leila* also reported an incident in the supermarket where a woman of the majority race told *Leila* that she should not be in this country.[449] *Shirin* recalled an incident when she first arrived in Britain. Some youths threw stones at her in public. *Shirin* protected herself by going to a local shop, and the police were informed.[450]

Their encounters with racism continued even when these converts were more established and started working in Britain. For instance, *Nader*, who worked as a public transport driver, said he got both explicit and subtle racial insults from his customers. *Nader* believed that racism in Britain remained the same in the last two decades since he arrived. He avoided going out and advised other Iranians the same when England won in football matches because of the fear of possible violence towards minority ethnics *Nader* had witnessed. *Nader* also reported witnessing local council staff of the majority race expressed their opinions that "*the government should kick out all the foreigners*" when Britain announced leaving the European Union. *Nader* decided to "*swallow it*" rather than report it.[451] *Hamid*, who worked in the construction industry, recalled that his colleagues accused him of "*changing his religion for a visa*". His colleagues also mocked him and called him "*church boy*" and "*idiot*" because of his Christian faith. *Hamid* left that job because of the situation. He also mentioned another incident outside work in which a man shouted at *Hamid* and his Iranian friend when they were talking in Farsi, "*What is this fXXXing [swear word] language you are speaking? Get back to your country, you two.*" *Hamid* highlighted the impact of these suffering and trauma: "*I had a few experiences of racism in England... It is really painful.*" [452]

Hence, the data illustrated that Iranian participants experienced various levels of suffering, primarily from their Christian conversion. Their suffering caused the first level of inner

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448 Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.
449 Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
450 Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
451 Nader.
452 Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.

tension among these converts, especially on the question of how God allowed their suffering despite their conversion. Moreover, their suffering was ongoing. *Reza*, who had left Iran for 19 years, said, "*You kind of find it easier to deal with them [challenges of living in Britain] … some never go away.*"[453] Furthermore, Iranian converts' suffering was profound. The traumatic experiences these converts had also led to avoidance commonly seen in individuals with significant trauma. Both *Babak and Mahmoud* were somewhat reluctant to discuss their traumatic experiences during the interview. This avoidance could affect how Iranian converts engaged with their Christian faith. *Sheila,* who witnessed her sister being forced to get married by their father in the name of Islam, mentioned that she had "*bad memories of people who talked about God in Farsi*". She explained she encountered some Iranian Christians teaching Christianity forcefully, such as saying, "*You must do this… why don't you do this?" Sheila* found that approach triggering and reminded her of what she experienced when she was a Muslim in Iran that she wanted to avoid remembering: "*I am very sensitive about any force.*"[454] All the trauma-related avoidance further supported this notion of inner tension from these converts' suffering and trauma, as they tried to minimise the discomfort caused by the tension.

4.4.2   "Trauma-faith" paradox: Iranian converts' understanding and experience of the Eucharist amidst their suffering

In this section, I will explain a "trauma-faith" paradox observed among Iranian converts, contributing to inner tensions. As mentioned, Iranian converts experienced suffering and trauma in Iran and Britain from their religious conversion. However, these converts also paradoxically persisted in their Christian faith rather than quitting in response to trauma, generating tension from this paradox. Despite their trauma, these converts reported positive experiences and values from the Eucharist. Notably, they believed the Eucharist was central to their individual Christian faith and advocated linking the Eucharist with their personal commitment to God. They

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[453] Reza.
[454] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

described this commitment as their covenant ("*peyman*" - پیمان) with God, which requires regular reminding and even renewing through recurring participation in the Eucharist. Some also found strength for their suffering and trauma through the Eucharist, including identifying their suffering and trauma with Christ's suffering. However, the Eucharist could trigger conflicting emotions and thoughts among some converts because of Jesus's betrayal and trauma narratives, echoing some of their personal experiences. Hence, tension arose as ongoing suffering and trauma impacted these converts' understandings and experiences of their Christian faith, particularly the Eucharist, with a mixture of favourable and potentially taxing thoughts and emotions. The conflicting experiences further contributed to their discordance.

4.4.2.1 Centrality of the Eucharist and individual covenant with God

All participants indicated that the Eucharist has been central to their Christian faith. Most were unaware of the Eucharist before their conversion. Many converts considered the Eucharist special. *Nader* mentioned, *"The Holy Communion is higher than anything else – everything else is good, but the Holy Communion is special."* [455] *Babak* suggested that there was something that could "*only be found in the Holy Communion*".   The understanding of the Eucharist related to Jesus's body and blood was well established among Iranian converts, and all participants could identify the bread and wine in the Eucharist as representing Jesus's body and blood. Nevertheless, how these convert participants understood the nature of the bread and the wine differed, reflecting the diversity of the understanding of the Eucharist throughout the Church's history and within Anglicanism. The data suggested that church traditions did not influence how these converts understood the Eucharist. Most converts, apart from *Hiva*, believed that the bread and the wine carried symbolic meanings of Jesus's body and blood. *Hiva* was the only convert who considered the Eucharist's bread turning into Christ's body.[456] Several converts elaborated and

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[455] Nader.
[456] Hiva.

said that bread and wine were "*more than symbols*".[457] Nader said, "*It is a symbol, but also, at the same time, it is not just bread I am having… It is a kind of both of them.*"[458] Most participants could link the Eucharist to the Gospel narratives of the Last Supper. Moreover, these converts often mentioned remembrance and sacrifice in their understanding of the Eucharist. Most participants spontaneously said in their interviews that the Eucharist reminded them of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross.[459] Similar expressions were also seen in the digital survey responses.[460] The Eucharist reminded some converts of Christ's teachings and examples. *Shirin* and *Hamid* both mentioned that remembering Jesus could also mean remembering his message, his work, and his life, not only his sacrifice.[461] *Reza,* whose conversion was inspired by Jesus's life and actions, advocated that remembrance in the Eucharist was also about how Jesus stood against societal injustice.[462] Furthermore, some Iranians highlighted the eschatological dimensions. *Maryam* indicated that the Eucharist reminded her of Jesus's death and "*his resurrection*", and she looked forward to Jesus's "*glorious return*".[463]

Besides, many converts highlighted the concept of "covenant" in their understanding of the Eucharist and linked that to their faith commitment. *Sara, Hiva* and *Aziz* used the Farsi term "*peyman" (پیمان)* in their interviews to explain the Eucharist as a reminder of their covenant with God.[464] *Sara* said this "*peyman*" made her feel closer to God.[465] Those who used English in the interviews also employed the term "*covenant*" to describe their understanding of the Eucharist.

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[457] Nader; Babak; Reza.

[458] Nader.

[459] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hiva; Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'; Nader; Babak; Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

[460] Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 6 February 2022; Maryam, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1)'; Sheila, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 16 January 2022.

[461] Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.

[462] Reza.

[463] Maryam, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1)'.

[464] Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'; Hiva; Aziz, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.

[465] Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.

[466] Noteworthily, the term *"peyman"* is used during the institution narrative in the CoE-authorised Persian translation of the Eucharistic liturgy for the "new covenant" through Christ's blood.[467] These converts also emphasised their personal holiness. *Shirin and Zoran* highlighted the need to examine themselves before participating in the Eucharist, especially the warning of the potential *"judgement"* to people not examining themselves before the Eucharist.[468] *Leila* and *Shirin* indicated that remembering Jesus's sacrifice during the Eucharist reminded them of guarding themselves against sinning.[469] In the digital written surveys asking how the Eucharist related to these participants' lives and faith experience the previous week, *Aziz* stated the need to *"get rid of evil or mistake as I am born again"*. *Sara* also indicated her responsibility of *"not deviating from the right path"*.[470] Consequently, many converts considered the Eucharist an opportunity to review and renew their individual "covenant" with God. For instance, *Reza* described the Eucharist as a source of connection with God that requires regular renewal.[471] Similarly, *Nader* suggested that each time he participated in the Eucharist, he got *"recalibrated"* with God. As a drone enthusiast, *Nader* linked the Eucharist with recalibrating a drone before flying it so that *"it can fly better and better coordinated."*[472] *Aziz*'s digital written survey responses also advocated this notion of renewal.[473] Moreover, several converts highlighted the necessity to receive the Eucharist repeatedly. *Aziz* even described the diminishing effect of the Eucharist several days following his participation: *"When time goes by, the sense of healing and joy would be less and less."*[474] *Reza* said the Eucharist helped him *"survive another week"* through the

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[466] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

[467] Archbishops' Council, the Church of England, 'Holy Communion (Order One) - English and Persian'.

[468] Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

[469] Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

[470] Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 16 January 2022; Sara, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 3) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 6 March 2022.

[471] Reza.

[472] Nader.

[473] Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1) - English Translation of Farsi Original'; Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 3) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 20 February 2022.

[474] Aziz, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'; Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1) - English Translation of Farsi Original'.

repeated review of his life of the previous week, asking God's forgiveness and strength for the coming week.[475]

Therefore, these converts demonstrated a strong and prevailing focus on the individual dimension of their faith in the Eucharist: the covenant "*peyman*", the perusal of personal holiness and the regular review of their individual lives. This predominant and firm emphasis on the personal dimension of their faith in the Eucharist contrasted significantly with the much more diverse and ambiguous understandings when discussing the Eucharist's communal dimension. This prevailing focus provided further evidence to support the "selective emphasis" highlighted in Theme Two because of Iranian converts' challenge in trusting others despite their communal culture, creating tension in their "social self".

4.4.2.2 Positive experiences and values from the Eucharist

Besides the centrality of the Eucharist to their faith and seeing the Eucharist as their personal commitment to God, Iranian converts also described positive experiences and values from participating in the Eucharist. Many described experiencing the divine presence during the Eucharist.[476] This sense of presence was linked to many converts' vivid experiences of indwelling and union with Christ during the Eucharist. For instance, *Babak* was somewhat embarrassed when he described feeling his body and soul "*melted with Jesus's body and soul*" when receiving the Eucharist.[477] Likewise, *Mahmoud* also felt self-conscious ("*sounded like a delusion*") when expressing that he "*combined with Jesus's body and became one*" at the Eucharist.[478] *Reza* described receiving the Eucharist as "*shaking hands and embracing God... you and God becoming*

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[475] Reza.

[476] Ibid.; Babak; Zoran, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'; Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Sheila, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 30 January 2022; Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 3) - English Translation of Farsi Original'.

[477] Babak.

[478] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

one thing – it is part of you ".[479] Several converts described this indwelling and union with Christ as a physical sensation. *Sheila* expressed a physical sensation of "*Christ entered her*" when she received the Eucharist.[480] *Maryam* experienced "*a warm feeling*" in her body during the Eucharist, calming her.[481] These intense physical experiences were somewhat prevalent. *Aziz* and *Mahmoud* described a physical feeling of being "*hugged by God*" during the Eucharist. *Aziz* said, "*I just feel that someone is hugging me…from the moment the priest gives me the bread*".[482] *Mahmoud* mentioned experiencing the "*heat of his [Jesus] body*" coming to him like an "*enthusiastic hug*" as if "*someone physically holds him tightly*".[483] Besides physical sensations, many converts described visualising the Last Supper scene, as seen in films, during the Eucharist.[484]

With these experiences, Iranian converts reported positive values from the Eucharist. Spiritually, they considered the Eucharist as "*nourishing*" like "*heavenly food*" and "*fresh air in the polluted lives*".[485] Through the Eucharist, they also experienced God's forgiveness of their sins[486] and the love of God and Christ[487]. Some considered the Eucharist as a gift and blessing from God to them.[488] Several converts highlighted the hope and the sense of new life from the Eucharist.[489] These converts also reported experiencing positive emotions during the Eucharist.

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[479] Reza.

[480] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Sheila, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2) - English Translation of Farsi Original'.

[481] Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.

[482] Aziz, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.

[483] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

[484] Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.

[485] Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 4) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 6 March 2022; Babak.

[486] Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hamid, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1) - English Translation of Farsi Original'; Mahmoud, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2)', 20 February 2022.

[487] Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2) - English Translation of Farsi Original'; Hamid, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1) - English Translation of Farsi Original'.

[488] Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

[489] Reza; Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 4) - English Translation of Farsi Original'.

These emotions included happiness, joy, and peace.[490] Notably, this peace was linked to a sense of strength that these converts often reported from the Eucharist, especially for their various challenges and sufferings.[491] For instance, *Hamid* highlighted in his digital written survey response after having some difficulties before Eucharist: "*I felt Jesus in me as usual… he made me feel calm, and I forgot about my sadness and my problem at once.*"[492] Likewise, *Aziz* reported the Eucharist gave him peace to help with his stress.[493] *Sheila* also described that through the Eucharist, she sensed God indicated to her that he heard her prayers and was always by her side.[494] Furthermore, these converts reported feeling thankful at the Eucharist for what God had done for them.[495] Consequently, they described how the Eucharist positively impacted their spiritual lives and faith experiences, including growing stronger spiritually and becoming kinder and more willing to help others.[496]

4.4.2.3 Conflicting emotions and thoughts from the Eucharist

In the previous sections, I illustrated that Iranian converts viewed the Eucharist as central to their Christian faith and close relationship with their personal commitment to God. The

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[490] Hiva; Maryam, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2)', 6 March 2022; Leila, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1)', 6 February 2022; Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2) - English Translation of Farsi Original'; Zoran, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 6 February 2022; Sheila, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1) - English Translation of Farsi Original'; Sara, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 20 February 2022; Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.

[491] Leila, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 3) - English Translation of Farsi Original'; Sheila, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 3) - English Translation of Farsi Original', 6 March 2022; Maryam, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2)'; Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.

[492] Hamid, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1) - English Translation of Farsi Original'.

[493] Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2) - English Translation of Farsi Original'.

[494] Sheila, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2) - English Translation of Farsi Original'.

[495] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Hiva.

[496] Zoran, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 3) - English Translation of Farsi Original'; Shirin, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1)', 6 February 2022; Sara, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2) - English Translation of Farsi Original'; Maryam, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1)'.

Eucharist also brings them strength, positive experiences and values. Although these converts suffered various traumas, they paradoxically persisted in their Christian faith rather than giving it up. Paradox typically creates tension because of the seeming contradictions. In particular, some converts suggested the Eucharist could trigger challenging and conflicting thoughts and emotions because of their sufferings and trauma, highlighting further inner tension. When asked about the Eucharist, most converts mentioned the passion narrative, including Jesus's betrayal, suffering and sacrificial death.[497] Nonetheless, the passion narrative reminded these converts of their suffering and trauma, including betrayal and sacrifices, causing conflicting thoughts and emotions. For instance, although *Aziz* reported a generally positive experience with the Eucharist, he also mentioned he felt sorrowful during the Eucharist because of what happened to Christ.[498] Likewise, *Leila* described mixed feelings during and after the Eucharist, including sadness and the need to cry.[499] *Maryam* illustrated the challenge of the passion narrative at the Eucharist, "*I was reminded of the sufferings of Jesus. Not something I would prefer to think, but it happened.*"[500] *Sara* also talked about Jesus's betrayal as a challenge to her, "*Reading about Jesus's response with love even though he was going to be betrayed… when we were betrayed, we would keep the other person at a distance.*"[501] Despite feeling thankful generally, these converts also questioned whether they deserved to partake in the Eucharist because of the perception of not being "*good enough*".[502] For instance, *Hamid* felt ashamed as he might not be "*a good Christian*".[503] All these conflicting thoughts and emotions from the Eucharist contributed to their inner tension.

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[497] Babak; Sheila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'; Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Maryam, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1)'; Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 2) - English Translation of Farsi Original'; Shirin, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 3)', 6 March 2022; Sheila, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 1) - English Translation of Farsi Original'.
[498] Aziz, 'Text Message Response of Digital Written Survey (Response Number 3) - English Translation of Farsi Original'.
[499] Leila, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[500] Maryam, '"Transcript", Interview Online with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[501] Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.
[502] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'; Shirin, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.
[503] Hamid, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person'.

Babak and *Mahmoud* both experienced significant trauma in Iran, and their accounts illustrated how the trauma that happened might have influenced these converts to respond differently. *Babak* was jailed in Iran because of his church leadership position. He indicated having traumatic experiences during and after that imprisonment that he did not want to disclose. When asked about his experience of the Eucharist, *Babak* described a tension between his understanding and his experience of the Eucharist because of his traumatic experience, which was after his conversion:

> *Because of my trauma, something in my mind is very challenging for me… one thing is about the Holy Communion… when I received that, I knew the meaning of it because of my knowledge… but spiritually, I didn't have any experience of that… when I receive the Holy Communion, sometimes I thought this is nonsense.* [504]

Hence, *Babak* suggested that his traumatic experience, which was closely related to his religious conversion, impacted his experience of the Eucharist. In contrast, *Mahmoud* had the opposite experience of the Eucharist and reported "*healing*" of his traumatic experience through the Eucharist. His trauma, which resulted in a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), happened in Iran before his religious conversion. *Mahmoud* believed that his trauma led him to Christianity after a trusted Christian friend knew what happened to *Mahmoud* and shared the faith with him. He explained that the healing from the Eucharist was through him identifying with Jesus's suffering, which *Mahmoud* tried to describe: "*The person [Jesus] who loves you, the person whom you love, has suffered a lot… You feel better when you understand that someone who loves you has also suffered a lot.*"[505]

Therefore, these examples highlighted that Iranian converts' experiences of the Eucharist could be multi-dimensional, mixed with positive experiences and values but also conflicting thoughts and emotions. Besides the tension generated by these converts' suffering and trauma

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[504] Babak.
[505] Mahmoud, '"Transcript", Interview Online'.

per se, the tension from the "trauma-faith" paradox, as illustrated by the various experiences about the Eucharist that were linked with these converts' suffering and trauma, created additional tension in these converts' "inner self". On the one hand, like *Mahmoud*, the Eucharist could bring "healing" by identifying with Christ's passion, which is highlighted in the Eucharistic liturgy, even leading to religious conversion. On the other hand, the Eucharist passion narrative could generate taxing and challenging thoughts and emotions, as seen in *Babak* and other converts' mixed feelings and views.

4.5   Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the three themes identified from the thematic analysis of the qualitative data of the 13 Iranian converts from three CoE congregations. The data describe these converts' understandings and lived experiences of the Eucharist, which addressed RQ1. The three themes from the thematic analysis also partially addressed RQ2 on how converts' background may have influenced their understanding and experiences of the Eucharist. Through their participation in the Eucharist, these themes showed their various tensions, contributing to the overall discordance among them internally and externally when they related to the world, including the Church. The data supports the argument that Iranian converts from Islam experienced discordance that is related to their cultural identities, religious conversion and traumatic experiences. These themes relate to the three core personhood domains, namely identity (the "cultural self"), belonging (the "social self"), and being (the "inner self"). The qualitative data suggested tensions in all three domains. Figure 2 summarises how these three domains are linked with specific foci.

The first tension about their identity came from how they should manage between their Iranian cultural heritage and the British tradition as diasporas. The crucial question is: "*Am I still an Iranian?*"   The second tension about belonging was linked with these converts' mistrust of others, especially when Iranian tradition values hospitality and communality. This tension

highlights the complexity of Iranian converts' interactions with one another, their churches and society. The critical question is: "*Where do I belong?*" Finally, the tension about these converts' being was secondary to their suffering and trauma, mainly from their religious conversion and being minority ethnics in Britain. The suffering and trauma created tension by themselves, but there was also a "trauma-faith" paradox that contributed to further tension related to their being. Despite their suffering and trauma from their conversion, these converts paradoxically persisted in their Christian faith rather than quitting, as a typical response to suffering and traumatic experiences. However, some converts reported triggering and taxing feelings and thoughts from the Eucharist because of the narrative of Jesus's betrayal, sacrifice and trauma, mirroring their own experience of betrayal and suffering. These mixed feelings and thoughts expanded this tension, posing another crucial question about these converts' being: "*Who am I really?*"

Figure 2 also highlights that these three distinct themes were related. These converts' being impacted by their suffering, trauma, and faith experiences could negatively affect their confidence in trusting others and their sense of belonging. Their inner being also altered how they expressed and behaved culturally. Moreover, their sense of belonging influenced the level of isolation, which reinforced and even aggravated the aftermath of their suffering and trauma that already impacted their being. This sense of belonging also potentially changed how much they wanted to keep their Iranian cultural identity as migrants in Britain, especially in their understanding and experiences of community. Finally, their cultural identities not only impacted how these converts experienced and understood their suffering and trauma that altered their being but also shaped how they considered belonging to the Church and British society, mainly since Iranian and British cultures differ significantly. All these three domains of tensions contributed to overall discordance in these converts.
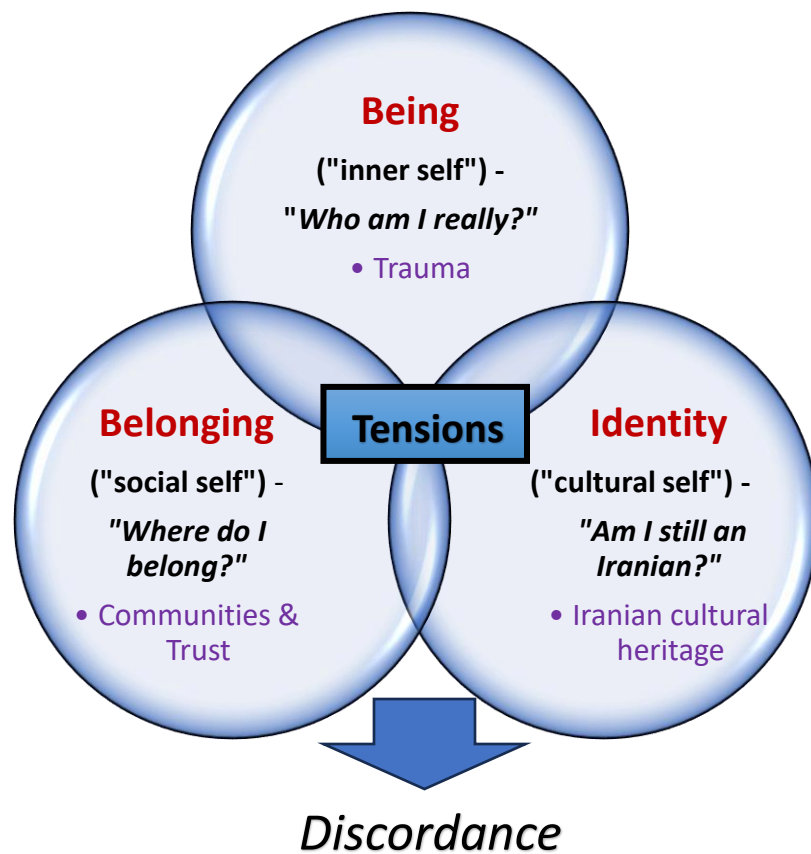
Figure 2 Three Domains of Tensions From Qualitative Data, Contributing to Discordance

These three domains of tensions summarise Iranian converts' lived experiences on the Eucharist and the Church. They will be the foundation for deeper analysis in the next stage of the pastoral cycle. In the next chapter, I will bring in other sources of knowledge from various disciplines for further conversations. First, I will draw on the social scientific concept of multiple cultural and religious identities for the tension of identity, the "cultural self". Second, for the tension of belonging, the "social self", I propose conversations with Islamic Studies' concept of "*ummah*"[506] and political Islam in Iran and analyse how these may affect these converts' sense of belonging, especially in the context of the CoE. Finally, for the tension of being, the "inner self", I will focus on the psychological and theological aspects of trauma, including racial trauma. The

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[506] See Glossary.

lived experiences from the qualitative data and the other sources of knowledge will also provide the grounding for further theological reflection and constructing theology in Chapter Six, supporting the second part of the overall thesis: discordance underpins the contextual understanding and practice related to the Eucharist, which can be the theological source for transformation and reconciliation in Iranian converts and the Church.

Chapter Five: Exploring Discordance Inter-disciplinarily

In Chapter Four, I presented the qualitative data of Iranian converts in their participation in the Eucharist, and the overarching discordance emerged from the three themes with associated tensions around identity ("cultural self"), belonging ("social self") and being ("inner self"). The data addressed RQ1, and the themes from the thematic analysis partially addressed RQ2. In this chapter, I will correlate Iranian converts' lived experiences from the data with interdisciplinary knowledge from other theological and non-theological sources for contextual analyses as the "exploration" of the pastoral cycle. These conversations will respond more comprehensively to RQ2 on how Iranian converts' cultural heritage, religious conversion from Islam and encounters with trauma and suffering influenced their understanding and experience of the Eucharist. First, for tension around identity, I will review the concept of multiple cultural and religious identities from social science and theological perspectives and argue that the tension observed in Iranian converts came from the ongoing formation of their multiple identities, which are complex and confusing. This formation also put them in an "in-between space". Second, regarding tension around belonging, I will apply the concept of "*ummah*" in Islamic Studies and the situation of political Islam in Iran to discuss belonging and inclusion. I propose that these converts were "included under duress" but did not belong to the Iranian Muslim communities, creating tension from this deficiency of belonging. As the qualitative data shows, this tension caused Iranian converts to face challenges in their sense of belonging to the Church, their new faith community. Finally, I will draw on psychological and theological insights about trauma, focusing on trauma survivors' disconnection in their memories and bodies. This disconnection also occurs in Iranian converts. The Eucharist, a tangible and tactile sacrament that embodies Christ's wounds, can facilitate these converts' "re-making" through reconstructing their trauma narratives. All these explorations inform and provide the foundation for further theological reflection and construction in Chapter Six.

5.1 *"Am I still an Iranian?"*: The "in-between space" for complex religio-cultural identities

The first tension that contributed to discordance was related to these converts' cultural identity as migrants in Britain. This tension arose from two elements. The first was with the British and Western cultures. The second was with their Christian faith, as there were conflicts between Iranian cultural heritage, which came from Zoroastrianism and Islam, and Iranian converts' understandings and practices of Christianity. As migrants, these converts faced acculturation challenges crucial for identity formation.[507] In this section, I will draw on social scientific theories on acculturation and multi-cultural identity to understand the qualitative data. I will also consider the notion of multiple religious identities to comprehend the intersection between culture and religion among these converts. I propose that Iranian converts underwent a multidimensional acculturation process, which formed "complex religio-cultural identities." I will argue that this identity formation process is complex and confusing, and these converts were in a demanding "in-between space".

Anthropologists Redfield, Linton and Herskovits defined acculturation as "the phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups".[508] Psychologist John Berry suggested four distinct acculturation strategies for individuals relating their original minority ethnic culture with the dominant majority culture. The first strategy is integration, which implies strong identification concurrently with the original and majority cultures. The second is assimilation, where individuals develop a strong relationship with the majority culture but a weak relationship with their original culture. The reverse is separation, where individuals have a weak connection with the majority culture but a strong association with their original culture. The last strategy is marginalisation, which involves a weak

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[507] Angela-MinhTu D Nguyen and Veronica Benet-Martinez, 'Multicultural Identity: What It Is and Why It Matters', in *The Psychology of Social and Cultural Diversity*, ed. by Richard J. Crisp (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 87–114 (p. 91).

[508] Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville J. Herskovits, 'Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation', *American Anthropologist*, 38.1 (1936), 149–52.

link with both cultures. Berry proposed a bidimensional acculturation model, which constantly negotiates two central issues. The first issue is to what extent individuals are motivated or allowed to retain identification and involvement with their original ethnic culture. The second issue is how much these individuals are motivated or allowed to identify with and participate in the majority culture.[509] Bicultural identity and acculturation are tightly intertwined.[510] How much bicultural individuals' cultural identities overlap varies. Individuals with high integration see themselves as part of a "hyphenated culture" and find the two cultures largely compatible, while individuals with low integration consider themselves living "in-between cultures" and see the two cultures as conflictual. Psychological research suggests that individuals who face various cultures and adopt integration result in greater well-being than those who have compartmentalised identities.[511] However, the benefit of integration is not universally accepted.[512]

Multi-cultural identity and acculturation can also be considered at the community level. Schwartz and his colleagues believed that how migrants acculturate depends not only on their individual experiences but also on their relationships with others from their minority culture (intragroup) and those of the majority culture (intergroup). They drew on social scientific self-categorisation and social identity theories to explain these relationships. Self-categorisation theory suggests that individuals are likely to define their self-identity by their cultural values and practices when encountering different cultures. This self-identity definition can result in "clashes of values" and be seen as identity threats to both majority and minority cultural groups. These threats can cause different cultural groups to maintain their identities by vigorously defending

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[509] John W. Berry, 'Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation', *Applied Psychology*, 46.1 (1997), 5–34.
[510] Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, p. 91.
[511] Maya A. Yampolsky, Catherine E. Amiot, and Roxane de la Sablonnière, 'Multicultural Identity Integration and Well-Being: A Qualitative Exploration of Variations in Narrative Coherence and Multicultural Identification', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4 (2013), 126.
[512] Floyd W. Rudmin, 'Critical History of the Acculturation Psychology of Assimilation, Separation, Integration, and Marginalization', *Review of General Psychology*, 7.1 (2003), 3–37; Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, pp. 102–5.

their practices and values.[513]   Psychologist Vignoles believed that people are motivated to construct and maintain individual and group identities that give them self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, meaning, belonging, and efficacy. Identity threats occur when these motives cannot be satisfied, leading to employing coping strategies to establish or restore satisfaction.[514] Moreover, social identity theory suggests that cultural majority and minority group members find ways to maintain the positive distinctiveness of their cultural identities as an "identity management strategy".[515]

Both the cultural majority and minority groups experience these identity threats but for different reasons. For the majority group, the threat comes not only from the cultural differences of the minority groups but also from the process of the minority group becoming part of the "national ingroup" to which the majority always belong. The ongoing negotiations of a superordinate "national identity", like Britishness, and how to become and behave as members of this revised "national ingroup" pose threats to both cultural majority and minority groups.[516] Moreover, for the minority group, the threats can include the lack of opportunities and resources due to their disadvantaged socioeconomic status, like Iranian converts as refugees and asylum seekers. This lower social position threatens their self-esteem, efficacy and belonging. The minority group faces additional pressure if the receiving nations push for assimilation ideologies and policies, which reduce the distinctiveness of the minority group's identity and undermine their feelings of continuity, resulting in the loss of meaning that they otherwise derive from their cultural identity.[517]   Asylum seekers and refugees run into the majority culture involuntarily, and this magnifies the cultural differences and identity threats.[518]

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[513] Seth J. Schwartz and others, 'The Identity Dynamics of Acculturation and Multiculturalism: Situating Acculturation in Context', in *The Oxford Handbook of Multicultural Identity*, ed. by Veronica Benet-Martinez and Ying-Yi Hong (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 57–93 (pp. 64–66).

[514] Vivian L. Vignoles, 'Identity Motives', in *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, ed. by Seth J. Schwartz, Koen Luyckx, and Vivian L. Vignoles (New York, Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London: Springer, 2011), pp. 403–32.

[515] Schwartz and others, pp. 66–78.

[516] Ibid., p. 70.

[517] Ibid., pp. 75–76.

[518] Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, p. 101.

The minorities may attempt to become or to be accepted as majority group members, who usually have higher social positions, to reduce identity threats. However, if this attempt is impossible or unsuccessful, the minority can identify more with their original culture, a phenomenon called reactive ethnicity. This phenomenon creates a buffer against identity threats' negative implications and the minority ethnics' perception as victims of discrimination. Unfortunately, this increase in identification with one's own cultural identity also means adopting separation as the acculturation strategy.[519] The identity formation processes of both majority and minority groups are closely interwoven. Intergroup and intragroup dynamics depend on factors that can be out of the control of both minority and majority groups, like world events and politics. Therefore, negotiations of their boundaries and identities between and within groups are ongoing. The newly emerged identities also influence intergroup and intragroup relations and further complicate matters.[520] Hence, individuals, especially minorities in lower social positions, are constantly in this exhausting "in-between space" of negotiations and re-negotiations, a massive challenge in acculturation. Schwartz and his colleagues suggest that biculturalism, in its most integrated form, implies being comfortable with both cultures and having fewer perceived identity threats from one's own and the receiving cultural groups. This ideal is achieved through the development of an integrated bicultural self.[521] However, it is demanding, and scholars have highlighted that reconciling the contrasting demands and expectations of one's heritage and the receiving cultural communities can be impossible.[522] Despite the benefits of biculturalism, the burden of integrating two cultures can cause stress, isolation, and identity confusion.[523] All these echo cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall's comment that cultural identity is not a fixed essence but a "positioning" and "a matter of becoming as well as of being".[524]

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[519] Schwartz and others, pp. 73–77.
[520] Ibid., pp. 80–82.
[521] Ibid., p. 84.
[522] Rudmin; Schwartz and others, p. 84.
[523] Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, p. 102.
[524] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 222–37.

These understandings and challenges of acculturation and biculturalism are evident among Iranian converts in this research. Their preference for saying the Lord's Prayer in English during the Eucharist at churches but in Farsi at home can be interpreted as their attempt to reduce the cultural identity threat by gaining acceptance from the cultural majority group with a higher social position. Their status as asylum seekers and refugees threatened these converts' self-esteem and potentially generated feelings that their native language, Farsi, may be less efficacious than English in prayers. Likewise, Iranian converts' partaking of the Act of Remembrance during Remembrance Sunday through imitation without much awareness of its meaning is another example of converts' attempt to reduce identity threats by conforming to the majority British cultural norm. This conformity, also seen in the memorial for the late Queen, can be interpreted as a "partial assimilation". However, by setting up an Iranian-style memorial corner and providing "*halva*", these converts also adopted integration as another acculturation strategy. Hence, it supports the dynamic nature of acculturation, employing two strategies on the same occasion. These identity threats created the tension observed in the data. Tension could also arise when motives clashed, as psychologist Vignoles proposed. For example, motive clashes were noted in the conflict about the Eucharistic liturgy's primary function for these converts. The meaning within the liturgy was vital for their understanding and practice of their Christian faith. Nevertheless, learning English could build their self-esteem, belonging and efficacy in living in the majority culture. These motives were potentially incompatible as some converts struggled to understand English, hence the meaning conveyed in the liturgy. This incompatibility, exemplified by what Babak said, "*What's the point if I don't understand?*" created the observed tension in Iranian converts.

Moreover, as part of the "identity management strategy", Iranian converts emphasised their cultural distinctiveness through the *Nowruz* celebration within their congregations, like having the *Haft-sin* tables in Christian worship venues and the fire-jumping ritual during the *Chahar-shanbeh Suri*. Iranian converts chose *Nowruz*, a festival with pre-Islamic Zoroastrian association, as their cultural distinctiveness instead of something Islamic. This pre-Islamic

inclination and preference for distancing themselves from Islam is observed in several other studies related to Iranians and their identities. Iranian researcher Natalie Soleiman observed and argued in her ethnographic research that the Iranian community in Newcastle, England, fixed and essentialised their diasporic identity to portray a stable, coherent Iranian cultural identity by distancing themselves from the image portrayed by the Iranian Islamic Republic. This distancing was a reaction to "the loss of their glorious Persian culture and history" after the Islamic Republic began.[525] Social scientists Speelman Poots and Gholami also highlighted this identification with Iran's pre-Islamic past as an attempt to transcend negative perceptions of Iran in Britain because of the rise of political Islam and the shift to Islamisation of British Muslims' identities.[526] Gholami further proposed the notion of "non-Islamiosity" and argued that Iranians in Britain more recently redefined their identity to an intra-diasporic secularism that marginalised, excluded, and even eradicated Islam from their Iranian cultural identity.[527] As highlighted in Chapter Two, missiologist Duane Miller reported a similar observation about Iranian converts using *Nowruz* to demonstrate "Persian-ness" to show their hostility to the perceived Islamic contamination of the original Persian culture as a form of Arabs' socio-religious colonialism.[528] Hence, Iranian converts utilised their cultural distinctiveness through the *Nowruz* celebration within their congregations as part of their acculturation.

This issue of multi-cultural identity among Iranian converts is further complicated by the strong association of Iranian cultural heritage with Zoroastrianism. Thus, there is an extra layer of multiple religious identities for Iranian converts. Indonesian Christian theologian Albertus Laksana highlighted that complex religious and cultural identity formation from multiple identities is the hallmark of Asian Christian communities. He argued that religious purity is "hard

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[525] Natalie Marie Soleiman, 'Living in the "in-Between" – Narrating Identity, Re-Imagining Home and Negotiating Belonging: An Ethnographic Investigation of the Iranian Diaspora in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne' (unpublished PhD, Keele University, 2017), pp. 225–26 <https://keele-repository.worktribe.com/output/408530> [accessed 29 December 2023].
[526] Spellman Poots and Gholami, p. 100.
[527] Reza Gholami, '"Is This Islamic Enough?" Intra-Diasporic Secularism and Religious Experience in the Shi'a Iranian Diaspora in London', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40.1 (2014), 60–78.
[528] Duane Alexander Miller, *Living Among the Breakage*, pp. 190–91.

to trace", but the degree and intensity of belonging to other religious traditions varies.[529]

Multiple religious identities in a Christian context are related to the theology of religions, which considers how Christianity relates to other religions theologically. It is also linked with the missological concept of inculturation or contextualisation. These theological and missiological concepts provide frameworks for individuals and scholars to reflect their positions in religious diversity. Catholic theologian Peter Phan proposed a more nuanced theological framework, "inclusive pluralism", to handle the challenges of multi-religious identities. Phan advocated that for Christians practising aspects of other religions, their Christian faith and identity should take precedence and become the meta-language of integration.[530] Theologian Jyrii Komulainen argued that "the Christian faith is capable of adapting itself flexibly to different cultural systems, not excluding their religious aspects".[531] Laksana labelled this a "complex religio-cultural identity", which involves interplay among various religious and cultural identities. This lengthy process demands constant negotiation and is situated in fluidity and ambiguities because of the encounters with different forms of cultural and religious "otherness".[532] Laksana also highlighted the colonial legacy of the global aspects of Christian identity that stem mainly from Western origin, adding further complexity to this "otherness" in the Asian context. He believed that Asian Christians were unwilling to abandon their native cultural identities. However, they were simultaneously deeply fascinated with Christianity's modern appeal and universal networks from the European tradition. Allowing these Iranian converts to have agency to determine the delicate and nuanced relationships between European colonialism through missionaries and the formation of indigenous Christian identities and communities among Iranian converts is vital.[533] This complex process requires ongoing discernment both individually and communally as a

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[529] Albertus Bagus Laksana, 'Multiple Religious Belonging or Complex Identity? An Asian Way of Being Religious', in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, ed. by Felix Wilfred (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 493–509 (pp. 494–95).

[530] Peter C. Phan, 'Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church', *Theological Studies*, 64.3 (2003), 495–519; Laksana, p. 495.

[531] Jyri Komulainen, 'Theological Reflections on Multi-Religious Identity', *Approaching Religion*, 1.1 (2011), 50–58 (p. 57).

[532] Laksana, p. 497.

[533] Ibid., pp. 496–97.

community. As an Asian Christian himself, Laksana was mindful that opposing opinions against multiple religious identities exist, especially among evangelical and Pentecostal churches in many parts of Asia. These churches tend to adopt exclusivism to avoid syncretism, advocating conversion as a total change of cultural and religious identity.[534]

Laksana's notion of "complex religio-cultural identity" helps us understand Iranian converts in this study. The data illustrated their assertion of cultural distinctiveness with a pre-Islamic Zoroastrian inclination and preference of distancing themselves from Islam. As in many Asian contexts, Iranian cultural heritage and religions (Zoroastrianism and Islam, adding Christianity for Iranian converts) are inseparably intertwined. Christian conversion pushes these Iranian converts to face this complexity, which creates tension because of constant negotiations, fluidity, and ambiguities. All converts in this research appeared to prioritise their Christian faith, as theologian Phan's notion of "inclusive pluralism". However, they also showed a range of acceptance of Zoroastrianism and Islam. For instance, when these converts explained their understanding of the Eucharist, some drew on the analogues with Islamic disposition and related Iranian and Middle Eastern cultural heritage: *Hiva* hesitantly associated the Eucharistic bread with his Muslim parents' teaching on respecting bread as God's blessings; *Sara* linked the Eucharist with the meaning of sharing bread and salt in Iranian and Middle Eastern cultural heritage; *Maryam* and *Reza* identified the parallels between the Eucharist and *Nowruz.* Iranian converts were "making theology" through their attempts to understand the Eucharist contextually, as missiologist Miller observed in his research.[535] However, these associations were not universal, and some converts disagreed with the *Nowruz* celebration after their conversion because of *Nowruz's* religious association with Zoroastrianism. These converts adopted a more exclusivist position in their understanding of religion, as Laksana had noticed in his context. Hence, as a cultural distinctiveness and "identity management strategy", *Nowruz* was contentious for some converts, creating tension when they tried to work out their identities.

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[534] Ibid., p. 504.
[535] Duane Alexander Miller, *Living Among the Breakage,* pp. 205–37.

Other examples of "inclusive pluralism" included the notion and understanding of purification in the ritual of jumping over the fire during the *Chahar-shanbeh Suri,* putting the Bible as the wisdom book on the *Nowruz Haft-sin* table, and using the Farsi term in the Bible to link the Christian concepts of renewal and resurrection with that seen in nature in the SAT-7 PARS *Nowruz* programme. Also, these converts' responses on whether Christianity is a "Western" religion demonstrated what Laksana described as the delicate relationships between their Christian identities and the European and Western colonial legacy. Although all participants disagreed that Christianity was a "Western" religion, and many pointed to the Middle Eastern or Asian origins of the Christian faith, the notions of missionaries and Western ownership of Christianity in some converts' responses suggested awareness of this legacy. European regimes had never colonised Iran, but some considered colonial reach still came to Iran before the Islamic Revolution, including the British involvement in the Iranian oil industry through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company from 1908.[536]

In summary, considering theories of multi-cultural and multiple religious identities, these Iranian converts underwent a complex acculturation process. The process was between their original Iranian heritage and the host British culture and concurrently between Christian "culture" and Iranian culture linked with Zoroastrianism and Islam. Rather than bidimensional, as proposed by psychologist Berry in his model, these Iranian converts' acculturation process is convoluted and multi-dimensional, with intricate intersections between religions and cultures. These intersections provide the breeding ground for the formation of Laksana's suggested "complex religio-cultural identity". Because of their conversion, Iranian converts can be considered as "minorities of the minorities" in the Iranian diaspora. Their identity threats created enduring tension, especially since the fluid and ambiguous acculturation process required constant re-evaluations and re-negotiations. Consequently, these converts were situated in an

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[536] Shahram Akbarzadeh, 'The Long History of Iranian Distrust of the West', *The Conversation*, 2011 <http://theconversation.com/the-long-history-of-iranian-distrust-of-the-west-4480> [accessed 4 January 2024]; Edward Henniker-Major, 'Nationalisation: The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in 1951 - Britain Vs. Iran', *Moral Cents: The Journal of Ethics in Finance*, 2.2 (2013), 16–34.

"in-between space" during the acculturation process, being pushed and pulled in various directions by multiple cultural and religious influences. Understandably, being in this "in-between space" is demanding and generates ongoing tension because of the constant changes. Acculturation and identity formation are also critical between ethnic groups within the Church. The issue of belonging, as seen in the second tension from the qualitative data, is significant.

5.2 "*Where do I belong?*": Iranian Islamic notion of "*ummah*" in conversations

The second tension relates to Iranian converts' belonging and "social self". Iranian converts showed a strong mistrust of one another and those in authority. Nevertheless, the mistrust went against the Iranian tradition of being communal and "togetherness". Some Iranian cultural heritage contributed to this mistrust, including the emphasis on shame and honour and the practice of *Taarof*. This tension was also associated with their experience of Iranian political Islam. It impacted these converts' Christian faith experience and sense of belonging in their participation in the CoE, despite the local congregations' efforts to build a sense of family that many converts had lost and missed. In this section, I will first review the ideas of inclusion and belonging. Then, I will consider the concept of community, *ummah*, from Islamic Studies, as all converts came from a Muslim background. I will also explore how the Iranian Islamic regime employs this concept of *ummah* politically and its impact on Iranian converts' belongings before their Christian conversion. I propose that these Iranians did not feel they belonged to the *ummah,* and they were forced to be "included". This lack of belonging had several outcomes. First, it pushed many Iranians to leave Islam and consider Christian conversion. Second, these Iranians focused on their pre-Islamic cultural root to find belonging. Nevertheless, belonging remained challenging for these converts because of their anger and experience with the Iranian political regime, which cultivated a sense of mistrust of one another and "inclusion under duress". This deficiency of belonging impacted their participation in their new faith community, the Church, as they longed more than to be included but to belong.

Several psychologists, Allen *et al.* acknowledged a lack of conceptual clarity and consistency in how "belonging" is defined. They considered belonging the "subjective feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences".[537] A healthy sense of belonging brings numerous positive effects, including better physical and mental health and academic and occupational achievements. In contrast, a lack of belonging results in loneliness, social isolation, and feelings of disconnection.[538] Allen *et al.* proposed an integrative framework of belonging with four interrelated components: competencies (skills and abilities), opportunities (enablers and barriers), motivations (the inner drive) and perceptions (experiences of connecting). These four components dynamically interact and influence one another as the individual navigates their social, cultural, environmental, and temporal contexts and experiences.[539]

Belonging is also considered in other disciplines outside psychology, including theology. Practical theologian John Swinton highlighted the differences between inclusion and belonging in his work on disability theology. He argued against the social and political rhetoric of disability and inclusion and suggested shifting the thinking from inclusion to belonging, focusing on love. Drawing on the theological construct of creation, Swinton indicated that "human beings are not simply *included* within creation; they *belong* to God's creation" (emphases original).[540] He concluded that "to be included, you just need to be there; to belong, you need to be missed; to miss one another we need to learn what it means to love with the passion of Jesus."[541] Swinton believes this is fundamental for an "authentic Christian community for *all* people"[542] (emphases original). Swinton merely focused on "disability" in his paper and explicitly moved his idea of "disability" beyond liberation, the approach that minority groups, including minority ethnics,

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[537] Kelly-Ann Allen and others, 'Belonging: A Review of Conceptual Issues, an Integrative Framework, and Directions for Future Research', *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 73.1 (2021), 87–102 (pp. 87, 89–90).
[538] Ibid., pp. 89–91.
[539] Ibid., pp. 91–94.
[540] John Swinton, 'From Inclusion to Belonging: A Practical Theology of Community, Disability and Humanness', *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health*, 16.2 (2012), 172–90 (p. 183).
[541] Ibid., p. 188.
[542] Ibid., p. 184.

generally adopt. However, Swinton's proposal to distinguish inclusion from belonging can apply to other minorities, such as Iranian converts. He highlighted that disability should be viewed as a "difference", a typical phenomenon among human beings when they share a common humanity.[543] As Swinton suggested, diversity is the norm, and it can include ethnic diversity, as in Iranian converts' situations.

Community is the cornerstone of belonging. In Islam, the notion of community is generally linked to this Arabic word, *ummah*. The definition of *ummah* varies among Islamic scholars and contexts.[544] "Community" is the standard English translation for *ummah*, which appears in the Qur'an over 60 times. The meaning also shifts within the Qur'an, depending on when the *surah*[545] that the word *ummah* appeared was believed to be received. In the earlier Meccan *surahs, ummah* was used loosely, but in the later Medinan period, *ummah* was more consistently applied to the newly emerging Islamic community under Muhammad at Medina.[546] As Islam expanded, the concept of *ummah* became more socio-political and applicable to all who came under Islamic rule. The final objective for all humanity is "one community of the faith" (*ummah wahida*[547]).[548] The idea of *ummah* eventually evolves into one global community submitted to one God and his *sharia*[549].[550] This "oneness" is closely linked to the Islamic theological concept of *Tawhid*, the oneness of Allah, and the *ummah*, which is characterised by accepting Islam and owing allegiance to Muhammad.[551] Even though the understanding of

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[543] Ibid., pp. 175–83.

[544] James Piscatori and Amin Saikal, *Islam Beyond Borders: The Umma in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 1.

[545] See Glossary.

[546] Manzooruddin Ahmed, 'Umma: The Idea of a Universal Community', *Islamic Studies*, 14.1 (1975), 27–54 (p. 27); Frederick Mathewson Denny, 'The Meaning of "Ummah" in the Qurʾān', *History of Religions*, 15.1 (1975), 34–70 (p. 36).

[547] Arabic - أمة واحدة

[548] Piscatori and Saikal, p. 1,17.

[549] See Glossary.

[550] Christian J Anderson, 'Navigating the Constraints of the Ummah: A Comparison of Christ Movements in Iran and Bangladesh', *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 35.3 (2018), 117–25 (p. 119).

[551] Ahmed, pp. 27–28.

ummah has gone beyond territorial into the spiritual realm, its socio-political underpinning remains.[552]

Ummah has been used to foster a sense of belonging, but without success, as evidenced by the Muslim world's fragmentation rather than the "oneness" anticipated.[553] The division between Sunni and Shi'a Islam is a prime example, and the two groups understand *ummah* differently, according to their distinct beliefs on who should succeed Muhammed. Sunnis considered the *Caliphate*, which was abolished by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1924, as the concrete representation of pan-Islamic unity, the *ummah*. Islamic Studies scholars Piscatori and Saikal concluded that Sunni's interpretations of *ummah* are intrinsically political, including strong leadership and the aspiration for unity.[554] In contrast, Shi'ism, the branch of Islam to which most Iranians are affiliated, has a distinct doctrine of *Imamate.* The *Imam* has divine authority through blood relations to Muhammad, and they are considered sinless, infallible, and directly ordained by Allah.[555] *Imams* are both religious and political leaders of *ummah.* The main branch of Shi'ism, the Twelver, believes in "Occultation" - the last or twelfth *Imam*, *al-Mahdi*, disappeared and did not die, as he was hidden by Allah and will return one day. Shi'ites think that when *al-Mahdi* is hidden, his duties are fulfilled by '*ulama*[556] as his deputy. The role of '*ulama* gradually became political and aspired to restore pan-Islamic unity politically. The pinnacle is Ayatullah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution in Iran around 1979. He pushed both his religious and political goals and advocated that Iran be the vanguard of *ummah* through complete theocratic governance under his interpretation of Shi'ism.[557]

Therefore, *ummah* is used politically in Iran to promote pan-Islamic solidarity and unity. Nevertheless, Khomeini's approach caused more divisions among Muslims, and many regimes

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[552] Nadia Amin Rehmani, 'Debating the Term Ummah as a Religious or Social and Political Notion', *Hamdard Islamicus*, 33.1 (2010), 7–19; Piscatori and Saikal, p. 2.

[553] Piscatori and Saikal, pp. 2–7.

[554] Ibid., pp. 16–49.

[555] Mohammad Ali Shomali, *Shī'ī Islam: Origins, Faith and Practices* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press & International Institute for Islamic Studies, 2003), pp. 93–106; Piscatori and Saikal, p. 53.

[556] See Glossary.

[557] Piscatori and Saikal, pp. 50–78.

turned against Iran. Khomeini's successor, Khamenei, continued a similar rhetorical stance of *ummah*. The consequence was that politics and Iranian Shi'ism were utterly intertwined, and the former was used to define the latter.[558]   The theocratic regime completely changed Iran's religious landscape. It caused turmoil among Iranians who used to enjoy religious freedom before the Revolution. Since the Revolution, Khomeini and his successor have exercised undue control in Islam's name to remove anything that undermines Shi'ism.[559]   Religious meaning was given to political events, like the Iran-Iraq war, as propaganda to promote the regime's political agendas. For instance, Khomeini used the idea of the "gift of martyrdom" and the narrative of a famous Shi'a *Imam* Husayn's sacrifice in Karbala (the "Karbala paradigm")[560] to encourage Iranians to fight for the regime.[561]   Khomeini also infused anti-Western sentiments into the religion.[562]   Moreover, women and other ethnic groups, like the Kurds, received more oppression because of their lower social positions.[563]   Furthermore, the Revolution and subsequent Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) damaged Iran's economy through workforce loss, other countries' sanctions, and foreign investors' departure. Iran became a closed country with limited international connections. Inflation and unemployment run high in Iran, affecting Iranians' livelihoods at the grassroots level.[564]   Understandably, many Iranians were infuriated by their government. Khomeini's promise of democracy did not materialise, and many Iranians felt deceived.[565] This anger is also towards Shi'a Islam, as the regime uses Shi'ism as a political vehicle, causing a negative sentiment about the religion.[566]   After the Revolution, Iranians shifted the blame for their problems from the government to the religion, and any failure of government policies

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[558] Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, Updated (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2004), pp. 83–88.

[559] Bradley, *Iran and Christianity*, p. 113,119.

[560] Michael M. J Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution*, Harvard Studies in Cultural Anthropology (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 13–20.

[561] Michael Axworthy, *Iran: Empire of the Mind: A History from Zoroaster to the Present Day* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 273; Yann Richard, *Shi'ite Islam: Polity, Ideology, and Creed*, trans. by Antonia Nevill (Oxford; Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1995), p. 211; Aidani, pp. 97–100.

[562] Bradley, *Iran and Christianity*, p. 114.

[563] Ibid., pp. 114–17.

[564] Axworthy, p. 279; Bradley, *Iran and Christianity*, pp. 100–112; Aidani, pp. 96–100.

[565] Aidani, p. 38.

[566] Richard C Foltz, *Spirituality in the Land of the Noble: How Iran Shaped the World's Religions* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004), p. 161; Fischer, p. 208; Axworthy, p. 260.

seriously undermined Shi'ism. Corruptions among Shi'a clerics were repeatedly discovered, which further harmed the religion's credibility.[567]

All these socio-political and historical backgrounds severely damaged Iranians' motivation to belong to the *ummah* and the country. Motivation is a core component of belonging, as Allen *et al*. suggested. Anger and frustration towards the regime and Shi'ism are evident among Iranian converts in this research. For instance, *Hamid* and *Shirin* reported being forced to practice Islam when they were in Iran. *Babak* highlighted that the Iranian regime attempted to control Iranians' minds. A worse treatment of women and Kurdish Iranians was spontaneously voiced in their interviews by *Maryam* and Kurdish Iranians *Hiva* and *Zoran,* respectively. This substantial disillusionment towards the regime and Shi'ism contributed to most convert participants' Christian conversions as a "push" factor, like what was suggested in Chapter Two. Their practice of the Islamic faith was nominal and superficial to conform to societal norms to avoid the regime's control and oppression. Hence, these converts' negative experiences of the regime and Shi'ism also impacted another core component of belonging, namely their perceptions. Drawing on Swinton's idea of inclusion and belonging, I consider Iranian converts were "included under duress" because of the socio-political situation in Iran, especially the control and oppression from the theocratic regime. Put differently, these Iranians were forced to be there but were not missed. As Allen *et al.* suggested, this lack of belonging led to isolation and disconnection.

These converts' lack of belonging to the Islamic *ummah* and the theocratic regime pushes them to search for alternative belonging. First, they turn to Christianity. Despite security concerns, meeting in underground house churches in Iran provides opportunities to belong, as Allen *et al.* highlighted in their framework of belonging. Second, I consider their return to pre-Islamic cultural heritage, such as the focus on *Nowruz*, providing Iranian converts further opportunities to belong. These opportunities were primarily through hospitality and

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[567] Bradley, *Iran and Christianity*, pp. 65, 108.

"*togetherness*", something Iranian converts struggled to get from *ummah*. In the last section, I have highlighted that Iranian converts' *Nowruz* celebration can be considered an "identity management strategy" in the acculturation process, as they emphasised their cultural distinctiveness. I argue that Iranian converts' distancing from Islam and returning to pre-Islamic Persian cultural roots can also be interpreted as their quest for belonging. Iranian converts' conflicts with their families from their religious conversion as "non-conformity" reinforces their search for belonging. These difficulties with their families, often causing separation, added to this vital loss of belonging, as evident in many converts' conversion narratives (*Aziz, Babak, Hiva, Sara, Sheila*, *Reza*, *Leila*, and *Hamid*).

Nevertheless, as seen from the qualitative data, mistrust is common among Iranian converts, and the socio-political situation in Iran contributed significantly to this mistrust. The Iranian Islamic regime dreads any criticism that they perceive as challenging their political and religious power, causing widespread fear and insecurities among Iranians. The corruption from the regime also makes Iranians suspicious of others' motives, including the established systems, causing further mistrust. Together with other issues reported in the qualitative data, namely shame and honour as the predominant culture among Iranians and the communication style of *Taarof* that Iranians often employ, the mistrust of others produces barriers (i.e. reduces opportunities), reduces motivations and reinforces the negative perception to belong, according to the framework proposed by Allen *et al*. The most severe form of this mistrust happened when Iranian converts started to explore and convert to Christianity. Individuals who leave Islam are no longer considered part of the *ummah* and face severe opposition and even persecution from the *ummah*.[568] These serious consequences further exaggerate the mistrust and undermine the sense of belonging, as observed in the concerns about the security of attending house churches in Iran, reported in *Mahmoud, Hiva and Hamid*'s interviews.   It was nearly impossible to have

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[568] Sufyan Baig, 'The Ummah and Christian Community', in *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in Between?*, ed. by David Greenlee (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), pp. 129–44 (pp. 133–36).

belonging if one kept thinking about having a "spy" in the house church, as *Hiva and Mahmoud* did.

The mistrust impacted Iranian converts' participation and belonging to the Church in Iran and Britain. They continued to have security concerns, as evident in the "no photograph policy" at *St Matthew's*. The local congregations attempted to give Iranian converts a sense of belonging as part of a church "family". Their efforts were commendable, especially when *St Matthew's Ebrahim* unexpectedly died*. Ebrahim* considered *St Matthew's* as his family despite leaving his family in Iran because of his conversion, and *St Matthew's* took on this family role of arranging his memorial service*.* Returning to Swinton's notion of inclusion and belonging, *Ebrahim* was missed and, therefore, belonged to *St Matthew's*. However, the qualitative data suggest that belonging to the Church was inconsistent. On other occasions, Iranian converts appeared to be merely "included", as observed in *St Matthew's* and *St Cuthbert's* Iranian converts sitting at the back and the peripherals of the pews in most Sunday Eucharist services. These converts appeared merely to be there, the idea of being "included" as advocated by Swinton. Language and lack of opportunities to actively participate in the Church could be barriers that reduced these converts' belonging to the Church. Many more Iranians sat at St Matthew's front and central section*s* for the Farsi Sunday Eucharist on the day of *Nowruz*. Many converts actively participated in various parts of that service*.* The language barrier was removed then, and Iranian converts' enthusiastic contributions to that service created ownership and belonging, especially with the big *Nowruz* feast after that service.   Hence, fostering belonging is bidirectional – it involves not only the British church *doing something to* Iranian converts but also the Church providing space and opportunities to *do something with* these converts and for them to contribute to the Church. Making a contribution is particularly critical in fostering a sense that they will be missed. Consequently, these converts rebuild their motivations, have fewer barriers, and gain a positive perception of belonging, according to the framework from Allen *et al.* This bidirectional belonging also removes another barrier: the feeling of the Christian teaching being

pushed on these converts, as *Sheila* detested from her traumatic experience with Iranian Shi'ism and some Iranian Christians teaching Christianity.

Moreover, Iranian converts' ambivalence in belonging to the CoE was reflected in the potential "selective emphasis" on individuals' personal relationship with Jesus when they considered the Eucharist, overlooking its communal dimension. This lack of belonging caused disconnection with others, pushing Iranian converts to focus primarily on their individual covenant, "*peyman*", with Jesus rather than considering the Eucharist as a sacrament, emphasising the Church as a community.[569] It is worth noting that although the concepts of *ummah* and the Church both carry the idea of community and the quest for unity, they have significant differences regarding how community and unity are established. Christian missiologist Phil Parshall compared the Islamic *ummah* with the Church. Parshall highlighted some key Qur'an verses related to *ummah,* underlining the essence of *ummah* emphasises external behaviours as "*enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong*".[570] Community and unity in Islam are founded through external identification with other Muslims in beliefs, practices (such as prayers, pilgrimage and fasting) and following *sharia*, which establish a bond of faith through the collective experience.[571] The unity of *ummah* comes from conforming outwardly with others through practising the same rituals and beliefs. Thus, even though the mosque is a crucial community in Islam, it is more of a congregation rather than the heart of the *ummah.* Instead, family is central to the *ummah* and contributes significantly to Iranians' Islamic religious identity.

In contrast, the Christian Church, or Parshall labelled it as the "Christian *ummah*"[572], is understood as the gathering (ἐκκλησία) of God's people in Christ's name.[573] Love is the

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[569] Walter Cardinal Kasper, *Sacrament of Unity: The Eucharist and the Church*, trans. by Brian McNeil (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004).

[570] Q3:103, 110 - quotes from Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 10th ed. (Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications,1999)

[571] Phil Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque: Christians Within Muslim Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), pp. 34–46.

[572] Ibid., p. 150.

[573] Allan J. McNicol, 'Church', ed. by David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 252–54.

integrating force of community for unity, as highlighted in the New Testament, including as a new direct commandment from Christ before his death.[574] Acts 2:41-47 describes the activities of the early Christian community: baptism (verse 41), receiving teaching and fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers (verse 42), sharing possessions to those in need (verse 45), praising God and having the goodwill of all the people (verse 47). The Church is also the vehicle of God's Kingdom to show the world God's love and mercy transcending cultural and ethnic boundaries. It is worth highlighting that the New Testament also uses family or household metaphorically to describe the Church.[575] For the Iranian converts whose understanding of belonging and togetherness is based on their Islamic background and anchored in their family structures, this notion of the Church as their spiritual family metaphorically can be challenging for the converts to navigate, as it involves a shift of worldview from a familial-centred religious identity to a community-centred ecclesial identity. This shift can generate further tension as these Iranian converts need to redefine their sense of belonging because of the complexity of theological understandings, cultural identities, and practical implications. Moreover, these Iranians' religious conversion to Christianity has often shattered their family relationships and trust, contributing additionally to this tension and intricacy. Also, Parshall critically admitted and lamented the disunity from the Christian Church's denominational fragmentation and institutionalisation throughout the Church's history.[576] This disunity can create added confusion and tension among the Iranian converts. Hence, the Islamic *ummah* and the Church have different foundations. Despite the various challenges and potential shortcomings, the Christian community reinforces what Swinton suggested about belonging, which relates to this love, "to miss one another, we need to learn what it means to love with the passion of Jesus".

In summary, I have reviewed inclusion and belonging from psychological and theological perspectives and considered *ummah* in Islamic Studies to explore the qualitative data. I have

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[574] 1 Cor 12:12-13:13; Jn 13:31-35.
[575] Eph 2:19-20; Gal 6:10; 1 Tim 3:15.
[576] Parshall, pp. 149–72.

argued that these Iranians did not feel they belonged to the *ummah,* and they were forced to be "included" because of the controlling and oppressive Iranian Islamic regime. This lack of belonging contributes to Iranian converts leaving Islam and considering Christianity. It also reinforces Iranian converts to focus on their pre-Islamic cultural root to find belonging. Nevertheless, belonging remained challenging for Iranian converts because of their anger and experiences with the Iranian political regime, which cultivated suspicion of one another and created mistrust. Also, the Iranian converts possess an Islamic religious worldview of belonging and togetherness based on their family structures. It differs from the Church, which holds a community-centred ecclesial identity. A worldview shift is necessary, but it is also challenging for the converts to feel they belong to the Church. This belonging challenge affected Iranian converts' participation in their new faith community, the Church, resulting in ambivalence in their sense of belonging to the Church and the tension observed. However, these converts long not just to "be included" but to belong, which demands mutual efforts from the Church and Iranian converts to remove barriers, foster positive experiences and motivations, and love as Jesus commanded to the Christian community.   Iranian converts' mistrust and other ongoing sufferings in Iran and Britain had traumatic impacts that created tension and a "trauma-faith" paradox and tension in their inner being.

5.3   "*Who am I really*?": Insights from trauma research and Eucharist for post-traumatic "re-making"

Iranian converts had tension in their "inner self" due to their suffering and trauma.   They experienced oppression in Iran and faced hostility and racism in Britain. Although many converts attached centrality to the Eucharist in their Christian faith, providing them with strength, some also experienced conflicting thoughts and emotions from the Eucharist because of the narrative of Jesus's betrayal and suffering, echoing their own traumatic experiences. I will draw on psychological and theological insights about trauma in this section, especially the relationships of trauma with bodies and memories. I consider that Iranian converts experienced trauma as

"ruptures" with "fractured" narratives. These ruptures led to the fragmentation of Iranian converts' inner selves, disconnection from their bodies, and a personal agency deficit, as suggested by trauma research. Processing the repercussions of the trauma requires them to remain in another "in-between space". They also need reorientation and reconstruction of their traumatic narratives to move forward. All these contribute to the tension observed in the qualitative data. The narrative reorientation and reconstruction facilitate Iranian converts to reconnect with their bodies and reintegrate their fractured memories. Also, tactile body-based interventions help trauma survivors reconnect with their bodies. I believe it may explain why Iranian converts, many of whom experienced trauma, including racial trauma, considered the Eucharist central to their faith because it is a tangible and tactile sacrament that embodies Christ's wound. Iranian converts' focus on the covenant, "*peyman*", between God and them in their understanding of the Eucharist can be interpreted as their theological reconstruction of the trauma narratives, which facilitates their post-traumatic "re-making".[577] Despite the ongoing tension from the aftermath of these converts' ruptures, the reconnection of their inner selves through the Eucharist allows them to regain personal agency.

The English word trauma comes from the Greek term for "wound", τραῦμα. This concept of "wound" is no longer restricted to physical injuries but includes that invisibly inflicted upon the mind.[578] The understanding of trauma has moved from the medical and psychiatric model, which focuses on diagnoses like PTSD and its treatment, to multidisciplinary insights, including disciplines like social sciences, theology, and literature. The definition of trauma is contentious because of how society outside academic or clinical settings has utilised the term broadly for various misfortunes. Nevertheless, a common consensus is that trauma refers to the

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[577] Post-traumatic "re-making": O'Donnell preferred and adopted this term from philosopher Susan Brison's work *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Other related concepts include post-traumatic growth, recovery and even healing.

[578] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 3–4.

impact of the "traumatic event" on the person rather than the event itself.[579] Trauma theologian

Serene Jones defined a traumatic event as an incident in which individuals perceive being

threatened by an external force that seeks to annihilate them, against which they cannot resist

and overwhelms their capacity to cope.[580] Hence, as observed in the qualitative data, traumatic

events had varying impacts on individuals as they perceive "threats" differently.   The impact

varies according to the event's nature and seriousness and the individual's previous experiences,

personality, and resources.[581]   Social psychologist Janoff-Bulman argued that this impact

resulted from the shattering of individuals' fundamental assumptions and injuries of the person's

inner world.[582] Trauma can also be "insidious", resulting from ongoing negative experiences

associated with living as an oppressed group member.[583] Moreover, there is substantial evidence

that trauma can be "intergenerational", and its adverse effects can be passed on to future

generations.[584] Furthermore, the whole community can experience "collective trauma", which

can happen alongside individual trauma and impact the interrelationships between traumatised

persons within a community and their relationships with those outside the community.[585]

Trauma theologian O'Donnell linked trauma with "ruptures", an idea like the earthquake

that destroys structures, uproots firmly held ideals and creates a deep sense of instability.[586] She

suggested that trauma causes three kinds of ruptures. The first is a rupture of bodily integrity:

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[579] Hilary Ison, 'Working with an Embodied and Systemic Approach to Trauma and Tragedy', in *Tragedies and Christian Congregations: The Practical Theology of Trauma*, ed. by Megan Warner and others (London; New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 47–63 (p. 50); Kimberly R Wagner, *Fractured Ground: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Trauma* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2023), pp. 12–14; R. Ruard Ganzevoort, 'Scars and Stigmata: Trauma, Identity and Theology', *Practical Theology*, 1.1 (2008), 19–31 (p. 20).

[580] Serene Jones, *Trauma + Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*, Second edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), p. 13.

[581] Ison, p. 50; Ganzevoort, p. 50.

[582] Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (New York: Free Press, 1992), pp. 51–52.

[583] Maria P. P. Root, 'Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality', in *Personality and Psychopathology: Feminist Reappraisals*, ed. by Laura Brown and Mary Ballou (New York; London: Guilford Press, 1992), pp. 229–65.

[584] Rachel Yehuda and Amy Lehrner, 'Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma Effects: Putative Role of Epigenetic Mechanisms', *World Psychiatry*, 17.3 (2018), 243–57.

[585] Wagner, p. 26.

[586] Karen O'Donnell, 'Eucharist and Trauma: Healing in the B/Body', in *Tragedies and Christian Congregations: The Practical Theology of Trauma*, ed. by Megan Warner and others (London; New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 182–93 (p. 185).

the body is always on guard and no longer safe. The second is a rupture of time, and past trauma continues to invade the present, like the persistence of trauma survivors' symptoms beyond the traumatic event. The last rupture is in language and cognition: survivors cannot remember and articulate what happened. Likewise, Presbyterian minister Kimberly Wagner named the loss of temporality (i.e. rupture of time) and coherence (i.e. rupture of cognition) as "narrative fracture". She believed that "narrative fracture" can lead to disconnection in the person and their bodies. This disconnection can cascade into disconnection from the community and God.[587]   Iranian medical anthropologist Orkideh Behrouzan also employed the concept of rupture for trauma. She wrote an ethnographic and historical account of the psychological experiences of trauma, which she called "ruptures" among Iranians of different generations in their everyday lives.[588] She described Iranians' collective and intergenerational trauma, especially among the 1980s generation (*daheh-ye-shasti-hā*)[589], as that generation lived through the Iraq-Iran war and had wartime childhood memories. Behrouzan argued that the ruptures' aftermath continued to affect Iranians collectively even now and caused further ruptures in living through the trauma. Behrouzan used the open wound (*khoreh* [590]*)* metaphor to describe the embodiment of Iranians' traumatic experiences, stating that "*khoreh* is not a scar but an open wound; not a lifeless remnant of tragedy but an invading, consuming, intoxicating presence".[591]   Although ruptures destroy, Behrouzan believed they can be generative and allow spaces to make meanings.[592]

The notion of ruptures was evident among this study's Iranian converts who experienced trauma.   Many converts had their lives turned upside down – as the idea of rupture O'Donnell described, causing instability. For instance, *Leila*'s family life was shattered by her separation from her husband and son after leaving Iran because of their religious conversion. She was upset when discussing that during the interview. Similar devastating family situations happened to

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[587] Wagner, p. 26.

[588] Orkideh Behrouzan, *Prozak Diaries: Psychiatry and Generational Memory in Iran* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), p. 31.

[589] See Glossary.

[590] See Glossary.

[591] Behrouzan, pp. 157–58.

[592] Ibid., pp. 126, 158.

other converts like *Mahmoud,* who had separated from his wife and family after his conversion. *Babak* was imprisoned in Iran because of his religious conversion, causing him various struggles. *Hamid* also reported the long wait and uncertainty about his asylum application in Britain, which caused a loss of agency and unexpected disruptions. These challenges highlighted Iranian converts' instability, as seen in ruptures. Their ruptures were further complicated by their experience of racism, which reinforced the sense of losing agency and that they did not belong to British society. Many minority ethnics experience racism, which can cause post-traumatic stress.[593] More than half of the converts in this research reported that they experienced racism in Britain, including several serious incidents: *Shirin* having stones thrown at her in public, *Leila* being told to return to her country, and *Sara* not receiving the appropriate healthcare. *Hamid* also described his ongoing pain after he experienced racial insults in his previous job and in public years ago. The concept of racial trauma emerged in the recent decade, especially with various racial incidents like George Floyd's murder in the USA in 2020. Trauma therapist Sheila Rowe defined racial trauma as "physical and psychological symptoms that people of colour[594] often experience after a stressful racist incident".[595] Rowe believed minority ethnics could experience racial trauma in various ways, including insidious trauma through microaggression and racial gaslighting. Racial trauma can also be historical and intergenerational.[596]

Trauma, including racial trauma, is closely linked with the body.[597] Psychiatrist van der Kolk advocated the link between mind, brain, and body in trauma. Neurosciences confirm that the "emotional brain" is responsible for individuals' fight-or-flight responses and storing sensory signals and emotional memories. In contrast, the "rational brain" allows individuals to plan and utilise language and abstractions and contributes to ordinary narrative memory.[598] Van der Kolk

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[593] Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Afterlife of Trauma* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), p. 78.

[594] A term generally used in America for minority ethnics.

[595] Rowe, p. 10.

[596] Ibid., pp. 10–17.

[597] Ibid., p. 10.

[598] Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), pp. 55–58.

believes that traumatic experiences change the balance between the two "brains" and disconnect these two memory systems. Consequently, traumatic experience imprints are organised in fragmented sensory and emotional traces. Traumatic memories are dissociated from narrative memories without proper integration.[599] This dissociation hides the traumatic memories until something triggers the recall of these memories from the "emotional brain". Hence, traumatic memories remain embodied and imprinted in the body: *"The body keeps the score"*, as van der Kolk suggested. It also contributes to the rupture of time: traumatic memories continue to impact beyond the events and have ongoing consequences on how trauma survivors manage to live now.[600] This imprint was also observed among Iranian converts. In the interviews, some recalled their traumatic experiences that happened even more than a decade ago: *Babak*'s imprisonment in Iran for his religious conversion, *Hamid* witnessing public execution in his childhood, and the racial incidents *Shirin* and *Nader* encountered. Also, *Nader*'s avoidance of going out on football match days suggested he was on guard, resonating with O'Donnell's notion of rupture of bodily integrity. Despite having left Iran for 19 years, *Reza* commented that his challenges and traumatic experiences "*would never go away*", resonating with van der Kolk's suggestion of the body keeping the score.

Trauma's impact on the body is not restricted to memories. Van der Kolk suggested that traumatic experiences also disrupt the connections between the brain and body. This disconnection contributes to the difficulties in feeling pleasure and having a sense of meaning.[601] He suggested trauma treatment aims "to integrate the cut-off elements of trauma into the ongoing narrative of life".[602] Wagner echoed van der Kolk's idea of integration and advocated that managing "narrative fracture" requires the survivor to "reorient and reconstruct a life in the new ways with remaining fragments and some new pieces".[603] Van der Kolk believed that creating a sense of personal safety and agency, demoting traumatic memories to the distant past,

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[599] Ibid., p. 176.
[600] Ibid., p. 21.
[601] Ibid., p. 99.
[602] Ibid., pp. 179-181,192-194.
[603] Wagner, p. 25.

and allowing the present and future to emerge, help trauma survivors move forward.[604] He

suggested various "paths to recovery", including bodywork with attuned somatic experiencing

that involves active body movement. These tactile and physical actions enable a sense of

personal safety and agency for survivors, allowing the body and brain to reconnect and providing

space to integrate and reconstruct traumatic memories.[605] In his book, van der Kolk included

Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn's picture *Christ Healing the Sick*, which was based on the

Gospel story about Jesus's ministry of physical healing, to illustrate that attuned touch is a

universally recognisable comfort gesture and its healing power.[606] This comfort gesture and

healing may explain why Iranian converts considered the Eucharist central and unique. All Iranian

converts considered the Eucharist the body of Christ. *Sheila, Maryam, Babak and Reza* reported

having intense physical and tactile experiences during the Eucharist. *Aziz* and *Mahmoud*

described feeling like God was hugging them when the priest gave them the bread at the

Eucharist. Through the Eucharist, Iranian converts also experienced positive emotions and values.

The Eucharist is a tangible sacrament that they can touch and taste. Other Christian activities like

sermons or Bible studies primarily engage the intellect and require a certain level of language

proficiency. Moreover, Iranian cultural heritage emphasises physical contact during individual

interactions, as observed in *Agape Fellowship*. Hence, the Eucharist's tactile element can provide

comfort and healing, as van der Kolk suggested.

Nonetheless, O'Donnell cautioned that the Eucharist can potentially re-traumatise

survivors as they recall not just the Last Supper but also Jesus's torture and crucifixion. They may

also be asked to ponder Jesus's submission to God's will to suffer. O'Donnell's concern was

observed in the tension of the "trauma-faith" paradox in the qualitative data. Some converts,

like *Babak, Maryam*, and *Sara*, reported conflicting thoughts and emotions about the Eucharist.

O'Donnell believed these recalls could trigger the survivors' traumatic memories and a feeling

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[604] Van der Kolk, pp. 192–99.
[605] Ibid., pp. 215–20.
[606] Ibid., p. 215.

that they should recast their trauma as positive because Jesus had also gone through traumatic experiences.[607] However, O'Donnell acknowledged that the Eucharist can powerfully contribute to the trauma survivors' post-traumatic "re-making", as evident in the case of *Mahmoud,* who found "healing" through the Eucharist. O'Donnell suggested that "re-making" requires being in a safe place, maintaining body integrity, constructing narratives that make sense of their trauma experience, having these narratives witnessed and believed, and reconnecting with one's body and others. She believed that the shape of the traditional Eucharistic liturgy, like the one used in the CoE, can provide these elements for post-traumatic "re-making". The Eucharist also draws different individuals into communion with God and each other, forming new connections.[608] However, O'Donnell emphasised that the words in the liturgy do not provide "magical recovery" for trauma survivors. Careful curation of the liturgy by the celebrant and congregation is essential to minimise re-traumatisation.[609]

Furthermore, O'Donnell considered that the participation of the Eucharist draws individuals' bodies into unity with the Church, the Body of Christ. She advocated that survivors' narrative reconstructions require those narratives to be believed and witnessed by others. The Eucharist allows the church congregation to witness the survivors' trauma in both vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension is the congregation, including survivors, witnessing trauma's devastation visible on the cross through the broken bread and outpouring of wine that speaks of Christ's body being torn apart. The horizontal dimension of witnessing highlights the Eucharist's communal aspect, about which some converts in this study hesitated. It involves witnessing the trauma that affects one another as the same Body of Christ. O'Donnell suggested that to witness horizontally involves accepting that trauma is "a complex and disorienting process in which the life-death boundary is complicated and ever-shifting".

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[607] O'Donnell, *Broken Bodies*, p. 171.
[608] Karen O'Donnell, 'Trauma Theology', ed. by Brendan Wolfe and others, *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology* (St Andrews: University of St Andrews, 2023) <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/TraumaTheology> [accessed 27 January 2024]; O'Donnell, 'Eucharist and Trauma: Healing in the B/Body', pp. 187–90; O'Donnell, *Broken Bodies*, pp. 179–80.
[609] O'Donnell, 'Eucharist and Trauma: Healing in the B/Body', pp. 190–93.

Witnessing includes attending to not only the traumatic experience but also the ongoing experience and the remaining aftermath of living with trauma.[610] This horizontal witness encompasses repeated listening, believing, and standing in grief and horror at the traumatic experience, perhaps for a lifetime.[611] O'Donnell believed that for post-traumatic "re-making", "trauma survivor reconstructs a self out of their narrative and the witness of those around them".[612]   Hence, those around the survivors, like the church congregation around Iranian converts, play a crucial role in their post-traumatic "re-making".

O'Donnell's suggestion of witnessing the ongoing experience and remaining aftermath of living with trauma resonates with another trauma theologian, Shelly Rambo's notion of "remaining at the Holy Saturday".   Rambo suggested that trauma survivors inhabit and remain in an "in-between space" between life and death, which is like the often-ignored theological idea of Holy Saturday in Christ's Passion narrative. This "in-between space" is where "death is neither completed nor in the past, and life is neither new nor directed toward the future" and holds the ruptures of time, language, and cognition from the trauma aftermath.[613] Rambo advocated the necessity of staying in this "in-between space" and cautioned against rushing too quickly to the triumphant of Christ's resurrection on Easter Day or focusing excessively on Jesus's crucifixion and sacrifice on Good Friday.[614] She believed the theological response is "to witness" trauma and its aftermath through a unique pneumatology that she called the "middle Spirit", which occupies a position between life and death. The middle Spirit, who is love, remains in this "in-between space".[615] In her follow-up work, *Resurrecting Wounds*, Rambo focused on Christ's bodily wounds and reinterpreted the Gospel narrative of Jesus appearing to the apostle Thomas.[616] She argued that the trauma wounds remain despite a new life, resonating with van

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[610] Ibid., pp. 191–92.
[611] Ibid., p. 192.
[612] Ibid., p. 192.
[613] Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 114.
[614] Ibid., p. 79.
[615] Ibid., pp. 130–41.
[616] Jn 20:19-28.

der Kolk's idea that "*the body keeps the score*". She advocated the need to consider "*after-living*": the concept of enduring woundedness in the earthly life rather than focusing on the conventional notion of the eschatological *afterlife*. Rambo focused on the ongoing reality of wounds in Jesus's post-traumatised body and highlighted the importance of not "erasing wounds". She argued that reformer John Calvin and others in the Church minimised the reality of woundedness in Jesus's resurrected body in their interpretations of Thomas' story by focusing on the resurrection's victory and signifying Thomas's faith. This interpretation occluded a more challenging but essential aspect of trauma: wounds remain. [617] Rambo also advocated the significance of surfacing hidden wounds involving confrontation and engagement with the truths the disciples may not be prepared to see. [618] She gave some examples of these hidden wounds, including the North American history of slavery and racism. Finally, Rambo believed Jesus directed his disciples to the collective healing work of their trauma by "reorientating their senses, pointing them to truths that rarely come to light". [619] Therefore, allowing wounds to surface rather than erasing them, remaining in the "in-between space", reconstructing and reorientating the trauma narratives, and reconnecting and integrating the survivors' bodies are essential paths for post-traumatic "re-making".

I believe that Iranian converts remained in this "in-between space", the "Holy Saturday", as Rambo suggested, resulting in tension. In this "in-between space" from their ruptures, they were neither fully alive nor entirely dead. However, remaining in the "in-between space" is necessary for their post-traumatic "re-making". Some converts had started to reconstruct and reorientate their trauma narratives, as evident in the qualitative data. Many converts highlighted that they valued the Eucharist as central to their faith, and several (*Sara, Hiva* and *Aziz*) linked the Eucharist personally to their covenant, "*peyman*", with God. The critical components of their traumatic narratives were various betrayals, which included those from the Iranian regime and

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[617] Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, pp. 17–42.
[618] Ibid., p. 84.
[619] Ibid., p. 136.

their experiences of racism and hostility in Britain. Through the Eucharist, they held on to this theological concept of covenant, contrasting with the betrayals they experienced. The notion of covenant reinforces God's faithfulness, mainly through the new covenant that was remembered in the Eucharist as Jesus's body and blood. The Eucharist embodied Jesus's wounds, the *khoreh*. Through Christ's *khoreh,* these converts' trauma narratives were reconstructed and reorientated to God's faithfulness in the covenant. This narrative reconstruction helped them reconnect with their inner selves through their bodies and memories, and hopefully with one another through the church, the Body of Christ, where God fully expressed his covenantal faithfulness. Although there is ongoing tension among these converts because of the aftermath of their ruptures, their inner self reconnection through the Eucharist's embodiment facilitates Iranian converts in regaining some personal agency lost in their trauma. Hence, besides the somatic experiences from the Eucharist as a tangible and tactile sacrament that helps these converts' post-traumatic "re-making" physically, as van der Kolk suggested, the Eucharistic account also facilitates their "re-making" through the reconstruction of their trauma narratives.

5.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have explored and conducted interdisciplinary correlations between the three themes derived from the qualitative data and other theological and non-theological knowledge sources. The correlations addressed RQ2 on how Iranian converts' cultural heritage, religious conversion and trauma experiences influenced their understanding and experience of the Eucharist. In particular, I focused on Iranian converts' overarching discordance. The exploration and correlations suggested that these converts were in an "in-between space", contributing to their discordance in two ways. First, the concepts of multiple cultural and religious identities put Iranian converts in an "in-between space" of ongoing and disorienting identity formation. Second, because of Iranian converts' ruptures from their religious conversion and experience of racism, they remained in another "in-between space", the "Holy Saturday",

with their ruptures' aftermath that caused their body and memory disconnection, contributing to discordance. The Eucharist, a tangible and tactile sacrament that embodied Christ's wounds, helped Iranian converts reconnect with their bodies and began to reconstruct the trauma narratives through the theological idea of the covenant that signified God's faithfulness, contrasting with their betrayal experience. This reconnection and reconstruction facilitate Iranian converts' post-traumatic "re-making". Besides being in the "in-between space", Iranian converts were "included under duress" because of the Iranian Islamic regime, and they did not feel they belonged to the *ummah*. This challenge of belonging affected their post-conversion participation in the Church, contributing to discordance. They long not just to "be included" but to belong in the Body of Christ.

Figure 3 summarises the three domains of these converts' tensions after this interdisciplinary exploration. These domains of tensions contribute to discordance, and their combination likely causes a synergistic effect on their discordance, as suggested in the sociological concept of intersectionality. Sociologists Collins and Bilge described six core ideas of intersectionality, including social inequality, intersecting power relations, social context, social justice, relationality, and complexity. [620] Relationality focuses on interconnections and complicated relationships rather than unrelated individual factors, while complexity highlights the multifaceted nature of the world, which deepens intersectionality. These core features of intersectionality are evident in this study. Iranian converts' discordance is closely related to their social context as minority ethnics in Britain who had experienced social injustice and inequality from oppression and racism.

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[620] Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*, 2nd edn (Cambridge; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2020), pp. 34–36.
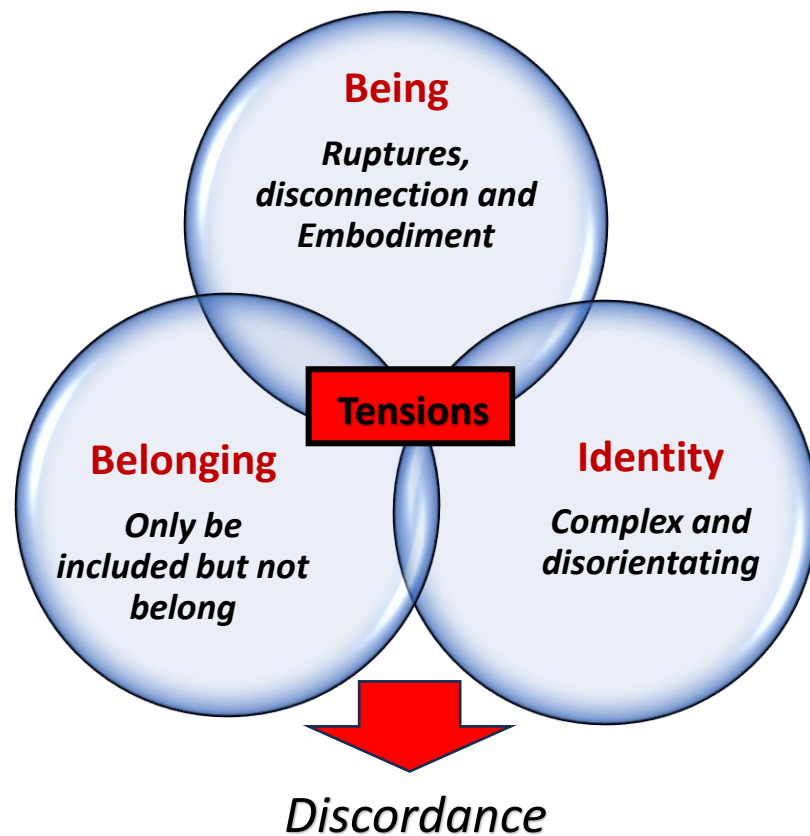
Figure 3 Interdisciplinary Exploration of These Three Domains of Tensions

This chapter's exploration and correlations have formed part of the theological reflection in the pastoral cycle, aiming to reflect on where God is in these converts' discordance. In Chapter Six, I will further reflect on this idea of discordance and propose theological constructions considering these converts' unique context in the CoE. It will address RQ3 in constructing contextualised theology and practices related to the Eucharist among Iranian converts. The theological reflection and construction support the second part of the overall thesis: discordance underpins the contextualised understanding and practice related to the Eucharist for Iranian converts in the CoE and the Church, potentially making the Eucharist a source of reconciliation and new life for Iranian converts.

Chapter Six: The Narratives and Sacrament of Discordance for Iranian converts

In Chapter Four, I introduced the overarching idea of discordance, a finding from the tensions identified in the qualitative data, which addressed RQ1. I explored the interdisciplinary correlations between the data and other theological and non-theological sources in Chapter Five. I also provided some theological reflection and addressed RQ2. As I previously discussed, Iranian converts found themselves in an 'in-between space', contributing to their tensions for two reasons. First, they grappled with a disorienting identity formation. Second, they had experienced ruptures from their religious conversion and their experience of racial injustice and hostility, leading to disconnection in their bodies and memories. Being Christian converts from Islam, these Iranians were included but did not fully belong to their original *ummah*, the community. This struggle for belonging significantly impacted their participation in the Church, furthering their tension as they yearned to belong to the Body of Christ.

In this chapter, I will continue the theological reflection and propose a theological construction of these converts within the CoE. This discussion will respond to RQ3, which seeks to provide a contextualised theology and practices related to the Eucharist among Iranian converts. The theological reflection and construction originated from Iranian converts' lived experiences, as evident in the qualitative data, which laid the foundation for the pastoral cycle. To do so, I will follow the CoE Eucharistic liturgy structure, highlighting two key components: the Liturgy of the Word and the Sacrament. Theologian O'Donnell has suggested that the traditional shape of the Eucharistic liturgy, such as the one used in the CoE, offers elements for post-traumatic "re-making". In the Liturgy of the Word section, I will interpret the resurrection narratives, including the Road to Emmaus story in Luke's Gospel Chapter 24, through the lens of Iranian converts' discordance and propose the narratives as "narratives of discordance" that resonate with Iranian converts' experiences, and how Christ responded to them. The narratives

will also highlight having these converts as part of the 'gathered' of the Church, according to 'The Gathering' part of the Eucharistic liturgy.

In the Liturgy of the Sacrament section, I will suggest re-evaluating the understanding of the Eucharist, advocating it not only as a sacrament for remembrance but also as a "sacrament for discordance". It is also a "sacrament of '*Rastakhiz*'" (رستاخیز), carrying the meanings of resurrection, reconciliation and new life, particularly in these converts' context. Like the qualitative data, the theological reflection and construction address the three domains of tensions that created converts' discordance. Following the pastoral cycle to the 'action' stage, I will propose several practices for Iranian converts and the CoE to respond to discordance. The first recommendation is the possibility of incorporating the *Nowruz Haft-sin* table with the Eucharistic Holy Table as a balanced combination of remembrance and the sense of new life and reconciliation symbolised by the *Haft-sin* table. This suggestion tackles the tension of identity ("cultural self"). Second, I will also highlight the need for the CoE to pursue trauma-informed ministries and to provide trauma-safe space for Iranian converts to address the tension of being ("inner self"). Finally, I will advocate that the relationship between the CoE and Iranian converts should be one of mutuality and humility. I will explore the challenges Iranian converts face in co-producing liturgies appropriate for their context within the CoE and how this may be overcome. I will also propose the need for the CoE to speak out and advocate against the injustice these converts face. This recommendation focuses on the tension of belonging ("social self").

6.1 Lukan Resurrection narratives as "narratives of discordance"

In this section, I will argue that the Lukan Resurrection narratives are "narratives of discordance" as Iranian converts' lived experiences resonate with Luke's accounts, which have three main themes. First, the women and Peter discovered the empty tomb, and the women received the angelic message about the resurrected Jesus (verses 1-12). The second theme is the experience of two of Jesus's followers, Cleopas and his companion, on the road to Emmaus

(verses 13-35). Initially, they could not recognise the resurrected Jesus. However, Jesus showed them from the Scriptures that Christ needed to suffer and then entered into his glory. The resurrected Jesus became known to them by breaking the bread. Finally, Jesus appeared to his disciples in Jerusalem with "flesh and bones" and opened their minds to understand the Scriptures about him (verses 36-49).

Iranian converts' experiences echo the "narratives of discordance" in several ways. First, in the narratives, various individuals were on different journeys: the women and Peter travelling to the tomb, and the two followers travelling to Emmaus and back to Jerusalem. Biblical scholar Joel Green highlighted in his commentary that "journey" was a significant motif in Luke's Gospel, with repeated references that Jesus enlightened his followers "on the way".[621] Likewise, Iranian converts were also on journeys physically from Iran to Britain and spiritually through their Christian conversion from Islam. Second, the resurrection narratives included those on the margins and were considered untrustworthy. When the women told the apostles what they experienced after receiving the message about Christ's resurrection, they viewed the women's words as "an idle tale" (verse 11). A widespread bias against women to discount them as trustworthy witnesses then was well documented in various commentaries and by the church historian Josephus.[622] Iranian converts also experienced similar marginalisation and were considered untrustworthy, particularly when seeking asylum in Britain. They were often accused of "fake religious conversion".[623] Third, the apostles, the women and the two followers on the Road to Emmaus had their lives turned upside down after Jesus's death. Luke described how Cleopas and his companion's assumption about Jesus was shattered after his crucifixion: "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel…" (verse 21). These two followers left

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[621] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 842–43.

[622] Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. by William Whiston (London: George Routledge & Sons), 4.8.15 § 219; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 839–40; John Nolland, *Luke 18:35-24:53*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1993), 35C, p. 1191.

[623] Mariam Issimdar and PA Media, '"Wrong" to Link Asylum Claim Abuse to Clergy, Says Bishop of Chelmsford', *BBC News, Essex*, 2024 <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-essex-68214055> [accessed 26 February 2024].

Jerusalem, where the apostles stayed, and headed towards Emmaus (verse 17). Biblical scholar John Nolland described these two followers as "into deep gloom, with all their hopes shattered" and "in a state of confusion and uncertainty".[624] Like Iranian converts, individuals in these resurrection narratives experienced "ruptures". Their norms and firmly held ideals were uprooted and destroyed, causing instability. Finally, several scholars link the Road to Emmaus story to the Eucharist, especially when the two followers recognised Christ by breaking the bread.[625] Nolland argued that Luke suggested believers of Luke's day could have the living Lord made known to them in the Eucharistic celebration, like the two Emmaus followers' experience.[626] This link with the Eucharist is contestable, as some scholars considered the "breaking of the bread" in the Emmaus narratives to be more in tune with Jesus's feeding the five thousand[627] rather than the Last Supper.[628]

With these similarities between the Lukan resurrection narratives and Iranian converts' discordance, I will offer two reflections. First, the resurrected Jesus came near and walked with those in the "in-between space" and helped individuals reconstruct and reinterpret their narratives of ruptures. Second, the encounter between the resurrected Jesus and his followers was mutual. Once the followers recognised Christ, they returned to the group as the "gathered". The interpretation of the "narratives of discordance" reveals how Christ would respond to Iranian converts' situations of rupture and being in the "in-between space" and Christ's example of relating to those in that space, like Iranian converts.

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[624] Nolland, 35C, p. 1208.

[625] Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, & Resurrection* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), pp. 64–65; Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. by Patrick SJ Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), pp. 161–70; Kasper, pp. 38–45; *The Eucharistic Faith* (London: SCM Press, 2019), pp. 161–66.

[626] Nolland, 35C, p. 1206.

[627] Lk 9:12-17.

[628] Green, p. 843; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke - Volume 2: 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), p. 1919.

6.1.1 The resurrected Jesus walked with those in the "in-between space" and reconstructed their "rupture" narratives

In this Lukan Resurrection account, the resurrected Jesus came near and walked with those disoriented and in the "in-between space". Luke described how different individuals were confused about the situation. For instance, the women were perplexed and frightened about the empty tomb and the angelic appearance (verses 4 and 5). Cleopas and his companion were sad when they discussed what had happened (verse 17). New Testament scholar Darrell Bock described the two followers as "deeply disappointed" and considered Jesus's death as "a severe setback".[629] Also, when Jesus appeared to the disciples, they were terrified. Even though Jesus showed the disciples his hands and feet, there were mixed emotions and bewilderment: feeling joy but simultaneously disbelieving and wondering (verse 41). Doubts occurred in their hearts (verses 36 to 38). These disciples experienced ruptures as their assumptions about Jesus were shattered after his death as they expected Jesus to be a different redeemer. All these emotions and thoughts likely led them to question their identities. I consider the individuals in the Lukan Resurrection narratives to be in a disorientating "in-between space" and with discordance. This "in-between space" was not only the physical space between Jerusalem and Emmaus but also came from their identity disorientation because they lost hope and concurrently had unusual experiences of the empty tomb, a stranger on the Road to Emmaus and seeing the resurrected Jesus. Likewise, Iranian converts experienced disorientation and discordance, similar to these individuals in the Lukan narratives.

Nevertheless, in the Emmaus story, Jesus came near, journeyed with those two followers in disorientation and discordance, and conversed with them (verses 15 to 17). Jesus continued to walk with them until their eyes were opened, and they recognised Jesus after he broke the bread (verse 31). Despite the resurrected Jesus's presence, Luke described that these two followers' eyes were kept from recognising him (verse 16). Nonetheless, the resurrected Jesus continued to engage with these two followers with another question (verse 19). Instead of

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[629] Bock, p. 1903.

revealing himself straightaway to them, Jesus led them to recall and give their account of what had happened: the past events that had caused them to leave Jerusalem. Jesus did not ignore or downplay these past events. Instead, he reconstructed and reinterpreted these events for these two followers by referring to their heritage through the Scriptures: "beginning with Moses and all the prophets". Ultimately, all these events pointed to Jesus himself (verse 27). Jesus did it again when he appeared to the disciples later (verse 46). Through Jesus's explanation, the ruptures his disciples experienced in Jerusalem because of Jesus's suffering and death had a new meaning. He explained and helped his followers and disciples understand what had happened and its necessity. The re-interpretation impacted them significantly as their eyes and minds were opened, and their hearts burned (verses 31, 32 and 45). These followers and disciples were transformed and "re-made" through their encounter with the resurrected Jesus, who re-interpreted the narratives. In the *Africa Bible Commentary,* Namibian theologian Paul Isaak interpreted the Emmaus narratives as the risen Christ travelling and walking beside his followers in their pain, confusion and fear, bringing healing. Christ also created opportunities for them to "reframe their perception of the recent events in Jerusalem".[630]

Likewise, In their sadness and disorientation, Iranian converts might not recognise Christ's presence on their journey. Nonetheless, Christ would not ignore these converts' past, including their ruptures. Instead, he would help converts understand and reinterpret how their religious and cultural heritages relate to their ruptures and how these understandings point to Christ. Iranian converts who experienced ruptures can be transformed through their embodied encounter with Christ, potentially through the Eucharist.

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[630] Paul John Isaak, 'Luke', in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. by Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), pp. 1229–76 (p. 1275).

6.1.2   The mutual encounter of the resurrected Jesus and those in discordance

Moreover, the encounters between the resurrected Jesus and the two followers in these Lukan resurrection narratives were mutual. Once these two followers recognised Jesus, they returned to the other disciples in Jerusalem to share the good news. Luke stated that the resurrected Jesus "vanished from their sight" (verse 31). Later, Jesus finally withdrew from them and ascended (verse 51). However, the followers' encounters with Jesus continued as the Church, the "gathered" Body of Christ.[631] This notion of the "gathered" is significant, and the qualitative data suggested some converts struggled with the Eucharist's communal aspect. The CoE CW Eucharistic Liturgy starts with "The Gathering". Liturgists Gordon-Taylor and Jones stated that "The Gathering" is a "desired transformation of identity from individual worshipper to the Eucharistic community" through corporate acts of praise, penitence and prayer. [632] Therefore, the Eucharist is a celebration that balances the individual and their faith community. Matthew's Gospel recorded that Jesus said to his disciples, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20). The Eucharist calls for togetherness. The Greek word for "gather" in this verse is συνηγμένοι, which can mean effecting renewed relations, reconciliation, and extending a welcome to someone as a guest.[633] Matthew 25:35 documented Jesus saying, "… I was a stranger, and you welcomed me…" The Greek word for "welcome" in this verse (συνηγάγετέ) comes from the same word as "gather" in Matthew 18:20. Hence, this gathering involves more than sitting together at the same place on Sundays. It demands much deeper relationships, including reconciliation and welcoming strangers and foreigners like Iranian converts. Linking with Swinton's notion, it is more than being included; it is to belong. Lacking humility and love from the Church or Iranian converts hinders the development of these deep relationships as "gathered", contributing to converts' discordance. In the liturgy of "The Gathering" section, the Prayers of Preparation and Penitence speak out about the need to

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[631] Eph 1:22-23; 4:11-16; 5:30; Rom 12:4-5; Col 3:15.

[632] Benjamin Gordon-Taylor and Simon Jones, *Celebrating the Eucharist* (London: SPCK, 2005), p. 28.

[633] Walter Bauer, 'Συνάγω', ed. by Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (BDAG)* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

examine oneself honestly as God "knows all desires and secrets". Anything that impedes this togetherness, whether negligence, weakness, or deliberate fault, requires repentance.

Luke also highlighted that Cleopas and his companion changed their direction after meeting the resurrected Jesus (verses 33). These two followers showed their urgency to return to Jerusalem after encountering the resurrected Jesus. They got up immediately even though the day was nearly over and originally intended to stay (verse 29). It suggested a complete reversal of what happened at the beginning when they left Jerusalem for Emmaus and appeared saddened. Their meeting with the resurrected Jesus, who helped them reinterpret the narrative of their ruptures, impelled these two followers to be "gathered" with others and share the good news of their encounter with Jesus. The new and "gathered" Body of Christ, the Church, continued what the risen Christ asked his followers to do: to proclaim in his name to all nations the repentance and forgiveness of sins and to be his witness (verses 47 and 48). Likewise, despite Iranian converts' ruptures and disorientating identity formation, they met the risen Christ, including through the Eucharist. With the others in the CoE, Iranian converts became part of the Body of Christ as "gathered" for the mission Christ had given his followers to do.

Furthermore, the interaction between the resurrected Jesus and the two followers was mutual rather than one-sided. They asked Jesus to stay with them because it was almost evening. Luke described in verses 28 and 29 that Jesus walked ahead in a distant position from them.[634] Instead of continuing to be ahead of them, Jesus accepted their invitation and hospitality to stay and be at the table together (verses 29 to 30). Being at the table together and staying with these two followers indicated that the resurrected Jesus was no longer in a distant position from them. This act of accepting their hospitality and "staying" has two implications. First, the interaction between Jesus and these two followers was mutual. Jesus directly ministered to them and concurrently received from them through their hospitality. This mutuality is crucial in the relationship between Jesus and his followers: Jesus said he no longer called his followers servants

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[634] Walter Bauer, 'Πόρρω', ed. by Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (BDAG)* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

but friends.[635] Cleopas and his companion did not even recognise that the person they invited to stay was the resurrected Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus accepted their hospitality and shared the table with them. Various commentaries on Luke's Gospel suggested that Jesus was the honoured guest invited by the two followers and the host of the meal when he gave the blessing later, further supporting this notion of mutuality.[636] In her interview, *Sara,* a convert in this research, said, "*We have a relationship as we have shared the table…*".[637] Sharing a table, togetherness, and hospitality are crucial in Iranian cultural heritage despite the challenge of being mistrustful as converts. This mutuality highlights a model of mutual services to one another with humility, particularly critical and relevant between Iranian converts and the CoE. Instead of considering themselves as "walking ahead" and adopting an imperious attitude and a distant position, the Church should follow Christ's example of willingly accepting converts' contributions and hospitality as guests. Like the risen Christ, the Church should stay and wholeheartedly be at the table with Iranian converts rather than merely instruct them with superiority on how to follow. The Church and the converts should all embrace both roles as guests and hosts. The qualitative data highlighted these converts' weariness of superiority and power: their interpretation of the ownership of the Christian faith and past cultural invasion by missionaries in Iran. Their disapproval of supremacy could stem from their adverse experiences with the Iranian theocratic regime and political Islam. To a degree, the local congregations attempted to provide Iranian converts with a sense of family. This generosity is commendable. Nonetheless, it remained doubtful whether this hospitality and humility extended to the whole CoE beyond the local congregations, especially with systemic racism within the CoE.[638]

The second implication is that though the risen Christ no longer "stays" in a bodily form with his followers, including Iranian converts, he remains with them through the Holy Spirit and

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[635] Jn 15:15.

[636] Diane G. Chen, 'Gospel of Luke', in *The New Testament in Color: A Multiethnic Bible Commentary*, ed. by Esau McCaulley and others (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2024), pp. 130–72 (p. 849); Bock, p. 1919.

[637] Sara, '"Transcript", Interview In-Person with a Farsi Interpreter'.

[638] The Church of England, *From Lament to Action*.

in different forms of the Body of Christ: the Eucharist and the Church. Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac highlighted the significance of unity in these three theological concepts, namely the Church, the Eucharist and the Body of Christ: "The Church, like the Eucharist, is a mystery of unity - the same mystery, and one with inexhaustible riches. Both are the Body of Christ - the same Body." [639] Church unity is crucial ecumenically among various church traditions and also individuals from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including Iranian converts within the CoE. This unity involves being "gathered" in communion with the risen Christ and one another, which is accomplished through humility and mutuality.

6.2 A contextual understanding of the Eucharist for Iranian converts

In this section, I will offer an interpretation of the Eucharist and a theological construction related to the Eucharist from Iranian converts' context. First, I will propose that the Eucharist is a "sacrament for discordance", drawing on theologian Daniel Groody's work on the Eucharistic vision of migration. Groody believed that the Eucharist allows human and divine communion and draws the migrants, who often experience discordance like Iranian converts, to an "in-between space" where they can meet with God for transformation. Second, I will argue that the Eucharist is also a sacrament of "*Rastakhiz*", a sacrament of resurrection and new life, particularly for Iranian converts.

6.2.1 Eucharist as a sacrament for discordance

In the "narratives of discordance", Cleopas and his companion recognised the resurrected Jesus's presence in their discordance when Jesus broke bread with them. The qualitative data showed that the Eucharist has been central to most converts' Christian faith, and some viewed it as their personal covenant, the "*peyman*", with God. The Lukan narratives and

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[639] Henri de Lubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. by Michael Mason (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1999), p. 156.

these converts' experience point towards the Eucharist as a "sacrament for discordance". In Chapter Two (Section 2.2.1), I have reviewed Groody's work on the Eucharist and migration. In this section, I will discuss how his work supports my proposal that the Eucharist is a sacrament for those who experience discordance, like Iranian converts. Particularly, Groody highlighted that the Eucharist ritualises the movements from alienation to communion with God and from otherness to oneness with others. These two movements are fundamental to reconciliation and relevant to Iranian converts' discordance. Besides, Groody also believed that the Eucharist provides individuals with the "in-between space" to meet with Christ. In Chapter Five, I demonstrated that Iranian converts were in an "in-between space" because of their multiple religious and cultural identity formation and their ruptures' aftermath. I suggest the Eucharist joins these "in-between spaces" together to allow transformation to occur through their encounter with Christ.

In Groody's Eucharistic vision of migration, he presented human migration as a journey. He linked it with Christ's Incarnation: God "crossing the border" by emptying himself of everything except love. Through this self-giving act, God fully identifies with human beings, enters their vulnerable situations, and accompanies them in solidarity.[640] Iranian converts were in various vulnerable situations, as evident in their experiences as migrants in Britain, contributing to their discordance. Their vulnerable situations were exacerbated by the hostility they faced in Britain because of the unwelcoming message from British asylum and immigration policy, including a controversial proposal to send asylum seekers to a third country.[641] Groody reported a similar political narrative of migration in the US, which emphasises the migrants' "otherness" rather than "oneness", ignoring them as part of the human community created by God. The notions of otherness and alienation contributed significantly to Iranian converts' discordance. However, Groody argued that the Eucharist highlights Christ's incarnation,

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[640] Groody, 'Crossing the Divide', p. 652.
[641] BBC, 'What Is the UK's Plan to Send Asylum Seekers to Rwanda and How Many Could Go?', *BBC News*, 11 May 2024, section UK <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-61782866> [accessed 14 May 2024].

redefining otherness by seeing strangers as neighbours, not enemies. [642] The Eucharist

counterculturally emphasises the movement from "otherness to oneness".[643] He believed that

the Eucharist links with God's Kingdom, which "re-members" those who have been marginalised

and cut off from society and their communities, like asylum seekers and refugees.[644] Iranian

converts long to be "re-membered" to feel they belonged and to rebuild the trust from their

mistrust. Hence, the Eucharist is more than a sacrament of remembrance of Christ's life and

salvation work; it also provides an opportunity for the Church to recall and re-establish the

forgotten and ignored "no-bodies", the marginalised and ignored in society, like Iranian

converts.[645] Being Christ's disciples, the Church is called to embody Christ's presence by sharing

Christ's love with all people, no matter who they are. Remembering Christ in the Eucharist allows

the process of reconciliation because it expresses tearing down walls created by sin that

alienates our relationships with one another, contributing to discordance seen in Iranian

converts.[646] As Groody suggested, "re-membering" means living out "anamnestic solidarity"

through reconciliation and challenging societal injustice. As the Body of Christ, the Church should

advocate transforming the prevailing narratives that exclude and discriminate into narratives

that include and unite with those in discordance. The Eucharist is about receiving the Body and

Blood of Christ and becoming the Body of Christ for one another and the world.[647] Hence, the

Eucharist is a "sacrament for discordance" as it reminds a Church, like the CoE, and those with

discordance of "oneness" and the sense of belonging, with which many converts struggled.

Moreover, the Eucharist reminds those with discordance, like Iranian converts, that they

are in communion with God, providing individuals with the "in-between space" to meet with

Christ. Groody argued that God first moved to "migrate to our world" in the incarnation. God

also calls humankind through Christ to "migrate back with him" to the spiritual homeland.[648]

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[642] Groody, *A Theology of Migration*, p. 234.
[643] Ibid., pp. 10–12.
[644] Ibid., p. 212.
[645] Ibid., p. 240.
[646] Ibid., pp. 240–41.
[647] Ibid., p. 299.
[648] Ibid., p. 8.

Groody considered the Eucharist to draw people into this "in-between space" where "the human and the divine meet, where human sinfulness is transformed into a new life, and where this present life meets eternity".[649] In this "in-between space", individuals' journey meets with Jesus's life, death and resurrection. For migrants like Iranian converts, these journeys are concurrently the outward journey of migration and the inner journey of faith and conversion. Groody believed this "in-between space" is a spiritual borderland to encounter Christ and where transformation happens.[650] The Eucharist originates from the Last Supper, a Jewish Passover meal. Groody saw that the Eucharist also connotes the "in-between space" when individual migrants "pass over" in their physical and spiritual migration journey. The Passover meal remembers Israel's migration from slavery to freedom and calls God's people to pass over to a new way of living and being in this world.[651] Put differently, the Eucharist reminds migrants like Iranian converts of their "passing over" from alienation to communion with God and their communion with others: from "otherness to oneness". This communion is at the heart of the mission of reconciliation.[652] Iranian converts experienced discordance partly due to being in an "in-between space" because of tensions from their multiple religious and cultural identity formation and their ruptures' aftermath. Considering Groody's proposals, the Eucharist provides Iranian converts with another "in-between space" to meet with Christ in the "in-between space" that contributed to their discordance. In other words, the Eucharistic "in-between space" joins with Iranian converts' "in-between space" for them to be in communion with Christ. Some converts reported that being in their "in-between space" can be taxing because of discordance. However, it is where transformation and "re-making" happen when they encounter Christ in the Eucharistic "in-between space" that enters their "in-between space". They encounter Christ through the Eucharist, where Christ is present sacramentally: he comes close and walks with those in the "in-between space" with discordance. Transformation occurs in encountering the

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[649] Ibid., p. 238.
[650] Ibid., pp. 208, 239.
[651] Ibid., pp. 212–13.
[652] Ibid., p. 225.

risen Christ through the Eucharist, as seen in the two disciples in the "narratives of discordance"
after Jesus broke bread with them (Lk 24: 30-31, 33, 35).

Therefore, the Eucharist is a "sacrament for discordance", including Iranian converts. It
brings the alienated to communion with God and from "otherness to oneness" with others. The
Eucharist also provides an "in-between space" to join with Iranian converts' "in-between space",
which contributes to discordance. In that joint space, Iranian converts encounter Christ, who
comes alongside them and facilitates reconciliation and transformation. Through the
reconciliation, it also allows those who are forgotten and ignored in society, like Iranian converts,
to be "re-membered" in the Church. Hence, the Eucharist is also a sacrament for transformation
that echoes the notions of renewal and resurrection: transformed from death to life. The
Eucharist is a sacrament of "*Rastakhiz*": a sacrament of new life and resurrection in Iranian
converts' context.

6.2.2   Eucharist as a sacrament of "*Rastakhiz*" (رستاخیز): renewal and reconciliation

In the qualitative data, "*Rastakhiz*", one of the terms used in the Farsi Bible for Christ's
resurrection, was linked with *Nowruz*, which is around springtime when nature is renewed. Some
converts connect this concept to renewal and transformation, which is imperative for those with
discordance. As Groody and others suggested, the Eucharist can facilitate transformation
through encountering Christ in the sacrament. Individuals with discordance yearn for a new life.
Transformation and new life do not necessarily mean forgetting the past or "erasing the wounds",
as trauma theologian Rambo was concerned. Those wounds remain, and the same for Iranian
converts' cultural identities. Nevertheless, transformation involves giving new meanings to these
elements of discordance. It also allows reconciliation and "re-membering" to be part of the
community and society. Hence, the Eucharist is more than a "sacrament for discordance". It is
also a "sacrament of '*Rastakhiz*'", a sacrament of renewal and resurrection, as it facilitates
transformation and reconciliation among Iranian converts and the Church. In his book on

resurrection, *Surprised by Hope*, Anglican bishop and biblical theologian NT Wright suggested that the Eucharist should be seen eschatologically as "the arrival of God's future in the present, not just the extension of God's past (or of Jesus' past) into our present". The resurrected Christ, who gives himself to his followers, has gone ahead into the transformed new world in the new creation. Christ meets us through the creation's symbols, the bread and wine, in the Eucharist. Wright believes the Eucharist can be understood most fully as anticipating the banquet in the renewal of heaven and earth at the Lamb's marriage supper. He asserted that Jesus's resurrection and the promise of the world's renewal provide the ontological, epistemological, and eschatological framework to understand the Eucharist afresh and give the hope that comes forward from God's future to sustain the believers in the present. [653] Hence, according to Wright, the Eucharist is a sacrament of renewal and resurrection. Besides Wright, theologian Geoffrey Wainwright also highlighted the eschatological schema of the Eucharist, which is closely linked with God's Kingdom.[654]

I will now focus on how this can be applied to Iranian converts in the CoE, considering various levels of reconciliation and renewal and the links between these levels and the Eucharist. I will argue that the Eucharist is also a sacrament of "*Rastakhiz*", new life and resurrection for Iranian converts and the CoE, which is significant for their discordance. Iranian converts emphasised their individual reconciliation with God through Christ's redemptive work, which is remembered in the Eucharist. Nevertheless, individual reconciliation also includes inward self-reconciliation to transform into a "new creation". It is particularly relevant to Iranian converts because of their ruptures and confusing cultural and religious identity formation. This inward reconciliation transforms various elements of the converts' identity to be more Christ-like.

Reconciliation also has a social dimension, which "re-members" those marginalised in society, like Iranian converts, to be part of the Church, the Body of Christ. Social reconciliation demolishes the division between members of their religio-cultural differences and builds unity

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[653] Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2011), pp. 285–88.
[654] Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 3rd edn (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003).

despite the diversity. The Eucharist reminds the believers that, no matter their background, they are equals before God. Mutuality and humility are needed to develop trust and overcome Iranian converts' mistrust. Reconciliation also includes the Church championing truth and justice through liberation. It demands acknowledging and confronting the world's wrongdoings and evils, such as the lack of religious freedom in Iran and the racial and migration injustices Iranian converts experienced in Britain. The Church, the Body of Christ, needs to speak out for marginalised people who may not have a voice and proclaim the eschatological hope of the coming of God's Kingdom: justice and peace. The Eucharist reminds the Church of this promise of the future of God's Kingdom.

Society tends to link reconciliation with wars, political conflicts, and violence. Catholic theologian Robert Schreiter suggested that the Christian understanding of reconciliation is context-dependent.[655] Having considered Paul's writings in the New Testament[656], Schreiter believed that reconciliation has three levels. First, Christologically, Christ is the mediator through whom God reconciles the world to Himself. Second, ecclesiologically, Christ reconciles Jews and Gentiles. Third, cosmically, Christ reconciles all the powers in heaven and earth. Besides the three levels, Schreiter highlighted two dimensions of reconciliation: individual and social. Schreiter emphasised that God initiates and brings about reconciliation, which can transform both protagonists and address their past to go forward. It is a multidimensional reality that requires God's reconciling activity and, concurrently, human agency.[657] The CoE Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, suggested that reconciliation is a work of courage and a source of hope. He believed that reconciliation, at the least, opens new possibilities for mitigating the harm but, at the most, can bring healing and transformation. It also opens the way to justice and truth and offers the

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[655] Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality & Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), p. 13.

[656] Rom 5:6-11; 2 Cor 5:11-20.

[657] Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), pp. 41–62; Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, pp. 14–22.

possibility of forgiving oneself and others. It requires humble sacrifice, especially when there is a power difference, and the stronger should not control, dominate, or rule the weaker.[658]

For the first Christological level of reconciliation, Iranian converts prioritised this level of reconciliation between themselves and God. From the qualitative data, they showed a strong and prevailing emphasis on the personal aspect of their faith, their individual "*peyman*" with God as remembered in their partaking of the Eucharist. Iranian converts are individually reconciled to God through Christ and receive the forgiveness of their sins. This individual reconciliation is a crucial element of the Christian faith. However, individual reconciliation is more than forgiving personal sins; it is also about restoring and transforming damaged humanity and rebuilding shattered lives.[659]   Christ's reconciliation work goes beyond personal salvation but also includes inward self-reconciliation as "re-making" and renewal, no matter whether the shattered lives are from the ruptures or confusing cultural and religious identity formation like what Iranian converts experienced. Put differently, the Christological level of reconciliation also includes converts' inward self-reconciliation for their renewal and "re-making". Paul wrote, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation… All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ" (2 Cor 5:17-18). A new creation in Christ includes a transformation through inward self-reconciliation. Tanzanian Catholic Archbishop Paul Ruzoka suggested, "Christian reconciliation is a radical transformation of the inner self. Reconciliation is also an inner peace-making and purification from the culture of nihilism."[660]   This inward self-reconciliation involves self-compassion, letting go of self-rejection, accepting personal dignity, and finding identity in Christ. Self-compassion is not about forgetting the wounds from ruptures or excusing wrongdoings but regaining agency and transforming through Christ. Self-reconciliation may also involve lamenting what had happened and coming to terms with the situation. Without this self-

[658] Justin Welby, *The Power of Reconciliation* (London; Dublin: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2022), pp. 263–66.
[659] Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, p. 111.
[660] Paul R Ruzoka, 'Experiences on the Pastoral Care of Refugees', *People on the Move*, 109 (Suppl.) (2009), 147–62.

reconciliation, it is challenging to build trust, which was observed as a significant struggle among Iranian converts.

The Eucharist is a powerful sacrament for Iranian converts, not only in their individual reconciliation with God through Christ but also in their inward self-reconciliation. Anglican theologian Kevin Emmert argued that the Eucharist is an identity-forming ritual that teaches Jesus's followers what it means to be a person in Christ. It shapes the individual's self-understanding and facilitates self-reconciliation, which is much needed for Iranian converts. Emmert believes that the Eucharist remembers Christ's self-giving work of salvation, constituting an individual's Christian identity.[661] The Eucharist forms the believers' self and identity, as the Christ story shapes these believers' personal stories.[662] In the Eucharist, their identity is enacted, fortified and even advanced.[663] Emmert advocated that believers are "commemorative beings". Through the Eucharist, they are reminded of who they are in Christ and comforted by the Spirit to become more of who they are and to live like Christ. Such knowledge lessens the fear of abandonment, anxiety, loneliness and suffering,[664] which is crucial for Iranian converts. The believer's identity is reaffirmed and reconciled through communion with Christ when participating in the Eucharist. It differs from contemporary self-care and self-help, suggesting that individuals empower themselves to restore and improve themselves.[665] Instead, the source of inward self-reconciliation is Christ. The believers reconcile with their most authentic selves when they become more like Christ.[666] The Eucharist, as a sacrament, communicates to Christ's followers what God has done for them and proclaims to them their identity and their purpose in Christ.[667] Therefore, the Eucharistic Holy Table invites individual reconciliation – with God and oneself to be the new creation in Christ.

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[661] Kevin P. Emmert, *The Water and the Blood: How the Sacraments Shape Christian Identity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), pp. 18–21.
[662] Ibid., p. 69.
[663] Ibid., pp. 111–12.
[664] Ibid., p. 128.
[665] Ibid., pp. 138–39.
[666] Ibid., p. 153.
[667] Ibid., p. 147.

In the second level, as Schreiter suggested, Christ also reconciles different groups, the "Jews" and the "Gentiles", within the Church. This level relates to social reconciliation and is particularly relevant for Iranian converts who struggle with the sense of belonging within the CoE. The New Testament letter to the Ephesians states that Christ is the peace. In his flesh, Christ has made both Jews and Gentiles into one group and has broken down the dividing wall and hostility between the two groups. Christ created in himself one new humanity to make peace. Through the cross, he reconciled both groups to God in one body to demolish the hostility because of their differences. In Christ, believers, no matter whether Jews or Gentiles, are no longer strangers and aliens but citizens with the saints. They are also "members of the household of God" and Christ himself as the cornerstone.[668] This research highlighted the tension among Iranian converts regarding belonging to the Church, contributing to their discordance. Groody suggested that the Eucharist is to "re-member" as part of a community, particularly those forgotten and ignored in society, like Iranian converts. Hence, Christ reconciles those from various religio-cultural backgrounds, like the Jews and Gentiles, to become members of God's household. The division between religio-cultural groups is destroyed in Christ, and unity begins despite the differences. Various theologians have advocated the uniting role of the Eucharist. St Augustine of Hippo called the Eucharist the "sign of unity" and "bond of charity".[669] Rowan Williams believed that the Eucharist obliges people to see the person next to them as "wanted by God". Williams also advocated that the Eucharist reminds the Church that individuals are invited to be guests and are set free to show God's hospitality in Christ by welcoming others to be guests.[670] Therefore, the Eucharist binds individuals from different backgrounds together as the "gathered". It affirms and renews what is written in the CW Eucharistic Liturgy: "Though we are many, we are one body because we all share in one bread." [671] This one Body of Christ includes Iranian converts and non-Iranian CoE congregation members. In reading the Lukan

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[668] Eph 2:14-16, 19-20, NRSV.
[669] Augustine of Hippo, sec. 26.13.
[670] Rowan Williams, *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer* (London: SPCK, 2014), pp. 46, 51.
[671] Archbishops' Council, the Church of England, *Common Worship*.

resurrection narratives, I highlighted that Christ demonstrated mutuality in his post-resurrection appearance to the two followers on the road to Emmaus. Social reconciliation, particularly between groups with significant power and status differences, such as Iranian converts' situations in the CoE, requires mutuality and humility. Repentance and forgiveness between groups may also be necessary for social reconciliation. The Eucharist reminds us that believers from whatever backgrounds are equals before God. Again, the Eucharistic Holy Table invites social reconciliation – no one at the table is superior to others before Christ as they all share the same bread, the same Christ. Thus, through Christ and the Eucharist, there is hope for reconciliation and forgiveness between Iranian converts and others, both other Iranians and non-Iranians. Trust can begin to develop to overcome Iranian converts' mistrust. The first and second levels are interconnected and interdependent as Schreiter believed that individual reconciliation is a prerequisite to social reconciliation. He advocated that individual reconciliation "helps nurture and strengthen social reconciliation" and "the processes of social reconciliation are necessary to ensure the long-term survival and flourishing of reconciled persons".[672]

In the third cosmic level of reconciliation, Schreiter suggested that Christ reconciles all the powers in heaven and earth. It is another social reconciliation which aims to reconstruct society's moral order, and truth and justice are the fundamental moral claims in this process.[673] Iranian converts experienced injustices throughout their faith journey: the lack of religious freedom in Iran, racism in Britain, and societal hostility and mistrust because they were asylum seekers and refugees. Schreiter rightly suggested that "a society cannot simply move from a state of oppression to a liberated state as though nothing had happened… The past, ensnarled in lies and injustice, must be confronted."[674] Reconciliation demands liberation by acknowledging the enactment of the "conflictive realities" in this world, including the wrongdoings and divisions,

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[672] Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, p. 111,116.
[673] Ibid., pp. 112–13.
[674] Ibid., p. 121.

and removing the structures and processes that allow them to continue or reappear.[675] The

Church often ignores these "conflictive realities" and avoids the quest for liberation. It is written

in the letter to the Colossians, "Through him (Christ) God was pleased to reconcile to himself all

things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross."[676] The

Christian faith must acknowledge and confront the "conflictive realities" of evils in humankind

and the enmity between God and the world. These "conflictive realities" were evident in Iranian

converts' experiences, contributing to their discordance. The Church, the Body of Christ, should

participate in overcoming them through liberation and proclaim the eschatological hope of

annihilating this enmity.[677] Essentially, reconciliation seeks the truth and continues speaking out

for the poor, the dispossessed, and the disadvantaged. It also awaits the ultimate justice, which

goes beyond retribution but creates a new world as God intended.[678] This quest for justice

echoes what Jesus said in the Lord's prayer, "May your kingdom come, May your will be done on

earth as it is in heaven."[679] Therefore, this third cosmic level reconciliation, closely related to

justice and truth, links with God's Kingdom now and in the future, on earth and in heaven.

Furthermore, Schreiter highlighted the significance of food and eating together as "a

sign of the peace of God's reign", particularly for the poor and the marginalised, like Iranian

converts. The Eucharist is the fundamental sign of this reign, this Kingdom, that Christ had

promised, and the Kingdom has now come into being. It is a foretaste of a reconciled creation.[680]

Nevertheless, God's Kingdom is a Kingdom of justice. Latin American liberation theologian

Gustavo Gutiérrez considered the Eucharist and God's Kingdom in his challenging context, which

included much corruption and suffering. His context then was like what Iranian converts had

experienced now. Gutiérrez stated, "Without a real commitment against exploitation and

alienation and for a society of solidarity and justice, the Eucharistic celebration is an empty action,

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[675] Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation*, pp. 21–23.
[676] Col 1:20, NRSV.
[677] Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation*, pp. 24–25.
[678] Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, p. 102.
[679] Mt 6:10, NRSV.
[680] Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, pp. 68–69.

lacking any genuine endorsement by those who participate in it."[681] He linked the Eucharist with human brotherhood, and the Church needs to denounce prophetically every dehumanising situation which contradicts brotherhood, justice, and liberty. The Church should also announce the Gospel message and the coming of the Kingdom, which is against any social injustice that alienates and shatters this human brotherhood.[682] Applying to the converts' context, the lack of religious freedom in Iran and the racial and migration injustices they faced in Britain are prime examples of the breaking of human brotherhood that the Church and its Iranian and non-Iranian members can denounce and speak out as part of God's Kingdom. God has entrusted the Church with a ministry of reconciliation, and the Church can create spaces of safety, memory and hope to facilitate reconciliation. The Church can also accompany survivors through hospitality and show society how living as a reconciled community can be possible "on earth as it is in heaven".[683] Hence, the Eucharist reminds the Church and believers of Christ's promise of the future of God's Kingdom and presses them to confront this world's evil and "conflictive realities" through liberation and reconciliation. The Eucharistic Holy Table invites justice and truth.

In summary, considering Schreiter's proposed three levels of reconciliation and applying them to the converts' context, I have argued that the Eucharist is also a sacrament of "*Rastakhiz*", new life and resurrection, for Iranian converts and their Church. Iranian converts emphasised their individual reconciliation with God through Christ's salvific work on the cross, which is remembered in the Eucharist. Nevertheless, individual reconciliation through Christ goes beyond personal salvation, and it should include individual inward self-reconciliation to transform as a "new creation". It is especially relevant to Iranian converts because of their ruptures and confusing cultural and religious identity formation. The Eucharist forms, reaffirms, and reconciles the identities of the believers, including Iranian converts, and transforms them into more Christ-like. The reconciliation also has a social dimension and ecclesiological purpose: to "re-member"

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[681] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. by Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (London: SCM Press, 1974), p. 265.
[682] Ibid., pp. 262–79.
[683] Robert J. Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation*, pp. 128–30.

those marginalised in society, like Iranian converts, to be part of the Church, the Body of Christ. This social reconciliation demolishes the division because of religio-cultural differences and builds unity despite the diversity. Mutuality and humility are needed to develop trust and overcome converts' mistrust. However, social reconciliation goes beyond the ecclesial level; it also includes reconstructing society's moral order and championing truth and justice through liberation. It demands acknowledging and confronting the "conflictive realities". The Church, the Body of Christ, needs to speak out for the disadvantaged and proclaim the eschatological hope of the coming of God's Kingdom of justice. The Eucharist reminds the Church and its members of Christ's promise of God's Kingdom. It also presses them to confront this world's evil through a ministry of reconciliation that God has entrusted the Church. Hence, the Eucharist brings new life, reconciliation and resurrection, the "*Rastakhiz*", to Iranian converts and the Church.

6.3   Suggestion of practices for Iranian converts and the Church

This last section will suggest practices for Iranian converts and the CoE. These suggestions aim to help them journey together as the "gathered" and achieve what the CoE CW Eucharistic liturgy highlights in the final "Dismissal" section: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." [684] First, I will propose incorporating the Eucharistic Holy Table with Iranian *Nowruz Haft-sin* table elements, symbolising reconciliation and new life. This contextualised suggestion addresses the discordance from the "in-between space" of Iranian converts' multiple religio-cultural identity formation. It also reassures them that they can keep their Iranian identity in the CoE as part of their inward self-reconciliation. Second, I will advocate trauma-informed ministries among Iranian converts within the CoE, and the churches they attend should be trauma-safe. These arrangements address their discordance from the aftermath of their ruptures. It also facilitates converts' inward self-reconciliation. Third, I will suggest the need for mutuality

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[684] Archbishops' Council, the Church of England, *Common Worship*.

between Iranian converts and the CoE, particularly raising the question about issues for liturgical co-production rather than having the current Farsi "translation" of the authorised liturgy entirely based on the original English version. This issue infers the power difference, reinforcing converts' sense of being included but not belonging to the CoE. The CoE must also journey with Iranian converts as the resurrected Jesus did with his two followers on the road to Emmaus. This journeying involves the Church's self-examination and repentance as the ecclesiological level of social reconciliation. It should also include advocating and speaking out for Iranian converts as the cosmic level of social reconciliation for God's Kingdom.

6.3.1   The *Haft-sin* Holy Table

The *Haft-sin* table is treasured among Iranians during *Nowruz*. Many research participants mentioned its significance in their interviews. The table carries various meanings, including togetherness (i.e. as "gathered"), forgiveness and reconciliation. *Sheila* and *Hamid* said in the interviews that family members were invited to gather around the *Haft-sin* table for their *Nowruz* celebration. The table provided opportunities for reconciliation between one another as the renewal *Nowruz* signifies. As observed in all three "cases", contextual adaptations of the *Haft-sin* table and Nowruz have already been made. These included using the Bible as the wisdom book and having the *Haft-sin* table in places for Christian worship. Hence, some inculturation occurred among Iranian converts in the CoE to incorporate their Christian faith into their religio-cultural heritage. As the *Haft-sin* table carries the meanings of forgiveness and reconciliation, there are parallels between it and the Eucharistic Holy Table. I believe these similarities may facilitate another inculturation that allows Iranian cultural heritage to be reflected in the Eucharist within the CoE. This arrangement can be momentous, demanding mutuality and humility.

Groody also included the Holy Table in his Eucharistic vision of migration and advocated that the Table symbolises universal love.[685] Although tables can create connections with others, they also cause stratification among people, including migrants like Iranian converts, who are often excluded from the same table. This stratification hugely contrasts with the ultimate Table for God's promised banquet at the end of time, where God welcomes all people to that Table.[686] Hence, the Eucharistic Holy Table reminds individuals of the quest for personal and social reconciliation. I have highlighted how the Eucharist associates with various levels of reconciliation in these converts' context and how the Eucharistic Holy Table is a table of invitation. It invites Iranian converts to reconcile individually with God through Christ and with themselves as part of renewal as Christ's new creation and their "re-making" and resurrection. The Holy Table also invites Iranian converts for social reconciliation with the CoE and its Iranian and non-Iranian members. Everyone is equal before God in this Eucharistic feast at the Table. Furthermore, the Holy Table invites the Church to pursue justice and truth and confront any wrongdoings that have occurred and continue to happen to Iranian converts. It is an invitation to God's Kingdom that is present now and in the future.

Likewise, the *Haft-sin* table is also a table of invitation in several ways. First, it invites converts to reconcile with their religious and cultural heritage by keeping this vital celebration as Iranians. Second, as the *Nowruz* custom, the *Haft-sin* table invites these converts to reconcile with one another in any broken relationships and offer forgiveness to others. Finally, as the *Nowruz* is a season of rebirth, the *Haft-sin* table invites converts to renewal, particularly through reconciliation with past ruptures and present circumstances, hoping for the ultimate eschatological renewal and transformation. Hence, the Eucharistic Holy Table and the *Haft-sin* table share common grounds of symbolising reconciliation and renewal. Incorporating elements together can benefit both Iranian converts and the Church. The combination reminds Iranian converts of their cultural heritage and new identities in Christ, formed through Christ's sacrifice

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[685] Groody, *A Theology of Migration*, p. 208.
[686] Lk 5:27-32.

and resurrection, remembered in the Eucharist. It also prompts Iranian converts to remember Christ's presence through the Eucharist amidst their past and present challenges as someone on the margins in a foreign country. For both the Church and Iranian converts, the combined *Haft-sin* Holy Table encourages all to adopt a humble and mutual posture to "re-member" all as the one Body of Christ. Also, for the Church, seeing Iranian cultural heritage displayed with the Holy Table reminds them of the need to advocate and speak for them in solidarity to confront any injustices these converts experience. An example of how this may be achieved practically is illustrated in the following picture.

Picture 8 Haft-sin Holy Table for Eucharist (Illustrator: Marianne Clough, used with consent)

I discussed the idea of a *Haft-sin* Holy Table with the key Iranian leaders in the three congregations, who were also the participants of this research (*Nader, Mahmoud, and Babak*). They all considered this suggestion appropriate. The possible concern for this proposal is syncretism, especially since *Nowruz* has a Zoroastrian association. I have already discussed this issue in Chapter Five and explained theologian Phan's suggestion of "inclusive pluralism" as a potential theological framework to handle multi-religious identities. I agree with Phan that Christians can practise some aspects of other religions, provided their Christian faith takes

precedence. The *Haft-sin* Holy Table focuses mainly on the Eucharist, and the suggestion is primarily to have elements which symbolise the *Haft-sin* Table placed in the Eucharistic Holy Table. Iranians should readily recognise these elements, which can be the *Sabzeh* (سبزه, sprouts grown in a dish), *Seeb* (سیب, apple: not shown in Picture 8), eggs or flowers. Having Chancel or altar flowers is already a common practice in some churches, often as a gesture of thanksgiving to God. According to the CoE Canons Section F2, the requirements of the Holy Table include its position, the material used, being "kept in a sufficient and seemly manner", and being "covered with a fair white linen cloth at the time of the celebration of the Holy Communion".[687] Similar descriptions are found in BCP.[688] Therefore, this proposal does not act against the CoE Canons and the historic formularies. The *Haft-sin* Table has already been placed in churches, as evidenced by the qualitative data. I argue that the current proposal is a step further in building a sense of belonging among Iranian converts. The practical details, such as how often and in what circumstances this arrangement should happen, depend on the local context. In some parishes with many Iranian converts, having this arrangement regularly and during festivals like *Nowruz* and *Yalda Night* can be particularly beneficial.

6.3.2 Trauma-informed ministries and trauma-safe churches for Iranian converts

My second suggestion is that the ministries that serve Iranian converts in the CoE should be trauma-informed, and these CoE churches should be trauma-safe because of Iranian converts' experience of ruptures. Trauma-informed ministries and trauma-safe churches should not be exclusive to Iranian converts, as churches often have individuals who have experienced and lived with the trauma aftermaths. Nevertheless, Iranian converts have additional challenges, partly because of their shame and honour culture, from which they are more likely to hide their

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[687] The Church of England, 'The Canons of the Church of England, Section F' (Church House Publishing, 2016), sec. F2 <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-services/canons-church-england/section-f> [accessed 17 May 2024].
[688] The Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 236–37.

traumatic experiences and suffering as these are often perceived as shameful. Also, the language barrier, lack of close support like family, and absence of meaningful engagement with society when they are waiting for their asylum outcomes exacerbate their challenges. Hence, a trauma-safe church is crucial to facilitate converts' inward self-reconciliation. Theologians Joshua Cockayne, Scott Harrower and Preston Hill defined trauma-safe churches as where those vulnerable to trauma are protected and where trauma healing can occur.[689] They highlighted that trauma-safe churches create spaces to bless trauma survivors' bodies and honour their boundaries. They advocate the rule of "always ask before touching", as many trauma survivors may have felt losing autonomy over their bodies.[690] Their observation is particularly relevant during the "sharing the peace" in the CoE Eucharistic rite. It often involves some bodily contact between congregation members to exchange a sign of peace, like handshakes or hugs. The "no-touch" approach can be suitable in the Western context. However, it may not apply to Iranians' cultural heritage, who generally prefer showing affection through touching and hugging others of the same sex. Not having bodily tactile contact may even be perceived as rude and inhospitable. On balance, I consider being cautious, as Cockayne *et al.* suggested, and asking Iranian converts about touching is reasonable, as one of the fundamental principles of a trauma-safe church is to "do no harm".[691]

This issue raised an important consideration on the cultural appropriateness of trauma-informed ministries and trauma-safe churches, which is essential for Iranian converts. There is a solid call to adopt culturally appropriate care in trauma-informed support outside the ecclesial settings, such as in social work. Several foundational principles for "culturally appropriate trauma-informed support" were suggested. These include increasing trauma awareness, promoting safety, supporting autonomy, sharing power, integrating holistic care as a whole person, prioritising relationships, emphasising strengths, and recognising the importance of

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[689] Joshua Cockayne, Scott Harrower, and Preston Hill, *Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), p. 216.
[690] Ibid., p. 186.
[691] Ibid., pp. 216–23.

cultural competency.[692]   These principles can also apply to the Church, though substantial training will be necessary. The final principle on cultural competency is especially relevant to the CoE, which has become increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse.[693] Cultural competency requires respect and appreciation of diversity, a willingness to examine one's cultural values and beliefs, and learning about other cultures' values and beliefs. However, most importantly, it demands an understanding that one culture is not superior to another.[694]

Cockayne et al. also advised that trauma-informed ministries require flexibility, as there is "no 'one-size-fits-all' formula for trauma, recovery and pastoral care".[695]   This flexibility includes the manner of participating in the Eucharist, and nobody should be pressured to receive the Eucharist.[696] This advice is relevant to the potential re-traumatisation reported by some converts and trauma theologian O'Donnell because of the trauma and betrayal being remembered during the Eucharist. Moreover, listening to trauma survivors' stories compassionately and empowering them to restore agency together with the Church is crucial in trauma-informed ministries.[697] Sharing stories requires vulnerability from both the teller and the hearer,[698] and it can be particularly challenging for Iranian converts when English is not their first language. The Church should be sensitive to these challenges and allow converts time and space to share, which helps restore agency. Besides the survivors sharing their stories, getting them actively involved in serving within the church community can also facilitate their "re-making" and belonging.[699] Particularly for asylum seekers like many converts who are not

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[692] Jennifer L. Ballard-Kang, 'Using Culturally Appropriate, Trauma-Informed Support to Promote Bicultural Self-Efficacy Among Resettled Refugees: A Conceptual Model', *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 29.1–3 (2020), 23–42 (pp. 29–33).

[693] Deborah Beach, Callan Slipper, and Jeremy Worthen, *Welcoming Ethnic Minority Congregations: Church-Sharing and the Church of England* (The Council for Christian Unity, 2020), pp. 6–10 <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/ethnic-minority-congregations-report-2020.pdf> [accessed 18 May 2024].

[694] Ballard-Kang, p. 32.

[695] Cockayne, Harrower, and Hill, p. 191.

[696] Ibid., p. 206.

[697] Ibid., p. 223.

[698] Ibid., p. 225.

[699] Ibid., p. 267.

allowed to work in Britain, getting them involved in some church ministry will bring back dignity, which is often lost in the challenging process of seeking asylum.

Besides the Church being trauma-informed in celebrating the Eucharist, there is also a need for more trauma-informed teaching, particularly on the practice of lament, which is often overlooked. Liturgist Don Saliers named the disconnection between the church's liturgical experiences and the trauma individuals encountered as "lament denial".[700] Biblical scholar Megan Warner argued that the practice of lament, mainly through the lament psalms in the Scriptures, can offer much to individual Christians and the Church amidst traumatic experiences. The liturgical movement from desolation and complaint to hope and praise with the lament psalms is valuable pastorally for trauma survivors' reconstruction and "re-making".[701] Using liturgies creatively and sensitively can provide healing and restoration for the survivors. Practical theologian Grosh-Miller and colleagues believe liturgy is "a tool that helps the lame to walk and those blinded by pain and fear to come to a new vision".[702] As liturgy powerfully impacts individuals, some liturgies may need to be adapted and reviewed to ensure they are trauma-informed. This adjustment requires trauma survivors' input through sharing their lived experiences. Such a review demands the Church's mutuality and humility, especially for the CoE, as their liturgies are standardised and require central approval. Regulating liturgies to ensure doctrinal coherence and accuracy is understandable. However, it also reflects the issues of power and control, which Iranian converts lack, maintaining discordance.

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[700] Don Saliers, 'Psalms in Our Lamentable World', *Yale Journal of Music & Religion*, 1.1 (2015), 103–11 (p. 104).

[701] Megan Warner, 'Teach to Your Daughters a Dirge: Revisiting the Practice of Lament in the Light of Trauma Theory', in *Tragedies and Christian Congregations: The Practical Theology of Trauma*, ed. by Megan Warner and others (London; New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 167–81.

[702] Carla A. Grosch-Miller, Megan Warner, and Hilary Ison, 'Enabling the Work of the People: Liturgy in the Aftermath of Trauma', in *Tragedies and Christian Congregations: The Practical Theology of Trauma*, ed. by Megan Warner and others, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology (London; New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 149–66 (p. 165).

6.3.3 Mutuality and Journeying together between the CoE and Iranian converts

Mutuality between Iranian converts and the CoE is crucial. In reading the "narratives of discordance", the resurrected Jesus demonstrated mutuality in his post-resurrection appearance to the two followers on the road to Emmaus. There is also a quest for social reconciliation between different religious and cultural groups, the "Jews and Gentiles" in the Church. These differences create significant power and status disparities in the Church, like the situation between Iranian converts and the majority within the CoE. For social reconciliation in the ecclesial setting, mutuality and humility are required on both sides. The Farsi translation of the CoE CW Eucharistic liturgy is an example to consider. The current CoE Farsi Eucharistic liturgy is directly translated from the CW English version. The celebration in Wakefield Cathedral in March 2019, with three Anglican bishops and more than 500 people attending, highlighted its significance in the CoE history.[703] Although the translation is more accessible for Iranian converts to participate in the Eucharist in their first language, no adaptation was made to ensure the liturgy is relevant and appropriate to Iranians' cultural context and experiences. Even though the translation was checked for accuracy and intelligibility by Iranian convert representatives within the CoE, they did not contribute to how the liturgy could be adapted to their cultural context and experiences. Considering Bevans's models of contextual theology, the CoE utilised the translation model.[704] Bevans argued that the translation model's fundamental presupposition is the message's supremacy (i.e. liturgy in this case). The translation model ignores the reality that the liturgy carried the cultural context when it was written. It assumes that various cultures are similar and that direct translation from one culture to another is acceptable without any adaptation. Bevans considered when the translation to another language is identical in format and content to the original language as "un-contextual".[705] In this case of the Eucharistic liturgy,

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[703] Wilkinson.
[704] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, pp. 37–53.
[705] Ibid., p. 47.

the CoE holds control. Iranian converts have minimal ownership of the liturgy, even though it is in Farsi and for their use.

This "un-contextual" approach raises two questions regarding the relationship between Iranian converts and the CoE. First, this unidirectional method does not foster any mutuality. It conveys a strong sense of power and dominance because of the vast difference in social status between the Iranian converts and the Church. The Church may believe the emphasis on liturgical uniformity encourages belonging. Instead, it is more likely to damage these converts' already suboptimal belonging to the CoE, as they have no representation and ownership in this Farsi version. Second, it is also a racial justice issue. The Archbishops' Anti-Racism Taskforce Report, *From Lament to Action*, highlighted "culture and liturgy" as one of their key terms of reference. It stated the need to "identify cultural barriers in worship and liturgical culture which act as disincentives to participation". It also mentioned that "one of the barriers to inclusion or continued participation in the CoE for those from UKME/GMH[706] and other backgrounds has been the challenge of 'cultural assimilation' into the Church, where there is perceived to be little or no room for cultural expression outside of a predominant culture which is predominately white and middle class".[707] The Farsi translation of the Eucharistic Liturgy intends to provide a way of inclusion for Iranian converts. Nevertheless, this measure reinforces a source of Iranian converts' tension: being included but not belonging. Many converts had experienced racism in Britain, and this issue about the liturgy translation reinforces their experiences of racial injustice that contributed significantly to their ruptures.

This issue about the CoE liturgy is further complicated by the CoE Canons, which pose restrictions. The Canons Section B is related to "Divine service and the administration of the sacraments". Canon B1 states the requirement of "conformity" and lists various authorised forms of service for use in the CoE. It also mentions, "Every minister shall use only the forms of service authorised by this Canon, except so far as he may exercise the discretion permitted by Canon

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[706] See List of Abbreviations and Glossary.
[707] The Church of England, *From Lament to Action*, p. 55.

B5".[708] General Synod's approvals are required for the forms of regular service to be authorised, and there are intricate and detailed rules about liturgy approvals.[709] The minister can "make and use variations" at their discretion when conducting the service. However, these variations are not of "substantial importance in any form of service authorised by Canon B1 according to particular circumstances". All variations and other forms of service used should be "reverent and seemly and shall be neither contrary to nor indicative of any departure from the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter". Bishops provide pastoral guidance, advice or directions about any question raised concerning these variations.[710] The Canons' Supplementary Material includes a list of approved and commended forms of service under Canons Section B.[711] Experimental use of other forms of service is allowed under Canon B5A for a period only, and formal approval by the General Synod under Canon B2 is required for long-term use.[712] Hence, although there is a provision in the Canons to allow some variations in the liturgy, the principle on liturgies as the forms of service is conformity, requiring General Synod authorisation.

Canon B42 can cause further difficulties. It states that the authorised forms of service should be said or sung in English, and "vernacular" should be used in the provinces of Canterbury and York outside England. The House of Bishops can approve translations of authorised forms of service, as listed in Canon B1, for use when permitted by the Diocesan Bishop after a joint written application from the minister and the parish parochial church council in the diocese. That bishop can also specify any conditions for such permission.[713] Therefore, translation of the existing authorised liturgies is allowed if the diocesan bishops approve and permit it.

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[708] The Church of England, 'The Canons of the Church of England, Section B' (Church House Publishing, 2016), sec. B1 <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-resources/canons-church-england/section-b> [accessed 17 May 2024].
[709] Ibid., sec. B2.
[710] Ibid., sec. B5.
[711] The Church of England, 'The Canons of the Church of England: Supplementary Material' (Church House Publishing, 2016) <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-services/canons-church-england/supplementary-material> [accessed 20 May 2024].
[712] The Church of England, 'The Canons of the Church of England, Section B', sec. 5A.
[713] Ibid., sec. B42.

Thus, although developing new or alternative liturgies relevant to Iranian converts' context is possible according to the current Canons, it is not straightforward. The current CoE Canons do not provide much space to facilitate co-production in partnership with Iranian converts, even though they have joined the CoE.   The present situation demonstrates a lack of mutuality, which does not help Iranian converts belong to the CoE. It can be argued that the CoE is a broad church with various expressions of traditions, and it is questionable whether the CoE strictly follows these rules in the Canons. However, the Canons are the ecclesiastical laws that govern the CoE. I propose amending the Canons to allow more flexibility in developing new liturgies of languages besides English, even though the amendment process is likely complex and protracted. Otherwise, liturgical co-production between the CoE and Iranian converts will remain challenging, especially considering all the additional barriers these converts must overcome. These barriers include not exhaustively language difficulty, the changeable social circumstances among many converts, and the lack of representation and opportunities for Iranian converts within the CoE hierarchy. It is commendable that one of the diocesan bishops, the Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, is Iranian herself. More Iranian converts have been in ordained ministries within the CoE in the past few years. Among the members of the Liturgical Commission, which oversees the liturgy within the CoE, some are minority ethnics, including the vice-chair, the Rt Revd Smitha Prasadam, the Bishop of Huddersfield.[714] However, the number of Iranian converts in influential positions within the CoE is still insignificant. Also, the lack of culturally relevant and sensitive theological education opportunities for Iranian converts adds extra challenges to their involvement in developing culturally appropriate Farsi liturgical material for the CoE. Therefore, to build a sense of belonging and help Iranian converts "re-member" as part of the CoE, the Church must humbly examine its standing, admit the shortcomings honestly, and take necessary

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[714] The Church of England, 'Liturgical Commission', *The Church of England* <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod/committees-and-commissions/liturgical-commission> [accessed 20 May 2024].

actions to ensure mutuality. It is worth noting that these issues affect not only Iranian converts in the CoE but also other minority ethnics.

Finally, as Christ set an example on the road to Emmaus by walking with his two followers who experienced ruptures, the CoE should follow Christ's example by journeying with Iranian converts who had similar experiences. One possibility is to advocate for them, especially in the recent hostile environment for asylum seekers and refugees in Britain. Advocacy is beneficial as many converts struggle to speak for themselves. It is the Church's response to injustice and an expression of God's Kingdom, a crucial element of Schreiter's cosmic level of social reconciliation. Journeying with Iranian converts should be done both within and outside the Church. It is encouraging that the two Archbishops and the Bishop of Southwark joined other church leaders in England to sign the statement voicing concerns about the recent controversial British government policy of sending asylum seekers and refugees to a third country. They spoke about the need for kindness and renewed the Church's commitment to caring for the vulnerable.[715] Advocacy should also be encouraged at the local parish or diocesan level to show solidarity with Iranian converts affected by these hostile policies. The Scriptures remind the Church, "Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy."[716] One of the five marks of mission the CoE adopted in 1996 is to transform society's unjust structures, challenge violence of every kind, and pursue peace and reconciliation.[717] Hence, speaking out for and with Iranian converts about their injustice as asylum seekers and refugees in Britain, contributing to their discordance, is not just to journey with these converts but to accomplish the CoE's essential mission.

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[715] The Church of England, 'After Rwanda: Church Leaders Speak Out Over Hostility to Refugees', *The Church of England*, 2024 <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/after-rwanda-church-leaders-speak-out-over-hostility-refugees> [accessed 20 May 2024].

[716] Proverbs 31:8-9, NRSV.

[717] Anne Richards and The Mission Theology Advisory Group, *The Five Marks of Mission* (London: The Chruch of England, 29 November 2017) <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/mtag-the-5-marks-of-mission.pdf> [accessed 20 May 2024].

6.4   Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have further explored Iranian converts' discordance in the CoE to address RQ3 on providing a contextualised and faithful theology and practices related to the Eucharist. I suggested reading the Lukan Resurrection narratives through the lens of Iranian converts' discordance and considered the narratives as "narratives of discordance" that echo these converts' experiences and how Christ responded to them. I also proposed a re-examination of the understanding of the Eucharist. I advocated it not only as a sacrament for remembrance but also as a "sacrament for discordance" and a "sacrament of '*Rastakhiz*'". The Eucharist signifies resurrection, reconciliation, and new life for Iranian converts.   I suggested several practices, including the potential of incorporating the *Nowruz Haft-sin* table with the Eucharistic Holy Table as a contextualised and balanced combination of remembrance and the sense of new life and reconciliation symbolised by the *Haft-sin* table. I also highlighted the need for the CoE to pursue trauma-informed ministries and to provide trauma-safe churches for Iranian converts who experienced ruptures. Finally, I urged the relationship between the CoE and Iranian converts to stem from mutuality and humility. I underscored the challenge for Iranian converts to co-produce liturgies appropriate for their context within the CoE and the need for the Church to speak out and advocate for the injustice these converts face. Together with the previous chapter, this chapter supports the second part of the overall thesis: discordance underpins the contextualised understanding and practices related to the Eucharist for Iranian converts in the CoE and the Church, potentially making the Eucharist a source of reconciliation and new life for Iranian converts and offering hope and inspiration in their journey. In the final chapter, I will evaluate this research and provide further reflexivity on my own "re-making" through this research process.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion – Christ amidst discordance

This study set out to explore the understandings and experiences of the Eucharist among Iranian converts in the CoE (RQ1) and examine how their cultural heritage, religious conversion, and encounters with suffering and trauma influence their experiences and understandings (RQ2). It also sought to develop theology and practice related to the Eucharist relevant to Iranian converts' context (RQ3). Employing lived theology and contextual theology within the practical theology framework, I used qualitative research methods to understand the contexts and lived experiences related to the Eucharist of 13 Iranian converts from three distinct CoE congregations. Three key themes were identified, encompassing various tensions contributing to the central premise of "discordance". These tensions were noticed in converts' identity ("cultural self"), belonging ("social self"), and being ("inner self"). Drawing on the insights from other theological and non-theological disciplines, I proposed that Iranian converts were in an "in-between space" because of the ongoing and disorienting cultural and religious identity formation and their trauma's aftermath. They also faced tension from merely being "included" without genuine belonging to the Church because of their previous challenging experience with political Islam in Iran. The Eucharist, a tangible and tactile sacrament that embodies Christ's wounds, helped Iranian converts' post-traumatic "re-making" by reconnecting with their bodies and reconstructing their trauma narratives through the notion of God's faithful covenant, contrasting with their experience of betrayal and trauma. These findings and analyses addressed RQ1 and RQ2 and provided the foundation for theological reflection and construction using the pastoral cycle.

Considering the Iranian convert's discordance in the CoE context, I addressed RQ3 by suggesting contextual interpretations of the Lukan Resurrection narratives as "narratives of discordance". The resurrected Jesus walked with those in the "in-between space", like Iranian converts, and helped them reconstruct and reinterpret their trauma narratives. The encounter between the resurrected Jesus and those in discordance was mutual, and this encounter

compelled them to be part of the "gathered": the Church. Moreover, I suggested the Eucharist can be understood as a "sacrament for discordance" and a "sacrament of '*Rastakhiz*'", which signifies resurrection, reconciliation, and new life for Iranian converts, echoing their *Nowruz* celebration. From the contextual reading and theological construction, I offered several practical suggestions. Hence, although Iranian converts' experience and understanding of the Eucharist comprised discordance, it became the source of contextual development of theology and practices related to the Eucharist for Iranian converts in the CoE. As a sacrament, the Eucharist provides Iranian converts with new life, facilitates reconciliation with themselves and others, and offers hope for their ongoing faith journey. Essentially, Christ is amid discordance with Iranian converts.

7.1   The research outcomes' implications and contributions

This study's qualitative findings, theological reflection and construction are significant for several reasons. First, despite their considerable numerical growth within the CoE and beyond, knowledge gaps exist due to little research about Iranian converts' faith experiences in Britain. This study's qualitative research findings have revealed their Christian faith lived experiences. These insights help the Church nurture Iranian converts' faith. It also provides valuable information for British society on Iranian converts' experiences as asylum seekers and refugees. Second, Iranian converts come from a unique situation with the combined influences from their Iranian cultural heritage, their traumatic experiences and their religious conversion from Islam. This study's findings and analyses explain how these factors impact their faith. Third, as this study is framed in practical theology rather than the sociology of religion, it attempts creatively to construct a contextual understanding of the Eucharist. Although I proposed this understanding as a non-Iranian, it is based on Iranian converts' lived experiences from the qualitative data. I have also performed "member-checking" with the key Iranian research participants. Therefore, the theological construction faithfully considered the Iranian convert's

context. This contextual understanding is crucial for Iranian converts as it reduces the "foreignness" of the Christian faith. It also empowers them to be simultaneously Christians and Iranians and encourages them to work out their unique identities rather than passively inheriting the Western form of Christianity. Finally, missiologist Duane Miller reported that Christians from Muslim backgrounds, including Iranian converts, engaged in "theology-making" in their context. Particularly, Iranian converts established the unique Iranian Christian identity by distancing themselves from Islam.[718] The current study's findings concurred with Miller's argument and expanded it to these converts' experiences of trauma and suffering. This study also explored what "theology-making" means to Iranian converts by combining various factors.

This research's beneficiaries are at various levels: Iranian converts, the CoE, academia, and I, as the researcher. For Iranian converts, besides developing contextual "theology-making", as stated above, this study also allows their voices as minorities to be heard publicly and their lived experiences to be revealed more widely. Multiple obstacles exist for Iranian converts' situations to be more broadly known, including language and cultural barriers, lack of platforms and opportunities for their voices and others to learn about their circumstances, and insufficient culturally appropriate theological education for them. This study provides a gateway for others to understand Iranian converts' context. For the CoE, this study's findings and theological reflections highlight a need to review its relationship with Iranian converts, particularly regarding mutuality and co-production of culturally relevant liturgy. Iranian converts' challenges, including their trauma and experiences of racism, also demand the Church's actions as the "gathered", the Body of Christ. This research provides insights and input into the racial justice work the CoE has committed to do. Although Iranian converts' situations are unique, other CoE minority ethnics share similar challenges, particularly regarding cultural identities and belonging. This study's outcomes help the Church gain perspectives on their experiences within the CoE.

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[718] Duane Alexander Miller, *Living Among the Breakage*.

Regarding academia, besides contributing to the knowledge of Iranian converts' experiences and understandings of the Eucharist and the related contextualised theology, this research also contributes to the growing field of World Christianity. It explores World Christianity's relationship with qualitative research and practical theology. Chinese-American theologian in World Christianity Easten Law argued that World Christianity theologians should adopt practical theology methods, particularly on lived theology, to "deepen the grounding of their theological construction in the experiences of the faithful".[719] Law believed that lived theology and qualitative research could "world" (as a verb) theology in both World Christianity and practical theology[720], and "worlding theology requires listening to sacred lives of the world in all of its forms".[721] This study exemplifies Law's proposal on World Christianity and practical theology. I have utilised qualitative research methods to understand Iranian converts' context and experiences and integrate these observations into relevant theological reflection and construction. Law considered there is a quest for both World Christianity scholars to engage in qualitative methods and practical theology and Global North practical theologians to deploy their methodological insights to other parts of the global Church. This study attempts to bridge this gap for a crucial theological task as Law suggested: "to forge a mosaic out of this colourful array of lived expressions reflects God's intent for the Church".[722] This research has also entered the realm of diasporas' lived faith experiences and brought migration and globalisation perspectives to broaden World Christianity.

Finally, this research has contributed to my formation as an academic researcher and a priest-theologian. Practical theologian Joyce Mercer advocated practical theology researchers' formation during the interdisciplinary research process, especially on discipline identity and the

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[719] Easten Law, 'Theology, Qualitative Research, and World Christianity', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. by Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), pp. 273–83 (p. 274).
[720] Ibid., p. 274.
[721] Ibid., p. 279.
[722] Ibid., p. 281.

need for humility and graciousness to learn from others.[723] Another practical and contextual theologian, Yara González-Justiniano, raised an essential question: "Who gets to say what matters?"[724] Throughout this study, I asked the same question. This research formed a significant part of my ordination training within the CoE, and the need to humbly listen to and consider others' experiences has shaped my future priestly ministry. This quality can be demanding and involves vulnerability. As an academic researcher, I must maintain objectivity as much as possible. Nevertheless, some Iranian converts' experiences, such as racism and the unexpected loss of *St Matthew's Ebrahim*, reminded me of my personal experience and generated some emotions within me. My experience mirrored what anthropologist Ruth Behar shared candidly.[725] Behar reflected on how her anthropology fieldwork as an ethnographer and her personal experiences and feelings were intricately linked. She challenged the conventional notion that distancing and detachment are essential for researchers and that vulnerability has no place in academia. Behar argued that the researcher's vulnerability could be beneficial through knowing others by knowing oneself and vice versa.[726] I experienced a similar dilemma in this research, and my previous experience in psychiatry has helped me deal with this predicament to an extent. Nevertheless, this research has made me consider where humility and vulnerability should sit as a priest-theologian in academic and ecclesial settings.

7.2   Strengths and Limitations

Using qualitative research methods is this study's vital strength, as it captures Iranian converts' unique context and illuminates their experiences and understandings. Through multiple rigorous data collection methods, I also discovered Iranian converts' situations to

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[723] Joyce Ann Mercer, 'Interdisciplinarity as a Practical Theological Conundrum', in *Conundrums in Practical Theology* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 162–89.

[724] Yara González-Justiniano, 'Contextual Theology', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Theology and Qualitative Research*, ed. by Pete Ward and Knut Tveitereid, Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), pp. 185–94 (p. 188).

[725] Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

[726] Ibid., p. 33.

understand their complex perspectives deeply. The qualitative data also provided the foundation for the thematic analysis, which learned their discordance. Another strength of this study is that it goes beyond the social scientific level and steps into developing imaginatively a contextualised and faithful theology related to the Eucharist for Iranian converts in the CoE, including suggestions of faith practices. My credentials in psychiatry give me some expertise in social sciences. Hence, in this research, I combined that with my theology knowledge, particularly in contextual theology. My distinctive background combination makes this research unique and holistic. Moreover, this study's sample included three CoE congregations with distinct characteristics and church traditions to mirror the CoE's "broad Church" nature. Furthermore, I have highlighted in Chapter Three (Section 3.2.4) the quality and credibility indicators, including "member-checking" the qualitative analyses and theological reflection with key Iranian convert leaders from the research congregations to ensure accuracy. I have also built trust among Iranian converts in these congregations to safeguard the collected data's trustworthiness. These indicators demonstrate this research's rigour and strengths.

There are several limitations to this research. First, although I have included CoE congregations with different characteristics, I did not manage to research a congregation from a "charismatic" background with a significant number of Iranian converts. Although Iranian converts in a CoE charismatic church may understand and experience the Eucharist differently, the qualitative data so far did not support any considerable difference in converts' understandings of the Eucharist because of church traditions. Second, this research is restricted to Iranian converts within the CoE. The research findings may not be generalised to those outside the CoE. Nevertheless, I consider Iranian converts outside the CoE are likely to share similar experiences and challenges of trauma, cultural identities and religious conversion from Islam. Hence, some findings and reflections may apply to those converts' contexts. Third, I am not Iranian, and I only understand and read some basic Farsi. Being a non-Iranian with limited competency in Farsi, I know I depended on interpreters in data collection. I may have missed some Farsi literature as archival data. I could also misinterpret some Iranian converts' behaviours

and communication, both verbal and non-verbal. In Chapter Three, I highlighted the safeguards to minimise misunderstandings. These measures include interpreters' standardisation and training and "member-checking". My previous experience ministering to Iranian converts has helped me understand their culture and communication styles. Besides, it could be beneficial for me as a non-Iranian "outsider" to collect, analyse and interpret the qualitative data, as I can provide the objectivity that only the "outsiders" can do. My experience as a migrant in Britain and my encounters with suffering could also offer additional perspectives to the analyses and theological construction. Finally, the interviews were conducted between January and April 2022, which coincided with the *Nowruz* season. As a result, the participants might have emphasised more about *Nowruz*. However, this study employed a mixed data collection strategy, and the participant observations were conducted over a much extended period between October 2021 and September 2022. This extended observation period should allow me to pick up other observations besides *Nowruz*.

7.3   Further recommendations

For future research, another qualitative research design involving Iranian converts can be the next step to encourage their contribution. Participatory research design, such as action research, is an option as it involves individuals' active participation as co-researchers. These designs differ as individuals are no longer considered passive research objects but have an active role in designing and conducting the research. Despite requiring more resources, participatory research can liberate and empower those marginalised.[727] Alternatively, as Duane Miller has pointed out, baptism is another important boundary marker for Iranian converts. A study examining Iranian converts' understandings and experiences of baptism and reflecting theologically on this sacrament of initiation in their context will enlighten the Church on these converts' faith journey. Also, future research can explore the potential initiatives and actions

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[727] Swinton and Mowat, pp. 211–34, 235–59.

these Iranian converts may take to navigate and engage with their theological understandings and practices of the Eucharist. In particular, exploring how those initiatives and actions can be associated with and contribute to their self-agency and personal growth will be valuable. Furthermore, other minority ethnic groups are growing numerically within the CoE, like the Spanish-speaking Latin American congregations established in the CoE parishes in South London and other major British cities.[728] Although they have different cultural and religious backgrounds, they share with Iranian converts similar experiences as migrants, particularly as asylum seekers and refugees. Investigating this growing group's faith experiences will allow comparisons between the CoE's ethnic groups.

For the Church and its members, including Iranian converts, I have recommended in Chapter Six (Section 6.3) incorporating the Iranian cultural iconic symbol *Nowruz Haft-sin* table with the Eucharistic Holy Table, pursuing trauma-informed ministries within the CoE and the need to co-produce liturgies with Iranian converts for mutuality and humility. The first recommendation highlights the necessity for the CoE to be more intercultural, which prioritises cultural integration for a unified and inclusive community where individuals from diverse backgrounds actively engage with one another culturally rather than coexist in parallel despite embracing diversity.[729] CoE Bishop Martyn Snow advocated for "intercultural gift exchange" as the Church's response to cultural diversity. He proposed that the Western church, including the CoE, counter "white normativity" and approach theology interculturally and contextually. Snow suggested establishing a framework for growing intercultural friendships and cultural competency.[730] Bishop Snow's vision of the intercultural church model is much needed within the CoE so its minority ethnic members, like Iranian converts, can genuinely belong to the Church. The Anglican Network for Intercultural Churches (ANIC) was recently established as a "grassroots"

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[728] Hugo Adán Fernández, 'A Lifeline for the Spanish-Speaking Community in London — and Beyond', *Church Times* (London, 4 August 2020) <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/7-august/comment/opinion/comment-a-lifeline-for-the-spanish-speaking-community-in-london-and-beyond> [accessed 13 July 2024].

[729] Martyn Snow, *An Intercultural Church for a Multicultural World: Reflections on Gift Exchange* (London: Church House Publishing, 2024), pp. 37–42.

[730] Snow.

network outside the CoE establishment to promote the intercultural church model.[731] This development is commendable, especially without the CoE central support, but its impact on the CoE is worth further investigation. I recommend that the CoE seriously consider its strategies for cultural diversity and establish concrete plans to incorporate intercultural ecclesiology.

My other recommendation, related to the intercultural church model, is the co-production of culturally sensitive liturgies in the CoE, which demands mutuality and humility. I have highlighted the issues of current Canons that require conformity in the form of service and pose legal challenges for liturgical co-production with Iranian converts and other minority ethnics. There are also issues of representation for Iranian converts and other minority ethnic groups within the CoE structure and leadership. Various obstacles exist, including language barriers, lack of culturally relevant and sensitive theological education opportunities, and the issues of mistrust and social instability among Iranian converts. Again, this question, "Who gets to say what matters?" continues demanding the Church respond swiftly. The CoE Racial Justice Unit's work has started tackling this essential question. I recommend that the CoE General Synod discuss amending the current Canons to allow more flexibility in developing new liturgies for other cultural groups. The CoE Bishops should continue to explore how representation and advocacy for Iranian converts and other minority ethnics can improve within the CoE structure.

Finally, I highlighted the need for trauma-informed ministries for Iranian converts, which will also benefit other individuals who have experienced trauma. Trauma-informed ministries start with recognising trauma's broad-ranging impact on individuals and trauma features. These recognitions require education, and various organisations, like the Clergy Support Trust, provide training on this aspect.[732] The Church also needs to respond by integrating knowledge about trauma into its policies and practices to minimise the risk of "re-traumatisation" that can occur when individuals like Iranian converts are exposed to situations that remind them of their

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[731] www.anic.org.uk
[732] https://www.clergysupport.org.uk/wellbeing-workshop-trauma-informed-ministry

traumatic experiences. One example is using Iranian converts' images on Church websites and social media without checking, as it can pose a risk to these converts and their families in Iran, reinforcing the sense of betrayal and mistrust. Hence, trauma-informed ministries will ensure appropriate policies are in place to provide a safe and trustworthy Church environment, facilitating various levels of reconciliation, including Iranian converts' self-reconciliation, as I highlighted in Chapter Six. Like safeguarding, the CoE should consider a national policy on how trauma-informed ministries can be implemented in a culturally appropriate and relevant manner.

7.4   Final remarks

Recently, I saw *Fatemeh* again when we both attended the parish Eucharist service. She showed the same excitement and delight in partaking in the Eucharist. After I have conducted this research on the Eucharist and Iranian converts, the CW Eucharistic rite Greeting, "*The Lord is here*", has become particularly meaningful when receiving the Eucharist with fellow Iranian convert brothers and sisters, as Christ is here amidst Iranian converts and others with discordance. This assurance is a prime reason for thanksgiving, the meaning of the Greek word εὐχαριστία, from which the word Eucharist originated. There are challenges for the Church and Iranian converts to overcome, particularly how both can journey in unity for the vision of the heavenly worship together before the throne and the Lamb with a great multitude from every nation, from all tribes and languages (Rev 7:9-10). My ongoing prayer echoes the CoE Post-communion prayer on the Corpus Christi[733] :

> All praise to you, our God and Father,
> for you have fed us with the bread of heaven
> and quenched our thirst from the true vine:
> hear our prayer that, being grafted into Christ,

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[733] Also known as "The Day of Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion" in the CoE.

we may grow together in unity

and feast with him in his kingdom;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*[734]*

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[734] Archbishops' Council, the Church of England, *Common Worship*, p. 407.

Introduction

مقدمه

Thank you for participating in this research. I want to make sure that you understand everything you told me will be kept confidential and only be used for this research purpose.

با تشکر از شما برای شرکت در این تحقیق. می‌خواهم مطمئن شوید که همه چیزهایی را که به من گفتید ، محرمانه خواهد ماند و فقط برای این هدف تحقیقاتی مورد استفاده قرار می‌گیرد.

I would also appreciate your honest answer, rather than the answer you think I want to hear. It is very important I know what you think. There is no right or wrong answer for these questions, and it is not a test of how much you know

همچنین از پاسخ صادقانه شما، به جای پاسخی که فکر می‌کنید می‌خواهم بشنوم، قدردانی می‌کنم. خیلی مهم است که بدانم شما چه فکر می کنید. هیچ پاسخ درست یا غلطی برای این سوالات وجود ندارد و این آزمونی نیست که شما چقدر می دانید

We may discuss something difficult about the past, and if you need a break, please let me know, and we can stop at any moment.

ما ممکن است در مورد موضوع دشوار گذشته صحبت کنیم، و اگر نیاز به استراحت دارید، لطفاً به من اطلاع دهید و ما می توانیم هر لحظه متوقف شویم.

Do you have any questions before we start?

آیا قبل از شروع ، سؤالی دارید از ما؟

Part A – Basic information

<div dir="rtl">

بخش – **A** اطلاعات اولیه

</div>

1. What is your age?

<div dir="rtl">

سن شما لطفا ؟

</div>

2. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

<div dir="rtl">

سطح تحصیلات شما چیست؟

</div>

3. What did you do in Iran before you came to the UK?

<div dir="rtl">

قبل از اینکه به انگلیس بیایید در ایران چه می کردید؟

</div>

4. Which branch of Islam did you belong to before becoming a Christian?

<div dir="rtl">

قبل از اینکه مسیحی شوید به کدام شاخه از اسلام تعلق داشتید؟

</div>

5. Do you consider yourself religious when you were a Muslim?

<div dir="rtl">

آیا زمانی که مسلمان بودید خود را مذهبی می دانستید؟

</div>

6. When you were a Muslim, did you practise your religion?

<div dir="rtl">

زمانی که مسلمان بودید به دین خود عمل می کردید؟

</div>

- Did you do prayer (Salat)? How often?

<div dir="rtl">

- آیا نماز (صلوات) را انجام می دادید ؟ هر چند وقت؟

</div>

- (For men) Did you go to the mosque? How often?

<div dir="rtl">

- برای مردان - یا به مسجد رفتید؟ هر چند وقت؟

</div>

- Did you read the Qur'an? How often?

<div dir="rtl">

- قرآن خواندی؟ هر چند وقت؟

</div>

- Did you fast during the month of Ramadan?

<div dir="rtl">

- آیا در ماه رمضان روزه گرفتید؟

</div>

7. When did you become a Christian?

چه زمانی مسیحی شدید؟

- o Did you become a Christian in Iran or outside Iran? If outside Iran, did you become a Christian in the UK?

- در ایران مسیحی شدید یا خارج از ایران؟ اگر خارج از ایران بودید در انگلستان مسیحی شدید؟

8. What led you to become a Christian?

چه چیزی باعث شد که مسیحی شوید؟

9. Are you baptised?

آیا شما غسل تعمید شده اید ؟

10. When did you arrive in the UK?

چه زمانی به انگلستان رسیدید؟

11. What is the reason you seek asylum in the UK? (if applicable)

دلیل درخواست پناهندگی شما در بریتانیا چیست؟ (در صورت وجود)

- o Is it because of religion or other reasons (race, nationality, political opinion, membership of a social group)?

- آیا دلیل آن مذهب است یا دلایل دیگر (نژاد، ملیت، عقاید سیاسی، عضویت در یک گروه اجتماعی)؟

12. Have you got your status to stay in England?

آیا برای ماندن در انگلیس جواب خود را گرفته اید؟

13. What challenges did you face after you changed your religion, inside and outside Iran?

بعد از تغییر مذهب در داخل و خارج از ایران با چه چالش هایی مواجه شدید؟

- Any racism in the UK?

   ○ آیا متوجه نژادپرستی در بریتانیا شده اید؟

14. What makes someone be a Christian?

چه چیزی باعث می شود کسی مسیحی باشد؟

Part B – the Eucharist (Holy Communion) and the Christian faith

بخش ب- عشای ربانی و ایمان مسیحی

1. Do you receive the Eucharist/Holy Communion regularly at church?

آیا به طور مرتب در کلیسا مراسم عشای ربانی را دریافت می کنید؟

   ○ How often?

   ● هر چند وقت؟

2. Do you know what the Eucharist/Holy Communion is before you became a Christian?

آیا می دانستید قبل از اینکه مسیحی شوید مراسم عشای ربانی چیست؟

3. Why do Christians have the Eucharist/Holy Communion?

چرا مسیحیان عشای ربانی دارند؟

4. Which Bible story does the Eucharist/Holy Communion relate to?

مراسم عشای ربانی به کدام داستان کتاب مقدس مربوط می شود؟

   ○ How does the Eucharist/Holy Communion relate to Jesus's life?

   ● چگونه عشای ربانی با زندگی عیسی ارتباط دارد؟

5. What do you understand about the Eucharist/Holy Communion?

در مورد عشای ربانی چه می دانید؟

o What do the bread and wine represent?

● نان و شراب چه چیزی را نشان می دهند؟

o What do you think about the table for the Eucharist/Holy Communion?

● در مورد سفره عشای ربانی چه می دانید

6. What are you usually thinking when taking the bread and the wine during the Eucharist/Holy Communion?

هنگام خوردن نان و شراب در هنگام عشای ربانی معمولاً به چه فکر می کنید؟

o What does the Eucharist/Holy Communion mean to you?

● عشای ربانی برای شما چه معنایی دارد؟

7. Is there anything special about the Eucharist/Holy Communion?

آیا برای شما چیز خاصی در مورد عشای ربانی وجود دارد؟

o To you personally?

● مخصوصا برای شما ؟

o Generally, to Christians and the Church?

● به طور کلی، به مسیحیان و کلیسا؟

8. Do you have any story or memory of a particular time or event special to you during or related to the Eucharist/Holy Communion?

آیا داستان یا خاطره ای از زمان یا رویداد خاصی در طول مراسم عشای ربانی یا مربوط به آن دارید؟

9. Do you see the Eucharist/Holy Communion as a shared meal?

آیا عشای ربانی را به عنوان اشتراک یک چیز خوردنی با هم می بینید؟

- If it is a meal, what is this meal about?

<div dir="rtl">

اگر یک وعده غذایی است، این غذا درباره چیست؟

</div>

10. An important part of the Eucharist/Holy Communion is the liturgy (i.e. what is said or done during the service). What can you remember about the liturgy during the Eucharist/Holy Communion? What different parts are included in the Eucharist/Holy Communion service?

<div dir="rtl">

بخش مهمی از عشای ربانی ، اداب عبادت است (یعنی آنچه در طول مراسم گفته یا انجام می شود). در زمان برگزاری عشای ربانی چه قسمتی از اداب عبادت را می توانید به یاد آورید؟ چه بخش های مختلفی در مراسم عشای ربانی گنجانده شده است؟

</div>

- Do you generally understand what is said or done during the service? Why or why not?

<div dir="rtl">

- آیا به طور کلی متوجه می شوید که در حین سرویس چه گفته یا انجام می شود؟ چرا و چرا نمی شوید؟

</div>

- Does Farsi translation in the service help? Why or why not? I notice that many Persians do not use the Farsi translation even it is available. Why?

<div dir="rtl">

- آیا ترجمه فارسی در سرویس کمکی می کند؟ چرا و چرا نمی شوید؟ من متوجه شدم که بسیاری از فارسی زبانها از ترجمه فارسی حتی وقتی هم که در دسترس هست ، استفاده نمی‌کنند. چرا؟

</div>

Part C – the Persian culture

<div dir="rtl">

بخش ج – فرهنگ ایرانی

</div>

1. Tell me something you have noticed that the Persian culture is different from the Western culture.

<div dir="rtl">

نکته ای را به من بگویید که متوجه شده اید فرهنگ ایرانی با فرهنگ غربی متفاوت است.

</div>

2. We talk about the Eucharist/Holy Communion as a meal. Tell me something about how the Persian culture thinks about a meal or a feast/banquet.

ما در مورد عشای ربانی به عنوان یک ضیافت غذایی صحبت می کنیم. در مورد نحوه تفکر فرهنگ ایرانی در مورد یک غذا یا یک مهمانی/ضیافت چیزی به من بگویید.

3. I heard many Iranians celebrate Nouwuz as an important festival of the year. Tell me more about Nouwuz.

شنیده ام بسیاری از ایرانیان عید نوروز را به عنوان جشن مهم سال جشن می گیرند. از عید نوروز بیشتر بگویید.

o Why do Persians celebrate Nouwuz?

● چرا ایرانی ها نوروز را جشن می گیرند؟

o What do you do?

● چه کار میکنید؟

o I heard there is a Nouwuz table. Can you tell me more about this? What do the objects on the table represent?

● شنیدم سفره نوروزی هست. می توانید در این مورد بیشتر به من بگویید؟ اشیاء روی سفره هر کدام چه معنایی دارند؟

o Is there any special story about Nouwuz you know of?

● آیا داستان خاصی در مورد نوروز را می دانی؟

o Any other customs?

● آداب و رسوم دیگه ای هست؟

4. Do you know anything about the Christian faith in Iran before Islam came to Persia? What do you know?

آیا از دین مسیحیت در ایران قبل از اسلام چیزی می دانید؟ چی میدونی؟

Part D – Conclusions

<div dir="rtl">

بخش د ــ نتیجه گیری

</div>

1. Anything else about how you understand the Eucharist and the Christian faith you want to tell me?

<div dir="rtl">

چیز دیگری در مورد چگونگی درک عشای ربانی و ایمان مسیحی هست که بخواهید به من بگویید؟

</div>

2. Anything else about the Iranian culture you think I should be aware of?

<div dir="rtl">

چیز دیگری در مورد فرهنگ ایرانی هست که فکر می کنید باید از آن آگاه باشم؟

</div>

3. Do you think Christianity is a western religion?

<div dir="rtl">

به نظر شما مسیحیت یک دین غربی است؟

</div>

English Information Sheet for Individual interviews and digital written surveys

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Project Title:

"*Draw near with faith*": a multiple case study on the experience and meaning of the Eucharist to the diaspora Christians of Persian heritage and Muslim background in the Church of England

Investigator: Dr Daniel Tai-yin Tsoi (under supervision of Prof Pete Ward and Revd Dr Paul Regan)

Programme: Doctor of Theology and Ministry, Durham University

You are being invited to take part in a research study. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. You may wish to discuss it with others.

The purpose of the research:

This research is being carried out by Dr Daniel Tsoi as part of the requirement of the doctorate of Theology and Ministry at Durham University. It is also part of Dr Tsoi's training as a priest within the Church of England.

This research aims to investigate the experience and understandings of the Eucharist (Holy Communion) among the Christians of Persian heritage and Muslim background within the Church of England. The research will examine how these Persians' cultural background, experiences, and previous religious background may influence their understanding and experience of the Eucharist (Holy Communion). This research also aims to develop a more personal and culturally sensitive understanding of the Eucharist (Holy Communion) and hopefully help the Persians to grow their Christian faith.

Why am I chosen to participate?

This research will be conducted in several Church of England congregations/churches with a reasonable number of Persians. You are chosen because you are of a Christian of Persian heritage and Muslim background, and you attend one of these congregations/churches.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to read this information sheet and have an opportunity to ask any questions about this study. A Farsi interpreter will be present to facilitate the communication. The interpreter receives some training from the investigator on the basics of translation and the importance of keeping information confidential.

If you are willing to take part, the investigator will ask you to contribute in the following ways (either one or both):

- Interview
    o The investigator will interview you with the Farsi interpreter. The interview can be in person or online at your convenience.
    o The interview will last for about two hours. It will be conducted privately to ensure the information you provide will be confidential.
    o The investigator will take some notes. The interview will also be recorded (only sound recording) so that the investigator can refer after the interview. The sound recording will be stored securely with encryption and will be destroyed after the research is completed.
    o The investigator will ask you questions about the following:
        - Some of your background information that may include some of the challenges in your faith journey inside and outside Iran
        - Your understanding and experience of the Eucharist (Holy Communion) and the Christian faith
        - Your understanding of the Persian culture

- The digital survey by messaging
    o Up to four separate occasions, soon after the Eucharist (Holy Communion), the investigator will send you the following two questions in Farsi through text messaging services such as Whatsapp.
        - What does the Eucharist (Holy Communion) mean to you today?
        - How does the Eucharist (Holy Communion) relate to your life and faith experience recently?
    o You will be asked to provide a free text response to these questions in Farsi to the investigator through text message. The answer should take no more than 10 minutes on each occasion.
    o The survey allows the investigator to understand your recent faith experience, including the Eucharist (Holy Communion).

Once I take part, can I change my mind?

After you have read this information and asked any questions, you will be asked to complete and sign an Informed Consent Form. You will be given a copy to keep.

If you wish to withdraw from the study for whatever reasons, before, during or after the research, you are free to do so at any time. You don't need to explain

your reasons for withdrawing.   However, it is usually not practical to withdraw after the research project has been completed, including writing up the results.

What personal information will be required from me?

You will be asked to provide information about your age and your current situation in the UK, such as your immigration status. If you participate in the digital survey by messaging, you will also be asked to provide a contact number for messaging.

Further details of how your personal data and information is processed in this research can be found in Durham University Data Privacy Notice either through this website: https://www.durham.ac.uk/about-us/governance/information-governance/data-protection/privacy-notices/researchers/ or through Dr Tsoi.

Are there any benefits in participating?

Your participation can help the church and others understand better the faith journeys of Christians with Persian heritage. Better insight allows a more culturally sensitive understanding of the Eucharist and hopefully help the Persian Christians to grow in their faith.

Are there any risks in participating?

There is no significant risk identified in participating in this study.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential, including the information you provide and your participation in this research. Your full name will not be included in any documentation apart from the consent form. All information you supply will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and will only be accessed by the investigator and his supervisors.

Some of the information you provide may be used in writing the research thesis, but this will be included in a way that you will not be identified. The information you provide during the interview will only be used for this research and not for other purposes.

All the data collected will be stored securely and anonymised. Digital data in storage will be encrypted. All data will be destroyed securely once the research is completed.

What will happen to the results of the study?

Information supplied during the research will be used by the investigator to complete his research thesis. The thesis will be submitted to Durham University, as per the requirements of the doctorate. The study results will also be discussed

and verified with selected Persian Christians in the UK to ensure culturally appropriate and correct interpretation and understanding. However, you will not be identified during the discussions. The results may also be disseminated to wider audiences through publications or conferences. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential, and you will not be identified in the results.

I have some more questions, who should I contact?

The first point of contact is Dr Daniel Tai-yin Tsoi (tai-yin.tsoi@durham.ac.uk or ██████████). You can also contact his supervisor Prof Pete Ward (peter.ward@durham.ac.uk).

Also, the rights and responsibilities of anyone taking part in Durham University research can be found in the University 'Participants Charter' through this weblink: https://www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/considerations/people/charter or through Dr Tsoi.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research.

This research project was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University.

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

(to be completed after Participant Information Sheet has been read)

Research Project Title:

"*Draw near with faith*": a multiple case study on the experience and meaning of the Eucharist to the diaspora Christians of Persian heritage and Muslim background in the Church of England

Investigator: Dr Daniel Tai-yin Tsoi (under supervision of Prof Pete Ward and Revd Dr Paul Regan)

Programme: Doctor of Theology and Ministry, Durham University

- The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Durham University

- I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study. I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage before the research is written up, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.

- I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers.

- I agree to the interview (if applicable) being audio recorded.

- I agree to participate in this study.

Your name (in print in English)   _____

Your signature   _____

Date   _____

Signature of investigator   _____

Participants will be given a copy of this signed, dated consent form. The investigator will keep the original signed consent form.

برگه اطلاعاتی شرکت کننده در تحقیق

عنوان پروژه:

"با ایمان نزدیک شوید": مطالعه ی چندگانه در مورد تجربه و معنای مراسم عشای ربانی مسیحیان ایرانی با پیشینه مسلمان در کلیساهای انگلستان

محقق: Daniel Tai-yin Tsoi (تحت تحت نظارت پروفسور پیت وارد و کشیش دکتر پل ریگان)

مترجم: AVG

برنامه: دکترای الهیات و وزارت، دانشگاه دورهام

از شما برای شرکت در یک مطالعه تحقیقاتی دعوت شده است. مهم است که بدانید چرا این تحقیق انجام می شود و شامل چه مواردی می شود. لطفاً برای مطالعه دقیق اطلاعات زیر وقت بگذارید. ممکن است بخواهید در مورد آن با دیگران بحث کنید.

هدف این تحقیق:

این تحقیق توسط Daniel Tsoi به عنوان بخشی از تحقیق در مقطع دکتری در الهیات در دانشگاه الهیات و وزارت دورهام وهمچنین بخشی از آموزش دکتر Tsoi به عنوان کشیش در کلیسای انگلستان است.

هدف این پژوهش بررسی تجربه و درک عشای ربانی در میان مسیحیان ایرانی با پیشینه مسلمان در کلیسای انگلستان است. این تحقیق بررسی خواهد کرد که چگونه پیشینه فرهنگی، تجربیات و پیشینه مذهبی قبلی این ایرانیان ممکن است بر درک و تجربه آنها از عشای ربانی تأثیر بگذارد. این تحقیق همچنین با هدف امیوار است که به ایرانیان کمک کند تا ایمان مسیحی خود را رشد دهند.

چرا من برای تحقیق انتخاب شده ام؟

این تحقیق در چندین جماعت/کلیسای انگلستان با تعداد معقولی از ایرانیان انجام خواهد شد. شما به این دلیل انتخاب شده‌اید که یک مسیحی با پیشینه ایرانی و پیشینه مسلمان هستید و در یکی از این جماعات/کلیساها شرکت می‌کنید.

از من چه کارهایی خواسته خواهد شد؟

از شما خواسته می شود این برگه اطلاعاتی را مطالعه کنید و هرگونه سؤالی که در مورد این مطالعه داشتید بپرسید. از آنجایی که محقق به زبان فارسی صحبت نمیکند، یک مترجم فارسی برای تسهیل درک حضور خواهد داشت. مترجم از شرایط خوبی از مبانی ترجمه و اهمیت حفظ اطلاعات محرمانه برخوردار است.

<u>مصاحبه</u>

اگر شما علاقه مند به شرکت در مصاحبه هستید، محقق به همراه مترجم با شما مصاحبه خواهد کرد. مصاحبه می تواند به صورت حضوری یا آنلاین در صورت تمایل شما باشد. مصاحبه حدود دو ساعت طول خواهد کشید. برای اطمینان از محرمانه بودن اطلاعاتی که ارائه می کنید، به صورت خصوصی انجام می شود. محقق یادداشت هایی را بر می دارد. مصاحبه نیز ضبط خواهد شد (فقط ضبط صدا) تا بازپرس پس از مصاحبه به آن مراجعه کند. صدای ضبط شده به صورت ایمن و با رمزگذاری ذخیره می شود و پس از تکمیل تحقیق از بین می رود.

محقق از شما سوالاتی در مورد موارد زیر خواهد پرسید :

- برخی از اطلاعات در مورد گذشته ی شما
- تجربه ی شخصی شما از عشای ربانی (عشای ربانی) و ایمان مسیحی
- درک شما از فرهنگ ایرانی

<u>نظرسنجی دیجیتالی از طریق پیام رسانی</u>

در چهار نوبت جداگانه، بلافاصله پس از عشای ربانی، محقق دو سوال زیر را به زبان فارسی از طریق سرویس های پیامکی مانند واتساپ برای شما ارسال می کند

- عشای ربانی امروز برای شما چه معنایی داشت؟
- عشای ربانی با زندگی و تجربه ایمانی اخیرشما چه ارتباطی دارد؟

از شما خواسته می شود که پاسخ متنی رایگان به این سوالات را به زبان فارسی از طریق پیامک در اختیار محقق قرار دهید. پاسخ در هر موقعیت نباید بیش از 10 دقیقه طول بکشد.

این نظرسنجی به محقق اجازه می دهد تا تجربه اخیر ایمانی شما، از جمله مراسم عشای ربانی را درک کند.

بعد از اینکه در مصاحبه شرکت کردم آیا میتوانم از آن انصراف دهم؟

پس از خواندن این اطلاعات و پرسیدن هرگونه سوال، از شما خواسته می شود یک فرم رضایتنامه را تکمیل و امضا کنید. یک نسخه به شما داده می شود تا نگه دارید

اگر بخواهید به هر دلیلی، قبل، در حین یا بعد از تحقیق، از مطالعه انصراف دهید، می توانید در هر زمانی این کار را انجام دهید. نیازی نیست دلایل خود را برای انصراف توضیح دهید. با این حال، معمولاً پس از اتمام پروژه تحقیقاتی، از جمله نوشتن نتایج، کنار کشیدن عملی نیست.

چه اطلاعات شخصی از من می خواهید؟

از شما خواسته می شود اطلاعاتی در مورد سن و وضعیت فعلی خود در بریتانیا، مانند وضعیت مهاجرت خود ارائه دهید. در صورت شرکت در نظرسنجی دیجیتال از طریق پیام رسانی، از شما خواسته می شود شماره تماس برای پیام رسانی را ارائه دهید.

جزئیات بیشتر در مورد نحوه پردازش داده ها و اطلاعات شخصی شما در این تحقیق را می توان در اطلاعیه حفظ حریم خصوصی داده دانشگاه دورهام یا از طریق این وب سایت یافت:

https://www.durham.ac.uk/about-us/governance/information-governance/data-protection/privacy-notices/researchers/

یا از طریق دکتر Tsoi.

آیا مشارکت مزایایی دارد؟

مشارکت شما می تواند به کلیسا و دیگران کمک کند تا تغییر ایمان مسیحیان با پیشینه ایرانی را بهتر درک کنند. بینش بهتر به درک فرهنگ حساس از مراسم عشای ربانی کمک می کند و امیدواریم به مسیحیان پارسی کمک کند تا در ایمان خود رشد کنند.

آیا خطری در مشارکت وجود دارد؟

هیچ خطر قابل توجهی در شرکت در این مطالعه شناسایی نشده است.

آیا شرکت من در این مطالعه محرمانه خواهد ماند؟

هویت شما از جمله اطلاعاتی که ارائه می دهید و مشارکت شما در این تحقیق کاملاً محرمانه خواهد بود. نام کامل شما به جز فرم رضایت در هیچ سندی گنجانده نخواهد شد. تمام اطلاعاتی که شما ارائه می کنید با نهایت محرمانه بودن رفتار می شود و فقط بازپرس و سرپرستان او به آنها دسترسی خواهند داشت.

ممکن است برخی از اطلاعاتی که ارائه می‌دهید در نگارش پایان‌نامه مورد استفاده قرار گیرد، اما این اطلاعات به گونه‌ای درج می‌شود که شناسایی نشوید. اطلاعاتی که در طول مصاحبه ارائه می دهید فقط برای این تحقیق استفاده می شود و برای اهداف دیگر استفاده نمی شود.

تمام داده های جمع آوری شده به صورت ایمن و ناشناس ذخیره می شود. داده های دیجیتال موجود در فضای ذخیره سازی رمزگذاری خواهند شد. پس از تکمیل تحقیقات، تمام داده ها به طور ایمن از بین می روند.

نتایج مطالعه چه خواهد شد؟

اطلاعات ارائه شده در طول تحقیق توسط محقق برای تکمیل پایان نامه تحقیقاتی خود استفاده خواهد شد. پایان نامه طبق شرایط دکتری به دانشگاه دورهام ارسال می شود. نتایج مطالعه همچنین با مسیحیان ایرانی منتخب در بریتانیا مورد بحث و بررسی قرار خواهد گرفت تا از تفسیر و درک صحیح و فرهنگی مناسب اطمینان حاصل شود. با این حال، شما در طول بحث شناسایی نخواهید شد. نتایج همچنین ممکن است از طریق نشریات یا کنفرانس ها به مخاطبان گسترده تری منتشر شود. هویت شما کاملاً محرمانه خواهد بود و در نتایج شناسایی نخواهید شد.

سوالات بیشتری دارم چگونه می توانم با شما در ارتباط باشم؟

آدرس ایمیل: tai-yin.tsoi@durham.ac.uk

شماره موبایل: ███████

همچنین می توانید با استاد راهنما پروفسور پیت وارد (peter.ward@durham.ac.uk) تماس بگیرید.

همچنین، حقوق و مسئولیت های هر فردی که در تحقیقات دانشگاه دورهام شرکت می کند را می توان در "منشور شرکت کنندگان" دانشگاه از طریق این پیوند اینترنتی یافت:
https://www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/considerations/people/charter
یا از طریق دکتر Tsoi.

از اینکه در این تحقیق شرکت کردید متشکریم

این طرح پژوهشی توسط کمیته اخلاق پژوهشی گروه الهیات و دین دانشگاه دورهام بررسی و تایید شد.

برگه اطلاعاتی شرکت کننده در تحقیق

عنوان پروژه:

"با ایمان نزدیک شوید": مطالعه ی چندگانه در مورد تجربه و معنای مراسم عشای ربانی مسیحیان ایرانی با پیشینه مسلمان در کلیساهای انگلستان

محقق: Daniel Tai-yin Tsoi (تحت تحت نظارت پروفسور پیت وارد و کشیش دکتر پل ریگان)

مترجم: AVG

برنامه: دکترای الهیات و وزارت، دانشگاه دورهام

- هدف و جزئیات این مطالعه برای من توضیح داده شده است. من درک می کنم که این مطالعه برای اطلاعات بیشتر طراحی شده است و تمام مراحل توسط کمیته اخلاق پژوهشی دانشگاه دورهام تایید شده است.
- من برگه اطلاعات و این فرم رضایت نامه را خوانده و درک کرده ام. من این فرصت را داشته ام تا در مورد مشارکت خود سوالاتی بپرسم.
- من درک می کنم که هیچ تعهدی برای شرکت در مطالعه ندارم. من حق انصراف از این مطالعه را در هر مرحله قبل از نگارش تحقیق دارم و نیازی به توضیح دلایل خود برای انصراف نخواهم داشت.
- می‌دانم که تمام اطلاعاتی که ارائه می‌دهم کاملاً محرمانه و ناشناس و محرمانه برای محققان نگهداری می‌شود.
- با ضبط صوت مصاحبه (در صورت وجود) موافق هستم.
- من موافق شرکت در این مطالعه هستم.

نام شما به زبان انگلیسی --

امضای شما --

تاریخ --

امضای محقق --

به شرکت کنندگان یک کپی از این فرم رضایت امضا شده با تاریخ داده می شود. محقق فرم رضایت امضا شده اصلی را نگه می دارد.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Project Title:

"*Draw near with faith*": a multiple case study on the experience and meaning of the Eucharist to the diaspora Christians of Persian heritage and Muslim background in the Church of England

Investigator: Dr Daniel Tai-yin Tsoi (under supervision of Prof Pete Ward and Revd Dr Paul Regan)

Programme: Doctor of Theology and Ministry, Durham University

You are being invited to take part in a research study. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. You may wish to discuss it with others.

The purpose of the research:

This research is being carried out by Dr Daniel Tsoi as part of the requirement of the doctorate of Theology and Ministry at Durham University. It is also part of Dr Tsoi's training as a priest within the Church of England.

This research aims to investigate the experience and understandings of the Eucharist (Holy Communion) among the Christians of Persian heritage and Muslim background within the Church of England. The research will examine how these Persians' cultural background, experiences, and previous religious background may influence their understanding and experience of the Eucharist (Holy Communion). This research also aims to develop a more personal and culturally sensitive understanding of the Eucharist (Holy communion) and hopefully help the Persians to grow their Christian faith.

Why am I chosen to participate?

This research will be conducted in several Church of England congregations/churches with a reasonable number of Persians. Individuals from other heritages are recruited from these congregations/churches to compare the research findings from the interviews and observations of the Christians of Persian heritage and Muslim background about their faith and culture. Also, individuals with a significant link with the Christians of Persian heritage are recruited to provide their opinion on the research findings to check the validity.

What will I be asked to do?

You will ask to read this information sheet and have an opportunity to ask any questions about this study.   If you are willing to take part, the investigator will ask you to contribute in one of the following ways:

- Individual interview
    - The investigator will interview you either in person or online at your convenience.
    - The interview will last for about an hour. It will be conducted privately to ensure that the information you provide will be confidential.
    - The investigator will take some notes. The interview will also be recorded (only sound recording) so that the investigator can refer after the interview. The sound recording will be stored securely with encryption and destroyed after the research is completed.
    - The investigator will mainly ask your opinions on the research findings from the interviews and observations among the Christians of Persian heritage and Muslim background within the Church of England, about faith (including Eucharist/Holy Communion) and culture.

- A group interview
    - The investigator will ask you to join a group of other Christians (up to 4) to discuss your experience and understanding of the Eucharist (Holy Communion). The investigator will ask you and the group some questions.
    - The group discussion will last for about 90 minutes. It will be conducted online. The information you provide will be confidential.
    - The investigator will take some notes. The discussion will also be recorded (only sound recording) so that the investigator can refer after the discussion. The sound recording will be stored securely with encryption and destroyed after the research is completed.

Once I take part, can I change my mind?

After you have read this information and asked any questions, you will be asked to complete and sign an Informed Consent Form. You will be given a copy to keep.

If you wish to withdraw from the study for whatever reasons, before, during or after the research, you are free to do so at any time. You don't need to explain your reasons for withdrawing.   However, it is usually not practical to withdraw after the research project has been completed, including writing up the results.

What personal information will be required from me?

You will be asked to provide information about your age and demographic information, such as your occupation.

Further details of how your personal data and information is processed in this research can be found in Durham University Data Privacy Notice either through this website: https://www.durham.ac.uk/about-us/governance/information-governance/data-protection/privacy-notices/researchers/ or through Dr Tsoi.

Are there any benefits in participating?

Your participation can help the church and others understand better the faith journeys of Christians with Persian heritage. Better insight allows a more culturally sensitive understanding of the Eucharist and hopefully help the Persian Christians to grow in their faith.

Are there any risks in participating?

There is no significant risk identified in participating in this study.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Your identity will be kept strictly confidential, including the information you provide and your participation in this research. Your full name will not be included in any documentation apart from the consent form. All information you supply will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and will only be accessed by the investigator and his supervisors.

Some of the information you provide may be used in writing the research thesis, but this will be included in a way that you will not be identified. The information you provide during the interview will only be used for this research and not for other purposes.

All the data collected will be stored securely and anonymised. Digital data in storage will be encrypted. All data will be destroyed securely once the research is completed.

What will happen to the results of the study?

Information supplied during the research will be used by the investigator to complete his research thesis. The thesis will be submitted to Durham University, as per the requirements of the doctorate. The study results will also be discussed and verified with selected Persian Christians in the UK to ensure culturally appropriate and correct interpretation and understanding. However, you will not be identified during the discussions. The results may also be disseminated to

wider audiences through publications or conferences. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential, and you will not be identified in the results.

I have some more questions, who should I contact?

The first point of contact is Dr Daniel Tai-yin Tsoi (tai-yin.tsoi@durham.ac.uk or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮). You can also contact his supervisor Prof Pete Ward (peter.ward@durham.ac.uk).

Also, the rights and responsibilities of anyone taking part in Durham University research can be found in the University 'Participants Charter' through this weblink: https://www.dur.ac.uk/research.innovation/governance/ethics/considerations/people/charter or through Dr Tsoi.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research.

This research project was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University.

Appendix Three: A sample of individual interview transcript

Participant code – SS2
Translator - LL
Date – 15/1/22
Time – 3:15 pm (length: 121.5 minutes)

Section /Qu (time)	Whom	Transcript
A1	DT	Okay, thank you so much, ███. I want to start by asking you a little bit about your background information. What is your age?
	SS2 (trans)	32
A2 (A-00:16)	DT	Okay. And what is your highest educational level in Iran?
	SS2 (trans)	Diploma/High School
	DT	High School – does it mean before university? Or after? What do you mean?
	SS2 (trans)	Before university. So, it's like GCSE…
A3 (A-00:56)	DT	What did you do in Iran before you came to the UK?
	SS2 (trans)	I was a beautician working in a beauty salon.
A4 (A-01:14)	DT	Were you a Muslim before you became a Christian? Which branch of Islam did you come from?
	ST (trans)	Shia
A5 (A-01:39)	DT	When you were a Muslim, would you consider yourself religious? Did you practise your religion?
	SS2 (trans)	My father is Sunni, and my mum is Shia – but both were religious.
	DT	How about you?
	SS2 (trans)	I was forced to observe and be religious because my parents were religious.
A6 (A-02:25)	DT	Just help me to understand… So, for example, did you pray regularly as a Muslim?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes
	DT	So how many times a day?
	SS2 (trans)	Three times
	DT	Did you read the Qur'an?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes
	DT	How about Ramadan – did you fast?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes… But everything was forced upon us.
A7 & A8 (A-04:28)	DT	When did you become a Christian? Tell me about your story – how did you become a Christian?
	SS2 (trans)	Three years ago… I was freer at that stage of my life… I had more friends, and I was working at a beauty salon… I had friends when I was working at a salon, and I got to know different religions— how they live and what they believe…
	DT	So, was it from your friends?
	SS2 (trans)	like from the customers…So, it was at that time, one of my friends from school, and she was Armenian… and I saw her again… we met up again, and since school days, we had more comings and goings…we talked about religion… So, it started three or four years ago with this Armenian friend.

	DT	Did you decide to become a Christian in Iran?
	SS2 (trans)	So, it was not in Iran… Islam was forced upon us, and I was tired of Islam, and I needed peace… I need to find another way… I did not become a Christian in Iran…. It's not possible to change their religion from one to another…
	DT	So, was it that you gradually changed your religion?
	SS2 (trans)	Even after talking to my friend about her religion, which was Christianity, I did not come to a decision about religion… I did not truly understand how to make a decision in Iran.
	DT	so, when did you actually make the decision to change your religion?
	SS2 (trans)	To be exact, it was probably in this church… I came to faith with a proper understanding… In this church, slowly and surely, as I learned and listened more… I understood more, and I became a believer… I came to the UK around March 2021… It was in May that my brother in Iran was hospitalised, but then he recovered… I felt like it was a miracle from God…
	SS2 (trans)	Even the doctor in Iran said my family should come the next day, as the doctors would remove all the life support from my brother… So, at that time, I was desperate, and I wanted to believe and ask Jesus and to have faith in Christ… I feel that it was that time I really decided…
	DT	What happened to your brother?
	SS2 (trans)	The whole family was, of course, shaken up by this incident as the brother was in the hospital… the good thing from this was that I gave my heart and my life to Christ… and it was something that I could tell my mum…
	SS2 (trans)	At that time, I was in (a city in Britain)… I decided to give myself to God, and I started reading Genesis… I wasn't going to any church at that time… I was reading the Bible myself.
	SS2 (trans)	I started reading Genesis, told God that I knew God could perform miracles, and asked God to save my brother. And then, if he did save my brother's life, I would commit myself to God.
	SS2 (trans)	The next day, my mum had to go and sign off to remove the life support from my brother … It took an hour, and then after that, he began to throw up and showed some signs of life…
	DT	Did it happen after you prayed?
	SS2 (trans)	Yeah…so my brother regained his life again… I told my mum it was not from the imams she had prayed to… It was of Jesus, and Jesus granted my prayer and performed the miracle… Thank God that Jesus answered the prayer…
	SS2 (trans)	So, I told my brother that Jesus answered my prayer… and my brother said that okay, one day we might go to church together – even though he was in Iran…. So, that's what led me to become a Christian.
	DT	Did you start to go to church afterwards?
	SS2 (trans)	One month after that, I was transferred to (another city). In this city, I got to know an Iranian friend … I was looking for a church close to her…
		So, the priest in my current church visited that place, and this was how I met him. The priest told me that their classes (Iranian Bible studies) were online now because of the coronavirus, so I started to join this church…

	DT	I noticed that you feel a bit emotional…are you okay? (*Tears when talking about her brother*)
	SS2 (trans)	It is because I am talking about my brother
	DT	Is talking about your brother making you emotional?
	SS2 (trans)	Yep…
	DT	So, it was that miracle – what Jesus did to your brother led you to become a Christian. Have I got it right?
	SS2 (trans)	Yeah… it was that miracle…
A9 (A-10:07)	DT	Were you baptised?
	SS2 (trans)	I got baptised in May 2021.
A10 (A-11:57)	DT	When did you arrive in the UK then?
	SS2 (trans)	March 2020.
A11 (A-12:13)	DT	So, you became a Christian in the UK. What's the reason for you to leave Iran and seek asylum here?
	SS2 (trans)	Even in Iran, I have started attending a house church. In (an Iranian city), there is one of the biggest Armenian churches…
	DT	But you went to a house church rather than the Armenian Church?
	SS2 (trans)	I had this friend from primary school and secondary school days, and then my friend came to my saloon as a client. We started our friendship… At that time, a big thing happened in my life… The situation with my dad and her mum – mum's relationship with dad, and my dad was quite a tyrant… So, all these things caused me to think that this was not right – and if this is Islam, this is not for me...
	DT	So, you started to have some problems and situations… and you began to investigate and to go to the church with your friend…
	SS2 (trans)	Because of all the problems in my life, there was a time when I felt that I wasn't a Muslim, and I didn't have a religion… My question was if there was a God, why I had all these problems in my life and my mum's life?
	SS2 (trans)	My dad was a Sunni, and he was very religious…my dad was so religious that if he could, he would have joined the Taliban…
	DT	Did you go to the house church and then become worried? Or did something happen that caused you to need to leave the country?
	SS2 (trans)	I went to a house church… House meetings are illegal…The Armenians have permission to gather… There was one special ceremony related to Armenians in the areas where they live… it is related to the water… On that day, even anyone who is not Armenian will be allowed to gather…
	SS2 (trans)	But they were not allowed Bible classes … I went to the house church …
	DT	How many times had you been to the house church?
	SS2 (trans)	five to six times… I would go every other week five or six times… It was quite dangerous even for Armenians, but particularly for me (not Armenian) … but because of my friend whom I know as a schoolmate, I was able to go…
	DT	Was that something had happened? Was there anything triggering for you to leave the country?
	SS2 (trans)	So, it was the fourth or fifth meeting… the fourth meeting…for every meeting, the location was changed. At that time, the

		meeting was set for 8 o'clock in an area full of gardens –where you go for parks… a big park outside of Isfahan. Then, when I got there, I saw the police cars were all there, and two or three people were taken. I didn't stop and just left the place…
	DT	So, you didn't go to the meeting, but you saw the police there…
	SS2 (trans)	I saw the police and just left the location…
	DT	What happened afterwards?
	SS2 (trans)	That night, I decided that I needed to go… My sister knew about attending the classes (which were Christian-related) … I am the youngest in the family… so it was that night that I decided to go…
	SS2 (trans)	That night, I left Isfahan... I didn't go back…
	DT	So, did you apply for asylum here mainly for religious reasons?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes
A12 (A-26:45)	DT	Have you got your status for staying in England?
	SS2 (trans)	Still waiting
	DT	So, you mentioned that you had told your mum about becoming a Christian… Have you told your dad? Does your family know now?
	SS2 (trans)	My dad does not have any information about me…
	DT	Does he know you have left the country, or does he not even know you have left?
	SS2 (trans)	He knows that I am not in Iran anymore – as far as my dad is concerned, I am dead…
	DT	Does he know what actually happened?
	SS2 (trans)	He treated me as if I was not there…
	DT	Even before you became a Christian?
	SS2 (trans)	Only recently, my dad told my mum that I was dead in his eyes… But my dad knew that I am not in Iran, but he didn't know which country I am in…
	DT	Does other family know that you became a Christian?
	SS2 (trans)	My mum… I am in touch with everyone in the family except my dad… They don't say anything about me in front of my dad…
A13 (A-28:58)	DT	One question I want to ask is, after you became a Christian, what were the challenges or difficulties as you became a Christian, or even before you became a Christian when you started to explore the Christian faith?
	SS2 (trans)	The challenges would be that people knew of me becoming a Christian as I am active on Instagram and Facebook… so some of those challenges would be people questioning my motives—why did I change my religion?
	SS2 (trans)	I put verses out on Instagram or Facebook, and I am quite open about my faith – so some ridicule from these people… I also feel that once I became a believer, I have a lot of things that my faith is tested… Some of these things are harder… Some of the challenges that came when I am obeying and walking with God
	DT	Can you give me some examples of what those things are?
	SS2 (trans)	so basically, the same thing here… the challenge is that sometimes because I post a lot on Facebook and Instagram, people will challenge me about why I post all these things… what's the difference? Putting all these Bible verses out there, and why didn't you put about the Qur'an? There's no difference between the two religions. But if you said no, I am doing that because I

		understand I have a life and walk with Christ…. I can tell for sure that I experience peace and hope…
	DT	Okay, anything else? Any other challenges or difficulties?
	SS2 (trans)	initially, when I shared with my mom… my mom said I was crazy. I was making a mistake in changing my religion… before that, my mum mocked and insulted me: "You are crazy" … but now, each time I go to church on Sunday, my mum will ask me to pray for her and my brother – a brother who is in prison… So, my mum has accepted my conversion…
	DT	How about in England? Did you have any problems when you became a Christian?
	SS2 (trans)	I still have friends who are Muslims… some of my friends will mock me…they put the Qur'an in front of me, and they told me to do something about the Qur'an for my brother's safe journey, but I said no, as I don't believe in that anymore…
	DT	How about as a minority? Have you experienced any racism in the UK, or does anyone see you differently because you are Iranian?
	SS2 (trans)	One time, I was in the hospital in the UK – a couple of months ago… And there were two people, and I felt they were racists…
	DT	So, what happened?
	SS2 (trans)	They were not every kind… I was hospitalised because I felt really bad at the hotel… I stayed one night in the hospital. Because I was over-stressed, the next morning, two interviewers/counsellors came to learn more about me in the hospital… They were English and one man and one woman… However, they were not very kind… I kept saying that I didn't know enough English to answer their questions and please bring a translator. And these two people said no, no, no and asked me to answer whatever they asked me…and they even said that they could have the questions written on a piece of paper, and asked me to look at it and try to translate by Google Translate by myself… So, three questions took three hours… and they also asked me where I got money to buy an iPhone or new shoes or anything, as they thought I was not badly dressed…They really stressed me out…
	SS2 (trans)	They worked for the hospital… They may want to find out what the problems are… There was a breakdown in communication, but they still did not provide a translator. Apparently, they worked for the mental health part of the hospital… They didn't try to understand but just focused on where I got the money to buy the nice stuff like shoes… They wanted to know where I got the money and who bought me these things…They may have an expectation that I should not be well dressed…
	DT	Apart from that incident, is that anything else?
	SS2 (trans)	There was a security guard in the hotel, and I think he was a bit racist… A lot of people living in the hotel feel the same.
A14 (45:22)	DT	I have one more question before we discuss Holy Communion. I want your opinion about what makes someone become a Christian.
	SS2 (trans)	Unless someone spends time researching and understanding or going deeper, you cannot really be a Christian.
	DT	So, you need to understand the faith basically… Anything else?
	SS2 (trans)	No (**nothing else**) …

B1 (B-00:00)	DT	Now, we are going to talk about the Holy Communion. Do you receive Holy Communion regularly in church?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes.
	DT	Is it every time you come to church when they have the Holy Communion?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes
B2 (B-00:38)	DT	So, before you became a Christian and even before you explored the Christian faith, have you heard about the Holy Communion?
	SS2 (trans)	Yep, I heard about this…
	DT	Even before you became a Christian? Where did you hear this from?
	SS2 (trans)	In Iran – In Isfahan. I heard of it, but I never saw that in Iran.
	DT	Did you hear that from your friend?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes, my friend explained to me about the Communion and also about Pentecost.
	DT	Was that from your Armenian friend?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes
B3 (B – 01:47)	DT	As I said before, I want to know what you think. Why do Christians have Communion?
	SS2 (trans)	Every religion has its ritual, which is the one special thing in Christianity. The Holy Communion was observed on the night before Jesus was betrayed. I understand that the bread is the symbol of his flesh, and the wine is the symbol of his blood. And I can't exactly say when I eat that bread… but it is special.
	SS2 (trans)	Every time I eat the bread, I have a sense of the covenant (check with the translator – *the term used is* پیمان – *peyman*)
	DT	When you said covenant, do you mean the covenant between you and God?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes, it is a covenant between me and God… It makes me feel closer to him… In Iranian culture, we share bread and salt together… This is a special thing, and we don't betray each other… It is a special thing when we share bread.
	DT	Tell me a bit more…
	SS2 (trans)	So, when I share the bread of Christ, it is like going back to the Iranian culture
	DT	So, is it like an idiom?
	SS2 (trans)	It is a proverb (ضرب‌المثل)
	DT	What are the exact words of the proverb?
	SS2 (trans)	"When you eat the bread and the salt, you don't break the saltshaker" (a literal translation) – "you don't break the saltshaker" means that you don't betray each other and don't do bad things to each other.
	DT	Why is it with salt?
	SS2 (trans)	Because bread is a sign of blessing… salt gives taste to our food and is on our tables. So, sometimes we say to each other that we have eaten your bread and salt – in a situation, it means to someone that you can trust me as I have eaten your bread and salt.
	DT	Help me to understand more about this proverb…Is this something you actually do, or is it just a saying?
	SS2 (trans)	I do not betray you if we share the bread and salt
	DT	So, in the past, it was with real action rather than just saying that…

	SS2 (trans)	It means that you actually have a relationship, and you have shared the table together… When I take the bread in the communion, this is the analogy for me as this proverb…
	DT	Have you spoken to other people about this thought related to Communion?
	SS2 (trans)	I have spoken to a friend …
	DT	Have you heard other people saying something similar before?
	SS2 (trans)	No—no one has made this connection before, and I think I made this connection for myself. For me, that is the connection.
B4 (B-10:00)	DT	You mentioned earlier the Last Supper. Do you know any other Bible story related to the Holy Communion?
	SS2 (trans)	I am sure that there are other stories, but I can't think of any now.
	DT	You said that the Holy Communion is related to Jesus's life… How does it relate to Jesus's life?
	SS2 (trans)	It is very interesting that Jesus knew what would happen to him when he had the Last Supper with the disciples… He knew that he would give his life, and he (Jesus) knew that someone would betray him, but he still conducted the Last Supper with his disciples. It was an interesting thing for me that he (Jesus) could have a meal with someone who was going to betray him later.
	DT	Is the betrayal you feel particularly important?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes, it is the betrayal…
B5 (B – 12:31)	DT	You told me the bread is Jesus's flesh and the wine is Jesus's blood. How about the table? When we have Holy Communion, there is a table where the priest puts things, and they stand behind the table. Does the table have any meaning?
	SS2 (trans)	The whole scene the priest did during the communion… the plate… each time brought me back to the film that I watched before about Jesus eating with the disciples, and he shared the bread and wine at the table.
	DT	Do you mean the scene of the Last Supper?
	SS2 (trans)	Yep…The scene with the table…
	DT	Do you mean that the priest is related to Jesus?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes… It is my imagination (*embarrassed smile*) … The priest is like Jesus in the scene I saw in the film.
	DT	You seem a bit embarrassed when you say it is your imagination. Why's that? Have I got it right?
	SS2 (trans)	Not really…
	DT	Who would be the disciples then, in the scene?
	SS2 (trans)	We are the disciples – it just reminds me of the scene each time I have Holy Communion.
B6 (B – 16:32)	DT	And how about when we go out to take the bread and the wine… When you have the bread and wine, do you think of anything? Is there anything particular you usually think about?
	SS2 (trans)	I have only seen the priest drink the wine
	DT	How about the bread? When you take the bread, do you think about anything in particular?
	SS2 (trans)	Each time I get up to go out to receive the bread, I go out with a wish and ask God to strengthen my faith.
	DT	Do you mean saying a prayer?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes. I say a prayer… it is a desire – ask God to strengthen my faith.
B7 (B-19:05)	DT	You mentioned a bit that the Holy Communion is something to remind you about the Last Supper, and it seems to be part of a

		covenant between you and God. Is there anything else? Anything special does the Holy Communion mean to you? Particularly to yourself…
	SS2 (trans)	Jesus was innocent and knew that he would be betrayed, but he still had the supper with the disciples…
	SS2 (trans)	Reading about Jesus's response with love even though he was going to be betrayed… compared to us, when we were betrayed, we would keep the other person at a distance. But Jesus responded in a special way.
	DT	Is there anything unusual that happens when you have Holy Communion?
	SS2 (trans)	When we talked about this topic, a lot of questions came to my mind—I don't think I have enough knowledge… Each time, I feel I grow some more understanding of the Holy Communion.
B8 (B – 23:48)	DT	Sometimes when people have the Holy Communion, they may think of something difficult that has happened in their lives. Or anything that happened in your life may be related to the Holy Communion. Do you have any similar experiences?
	SS2 (trans)	No
B9 (B- 25:15)	DT	We talked about the Holy Communion as like the Last Supper—a meal shared between Jesus and his disciples. Do you see that when we have Communion at church, it is a shared meal?
	SS2 (trans)	Hmm… it used to be a shared meal, but it is not a shared meal.
	DT	So, you don't think it is a shared meal?
	SS2 (trans)	No, it appears to be – it has the appearance of a shared meal…
	DT	Why don't you think it is a shared meal?
	SS2 (trans)	I see it more as a covenant…
	DT	So, is it more personal rather than together?
	SS2 (trans)	No, it is a covenant between God and me, not a shared meal.
B10 (B – 27:18)	DT	Communion is not just receiving the bread; it includes other things, like the prayers—this is what we call the liturgy. I wonder whether you remember when we have the Communion service. What are the different parts of the service you can remember?
	SS2 (trans)	The priest starts with a prayer, raises his hands, and then says, "This is my blood" …
	DT	So, you remember what he says about the blood…
	SS2 (trans)	Yep… but as it is all done in English, I am guessing… but the thing I remember is that he prays, raises his hands, and says the bread is "my body" and the wine is "my blood." …
	SS2 (trans)	Because I don't know English, and this is what I can remember…
	DT	Sometimes, we have Farsi and English together on the screen during Communion. We don't do it often now, but in the past, we did more… Do you think that it would be helpful?
	SS2 (trans)	Definitely, it would be very helpful…
	DT	Okay, so with Farsi, that would be helpful…
	SS2 (trans)	Yes
	DT	Would you say that you struggle to understand what is happening in the service because of the English language?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes, it is… It is not just me – many other Iranians struggle, like those who just came to the country… These Iranians may ask me what is going on during the service, and I tell them.
	DT	We usually have the Lord's Prayer in both Farsi and English on the screen, even though we don't have everything in two languages…

		So, if the Lord's prayer is in two languages on the screen, would you say that in Farsi?
	SS2 (trans)	I will read from the English
	DT	Even with both languages?
	SS2 (trans)	I read the English version as I want to improve my English…
	DT	Okay… So, when you go back home, do you pray in Farsi?
	SS2 (trans)	At church, I prefer to pray in English because I want to get used to It, but I pray in Farsi at home.
	DT	If we have both English and Farsi translations for the Communion service, will you still participate in English, but Farsi will help you understand?
	SS2 (trans)	If there is a Farsi translation, that would help me understand English. But I will try to use English as I want to improve my English… The Farsi translation will help me understand what I am saying as responses in English.
	DT	If I gave you a choice, would you prefer communion in English or Farsi if the priest can speak Farsi?
	SS2 (trans)	Of course, in Farsi – I will understand much better in Farsi and what is going on…
	SS2 (trans)	When I can do things in my language, of course, it helps me a lot. For example, the Elam class *(the mid-week discipleship class)* is all done in Farsi, and definitely, I understand the whole lot better… My language and my mother tongue will help me to understand.
C1 (C-00.00)	DT	The final part is mainly to help me understand Iranian culture. You have been in the UK for nearly two years now. Please tell me what you notice about the differences between Iranian culture and British or Western culture.
	SS2 (trans)	A lot of differences… Like how people relate to one another is different.
	DT	Explain a bit more…
	SS2 (trans)	Iranians are more hospitable and more sociable… in establishing relationships, Iranians are warmer… but English folks are "colder"
	DT	Anything else?
	SS2 (trans)	So, if this question were asked to me in Iran, I would probably say more about Iranian culture. Here, I want to understand Western culture more… Iranians are definitely quicker to help—more helpful compared to Western culture.
	DT	I don't quite understand the first part – what is the difference? Why?
	SS2 (trans)	Because I have been here for two and a half years… I feel a little bit distant from Iranian culture… I am in between two cultures now… so I am in the middle between Iranian and Western cultures. I can see good and bad things in Iranian culture and, likewise, in Western culture.
	DT	So far, it seems you have told me the good things about Iranian culture. Is there anything not so good when compared to Western culture?
	SS2 (trans)	So, comparing the Persians in Iran and here in the UK… In Iran, people are more helpful to one another… but here, the Iranians keep to themselves… In Iran, people are more out there and helpful…

	SS2 (trans)	the Iranians here are between two cultures, and they are keeping more to themselves… perhaps they are afraid of being hurt by other Iranians for whatever reasons… They are like to have two personalities…
	DT	That is very interesting. You mentioned that you are between two cultures—is this a good thing or a bad thing for you?
	SS2 (trans)	In Iran, when it comes to hospitality, we go out and share a meal… it is very important to have each other to eat with… but the situation here is so different, and we don't have this here… So, I feel Iranians here can lose part of themselves and the richness they came with… the Iranians here cannot serve as much food as they wish like in Iran.
	DT	Is it related to the pandemic, or do you think people have changed after coming to the UK?
	SS2 (trans)	Westerners do not get into your business—they don't question you about things… but Iranians want to know everything about you—why did you do that, etc.? The English person will not get into your business, but Iranians will.
	DT	Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Which one do you prefer?
	SS2 (trans)	I prefer the English way – people should only mind their own business…so it is a good thing.
C2 (C-10:00)	DT	We talked about how Holy Communion is like a meal, and you touched on how the Iranians are very hospitable. So, about food and all those… Tell me about the Iranians having a meal and a party. What will happen?
	SS2 (trans)	It is the best kind of feast… Receiving guests is very important… You will definitely put the best bread out… a feast is something that they go all the way out.
	DT	Do you miss that?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes…
	DT	Have you had a good Iranian feast in the UK?
	SS2 (trans)	I did… I had that with my friends, who invited me home for food…
C3 (C-12.17)	DT	Now, I want to learn something about Nowruz… I heard Nowruz is very important to the Iranians… Tell me what you know about Nowruz.
	SS2 (trams_	In Asia, Nowruz is a new day and a new year after 12 months… It is a tradition from the ancient world.
	DT	Why do Iranians celebrate Nowruz?
	SS2 (trans)	new season, new life after the long winter into spring
	DT	Do you celebrate Nowruz? How do you do that?
	SS2 (trans)	When I was younger, we would buy new clothes…we would have the Haft-sin table… and there would be a particular moment when the start of the new year would be announced…
	DT	Is it related to seeing the moon?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes…
	SS2 (trans)	We also read Hafiz until the New Year comes…
	SS2 (trans)	The father will put money in the Qur'an…
	DT	I never heard about this…
	SS2 (trans)	My father is Sunni – so it is a bit of mixed practice… My father has some unusual religious practices – when a child or grandchild is born, my father will choose a few names and put those names in a Qur'an and then randomly open it to see which name should be the name for the newborn… My father will put money in the

		Qur'an during Nowruz as it (the Qur'an) is full of blessings… Anything from the Qur'an is full of blessings
	DT	So, you mentioned the Haft-sin table. What do you put on the table?
	SS2 (trans)	Come from the alphabet "Sin" – apple (سركه), vinegar (سركه), dried date (سنجد), paste from wheatgrass (سمنو), sumac, garlic (سير)…
	DT	Don't worry if you can't remember more… Do they have meaning?
	SS2 (trans)	The paste from wheatgrass means blessing… the wheatgrass is new life, and the red fish represent living life… I can't tell you now…
	DT	How many Nowruz have you had in the UK?
	SS2 (trans)	two…
	DT	So, do you still have a Nowruz table in your room?
	SS2 (trans)	I didn't do it in my room, but my friend had a table… I may do that this year.
	DT	Are there any other customs you will do during Nowruz?
	SS2 (trans)	We have some Yalda…
	DT	Do you celebrate Yalda?
	SS2 (trans)	Definitely…
C4 (C-22.30)	DT	Now you are a Christian… from history, the Christian faith in Iran came before Islam. Are you aware of this, and what do you know about the Christian faith before Islam?
	SS2 (trans)	No, I have heard about this.
	DT	Are you surprised when I said this?
	SS2 (trans)	Yes, I am surprised…
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D3 (C-24.00)	DT	Do you think the Christian faith is a Western religion?
	SS2 (trans)	No, I don't see it this way.
	DT	Why not?
	SS2 (trans)	In my mind, religion does not have the label of Eastern or Western… we need to love and do good things.
	DT	So, we should not have eastern or western religions?
	SS2 (trans)	Islam is a bunch of rules that tell you not to do this and not to do that… Christianity teaches us how to be human.
D1 & D2 (C – 25.10)	DT	We talked about many different things like Communion… Is there anything you have not told me but think I should know?
	SS2 (trans)	So, I have asked different people about the Christian faith and what Christianity means to them… It is not just me, but many of my friends who are believers say that they have peace, this special peace they experience… It is good that we all share this faith in Christ—and faith in Christ means how to be better people.
	SS2 (trans)	If I could choose religion in Iran, I would not leave my country and come here… My life here is much harder…. I used to have a good life in Iran… Most people who come here used to have good lives in Iran, and the standard of living here is lower. Many local people think refugees always come from poor countries, but actually, we have had a good life in Iran. I can say that if there is freedom of religion in Iran, 99% will not come here to suffer hardship… This is something that troubles me.

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