Religion, Displacement, Resilience & Community:

An Exploration of Localised Communitarian Support Networks for Religious Minority Refugees

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Funded by: The Laidlaw Foundation as part of the Laidlaw Undergraduate Research and Leadership Scholarship

Summer 2024 Research Project

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Abstract:

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A critical component of migration studies has been the study of how religion impacts and intersects with experiences of forcible displacement (Hollenbach, 2014). This study enriches current understanding by analysing how Copts as religious minorities organise and operate to be actors of support and resilience to the trauma and barriers faced by Coptic refugees. Drawing on interviews with religious leaders across Europe, this study explores how churches expand their role above simply buildings as sites of worship but becoming sites for emotional, administrative, and humanitarian aid. These religious communities heavily rely on people-based networks to assemble and operationalise. They then employ methods of community support through the creation of safe spaces, delivery of aid, support in paperwork, languages and job opportunities. Critically, they are spaces rich in identity rhetoric which fundamentally changes how refugees interact with these sites. Through these findings, the research underscores the necessity of considering religious institutions as key actors in refugee integration and support, particularly for faith-based minority groups like the Copts.

Word Count: 6603

Acknowledgements:

We would like to firstly express our sincerest gratitude to the Laidlaw Foundation which is the core reason why we were able to conduct this research; they have funded and enabled this research, financially supporting this research, and creating the opportunity for this research to be conducted. The Laidlaw Foundation is a global non-profit dedicated to enriching lives through the transformative power of education, particularly focusing on individuals from underserved communities. The Laidlaw Scholars Leadership & Research Programme invests in passionate undergraduate students to become ethical leaders in every sector and geography.

Secondly, we would like to give our gratitude to Philip Rauber and Kelly Zerrouk who were invaluable sources of help during the completion of this project as our LSE-Laidlaw Leaders. Additionally, we would like to thank Dr Ioanna Gouseti, our supervisor who was immensely supportive with her guidance and expertise during this project.

Finally, our biggest thanks goes to all the participants from the Coptic Orthodox Church who we interviewed for their graciousness, hospitality, and generosity with their time. We are incredibly grateful that they opened their doors to us, allowing us a glimpse into their lives and experiences.

Introduction:

This study aims to explore the experiences of refugees in Europe who can be deemed an invisible religious minority and how these experiences can affect their sense of identity and assimilation into the host countries. Much of the current research that exists surrounding the experiences of refugees in Europe, particularly of those from the Middle East in recent times, are understandably focused on the Muslim experience as they represent the majority experience of refugees in Europe (Wilson et al. 2016; Fruja Amthor 2017; Hackett 2015; Paz et al. 2020; Dialog et al 2021; Abdelaaty et al. 2020). Because of this, there is a gap in the literature for a discussion about the particular experiences of the 'invisible minorities', those that follow different religions to Islam, but are taking similar journeys into Europe as the assistance that they seek and the communities they assimilate into can differ.

This study examines this through researching how Coptic religious leaders and practitioners make sense of the experience of Coptic refugees and the role the Church plays in their post-migration experiences. We have chosen to explore this topic through the lens of Coptic Christians as Egyptian Copts are the biggest religious minority in the middle east and have faced discrimination by state institutions and are at continued risk of sectarian violence (Gabbay 2018; Ashok 2023; Iskander 2012; Hasan 2003; Rubinstein 2010; Younan 2014). This means that the experiences and traumas that they handle in the host countries and their view of identity can differ from that explored in previous literature. For various reasons, Copts leave Egypt as refugees travelling to Europe, North America, and Australia as refugees. In doing so, they often embark on treacherous journeys and face additional discrimination, as our research confirms, leading to added layers of their identity and experiences.

This study investigates the importance of Coptic churches acting as multi-faceted institutions for how Coptic refugees navigate their lives in their host countries through community support and social welfare.

Our research uncovered how the role of the church has expanded to advisory roles when handling bureaucratic challenges, community support and a place to work towards overcoming

traumas, these roles have developed in different ways depending on the European country. Specifically, we explored how the Coptic Church can act as a hub for quasi-governmental advice and provisioning aid as well as a safe space to build community and how this can help refugees integrate into their host countries whilst also reinforcing their Coptic identity.

Following a series of semi-structured interviews with different Abunas (Coptic religious leaders) about the role of the church with refugees and the interaction between them and broader society, this study highlights how the intersection of faith, trauma and identity has become a key element of the church's role in the Coptic diaspora. By offering spiritual aid, practical jobs and trauma groups to share personal stories in a supportive environment, Coptic churches create spaces where individuals can heal and reconnect with their cultural and religious identity. By covering so many roles and providing aid in both a spiritual and material sense, the Coptic church has become the first port of call for any Coptic refugee regardless of how connected to their faith beforehand. This might allow refugees who may have strayed from their religion through their hardships to re-establish their identity within the religion and its people.

The following sections include a literature review that explores what research has already been conducted on the role of Coptic Church in supporting Coptic refugees, the breakdown of this paper's methodology when conducting primary research through semi-structured interviews and an analysis of our findings, exploring the role of a church as a safe place and a site of community support, their role in the distribution of humanitarian aid and as informal administrative facilitators.

Literature Review:

This literature review examines the multifaceted role of the Coptic Church in supporting Coptic refugees across Europe, focusing on four key areas: quasi-governmental advice, provisioning aid, community support, and the creation of safe spaces for trauma healing and identity preservation. The review adopts the perspective that faith-based institutions, particularly the Coptic Church, serve as crucial support systems for refugees beyond their traditional spiritual roles

Key debates in this field revolve around the extent to which religious institutions should be involved in refugee support, the balance between maintaining cultural identity and facilitating integration, and the adaptability of religious institutions' roles across different national contexts. The review is organised into four main sections corresponding to the key areas of the Church's involvement. It focuses on literature from refugee studies, sociology of religion, and migration studies published in the last two decades, incorporating primary research from interviews with Coptic priests in various European countries, including Spain and Hungary. While concentrating on the Coptic Church specifically, it draws comparisons with other faith-based institutions where relevant to provide a broader context.

A significant body of literature highlights the role of religious institutions, including the Coptic Church, in providing quasi-governmental advice to refugees. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Pacitto (2015) argue that faith-based organisations often act as crucial intermediaries between refugees and governmental institutions, particularly in navigating complex bureaucratic processes. This intermediary role is especially important given the often opaque and challenging nature of refugee resettlement procedures. Hirschman (2004) extends this argument, suggesting that religious institutions provide not just practical advice, but also serve as cultural brokers, helping refugees understand and navigate the social norms and expectations of their host countries. This cultural brokerage function is particularly relevant for the Coptic Church, given its strong ties to both Egyptian culture and various European contexts.

Bauer et al. (2010) focus specifically on the role of churches in providing legal and administrative support to refugees. Their research indicates that church leaders often develop expertise in immigration law and procedures, becoming valuable resources for their communities. However, Zetter et al. (2005) suggests that while religious institutions can provide valuable support, there's a risk of creating parallel systems that may ultimately hinder integration into mainstream society.

Existing literature consistently highlights the efforts of religious institutions, including the Coptic Church, in providing physical aid to refugees. Goodall (2015) provides a comprehensive study of faith-based humanitarian organisations, emphasising their role in meeting refugees' basic needs, often in collaboration with larger secular organisations.

However, Ferris (as cited in Landau, 2012) raises concerns about the potential for proselytization or conditional support, arguing that religious motivations can sometimes conflict with humanitarian principles. This debate remains active in the field, with scholars like Ager and Ager (2015) arguing for a more nuanced understanding of the role of faith in humanitarian aid.

Bauer et al. (2010) argue that in some contexts, faith-based organisations may be more effective due to their cultural proximity to the communities they serve, a point particularly relevant to the Coptic Church's work with Egyptian refugees.

These contribute to the ongoing discussion about the adaptability and responsiveness of faith-based aid provision, suggesting that the Coptic Church's approach to aid is highly context-specific, adapting to local needs, resources, and political climates.

The literature extensively discusses the role of faith-based institutions in providing community support to refugees. Hirschman (2004) argues that religious institutions often serve as important networking hubs, connecting refugees with employment opportunities and social resources within the community.

Ager and Strang (2008) provide a comprehensive framework for understanding refugee integration, highlighting the importance of community institutions in facilitating language

learning and cultural orientation. They argue that faith-based institutions can play a crucial role in this process, particularly for refugees with strong religious identities.

Foner and Alba (2008) focus specifically on the role of religious institutions in supporting second-generation immigrants. They suggest that these institutions can provide important spaces for negotiating between heritage cultures and host society norms, a function particularly relevant to the Coptic Church given its strong cultural ties to Egypt.

These findings contribute to the ongoing discussion about the multifaceted nature of community support provided by religious institutions, suggesting that the Coptic Church's approach is highly responsive to the specific needs and circumstances of its communities across different European contexts.

Scholars emphasise the importance of religious institutions in offering spiritual aid and creating environments where refugees can freely express their identities. Gozdziak and Shandy (2002) argue that shared religious practices and spaces can provide comfort and continuity for refugees, helping them cope with the trauma of displacement.

Bentley et al. (2021) focus on the psychological benefits of religious community membership for refugees, suggesting that it can provide a sense of belonging and purpose that is crucial for mental health and well-being in the context of displacement.

This literature review establishes clear links to our research paper, exploring four key areas across different European contexts and contributing to filling identified gaps in the literature. The current state of the literature, supplemented by our research, suggests a growing recognition of the importance of faith-based institutions in refugee support systems. However, it also reveals the complexity and context-specificity of this role across different European settings.

More research is needed on the long-term impacts of church-based support on refugee integration outcomes, and for comparative studies between different faith-based institutions and their approaches to refugee support across various European contexts. Future studies could explore topics such as the potential tensions between the Church's role in preserving

cultural identity and the pressure for refugees to integrate into host societies, or more narrowly on how the Church adapts its support mechanisms in different cultural and political contexts.

Methodology:

This study adopted a qualitative research design, using semi-structured interviews in order to explore how religious elites understand the intersectionality of refugee identity and how they integrate post-displacement with the fact that they are a religious minority. A qualitative approach was chosen as it allowed for a more in-depth discussion surrounding this topic and resulted in more nuanced results as will be discussed later. Participants were purposefully chosen as they were Abunas (Coptic Priests - religious leaders) and had direct experience with Coptic refugees who had come to their Churches across Europe.

Accessibility was also a key component when choosing who to interview. A total of five Abunas were interviewed across Rome, Milan, Barcelona and Budapest and interviewing across Europe allowed for the capture of a wide variety of perspectives and experience with the religious minority refugees. The study used semi-structured interviews as this allowed for a flexible exploration of the study's themes and the Abuna's individual experiences whilst also maintaining some consistency across the interviews. The interviews were conducted in Arabic as the Abuna's felt more comfortable articulating their responses this way as English was usually their third or fourth language. The interview guide included open-ended questions surrounding the role of the Coptic Church with refugees, the interaction between society and refugees and their thoughts on policies about these issues. The interviews were conducted in person and all participants were given the interview questions in both written English and Arabic.

Participants signed informed consent forms before the interviews began and were made aware that their identity was completely anonymised to ensure confidentiality and openness within the discussion. They were also informed that they could redact consent or any statements after the interviews were conducted if they had second thoughts or apprehensions. In one particular

interview in Milan, the main Abuna that was interviewed also invited another Abuna and young woman to give their insights or answer questions and as they work under the main Abuna he gave consent on their behalf as that was what was respectful of the cultural and religious context; it was clear that the two other people who were invited to speak were consenting and happy to provide input, though we didn't get signed consent from them individually but from the main Abuna on behalf of them all.

All interviews were audio-recorded on multiple devices and saved to a secured file with the participants permission, from which they were translated into English and then transcribed, capturing as nuance and linguistic context as possible. We employed a thematic analysis strategy for the data analysis, involving coding the transcriptions and comparison to each other to pull out key themes, subthemes and differences across the interviews.

Some limitations to the methodology included a small sample size because of accessibility as this may limit the generalisability of the findings. There was a singular case of attrition when a scheduled interview in Greece was cancelled at the last minute on the participants behalf which reduced the sample size. Additionally, translations can introduce bias but having a team member who understands the Coptic culture and who is fluent in Arabic to do the translations allows for as much cultural context and nuance to be captured as possible.

Key Findings & Analysis:

During this research on the intersecting impact of religion and displacement for Copts, the significance of how religion is the backbone of their self-made communities has been apparent. Subsequently, what is apparent is how Copts have been able to access practical and emotional support. This section explores four key findings on how Coptic diasporic communities transformed religion from simply an aspect of their identity into a site and method for survival in many cases. Our interviews revealed how churches and religious communities encourage emotional support and simultaneously become agents for aid delivery and administrative dilemmas.

Churches as Sites of Support & Community - Safe Spaces

An interesting phenomenon regarding the spread and growth of Coptic Orthodox churches within Europe from Egypt has been that, unlike other religious orders, the Coptic churches in Europe were not established through missionary orders. Unlike a religious leader being sent to establish a community and Church, Coptic lay people begin the process by forming small communities who then request the Church to send a priest and then hire a venue to act as a church. Multiple interviewees recollect how they were called to serve in their current positions after requests were made by their future congregants. One participant stated how:

"For us, Copts, the church is built revolving around the people, it is the people that came here first, so the church is established because they want one."

What this illustrates is how critical religion is as an active component of Coptic refugees' lives. Whilst the physical construction of the churches occurred through formal requests to Archbishops, delegation of Priests, and often the renting of spaces from institutions such as the Catholic Church, what became a pillar to Coptic refugees was the communities that created those churches. For many, churches acted as a third 'safe space'. While there were individual

homes, places of employment or schools, the interviews evidenced how a third 'safe space' was created in these churches for refugees to place their identity. Whilst displacement by its nature dislodges conceptions of 'home', many of the participants reported how religion became a way to anchor their identity in a new 'home' through their religious community. One interviewee, part of the quasi-focus group and the only non-religious figure said:

"*… there were no churches nearby, and I really strongly felt that I was missing a part of my identity… Ever since I was really young, my mum and dad have been very vigilant to make sure that I go to Church... When I am inside the Church, I have protection…*"

In these spaces, shared religious beliefs often allow for a communal environment that allows for continuity in their environments and becomes a safe space for them.

For Coptic refugees in camps where a physical church was lacking, one participant recounts how his first contact with one refugee camp group was when they requested that he come to visit and conduct mass inside the camp. The participant recounts how we took all the equipment needed to administer holy communion and even took some 'shamaseen' or deacons with him into the camp. Another participant recounted how, in 2013, within a camp of 100-120 Copts, the Priest, when visiting, would make a makeshift alter inside the camp for prayer and mass. In this sense, as part of the religious community's support, a level of spiritual aid or support is also included within the needs of the Coptic diaspora.

Within these safe spaces, often traumatic experiences, especially of the path taken from North Africa to Europe, are discussed. One Priest shares the story of two of his congregants who were thrown off a boat coming from Libya and left in the dark in the sea at night for seven hours. Another recounts how many children died in the dangerous methods of human trafficking, all stories shared between Copts. A different participant recounts how a seventeen-year-old boy from Al Minya had drowned on the journey, and his family sent his fourteen-year-old brother on the same journey, he had arrived safely and was in the Church, which the participant spoke of.

Another phenomenon identified by the participants is that young men, once leaving refugee camps, often used the Church as a way to meet others and organise accommodation. They

would organize themselves into groups and rent flats to live together since living alone was too costly. One interviewee said that most would have three beds in one room that they would share. In this way, the Church became a method of organising how to live together post-camp.

Our results aligned with the work of scholars such as Bentley et al. (2021) and, Gozdziak and Shandy, (2002) revealing the Church's adaptability and strength in addressing trauma and providing safe spaces. In some European countries. We also observed efforts to incorporate local mental health resources into the Church's support systems, reflecting an integration of spiritual support with professional psychological assistance.

Churches as Sites of Support & Community - Linguistic Barriers

Every participant indicated that language was one of the critical disadvantages that all Copts arriving in Europe struggled with. A key barrier was the lack of fluency in the official language, especially when considering the distinct differences between generations within families. One participant recounted:

"They have issues sometimes where the parents are not perfect in their Spanish, but their children who attend Spanish schools are, so they speak to their children in Arabic. So children from five or six years old can struggle by being late in speech. Why? Because they can't switch between Arabic and Spanish. Arabic is the language of their parents, but they cannot write it; they can only listen and comprehend. Yet the language in school they study is difficult since they then go home and hear an opposite language… They have lots of issues."

Language barriers form one of the key sources of tension within refugee families. All struggle to communicate, but younger generations are taught in school, which means they learn at far quicker rates than their parents, who struggle greatly. The same participant recalls how when he organises the mass, he mixes the European language with Arabic and Coptic. This demonstrates how even the presence of church meetings, such as for mass or festivities,

provides a bridging environment for all languages and a shared opportunity for a linguistic connection across barriers.

Much of the existing literature such as Ager and Strang (2008) illustrate the importance of community institutions in facilitating language learning and cultural orientation, with faith-based institutions can play a crucial role in this process, particularly for refugees with strong religious identities. Our research illustrated however, both supported and added depth to this research; not only did the Church provide language learning skills, but it also acted as an effective 'bridging environment' for linguistic connection across borders and cultural connection.

Churches as Sites of Support & Community - Becoming Part of a New Community

Displacement changes everything—family, language, culture, and jobs. For most Copts, their identity is already largely cemented within Coptic communities, especially as persecuted minorities in Egypt. One participant labelled this phenomenon of life revolving around your community as part of *"a very Coptic culture."* This may explain why Coptic refugees continue to maintain this sense of community within the diaspora. However, one difficult-to-replicate aspect of this 'Coptic culture' is jobs, employable skills, and opportunities. This complements Hirschman (2004) who argues that religious institutions often serve as important networking hubs, connecting refugees with employment opportunities and social resources within the community.

Yet within these religious communities, Coptic refugees have expanded the religious and communal aspects to include the creation of a hub for opportunities. One participant recounted how he used the Church as a site to enable young men (who were the majority of refugees) to find meaning, learn new skills, and begin a path to employment.

This participant recalls how the majority of young men coming as Coptic refugees would struggle with employment, even in finding service jobs- such as being servers in restaurants

since they lacked language and would ultimately work in menial jobs. Having no in-country or even European referees, a lack of formally accepted vocational certificates often creates a feeling of a lack of purpose for these young men. The participant explained that he gave some young men the express role of making 'Orban'. Orban is a specific type of Coptic bread, stamped with the Coptic cross, made within the Church and is used during Communion for the entire community. He recounted another instance where he 'employed' some of the young men to fix a falling wall in a church corridor. Showing us the plastered wall with pride, the participant recalled how it allowed the men to display their work to future employers as potential handymen and give them a feeling that they were essential to the community. He compared it to having a role in building the Church, literally and physically, giving them a feeling of community.

Additionally, when the formation of this new community impacted refugees, our analysis revealed two specific trends in inter-community integration for specifically young people.

Firstly, participants spoke of creating spaces, especially for specifically young men, and their integration within the church community and broader society. These spaces often took place as the opportunity for separate mass times so that there would be a specific time for them to be available to the priests for confession and prayer as a group. This also appeared through the creation of specific weekly youth group meetings for these specific groups.

Secondly, the churches took an active role in presenting themselves to their local communities with pride. All participants took great pride in stressing that the community attempts to present themselves positively with their new neighbourhoods. Particular regard was given to sharing 'success stories' of young, displaced people who had contributed beneficially to their surroundings. For example, one participant states how they celebrated a young man who was given a community award and celebrated in the local paper due to his volunteer gardening. Another spoke fondly of how the Church had led a nationally celebrated event where young people presented who they were and the history of the Copts.

Religious Communities Role in Humanitarian Aid Distribution

Churches were found to be not only sources of individual aid to refugees by offering community, opportunity, and a safe space but also a source of mass support in humanitarian aid distribution. The nature and methods of this aid distribution varied between churches, especially considering their proximity to refugee camps.

Multiple participants recounted the role of churches in providing physical humanitarian aid to refugees. One Church had a formal commission with the government since they were seen as trusted entities with knowledge of refugees' personal circumstances. The government directly provided provisions based on data the Church collected. The participant recollected how they would find out one family had a new baby so that they would update the register with a family needing increased resources. The participant showed us the crates of biscuits, jams, pasta, rice and other non-perishables they still had on hand, replenished by the government monthly. The Church additionally provided additional supplies for young men for specific requests, like SIM cards or clothes.

In some cases, unlike the first participant, other churches did not have formalised agreements with governments yet maintained their role as providers of humanitarian aid in other ways. One participant created a charitable entity within the Church. This interviewee recalled how they would ask congregants to bring in non-perishables routinely; he would load up his car with the help of some of the young people, filling it with non-perishables: cans, tins, food with long expiration dates. Then, with permission from refugee camps, they would transport it in. The participant noted that entry and accessibility into bringing aid into camps was more manageable due to their status as religious figures.

There were participants who found other ways of using the Church or religious community for support and used other Christian NGOs as a method for connecting. One Church became formally involved with the work of CARITAS, despite being a different denomination, and would help out in specific issues, like that of refugees. Rather than being a more grassroots operation like the first two participants, they worked in a more formalised organisational capacity,

responding to alerts by CARITAS. Similar to the previous case, however, the activity of preparing support stemmed from the religious community itself. The participant recalled:

"The support offered by the Coptic Church is in tandem with CARITAS. We offer a service to various things like service to refugees. It depends on which section we are involved in that we are alerted by CARITAS and get started. We organise food parcels and meals, we provide blankets, and stuff like that. So the contact is often through CARITAS…"

In all three cases, whether it be religious communities activating with direct governmental aid, in a charitable grassroots setting, or as one entity within a larger organisational setting, what is clear is the role of religious communities in aid distribution. The nature of religious minorities being tight-knit communities which are heavily connected through religion, identity, and personal networks has emboldened these religious institutions to be able to deliver targeted aid directly to these refugees. In some cases therefore, this aligns with Goodall's (2015) comprehensive study of faith-based humanitarian organisations, who suggests that they often operate in collaboration with larger secular organisations, whilst in other contexts they operate outside of formalised agreements and more independently.

Religious Communities as Informal Administrative Facilitators

The initial section of this discussion analysed how the creation of these churches stemmed from the gathering of Coptic communities, either as individuals or as young families, as per our findings. Yet a critical component of the genesis of these communities is how these different refugees and immigrants discovered each other in the first place.

A consistent finding across all participants and one widely known within Coptic communities is that, to some extent, most Copts know each other through their regional religious ties. One participant said:

"Copts heavily rely on each other in their networks. For example, in Alexandria, Cairo, and Minia, they all know of each other."

Perhaps it may be because they are minorities that each family regionally knows of the other, or the religious element in that families regularly congregate communally, or that Copts experience heavy discrimination (both socially and legally) within Egypt, so naturally may band together. In any of these cases, what is clear across all participants is that Coptic networks are robust. When asked how Coptic refugees had recently discovered the Church we interviewed in, all participants gave answers that heavily stressed the same answer: 'someone-knows-someone-who-told-them'.

The use of the internet or social-media to advertise locations of churches is patchy depending on the capacity of the Priests. Whilst some were able to set up functioning social media profiles another humbly stated that he's not "*clever with that stuff at all*". Nevertheless, in either case, people-based networks took precedence.

A foundational aspect of the Coptic experience of displacement is relying on people-based connections in order to build a community. Participants recalled many different uses of this method, either that someone from Egypt would have their Priest contact the Priest the individual was taking refuge, or people sharing stories or information.

Evidently, these communities' knowledge-sharing roles extended beyond just creating a community. All participants heavily noted the informal role of information sharing and support for refugees regarding paperwork and administrative issues. Language is the first major issue for all refugees, and it seems natural that the first role that communities took on was to help new refugees with paperwork or understanding of the legal system. One participant recalls his role in facilitating support within the community when a new Coptic refugee would arrive:

"After I hear of their experiences, I will try to find someone who can help them. They may not have money, languages, or knowledge, so they need someone in a big capacity. For example, I translate for them when they get paperwork. This is a big part of people's service."

In addition to translation, there would be internal community communication in order to understand the country's system. One participant said they might know of lawyers who could advise and would ring them on behalf of the refugee. The role of 'pointing people in the right direction' is also noted in these communities since there is a sense of similarity in their experiences, which creates a site for support. A participant said of this community that from the perspective of the incoming young men:

"The nice thing …is that they will check if there are people from the same place as me, if he is from the same country that I am and if he is like me. So the Church becomes like a big home where they can go if they need help."

One Church formalises itself into taking a more active role in paperwork than others since they believe in their position, and thus, opinion is recognised by the government. In cases where deserved, the Priest recalls writing letters of recommendation of character or how they have benefited the community for refugees to add to their documents submitted to the courts. The ability of the Coptic Church to integrate its citizens starkly contrasts Zetter et al. (2005) who suggests that while religious institutions can provide valuable support, there's a risk of creating parallel systems that may ultimately hinder integration into mainstream society. Rather it is evident that such institutions significantly aid effective integration into the host country.

Conclusion:

This study has explored how refugees from religious minorities experience identity and understand their trauma and how this both impacts and is affected by their experience settling into their host countries post-migration. The study has unpacked the different methods that refugee communities have developed to foster community resilience to trauma and the barriers they face and has done so by investigating the particular experiences of Coptic Christian refugees and the assistance they have found within the Church above all other routes to aid or support. These experiences reveal how deeply religion, community, and identity are intertwined with displacement experiences. Churches transcend merely being physical buildings for religion, but hubs of activity and support. The religious communities that inhabit these spaces serve as critical 'safe spaces' for displaced people to anchor their identity, process trauma, and reclaim a sense of belonging in very new environments. Their role in aiding and integrating minority refugee groups is truly commendable.

Coptic religious communities additionally became sources of humanitarian assistance. In some cases, there were formal arrangements with the government to supply refugee communities; some took on a grassroots charitable approach, entering refugee camps to deliver aid, and others worked within larger organisations organising food packages based on alerts. In addition to physical aid, churches also supplied spiritual and emotional support upon request, creating opportunities for mass assembled within refugee camps and the creation of separate spaces tailored explicitly to aiding young people who experienced forcible displacement. Furthermore, the Church becomes a site which offers opportunities for them to learn skills, find housing, and develop skills for potential employers. In many cases, young refugees have found purpose and a sense of belonging by contributing to the physical maintenance of the Church or participating in religious services, strengthening their connection to the community. This unique style of delivering physical and non-physical aid encapsulates the tight-knit nature of Coptic diasporic communities and their ability to create support networks.

These people-based networks were found to be critical for these minority groups. Considering many of the challenges refugees face, such as language and paperwork, these religious communities use community bonds to overcome these challenges. For many Coptic refugees, navigating the legal and bureaucratic systems of their host countries is a daunting challenge, especially when faced with language barriers. Churches often serve as informal administrative facilitators, providing translation services, assisting with paperwork, and connecting refugees to legal aid and other forms of support.

In conclusion, Coptic refugee communities have heavily relied upon and utilised people-based networks and connections to develop thorough and extensive methods of resilience to trauma and barriers experienced due to forcible displacement. This comprehensive support system, which addresses the material, emotional, and social needs of displaced individuals, provides a reassuring picture of the well-being of the refugees. The findings of this research contribute to academic and policy understanding of the role and impact of religious communities as key actors in refugee aid and integration, particularly for minority communities whose identity is closely tied to their faith.

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