

Conversions from Islam to Christianity

by Ibn Warraq (February 2016)

In the last fifteen years, there has been a spate of books, published in the West, by Muslims who have converted to Christianity, and many anthologies of testimonies of former Muslims, and even former Muslim terrorists.[\[1\]](#) The internet, of course, is full of Christian sites with the testimonies of former Muslims. These personal journeys, some moving and some very sentimental, are of considerable interest but do not help us to establish the number of true conversions to Christianity in the Islamic world. Large claims are made by various Christian evangelical groups giving suspect statistics.

ALGERIA

I remember being startled when I came across an article in the French journal *Courrier International* of January, 2001.[\[2\]](#) The latter journal, in turn, was translating an article that first appeared in the Algerian daily newspaper, *Al-Yawm* in late December 2000. I translated it for *The Middle East Quarterly*.[\[3\]](#) The article begins, "In Kabylie, people of all ages are converting to Christianity. In certain towns and villages of Greater Kabylie, there is at least one church, as for example at Ouadhias, Draa Benkhedda, Ain el-Hammam, and Boghni. In the latter village, for instance, two churches have opened their doors during the last two years. Although the original builders of these two churches had worked in absolute secrecy, the number of citizens who have embraced Christianity has grown rapidly. The [Protestant] church of Ouadhias has played an important role in the proliferation of the number of conversions in Kabylie, and it is considered the Mother Church, never having ceased its activities, even after [Algeria's] independence [1962] and the departure of the French and humanitarian missionaries."

Here are some of the reasons given for the conversions, "The deterioration of the image of Islam during the crisis has played its part in this rise of conversions to Christianity and the adoption of its principles. What is happening and what has happened in Algeria, such as the massacres and killings

in the name of Islam, have led many, when asked what the difference, in their view, was between Islam and Christianity, to declare: 'Christianity is life, Islam is death.' For Samia, a secondary school pupil, the proof of the difference between Islam and Christianity was the mixing and relationship between the sexes, the former forbidding it, and the latter allowing it."[\[4\]](#)

This was credible since it appeared in an Algerian newspaper, and startling since Algeria at the time was undergoing a civil war of unbelievable savagery which resulted in the death of perhaps as many as 200,000 Algerians.[\[5\]](#) Women had their throats cut for wearing lipstick, and yet here were Muslims converting to Christianity, and risking a similar fate.

Many of the converts were Berbers or Amazigh[\[6\]](#) who are an ethnic group indigenous to North Africa, most now live in Algeria (in the Kabylie region) and Morocco but are also to be found in Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania, Mali and Niger. They speak their own language, and have in recent years tried to reclaim their pre-Islamic Berber culture and identity, and resent being called "Arab." The main opposition political parties in Algeria are secular and mainly Berber.

Twelve years later we find the following report (13 November, 2012), in the Arabic on-line journal *Ilaf* [Elaph][\[7\]](#) on the continuation of Algerians, including many Berbers, converting to Christianity with the headline "That Algerians are leaving Islam is a phenomenon not denied by the government or civil organizations; however it suffers from being a subject not openly discussed. Added to that, is a paucity of documented information necessary for a proper pursuit of our investigation."

The report then tells us:

"The subject of Christianization remains a much discussed matter in Algeria, even though no official census exists that would reveal the actual number of people who have embraced Christianity. Neither the Ministry of Religious Affairs & Awqaf nor the Algerian Episcopal authorities are willing to divulge their number. While governmental authorities tend to minimize the size of this phenomenon, discussion of it is occurring among both politicians and religious leaders regarding its spread among Algerians, especially among the young people.

"According to the field research of three Algerian experts, Jalal Mousa,

Salaf Rahmouni, and Naseema Raqiq, there is a noticeable rise in the number of Algerians leaving Islam, reaching 10,000 people, and averaging six individuals per day, most of whom are young people. According to researcher Jalal Mousa, 'the number of people who have embraced Christianity is estimated at 10,000.'

"In his research, Mousa emphasized that 'those becoming Christian move freely without any governmental surveillance, and in turn, concentrate their efforts on working among the young people, with the goal of establishing a religious minority who are willing and active in defending their rights. Their activities are accomplished through philanthropic organizations that seek to prevent young people from indulging in the use of alcoholic beverages and narcotics, and calling them to adopt good morals.'

"According to some experts, the Grand Kabyle region has become a fertile field for evangelization by Western Christians who often visit the area. Nineteen Christian philanthropic organizations are also active, making a claim of an average of 6 converts per day

"The U. S. Bureau of Democracy & Human Rights of the Department of State estimates that the number of non-Muslims in Algeria has reached 500,000. They attend 300 churches, most of which are in the Kabyle region."[\[8\]](#)

Again this is a report from an Algerian online news service, and cannot be easily dismissed as Christian propaganda.

Amazigh (Berber) self-assertion has increased in recent years, and is a positive sign. As Berber specialist, Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, put it, "There is even a body called the World Amazigh [Berber] Congress, established in 1997 and headquartered in Paris, that brings together constituent associations in periodic gatherings. And even as they decry the perfidious, leveling impact of globalization processes on indigenous cultures, Amazigh activists have enjoyed the benefits thereof, maintaining an active presence in the cyber-world There they come into partial alliance with other "civil society" forces such as the women's and human rights groups and the liberal political voices and bloggers of North Africa's overwhelmingly youthful population.

"A further indication of this outward-looking, modern perspective is the

fact that the movement's overarching discourse is profoundly sympathetic to Western liberal-humanist values and strongly condemns the predominant North African political and cultural order, which prioritizes Islam and Arab identity in an uneasy and erratic coexistence with French linguistic and cultural influences. As such, the Amazigh movement leaves little or no room for other, more Islamic-centered aspects of Berber societal norms. This may well prove to be a serious shortcoming in Amazigh mobilization efforts, but to the extent that those efforts succeed, Amazighité represents a bulwark against the spread of Islamist influence."[\[9\]](#)

As Mira Z. Amiras also explains, "Amazigh militants reject both Islam and Arabism, claiming that Islam is nothing more than a mask for Arabism rather than the reverse."[\[10\]](#) I shall discuss the assassinated Amazigh or Berber Kabyle singer, and human rights activist, Lounès Matoub who was an atheist, later in an article on Muslim atheists.

MOROCCO

In Morocco, there is also a certain amount of evidence of Muslims converting to Christianity. While the majority of Christians are foreigners, the organisation known as the Voice of the Martyrs, founded to help persecuted Christians round the world, claims that there are at least 45,000 native Moroccans who have converted to Christianity, particularly in rural areas, often baptized in secret in various Moroccan churches. However, the International Religious Freedom Report published by the United States Department of State gives a much smaller figure, citing the estimates given by Moroccan Christian leaders, of 8000 Moroccan Christians out of a population of 34.8 million.[\[11\]](#)

An article published in 2006, on the Moroccan website, Ya-biladi, gives the reason for this modest but nonetheless remarkable movement towards Christianity, "The Arab press has been quick to accuse the US evangelists for the massive conversion numbers, therefore playing into the hands of the Islamists who advocate an end to the semi-freedom of religion in Morocco. But this assumption is wrong because as many observers emphasized, some Muslims are disillusioned by the crimes committed in the name of Islam, especially in Algeria by the Islamists and al-Qaida's terrorist acts and are looking for something else."[\[12\]](#)

Perhaps the first truly in depth study of conversions to Christianity in recent years comes from David Garrison and his colleagues, the results of which he recounts in his book, *A Wind in the House of Islam*, published in 2014.^[13] He conducted two studies, the first took six years, and then one in greater depth, between 2011 and 2014, which took two and a half years. He writes, "With the assistance of numerous on-site collaborators, interviews have been collected from 45 movements in 33 Muslim people groups in 14 countries." He defines a "movement" as "a movement of Muslims to Christ to be at least 100 new church starts or 1,000 baptisms that occur over a two-decade period." Garrison's conclusion is that "Today, in more than 70 separate locations in 29 nations, new movements of Muslim-background followers has crossed the threshold of at least 100 new church starts or 1,000 baptized believers, all of whom have come to Christ over the past two decades. In some countries the numbers within these new movements have grown to tens of thousands. Though the total number of new Christ followers, between two and seven million, maybe a statistically small drop in the vast sea of Islam, they are not insignificant."^[14]

The interviews were conducted in the languages of the converts and then translated with the help of bilingual assistants. Garrison and his co-workers isolated nine distinct geo-cultural clusters or complexes of Muslim people groups.

"Defined initially by geography, these clusters have been further shaped by shared history, languages, trade, conflict and thus, destiny. Following Arab Muslims' description of their world as "The House of Islam," we called these nine geo-cultural clusters "Rooms." Rooms within the House of Islam: (1) West Africa, (2) North Africa, (3) East Africa, (4) The Arab World, (5) The Persian World, (6) Turkestan, (7) Western South Asia, (8) Eastern South Asia, and (9) Indo-Malaysia."^[15]

Garrison is careful not to sound triumphalist, on the contrary, as he points out with due modesty, the figure of two to seven million converts to Christianity, comes to "less than one-half of one percent of the Muslim world's population, hardly a cause to gloat."^[16] A little further on, he admits, "As an evangelical Christian, I come to this study with biases, I submit my own faith and practice to the authority of the Bible and the unique and exclusive salvation claims of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. But as a phenomenologist, I have attempted to hold my personal convictions at bay until I

accurately described the phenomenon in question.” He finds much to admire in Islam and Islamic civilization, he has studied Arabic, and lived among Muslims in India, Egypt and Tunisia. His Muslim friends are described by him as “the most hospitable, generous and gracious people” he has ever known.[\[17\]](#)

IRAN

Iran is one of the most interesting of all the “rooms” that Garrison studied. He observes that, “Of Iran’s population 64 percent were born after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, and have little affection for it. While Christianity is growing rapidly in the country, so too are many other worldviews as Muslim Iranians seek a respite from the state religion. It is common to find Iranian young adults walking away from Islam and turning to atheism, secularism, hedonism, drugs, and even ancient pathways such as Zoroastrianism and Buddhism.”[\[18\]](#) I shall be discussing Iranian atheists in a later section, but I can personally vouch for Garrison’s latter conclusion. Over the last twenty years, I have given talks to Iranian groups in Paris, Stockholm (Sweden), Chicago, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and New York; they have all been anti-Khomeini, and most have been atheists, and certainly secularists – thus, evidently, their flight from Iran. Garrison also points out, quoting journalist Scott Peterson, “‘hidden behind the mullah’s mask is the most unashamedly pro-American population in the Middle East’. The sentiment was expressed spontaneously after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America, when 60,000 Iranians gathered on Tehran’s football stadium dressed in black to hold a candlelight vigil.”[\[19\]](#)

House churches are the most common place for Muslim converts to Christianity to worship. The House Church movement may have, as a conservative estimate, 100,000 followers but “data from interviews with Iranian Christian refugees, and the number of correspondents to satellite Christian television programs give reason to believe that figure could be as high as a few million”.[\[20\]](#)

Garrison refers to Mark Bradley[\[21\]](#) who wrote, “If the figures from the survey carried out by Mohabbat TV were translated nationally, it would mean that 8 million people are interested in Christianity and nearly 3 million would actually want to become Christian.” The German online journal, Deutsche Welle [DW] cites other figures, “It is said that between 250,000 and 500,000 Iranians have converted, though the actual number is impossible to know.”[\[22\]](#)

DW then explains the reasons for conversions, "They are turning away from Islam primarily because they are disappointed in their government, which has tied politics and religion together so as to make them inseparable, and has curtailed many civil rights in the name of Islam."[\[23\]](#)

Persecution of Iranian Muslim converts to Christianity has led many to flee to the West. The U.K. daily newspaper, *The Guardian*,[\[24\]](#) describes the journey of these asylum seekers in Germany, mainly Iranian, and occasionally Afghan, émigrés who have given a new lease of life to the religious life of Germany. Many have paid as much as to \$30,000 to be smuggled into the country with fake passports. Once in Germany they have usually adopted western names, and have added greatly to congregation numbers in several independent Lutheran, Evangelical and Presbyterian churches. They are now waiting for their baptism ceremonies as they rebuild their lives. The last time Germany saw so many Iranians seeking entry was just after the 1979 revolution. The number of Iranian refugees has doubled every year for the last five years, from less than 1,000 in 2008 to 4,348 in 2012. Official figures from the federal office for migration and refugees confirm this trend. Over 3,500 Iranians were granted asylum last year, and Iran was one of the countries from which Germany saw a steep rise in asylum applications.

The Guardian gives the reasons for this exodus, "Spread across multiple churches and asylum camps, Muslim- to-Christian converts from Iran make up a noticeable population of asylum seekers who say a growing crackdown on Muslim-born Christian converts back home, and disillusion from decades of living under Islamic law, have led them to Germany. Though Iranian converts can be found in The Netherlands, Sweden and Austria, Germany's economic stability and reputation as a major refugee hosting country has made the European country the most desirable destination."

In the past most of Iran's Christians were ethnic Armenians and Assyrians who are allowed to practice their religion freely as long as they did not proselytize. Thanks to Christian satellite television broadcasts, in the last five- to-10 years, Iranian Diasporan Christian pastors have had an enormous influence over their fellow Iranians back home. Even ethnic Armenians and Assyrians have taken to spreading the gospel to their Muslim neighbours. The combined result is that the religion is taking hold throughout Iran. *The Guardian* tries to give estimates of the numbers involved but, "The underground

nature of the Christian conversion movement has made numbers impossible to determine accurately. Estimates range from 300,000 to 500,000 by various sources. Though these statistics cannot be independently verified, converts and pastors both in and out of Iran say the movement is strong and widely spread. Some converts have also been reported to travel to neighboring Armenia to become baptized."

STATISTICS

Perhaps one of the most astonishing statistics thrown out comes from a Muslim cleric, Sheikh Ahmad al-Katani, in an interview conducted by Al-Jazeera television[\[25\]](#) in 2000. Al-Jazeera quickly deleted the interview, but intrepid Christian evangelicals have managed to retrieve it, [\[26\]](#) and even have the link to the original Arabic transcript.[\[27\]](#) Sheikh Ahmad Al Katani, the president of The Companions Lighthouse for the Science of Islamic Law in Libya, claimed that in Africa (by which he means essentially Black Africa), "On the other hand, the number of Christians has increased from one million in 1902 to 329, 882,000. Let us round off that number to 330 million in the year 2000....In every hour, 667 Muslims convert to Christianity. Everyday, 16,000 Muslims convert to Christianity. Every year, 6 million Muslims convert to Christianity. These are huge numbers...."

Al Katani does not tell us how he arrived at those extraordinary numbers.

Pew Research Center's figures tell us that, "the number of Muslims living between the Sahara Desert and the Cape of Good Hope has increased more than 20-fold, rising from an estimated 11 million in 1900 to approximately 234 million in 2010. **The number of Christians has grown even faster, soaring almost 70-fold from about 7 million to 470 million** [emphasis added] Sub-Saharan Africa now is home to about one-in-five of all the Christians in the world (21%) and more than one-in-seven of the world's Muslims (15%)." [\[30\]](#) And yet, the following Pew conclusions contradict the Sheikh's contention that Muslims in Black Africa are converting to Christianity at, to him, an alarming rate: "Neither Christianity nor Islam is growing significantly in sub-Saharan Africa at the expense of the other; there is virtually no net change in either direction through religious switching." [\[31\]](#) Who is right?

According to the website, Muslim Statistics, "A major Christian syndication has

provided video evidence to us from their user data around the world which proves that a massive 350 million (!) Muslims live their outward lives as Muslims, on the surface, but have secretly converted to Christianity.”[\[32\]](#)

But Muslim Statistics website refuses to provide the sources for such a claim, in order not, so it is claimed, to endanger the converts concerned, “Because of the extreme persecution against Christians taking place all across the Middle East we have decided not to publish the source or details of this data or where these converted populations live in the Islamic world out of consideration for their security and safety. It is our opinion that the mass slaughter of Christians taking place right now is exactly due to the fact that millions of Muslims have converted to Christianity and authorities and Salafis are aware that changes are taking place and trying to put a stop to it.”[\[33\]](#) There is no way for us to independently confirm these claims, which if true, would mean that 16% of 2.08 billion Muslims were secret Christians. This really seems a large number. I am more inclined to accept David Garrison’s more modest figures of between three to seven million Muslims converting to Christianity over the last ten years. Though I could be wrong.

There are further problems with such statistics. Many of those who converted to Christianity may have kept many aspects of their previous traditions, and thus have inadvertently produced a kind of syncretic religion of their own. Also, many ex-Muslims may have converted or rather reverted back to Islam, as was the case with Americans who converted to Islam only to leave after a few years.

BROTHER RACHID AND AL-HAYAT TELEVISION

There are probably around twenty Christian channels broadcasting to the Islamic world, such as Middle East Television (also known as “METV”) which is a satellite television broadcasting network located in Limassol, Cyprus. Brother Rachid is the remarkable host of a live, call-in show on Al-Hayat Television [al-Hayat TV], which has bases in Europe and the United States. He is a convert from Islam, and was born into a conservative Muslim family in Morocco. Since his father was an imam, Rachid started life as a devout Muslim, memorising large parts of the Koran.

Since the launch of his show on al-Hayat TV, Rachid has devoted his life to defending the rights of Muslims to convert to Christianity, or simply changing

their religion as they see fit, particularly in his native Morocco. Brother Rachid is not all afraid of criticizing Islam, or pointing out the virtues of Christianity over Islam, and has interviewed controversial figures such as Robert Spencer, and Christoph Luxenberg. He believes that there have been probably somewhere between 40,000 to 60,000 converts to Christianity in Morocco alone in the last ten years. He receives nearly 13,000 emails per month since he started broadcasting in 2007. In an article in *Morocco World News*, we learn that Rachid “has recently posted videos on YouTube translating the Quran into Moroccan Arabic dialect. His initiative was viewed by many Moroccan Muslims as provocative. Rachid cited to the daily the following demands that Moroccan Christians are still asking for:

1. To change one’s religion and the right for free practice of Christian religious customs.

2. To own the translated version of the bible in Moroccan Arabic or Arabic language, without fear of being arrested.

3. To give Christian names to their children.

4. To teach their children Christianity in school instead of Islam.

5. The right of Moroccan Christian women to marry a foreign Christian man, without having to prove his affiliation to the Islamic religion.”[\[34\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) Here is a random list of thirteen

1. Joel Richardson and Susan Crimp. *Why We Left Islam: Former Muslims Speak Out*, WND Books; 1 edition (April 29, 2008).
2. Steve Mashni, *Out of Darkness Into Light: True life stories of Muslim’s Coming to Jesus Christ Through Visions, Dreams and Miracles*, Kindle Edition, 2015
3. Robert Hussein, *Apostate Son*, Najiba Pub Co; 1st edition (December 23,

1998)

4. Ant Greenham, *Muslim Conversions to Christ: An Investigation of Palestinian Converts Living in the Holy Land*, William Carey International University Press (January 11, 2011)
5. Walid Shoebat, *Why I Left Jihad: The Root of Terrorism and the Return of Radical Islam*, Top Executive Media; 1 edition (May 30, 2005)
6. Ergun Caner & Emir Fethi Caner. *Unveiling Islam: An Insider's Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs*, Kregel Publications; Updated and Expanded edition (April 14, 2009)
7. Bilquis Sheikh, *I Dared to Call Him Father: The Miraculous Story of a Muslim Woman's Encounter with God*, Chosen Books (April 1, 2003)
8. Nabeel Qureshi, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A Devout Muslim Encounters Christianity*, Zondervan (February 11, 2014)
9. Samaa Habib & Bodie Thoene, *Face to Face with Jesus: A Former Muslim's Extraordinary Journey to Heaven and Encounter with the God of Love*, Chosen Books, June 3, 2014
10. Gulshan Esther, *The Torn Veil*, CLC Publications (November 1, 2010)
11. Mosab Hassan Yousef, *Son of Hamas: A Gripping Account of Terror, Betrayal, Political Intrigue, and Unthinkable Choices*, Tyndale Momentum; Reprint edition (February 24, 2011)
12. Tass Saada, *Once an Arafat Man: The True Story of How a PLO Sniper Found a New Life*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.; First Edition edition (December 17, 2009)
13. Kamal Saleem, *The Blood of Lambs: A Former Terrorist's Memoir of Death and Redemption*, Howard Books; First edition (April 7, 2009).

[2] Courrier International (Paris) of January 4-10, 2001, page 29.

[3] "Christianity Is Life," *Middle East Quarterly*, Summer 2001, pp. 94-95. Available at <http://www.meforum.org/104/christianity-is-life>

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Fouad Ajami (January 27, 2010). "The Furrows of Algeria". *New Republic*.

[6] There have been several famous Christian Berbers in history, the most famous being St. Augustine, but others include Roman writers such as Terentius, Lactantius, Martianus Capella, Marcus Cornelius Fronto, Apuleius and Tertullianus. Christian saints include Scillitan Martyrs, Cyprian, Victor Maurus, Saint Monica, mother of St. Augustine, and Roman popes like Pope Victor I, Pope Miltiades, Pope Gelasius I; and even Roman emperors such as Septimius Severus, Macrinus and Emilianus.

[7] <http://elaph.com/Web/news/2012/11/773637.html>

[8] Jacob Thomas, *The Christianization of Algeria*, published 2013 at http://www.answerislam.org/authors/thomas/christianization_algeria.html

[9] Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "The Berber Awakening" in *The American Interest*, Volume 6, Number 5 : May 1, 2011.

[10] Mira Z. Amiras, "Amazighité, Arab/Islamic Hegemony, and the Christian Evangelical Challenge", in edd. Galina Lindquist & Don Handelman, *Religion, Politics and Globalization* Berghahn Books, 2011, p.226.

[11] <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4f4361e72.html>

[12]

<http://www.yabiladi.com/forum/moroccans-converting-christianity-44-1032753.html>

[13] David Garrison, *A Wind in the House of Islam, How God is Drawing Muslims Around the World to Faith in Jesus Christ*, Colorado: Wigtake Resources, 2014.

[14] Garrison, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

[15] Garrison, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

[16] Garrison, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

[17] Garrison, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

[18] Garrison, *op.cit.*, p. 135.

[19] Garrison, *op.cit.*, p. 135, quoting Scott Peterson, "Iranians Love the U.S.A.", In *Iran*, Issue 7, Summer 2013, pp. 13-14.

[20] Garrison, *op.cit.*, p. 140.

[21] Mark Bradley, *Iran and Christianity: Historical Identity and Present Relevance*, Bloomsbury Academic; 1 edition (December 29, 2011), p187, note 2. See also Mark Bradley, *Too Many to Jail: The Story of Iran's New Christians*. Monarch Books; 1st New edition (December 1, 2014).

[22] Thomas Latschan / js, "Iran's persecuted converts," *Deutsche Welle* [DW], 20 May, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/irans-persecuted-converts/a-18464360>

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Liana Aghajanian, "Iranian converts flock to Germany," *The Guardian*, Monday 12 May 2014.

[25]

<https://muslimstatistics.wordpress.com/2012/12/14/al-jazeera-6-million-muslims-convert-to-christianity-in-africa-each-year/>

[26]

<https://themuslimissue.wordpress.com/2013/06/17/w-got-it-here-al-jazeeras-deleted-interview-with-sheikh-ahmad-al-katani-on-6-million-muslim-conversions-to-christianity-per-year/>

[27] <http://web.archive.org/web/20040402023134/www.aljazeera.net/programs/shareea/articles/2000/12/12-12-6.htm>

[30]

<http://www.pewforum.org/2010/04/15/executive-summary-islam-and-christianity-in-saharan-africa/>

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] '350 million Muslims secretly live as Christian converts', November 4, 2014

<https://muslimstatistics.wordpress.com/2014/11/04/350-million-muslims-are-secretly-living-lives-as-christian-converts/>

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] "Moroccan Converts to Christianity told their stories", in *Morocco World News*, 10 February 2013, <http://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2013/02/77798/moroccan-converts-to-christianity-told-their-stories/>

Ibn Warraq's latest book with New English Review Press is [here](#).

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