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CONVERSION TO ISLAM IN UKRAINE: PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

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With the onset of a religious revival in Ukraine in the 1990s and the emergence of several Islamic organisations, conversion to Islam became a viable religious choice for many Ukrainians.

This article offers several preliminary observations with an aim to go beyond traditional stereotypes about the key gender and ideological aspects of this process. The source base of this study encompasses thirteen unstructured in-depth interviews conducted by the author as well as a number of conversion accounts published by Ukrainian media and Islamic religious web resources. The theoretical framework employed for the analysis of these data is based upon Lofland and Skonovd's schema of six major modes of conversion which emphasises different paths of adopting a certain religion. Following the investigation of the converts' narratives, the article demonstrates that conversion to Islam in Ukraine constitutes a complex and multifaceted social phenomenon. Due to the developments in modern technology and social media, it now occurs not only in large cities with active Islamic centres, but also in small rural localities without any Muslim presence. Furthermore, while for some women turning to Islam is directly or indirectly linked to marriage to foreigners from Muslim countries, the majority of female conversions also contain other important facets, such as spiritual search, cultural immersion or even mystical experiences. On the opposite side of the spectrum, even though cases of conversion to Islam among Ukrainian men arguably are not as common, they offer important insights regarding the dynamics of religious choices of Ukrainians and the potential emergence of Ukrainian Islam as a local phenomenon. These and other issues merit further detailed analysis of conversion to Islam in Ukraine.

Keywords: conversion, Islam, Ukraine, Ukrainian Muslims, European Islam

Conversion to Islam in the West has been a growing phenomenon for the past three decades. Despite the predominance of various negative stereotypes about this religion, it has been attracting more and more individuals of Christian background both in Europe and the USA. While in the 1990s this issue was still discussed more as an exotic personal preference or an outlier, after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks conversion of Westerners to Islam turned into a question of particular significance. Moreover, in some European countries such converts became perceived as a distinct security risk due to general lack of proper religious knowledge and, thus, a higher possibility of their radicalisation by Islamist preachers.

With the onset of a religious revival in Ukraine in the 1990s and the emergence of several Islamic organisations, conversion to Islam became a more common religious choice for Ukrainians as well. Initially, this phenomenon attracted no attention of scholars or the media due to a relatively small number of converts and also due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of them were stereotypically attributed to the cases of Ukrainian women marrying foreigners from Muslim countries. However, the general tendencies of the past two decades have demonstrated that this view oversimplifies the situation and

ignores some potentially significant shifts in the religious self-perception of Ukrainians. In particular, it can be argued that the growing number of male Ukrainian converts (which includes several scholars of Islam and academic researchers in other fields) provides a range of interesting cases for understanding the phenomenon. Some of the Ukrainian converts, both male and female, have also come to play visible roles in the public activities of Islamic organisations, becoming mediators in the interaction between Muslim communities and Ukrainian society at large. Taking this into account, this paper aims to lay the foundation for the further analysis of conversion to Islam among Ukrainians by tracing the religious and social aspects of this process reflected in the currently available conversion accounts.

Until the 1990s, the subject of conversion to Islam had been an issue of special interest mostly for historians who studied the Arab Conquests and Islamisation of the Near East from the 7th c. onwards [Bulliet 1979; Levtzion 1979]. However, the demographic shifts in many western societies in the late 20th century which featured several waves of migration of the Muslim population from the Middle East and subsequent emergence of active Islamic centres increased academic interest in this phenomenon on the part of sociologists and anthropologists, studying religious conversion in Western Europe and the USA. One of the driving factors of this interest was a realisation that native European Muslims no longer represented only marginal individuals from high intellectual circles, but important social actors capable of forging new framework of relations between Muslim communities and European societies.

From the early 1990s onwards, a number of scholars have explored conversion to Islam in the West from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. However, only some of these studies have offered a broad overview of this process [Hermansen 1999; Hermansen 2014; Bowen 2015]. Instead, the majority of monographs and research papers have focused on the peculiar features of conversion, characteristic of specific European countries or regions. For instance, one of the first attempts to analyse conversion to Islam in the USA was undertaken by Larry Poston in 1992 [Poston 1992, 158–180] in conjunction with his study of the basic strategies employed by various Islamic groups and preachers for attracting new followers of non-Muslim background. Although Poston's methodology and conclusions have been strongly questioned by later scholars [Roald 2004], his observations regarding the conversion accounts published in the second half of the 20th century provide a number of important vantage points for the further analysis of the topic.

A more substantial study of conversion to Islam in the USA from a sociological perspective was offered by Patrick Bowen [Bowen 2015, 259–272]. In stark contrast to Poston, who based his generalisations on narratives derived from various *da'wa* materials, Bowen conducted a number of in-depth interviews with converts from different regions of the USA. Based on contemporary and historical cases, he also singled out the most characteristic traits of American converts.

In turn, various overviews of conversion to Islam in Western Europe can be found in several extensive case studies, focused on specific countries with significant Muslim populations. Of special interests in this respect are the books by Ali Köse [Köse 1996] and Kate Zebiri [Zebiri 2008] which explore the social background and worldviews of contemporary Muslim converts in Great Britain. In particular, in one of the biggest studies of the kind, Köse conducted interviews with 70 British converts of various age groups. Based on his findings, Köse came to the conclusion that the primary driving force for choosing Islam for them was a strong protest against the growing over-secularisation of British society which, from the converts' point of view, was dramatically exacerbated by the church's inadequate willingness to make compromises in the spheres of public morality [Köse 1996, 189–195; Köse 1999]. While Zebiri's study used a smaller sample, she also stressed the role of disillusionment with Western values and morality among the

British converts [Zebiri 2008, 248–253]. An important advantage of her book is the focus on exploring the converts' new identities, including their views on the current developments in Islam, global geopolitics and such practices as wearing *hijab* as a marker of religious identity.

Another extensive study of European converts to Islam was conducted by Roald in three Scandinavian countries [Roald 2004]. The major significance of this research project stems from its attention to the visible role of the new Muslims of Scandinavian background in overcoming negative stereotypes about Islamic teaching and also their activities as *de facto* mediators between the ethnic Muslim immigrants and the local population in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Roald also argued that the growing rate of conversions could lead to gradual emergence of local European versions of Islam. Other important contributions to the topic of Islamic conversions in this region are the research articles of Sultan [Sultan 1999] and Jensen [Jensen 2006].

There are numerous similar studies concerning other European countries which point to the importance of the issue in the framework of general research on European Islam. In the German context, the process of conversion to Islam was extensively analysed by Wohlrab-Sahr [Wohlrab-Sahr 1996, 1999a, 1999b, 2006]. El-Hourani Setta offers a preliminary study of Swiss converts [Setta 1999], trying to delineate typical scenarios of such a religious choice in contemporary Switzerland in connection to the discussion of the threats presented by militant Islam. The works of Allievi and Daynes explore the process of conversion to Islam in France [Allievi 2000; Daynes 1999]. It is worth noting that in his articles Allievi made an attempt to theorise conversion to Islam among Europeans as a special type of conversion in the sociology of religion [Allievi 1999, 2000].

While male European and American converts to Islam have been typically studied only as part of mixed samples, special attention in academic literature has been devoted to the experiences of female converts. This imbalance can be partially explained by the widespread view that women constitute an overwhelming majority of new Muslim Westerners due to the basic dynamics of interreligious or interracial marriages. In this area, the most significant contributions to the subject have been published by Mansson [Mansson 2002], Guimond [Guimond 2017] and Nieuwkerk [Nieuwkerk 2006, 2014].

In sum, there is a wealth of studies that provide a solid theoretical and methodological foundation for a similar analysis of conversion to Islam in other cultural contexts, such as that of Eastern Europe, where general secularisation tendencies often coexist with a strong intertwining of religious and national identities. In this regard, although the social status and theological agendas of Islamic organisations in Ukraine have been the subject of close scrutiny by several scholars [Bogomolov et al. 2006; Yaqubovych 2010; Yarosh and Brylov 2011; Bogomolov 2015], conversion to Islam among Ukrainians so far has been a neglected area of research – a gap which the present study shall try to remedy by offering several preliminary observations on the traits of Ukrainian converts.

Theoretical framework. The theoretical framework employed in this paper for the analysis of converts' interviews and narratives is based upon Lofland and Skonovd's ideas about the six major modes of religious conversion: intellectual, affectional, experimental, mystical, revivalistic and coercive [Lofland and Skonovd 1981]. While in reality they are often intertwined, each of these modes emphasises certain motives or circumstances which accompany an individual's turning to religion. Of primary interest for this study are the intellectual, affectional, experimental, and mystical modes as most relevant to the situation in the post-Soviet religious market of Ukraine.

According to Lofland and Skonovd, the *intellectual mode* begins with “reconnaissance”, or “individual, private investigation of possible ‘new grounds of being’, alternate theodicies, personal fulfillment, etc. by reading books, watching television, attending lectures” [Lofland and Skonovd 1981, 376]. They argue that individuals who take this path often convert themselves in isolation and without experience of life or interaction with

the respective religious community [Lofland and Skonovd 1981, 376]. By contrast, the *affectional mode* of conversion is directly or indirectly linked to “personal attachments or strong liking for practicing believers” [Lofland and Skonovd 1981, 379–380].

In contrast to these two types, the *experimental mode* appears to be a preliminary stage before actual conversion; during this stage potential converts try to behave like devotees of the religion of their choice and participate in collective practices or activities of the group without making a formal or final commitment [Lofland and Skonovd 1981, 378–379]. On the one hand, this mode may reflect “situational adjustment” [Lofland and Skonovd 1981, 379] which reaches its peak in full transition after a period of gradual adaptation. On the other hand, in some cases this mode may concern other types of “experimentation”, such as an attempt at immersion in a new cultural milieu for professional or psychological reasons which are unrelated directly to religious search *per se*. It is interesting to note that the experimental aspect is widely used by religious organisations as a strategy of attracting new followers. In such cases, potential converts are invited to various religious gatherings or occasions which may evoke positive emotions or create personal experiences, facilitating further interest and eventual conversion.

Finally, the mystical mode is described by Lofland and Skonovd in a deliberately vague fashion in order to classify situations where converts report experiencing something that “cannot be expressed in logical and coherent terms” [Lofland and Skonovd 1981, 377]. In the most straightforward cases, this type can be detected in those accounts where individuals link their conversion to involvement of some supernatural forces or unexplainable events which predetermined their affiliation to a specific religion.

There are numerous other sociological and psychological theories designed by scholars for defining the precise meaning or the stages of the process of religious conversion. These, however, cannot be properly elaborated on and employed in this preliminary study of the Ukrainian situation. One of such important ideas that require additional testing with longitude research is the influence of social and cultural environment on the long-term status of native Ukrainian converts. In this respect, as Peter Berger argues, “the individual who wishes to convert, and (more importantly) to ‘stay converted’, must engineer his social life in accordance with this purpose” [Berger 1969, 50]. He asserts that in order to secure his religious choice, a convert “must dissociate himself from those individuals or groups that constituted the plausibility structure of his past religious reality, and associate himself all the more intensively and (if possible) exclusively with those who serve to maintain his new one” [Berger 1969, 51]. While these assumptions are plausible enough, it is also logical to argue that in some cases, instead of severing all ties with their previous environment, converts may try to preserve their circle of communication by convincing relatives or friends that the new religion offers a better or more effective plausibility structure (i.e. by converting their immediate surroundings in order to avoid a clash of plausibility structures). This issue is crucial for understanding the dynamics of personal relationships of the new Ukrainian Muslims and the impact of their conversion on interaction with colleagues, spouses, parents and children. Another factor of this analysis is determining whether traditional Orthodox Christianity – undermined by decades of the Soviet atheist period – can offer adequate plausibility structures which would effectively deter Ukrainians from converting to other religions.

Conversion to Islam in Ukraine. As is the case with many Western societies, the overall number of converts to Islam in Ukraine remains unknown; neither it is possible to trace the dynamics of this process in the past three decades. However, the available conversion accounts demonstrate that individuals who have made the decision to embrace Islamic teaching and lifestyle come from different regions of the country as well as from a variety of religious, cultural and professional backgrounds, including business, jurisprudence and manual labour.

The primary source material for this study comes from 13 unstructured in-depth interviews (male – 8, female – 5) conducted as a pilot in February and March of 2011. At the time of the interviews, the majority of respondents (except for one) lived permanently in Kyiv or nearby towns. The converts were selected using snowballing and convenience sampling in an Islamic centre. Along with this, for the purposes of this preliminary analysis, I used a number of conversion accounts published either in Ukrainian mainstream media or on the internet resources of various Islamic organisations. Some of these accounts constitute fully fledged interviews; others are brief narratives or short media reports which mention only general description of the individual's path to conversion. The majority of such media accounts (18 out of 25 cases) belong to female converts. On the one hand, this discrepancy helps improve the gender balance of the sample. On the other hand, however, it reflects a much higher level of attention given to female converts in both secular and religious media of Ukraine which can be attributed to the fact that conversion to Islam is predominantly seen as a female phenomenon. Another factor that may come into play is that for women conversion to Islam has more palpable social repercussions, such as the obligation of wearing a headscarf (*hijab*) in public.

The majority of females in my sample converted to Islam at the age 16–24. However, in the two most recent cases of “intellectual conversion” which, according to the media reports, happened in small villages the female converts were of a more mature age (one of them was 42). The age of conversion for males varies more significantly; the youngest convert of the sample turned to Islam at 19 and the oldest at 39.

Based on the accounts included in this study, several major aspects of conversion to Islam in Ukraine can be singled out. Some of them overlap with the general tendencies found in the USA and Western Europe; others, however, reflect the specifics of the social milieu of post-Soviet Eastern Europe where the revival of Orthodoxy and other confessions coexists with the inertia of the Soviet atheistic past which, among other things, manifests itself in the low level of practiced religiosity and diffusion of religious identity.

In the first place, it is noteworthy that only in four cases out of twenty three female conversions fall under the category of Ukrainian women marrying a foreigner from a predominantly Muslim country. Two of these conversions are reported to have happened several months after the marriages took place. Neither of these female converts in question mentioned any prior religious interests, but underscored that they converted of their own initiative, following a positive experience of immersion in Islamic culture and without any pressure from their Muslim spouses. In the other two cases, conversions occurred sometime before marriage as a consequence of intense religious discussions with the future husbands. Both women were young highly observant Christians from religious families, separated from their traditional “structures of plausibility” after moving to a different city to study at a university. They did retrospectively report some degree of dissatisfaction with certain aspects of Christianity which could have predisposed them to conversion, but mentioned no actual spiritual search or intellectual curiosity in Islam or other religious traditions before encountering Muslim students.

On the opposite side of the gender divide, there are also two cases of what may be termed as “affectional conversion” in which Ukrainian males converted under the influence of their Ukrainian wives who, in turn, came to embracing Islam in the course of their individual intellectual or spiritual quests. In one of them, the husband reported his prior personal interest in finding a suitable religious tradition. However, his final move was evidently determined by the religious choice of his wife and took the form of an experimental mode where religious practice precedes formal affiliation. For instance, he stated: “My faith emerged during Ramadan. My wife began fasting. I grew interested from a physiological point of view, even though I was not yet a Muslim. So I started fasting myself and then converted to make things right. [Fasting] did play a role in my conversion, I do not know why”.

In another case which happened in a small rural village in the Cherkasy region the element of affectional conversion was even more pronounced. After a Ukrainian woman learnt about the Quran on the Internet and converted to Islam, her husband followed suit, describing his motives as follows: “One day I came home and she simply placed me before the fact that she had converted to Islam. I love my family, I love my kids. I think that God is the same everywhere. With the garden and the house, we own sixty hundred square meters of land together”.

There is also one case of the opposite scenario in which the wife decided to switch to Islam following her Ukrainian husband’s conversion. Likewise, only in one case out of thirty eight in the sample conversion led to breakup of marriage. Despite the change of religion, Ukrainian converts stayed in a relationship with their partners who did not display intentions to switch to Islam in a long term perspective. Reactions to conversion from other family members varied significantly, ranging from broadly supportive to explicitly hostile. While only a few converts in this sample described substantial deterioration of relations with their close relatives, subsequent conversion of parents and siblings under the influence of new Ukrainian Muslims were also rare. In one notable case of the latter situation, conversion of a young Ukrainian woman from a highly religious Christian family was followed by the conversions of her mother, younger sister as well as several other siblings.

Thus while the actual motives of conversion are often open to interpretation, the aforementioned cases concerning marriage and family relationships generally fall under the category of Lofland and Skonovd’s *affectional* mode. The elements of this mode can manifest themselves in other forms as well, playing a substantial part in the conversion cases which are rooted in individual spiritual quests, unfolding over a significant period of time. For example, it is frequently reported by female converts that they were first brought to a mosque or introduced to Islam and Islamic lifestyle by their close female Muslim friends or acquaintances. In some of them, female Muslims act as positive role models inspiring interest and attraction to Islam as a religion. This type of formation of affectional bonds can be viewed as an effective way of indirect *da’wa*, along with lessons of Arabic in Islamic centres and organising such cultural occasions as “Day of hijab” which introduce potential converts to the cultural and personal advantages of belonging to a Muslim community.

In the majority of the male accounts, the intellectual mode appears to be the predominant one while affectional elements or contact with carriers of Islamic identity play mostly a subsidiary role. Another important issue that differentiates male Ukrainian converts from female converts is a set of motives which describe conversion to Islam as an instrument of moral reform or overcoming existential crisis. In this regard, several respondents reported feeling despondent as a result of personal troubles or deeply dissatisfied with leading a dissipate way of life prior to conversion. Consequently, in their narratives these converts put a special emphasis on Islam as a source of moral values which helps deal with drinking or other harmful behaviour.

While male accounts are generally devoid of mystical elements, the latter are highly pronounced in some female narratives of conversion. For example, such mystical elements can be dreams that either point the individual in the direction of Islam or serve as a final incentive for converting. For instance, in one account of a former practicing Orthodox Christian, her initial religious search and acquaintance with Islam were triggered by a personal tragedy, namely the death of her highly religious mother. While being in doubt regarding the future repercussions of her conversion to Islam, the convert had a dream which cured her indecision: “I prayed and asked God to grant me wisdom and guide me. Was it the right move [to convert to Islam]? What would my mother say? This was very important to me. Then I saw a dream that my mother when she was already sick (she had cancer) came with my father to Kyiv. We went to the doctor and he said that the situation

was bad. After that we entered a room, a huge room, and I heard very loud and beautiful male voice reciting in Arabic: 'Bismi-l-lahi-r-rahmani-r-rahim'. When I woke up I was overwhelmed. I realised that the room from my dream was a mosque". It should be mentioned though that at that time the convert presumably worked as a teacher at a school supervised by an Islamic organisation and thus was to a certain degree exposed to a Muslim environment.

Another female convert reported that she had a dream in which she saw the first name and surname of the person who was supposed to introduce her to Islam. She stated: "...This dream ended with a man taking me by my hand and leading me into a room with a window which filled the room with light white as milk... After this dream, I felt as if I did not fully wake up. My body left that dream but I stayed in it with my thoughts and my heart. I opened Facebook because I thought I had heard that surname from somewhere and I found this person among my friends". While the conversion account does not provide the full story, this person turned out to be a Muslim who guided the woman through the phases of learning about Islam and eventually encouraged her conversion.

Another aspect which stands out in the available accounts is that for many female converts initial attraction to Islam emerged as a result of dispelling traditional stereotypes about the subjugated status of women under *sharia* law. In other words, overcoming strongly negative popular views and learning the Islamic perspective on the state of affairs arguably served as a factor of forming an opposite attitude to Islam which, in combination with other personal incentives, brought women closer to embracing it as a religious choice. It is also noteworthy that, in contrast to some male Ukrainian converts, female converts did not report any conflict between their newly adopted Islamic identity and general national identity as ethnic Ukrainians.

As such, disappointment with Christianity does not figure prominently in the conversion accounts as a predominant feature of the Ukrainians' path to Islam. Only eight of the converts (three men and five women) in the current sample reported being a practicing devotee of an Orthodox church or other Christian confession at a certain point in their lives. Some of them, possibly retrospectively, recall dissatisfaction with some aspects of Christian teaching or traditions even before they embarked upon the religious quest and had a chance to familiarise themselves with Islam. Other respondents mention that they were driven away from Orthodoxy at some point by negative experiences of interaction with the clergy (such as observing a drunken priest during religious services).

Summarising this brief overview, one can argue that in many cases Lofland and Skonovd's classification can be of only limited use for understanding and explaining experiences of native Ukrainian converts. To be properly employed, it may require a lot of speculative assumptions which would fill various gaps in conversion narratives. More often than not, the different modes closely intertwine and appear as stages of a single conversion process which happens over a significant period of time. In this regard, the intellectual mode – which manifests itself in individual religious or spiritual search – seems to be a common denominator of the majority of the narratives analysed. However, in order to lead to full commitment it might need a trigger in the form of affectional bonds or a positive cultural experience in the community. Similarly, the experimental mode may be seen as merely an intermediary stage which simplifies a de facto semi-forced transition into the new religious universe of discourse, already adopted by the marital partner. In such cases, conversion – typically framed in the narrative as a free personal choice resulting from an individual's own quest – might happen as an attempt to secure the stability of the relationship. In other cases where the experimental mode is combined with the intellectual mode conversion may be only a temporary phase which does not lead to permanent commitment.

Conclusion. This paper has provided several preliminary observations regarding the process of conversion to Islam in Ukraine which can be used as vantage points for the

further analysis of this complex and multifaceted phenomenon beyond popular stereotypes. For one thing, Ukrainian converts come from different cultural, religious and professional backgrounds. In this regard, due to developments in modern technology and social media, conversions to Islam happen both in large cities with active Islamic centres and in small rural areas without any Muslim presence. For some individuals, conversion constitutes the summit of a prolonged religious quest for the truth about God; for others it becomes an outcome of general intellectual curiosity about Islamic history or culture. Furthermore, while in some cases female conversions are still intricately linked to marriages with foreigners from predominantly Muslim countries, these situations also involve other important facets, such as spiritual crisis, intellectual exploration or mystical experience. In other words, these cases can be properly categorised as *religious* conversions, rather than simply cultural adaptation or embracing Islamic lifestyle for the sake of maintaining marital status. On the opposite side of the spectrum, even though cases of conversion to Islam among men are arguably not as common, they offer important insights regarding the dynamics of religious choices of Ukrainians and the potential emergence of local Islam as a distinct phenomenon. These and other dimensions merit a more in-depth analysis of conversion to Islam in Ukraine in the context of the new socio-political and religious situation in the country after the annexation of Crimea and the outburst of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

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НАВЕРНЕННЯ В ІСЛАМ В УКРАЇНІ: ПОПЕРЕДНІ СПОСТЕРЕЖЕННЯ

Після початку релігійного відродження в Україні у 90-х роках та виникнення кількох ісламських організацій перехід до ісламу став більш доступним релігійним вибором для багатьох українців. Ця стаття пропонує кілька попередніх спостережень, які мають на меті вийти за межі традиційних стереотипів щодо ключових гендерних та ідеологічних аспектів цього процесу. Джерельна база дослідження включає тринадцять неструктурованих глибинних інтерв'ю, проведених автором у 2011 році, а також ряд останніх конверсійних аккаунтів, опублікованих українськими ЗМІ та ісламськими релігійними веб-ресурсами. Теоретична база, що була використана для аналізу цих даних, включає схему Лофленда та

Сконовда, яка окреслює шість основних шляхів до прийняття певної релігії. У результаті дослідження нарративів ново навернених, стаття демонструє, що навернення в іслам в Україні є складним і багатограним явищем. Через розвиток сучасних технологій та соціальних мереж цей процес відбувається не лише у великих містах із діючими ісламськими центрами, а й у невеликих сільських районах без будь-якої присутності мусульман. Крім того, хоча для деяких жінок конверсії прямо або безпосередньо пов'язані зі шлюбами з іноземцями з мусульманських країн, більшість випадків також містять інші важливі аспекти, такі як духовний пошук, культурне занурення або навіть містичний досвід. З іншого боку, хоча випадки переходу в іслам серед українських чоловіків, відповідно до загальних уявлень, є менш поширеними, вони, тим не менш, вказують на важливі зсуви в динаміці релігійного вибору українців, а також на можливу появу українського ісламу як окремого явища. Ці та інші питання заслуговують на подальший детальний аналіз навернення до ісламу в Україні.

Ключові слова: іслам, навернення в іслам, Україна, українські мусульмани, європейський іслам

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ОБРАЩЕНИЕ В ИСЛАМ В УКРАИНЕ: ПРЕДВАРИТЕЛЬНЫЕ НАБЛЮДЕНИЯ

С началом религиозного возрождения в Украине в 90-х годах и возникновением нескольких исламских организаций обращение в ислам стало более доступным религиозным выбором для многих украинцев. Эта статья предлагает несколько предварительных наблюдений, которые ставят перед собой цель вывести исследование темы за пределы традиционных стереотипов относительно ключевых гендерных и идеологических аспектов этого процесса. База источников этого исследования включает тринадцать неструктурированных глубинных интервью, проведенных автором в 2011 году, а также ряд последних конверсионных историй, опубликованных украинскими СМИ и исламскими религиозными веб-ресурсами. Теоретическая база, использованная для анализа этих данных, включает схему Лофленда и Сконовда, которая определяет шесть основных путей к принятию той или иной религии. В результате исследования нарративов новообращенных, статья демонстрирует, что обращение в ислам в Украине является сложным и многогранным явлением. В силу развития современных технологий и социальных сетей этот процесс происходит не только в больших городах с действующими исламскими центрами, но и в небольших сельских районах без какого-либо присутствия мусульман. Кроме того, хотя для некоторых женщин конверсии прямо или косвенно связаны с браком с иностранцами из мусульманских стран, большинство таких случаев содержит другие важные аспекты, такие как духовный поиск, культурное погружение или даже мистический опыт. С другой стороны, хотя случаи перехода в ислам среди украинских мужчин, по общим представлениям, менее распространены, они, тем не менее, указывают на важные сдвиги в динамике религиозного выбора украинцев, а также на возможное появление украинского ислама как отдельного явления. Эти и другие вопросы обращения в ислам в Украине заслуживают дальнейшего детального анализа.

Ключевые слова: ислам, обращение в ислам, Украина, украинские мусульмане, европейский ислам

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