

Article

Islam in Iranian Prisons: Practicing Religious Rituals behind Bars

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Abstract: The focus of research, pertaining to the practice of Islam in prisons, has been primarily on Western countries (the US, the UK, and France) where Muslim inmates struggle with discrimination and stigmatization as “religious radicals” or “terrorists”. Far less is known about the relationship Muslim prisoners have with their faith in countries where Islam is the official religion and imposed by the State, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. Understanding the influence of political, legal, and religious institutions is crucial to exploring Islam in Iranian prisons, as well as the role of other less prominent determining factors. This qualitative study examines the practice and perception of Islam in Iranian prisons. Data were collected through 90 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with prisoners and former prisoners, and analyzed using grounded theory. Results show that practicing Islam rituals and converting from a “sinner” to a “believer” was pervasive among inmates on death row and incarcerated mothers who left their children for a life of confinement. Practicing Islamic rituals, which entail the achievement of privileges, especially memorizing the holy Quran or attending congregational prayers, question the authenticity of faith and religious beliefs in prison; prisoners disparage those who practice rituals as “fake believers” who are merely seeking preferential treatment. While practicing Islam rituals provoked hatred and humor among prisoners, attending the Ashura mourning ceremony and performing self-flagellation are respected and admired practices. Iranian prisoners create a subculture where Islam is not pivotal to constructing or reconstructing their identities, yet religious-based rehabilitation still exists.



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Keywords: Iran; Islam; the holy Quran; religious-based rehabilitation

1. Introduction

Research concerning Islam in prisons has been focused mostly on Western countries (the US, the UK, and France) where Muslim inmates struggle with discrimination and stigmatization as “religious radicals” or “terrorists”. Far less is known about the relationship Muslim prisoners have with their faith in countries, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, where Islam is the official religion and imposed by the State. Most writings on the topic are merely personal experiences of imprisoned political and social activists, especially pre and post the 1979 revolution. Those published prison memoirs, which mostly focused on the daily life of prisoners, have not specifically explored the exercise of Islam in Iranian prisons. Particularly, there is a lack of information about practicing Islam among the inmates other than political activists.

A wide variety of topics regarding the practice of Islam in Western prisons have been assessed—i.e., radicalization and the impact of organizational and institutional factors on the process of radicalization (Marranci 2020; Khosrokhavar 2013; Hamm 2009), Muslim chaplaincies (or imams) and religious services to practice Islam in prison (Khosrokhavar 2015; Basia and Wilson 2013), patterns of conversion to Islam in prison (Wilkinson et al. 2021; Spalek and El-Hassan 2007; Ammar et al. 2004), conversion to Islam and rehabilitation (Kusha 2016), and the effect of gender on the religiosity of Muslim prisoners (Schneuwly Purdie et al. 2021; Dix-Richardson 2002; Castel de Bergerac 2020; Béraud et al. 2017). The dearth of scientific evaluations and scholarly work on the Islamic faith in Iranian prisons

provides the basis for this study. In this paper, an attempt is calibrated to explore the perception and practice of Islam in contemporary Iranian prisons.

2. Islam in Prison: After the Revolution

The practice of Islam in Iranian prisons following the Islamic revolution can be divided into three periods: early after the revolution, transition, and late. After the 1979 revolution, not only was the judiciary Islamicized, but also prisons emerged as “educational institutions” where prisoners were meant to adopt elements of good behavior dictated by the principles of Islam. According to Asad-o Allah Lajevardi (warden of Evin prison), prisons are converted into “rehabilitation centers”, “ideological schools”, or “indoctrination and reformatory centers” wherein prisoners study Islam and the Quran, and, with the help of “honest repentance”, turned from “deviates” into “human beings” before returning to the society (Abrahamian 1999, pp. 138, 168). Prisoners were considered inerudite children who are to be educated and transformed in prison. According to Rejali (1994, p. 119), different techniques were utilized by the authorities to intimidate and induce change in prisoners through what they “say, hear, see and do not see”, which were predicated on the Islamic faith and principles of the revolution. The techniques included but were not limited to reciting and repeating sections of the Quran or slogans (e.g., God is great) and listening to broadcasted prayers or religious speeches. Slogans such as “Death to the Unbelievers and Those Who Fight God” were displayed ubiquitously in prisons. The prisoners were surrounded by Islamic propaganda from various sources (i.e., radio, television, prison loudspeakers, compulsory Friday prayers, Ramadan fast, Moharram flagellations, and ideological sessions) (Abrahamian 1999). Collective singing the song of “Khomeini is Imam”¹ became a mandatory morning routine in all wards of Ghezel Hesar prison (Ardavan 2003, p. 42). The prisons were considered educational and ideological schools where prisoners were constantly coerced, inundated, and exposed to Islamic educational sessions, propaganda, and slogans. Attending the Islamic Ideologic training sessions were mandatory, and prisoners were forced and threatened to regularly show up (Ardavan 2003, p. 41). For two to three hours every morning, prisoners had to attend an “educational program”, which was based on Islamic propaganda that consisted of video lectures by mullahs, and attendees were “forced to stay in the room, awake and attentive” (Agah et al. 2007, p. 87). During Ramadan, as Agah et al. (2007) report, food was served twice a day, provisioned at dusk and dawn. Prisoners were forced awake (usually through loud broadcasts of religious chanting over the prisons’ speakers around three in the morning) at dawn to not only receive their food, but also pray before sunrise. To satisfy the informants, most inmates pretended to pray and then proceeded to return to sleep. Furthermore, female inmates were exposed to additional restrictions, such as following the Islamic dress code (wearing a full black chador) and the prohibition of watching sports, such as soccer, as the athletes wore “revealing” clothing (i.e., short pants). Practicing Islam in this period was rendered compulsory, especially for political prisoners. According to one of the participants who has been in prison for more than three decades, the Islamic restrictions were applied to other criminals (e.g., drug-related offenders²) as well; however, they were not as serious as for the political prisoners.

One of the most controversial groups of prisoners, particularly among political prisoners, who were created to enforce religious morality and oversee the Islamization transition of prisons after the revolution, was the *tavabins* (repenters)—inmates who denounced their political preferences and agreed to follow Islam rules and principles. Their existence was crucial as they surveilled prisoners to report any disobedience and religious deviations (e.g., skipping prayers, breaking Ramadan fasting rules, etc.) for the sake of their freedom and additional privileges in prison. Refusing to comply with religious principles resulted in severe flagellation. Those who did not practice Islam were not only punished physically (i.e., flogged) by the guards, but were also subject to social isolation and exclusion; none were allowed to communicate with them. Consequently, they wandered between cells and corridors to find a spot to sleep. *Najes* rules became much more severe and complicated

after the revolution. Prisoners had to consider *najes* rules to avoid any physical contact with infidels, leftists, and Bahais. There were sharp distinguishing lines between believers and nonbelievers, repenters and non-repenters, and Marxists and non-Marxists. Prisoners were asked about their religious standing by guards at the point of entry into prison. Prisoners were pointed towards designated wards based on their responses. During this period, prisoners were divided into unbelievers and believers. They were sorted and assigned to the different wards based on their response to the mandatory question: “Do you pray or do you not pray—like the Jews?” (Abrahamian 1999, p. 172).

Although religious programs, Islamic propaganda, and Ramadan rituals (e.g., serving food two times daily) are still in operation in prisons³, most of the restrictions and coercions regarding praying and fasting were relaxed in 1985 due to the separation of nonbelievers from believers and the execution of most political prisoners in 1989 (Sabet 2004, p. 47). In 1988, during the mass execution of political activists, the religious beliefs of inmates (e.g., beliefs in God, Islam, and prayers predicated on the holy Quran) were targeted rather than their political affiliations. The objective of the religious disciplinary apparatus, early after the revolution, was training “the elements of good behavior and the pains that are the reward of evil conduct” (Rejali 1994, p. 118) and creating “a locus of convergence for everything that must be known: a perfect eye that nothing would escape”. (Foucault 1979, p. 173).

3. Islam in Prison: From 1989 to the Recent

Gradually, from 1989, after the mass execution of political prisoners and designating a separated ward for political prisoners, the coercion regarding practicing Islamic rituals faded out. The priority of the state significantly leaned from political issues toward social ones, such as drugs and addiction. By overemphasizing on a crime-oriented approach and supply reduction in the field of drugs rather than a treatment approach and demand or harm reduction, the number of drug-related arrests increased from 396,986 in 1980–1988 to 738,167 in 1989–1996 and from 204,385 in 2010 to 217,851 in 2014 (Madani Qahrifarkhi 2011, p. 339). The growing number of drug-related criminals and emphasizing on punishment rather than rehabilitation turned the prisons into a “recidivism workshop” (Anaraki 2021a, p. 51).

Before assigning any formal privileges to those who memorized the holy Quran in prison in 2010, prisoners did not care about practicing rituals and, furthermore, stigmatized and excluded those who were practicing Islam. While research in England, Wales, and France has identified a culture of discrimination against Muslim inmates who guards often described as “plastic” Muslims, in Iranian prisons, similar labels are assigned by the inmates themselves (Beckford et al. 2005, p. 114). Prisoners humiliate those who actively worship as “fake believers” merely seeking preferential treatment. Often, they are also suspected to be a “*Mokhber*”. Nevertheless, inmates on death row were an exception in this regard. Practicing Islam in this period depends on the prisoner’s criminal history and the ward in which they are assigned to.

During the late period, the instrumental mechanism of religion initiated in 2010 when memorizing the holy Quran was considered a privilege in prison. Those privileges do not apply to praying or fasting; as one of the interlocutors believes, memorizing the holy Quran was the only performative practice that is “publicly displayable and politically maneuverable”. Prison authorities mostly act in a neutral manner toward individuals praying and fasting. However, it was still appreciated by them to preserve and maintain security and safety in prison. According to statistics, there were 900 *Hafez* (memorizer) of the Quran at the Hormozgan prison in 2019⁴, 64 *Hafez* of the Quran at the Ghezel Hesar prison⁵, and 1230 *Hafez* of the Quran at the Tehran prisons in 2021⁶. In 2013, there were 720 *Hafez* of the Quran at the Isfahan prison and the sentence of 16 prisoners on death row was reduced to life imprisonment accordingly⁷. Meanwhile, one of the prisoners evoked the experiences of a fellow prisoner in 2005, who memorized eight *juz* (parts) of the Quran but was not assigned any privileges. Practicing Islam, especially memorizing

the Quran, converted into privileges for most prisoners, with notable exception to those who convert to a “newborn Muslim” and did not care for privileges. Privileges include but were not limited to prison furloughs, remission, extra in-person visits, extra phone minutes, and a guaranteed permission to leave the ward to attend educational classes, cinema, and access to gym facilities. Recently, however, passion and enthusiasm toward memorizing the Quran to achieve privileges have been significantly decreased as authorities gradually altered certain privileges (e.g., decreasing prison leave).

4. Methods

This study is based on gathered data derived from in-depth, semi-structured interviews in Iran in the summer and fall of 2012 and 2017, with 90 prisoners and former prisoners, where data were analyzed using grounded theory.

The main objective of the first study conducted in 2012 was to explore the lived experiences of incarcerated mothers and their children⁸. With the full support of a non-governmental organization, which was in charge of operating a kindergarten in prison, I got official permission to gain access to the women’s ward and conduct interviews with incarcerated mothers. Struggling to gain access to participants was the primary barrier to studying such sensitive topics in Iran. Even with the full-fledged support of the respective nongovernmental organization, I was recurrently sent to different prison departments to meet several authorities before receiving the required official permission over the timespan of a couple of weeks. However, having official permission does not always guarantee access to the women’s ward. Decisions regarding my access were changed on a weekly basis and depended on the opinion of a shift guard (i.e., some of them were not co-operative until the very last day) and the situation of the ward (i.e., in case of any tensions or conflicts among inmates or guards).

The second study was conducted in 2017⁹. I travelled to Iran after years of studying and living in Canada to collect data about the lived experiences of people who use/have used substances in prison and treatment organizations¹⁰. Despite all connections with several gatekeepers known from the previous study in prison, I could not attain access to the prison as I was studying at a Western university; this served as the main barrier to negotiating permission with gatekeepers. To reach saturation, I travelled from Isfahan to four cities (446 km to Tehran, 715 km to Mazandaran, and 676 km to Kerman) in Iran to access diverse participants and organizations (e.g., the Association for the Protection of Prisoners, Court, prisons, voluntary drug treatment camps, compulsory drug treatment camps, Narcotics Anonymous, rehabilitation center, and night drop-in center). As a female researcher who was studying a very sensitive topic in Iran, I was warned of potential risks. However, during years of conducting research in prison and drug treatment settings, I did not face any serious issues with the authorities. In the second study, almost all the participants were recruited through gatekeepers in governmental and nongovernmental drug treatment organizations.

While I did not specifically focus on the issues of religion in either of the studies, part of the questions to comprehend the lived experiences of participants was about their activities and entertainment during incarceration. For some prisoners, attending Islam rituals, i.e., Friday collective prayer and Muharram flagellations (e.g., chest-beating, striking of backs with chains, and cutting forehead with swords), were considered as entertaining activities which provided them with socializing opportunities. Other than entertainment, I observed that, for some prisoners, especially those who served on death row or were mothers with children behind bars, practicing religious rituals and even converting from a “sinner” to “believer” comprised a pervasive phenomenon. That is why I decided to extract religious-related categories from the 2012 and 2017 studies.

4.1. Building Trust in the Field

I applied various strategies to establish and maintain rapport to build trust in the field of study during 2012 and 2017. For the first couple of weeks in prison, I was under

severe surveillance of the guards. One of the guards persistently wandered around me while I was interviewing the participants. As reflected by these circumstances, there was no sign of a trusting relationship with the guards nor prisoners. Prisoners explicitly stated that they were afraid of sharing any information as they were suspicious that the data would inevitably be utilized against them. However, I spent considerable amounts of time with participants, guards, and social workers, which gradually assisted in developing rapport. Regarding prisoners, from the very initial days of engagement, I was involved in their routine activities, from serving food, taking care of children, and visiting families, to consulting with social workers. I spent at least an hour or two with the prison social workers in the consulting services while they were offering consultations or discussing the clients' issues. Other times, I would be simply walking around and making conversation with the staff and guards, along with providing them with more details regarding the project. In prison, after a couple of weeks, the guards who oversaw in-person visits permitted my access to the visiting areas. While I was observing the interactions of prisoners with their family members, I was asked by one of the prisoners to hold her newborn baby. I took care of the timid baby for about 20 min. Unsurprisingly, many participants initiated sharing their stories and experiences after a couple of weeks. The trust of guards was garnered after a few weeks and their constant surveillance vanished. I found myself in an interesting position inside the prison, which was one who was mistakably taken as a prisoner. The only thing that distinguished me from the inmates was my black chador, as prisoners wear gray or dark floral chador.

In fact, constant reciprocated genial interactions with participants, showing respect, and expressing sympathy toward them play a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining trust between a researcher and participant (Liamputtong 2006; Mallozzi 2009). Almost all participants of this study have been excluded, isolated, and degraded and struggled with social, economic, and health issues. Being a good listener, giving them an opportunity to share their problems, and showing empathy helped to gradually build rapport and trust with the participants. In the night drop-in center, I started to teach the alphabet to a daughter of one of the clients, assisted in cooking dinner, and sorted out the food storage. As most of the treatment centers and night drop-in centers were financially in crisis, during the study, I bought fruits, sweets, and snacks for the clients at the center several times, especially during the initial contact, as suggested by gatekeepers who were aware of their needs and shortages. In accordance with the formal and informal rules of the organizations (e.g., governmental and nongovernmental), I adjusted my dress and appearance. For instance, I wore make-up and nail polish at the night drop-in center, and wore a chador with absolutely no make-up at the prison. I attempted to follow the formal rules partly due to its mandatory nature (i.e., wearing chador in prison) but mostly to make my appearance much more like the potential participants. This strategy allowed me to be more accepted among gatekeepers and participants. In addition to the aforementioned strategies, it was seldom sufficient to explain the objective and importance of the study to some managers, gatekeepers, and participants to attain their full co-operation and support. On one occasion, I directly, without the mediation of a gatekeeper, contacted the manager of the harm reduction center. The manager was impressed by the project and, after having regular meetings for a couple of days, I gained permission to contact potential participants at the center and be involved in their routine activities, such as distributing sterile injecting materials, condoms, menstrual pads, etc. Gradually, trusting and close relationships were formed with the participants along with the gatekeepers in nongovernmental organization as well.

4.2. Reflexivity and Objectivity

The crime-oriented approach toward incarcerated individuals and those who use/have used substances, which have consequently excluded, stigmatized, degraded, and isolated them as "unwanted", "criminal", "dangerous class", and "abnormal", is a societally dominant approach (Anaraki 2022). The pervasive punitive perception can be even tracked in

the strange and curious look of fellow passengers on the bus commute that I used to take back and forth to the prison, or receiving puzzled questions and comments about the topic of my studies (e.g., “How can you dare to sit and talk with prisoners? Are you scared when you talk with the murderers? How can you talk with them for six hours? Are there children inside the prison?” (Anaraki 2021a, pp. 1–2). Furthermore, it is reflected in the cautious advice of taxi drivers to dissuade me from going to the women night drop-in center to collect data. According to one of the interlocutors, the societal perceptions and stereotypes evaluate criminals as those who have “no religion and no faith”. I, as a researcher, needed to try and remain neutral and listen to what the participants were saying, see what participants were doing, and report the derived findings as accurately as possible. Being aware of my role as a researcher and my biases throughout the study, along with stepping back regularly to ask, “what is going on here?” gave me an opportunity to have some degree of objectivity (Glaser and Strauss 1967). It has often been argued that qualitative research is not based on objective reality and is not unbiased (Kvale 1996). Objectivity in qualitative research does not imply controlling variables; rather, it refers to reporting participants’ perceptions, interpretations, and understandings as accurately as possible. Since the values and beliefs of investigators are integral parts of their personalities, they cannot be extirpated. As King et al. (1994, p. 127) state, it is not “an attractive option” that the researcher forgets her/his knowledge to avoid selection bias; rather, the researcher should have an awareness of his or her bias throughout the process and attempt to partially correct it as an alternative option.

5. Findings

Ninety participants with experiences of incarceration were recruited via governmental and nongovernmental organizations in Iran. The participants consisted of 38 males and 52 females ranging in age from 10 to 65 years old. Four categories were identified and explored:

1. Death row and mothers’ wards: religious landscape;
2. Memorizing the Quran to minimize deprivation;
3. Performing prayers as a habit or seeking forgiveness;
4. Islamic Carnivals: Muharram and Ramadan.

5.1. Death Row and Mothers’ Wards: Religious Landscape

Most of the participants interviewed in this study considered the death row ward as a “spiritual and religious territory”. Inmates on death row most often are long-term prisoners who have been left alone behind bars due to lack of family support. Family members of inmates on death row struggle with restoring the lost honor due to the committed dishonorable and illegal activities. The death row ward, for most, is a permanent shelter and the last place they could call “home”. Lack of familial support (i.e., financial, emotional, and moral) and the bare possibility of clemency leave inmates with no choice but to make repentance and seek the forgiveness of God. As one of the participants who was incarcerated for 10 years states: “I lived in a death row for almost 10 years, it was my home, the last hope, it was the only shelter that I had. It is not easy. I did not have a face to get back to my family and my family gave up on me. Not any sort of contact with the outside world, nothing”. They are devoted to the practice of Islamic rituals (i.e., performing prayers, reading the holy Quran, fasting, etc.), with special attention to the five mandatory prayers (i.e., Fajr (sunrise prayer), Dhuhr (noon prayer), Asr (afternoon prayer), Maghrib (sunset prayer), and Isha (night prayer)). Participants believe that death row is an “exceptional” ward in which inmates not only amuse those who practice Islam, but also question prisoners with a lack of practice. This does not imply that death row is devoid of criminal activities, such as drug smuggling and consumption. Drug-related networks leave almost no wards in prison untouched; death row presents no exception to this phenomenon (Anaraki 2022). Yet, practicing religious rituals is a pervasive phenomenon to the extent that newcomers are forced to conform upon arrival. It seems to be the mandatory social rule at the beginning

of incarceration; however, this practice gradually becomes the sole source of serenity and tranquility for inmates. As the interlocutors constantly repeated: *“we lost our hope on human beings, so God would be the one and only who is left for us”*. While the drug network is an integral ingredient of prison life, the dominant spiritual and religious culture makes the death row the least challenging of wards in prison. According to the participant: *“it does not mean we won’t use drugs or we don’t smuggle drugs in prison; yes, we do, however, we perform prayers, practice fasting, and memorize Quran simultaneously”*.

Most often, guards permit commuting of long-term criminals on death row, who practice Islam, to other wards for the purpose of sustaining morale; however, the implicit purpose is to spread spirituality and encourage religious attitudes. The manners of high-status criminals who have already achieved respect among prisoners due to meeting informal hierarchical requirements (e.g., violent criminal history, controlling the drug network, wealth, financial reliability, etc.) are highly revered by other inmates (Anaraki 2021b). Being part of the most powerful criminals in prison and seriously devoted to Islam rituals emanates inspiration that influences other inmates’ attitudes. They have been considered the most invisible and accessible rehabilitation pillar that indirectly decreases tension and conflict among prisoners. According to one of the interlocutors: *“there was a very serious criminal in a death row who everyone respects. When other inmates realize he performs prayers. It inspired them. When these criminals have some contact with other prisoners in other wards, they influence them”*. With the goal to maintain security in prison, an efficient and effective strategy is religion. One might confuse this current instrumental mechanism with the disciplinary one early after the 1979 revolution. There is no doubt that the former might lean toward religious-based rehabilitation, while the objective is to enhance prison security by entertaining prisoners with religious activities and spare them no extra time to communicate with their fellows or be actively involved in prison infractions. Alternatively, the latter aimed at Islamicized prisons and converging inmates according to the Islamic criteria.

Almost all the inmates in death row are “situational religious players”. They turned from “sinner” to “believer” and, consequently, sincerely practice Islam rituals. It is worth noting that the rituals associated to the holy month of Muharram are an exception; most were practiced by inmates long before incarceration. Performing prayers, reading the holy Quran, and fasting are among religious rituals which were the most mobilized due to prison deprivation, not only deprivation of liberty, but also hopelessness, helplessness, and lack of family support. Most of the inmates interviewed believed that dramatic change in the religiosity of inmates on death row, which was triggered by reasons other than faith (to some latent extent), gradually became an inseparable part of their life—almost as though they have always been religious. *“No one could believe the fact that he is a serious criminal who keeps praying and fasting in prison. He lost everything. The only hope is God for him”*. Practicing Islam on death row was not only accepted by inmates, but also appreciated. Inmates on death row show compassion and sympathy to their cellmates who practice Islamic rituals. As one of the participants states, *“there is no sign of teasing, embarrassing, or bothering of those who practice rituals. Nobody even thinks about that. It is the humblest ward in prison. They are serious men. They will be executed sooner or later; there is nothing over there to laugh about. It is serious. They are decent men. Who dares make fun of their prayers?”*

They are far from being the only group that embrace Islam, maintain prayers, and practice fasting in prison. Incarcerated women who left their children behind devoted their life to praying; this was particularly the case with those who were the sole breadwinners and caregivers of their children. Incarcerated mothers constantly mentioned the sufferings they were subjected to with respect to their children’s circumstances and regrets about their crimes. Feelings of guilt and shame, which are directly associated with the separation from their family members, especially children, play a pivotal role in mobilizing religious rituals among incarcerated women to alleviate their pain and emotional distress, and also to attain spiritual forgiveness. In some cases, practicing Islamic rituals are unified with the excessive emotional distress of incarcerated mothers. As a result of family separation and traumatic

experiences (i.e., sexual harassment, financial deprivation, sibling separation, etc.) that their children outside the prison are suffering, some incarcerated mothers practice excessive and repetitive prayers while grieving. In the respective circumstance, other inmates avoid contact with the respective religiously devoted prisoners and keep them away from the cells. Therefore, they usually spend time in the prison's yard or *Namazkhane* (prayer room). As one of the incarcerated mothers mentioned: *"my daughter is 17 years old and my son is 12, they are living with someone who I know from the mosque in our neighborhood. I do not have any family who I can ask to take care of them. My son has asthma, and it is getting worse and worse after my incarceration. My daughter is the only one who is following up my legal matters in the court. And it is not a day that she is not being harassed by men who is she contacting to resolve my problem. I cried all day; I pray from morning to evening. I read the Quran every day. They kicked me out of the cell. They believe I'm so annoying and make them depressed by praying and crying"*.

5.2. Memorizing Quran to Minimize Deprivation

In 2010, after announcing privileges (i.e., gaining parole and furlough, extra phone minutes, more in-person visits, getting time away from the ward, and access to high-quality facilities) had been attached to memorizing the holy Quran, most inmates took advantage of this opportunity once they realized religion can offer desired advantages. In line with the "memorizing Quran plan", the *Daroll Ghoran* ward was established and assigned to inmates who engage in the practice of memorizing the Quran and abstain from using drugs, and provided them with religious services, such as a digital Quran pen reader and high-quality services in terms of sleeping arrangements, food, and clothes. The practice of memorizing the Quran in prisons is not novel. However, after allocating privileges to those who memorize passages of the Quran, the practice became a popular and pervasive phenomenon in prisons. Inmates do not necessarily memorize the Quran for religious or spiritual purposes; essentially, as one of the interlocutors believed, *"it is not anymore about believes or faiths, rather being away from the prison or to be entitled to parole"*. However, dedicating substantial time on memorizing the Quran and getting prepared for a final exam¹¹ left inmates with no available time to communicate with their peers or be involved in any conflict in prison. This process is time and energy consuming, as prisoners could spend the whole day long in *Namazkhane* or *Daroll Ghoran* to concentrate and not get distracted by prison matters. As a result, almost all who are busy memorizing the Quran gradually give up the criminal lifestyle in prison. Involvement in religious services and preparing for the final exam form the basis of their time spent in prison. They find a purpose to keep themselves preoccupied while pursuing a promising reward at the end (i.e., parole or furlough). Although memorizing the Quran is perceived as trading for the sake of privileges or, as one of the participants put it, *"Moamel-e ba Khoda"* (trading with God), the positive influences of this "exchange" is undeniable. It can be noticed that memorizing the Quran is a win-win negotiation between prison administrations and prisoners; it fills various needs of prisoners, from gaining parole to access to the high-quality services, and also functions to ensure prison security simultaneously. Prisoners are connected and hooked on the religion without being religious. The primary reason of memorizing the holy Quran is to break the cage of deprivation. Even though the passion and enthusiasm for this memorization is not rooted in faith or religious and spiritual beliefs, it plays a role as a tool for rehabilitation. Several prisoners believe that the respective memorizers are not "true believers"; they are just bartering for the desired advantages. However, this perceived inauthentic procedure leads toward achieving the main objective of the "memorizing Quran plan", which is rehabilitation. According to interlocutors, those who gain parole as a result of memorizing the Quran did not get back to the criminal lifestyle, neither in prison nor outside. One of the prisoners mentioned: *"they do not have time to engage in any criminal activities in prison. They spend all their time memorizing what they should do to get parole or leave; what would have been left for them? Nothing, no free time. The Quran penetrates into their life, mind, and hearth. They become spiritual gradually"*. Although the purpose of the inmates who initiate this ritual does not serve toward any religious or spiritual ends,

the outcome is the reconstruction of a new noncriminal identity. According to one of the participants: *“I saw with my own eyes, the worst and dangerous criminals in prison, gain parole as a result of memorizing the Quran and he gave up the criminal lifestyle. He is now living clean”*. Recently, other evidence illustrates that memorizing the Quran in prison does not achieve the desired results. It is reported that the maximum day furlough for memorizing the Quran has been decreased due to the involvement of some furloughed inmates in drug trafficking. According to one of the participants: *“apparently, recently memorizing the Quran is not popular as before among prisoners as the leave days is decreased and the plan is not developing and maintaining by the prison authorities as before. Well, some prisoners who gain furlough due to memorizing the Quran misuse the opportunity and smuggle drugs while on leave. So, the same incident repeated a couple of times, and apparently the authorities decided to apply some restrictions to the memorizing Quran plan”*.

5.3. Performing Prayers as a Habit or Seeking Forgiveness

Among the five pillars of the Islamic faith (i.e., the declaration of faith (shahada), prayer (salah), alms-giving (zakat), fasting (sawm) and pilgrimage (hajj)), five mandatory daily prayers were considered the most common ritual in prison that was practiced by some prisoners; although, no privileges or advantages are expected. In other words, performing obligatory prayers by oneself in contrast to participating in congregational prayers do not confer benefits to prisoners. Prisoners usually practice prayers as a daily habit or as an emotional coping strategy and repentance. Performing obligatory prayers to gain balance and seek forgiveness are the most common, usual, and acceptable practices among prisoners on death row and incarcerated mothers. In comparison, those who committed white-collar crimes (e.g., fraud or financial crimes) mostly practice Islamic rituals (i.e., performing obligatory prayers) as a daily habit during incarceration with no intention to seek God’s forgiveness or gain inner peace. In the ward comprising the respective prisoners, in similar circumstance as the death row ward, prisoners show compassion and sympathy toward those who practice Islam; there is no room for assault and stigmatization. Most of the inmates in this section did not lose family ties; therefore, practicing Islam (e.g., memorizing Quran or attending congregational prayers) essentially is for the sake of family reunion by gaining furlough. As one of the participants mentioned: *“those who are in financial ward practice prayers. Not because they are religious; no, most of them perform prayers because they get used to that. They have done that as far as they remember. Most of them are not familiar with the criminal lifestyle; they are just ordinary people who commit petty financial crimes. No one here makes fun of anyone for reading the Quran or praying. We are ordinary people; we all know that we want to get released as soon as possible. We understand if someone is memorizing the Quran. Of course, he wants to get released sooner or to have the opportunity to visit his family. So, no joke around”*.

In sections assigned for drug-related crimes, property, and sexual crimes with short-term sentences, hardly any practices of the Islamic rituals are tolerated. According to the participants: *“who does care to perform prayer? There are a couple of prisoners who pray, which I believe they are doing so to as a habit or want to get the attention of guards. We hit extremists with hot water flux”*. Those wards, which are called by prisoners as “end of the world”, perpetrate assault and cast aspersions to those who practice Islam. The prisoners who practice Islam in the respective wards are constantly subject to humiliation, exclusion, and isolation. They are stigmatized as “Mokhber” (informants) or “fake believers”. Prisoners of these wards believe that there is barely any religious or spiritual willing associated with practicing Islam. On the contrary, achieving privileges (e.g., getting close to the guards) is perceived as the primary goal over spiritual enlightenment. According to the participant: *“we called those who practice Islam opportunist, rats, ass kisser. They don’t dare to tolerate the consequences of their actions. They memorize the Quran to escape from their actions. They do not have the balls to tolerate the difficulties of living in prison. We told them if they are really believers, and why they did not pray instead of drug trafficking in society. They are ass kissers”*. They believe that those who practice Islam usually inform guards on any undertaking in illegal

activities (e.g., using drugs). Consequently, a sudden inspection by guards is to be expected at any moment. However, according to the informants in prison, performing prayers does not seem to be a determining factor in assigning an informant or allocating high-status positions; rather, reliability, capability to grant security, and decrease conflict and tension determine the basis for assigning informants. The participant continues: *“guards or even authorities do not care who is praying and who is not praying in prison. This is not a question at all. Nobody cares. The only thing that matters in prison is security. I don’t pray at all. I’m not a religious person. I drink alcohol so much. But I was a reliable person for the guards”*.

Performing congregational prayers is considered highly important by the authorities. Congregational prayers are performed by the mullahs (Muslim Clergy) who are engaged in religious and cultural activities in prison. According to the participant: *“mullahs are in the cultural department of prison for two hours daily to answer inmates’ questions or sort out religious services and activities”*. Mullahs are not generally acknowledged by prisoners, and communications between them usually transpire during performing prayers, listening to brief preaching after prayers, and asking for *Istikhaara* (prayer of seeking counsel and guidance from God); inmates on death row build a relatively close relationship with mullahs. Their discourses delve deeper than religious activities; in fact, mullahs occasionally follow up to resolve inmates’ legal issues.

Attending congregational prayers does not entail any privileges formally; however, it is considered a *“Hosn-e Akhlagh”* (decent attitude) and possesses a slightly positive impact on the inmates’ legal procedure. Therefore, inmates take the opportunity to not only gain a positive record stemming from *Hosn-e Akhlagh*, but also dawdle while socializing with their peers and being entertained by amusing mullahs’ preaching. Mullahs are cognizant of this circumstance and set strict boundaries to avoid any trouble. However, the boundaries might be infiltrated by inmates, which jeopardizes the status of the mullah. For instance, on one occasion, the mullah, under the influence of inmates, had smuggled drugs into the prison, which ended up in the conviction and incarceration of the mullah. According to the participant, *“we make fun of them and they well know where they are and with whom they are dealing. So, they have just performed prayers and did some preaching and left. I remember the time prisoners deceived mullah and asked him to smuggle drugs into the prison in exchange for money. Mullah accepted the offer as he needed money, but he got arrested immediately”*.

5.4. Islamic Carnivals: Muharram and Ramadan

Almost all prisoners, even those who do not partake in the daily rituals (such as prayers), respect the holy month of Ramadan. Although almost no one but inmates on death row practice the fast of Ramadan, respect is promulgated by simply refraining from food and drink consumption in public (*Roz-e Khari*) or, at the very least, in front of those who practice the fast. The food regulations are adjusted for the month of Ramadan. Breakfast and lunch are distributed in the morning before dawn and dinner is served after sunset, rather than the regular schedule wherein food is distributed in the morning, noon, and evening. All inmates are supposed to wake up in the morning to receive their allotted food share. Those who do not participate in the fast save their share for lunch, which is a source of several complaints from prisoners due to the lack of available devices to keep their food warm. Additionally, they are not allowed a *sofreh* (tablecloth) for serving lunch; they are advised to serve food either on their beds or at a corner of a given cell. As one of the participants states: *“the food is already a disaster; imagine after 8 h being kept under the bed, how it would be? the oil is frozen, and we should eat that food as we have no other option available”*. Even though inmates of death row fast regularly during the year, Ramadan provides them with the opportunity to collectively fast and pray. As participants believe, during the holy month of Ramadan, the spiritual atmosphere of the death row ward is much more palpable. According to one of the participants: *“we have inmates who are criminals, very serious ones, but they fast during the year. Most of the days they are fasting. During Ramadan we are blessed to fast all together and pray”*. While fasting is regular and commonplace in the death row ward, it does not concern the other wards. One of the inmates even stated that, *“Nobody*

cares about Ramadan anymore. People in society who are free and not under the pressure of prison officers do not practice Islam. They have all lost their faith. How do you expect us, in this situation, to do prayers or fasting?"

Muharram is another holy month of the year. A full-fledged *Ashura* mourning ceremony, as one of the participants called it, "Islamic carnivals", also takes place in prison. Almost all prisoners, regardless of their religiosity, attend the associated rituals from *sineh-zani* (chest-beating) and *zanjeer-zani* (striking of backs with chains) to *qama-zani* (cutting forehead). Performing rituals during *Ashura* not only serves as entertainment, but also breaks the prison life routine for a brief number of days by providing prisoners with the opportunity to get time away from their cells more often and in a manner that is not based on a regular schedule. Other than disrupting the daily commute schedule during Muharram, the food services program is also affected. During the holy month of Muharram, the food quality is extensively enhanced, as most days during the month, prisoners are provided with high-quality food donated by charities outside the prison or philanthropists inside the prison. As one of the participants states: *"in a regular basis, you are not allowed to often leave the cell and ward; however, during Muharram the restrictions are loosened, and we can commute a bit easier. Also, every night, whether we had good food from outside or prisoners donate some money to provide us with better food"*. Attending Muharram rituals, especially flagellation, is a performative showcase of masculinity and heroism for prisoners. In fact, in contrast to other Islamic rituals (e.g., prayers and reading the Quran, and fasting), practicing self-flagellation does not provoke hatred or derision but, rather, invokes admiration. By performing rituals, prisoners prove their commitment to Hossein ibn Ali, while, for most prisoners, practicing Moharram rituals are perceived as a habit which is inherited from their family members. According to one of the participants, *"I used to attend Muharram mourning every year for almost 35 years. Qama-zani was always part of the mourning for me. Even in prison, for several years, I did so. It was like showing off among prisoners that I was man enough, I don't know I love Hossein ibn Ali. It does not mean I was a religious person. No, I was not. As far as I remember, my uncles, father, brothers, and my grandfather qama-zani. I learned from them"*.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This article reflects one of the first investigations into the practice of Islam in Iranian prisons. Although the findings of this study must be understood as tentative, preliminary information was extracted for further investigation of the Islamic faith in Iranian prisons. This paper does not aim to disregard the impact of practicing Islamic rituals in faith-based rehabilitation in Iranian prisons but, rather, to articulate the relationship Iranian prisoners have with Islamic rituals. Understanding the influence of political, legal, and religious institutions is crucial to explore the practice of Islam in prisons along with considerations of other, less prominent determining factors (Beckford et al. 2005). Over the course of the study, four categories were extracted. The categories provide an illustration of the parameters for practicing Islamic rituals in Iranian prisons. This finding is consistent with the majority of studies exploring the practice of faith in prisons around the world. However, practicing Islam in Iranian prisons where religion is imposed from above is not a symbol of resistance to a secular order, as suggested by some researchers (Khosrokhavar 2019). It is, rather, a routine to alleviate pains of imprisonment, alleviate emotional distress, seek God's forgiveness, gain furlough, and potentially guarantee clemency. While Muslim inmates in some Western countries are not provided with sufficient facilities (for instance, in French prisons) to practice Islam in comparison with Christians and Jews, Iranian prisons are equipped by *Namazkhaneh* and *Daroll Ghoran* to provide those who practice Islam with required facilities to pursue their mission (Beckford et al. 2005, p. 129). It is worth noting that, in Assad's prisons in Syria, while 74% of the Syrian population is Sunni Muslims and the regime is governed by Alawites (i.e., an offshoot of Shi'a Islam), prisoners not only suffered restriction on practicing their religious beliefs (e.g., prayer, fasting, and growing of a bread), but also being forced to sin (e.g., verbal and physical blasphemy) (Shalabi 2017, p. 2).

Given almost all prisoners in this study, irrespective of their religious affiliations, respect the fast of Ramadan, which is similar to the findings derived by Beckford et al. (2005), it is evident that fasting does not seem to play any integral role in the Iranian prison system, while it plays a pivotal role in the identity of Muslim prisoners in French and English prisons (Beckford et al. 2005, p. 130). However, in Iranian prisons, attending *Ashura* mourning ceremony and showing respect to Hossein ibn Ali is crucial to establish a concrete identity in the hierarchical structure.

Some literature focuses on the impact of religion on prison adjustment and the process of offender rehabilitation (Clear et al. 1992; Johnson et al. 1997; Clear and Sumter 2002). For instance, the result of Butler's (1978) study, which was one of the first studies of Islam in prison after Nation of Islam (NOI) during the 1960s, found the positive impact of NOI on morale and rehabilitation among inmates in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey prisons. The literature suggests that the transformative religious conversion in prison often involves the creation of a novel noncriminal identity that is predicated on self-control and sacrifice, a new identity that refrains from crime and association with criminals and a revision of one's spiritual standing based on a newly formulated worldview (Williams 2018; Maruna et al. 2006; Spalek and El-Hassan 2007; Snow and Machalek 1983). Clear and Sumter's study (2002) of 769 inmates in 20 prisons from 12 states of the US shows that there is a significant correlation between religiosity of inmates and their adjustment to prison. Also, according to Beckford et al. (2005, p. 132), "being imprisoned has actually helped them to begin praying or to take up prayers again after a long period of interruption". Findings from these studies parallel the data derived from the investigation of this study about inmates on death row. Practicing Islam acts as a turning point in the life of prisoners, changing them into theists, believers, and faithful observants of religion. Almost all prisoners mentioned that they were "nonbelievers" or "sinners" at the time of incarceration. However, most of them converted to "believers" during their imprisonment.

Although the findings by Beckford et al. (2005, p. 133) illustrate that the practice of Islam among most prisoners is not always necessarily correlated with abandoning the "vicious cycle of crime", the insights formulated by this study fall in line with availing literature, such as O'Connor et al. (1996), which found the correlation between religious involvement and recidivism. Also, the findings of O'Connor and Perreyclear's study in South Carolina "provide greater insight into the nature of religion in prison setting and support the view that religion can be an important factor in the process of offender rehabilitation" (O'Connor and Perreyclear 2013, p. 11). This study found that prisoners on death row (if given a chance to gain clemency) and most Quran memorizers desist from the criminal lifestyle after being released.

Although some studies, such as Pass (1999), did not find any relationship between religiousness and in-prison infractions, findings of this study illustrate that those who practice Islam rituals (particularly memorizing the Quran) significantly deviate from criminal activities and association with criminals in prison. Spending extensive time focused on memorizing the Quran left them with no available time to spare. Notably, being involved in religious activities influences their behaviors in prison. This applies to prisoners on death row and is reflected by their ward being considered as the most peaceful, spiritual, and tranquil in prison. These findings are similar to the insights calibrated by the study by Clear and Sumter (2002), which asserts that the level of religiousness among prisoners directly impacted their psychological adjustment to the aggregate institutions' environment, and significantly decreased the frequency of problematic behaviors and the resulting disciplinary confinements received.

Prison conversion, either extra-faith (i.e., conversion from one faith or no faith to another) or intra-faith (i.e., changing of religious interpretations, level of commitment to the religion, and practices within a faith), is also seen as "inauthentic", "fake identity", or "fast fame", which is cited as an opportunistic undertaking to receive safety, protection, sympathy, group belonging, and social status among prisoners or the reception of privileges, such as gaining parole from guards; alternatively, it is also viewed simply as a chance to

find time away from their cells (Clear et al. 2000; Schneuwly Purdie 2020; Hamm 2009; Phillips 2012, p. 97; Spalek and El-Hassan 2007). According to Beckford et al. (2005, p. 114), Muslim inmates are labelled as “plastic” Muslims by prison officers “because they were supposedly registered as such only for food” or for “chatting to their comrades”. These assessments are partially parallel to the results of this study. In Iranian prisons, however, it is not the officers who categorize or cast appellations for prisoners who practice rituals but, rather, inmates. Prisoners in the drug-related, property, and sexual crimes wards perceived those who practice Islam in prison as informants, opportunists, and fake believers who seek privileges rather than spirituality.

Contrary to cynical interpretations of the phenomenon of religious conversion in prison, the findings of this study illustrate that practicing Islam in prison, for some prisoners, is simply the pursuit of inner peace, God’s forgiveness, and gaining balance in one’s life. Wilkinson et al. (2021) show that piety, emotional coping, and good company are among the several reasons to practice Islam in prisons, which have a positive impact on inmates’ attitudes toward rehabilitation. Some studies also argue the positive impact of religion on reducing stress, increasing self-esteem, feelings of efficacy, and inmate mental health (Drakeford 2019; Barringer 1998).

Although Islam is imposed from above, there is no formal or informal coercion mechanisms that enforces the practice of Islam rituals in Iranian prisons nowadays, in contrast to early after the revolution. By assigning privileges to memorizing the Quran, practicing Islam in Iranian prisons has entered a new arena—a significant shift from coercive mechanisms (early after the revolution) to instrumental ones (the late) that dramatically changed the prisoners’ perceptions about Islam. Religion has ceased to be a salient component underpinning the subculture of a prison as it was early after the revolution. In contrast, the practice of Islamic rituals is habitual behavior (e.g., performing prayers among white-color criminals and practicing Muharram rituals by most of the prisoners) or a situational phenomenon which is mobilized under particular circumstances (e.g., emotional distress, being hopeless and helpless, lack of familial supports, weighted down by feelings of guilt and shame, and advantages being assigned to the Islamic rituals) to alleviate pain, gain forgiveness of God, and also as an exchange for privileges. According to Schneuwly Purdie (2013, p. 114), “situational religious players, that is to say that they do not refer to religion on a regular and normative bases, but they mobilize the religious component situationally when they need to, when they feel like it, when they have time, or when it is useful”. Nevertheless, the cycle of constructing and reconstructing one’s noncriminal identity among inmates on death row and the *Hafez* of the Quran is undeniable.

The findings of this study reflect the lived experiences of prisoners and former prisoners in Iran. Although they were assigned to different wards (i.e., women’s ward, mother and children’s ward, death row ward, drug-related crimes ward, financial crimes ward, etc.) and they shared relatively common experiences during their incarceration, this study included neither political prisoners, various ethnic groups (e.g., Kurds, Arabs, etc.), nor other religions (e.g., Christian, Bahai, and Sunni Islam). To capture a full spectrum of practicing Islam in Iranian prisons, future studies may consider particularities of the phenomenon in different wards. Additionally, to determine which practices of those described in the current study prevail in Iran today, one needs to access statistics on distribution of prisoners across various silos of detention (e.g., percentage of prisoners on death row ward). These data are not publicly available, unfortunately. Finally, it is not evident whether respective circumstances which mobilize Islam rituals in prison are also engaged in the society or not. To discover either general processes or variance in different social contexts, comparative studies are required; in other words, “they ‘anchor’ points of references in real life situations and help avoid dangers of extreme subjectivism and purely ‘normative’ approaches” (Oleinik 2006, p. 161). Studying practicing Islam rituals in Iranian society vs. Iranian prisons would shed light on phenomena that cannot be explored without adding a comparative dimension to the inquiry.

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Data Availability Statement: The data from this study are not accessible to the public to safeguard confidentiality and privacy of participants.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 “Khomeini held the title of Grand Ayatollah and is officially known as Imam Khomeini inside Iran and by his supporters internationally” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruhollah_Khomeini (accessed on 1 June 2022).
- 2 After the 1979 revolution, drug addiction was perceived as a crime against the state, security, religion; in fact, Iran was involved in war on drugs other than war against Iraq (Ghiabi 2019). Prisons in Iran were overcrowded by not only political prisoners, but also drug-related criminals. According to Abdi (2011), in 1987, more than 50% of prisons in Iran were over occupied by drug-related criminals (political prisoners were not counted in this report).
- 3 Prison population in Iran increased from 14,019 in 1980 to 296,565 in 1986 (Abdi 2011). According to World Prison Brief (2018), prison population increased from 232 prisoners per 100,000 in 2010, to 294 per 100,000 in 2018, which is a direct result of growing number of political prisoners, applying incarceration punishment as an alternative to other kind of punishments (e.g., flogging), and increasing severity of punishment toward specific kind of crimes (e.g., drug related crimes). (Anaraki 2021a).
- 4 <https://www.mojnews.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%A7-62/326586-%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B2%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A2%D9%86-%DA%A9%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF#gsc.tab=0> (accessed on 1 June 2022).
- 5 <https://samanealborz.ir/%DB%B6%DB%B4-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%AF%D8%AC%D9%88-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AA%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%82%D8%B2%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AC-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8-%D9%82/> (accessed 1 June 2022).
- 6 <https://www.mizan.news/780663/%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D9%87%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%88-%DB%B2%DB%B3%DB%B0-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7/> (accessed on 1 June 2022).
- 7 <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/338404/%D8%AD%D9%81%D8%B8-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A2%D9%86-16-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D8%B1%DA%AF-%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF> (accessed on 1 June 2022); <https://www.ima.ir/news/80723307/%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AD%D9%81%D8%B8-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A2%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%85%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%81%D9%88-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D8%AE%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%81-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF> (accessed on 1 June 2022).
- 8 The results of this study were published in papers titled “Mother–child interaction: a qualitative investigation of imprisoned mothers”, (Anaraki and Boostani 2014b), Quality and Quantity International Journal of Methodology, “Living in and living out: a qualitative study of incarcerated mothers’ narratives of their children’s living condition”, (Anaraki and Boostani 2014a), Quality and Quantity International Journal of Methodology, and “Patriarchy as a contextual and gendered pathway to crime: a qualitative study of Iranian women offenders” (Maghsoudi et al. 2018), Quality and Quantity International Journal of Methodology.
- 9 The field work was approved by Memorial’s Research Ethics Board and was performed in accordance with TCSP (Canada’s Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans).
- 10 The results of this study were published in two books titled “Prison in Iran: A Known Unknown.” (Anaraki 2021a) and “Life on Drugs in Iran: Between Prison and Rehab.” (Anaraki 2022), and a paper titled “Prison gangs in Iran: Between violence and safety.” (Anaraki 2021b).
- 11 In general, the test contains the following components: “in one test they are asked to continue the recitation of a passage taken randomly from the Qur’an. As they do not know which passage will be chosen, they must know the whole text in order to be sure of passing. In another test, a would-be hafiz might be asked to recite verses containing a specific word or phrase”. [https://islam.fandom.com/wiki/Hafiz_\(Quran\)#Practice](https://islam.fandom.com/wiki/Hafiz_(Quran)#Practice) (accessed on 1 June 2022).

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