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Миграция сирийских православных христиан в Европу и процесс их адаптации

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Аннотация. Цель исследования – дать представление о религиозной и социальной идентичности сирийских православных беженцев в Европе и о природе межрелигиозного конфликта. Статья посвящена рассмотрению следующих вопросов: Сирия стала перекрестком международных конфликтов, которые глубоко затронули религиозные меньшинства. Сирийские христиане, бежавшие от войны в Европу, не имея возможности обосноваться в странах Ближнего Востока, столкнулись с новыми проблемами адаптации и безопасности. Игнорирование религиозных различий фактически приводит к преследованиям христиан и исламофобии. Научная новизна исследования заключается в выявлении роли религиозных различий во взаимодействии сирийских православных беженцев с мусульманским окружением в Европе. В результате доказано, что в ситуации отсутствия безопасных и законных способов поддержки для групп с различным религиозным и социальным происхождением ни одна мера не подходит для всех, и роль христианских церквей и других гражданских институтов, таких как гражданское общество и социальный консенсус, значительно возрастает и должна быть изучена.

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Migration of Syrian Orthodox Christians to Europe and their adaptation process

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Abstract. The purpose of the study is to provide insight into the religious and social identity of Syrian Orthodox refugees in Europe, into the nature of interreligious conflict. The paper deals with the following: Syria has become a crossroads of international conflicts that have deeply affected religious minorities. Syrian Christians who fled to Europe, being unable to settle in the countries of the Middle East, faced new problems of adaptation and security. Ignoring religious differences actually leads to persecution of Christians and Islamophobia. The scientific novelty of the study is presented by the determination of the role of religious differences in the interaction of Syrian Orthodox refugees with the Muslim environment in Europe. As a result, it has been proved that in the absence of safe and legal means of support for groups with different religious and cultural origins, there is no single specific measure that is suitable for everyone, and the role of the Christian churches and other civil institutions, such as civil society and social consensus, increases significantly and should be studied.

Introduction

The relevance of the study is due to the fact that recently Syria became the crossroad of international conflicts that profoundly affected religious minorities. Syrian Christians who fled from war to Europe, having no possibility to settle in the Middle Eastern countries, faced new problems. On the one hand, their presence in Europe poses the question if these refugees may be a regional threat, as well as a threat to Central European security (Europe - Space for Transcultural Existence?.. 2013). On the other hand, they suffer from persecution inside UNHCR (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) camps from other refugees, generally Sunni Muslims. As Syrian Christians avoid entering the camps, they become more vulnerable than other refugees. According to Islamic radicalist view, those Christians who were converted from Islam are apostates and they lose the right to life. Because of humiliation and harassment caused by extremist Muslim neighbors, the suggestion to build refugee camps specifically for Christians and to segregate Christian and Muslim refugees has been raised by some responsible persons.

Disregarding religious difference actually leads to persecution of Christians and Islamophobia. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that under the guise of refugees potential terrorists may arrive in Europe. Syrian Christians

are afraid to stay in camps in the night time and seek shelter in churches and monasteries. These churches do not necessarily belong to the Syriac-Orthodox tradition. In the situation of the lack of safe and legal ways of protection for groups with diverse backgrounds, there is no single measure that fits all, and the role of the Church and other civil institutes, like civil society and social consensus, highly increases and should be studied. However most studies of Syrian Christians are more concerned with political, economical or ethnical issues only (Ferris, 2016). Meanwhile it is necessary to remember that the cultural and religious identity of Syrian Christians is not a technical entity and it is not less vulnerable and important in preserving the community at home and especially abroad.

The tasks of the study include the following:

- to differentiate the religious and cultural basis of the problematic situation of the Syrian refugees;
- to define the perspective of improving the interreligious and intercultural communication between refugees and local European people.

Theoretical basis. Scholars have written numerous works on the treatment of non-Muslims within Islamic law (Rahman, Setia, 2021; Bjorn, 2015). Works by R. Spencer (Spencer, 2005), Bat Ye'or (Ye'or, 2016), Mark Durie (Durie, 2010) represent this problematic area. There are works advocating the position of Islamic law regarding non-Muslims, for example (Chaudhry, 1995). The opposite opinion is presented by M. Coren (Coren, 2014). The Orthodox experience in the Middle East and in Syria and religious policy in Syria is in the center of interest of M. Tamcke (Tamcke, 2006, 2012), N. G. Awad (Awad, 2015).

This research is based on a postsecular paradigm and methodology of synergic anthropology of S. Horujy (Хоружий, 2002). Another important conception is the theory of multiple modernities of S. N. Eisenstadt (Eisenstadt, 1966), which states that each modernity has a potential for self-correction, its ability to confront problems. To research practical area, we use the Lived religion methodology (Strenski I., 2020) in sociology of religion based on Max Weber's *Verstehen* method and Emile Durkheim's methodology. We use qualitative methodology which includes the following components:

a) Review of specialized books, studies, articles, reports and electronic resources. The books examined tackle the perspectives of refugees from the Middle East. There are books and articles on the positive and negative attitude to refugees and migrants, both positions are presented in European and Russian scientific discourse and in public opinion.

b) Review of research on relations of Syrian Christians with other religious groups in history and in present Europe; study of Syrian Christian migration to Europe reflected in Syrian and European Christian thought.

Practical significance of the study. During and after the research we organized several discussions on the topic with the inclusion of specialists in theology, religious studies, sociology, psychology. For the purpose of facilitating the methodological approach, as well as research tools, an inquiry was conducted among the scientists and specialists in different professional organizations (such as the Department of External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Russian State Christian Academy, the Moscow Institute of St. Apostle Andrey, etc.), to which the researchers are affiliated. The discourse-analysis of anti-migrant texts from political programs, media, Internet, etc. and their correlation with the religious identity of migrants and the result of interviews and discussions allows us to suggest that it is not effective to underestimate the meaning of the religious factor in the social events (Syrian Christian's quest for secularism, 1975; Syrian identity in the Greco-Roman world, 2013). The research asserts that religion and belief have never been ethically limited by the private zone neither for Syrian Christians, nor for their Muslim environment. This dualism contradicts the Muslim vision of the place of religion in society and in the modern world, and it provokes the opposition "the West and the Rest" (Ferguson, 2011). The practical significance of this conclusion is that it opens a new perspective of the dialogue between refugees and European local communities on the basis of not only democratic values and secular state, but religious background, and understanding social identity through religion not only as social phenomenon but engine of life. This will bring mutual understanding between secular and religious consciousness and give light to the problem of migrants in Europe as a marginal phenomenon.

Discussion and Results

The picture of the Middle East gives the brightest scenes of destructive anthropological tendencies of the modern world, such as religious extremism, which becomes the greatest source of persecution of Christians, and different forms of self-destruction, the leading menace for human society until it is the threat to its very existence (Zaman, 2016). Thus, there is a pressing need for overcoming these risks and correcting the anthropological situation (Borneman J., 2013).

It seems to be fruitful to compare the life of the Syrian Orthodox community with the practices of other religious groups migrating to Europe, like Muslims, to comprehend the autochthonous ideas of the cultural community and to discover the roots of "sectarian" conflicts of Christian refugees with Islamic radicalists. Still, there is no enough scientific reflection of the connection between Christian-Muslim conflicts in Syria and the ideological foundation of ISIS (terrorist organization banned in Russia/запрещённая в России террористическая организация), even though ISIS is often mentioned as the main source of Christian refugees suffering. To differentiate ideas of ISIS from Islam is possible on the ground of religious knowledge, and sociological methodology is not enough. Although the overall negative assessment of ISIS *activity* along with quite poor attention to their *ideas* affirms the right moral evaluation of this extremist phenomenon, it leaves no chance for a clear understanding of its peculiarity. Although the jihadist ideology of ISIS is usually estimated as alien to initial Islam, in general, the position about the organic aggressiveness of Islam is very common among refugees as well as Christian inhabitants outside the conflict zones. We see the following reasons for that:

1. The illusive understandability of the religious scripture is usually the motive among non-Muslims to “appeal to the origin” without theological training, to find the answers in Quran on their own or with the help of mass media.
2. The appeal to historical events for confirmation of essential hostility of adherents of Islam towards Christians and the painting of the picture of coercion using randomly selected historical facts (Coren, 2014).
3. The negative position about a “wrong interpretation of the source”: if the extremists’ teaching is the perversion of Quran, there is no need for analysis of radicalists’ texts.
4. The assessment of Muslim society from the secular point of view (Friedmann, 2003). The dualism “secular/religious” is designed to describe religion as a social phenomenon and to move the religious content aside, to the private sphere.
5. The dismissive secular attitude towards religious doctrine presumes the cliché, according to which social methodology, politics and economical factors are more influential than old religious ideas and metaphysical texts.

As a result of the false premises, in many cases neither Christians and Muslims, no researchers themselves can clearly understand the ideological validity of aggressive attitude of radicalists towards non-Muslims in a concrete social situation, while dilettante generalization may lead to the baseless accusations of Islam and bring back more aggression.

One of the mainstreams of Muslim Russian sites is describing the forcible ideology of the West as cultural expansion, which Western states fulfill in a style similar to a Communist regime. The imposition of liberalism and democracy are used for destruction of values of Eastern countries. It is said that despite the equal rights of non-believers, believers and infidels, Islamophobia can be considered as the ideology artificially created by secular Western states (www.ansar.ru/analytics/zachem-evropa-ubila-boga).

The search for adaptation conditions of refugees can be fulfilled on the grounds of the following theoretical suggestions:

1. The radical anthropological trend

This research takes anthropological notions out of toolbox of the postsecular paradigm, thus getting access to the *interface of the anthropological and social trends*.

The *anthropological trend* (Хоружий С.С., 2002) is the most typical and noticeable anthropological phenomenon that includes certain type of anthropological practices, and it has the dynamic of social growth. By the localization of the anthropological trend we discover the corresponding personal and identical structure. The dominant anthropological trend of modernity is a *radical trend*, which means striving to extreme experience of all kinds, irrespective of its possible dangers and risks as well as its ethical or unethical, humane or inhumane nature. According to S. Horujy (Хоружий С.С., 2002), one significant manifestation of the radical trend is the *practice of religious extremism and suicidal terrorism*.

On the opposite end from the extremist type of the radical trend, there is radical phenomenon of *refugees*, - people, transgressing social and physical landscape boundaries and borders, risking their lives and straining to the limits of their capabilities. These two sides of the radical trend are in conflict and they do not have any social or religious subjects in common, that is why searching for common values or negotiating is useless. But is this because the solution of conflict is impossible, or because the division “secular/religious” is not applicable to modern anthropological trends? Are there any anthropological practices that both extremists and refugees are engaged in?

2. Anthropological practices of the radical trend

Some practices of the radical anthropological trend express the specific relationships with the anthropological boundary, bringing the deep menace and danger for a human being, but in general its practices may have the constructive as well as the destructive character. Cultural adaptation of refugees is the example of a constructive kind, religious extremism – of a destructive kind, and forced migration – of a self-destructive kind.

This research offers to reveal and conceptualize the anthropological practices marking the radical trend, in particular, to find the anthropological practices that characterize the existence of the Syrian Orthodox community abroad and create the problem during their encounter with the environment. The marginal practices at the same time outline the boundary of a community’s contact with the outer world, and they are most influential in *constructing its identity*. It is important to decide if these practices can be defined as “religious” or “cultural” and “social”, to understand which sphere is more troublesome.

One of the problems of refugees is the pressure that Syrian Christians suffer from the Muslims in camps. The field research in camps and in churches where Syrian Christians find shelter could help to find out which practices of Syrians are giving a reason for a “sectarian conflict”, and first of all to *make them recognizable* as Christians (we put aside the case when former compatriots know each other).

If the forms that refugees fill out when they register at a housing center in Berlin do not ask for a person’s religion, than what type of behavior becomes the indicator of Christian belonging? The answer is not so evident, if we compare this situation with the coexistence of religious groups in secular society, let alone the fact that even the national identity of a newly arrived refugee is often difficult to determine, as a lot of refugees throw away their passports and cease posing as Syrians.

If Christian refugees are suppressed because of their religious practice, it means that religious factor has a great significance in their self-perception, otherwise they would not be recognized as Christians in the camp, or would deliberately prefer to be unnoticed. To compare, according to a sociological survey conducted among people who identify as Orthodox Christians in Veliky Novgorod, North-West of Russia, 80% of them (30 people interviewed in Hutin monastery in 2022) stated that, in the situation of menace, similar to Syrian refugees in the camps, they would not show their belonging to Christianity in external actions. Moreover, the regular performance of sacraments and rituals is not a mandatory part of their life. Similar point of view was expressed by 10 Syrian migrants in Munster

and Gottingen, Germany, 2019. Here raises a question, is the centre of tension situated in social, cultural or *religious* marginal practices of refugees?

3. *Reconstruction of identity*

If to begin with the premise that anthropological dynamics is constructing human identity, we can focus on the fluidity of identity and its dialectical nature as the basis of cultural security. If the cultural context of a mobile person may be always changing, the context of a migrant is changing unpredictably and *radically*.

The minorities of Syria, having left their country, leave their culture as well to get some guarantees that are understood to be human security: freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity. Their identity is tied to their land and religion, and they want to be accepted with their ethnical identity. They may feel, and in many cases realize that ontological survival of their community may be at risk, because Europe has different hierarchy of values, modulating identity. So there is a contradiction between dialectical identity and traditional values in refugees' life.

Conclusion

Religious differences are only the first level of the intercultural conflict in the European migration crisis, there is an obvious need to study the basis of the Syrian worldview apart from European values to provide mutual understanding and not to create the position of superior European set of values and ignorance regarding Eastern cultures.

Cultural integration of Syrian Christians cannot be fulfilled on the ground of democratic values alone, without taking into account the peculiarities of religious thinking. Here the role of Christian Church in their adaptation process becomes very important. The Syrian Orthodox Church has a great Diaspora, and one of the possible ways of making refugees' adaptation easier is not only dialogue between people but also between churches. European Christian churches often open their doors to refugees helping them to accommodate, and religious support and dialogue could be more than helpful. Also, Syrian Orthodox Church has big communities that has kept their cultural traditions, Syrian language and the Western Syrian rite. One of them is the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of India, which presents a coexistence with other religions in terms of the anti-conversion law and can explicate the social practices of this minority's survival. The believers from the Malankara Church also live in Europe, as well as those from the Coptic Orthodox Church, and organization of the territory and events of religious common space between churches could contribute to soothing the conflicts more than isolation of refugees in their religion and culture.

Prospects for further research

To study the cultural and religious change of Syrian community in terms of migration is very difficult due to the lack of research on this topic. Meanwhile the better understanding of the anthropological dynamics of the Syrian Christian identity and their relationships with the Christian church in marginal conditions is a very new and interesting matter that may mitigate interreligious and intercultural conflicts and can be carried out only in a field research, communicating with refugees and clergy in Europe, interviewing them and observing their practices. Germany gives a vast material for this study, for it pledged to take in thousands refugees from Syria. Also, Hegumen Daniil (Irbits), superior of St. George the Victorious Monastery in Gotschendorf, is actively participating in sheltering Syrians, and it would be very useful to explore the dialogue of Oriental Orthodox Syrians and Eastern Orthodox Russians and its expression in the religious practice of newcomers.

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