

The Migration of the Syriac Orthodox Community to Sweden: Towards a Description of Patterns of Change and Liturgical Adaptation

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In this paper, I will attempt to explore how migration to Europe has affected the Syriac Orthodox community with a specific focus on how the liturgy has been adapted in the migration process. A primary methodological question to ask when studying the liturgy is how one perceives the liturgy. Is liturgy simply in the text, or is liturgy an event that takes place whenever and wherever it takes place, regardless of the textual basis? My perspective is that liturgy is not in the text, rather it is alive; it is a ritual that takes place anew and requires what Catherine Bell has called ritual mastery from those that lead the liturgy, a kind of embodied competency interiorized of the liturgical practices. Anybody who is sufficiently familiar with the liturgical practice of the Syriac Orthodox Church will know that far from every act in the liturgy is codified. The practice is fluid and malleable. Its plasticity is not arbitrary; rather, it requires the leadership of ritual masters and the participation of the liturgy community. Consequently, negotiation in the act of performance is at the heart of the liturgical practice.

Where does this leave us with the literary tradition of the liturgical texts, in line with the focus of this volume? Liturgical texts are used in the liturgy and for the performance in the liturgy. Liturgical practices change and are fluid and change based on various variables, irrespective of the text. One such variable is the changing worldview of the community itself and movement into various contexts in the diaspora. The diasporic contexts have had an immense impact, and still do, on the liturgical tradition and the textual production of liturgical texts. One could describe this development in different stages. As we look at the different stages, it is useful to consider migration studies that describe the establishment of new groups in new contexts. The entire liturgical system of the Syriac Orthodox Church was developed in a rural context where the church had a central role in the lives

of the faithful.¹ It seems that it will not be so much longer, in the diaspora.² With this complexity in mind regarding the relationship between liturgical text, liturgical practice, and migration, I will explore patterns of change and adaptations. My data is limited and therefore my results will be limited and not generalizable. More comprehensive data-gathering is required for a fuller understanding of this complex relationship concerning the Syriac Orthodox communities.

Previous research on migration and liturgical adaptation

In this section, the literature regarding the experience of migration will be explored, followed by a review of the literature on the Syriac Orthodox experiences of migration. In an article concerning migration and culture, the anthropologist Pnina Werbner argues that many studies that deal with migration have an essentialist view of culture.³ Instead, she explores other ways of approaching migration and culture that evade essentialism. By referring to a range of ethnographic cases, among which rituals are to be found, she suggests that cultural hybridity may be a better term to make visible the changes that take place as groups translocate and migrate to other places. She uses three terms to capture the process of change, namely, *dislocation*, second *transplantation*, and finally, *relocation*. The three terms are distinct yet not separate from one another. It would be erroneous to assume a linear development. Rather, the three terms can enmesh any given case simultaneously.

Her conclusions about cultural hybridity are close to those drawn in the recent doctoral dissertation of Victor Dudas, who conducted a study among Syriac Orthodox school children in Södertälje, a major southern suburb of Stockholm with a large population of Syriac Orthodox. He concluded that school children navigate several social identities connected to the family in which religion seems to play an important role, social identity in relation to peers, and Swedish society.⁴

In relation to the rituals of a community, Werbner argues that it is impossible for a migrant community to uphold old rituals. Rather, with different commitments, both to the new context they find themselves in and to their past and

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- 1 Gabriel Bar-Sawme, *Entering the Holy Place in Syriac Orthodox Liturgy: A Ritual and Theological Analysis* (Uppsala:, 2021).
 - 2 Önver Cetrez, *Meaning-Making Variations in Acculturation and Ritualization* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2005).
 - 3 Pnina Werbner, "Migration and Culture," in *Oxford Handbook of the Politics of International Migration*, eds. Marc R. Rosenblum and Daniel J. Tichenor, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford University Press, 2012).
 - 4 Victor Dudas, *Exploring the Identity of a Group of Assyrian/Syriac Young Adolescents in Sweden : A Mixed-Methods Study within the Discipline of Psychology Religion and the Research Field of Identity Development* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2020).

homeland, rituals are renegotiated and hence changed. This was also suggested by a comparative study conducted by the anthropologists Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter.⁵ They use language similar to Werbner's to describe the process migrant groups seem to go through, that is, *change and continuity*, *processes of placemaking*, and *lines of social differentiation*. According to them, it is beneficial to explore migration processes together with rituals. They see rituals of migrant communities as cultural prisms through which one could explore religious rituals and practices. This is often something overlooked in migration studies as well as in ritual studies. In comparing several cases, they argue that innovative dynamics of religious rituals offer experiences of connection and continuity, even when the rituals change and are adapted to the new context. Ritual practices offer a sense of grounding, so to speak, a connection to home and a making of a new home in the new context. At the same time, rituals seem to be part of a process of creating new identities and notions of belonging, making new physical buildings, and taking space that involves new relationships with the local environment. Finally, they suggest that rituals are important identity markers in creating boundaries. Informed by Catherine Bell's theory of ritual as a differentiation process,⁶ they argue that rituals construct boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

In line with the final point made by Pedersen and Rutter, one could argue that the adaptation and changes to ritual practices and texts depend on the physical space where the group chooses to settle. Studies concerning segregation in the Nordic countries in general and Sweden in particular show that people with a background in countries outside of Europe or North America have a higher unemployment rate and are concentrated in big cities and poorer areas. There is, therefore, a correlation between ethnic background and socioeconomic position in society and housing segregation.⁷ A consequence of this variation is that groups close in and focus internally on the group's survival and continuation.⁸

While housing segregation and a high concentration of immigrants in certain areas and their lack of integration into the job market can be seen as something negative and its causes vary, it could also be seen as something positive for the survival of minority groups. The physical concentration of migration groups in certain areas leads to, among several things, a focus on the group itself. Most stud-

5 Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter, "Rituals of Migration: An Introduction," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44, 16 (2018): 2603–16.

6 Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

7 Moa Tunström and Shinan Wang, *Den Segregerade Staden [Elektronisk Resurs] En Nordisk Översikt* (Copenhagen: Nordisk Ministerråd, 2019).

8 *Svensk Forskning Om Segregation* (Vetenskapsrådet, 2018).

ies deal with the negative effects of segregation, which is usually seen from the majority perspective in society, and immigrants are often seen as a problem.⁹ The term segregation is mainly applied to immigrant groups and not rich, indigenous groups that move from areas with higher diversity. It seems then that the concentration of migrant groups in certain housing areas supports the survival of the group itself. The Syriac Orthodox communities in Sweden mostly live in segregated areas. A big part of the group settled in these areas, and as they integrated into the job market and received higher-paying jobs through education and entrepreneurship, they eventually moved out to other housing areas.¹⁰ However, the churches that have been built have largely remained in the original areas of settlement in Swedish society,¹¹ potentially playing an important role that the church may have had in maintaining an important influence in the group.

Some studies have dealt specifically with the Syriac Orthodox communities and their integration into Swedish society, as well as their changing relation to church and ethnicity.¹² The studies show that the role of the church is diminished in the new Swedish context. Furthermore, ethnic identity movements among the Syriac Orthodox group have played a significant role in the new context. The internal struggle within the group has been coined as a struggle between a diverse minority group with ambitions to see itself as one group. The internal tension concerns the survival of the group and power struggles concerning group identity. More specifically, the name issue of *syrianska/assyriska* has remained an important question and was a divisive driving force in the 1980s and onwards. The internal tension in the church eventually led to the making of two dioceses in Sweden

9 Svensk Forskning Om Segregation.

10 Oscar Pripp, *Företagande i Minoritet : Om Etnicitet, Strategier Och Resurser Bland Assyrier Och Syri-
aner i Södertälje* (Tumba: Mångkulturellt centrum, 2001).

11 "Lokala församlingar – Syrisk ortodoxa kyrkan," 2023.

12 Naures Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland, Orphans in the Diaspora: Identity Discourses among the Assyrian/Syriac Elites in the European Diaspora." (Dissertation Leiden University, Leiden University Press, 2011); Ulf Björklund, *North to Another Country: The Formation of a Suryoyo Community in Sweden* (Stockholm: Dep. of social anthropology, Univ. of Stockholm [Socialantropologiska inst., Stockholms univ.] 1981); Cetrez, *Meaning-Making Variations in Acculturation and Ritualization*; Fuat Deniz, *En Minoritets Odysse*, vol. 21, Örebro Studies (Univ.-bibl, 2001); Fuat Deniz and Antonios Perdikaris, *Ett Liv Mellan Två Världar*, vol. 2, Forum För Migration Och Kultur (Institutionen för samhällsvetenskap, Örebro univ, 2000); Marianne Freyne-Lindhagen, *Identitet Och Kulturmöte : Syrianska Kvinnors Exempel : En Diskussion Om Grounded Theory* (Örebro: Högsk., 1997); David Gaunt, "Identity Conflicts among Oriental Christians in Sweden," *Sens Public: Revue Internationale*, 2010, <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:sh:diva-4814>; Bengt Knutsson, *Assur Eller Aram-Språklig, Religios Och Nationell Identifikation Hos Sveriges Assyrier Och Syrianer (siv Rapport)* (Statens invandrarverk, 1982); Pripp, *Företagande i Minoritet*; Samuel Rubenson, "Kyrka Eller Folk – Den Syrisk-Ortodoxa Kyrkan Och Det Svenska Samhället," *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 68 (1992): 71–79.

in the 1990s. While it seems to have been an issue of name and, hence, identity that was the driving force, there are indications that the divide was driven by clans and kinship that struggled to get a hold of the church through which an influence could be exercised in the group. Furthermore, some studies show that the church plays an increasingly less important role for the second and third generations of the group.¹³ Kinship seems to be important, while the church is not. This suggests that the church's rituals play a less important role as a meaning-making system for the younger generations. The trend seems, therefore, to be that the role of the church diminishes over time.

This leads to another important field that needs to be touched on regarding the Syriac Orthodox community, namely the adaptation of the church in the face of new challenges and its diminished role. Almost no study has dealt with liturgical changes concerning the Syriac Orthodox group in the diaspora, with some exceptions.¹⁴ This is an open field that needs data gathering. The lack of knowledge regarding the relationship between migration and rituals pertains not only to the Syriac Orthodox community but also to religious communities in general.¹⁵ However, against the background of the field of migration studies, it is worthwhile considering the dynamic relationship between migration processes and ritual renegotiations.

The liminal experience of being on the go

Arnold van Gennep coined the rites of passage theory in the early twentieth century, after which it was made popular first by Victor Turner in the 1960s and later taken up by Ronald Grimes and other scholars.¹⁶ There are three fundamental concepts connected to the rite of passage theory, which correspond fittingly with the migratory experience: *separation*, *transition*, and *reintegration*. These phases may have been fixed in the rites of passage that Van Gennep studied but have been

13 Cetrez, *Meaning-Making Variations in Acculturation and Ritualization*; Dudas, *Exploring the Identity of a Group of Assyrian/Syriac Young Adolescents in Sweden*.

14 Gabriel Bar-Sawme, "Den syrisk-ortodoxa liturgin i Sverige," in *Gudstjänstens mening*, ed.

Stephan Borgehammar, *Svenskt gudstjänstliv*, årgång 94 (2019) (Skellefteå: Artos, 2019), 13–25.

15 Magdalena Nordin, "Vad vi vet och inte vet om kristna migranter i Sverige," in *Kristne migranter i Norden*, ed. Anders Aschim, Olav Hovdelien, and Helje Kringlebotn Sødal, vol. 28 (Portal forlag, 2016), 17, <http://lup.lub.lu.se/record/dfa62e8c-3d56-4a73-bc84-ec0ef315d413>; Magdalena Nordin, *Migration, Religion Och Integration* (Stockholm: Delmi, 2023).

16 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 1960; Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Waterloo, Ontario: Ritual Studies International, 2013); Bjørn Thomassen, "The Uses and Meaning of Liminality," *International Political Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (March 3, 2009): 5–28; Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures (Cornell University, 1977).

used successfully by scholars more recently to describe other types of experiences that are more fluid. Pnina Werbner's terms to describe patterns of migration correspond quite fittingly with these three terms of van Gennep, namely, *dislocation*, *translocation*, and *relocation*.¹⁷ An immigrant to a new country who, according to any kind of measurement, has been integrated into the new society (e.g. has a job, knows the language, and contributes to society in different ways) may still have a sense of longing for the past and have a sense of not belonging. By this, I mean that Van Gennep's tripartite phases can coexist simultaneously.

Other theorists of migration studies have described the experience of migration as a liminal experience consisting of insecurity, uncertainty, and lack of belonging to any particular group other than its own.¹⁸ The immigrant experience involves, perhaps more than anything, a lack of belonging to the new host country and a sense of belonging to the old country. According to the analysis of the ritual scholars Patrice Ladwig and Nicole Reichert, the successful creation of liminality of the heterogeneous Lao migrant community in Berlin contributed to the renewal of identity and belonging within the diverse group who had a variety of backgrounds and experiences of migration.¹⁹

The benefit of using a theory that has been applied to other migratory experiences is that it can make visible the common experience that the Syriac Orthodox communities had in the process of moving from one place to another.

Dislocation: trajectories of migration and finding a new home

In light of previous studies concerning migration studies and the Syriac Orthodox group, I will, in this section, attempt to describe trends in the migration of the community to Europe in general but in particular to Sweden. One of the insights from migration studies regarding transnational movements is that it is a simplification to think about migration from one country to another as a way immigrants carry their culture, as if in a bag, from one place to another. Religious and secular rituals cannot simply be transferred from one place to another. They cannot simply be renewed; rather, they must be reconstructed. Reconstructed because rituals depend on the physical environment and space of the place from where

¹⁷ Werbner, "Migration and Culture."

¹⁸ Ville R. Hartonen et al., "A Stage of Limbo: A Meta-synthesis of Refugees' Liminality," *Applied Psychology* 71, no. 3 (2022): 1132–67, <https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12349>; Patrice Ladwig and Nicole Reichert, "Ritual Insecurity, Liminality and Identity. Differing Migration Trajectories and Their Impact on Buddhist Rituals in a Lao Migrant Community in Berlin," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 34, no. 1 (2020): 1–16.

¹⁹ Ladwig and Reichert, "Ritual Insecurity, Liminality and Identity. Differing Migration Trajectories and Their Impact on Buddhist Rituals in a Lao Migrant Community in Berlin."

the immigrants originate.²⁰ The Syriac Orthodox communities come from various contexts in the Middle East. Some come from big cities in the Middle East, such as Diyarbakir, Mardin, Beirut, and so on. However, the entire liturgical calendar and the liturgical celebration of the Syriac Orthodox Church are dependent on a rural context. It was developed to support the lives of farmers by asking for, for example, Marian blessings for the cycle of the year when it comes to farming, e.g., blessings for seeds, crops, harvests, grapes, and so on.

To illuminate how migration and liturgical reform influence one another, it becomes crucial to start with a description of the trajectory of migration that took place. Dislocation refers to the experience of moving from one's home to another place. It is the first step in the migration process. But to better understand the situation in Sweden, it is useful to paint an image of the migration process from the Middle East since it involves people moving from different countries and in different periods. Finally, in Sweden, in any given parish, the diversity is even greater than in the Middle East. From the homogeneity of the village or the city in the Middle East to a new country, a new meeting point.

Naures Atto distinguishes between three main migration periods in the second half of the twentieth and beginning of twenty-first centuries.²¹ This is to illustrate the complexity of the migration process, leading to the fact that in any given parish in Sweden, the end destination for many, people from different countries and cities in the Middle East would have arrived. The three periods are: 1965 to 1975, 1975 to 1984 and 1984 to 2009.

Migration falls into two different categories: asylum seekers and labour migrants who seek employment. The two groups coalesce in periods during the migration period. However, what is more interesting and important for our purposes is highlighting the trajectories of migrations. Atto describes an eightfold path in the trajectories of migration: From Tur Abdin to Syria and Lebanon; from Hakkari and Tur Abdin to Iraq; from Syria to Lebanon; from Tur Abdin to Istanbul; from Tur Abdin directly to Europe; from Tur Abdin to Istanbul and then to Europe; from Gozarto in Northern Syria to Europe; from Gozarto to Damascus, Aleppo or Beirut and then to Europe.²²

This eightfold trajectory indicates the diversity of the Syriac Orthodox communities and that they have a variety of backgrounds and migration experiences. The different groups finally met in Europe. As indicated above, migration to

²⁰ Bar-Sawme, *Entering the Holy Place in Syriac Orthodox Liturgy*.

²¹ Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland," 144.

²² Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland," 145.

Europe happened in waves to different countries. The migration process was not collectively organised by any institution. However, family networks became very important in facilitating the trajectories. It is clear from the studies that families helped one another, villagers one another. The help consisted of assisting with the visa process, finding a job, and even offering housing during a transitory period.²³ People from the same villages or cities in the Middle East ended up at the same destination.

A primary concern for the community in the migration process seems to have been seizing the opportunity to find its way to Europe. In the disruptive process of migration, their natural pull towards other extended family members and villagers can be seen as a process of cultural reconstruction and revitalization. In other words, it means seeking security, what is known and safe in the face of the disruption of migration, and leaving one's home behind.²⁴ According to Atto, those who left the homeland rejected it and justified the migration process by saying that there is nothing to go back to. Consequently, she found a discourse of distance-making and of border-making. Some who left their homeland sold everything they owned as they came to Europe, for example, in the village Kerburan (Dargecit). Not because they had to, but to reject and move on.²⁵ On the other hand, many did not sell their properties. In Midyat in Tur Abdin, people invested their money in their houses and churches before they left to stay connected and not lose the transnational bond between the diaspora and the homeland.

Sweden was chosen as a country to migrate to due to the conditions regarding receiving permanent residence and citizenship. The Syriac Orthodox fled from fear and insecurity towards stability and a new home.²⁶ The pull to Sweden left the homeland abandoned, and a word often used by the group to describe this process is that Sweden *maḥraulāh* (has destroyed) the homeland. The migration to Europe and Sweden did not leave the group without longing for the homeland. More specifically, it was a longing for those who had been left behind. In the correspondence that Atto has studied both in cassettes and in letters, the perception of Sweden was that it was like heaven.²⁷ The heaven-like description consisted of the freedom that the people enjoyed in wearing a cross openly, being treated well, nature being beautiful, and the riches of the country.

23 Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland;" Björklund, *North to Another Country*; Deniz, *En Minoritets Odysseé*.

24 Werbner, "Migration and Culture."

25 Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland," 177.

26 Atto, 178.

27 Atto, 181.

Church leaders in the Middle East were worried about the migration to Europe. In relation to political leaders in the Middle East, the leadership of the church rejected the idea of migration and denied that their home countries were oppressive in any way. An example of this can be found in an interview with the Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet* on May 30 1982 with the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Zakka I Iwas who said: “Those who say ‘we are persecuted in Turkey’ use this just to get residence permission in European countries. They are not part of us.”²⁸ Another example of this is a statement made by Chorepiscopus of Istanbul Aziz Günel during a visit with the Turkish ambassador in Berlin in 1982:²⁹

We are sad about the news about our people in the European newspapers. We, who live in Turkey as citizens of the Turkish Republic and as the Turkish *Süryani Kadim* community, have never been persecuted in Turkey. Some people use this argument when they apply for asylum. But, this is not true. We are Turks. Throughout history we have never been oppressed. We have always enjoyed the freedom to live our religious activities.

These statements must also be understood in the context of the political climate at the time, where church leaders in Turkey were likely unable to speak freely in the press. The point of these statements is to exemplify that at the time of the initial migration process, the disruption of the dislocating experience was multidimensional and painful. Those who migrated to the new context found ways to justify the move while apparently not having the support from those who were left behind. Especially the clergy of the church was negative to the migration, with the exception of some clergy, such as the late Archbishop Julius Çiçek of Central Europe – perhaps out of fear for authorities, perhaps out of fear for the potential assimilation process of the migration and consequently as the emptying of the land of the forefathers. Nevertheless, there was a clear discrepancy between what the asylum seekers said and the reports they received from the church leadership in the Middle East. This did not, however, stop the migration process. Rather, it furthered a rift between the church leadership and the eventual secular movements within the group in Europe.³⁰ The migration from Tur Abdin took place in waves, as indicated above, always driven by different social circumstances and with the support of those who had come before to Europe. The fall of Saddam

²⁸ Quoted in Atto, 187.

²⁹ Quoted in Atto, 188.

³⁰ Deniz, *En Minoritets Odyssé*.

Hussein in 2003 led to a new migration wave from Iraq to Europe, and most specifically, to Sweden. The same can be said about the more recent war in Syria, which has led to significant new migration waves to Europe in general but to Sweden in particular.

The new migration situation in Sweden led to the formation of two independent ethnic federations, Syrianska Riksförbundet and Assyriska Riksförbundet, in 1977³¹ and 1978.³² This shows how, on a group level, the community organized early on separately from the church.³³

The stories of the newly arrived immigrants to Sweden spurred responses from authorities. Some studies were conducted on the naming issue between *assyriska* and *syrianska*.³⁴ The stories of the Syriac Orthodox community were also told in the annotated picture book *Slutet på en resa, början på en resa*.³⁵ In the introduction to the book, the author Staffan Ekegren, writes³⁶

During a couple of years, we have followed some families from the syrianska group in Örebro. The reasons are many: first of all, we wanted to retell the story which we think ought to be a role model – for example the cohesion within the family in combination with their generosity towards outsiders. Second, we wanted to explain what seems to be odd or deviant to Swedes, that the Syriac Orthodox Church takes up so much space in the lives of the syrianer because the tradition is so important and a cause for the emigration itself.

This book is important since it depicts and documents, with images and texts, the experience of the Syriac Orthodox community in the 80s from the very beginning after their arrival to Sweden. Ekegren suggests that the community has two pillars: family and church. He attended a Sunday liturgy in the parish in Örebro and describes how the liturgy starts with only the priest and a deacon; with more deacons, the choir and other people fill the church accompanied by waves of incense. However, the liturgy in the new country is different from that in the homeland. In an interview with a member of the community, a member of the church says: “Before the kids were not inside the church as much as now. In Turkey they were

31 “Assyriska Riksförbundet – Historia,” 2023, <https://www.assyriskariksforbundet.se/om/historia>.

32 “SRF’s Historia – Syrianska Riksförbundet,” 2023, <http://syrianska.org/srf-s-historia.html>.

33 This division took place within the Syriac Orthodox communities in Sweden.

34 Knutsson, *Assur Eller Aram-Spraklig, Religios Och Nationell Identifikation Hos Sveriges Assyrier Och Syrianer* (SIV Rapport).

35 Staffan Ekegren, *Slutet På En Resa, Början På En Resa*, 1986.

36 Ekegren.

outside and played in the square – there were no cars. Older siblings took care of them. The youngest who were inside the church with their moms were more disciplined than here. Nowadays, they run in and out all the time.”³⁷ In another interview with a Swedish priest, he predicts that the community will go through a similar process of a crisis of faith in the new context and that the church will have difficulties in meeting the curiosity and critical thinking of a new generation.³⁸

The communities that are present in the same parish can at the same time be different, but through the same identity of being Syriac orthodox and attending the same liturgy develop a common identity and group belonging. The role of the church and the religious rites varied depending on where in the Middle East they were from. In an interview with a parish member from Örebro, it is said:³⁹

Our religious tradition differs from family to family. Those who cleave strongest to the church come from the mountain plains in the southeast of Turkey. They lived isolated and were exposed in the middle of Muslim settlements. In that situation, the priest and the church kept the syrianer together. Also, there was not much to do up in the mountains. In Beirut where we lived, there was so much else that dragged away our attention from religious life.

The quotation shows the image an immigrant from Beirut has concerning immigrants from Tur Abdin. This also shows how people from different parts of the Middle East met in Sweden, with their variety of traditions in Sweden, with challenges that required negotiations regarding the role of the church in the life of the community and how the church ought to be organized and the liturgy be celebrated.

The conflicts that arose after the migration to Sweden cannot be reduced to different traditions from different parts of the Middle East. In the new society, where women had greater action space, conflicts between church leadership and women’s organisation were also part of the negotiation process. In an interview with Susan Dogan, who was the chairwoman of *Syrianska kvinnoföreningen* [Suryoyo women’s association] she says:⁴⁰

37 Ekegren, 23.

38 Ekegren, 18.

39 Ekegren, 27.

40 Ekegren, 30.

We have focused on relationship issues, children, and youth problems by working practically. We have opened a centre for leisure activities for youth, activated older people and helped the school children with their homework. We have even tailored the church gowns for the girl choir at church. Despite this, we have been continuously opposed by the church board, which only has men as members. Even outside the board, the men have opposed us. I think they are scared concerning what they've heard about, namely 'women's emancipation from men' and that we will organize against them.

The conflicts that are exemplified by what Susan says and what the person from Beirut says could be seen as a struggle for power and action space in the liminal phase of the migration process. This is not only known in the Syriac Orthodox community but this pattern of change in the dynamics of power has also been seen in other immigrant groups.⁴¹ The Nordic countries are, according to the World Value Survey, associated with secular, liberal, and individualistic norms and values. In contrast to these values, immigrant groups from the Middle East are associated with values associated with religion, conservatism, and collectivism.⁴² Especially among the younger generation, values in the host country are assumed, and conflicts between the different value systems occur in different ways. Here, it is clear that what Susan Dogan expresses is not something unique. Mehrdad Darvishpour, who studied the divorce rate and changing family relations among immigrant groups from the Middle East in Sweden, drew a similar conclusion. The divorce rate was higher among immigrant groups, and the explanation, it seems, is that women gain more action space and are thus filing for divorce. The changing power structure between men and women leads to higher degrees of conflict, which may lead to divorce.⁴³ A similar study among the Syriac Orthodox has yet to be conducted. Yet, it is to be expected that this would be rather similar, tying in with the fears expressed by Susan Dogan and others in the 1980s.⁴⁴

The point that I want to underline in this part of the paper is that negotiations and changing power structures happen on different levels. We see in the story of

41 Mehrdad Darvishpour, "Immigrant Women Challenge the Role of Men: How the Changing Power Relationship within Iranian Families in Sweden Intensifies Family Conflicts after Immigration," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 33, 2 (2002): 271–96; Pernilla Ouis, "Hedersrelaterade familjekonflikter: Konsekvenser av förändrade normer i migrationsprocessen," *Fokus på familjen* 49, no. 3 (2021): 213–36.

42 Ouis, "Hedersrelaterade familjekonflikter."

43 Darvishpour, "Immigrant Women Challenge the Role of Men."

44 Ekegren, *Slutet På En Resa, Början På En Resa*.

Susan Dogan that already in the early 1980s, negotiation from a gender perspective is taking place. The institution of the church is afraid of making changes to the gender roles and letting women into power positions. The complexity of the power struggle is amplified by the power structure of ethnicity. It has perhaps been assumed that the Syriac Orthodox community is a homogenous group. But this is not true. Not only is it diverse, but as I indicated above, the immigration to Sweden took place in different periods, which means that the group that meets at the liturgy, for whom the church is a fundamental pillar, have different histories and have not been in Sweden for the same amount of time. The patterns I have thus far highlighted are characteristics of the liminal stage in the life of groups on the go. As they arrive in Sweden, they create a safe space of shared identity and belonging. Naturally, this has led to severe conflicts within the family structure in relation to the institution of the church. To some extent, the liminal experience of being in a place outside of the home is what Victor Turner has called the experience of the neophytes as having a physical but no social reality. Neophytes in the groups that were studied by Turner were preparing to be given the status of fully incorporated members of the social group.⁴⁵ While the Syriac Orthodox group evidently had a community with one another, it is also clear from their experience that their longing for their relatives and not fully participating in society was a liminal experience.⁴⁶

Furthermore, at its very core, the conflict of ethnicity-church should be seen as a power struggle between different groups within the diverse Syriac Orthodox community and its in/ability to handle the conflict, which eventually led to a split. Against the background painted above, with the power struggle taking place in the new context of one community with high diversity it is also worthwhile portraying the ecclesial conflict and split that took place in Sweden.

“Even the Swedish Archbishop has to obey the government. Therefore, our bishop has to obey us, the people.”⁴⁷ This is a quote from a member of the central board in Sweden from the 1990s and reveals the complexity of the institutional conflict that took place, which eventually led to two jurisdictions in Sweden.⁴⁸ For the member of the board quoted above, the central board of the diocese is elected by the people and represents the people. The bishop is considered the

45 Turner, *The Ritual Process*.

46 See Thomassen, “The Uses and Meaning of Liminality”; Bjørn Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern Living through the In-Between* (Farnham, Surrey ; Ashgate, 2014).

47 Rubenson, “Kyrka Eller Folk – Den Syrisk-Ortodoxa Kyrkan Och Det Svenska Samhället.”

48 Thomas Arentzen, *Ortodoxa och österländska kyrkor i Sverige*, vol. 5,5 (Stockholm: Nämnden för statligt stöd till trossamfund, 2015).

leader who must listen to the elected board. According to the *millet* system, the bishop would have been the *millet bashi*, as we saw above, the representative of the people. In Turkey, there was no democratic vote for the bishop or for the members of any board. With the move to Sweden, elections of lay people to a diocesan board became a reality; therefore, a clash between the institutional church and the lay people was expected. The complexity of the issue is, therefore, a clash between the organizational structure from the Middle East and the organizational structure from Sweden.

In addition to the clash between the way the church was managed in Turkey and in Sweden, clan intrigues and conflicts had a big impact on the conflict. This led to an institutional division. At its heart, this institutional division is about different understandings of the relationship between church and society. The conflict was deepened under the guise of the ethnic division concerning the question of the identity markers of *syrianska* and *assyriskä*. In a simplifying way, one could say that those in favor of the *assyriskä* name held a position that there should be a separation between church and ethnicity. Those favoring the *syrianska* name as an identity marker put the church at the center. The church, from a synodal level, rejected any secular-ethnic movement that it understood as a factor that led to division of the people and tried to handle it by exhorting its members to reject any secular-ethnic discourse and movement. In the Encyclical issued by Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I on November 29, 1981, he took a stand against Aramaic and Assyrian movements as secular-ethnic movements that led to division. Local bishops were given the authority to use excommunication to stop the movements – which, in retrospect, were not successful. The variables of division should be understood from an intersectional perspective, where ethnicity, language, clan belonging, gender, and religion simultaneously intersect and amplify the conflict. These should be seen as power structures that play out in a game of gaining or maintaining action space and influence, all within the process of migration. For example, in the relationship described above between the bishop and the board, there is clearly a struggle for action space.

I hope to have shown so far that the experiences of migration differed in the Syriac Orthodox group. The experience was disruptive in many ways. First, the group that arrived in Europe and Sweden was heterogeneous. They arrived in different periods, and the group of people had different experiences from their home countries and spent varying periods in Europe and Sweden. The conflicts within the group were multifaceted and were mainly connected to clan and institution, family belonging, and church organization. The conflicts within the group also show the importance of the institution of the church. One could argue that

the rejection of the ethnic movements by Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas was an attempt to keep conflict and division out of the church and reflected a desire to keep the unity of the church. However, part of the issue was the conflation of church and people and an inability to handle the diversity among the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church. Even so, even though I have so far emphasized the migratory experiences and the internal conflicts among the members of the Syriac Orthodox Church, I mean to argue that the liturgy was an important space where the diverse group met. It was also here that the conflicts were inflamed. The indication of the importance of the liturgy is seen in the attempt by the clergy to still conflicts by using excommunication.

Translocation: printing liturgical books, building churches, and changing ritual patterns

Part of the migration experience relating to liturgical practice and texts can be described as ritual insecurity in that there were no books, no priests, and no space to perform the liturgy initially. After the arrival of the community to Sweden, many attended the Church of Sweden and attended their Sunday school teaching and went to their Sunday mass. In the case where a priest was present, the role of the priest would have been to keep the commonality/oneness of the group despite its heterogeneity. The priest had to know several languages and function as somebody who was able to relate to different groups.

For the initial process of establishment in the countries in Europe, the work of bishop Mor Julius Yesu Çiçek was transformative. He published the anaphora in 1985, followed by books for the deacons to use in the Eucharistic rite.⁴⁹ Everything was written by hand until there was a way to use computing for writing liturgical books. The anaphora was, of course, not sufficient for the celebration of the entire liturgical year. For that, one needed the so-called *M'ad'dono*, the book for the feast days used in the Eucharistic liturgy. The *Shhimo* for the daily prayers, which could be used for morning prayers prior to Sunday liturgies if need be, was published in 1981.⁵⁰ The most necessary liturgical books were published and distributed in Europe by the late bishop in the 1980s. There were still the other liturgical books that were needed for the full celebration of the liturgical year, the *Panqitho* and the *Hussoyo*, needed for morning prayers on Sundays, for *ramsho* on Saturday evenings, for Lent and other major feast days and saint days during the liturgical year.

49 Mar Yulius Yesu Çiçek, ed., *أنافورا حسبما وجدنا في كنيسة أنطاكية* [Anaphora According to the Order of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch] (Holland: St Ephrem der Syrer Kloster, 1985).

50 Ignatius Ephrem I Barsaüm, *سحيم*, ed. Mar Yulius Yesu Çiçek, 4th ed. (Holland: Maouchy & Zakaria Printing Press, 1981).

These books are big, written to be used by the deacons and deaconesses on the *gudo*, in the nave of the church. The process of obtaining these looked different from parish to parish, a story that has not been told yet. There is, however, one case that I would like to point to.⁵¹

In 1981, Resit Özdemir accepted the calling to become a priest in a parish in Västerås in Sweden. The majority of the about 150 Syriac Orthodox families in Västerås were from the village of Kerburan in Tur Abdin. A graduate of the monastery Deir al-Zaʿfaran in Mardin, he decided to go back there to prepare for ordination, to learn what he needed to learn, and especially to master the liturgical year. During his stay in Deir al-Zaʿfaran, he went to the Mor Gabriel monastery as well. The village of Kerburan had been emptied of Christians, and the last one, Indrawus Demir, was killed in 1976.⁵² All the remaining books in the church were brought to Mor Gabriel monastery, alongside the church bell, which is still used at the monastery today. Visiting the monastery, Özdemir investigated whether the books of this village could be brought to Sweden. Among the books which were at the monastery were *Panqyotho* for the entire liturgical year. These manuscripts had been copied by village priests. Most of the *Panqyotho* were written by chor-bishop Fatrus Ay, the last priest of Kerburan before the migration to Europe. He also came to Sweden and, until his death, served as a priest in the parish of Mor Gabriel in Gothenburg. He is now buried in the monastery of Mor Ephrem in Holland. Some of the books had also been copied by Fr Iskander Sawma (Demir), who relocated to Sweden and served as a priest in Mor Efrem in Södertälje until his death. These were most notably the burial books for priests and laypeople. One of the most precious manuscripts of the village was a Gospel manuscript dated to the 1650s. Resit Özdemir searched Mardin for somebody who could bring the books to Sweden. Some freight companies imported goods from Lebanon and drove via Mardin, then, on to Sweden as the final destination. These were Swedish drivers with whom Resit made a deal. The books arrived in Sweden and were brought to the parish of St Koriakos (same name as the main church in Kerburan) in Västerås. They are all kept there. They were used for several years and were later copied as well for use in other parishes in Sweden. Hence, in 1981, St Koriakos parish in Västerås was one of the first parishes in Sweden to have been able to celebrate the full liturgical calendar in one year. This example shows how the manuscripts for the celebration of the full liturgical year could make their way to the diaspora after

⁵¹ The data presented is based on an interview with Resit Özdemir 2017-07-22, today chor-episcopos Simon Bar-Sawme and my own observation of the liturgy of the parish.

⁵² Atto, "Hostages in the Homeland."

the initial establishment in Sweden. I am sure there are other similar stories to be traced, which combined would provide a fuller picture of how the process of being able to celebrate the full liturgical year could look like.

The initial process of the establishment of the Syriac Orthodox Church after the dislocation from the Middle East was to focus on the ability to celebrate the liturgical year, and having the right tools and location to do so. It meant publishing the necessary books for the celebration of the liturgical year, and finding locations where the liturgy could take place. This in and of itself meant reconstruction and an impossibility to simply perform the liturgy as it had been in the Middle East. Renegotiations must have taken place since the liturgical celebrations would have varied in the Middle East. In in the diaspora, where people from varied countries, cities, and villages would celebrate together, slightly different traditions met. Everything from how you perform the liturgy to melodies sung (*Beth Gazo* and tones of recitation) would have differed and indeed differ today. In the parish of St Koriakos in Västerås, most parishioners were from the village of Kerburan. But there were also members from other villages in the Tur Abdin. But those who would influence the rituals were mostly the deacons and the priest. The deacons were from Kerburan, Miden, Mar Bobo, and other villages. The deacons leading the liturgy had studied in Deir al-Zaʿfaran and Mor Gabriel. Mardin and Tur Abdin met and had to negotiate and adapt to one another. This meant primarily a negotiation on how to sing the melodies of the *Beth Gazo*. There was generally a great acceptance of the different musical traditions within the parish. A deacon trained at the Mor Gabriel monastery leading the *gudo* would sing according to his tradition, and everybody would attempt to adapt and line in with the tune, even though they would have had a different tradition. Most often, this worked fine since the differences in the tunes would not be so significant. The same kind of negotiation would take place if a deacon trained at Mardin led the *gudo*. However, as for the practices of the liturgical year, negotiations would most often take place prior to the actual practices taking place. Deacons, with the priest, had meetings most often before the big holidays to prepare for liturgical performances. Negotiations would take place between the different schools but also in relation to the rubrics of the given liturgical book. For example, the *Mʿadʿdono*, the book used for holidays in the Syriac Orthodox Church, contains rubrics and instructions on how to perform specific liturgical practices, from the feast of *Denho* (Epiphany) to all the big events happening during Great Lent. The negotiation would consist of what the right tradition is and whether the deacons and priest ought to slavishly follow the written instructions or whether the tradition they knew from their home village or the monastery is the correct one. Implicit in the negotiation

are negotiations between different ecclesiological views. Those wanting to follow the book slavishly referred most often to the authority of the book and the author of the book. Those who argued for an adapted practice based on the village's previous tradition argued for the diversity of practices. The negotiators, deacons, and priests referred to different sources of authority as the basis for practice.

The parish in Västerås did not have a church building of its own. Rather, they borrowed and rented parishes from the Church of Sweden. This was the situation for most parishes in Sweden. The deacons and the priests tried to uphold the tradition as they knew it. Since liturgy is more than simply reciting what is in the text, that is, it is about the performance of the text within a physical building to track all changes and adaptations, an in-depth comparison would need ethnographic material from Tur Abdin, from before the migration to Europe. Based on interviews with deacons from Miden, graduates of Mor Gabriel, at the parish of St Koriakos in Västerås, I contend that even in Tur Abdin the liturgical practices varied from village to village, and the structure of the church buildings varied as well.⁵³ Indeed, any ethnographic material from different parishes in Sweden today would show a big variation in the celebration of the liturgy, all depending on the tradition the priest and deacons belong to and whether they have their own church building or not.

The parish of Mor Koriakos in Västerås built its church and celebrated the first liturgy on Christmas day in the year 2000. Since the establishment of the church building, many different patterns of adaptations and change have taken place. One of the most significant adaptations was the introduction of Swedish in the liturgy. Most of the older generation in the parish in Västerås speak Kurdish (Kurmanci). Like in Kerburan, readings from Scriptures and liturgical texts were translated orally into Kurdish by deacons and the priest. In Sweden, many liturgical books were translated to Swedish via English. The late bishop Athanasius Yeshu Samuel of the USA had several liturgical books translated into English in the late 1990s, such as *The Order for Baptism and Marriage*.⁵⁴ The path to Swedish via English is an important pattern, not only because of the translation work per se, but because of the influence the liturgical developments in the USA would come to have on the rest of the Syriac Orthodox Church in the rest of the world, and not the least in Sweden. Once available, these Swedish translations replaced the Kurdish ones in the church in Västerås.

⁵³ Bar-Sawme, *Entering the Holy Place in Syriac Orthodox Liturgy*.

⁵⁴ Ignatius Ephrem Barsoum, *Vigselnas Sakrament: Enligt Den Syrisk-Ortodoxa Kyrkans Urgamla Ritual* [Elektronisk Resurs], trans. Tony Larsson (Gloria Förlag, 1998).

The next big adaptation of the liturgical practice in Sweden was the introduction of the projection of the liturgical text on a screen during the liturgy. The Syriac text of the liturgy, together with a Swedish translation, is projected, which means that the screen probably becomes the focal point for the participants in the liturgy. The Syriac text is not always transliterated, but the Swedish translation becomes the focus point. Only three anaphoras (out of more than twenty that are in regular usage) have been translated into Swedish, which means that the priest either must adapt and only use a selection of anaphoras and, therefore, not use the variety of texts that are extant or use the other dozen or so that are printed and in use today and pray something different than what is projected on the screen. This is what happens in the Mor Koriakos parish in Västerås today. The liturgical text is projected on the screen, but the priest chooses from various prayers and liturgical texts that are not translated. So, on any given Sunday, there is a mismatch between the screen and the actual liturgical text used.

Another pattern of change in the parish can be summarized under the term reduction. Liturgical texts published recently have been reworked and updated with full vocalization. In addition, the *Panqitho* used today in the parish has all the antiphons and instructions included in the book itself. These had to be added previously using other books. However, where the texts are more comprehensive, the practice has been reduced. One such reduction can be seen in the performance of the *Denho* (Epiphany) where according to the *M'ad'dono* a full blessing of the water according to the baptism rite should be performed.⁵⁵ The performance has been reduced significantly to the minimum blessing of the water. Rather than shortening rites, some of the rites are reduced completely. One example of this in Mor Koriakos parish in Västerås is the liturgical practice of the morning and evening prayers of the *Shhimo*, which are no longer performed. Until the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019, the parish performed morning and evening prayers daily. Most attendees were retired people.

Similar reductive adaptations can be seen throughout the ritual system. While there is a tendency towards reduction, there is also a pattern of change originating from a liturgical movement in the USA, where the role of the laypeople is changing in relation to different liturgical practices. As a deacon, I was surprised when I moved to the USA in 2011 to study for my master's degree in theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and attended the liturgy in various parishes in New Jersey. I was surprised by the fact that all responses in the liturgy were said by the lay people and not by the deacons. A comparison between the Anaphora published by

⁵⁵ Denysenko, 2012.

Çiçek in 1985⁵⁶ and the order for the liturgy published for the deacons (*Qinotho*) by Çiçek in 1990⁵⁷ shows a discrepancy in the rubrics. In the anaphora, the book instructs the people to give the responses, whereas in the *Qinotho*, the deacons are instructed to give the responses. The latter reflected the actual practice at the time, whereas the Anaphora, which is based on a manuscript from the 15th century, reflects an older practice. The US practice reflects a general trend and movement within the church to go back to an older practice in which laypeople participate more in the liturgy. I was also surprised that women read the readings in the liturgy, that lay people prayed the litany in the liturgy, and that communion was received in the hand and not in the mouth during the liturgy and not after. The change in how communion was received occurred after the Sars Epidemic 2003 in the USA. The rest of the church followed along after the Corona pandemic in 2019. To this day, the readings are always done by deacons in the Mor Koriakos parish in Västerås and the litany is also prayed by the deacons. In some parishes in Sweden, communion is not given after the ending of the liturgy but in the proper place in the liturgical rite. The Syriac Orthodox community in the USA has a longer history than the community in Sweden⁵⁸ and with one of its previous hierarchs now being the patriarch of the entire church, there seems to be a general movement toward going back to older practices if they motivate higher lay participation.

Relocation?

The church has gone through several stages in its establishment in Sweden, which has been coupled with internal struggles and difficult negotiations. In Sweden, Syriac Orthodox meet from many countries in the Middle East with different commitments and loyalties. That also means different power structures and clans with different goals and intentions. This struggle has dominated the establishment of the community in Sweden. While the processes can be described as dislocation, transplantation, and relocation, they are far from linear. The process is messy with internal conflicts, power struggles, it being a search for identity and belonging, and new ways of being church in a completely new world. This search has been characterized by a reduction and shortening in liturgical practices. At the same time, there is a movement towards including lay people more and trans-

56 Çiçek, *ܐܢܦܗܘܪܐ ܕܡܫܚܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ* [Anaphora According to the Order of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch].

57 Mar Yulius Yesu Çiçek, ed., *Qinotho (Hymns of the Divine Liturgy According to the Rite of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch)* (Holland: St Ephrem's Monastery, 1990).

58 George Anton Kiraz, *The Syriac Orthodox in North America (1895-1995): A Short History* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2019).

lating important liturgical texts into Swedish. This process is extremely complex to capture but is played in a field of tension between the younger generation, the older generation, clergy and laypeople, clan leaders of different clans, commitments to Swedish society, and commitments to an imagined past. The process is far from over, and probably will never be since such an assumption is based on an essentialist view of culture.⁵⁹

One of the important aspects of ritual theory is the insight that ritual practices are spaces in which groups come together and form a community that may very well exist beyond the ritual itself. This is what I hope to have shown in this paper, namely, that even though the Syriac Orthodox community is heterogenous and has arrived in Sweden from different places in the Middle East in different periods, the liturgy seems to be the place where they all meet and have been forced to negotiate. One could argue that the role of a ritual is to have an effect on the audience, usually called ritual efficacy.⁶⁰ One such effect is the creation of a common identity and belonging. It seems that the liturgy both had successes and failures in this regard. The response of the hierarchy of the church to the Assyriska and Syrianska movements in the late 1970s and 1980s was a clear rejection, which eventually led to the split of the diocese in Sweden based on this issue. At the same time, liturgical adaptations to meet the new generation take place continuously. The adaptations seem to be driven by the migration process, meeting with new contexts, and changes in values within the community itself. It would have been unspeakable to allow a woman to read Scriptures at the liturgy, and it still is in many places in the Syriac Orthodox church. Yet, in parishes in the USA, this happens. Finally, the data is limited; therefore, the conclusions I draw regarding the patterns of change cannot be generalized. What is clear is that there are messy patterns, like life is messy. More ethnographic data is needed for a fuller understanding of what is happening with the community and the liturgical practices.

⁵⁹ Werbner, "Migration and Culture."

⁶⁰ Jørgen Podemann Sørensen, "Efficacy," in *Theorizing rituals: issues, topics, approaches, concepts*, ed. Jens Kreinath, Joannes Augustinus Maria Snoek, and Michael Stausberg, Studies in the history of religions, 0169-8834 ; 114-1 (Leiden ; Brill, 2006), 523-31.

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