

Yuriy Pachkovskyy
Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Ukraine)
ORCID: 0000-0002-6076-055X

Oleg Demkiv
Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Ukraine)
ORCID: 0000-0001-5233-0472

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THE SOCIAL CAPITAL OF THE COMMUNITY OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN MODERN UKRAINE: SOCIOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

Kapitał społeczny wspólnoty Świadków Jehowy we współczesnej Ukrainie: dyskurs socjologiczny

Abstract

At the theoretical and empirical levels the social capital of the Jehovah's Witness communities in contemporary Ukrainian society is examined. The necessity of sociological study of the influence of social capital (J. Coleman, R. Patnam, M. Oberg etc.) on the formation and development of neoprottestant religious communities is substantiated. On the basis of 40 semi-structured interviews with Jehovah's Witnesses the social capital of JW communities is analyzed. It is concluded that latter is driven by high regulatory and symbolic integration within the community, as well as intensified inclusive social ties. As a consequence, the individual's involvement in JW community structure, dependence on it and solidarity with the goals of its activity increases. Such a process does not, however, contribute to the creation of cross-sectional social bonds, which is a problematic basis for the further creation of social capital in society scale.

Keywords: social capital, community, Jehovah's Witnesses, religious conversion, solidarity.

Streszczenie

Na poziomie teoretycznym i empirycznym rozważany jest proces tworzenia kapitału społecznego społeczności Świadków Jehowy we współczesnym społeczeństwie ukraińskim. Określa się produktywność zasad teorii „kapitału społecznego” (J. Coleman, R. Patnam, M. Oberg itp.) w badaniu więzi społecznych i relacji zachodzących w społecznościach neoprotestanckich. Na podstawie metod jakościowych, a mianowicie częściowo ustrukturyzowanych 40 wywiadów narracyjnych ze Świadkami Jehowy stwierdza się, że ich kapitał społeczny napędzany jest wysoką integracją regulacyjną i symboliczną w obrębie społeczności, a także zintensyfikowanymi inkluzywnymi więzami społecznymi. W konsekwencji wzrasta zaangażowanie jednostki w strukturę społeczności, zależność od niej i solidarność z celami jej działalności. Taki proces nie przyczynia się jednak do tworzenia przekrojowych więzi społecznych, co stanowi problematyczną podstawę dla dalszego tworzenia ogólnospołecznego kapitału społecznego.

Słowa kluczowe: kapitał społeczny, społeczność, Świadkowie Jehowy, konwersja religijna, solidarność.

Introduction

The specificity of Ukrainian society of the last decades in the religious dimension concerns the increase of intensity and variety of forms of religious life – a phenomenon known as the “religious renaissance”. During this period the proportion of believers raised significantly (up to over 70% of the population). According to the results of the sixth wave of the European Social Survey (ESS, 2012), 74.79% of the population of Ukraine consider themselves to be of a particular religion, which is quite high on a pan-European scale: seventh place out of 23 participating countries (after Cyprus, Poland, Portugal, Ireland, Slovakia, and Bulgaria)¹. Against the background of these changes, the question of social projections of increasing intensity and diversity of religious life remains open.

Among the new religious communities that are gaining in popularity in modern Ukraine, one of the most prominent is the denomination of Jehovah’s Witnesses (hereinafter referred to as the “JW”), mostly due to its proselytizing activity. The beginnings of JW activity in Ukraine date back to 1911. In the future, this trend was extended mainly to the western regions by Ukrainians who converted during their trips abroad. In the following historical period, the Soviet policy of state atheism had the most destructive effect on those denominations that were marked by some opposition to power, or even emphasized autonomy of religion sphere. As M. Rajtar notes: “Both, the position of the witnesses themselves (for example, on the refusal from military service or membership in socialist youth organizations) and their “message” were differently (and often wrongly) interpreted... as part of the political opposition. In their own eyes, on the other hand, they were the ones who “did not get involved in certain things, “precisely because of the biblically motivated political neutrality” (Rajtar 2010: 409).

During different periods of its existence, the Soviet government changed its attitude toward JW, from severe persecution to restriction of preaching. One of the most known contemporary work on this subject is E. Baran’s “Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah’s Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach About It” that analyzes tactics of soft resistance by JW against pressure of Soviet repressive machine. What surprises, researcher notes, is not the fact that Soviet system repressed witnesses, but the fact that witnesses opposed it for so long and relatively successfully, resorting to a wide range of nonviolent methods of resistance and even carrying out proselytizing activities in close to biblical forms (such as attempts to convert security service officers who arrested and interrogated witnesses) (Baran 2014).

The most severe was the postwar period from 1947 to 1951, when several thousands of JW were sent to the Gulag camps in Siberia for “anti-Soviet activities”. Belonging to the Witness community alone was sufficient reason for repression. Significant mitigation occurred in 1965. From then until the end of Soviet period, Witnesses were imprisoned mostly for popularizing their teachings and distributing religious literature. In the second half of the 1980s, the pressure on JW eased and it is believed that starting from 1987 imprisonment for religion connected motivations ceased. In the early 1990s, most Protestant communities in Ukraine became legal. Since then, the process of their institutionalization and the development of a formal structure have continued.

The largest increase in the number of JW believers has taken place since 1997. Thus, according to some researchers, the number of JW believers increased by over 380% during the period 1991 – 2000 (Leshan 2010: 52). More than 90% of Jehovah’s Witnesses have not been a member of this denomination since birth, with an average membership of 4-5 years (Nazarkina 2001: 8). Such intense growth is of concern to traditional denominations, not only in theological and symbolic terms, but also in terms of the potential danger of reducing the parish.

Today, there is an inter-religious tension in Ukrainian society that manifests itself in various forms, including initiatives to formally limit the activities of the JW. The question remains of a qualitative transformation of the JW religion – the transition from a non-public, semi-legal mode to a formalized one, and the corresponding changes concerning generalized trust, inclusion and solidarity of this community with the rest of society.

¹ ESS Round 6: European Social Survey Round 6 Data (2012), Data file edition 2.3. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC.

This paper focuses on the explanation of the social mechanisms of the formation and functioning of the JW community from the perspective of social capital theory.

Sociological discourse on social capital and religion

There is a considerable body of research on the relationship between religiosity and social capital. Probably one of the first researchers to thoroughly cover the topic of the relationship between religion and socio-political dimension of society, while not using the term “social capital”, is the French researcher A. de Tocqueville. In the work “Democracy in America” (1835) he expressed an innovative idea that religiousness of the population could contribute to the democracy of society, while most of the French thinkers of that time were convinced that religion as a belief in a supernatural being or a supernatural world impeded the political and economic development.

In contemporary socio-humanitarian discourse, the contribution to the elaboration of the classics of the theory of social capital by J. Coleman and R. Putnam is noticeable. J. Coleman emphasized the functional role of religious communities, in particular, in creating a supportive environment for youth socialization (Coleman 1990: 306-313). R. Putnam in a work devoted to the tradition of civic participation in Italy, concludes that the dysfunctional nature of religious organizations is due to relatively hermetic, hierarchical and particularistic structures and thus generates bonding ties and bounded solidarity. Accordingly, the organizational activity of citizens in church and religious organizations should be excluded from the “formula” of calculating the level of civic social capital. However, in his famous “Bowling Alone...” R. Putnam emphasized the unique role of religious (and particularly Protestant) communities in the creation of America’s social capital. Religious involvement, at least in the modern United States, is associated with a range of activities that go beyond narrow religious boundaries, including volunteer charitable activities (Putnam 2000: 66).

Not all authors share this view, including those who have focused their research on the social capital of post-Soviet societies. So, M. Aberg believes that in Eastern Europe under totalitarianism the church (both as a hierarchical institution and as a network of communication between parishioners and church employees) was one of the few legally existing alternatives to the public sphere, completely controlled by political regime. In particular, M. Aberg, in support of this thesis, reminds that in Western Ukraine the national revival and democratization of the early 1990s went along with the revival of church life and religiosity, but in the end, the latter led to the preservation of peculiar “non-civil” models of forming personal social networks, that the author describes using the term “ethnic lenses” (Aberg 2000: 314).

Highlighting the positive impact of religiosity on social capital, a number of contemporary researchers argue that people who are actively involved in the life of church communities develop relationships of trust, gain civic engagement skills, and expand their communication within “church” social networks (Halman, Luijckx 2006: 87). At the same time, religious activity can reduce the time for other activities, such as participating in volunteer campaigns outside the church. In addition, engaging in one of the religious groups may result in a decrease in tolerance towards those who do not share relevant values and beliefs.

A. Kaas, on the basis of a comparative study of European countries, reaffirmed the assumption that religiosity (faith and service attendance) promotes the development of social capital, as it encourages participation in various organizations and thus helps build civic skills, promoting values such as solidarity in society, altruism, honesty. At the same time, the study found that adherents of hierarchically organized religion organizations are less likely to participate in social life, and at the same time tend to shift responsibility in all spheres of society to the state. The negative impact of hierarchical religion structures on the development of cognitive social capital was also confirmed (Kaasa 2013: 581). At the same time, the issue of the interconnectedness of the religiosity of small, highly integrated communities with the social capital of society in general is marginal in sociological discourse.

The first sociological work focused specifically on the study of Jehovah’s Witnesses is the work of J. Beckford (1975) entitled “The Trumpet of Prophecy: A Sociological Study of Jehovah’s Witnesses”. Based on empirical studies of the activities of JW and their perceptions in different societies of the world, in particular in Britain, France and Germany, Beckford argued that public reactions to new religious movements reveal as much

about society as they do about the most recent religious movements (Beckford 1975: 186 – 189). The named study, unfortunately, remained alone of a kind and in 1997 R. Stark and L. R. Iannaccone noted that, despite the significant scale of the phenomenon, including millions of believers, most sociologists of religion did not pay any attention to study of the Jehovah's Witnesses until recently (Stark, Iannaccone 1997: 134). As M. Rajtar notes, "Interest of anthropologists and sociologists or historians of religion in Jehovah's Witnesses has so far been limited primarily to the analysis of their worldview and behavior, their numerical growth and conversion, relations with the state, or teaching and writing practices" (Rajtar 2014: 260).

Over time, the sociological discourse on JW has expanded, in particular with regard to such aspects as religious freedom, trust, discrimination, inequality, social support networks, and social well-being. At the same time, current scientific discourse on Jehovah's Witnesses is clearly dominated by the topics of bioethics and sociology of medicine – most of the scientific publications mentioning JW are dedicated to the features of medical beliefs and the culture of treatment of believers of this denomination (peculiarities of the healing process, organs transplantation, blood transfusion etc.) (Maselko, Hughes, Cheney 2011; DeMichelis 2017).

The most recent sociological innovation in the study of this denomination is the application of the concept of religious social capital (in some publications the term "religious social capital" is used). Religious social capital is understood as a social resource accessible to individuals and groups through their social ties within the religious community. It influences such areas as group membership, social integration, values and norms, trust, and social support. According to D. Myronovich, the concept of religious capital is an attempt to combine the concepts of human and social capital as a combination of social ties, informal practices and cultural norms, as well as certain "endogenous" aspects such as the presence of religious knowledge, feelings and beliefs (Mironovich 2013: 44-45).

At the same time, it is doubtful whether the introduction of this concept really extends the research toolkit, or whether it is an unnecessary step towards the deepening of terminological ambiguity in the social sciences. At present, the concept of "religious capital" is underconceptualized.

Research methodology

Social capital theory has potential in exploring different aspects of social reality and, in particular, in the study of relatively autonomous religious communities. Such is the community of the JW confession, which has for a long time been semi-legal in Soviet society and forcibly oppressed by official authorities for a number of reasons. In accordance with the norms of the JW religious doctrine, and partly due to the historical experience of oppression and discrimination, this community is characterized by a high level of seclusion and isolation from the rest of society. The explanation of the structural, symbolic, normative and conative aspects of the functioning of the JW communities gives an opportunity to answer a number of urgent questions in the practical and theoretical dimensions: to identify the peculiarities of the transformation of the social networks of the newly converted JW believers; explore the network structure of the JW community; analyze the specificities of the "trust radius" of the JW communities in the context of bounded and generalized trust; consider the functional dimension of community with attention to practices that reproduce community social integration.

Social capital theory allows to analyze the functioning of the JW community in the context of a dilemma, in which the two opposite "poles" are represented by an autonomous, closed and highly integrated community, on one hand, and an inclusive, heterogeneous, deinstitutionalized community, on the other. On the one hand, a strong community that has diverse structures that govern its life protects members of the community from various manifestations of social disorganization: from unemployment to lack of care or family breakdown. Such a community prevents deviant behavior of its members, monitors and controls the compliance of the behavior with the established norms of the community. On the other hand, such a community is a complete universe of meanings, connections, institutions, and whether or not it intentionally complicates the interaction of members of the community with society "from the outside".

As we know from social capital theory, high intra-group integration and strong shared identity form social communities with a narrow radius of trust and so-called internal solidarity that is getting stronger due to

external pressure and discriminatory barriers. The specificity of JW denominations lies in the extraordinarily high level of intra-group integration, which can complicate the formation of cross-cutting social ties that would integrate society beyond the denominational communities. The social mechanism for the spread of new religious movements, the processes of defection (rejection of membership in a particular religious community) and conversion (formation of membership in a new religious organization) in contemporary Ukrainian society require a thorough sociological analysis.

The given analysis addresses the following aspects of the phenomenon of social capital: 1) structural (network) aspects of the social capital of the JW communities; 2) the symbolic and regulatory aspects of the social capital of the JW communities; 3) the sociocultural aspects of the social capital of the JW communities. The study of the symbolic and normative aspects of the social capital of the JW shows the content of the central elements of the normative and symbolic component of social capital – beliefs and solidarity in these communities. The study of the sociocultural dimension of the social capital of JW reveals the characteristics of the practices which support the internal grouping of the community and its contacts with the “outside world”.

Research methods

As it is an area of life experience and spirituality, the perception of the same events and factors by different respondents may differ significantly. Taking into account the “sensitivity” of the religious sphere, our study used a qualitative method of semi-structured interviews, in which respondents (JW believers) spoke in a relatively free form about various aspects of their lives in the past and present, focusing on the issues of defection and conversion, experience of external pressure and prejudices, changes in the circle of communication and collective practices in JW communities, bounded and general trust and solidarity. This created the preconditions for the comparative analysis of biographies and for the development of a typology of individual behavior based on it. The empirical basis of the research is 40 semi-structured interviews with representatives of the JW denomination conducted in spring 2019. The study participants were selected with a combination of the status and snowball methods. The study participants were: 1) those who turned to researchers for the purpose of their proselytizing activities (20 persons); 2) those with life experience of belonging to the JW community (20 people). All respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, agreed to participate in it and signed informed consent.

Results

Common for all respondents was the fact that they had undergone a denominational conversion process throughout their lives. By gender, respondents were predominantly female (32 female and 18 male). We assume that this, on one hand, reflects the structure of communities of believers in these denomination, and on the other – gender differences in willingness to participate in interview (women agreed to be interviewed more willingly than men). M. Rajtar noticed similar gender distribution of respondents in her quality methods based survey although author notes that “high proportion of interviewed women, however, does not correspond to the gender division in the congregation... I was able to talk to more women than men for two reasons. Firstly, as (a single) woman I was unable to talk to (single) men without the presence of other Witnesses, which was often impossible to arrange. Secondly, in many Witness families it is a woman who does the bulk of evangelising (e.g. as a Society’s pioneer) and thus has “more” time; while we were talking, their husbands were usually at work” (Rajtar 2009: 8).

Concerning the time of confessional conversion, it varies from 1991 to 2019 (thus, it can be assumed that the number of confessional conversions towards JW increased in the post-Soviet period). The longest time in the JW denomination among respondents is 27 years. The shortest stay in the new denomination is 2.5 years. In terms of conversion age, the lowest is 14 years and the highest is 48 years.

The most popular answer to the question to which denomination respondents belonged before conversion was belonging to Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC). In almost all cases, we have recorded total conversion, ie one that covers both a structural dimension (belonging to a group and engaging in group

practices) and a personal dimension (changing identities, values and norms). However, in two cases, the structural component prevailed: these were cases, where the newly converted JW members responded by life circumstances (marrying a faithful JW member or adoption to a family belonging to JW denomination). In these cases, the respondents are structurally integrated into the group, but when it comes to their values and normative orientations, we have noted some distance from the new denomination (or at least – lack of such enthusiasm and conviction as in the rest of the respondents).

The initiative to change confession in all cases came from the believers themselves. The defects had certain perceptions of the doctrinal and secular aspects of the functioning of their former religious organizations and communities. The following were cited as “secular” (unrelated to doctrine and rite) by the repulsive factors that prompted respondents to convert. “I do not know where the money raised in the churches go. Now (in my new church) I know that they are going for the right purposes” (Maria, 53). “There is corruption in the upper echelons of religious organizations. For example, the law of Simony is that church posts were bought for money and sold for money. This was the case in history. Probably so and now remains ... Excessive focus on material affairs. Payment for weddings, baptisms, funerals, consecrations. There is a “fee”. Candles, chanting, prayers – all must be paid for. There’s less spirituality, more material. This also applies to the Orthodox and all other traditional churches” (Larysa, 54). “Every church is an organization and it is quite corrupt. Many churches function not to help people but to keep up with business” (Nadia, 50). “Most churches are focused on making money. Donations ...” (Olexandra, 19).

In the structural dimension, we have identified two models of personal network transformations of those interviewed as a result of the change of their confessional affiliation. In the first case, relatives and the closest circle of acquaintances of the respondent still belong to the traditional denomination or at least have not undergone a denominational conversion (as the respondent did). In such cases, respondents mostly talk about temporary or permanent deterioration of family relationships, condemnation and pressure from relatives. However, in most of the interviews, it was also said that over time such conflicts were mitigated: “Relatives, of course, thought it was a sect. As time passed, they saw that I became completely different. Not like I used to be but better. In general, the Lord has changed me... now a very good relationship with relatives. I pray for them. They are not of my denomination” (Daryna, 50). In other cases, the relatives’ attitude remained hostile and the conversion worsened the family relationship: “The parents were surprised, disappointed. They didn’t talk to me for a long time. They did not understand why I did it” (Natalia, 40); “Not very commendable. It was problematic, but they got already used to it. There were family conflicts” (Oksana, 50); “My mom had negative attitude first when I was studying the Bible. Then, when I became a baptized messenger, she became very opposed. Because I went to preach. She thought it didn’t make sense because they pay me nothing. I have no use for that. My mother is very materialistic, pragmatic, she says – it is impossible to live purely spiritual. She didn’t consider me a fanatic, but something like that. Daddy had aggression. He threatened me” (Olexandra, 19).

Within this model, the identity of the new converts to the JW denomination changes significantly, the intensity of contacts and emotional closeness with the former members of the personal network weakens, and their place is taken by new acquaintances among the believers of the new denomination.

The second type of transformation of the converts’ personal network implies that members of the neophyte’s personal network also undergo a denominational conversion (in this case, they refer to a group conversion that is done to spouses, or the whole family). In such cases, the spouses or whole families of the new converts become a kind of religious entity in which certain ritual activities are performed. In such cases, the family relations are described positively by the respondent and external pressure and stereotyping are absent: “At that moment all my acquaintances were in the church (JW), so they were very happy...” (Tatiana, 23); “...An acquaintance with my mother invited us to a meeting. And so step by step, slowly, having more knowledge, I was baptized a year later...” (Halyna, 17); “I was influenced by my friend. She and all her family came to the denomination of Jehovah’s Witnesses” (Svitlana, 43); “It was my desire to join Jehovah’s Witnesses. And my husband’s wishes. We are together... Although we have good relations with our husband before, they continue to develop and improve after we together joined JW” (Iryna, 57).

In the symbolic and normative dimension, the JW confessionals demonstrate a clear confessional identity (this is not always inherent in the traditional, especially Orthodox, confessions). It should be noted that the JW identity in the interviews we received is combined with a certain broader Protestant identity, a sense of solidarity and common life situations and problems with representatives of other Protestant denominations. JW shared identity should not be perceived as narrow-religious, since the latter displaces civic identity, in particular by establishing a non-civic (extra-political) system of loyalties.

JW is characterized by a clear positive self-stereotyping. His confession is described as “close to God“, “true“, “special“ (traditional confessions were called “ordinary“ by some respondents). People belonging to the Neo-Protestant denominations are described as “moral“. It should be noted that, according to the respondents, one can conclude that there is a certain super-denominational affinity between Protestants, which may be derived both from a certain similarity of doctrine and rites, as well as from a particular situation and difficulties in the Ukrainian society.

In a somewhat different light, the JW position in society in terms of stereotypes is represented by the following words of one respondent: “I know that many employers want Jehovah’s Witnesses to come to their work. Because they know that the Witnesses will be honest, will be sober, will not steal, will be very obedient at work ...” (Olga, 19).

When it comes to the attitude of the state, all the respondents expressed their opinion that the state either cooperates with the JW denomination, or is passive: “I know that the authorities respect the Jehovah’s Witnesses because they are legal, they pay all taxes” (Oleg, 27); “Public authorities support us if there are any social projects. But mostly we do not feel support from the state” (Halyna, 24); “That is, for all denominations. That they (the state) don’t care” (Ivan, 63); “The attitude of the state is normal. JW is a legal organization. There are many examples of cooperation. There are many social programs. Some programs run by our church (Eight Health Principles, Health Country, Oriental Angel) have even been included in city administration social programs. The state supports this. As enshrined in the constitution” (Larysa, 54).

The study found that the intensity of religious life is extremely high for ordinary members of the JW community. Thus, in particular, the available quantitative data indicate that only one in five Ukrainians attend church weekly². In particular, Ukrainians who consider themselves Orthodox usually go to church only for religious holidays. More than once a week religious services, congregations, worships of 2.9% of believers of the UOC of the Moscow Patriarchate, 3.2% of the UOC of the Kiev Patriarchate, 0.4% of other Orthodox, 7.1% of Greek Catholics visit church more than once a week³. Instead, at least twice a week, all JW respondents participate in religious and non-religious collective practices together with other members of their communities. These practices are quite diverse. These are: missionary work (respondents used the terms “go to tent“, “preach from home to home“, “distribute magazines“), the operation of the so-called “home church“, church choir, Saturday school for children and teenagers, having a Saturday dinner at a community member houses. It is recorded that the intensity of participation in collective religious practices is not less than twice a week, and the intensity of participation in individual religious practices is not lower than daily.

The high intensity of collective practices is, in fact, a tool for transforming a new converts’ personal network: old social connections are being displaced or weakened, and new highly intensive and diverse (religious and non-religious) relationships with members are coming into their place.

Conclusions

We learned that the conversions of the members of the JW mainly occurred in the period after 1991, in the period of exacerbation of economic and political crisis and widespread anomic demoralization. According to Ukrainian sociologist M. Paraschevin, in the conditions of permanent crisis in modern Ukrainian society,

2 *The number of believers has decreased in Ukraine – Razumkov Center study*, https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/community/social_questioning/67086 (accessed 24.05.2017).

3 *Orthodox in Ukraine are far less likely to believe in other denominations go to church – poll May 26, 2016*, https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/community/social_questioning/63507.

religious affiliation is one of the factors of overcoming the crisis of individual life. Accordingly, one of the factors behind the conversion to religion is the desire to find affiliation to a reference group. This can be explained by the abrupt increase in the number of JW's (Paraschevin 2009: 331). In particular, this is due to the integration into the dense social networks and the various forms of support that the JW communities provide to their fellow believers.

In all interviews, respondents reported significant positive changes in their lives following the denominational conversion. These changes were primarily about enhancing the level of social integration. Converters have become part of a highly integrated community with high intensity of daily collective practices, a dense network of social connections and exchanges. The JW communities offer their believers a very detailed budget of time with intensive religious and trans-religious practices (leisure, medical, proselytizing or volunteer activities).

The JW communities have remained largely disconnected from public and political discourse, although in recent years their integration into the socio-political processes that are ongoing in Ukrainian society has increased. One of the most effective mechanisms for such integration is voluntary charity work, aimed at a wide range of social issues, which aims primarily at proselytizing, but latently has other, non-religious consequences. Another mechanism for integrating JW communities into the discursive field of society, the activities of other (non-religious) social institutions, and the acquisition (or strengthening) of civic identity is the politicization mechanism that has been intensifying in recent years due to the narrowing of religious freedom on occupied territories of Ukraine.

The active charity work of JW communities has become an additional mechanism for their integration both into the public sphere of society and in cooperation with state bodies. An additional factor that weakens the self-isolation of these communities is a significant worsening of the situation with the freedom of activity of their cells in the occupied territories (Crimea and certain regions of Donetsk and Luhansk regions). In fact, Protestant denominations in these territories were forced to deinstitutionalization, to curtail their activities in public space, avoiding possible harassment and even aggression in violent forms. Some high-profile cases of persecution and even the death of Neo-Protestants, along with the narrowing of religious freedom in the neighboring RF (in particular, the ban on the activities of JW organizations) have led to a significant politicization of Protestants, their integration into intra-Ukrainian political processes⁴.

In our view, the social capital of the JW communities is one of culturally uniting nature and is status bridging at the same time. It is unifying since JW communities are highly integrated, relatively homogeneous in terms of culture, identity and practices, with intense social ties, and joining a community involves displacing (or weakening) other (in particular, national and civic-political) identities with the new common identity of believers. The social capital of the JW is a status-connecting one, since within communities "owners" of different "volumes" of power, prestige, capital in different forms interact. Due to their involvement in a highly integrated network, various forms of resources are made available to all members of the community, including members of vulnerable social groups. In this way, one of the components of the poverty phenomenon – network poverty – is overcome and the life chances of the socially disadvantaged members of the religious community are improved. All respondents reported having a different religious background in their own personal network, while only about a third of those surveyed reported having close friends who were not members of the JW community. Reproduction of personal social networks of believers of this denomination occurs in such a way that strong ties are strengthened and weak ties are weakened. Accordingly, the embeddedness of the individual believer in the structure of the community, dependence on it, and solidarity with the goals of its activity increases. Thus, JW social capital does not contribute to the formation of so-called crosscutting social ties, and in this sense is a problematic basis for the creation of the whole society social capital. At the same time, social capital of the JW is marked by a dynamic that over time weakens the isolation of the communities of this religious trend.

⁴ *Terror in occupied territories of eastern Ukraine: IRF published the facts of religious persecutions*, <https://irs.in.ua/en/irf-report-2018-russian-terror-in-the-occupied-territories-of-eastern-ukraine> (accessed 24.10.2018).

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