

Wisdom-Based Guidance for Muslim Converts: The Role of Religious Institutions and NGOs in Navigating Non-Islamic Festival Celebrations

Azarudin Awang*, Azman Che Mat

Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies (ACIS), University Technology MARA (UiTM) Terengganu Branch, Dungun Campus, 23000 Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia.

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Muslim converts who attend non-Islamic celebrations such as Chinese New Year, Deepavali, and Christmas often face dilemmas between preserving their faith and maintaining social harmony. On one hand, Islamic law emphasizes the importance of safeguarding one's 'aqidah (Islamic faith) from any elements of polytheism and non-Islamic ritual practices. On the other hand, family relationships with non-Muslim relatives require approaches based on respect, compassion (ihsan), and sensitivity to cultural norms. This study aims to examine the approaches adopted by religious institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in guiding Muslim converts when navigating issues related to participating in non-Islamic celebrations across selected zones in Sabah, Johor, Penang, and Kelantan. The study employs a qualitative design using document analysis and semi-structured interviews with key informants from the four selected zones in Malaysia. Findings indicate that state religious institutions adopt a wisdom-based approach through the issuance of official guidelines guided by fatwas, the organization of alternative Islamic programs, and the provision of continuous psychosocial support to Muslim converts. NGOs complement these efforts by offering emotional support, religious education classes, and da'wah approaches that are sensitive to the Muslim converts' original cultural backgrounds. All these approaches emphasize the separation of cultural practices from religious rituals and uphold the identity of Muslim converts as Muslims living within non-Muslim family environments. The study recommends that frameworks such as fiqh al-ta'ayush (coexistence jurisprudence), maqasid al-shariah (objectives of Islamic law), and da'wah bil hāl (contextualized preaching) be adopted as the main foundation in developing comprehensive national guidelines to support converts in navigating non-Islamic celebrations in Malaysia.

Keywords: Strategy, Festival Celebrations, Muslim Converts, Religious Institutions, NGOs

INTRODUCTION

The involvement of Muslim communities in non-Islamic festival celebrations such as Chinese New Year, Deepavali, or Christmas often presents a dilemma, particularly for Muslim converts, regarding whether or not to participate. Their presence at celebrations organized by their non-Muslim families raises questions of Islamic law and the limits of sharia, especially when such celebrations involve religious or cultural elements that conflict with Islamic principles. In this context, the role of religious institutions and Islamic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that manage Muslim converts is crucial in providing guidance, emotional support, and clear understanding of 'aqidah (faith), enabling Muslim converts to make decisions that align with sharia without severing family ties. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the approaches adopted by religious institutions and NGOs in selected zones in guiding Muslim converts when facing issues related to participation in non-Islamic celebrations.

In Malaysia, Muslim converts often face a dilemma when their families invite them to join non-Islamic celebrations: on one hand, they must uphold their faith and sharia boundaries, while on the other hand, they need

to maintain family relationships. Ambiguity regarding whether their attendance constitutes support for non-Islamic religious elements or merely fulfills social obligations often generates feelings of confusion (Mohd Faqih & Zuliza, 2021). Although state-level Muslim convert guidance centers and Islamic NGOs have been established to provide explanations and recommend appropriate approaches for assisting Muslim converts when invited to their families' original celebrations, the modules offered remain inconsistent. In some locations, clear fiqh-based guidelines are provided, whereas in others, Muslim converts must rely on informal advice or personal exploration (Azarudin & Azman, 2024). The absence of specific guidance regarding Muslim participation in non-Islamic festival events including matters related to food, attire, and ritual activities often undermines Muslim converts' confidence in making decisions. Simultaneously, Muslim converts face social pressure to "readapt" to their original communities within a 'new' religious context, which can partly challenge their Islamic identity (Mohd Zulfikaar & Zaifudin, 2024). Therefore, a more in-depth study is needed to explore the role of religious institutions and NGOs in addressing the faith, emotional, and social needs of Muslim converts, especially in relation to their interactions with non-Muslim family members.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Festivals

Celebration of festivals in Islam is not merely an expression of joy; it also constitutes a form of worship imbued with spiritual values, gratitude, and devotion to Allah. Major Islamic festivals, such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, not only mark the completion of specific acts of worship, such as fasting and Hajj, but also serve as a medium to strengthen ukhuwah (brotherhood), support diverse communities, and express compassion within the framework of family and societal life. These celebrations also provide an opportunity to enhance family bonds and harmonious interactions with non-Muslim communities, while observing Islamic etiquette and legal boundaries. Therefore, festivals in Islam carry profound meaning as a manifestation of balance between spiritual obligations, social responsibilities, and universal human values (Mukhriz, 2025).

The concept of non-Islamic festival celebrations in a plural society like Malaysia can be understood as a space for social and cultural interaction that fosters harmony and strengthens inter-ethnic and interfaith relationships. Although Islam does not recognize non-Islamic festivals as acts of worship, selective and prudent participation such as offering greetings, visiting non-Muslim family members, or attending certain events without engaging in polytheistic practices or religious rituals is permissible as a form of ihsan (benevolence) and da'wah bil-hāl (contextual preaching). Within the framework of fiqh al-muamalat, this approach reflects a principle of tasāmuḥ (principled tolerance) based on maqasid al-shariah, i.e., maintaining social cohesion, as long as it does not conflict with Islamic creed and legal boundaries. However, the limitations set by the Muslim community are sometimes perceived as restrictions on tolerance, causing awkwardness among non-Muslims. Nevertheless, these boundaries should be understood as part of religious principles that must be respected within the context of living together in a plural society (Nur Farhana et al., 2020).

Major Festivals in Malaysia

The major festivals in Malaysia reflect the country's ethnic and religious diversity, which forms the foundation of social harmony. The Muslim community in Malaysia celebrates two main festivals: Hari Raya Aidilfitri, marking the end of the month-long fasting during Ramadan, and Hari Raya Aidiladha, commemorating the sacrifice of Prophet Ibrahim and the value of devotion to God (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). The Chinese community celebrates the Lunar New Year, a colorful festival that marks the beginning of the lunar year, with traditions such as family reunions, giving ang pau (red packets), and lion dances (Tan, 2015). The Indian community celebrates Deepavali, symbolizing the victory of light over darkness and good over evil, by decorating homes with lamps and candles and gathering with family (Kumar, 2017). Meanwhile, the Buddhist community in Malaysia observes Wesak Day, commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha, through activities such as prayers, charitable giving, and releasing animals as a symbol of liberation (Chin, 2016). Thaipusam is celebrated by the Tamil Hindu community to commemorate the victory of Lord Murugan over evil, with rituals including processions to Batu Caves while carrying kavadi as a sign of sacrifice and gratitude (Ramasamy, 2018). In Sabah and Labuan, the Kadazan-Dusun, Murut, Rungus, and Lundayeh

communities celebrate the Kaamatan Festival on May 30–31 each year as a thanksgiving for the rice harvest. The festival is also marked by cultural activities such as the Sumazau dance and the Unduk Ngadau pageant (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). In Sarawak, Dayak communities such as the Iban and Bidayuh observe Gawai Dayak on June 1–2, a harvest festival that functions as both a religious and social ceremony to honor the harvest and mark the beginning of the new agricultural season (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010).

Muslim Converts in Malaysia

Muslim converts or mualaf in Malaysia refer to individuals from non-Muslim backgrounds who have embraced Islam, coming from diverse ethnic groups such as Chinese, Indian, and Indigenous (Orang Asli) communities. This ethnic diversity among Muslim converts reflects Malaysia's multicultural composition, encompassing various races, languages, cultures, and religions (Nur Shuhadah et al., 2024). The welfare and guidance of Muslim converts are managed by state religious institutions, with assistance from NGOs focused on new Muslims, including the Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA), Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia (PERKIM), and Islamic Outreach ABIM (IOA). These organizations provide initiatives such as basic Islamic education, welfare assistance, and dawah programs (Nur Najwa Hanani et al., 2022).

Typically, Muslim converts undergo a period of “identity conflict” due to familial opposition and challenges in adapting to Islamic culture (Nur A'thiroh & Norra, 2023). Therefore, they require continuous support and wisdom-based da'wah approaches that consider their original cultural backgrounds to ensure their journey of spiritual migration remains strong and becomes a positive reflection for their communities of origin. The relationship between Muslim converts and their families is often complex and gradual, influenced by emotional, religious, cultural, and social acceptance factors. Some Muslim converts maintain good relations with their non-Muslim families, especially when the conversion process is carried out harmoniously and wisely. However, it is undeniable that some experience rejection, marginalization, or pressure from families who struggle to accept the change in faith, along with negative stereotypes toward Islam (Zaifuddin et al., 2025).

Muslim converts also serve as bridges connecting Muslim and non-Muslim communities, as they understand both worlds in terms of culture, language, and way of life. Their position at the intersection of identities enables them to act as effective agents of dawah and maintain social ties between religions and ethnicities (Safinah et al., 2021). Through their personal experience in adjusting to life as Muslims, Muslim converts can explain Islam with a more empathetic and culturally appropriate approach to their families and the wider non-Muslim community, thereby strengthening harmony and mutual understanding within Malaysia's pluralistic society.

Guidelines for the Involvement of Muslim Converts in Festivals

Discussions on the legal rulings and guidelines regarding Muslim participation in non-Islamic festivals have been extensively addressed in contemporary fiqh literature and local fatwas. For instance, the Lajnah Fatwa al-Da'im (1990), comprising prominent scholars from Saudi Arabia, explicitly prohibited any form of Muslim involvement in festivals organized by followers of other religions. According to this fatwa, such participation is considered a form of taḥābbuh (imitation) and implicitly implies approval of practices that contradict the principles of tauhid in Islam. However, Ahmad al-Syarbashi (n.d.) notes that Islam permits participation in festivals with non-Muslims, particularly when it involves close acquaintances such as colleagues, neighbors, and friends. Such participation is only allowed if the event does not include elements that conflict with Islamic beliefs or involve prohibited activities, such as the provision of alcohol, use of drugs, or religious rituals incompatible with Islam.

Typically, festival celebrations involve close family members, friends, and relatives, regardless of religion, gathering together to celebrate. Considering Malaysia's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, guidelines for Muslim participation in non-Islamic festivals were presented in the Muzakarah of the National Fatwa Committee on Islamic Affairs Malaysia, 68th session, held on 14 April 2005. Overall, the Muzakarah concluded that Muslim participation in non-Islamic religious festivals is permissible under specific conditions. These conditions include avoiding participation in rituals contradicting Islamic beliefs, ensuring no element violates syarak, refraining from behaviors or symbols that disrespect Islam, avoiding actions that could be sensitive to Muslims, and not

engaging in activities against Islamic moral and ethical values (Farrah Wahida & Adam, 2021).

Nonetheless, the real challenge arises in the lived experiences of Muslim converts, who often face dilemmas between upholding Islamic faith and maintaining harmonious relationships with non-Muslim family members. Muslim converts frequently experience emotional pressure and confusion when invited to festivals such as Chinese New Year, Deepavali, or Christmas organized by their families. Even with the intention of preserving family ties, there is concern that participation may inadvertently breach the limits of Islamic faith (Mohd Faqih & Zuliza, 2021). Nik Azis Nik Pa et al. (2021) highlight that the imbalance between social obligations and religious demands among Muslim converts can result in psychological stress and identity conflict, particularly in the absence of clear guidance and support from religious institutions.

Collaboration Between Religious Institutions and NGOs in Guiding Muslim Converts

In this context, the role of religious institutions such as State Islamic Religious Departments, Islamic Religious Councils, and da'wah centers like the Muslim Converts Guidance Centers is crucial in providing clear understanding of the boundaries permitted in non-Islamic festival celebrations. According to Mahayudin Yahaya et al. (2018), comprehensive and continuous guidance programs for Muslim converts can illuminate issues such as social participation without violating the principles of aqidah. Guidance modules that integrate aspects of fiqh, socio-cultural understanding, and psychology are highly effective in strengthening the spiritual resilience of Muslim converts when facing pressure from their original families. This effort is further reinforced through moral support provided by Islamic NGOs, which complement the role of official institutions.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that serve Muslim converts in Malaysia, such as PERKIM, ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia), MACMA, and the Hidayah Centre Foundation, play a significant role in attending to the emotional and social well-being of Muslim converts. These organizations not only provide religious education classes but also serve as reference points and new social networks for Muslim converts. According to Nurul Izzati Ismail and Haliza Harun (2021), such NGOs are able to offer platforms for Muslim converts to share experiences, express concerns, and receive balanced guidance that reconciles the demands of syarak with familial obligations. In the context of non-Islamic festivals, NGOs often act as intermediaries, helping to explain guidelines tactfully and assisting Muslim converts in finding compromises, such as attending without participating in ritual activities or offering gifts as gestures of respect without compromising their aqidah.

Participation of Muslim converts in non-Islamic festivals is a complex issue that requires a holistic approach. It should not be viewed solely from a legal perspective, but must also consider familial, emotional, and social dimensions. In this regard, close collaboration between religious institutions and NGOs is essential to create a comprehensive support framework for Muslim converts, enabling them to uphold Islamic principles while remaining connected to their original families, thereby fostering social harmony grounded in understanding and empathy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed two main methods: document analysis and field study. Document analysis involved reviewing secondary sources such as books, journals, theses, and articles to understand the background of the topic and identify existing research gaps. The field study was conducted in four selected zones in Malaysia: the East Zone (Kelantan), the South Zone (Johor), East Malaysia (Sabah), and the North Zone (Penang). Accordingly, interviews were conducted with four individuals who are directly involved in managing Muslim converts at the main guidance centers in each zone.

A purposive sampling method was used to select respondents suitable for the study's objectives. Data were collected through in-depth interviews using semi-structured questions developed based on the study's themes. A pilot study was first conducted to assess the appropriateness of the questions and identify any field constraints. Interview responses were recorded in audio format, then transcribed verbatim and analyzed through coding to identify key themes. For confidentiality purposes, study participants were identified using codes such as Info#1

to Info#4. This study obtained approval from the Research Ethics Committee (REC), and all participants provided informed consent prior to the interview sessions. Other ethical considerations, including confidentiality of identity, the right to withdraw, and assurance that the data would be used solely for academic purposes, were fully observed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Conditional Participation Based on Mufti Department Guidelines

Typically, Muslim converts consult with their religious teachers (ustaz or ustazah) before participating in celebrations or cultural events from their original communities, especially when such events involve sensitive religious or customary aspects. In this regard, institutions managing Muslim converts adopt a supportive approach by allowing conditional participation guided by official guidelines issued by the Mufti's office. These guidelines emphasize that Muslim converts participation in non-Islamic festivals is permitted as long as it does not involve any acts of worship, religious rituals, communal prayers, or actions that may cause confusion regarding Islamic faith. Conversely, participation in social aspects such as attending festive meals, visiting family during celebrations, or engaging in cultural activities that are not religious in nature may be considered, based on maintaining familial ties and social harmony. This supportive approach allows Muslim convert to maintain connections with their families and original communities without compromising their religious beliefs, while simultaneously strengthening their integration into the Muslim community. As expressed in the transcript:

"...so if they want to attend the celebration, they will first check the guidelines (Mufti's office guidelines), what is allowed and what is not..." (Info#1)

Similarly, regarding the death of non-Muslim family members, mualaf often face confusion and questions concerning the limits of their participation in such ceremonies:

"It's like with celebrations... mostly with funerals, they come back... They like to ask, 'Can I do this, Ustazah?' We provide explanations, answer their questions, and guide them if they want to know more." (Info#4)

Guidelines issued by the Mufti Department serve as a legal framework offering clear directions to Muslim converts to prevent involvement in acts that may compromise their faith, such as worship, rituals, prayers, or religious symbols from non-Islamic practices. These guidelines are grounded in the principles of *saddu al-zarā'i* (blocking paths that may harm faith) and *maṣlaḥah mursalah* (protecting public interest), aligning with the objectives of Shariah (*maqasid syariah*) in preserving religion (*hifz al-dīn*) (Farrah Wahida & Adam, 2021). Based on the findings, Info#1 emphasizes the reliance of converts on the Mufti's guidelines before making decisions, whereas Info#4 reflects the reality of converts who are more often confronted with practical situations, particularly in matters related to the death of non-Muslim family members, thus requiring immediate guidance from religious authorities.

Khairul Azhar (2020) notes that *fiqh*-based approaches to participation in non-Islamic events should consider social and familial necessities and potential opportunities for *dawah* by demonstrating the goodness of Islam. Hence, Muslim converts participation in social interactions with their families such as attending weddings, festive gatherings, family visits, or cultural activities may be deemed permissible, provided it does not involve prohibited imitation (*tashābbuh*). Muslim converts often maintain close ties with their families, which necessitates a thoughtful *fiqh*-based approach to prevent conflicts (Suraya et al., 2024). According to Mohd Faqih & Zuliza (2019), although the program's primary goal is positive to strengthen inter-ethnic cohesion its implementation must adhere to Islamic legal standards. Therefore, institutions such as State Islamic Religious Departments, PERKIM, and Mualaf Centres play a crucial role in continuously guiding Muslim converts, not only in legal matters but also in psychosocial and cultural integration. Muslim converts require not only answers regarding permissibility but also practical guidance to adapt to their new life without neglecting existing family relationships. Conditional guidelines from the Mufti's office thus allow Muslim converts to interact with non-Muslim family members in a directed and respectful manner without compromising Islamic principles, reflecting Islam's flexibility in pluralistic social contexts in accordance with the spirit of *rahmatan lil-'alamin*.

Ensuring the Separation of Ritual Elements

Muslim converts are also reminded not to engage in any ritual elements in non-Islamic celebrations or cultural practices. This separation aims to safeguard faith by distinguishing between permissible social activities such as attending meals, visiting, or participating in cultural events and prohibited religious rituals like lighting candles, communal prayers, or participation in other religious ceremonies. Institutions managing Muslim converts play a critical role in guiding Muslim converts to avoid confusion between culture and religion. Participation while avoiding ritual elements becomes the main guideline for Muslim converts to continue engaging with their original communities without compromising their Islamic beliefs. As illustrated in the transcript:

“...some activities are just about large family meals. In Deepavali, there is worship... the religious office does not allow that...” (Info#3)

Participation is not only guided by faith considerations but also involves issues of dining etiquette and social interaction. This is further explained:

“We advise Muslim converts that they may attend family celebrations, as long as they do not engage in polytheistic acts. For instance, do not worship idols, do not join other religious prayers, and do not consume forbidden foods. They are also advised to observe modesty and proper conduct as Muslims. If the celebration is social, such as meals or visits, it is allowed.” (Info#1)

For Muslim converts wishing to celebrate festivals in their country of origin, institutions provide information regarding religious boundaries:

“We understand their culture, and even though we remind them of religious boundaries, they are allowed to celebrate family events like Chinese New Year politely and without any polytheistic elements. Sometimes they return to their home countries for celebrations or family deaths, and we provide legal explanations.” (Info#4)

Further guidance is given for Muslim converts celebrating the Kaamatan festival:

“The Kaamatan festival among the Dusun community in Sabah is celebrated extensively and recognized as a public holiday. We do not prohibit Muslim converts from participating, but they must observe Shariah boundaries. For example, regarding food, they must ensure it is halal and not mixed with forbidden items.” (Info#1)

The findings show that Info#3 emphasizes a strict prohibition against participating in non-Islamic rituals, Info#1 highlights adherence to Islamic guidelines while maintaining social etiquette, whereas Info#4 reflects the practical realities of converts who often face family situations with non-Muslims and therefore require immediate guidance. Separating cultural and religious rituals is not merely a legal issue but a foundational step in establishing a strong Muslim identity for Muslim converts. Mohd Anuar et al. (2016) note that Muslim converts navigating between their original cultural background and Islamic commitment often experience identity confusion without balanced guidance. Ritual separation serves as a symbolic measure to reinforce commitment to their new religious life, implemented with a wasatiyyah-based approach emphasizing moderation and harmony, allowing Muslim converts to maintain cultural roots while building a stable Muslim identity.

However, some Muslim convert still face familial pressure to participate in celebrations containing non-Islamic rituals. Choosing not to engage in rituals while attending certain events, such as meals or helping with preparations, constitutes a form of soft resistance (*mujāmalah fi ghayr al-maʿsiyah*), which is gentle in permissible matters but firm in prohibited ones. Organizations like PERKIM, MACMA, and State Islamic Religious Departments act as agents of religious socialization, providing guidance on distinguishing religious rituals from cultural practices. Ahmad Yunus et al. (2017) assert that continuous education helps Muslim converts confidently delineate boundaries between religious obligations and cultural expectations, rather than making emotional decisions. Therefore, avoiding participation in non-Muslim prayers, candle lighting, or worship does not sever relationships but preserves religious integrity within a pluralistic social space.

Integrating Celebrations According to Islamic Shariah

Religious offices also organize non-Islamic festivals in a manner that aligns with Islamic principles, providing a more controlled alternative, especially for Muslim converts. This initiative aims to demonstrate how celebrations from one's original community can be adapted to avoid reckless participation in events that may include elements contradictory to Islamic faith and law. This step also reflects the concern of religious institutions in guiding Muslim converts to adapt within their original communities, particularly when invited to celebrate together. As expressed in the transcript:

"...we once organized a program with the Dayak Muslim Association on 1 June for Gawai... but it followed Islamic principles, such as observing hijab..." (Info#1)

During Chinese New Year celebrations, Muslim members of the Chinese community can gather and share meals with family, provided that the food is halal and no non-Islamic religious practices are observed by Muslims. This is explained as follows:

"We also ensure that elements inappropriate from a religious standpoint are omitted, and the concept of the celebration is modified to align with Islamic principles." (Info#3)

Further, Info#2 stated:

"We, together with the Religious Office, organize Chinese New Year celebrations while adapting them with Islamic values as a more harmonious alternative."

In general, Info#1 explains that the Gawai celebration is adapted by ensuring proper covering of the aurat, allowing Dayak Muslim culture to be preserved without violating Islamic law. Meanwhile, Info#2 and Info#3 emphasize that during the Chinese New Year celebration, the food served must be halal, while any form of religious rituals should be avoided. The Islamic principle of *al-taysir*, emphasizing ease and suitability in the application of law according to socio-cultural realities, is manifested through efforts by religious institutions and NGOs guiding Muslim converts to separate religious ritual elements from social aspects of non-Islamic festivals. Al-Qaradawi asserts that the principle of *taysir* is a crucial foundation in minority Muslim jurisprudence (*fiqh al-aqalliyyāt*), enabling Muslims especially Muslim converts to maintain social relationships without compromising faith (Zainul, 2021). The experiences shared by informants demonstrate that celebrations such as Gawai or Chinese New Year, infused with Islamic values, are manifestations of Islamized culture.

The concept of cultural Islamization aligns with the study by Azarudin and Khadijah (2016), which emphasizes purifying culture from elements contradictory to faith while preserving moral values and social heritage. Such an approach allows Muslim converts to remain engaged within their families and original communities without identity confusion or open resistance. It also aligns with the concept of *da'wah bil hāl*, conveying Islamic teachings through example and harmonious living rather than outright rejection of one's original culture (Farrah Wahida & Adam, 2021). In other words, this approach helps Muslim converts understand that not all celebrations need to be wholly rejected; they can be adapted in accordance with Shariah. Azarudin et al. (2022) further indicate that Muslim converts who receive institutional support in the form of social and religious guidance are more likely to adapt positively within pluralistic communities.

Hari Raya Gatherings with Multiethnic Features

Religious offices and NGOs also organize Hari Raya celebrations involving the non-Muslim family members of Muslim converts. The purpose is to foster familial bonds and correct misunderstandings within families that Islam disregards family relationships due to religious differences. Participants from various ethnic backgrounds contribute traditional dishes from their respective cultures. This is described as follows:

"...we organized a Hari Raya Puasa gathering, and the feast included dishes from various ethnicities, such as Indian, Sabah, and others..." (Info#3)

Another informant stated:

“We create an Islamic-oriented celebration environment. Sometimes there are cultural activities, performances, and Raya feasts. We encourage Muslim converts to bring their families so that family members can witness and experience an Islamic celebration filled with proper etiquette and values of love.” (Info#1)

Further clarification was given:

“Muslim converts really enjoy it because all the food is delicious, and our team provides ample explanation. I feel relieved that they can celebrate Raya with their families even after embracing Islam.” (Info#2)

Info#3 emphasizes the preparation of Hari Raya feasts with a variety of foods representing different ethnic groups, while Info#1 describes the Islamic atmosphere of the celebration that encourages the participation of non-Muslim family members. Meanwhile, Info#2 highlights the joy of converts in being able to celebrate Hari Raya with their families despite religious differences. Nevertheless, all these efforts by the informants aim to strengthen love and family bonds within the Muslim converts community, even across different faiths. In this context, the involvement of non-Muslim family members in Hari Raya celebrations also serves as a platform for fostering positive perceptions of Islam and correcting negative stereotypes within families that conversion severs familial ties. Azarudin and Khadijah (2016) also report that one source of psychosocial pressure on Muslim converts is guilt toward families who feel alienated. Thus, such programs address the psychological and emotional needs of Muslim converts, while conveying the message that Islam values blood ties and family bonds despite religious differences. Overall, these findings demonstrate a realistic approach that not only supports Muslim converts but also strengthens social relationships and broadens understanding of Islam among non-Muslims through firsthand experiences characterized by proper etiquette, compassion, and mutual respect.

Not Organizing Non-Islamic Celebrations Formally

To avoid potential polemics, religious departments do not formally organize non-Islamic celebrations but instead replace them with Islamic programs that are mualaf-friendly. Controversies around such celebrations arise because they contain various ritualistic and symbolic elements deemed incompatible with Islamic principles and teachings. Elements originating from non-Islamic cultural traditions may cause confusion among Muslims regarding the permissible boundaries of practice. Consequently, debates and ethical questions often arise among Islamic scholars and adherents, particularly within pluralistic societies where such celebrations are widely observed. Therefore, religious departments adopt a middle path by not organizing these celebrations. This is illustrated in the following transcript:

“...we focus more on Islamic fellowship days such as Maulid and Maal Hijrah... so for celebrations like these, we do not hold them...” (Info#4)

Further explanation from another transcript states:

“JAIS (Sabah Islamic Religious Department) does not organize or support non-Islamic celebrations. We focus solely on Islam and ensure that Muslims observe religious boundaries. For example, we encourage Muslims to celebrate Islamic festivals such as Aidilfitri and Aidiladha only.” (Info#1)

The prohibition on these celebrations arises from the fact that they include religious ritual elements considered inconsistent with Shariah principles. For instance, Wesak and Thaipusam celebrations involve various rituals closely tied to their respective religious beliefs, such as honoring deities, using mantras or incantations, and performing symbolic ceremonies. This is expressed as follows:

“Wesak (Buddhism) and Thaipusam (Hinduism) involve practices closely related to their religious beliefs, such as worshipping deities... so we do not participate.” (Info#3)

The approach taken by state religious departments, such as not organizing non-Islamic celebrations and instead offering Islamic programs suitable for Muslim converts like Maulidur Rasul and Maal Hijrah is a measure

aligned with preserving their faith. This strategy also aims to prevent confusion, especially among Muslim converts who may not yet fully understand Shariah boundaries. Info#4 mentions that only celebrations such as Maulid and Maal Hijrah are held, while Info#1 explains that JAIS only encourages Islamic celebrations like Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Info#3 rejects involvement in Wesak and Thaipusam because they contain non-Islamic religious rituals. Azizan Baharuddin (2014) emphasizes that religious institutions play a crucial role in regulating Muslim participation in interfaith activities to prevent syncretism or dilution of core beliefs. Basri Ibrahim (2011) notes that organizing non-Islamic festivals by Islamic institutions may trigger faith conflicts if left uncontrolled, particularly in multi-religious societies. Nazneen et al. (2018) explain the concept of *fiqh ta'āyush* as a guideline for harmonious coexistence with non-Muslim communities without participating in their religious rituals. Such interactions should be built on respect rather than ritual involvement to safeguard Islamic faith. Nur Farhana et al. (2020) highlight that understanding other religions should occur within a Shariah-guided framework of tolerance, not based on unrestricted openness.

CONCLUSION

The involvement of the Muslim community, particularly Muslim converts, in non-Islamic celebrations presents a dilemma requiring a wise, Shariah-compliant approach that also considers psychosocial and familial dimensions. Living in a pluralistic society makes the relationship between Muslim converts and their original families more than just social; it is laden with emotion, cultural values, and identity challenges. Attendance at celebrations such as Chinese New Year, Deepavali, or Christmas often raises confusion regarding whether participation constitutes respect or endorsement of non-Islamic religious elements.

Research findings indicate that religious institutions and NGOs play a significant role in guiding Muslim converts to maintain family relationships without compromising faith. Through Mufti-issued guidelines, mualaf-friendly da'wah programs, and approaches separating ritual from cultural practices, Muslim converts are supported in making informed and confident decisions. Alternative Islamic programs and multiethnic Hari Raya gatherings demonstrate that Islam does not reject interfaith social engagement but embraces humanistic values within defined limits.

Thus, a balance between religious obligations and social needs of Muslim converts can be achieved through synergy among religious policy, psychosocial support, and da'wah bil hāl approaches. This study demonstrates that Islam can guide its adherents to interact harmoniously in a multi-religious society without compromising the core principles of faith. Principles such as *fiqh ta'āyush* and the objectives of Shariah (*maqasid al-shariah*) provide a framework to support Muslim converts and build a society rooted in mutual respect and moral integrity. Future research should focus on the direct experiences of converts with their families of origin in the context of non-Muslim festival celebrations, taking into account psychosocial dimensions, identity challenges, and the coping strategies employed.

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