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RUSSIAN CONVERTS TO SHIA ISLAM IN MOSCOW: EXPERIENCE OF INTERACTION AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Using personal narratives as empirical material, this article analyses the phenomenon of Russian converts to Shia Islam as a brand new occurrence in the post-Soviet context. Studying recent converts residing in Moscow, the author proposes an analytical perspective alternative to the securitization approach: rather than focusing on real and perceived threats to the state security allegedly posed by new converts, the author suggests that attention should be paid to the living dynamics of religious conversion and to the processes by which a new identity is constructed in an urban setting. The examined case studies indicate that conversion to Shia Islam is largely motivated by individual inner needs and spiritual quests rather than by political orientations. Based on field research materials, the author concludes that Russian Shias do not constitute a homogeneous group but rather a community of individuals with diverse life trajectories and tactics, who independently constitute their new “self” within a religious practice that is new to them and who experience differing degrees of success in their attempts to integrate into Moscow’s established Shia religious networks.

Keywords: *Shiism, converts, religious conversion, religious practices, Moscow, Russian Muslims*

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